

Treaty of Rome

The Treaty of Rome was the founding treaty of the European Economic Community (EEC), which later became the EU. Also known as the Treaty of the European Community (TEC), all the subsequent European treaties have built upon or amended the Treaty of Rome and its provisions still form the majority of EU treaty law. The treaty focused overwhelmingly on economic co-operation, but it also set out a wider political vision for ‘an ever closer union’ to ‘eliminate the barriers which divide Europe’.

History

Signed in 1957 by the heads of government of France, Belgium, Luxembourg, West Germany, the Netherlands and Italy, the treaty was the result of eleven years of attempts to reconstruct the European continent after World War II. The European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) laid the ground for the EEC by opening the markets for those products between several countries in continental Europe. The Treaty of Rome adopted many of the institutional structures of the ECSC but set out to have far greater reach. It tried to combine federalist and intergovernmental ideas. The idea of a ‘United States of Europe’ had been posed by Sir Winston Churchill in 1946 and was driven forward by Jean Monnet during the 1950s. However, the Treaty of Rome, which set up the intergovernmental Council of Ministers, stopped far short of creating Monnet’s vision of a federal Europe. Until the treaty was amended in the 1980s, it was fundamentally an economic institution. Nevertheless, the *supranational* model of European integration on which it was based created the foundation for the development of the European Union in the 1990s.

What did the Treaty of Rome do?

At a practical level, the Treaty established four institutions – a Commission, a Council of Ministers, a European Parliament and a European Court of Justice. These were to be staffed by officials, ministers, judges and parliamentarians from member states. They were in charge of creating closer co-operation on a range of economic and trade issues from agriculture to overseas aid, commerce to taxation. Another treaty was signed at the same time as the Treaty establishing the European Community, which encouraged co-operation in the use of atomic energy, under an organisation called EURATOM, which was later absorbed into the structure of the European Community.

At a philosophical level, the treaty laid the foundation for ‘ever closer union’: establishing European government bodies, the freedom to move goods, capital and people, and the concept of cohesion – that member states should give economic support to each other to help all countries to grow at a similar rate.

Facts and Figures

- The negotiations that led to the Treaty of Rome began at Messina, Italy in 1955. The Treaty was signed in Rome in March 1957 and came into force in January 1958.
- The ECSC, forerunner of the EEC, was established under the Treaty of Paris (1951).

Arguments

For

- The Treaty of Rome was a ticket to greater economic growth because it started to break down the barriers to trade and investment that had existed in Europe since the 1930s.
- The Treaty enshrined the dream of a united Europe that would make it impossible for European countries to go to war again.
- The Treaty was an incredible feat of diplomacy that paved the way for European reconciliation and the spread of democracy.

Against

- The Treaty set out an impossible goal of creating a united Europe – ignoring the cultural and linguistic barriers that divide the continent.
- The Treaty was fundamentally confused: while at one level it aimed to promote economic co-operation, it tried to do this through an undemocratic and unnecessary political apparatus.
- The institutions that were created are distant and unfamiliar. In their original form they allowed many decisions to be made behind closed doors thus discouraging open debate and participation.

Quotes

‘We can never sufficiently emphasise that the six Community countries are the forerunners of a broader, united Europe...’ Jean Monnet, 1978

‘Europe will not be built in a day, nor to an overall design; it will be built through practical achievements that first establish a sense of common achievement.’
Robert Schuman, 1950

Technical Terms

Supranational: a form of organisation through which decisions are made by international institutions, not by individual states.

Links

- http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries/institutional_affairs/treaties/treaties_eec_en.htm