May 1958 marked the start of a new sequence of events in the history of the European University. This was the date at which the institutions of the new European Communities first discussed Articles 9(2) and 216 of the European Atomic Energy Community Treaty – the duty of the atomic energy community to create a university institution. The two Treaties of Rome had come into operation in January 1958, the one to establish the European Economic Community (EEC), the other the European Atomic Energy Community (Euratom). While the establishment of the Communities is seen with hindsight as marking the most ambitious act of peaceful integration ever seen on the European continent, the higher education issue has been a forgotten footnote – Jean-Marie Palayret’s archive-based account of the pre-history of the European University Institute is the major exception.¹ The Euratom treaty provision for a supranational university institution was never implemented. This chapter tells us why.

Establishing a venue for policy-making

Once the Communities were established, the survival of the European University idea depended on new institutions and a larger group of actors. The new institutions most immediately concerned were the Commissions of the EEC and of Euratom, as the initiators of policy and guardians of the Treaties of Rome, and a Council of Ministers as the principal decision-making body. Each Community had its own Council, usually led by foreign ministers. They usually met jointly in the early stages. The other institution with a role to play at this stage was the future European Parliament (EP), at this stage an appointed Assembly with a basically advisory role, composed of delegates from national parliaments.
However although the institutional settings were different, at Community level many of the individual actors were the same. Among the veterans of Messina, Walter Hallstein had become President of the EEC Commission. Louis Armand, who had led the French delegation in the Euratom negotiations, was President of the Euratom Commission, respecting the tradition that it was indeed French ‘property’.

Müller-Armack, the instigator of the European University idea, headed the diplomatic delegation of the German Federal Republic when economic ministers took the lead. Another German, Hans von der Groeben, one of the three draughtsmen of the Spaak report, was a German-nominated EEC Commissioner. Christian Calmès, another supporter of the European University, was Secretary-General of the Euratom Commission.

The wider policy community also became involved once the process of implementing the treaties began. The EEC treaty provisions for the recognition of degrees and other qualifications, and – far more immediately – the Euratom treaty proposal for the creation of a university institution brought to the fore university rectors from throughout the Community. By 1958, rectors of universities in western Europe had been meeting collectively for three years. They were about to take the step of creating a corporate body, the Conférence des Recteurs Européens.

The rectors, with the rectors of the West German conference of rectors in the lead, opposed the European University. Having suffered – or resisted – the extremist nationalism of Nazis and fascists in the years leading up to and during the second world war, university leaders were deeply suspicious of a European supranationalism. The rectors’ concern to have university autonomy guaranteed had been made clear at the Congress of the Hague in 1948, a glittering meeting of politicians and intellectuals, chaired by Winston Churchill. The congress is most usually remembered for a host of economic, political and cultural initiatives, including the creation of what would become the Council of Europe and the EEC itself. But the congress also has a place in university history. The rectors wholeheartedly supported the resolution of its cultural committee calling for ‘efforts tending towards a federation of European universities and towards a guarantee of their freedom from state or political pressure’.

Hallstein, who was then rector of Frankfurt University, had himself been present as part of the West German rectors’ delegation, though he is not recorded as speaking.

The initial prompting for rectors to meet collectively had come in 1955, when the Western European Union (WEU) set up a meeting in