

The Assizes

The Assizes meeting that was held on the eve of the Maastricht IGC on 27-30 November 1990 in Rome in the Italian Chamber of Deputies comprised 173 national parliamentarians and 85 Members of European Parliament.

The idea of organising the Assizes had been proposed by the French President, Mr François Mitterrand, in a speech on 25 October 1989 before the European Parliament and was later supported by two resolutions of the European Parliament, who saw this as an opportunity to gain support for its proposals in the Spinelli report, providing a blueprint for a Treaty Establishing a European Union. COSAC welcomed the principle of organising the Assizes to discuss possible Treaty changes at its meeting in Cork in May 1990, but wanted to influence its organisation. Hence delegations considered it necessary that a restricted meeting of the Chairmen of the European Affairs Committees and the European Parliament be held with a view to preparing the Assizes. A number of organisational issues were addressed at that meeting, which took place in the Belgian Parliament on 26 June. However, the formal decision to convene the Assizes and settle the organisation of the event was taken by the Speakers of the Parliaments at a meeting on 20 September 1990. Apart from settling issues such as the composition, working method and presidency of the Assizes, they also ensured a link to COSAC by establishing a drafting committee composed of the Chairmen of the European Affairs Committees plus five MEPs charged with the task of drafting the final declaration of the Assizes.

At its Conference on 1 and 2 October in Rome (just 8 weeks before the Assizes) COSAC attempted to influence the agenda of the Assizes by recommending that the debate be divided into four general topics: 1) the new goals of the Community; 2) strengthening democratic legitimacy; 3) allocation of competences; and 4) relations with other countries and institutions of Europe. It was agreed that the Chairmen of the European Affairs Committees plus five MEPs (identical with the "drafting committee" established by the Speakers) should finalise preparations of the Assizes. However, at a meeting on 12 November the "triple presidency" of the Assizes (the 2 Italian Chambers and the European Parliament) refused to accept COSAC's proposal for the agenda, which they found would effectively alter the decision reached by the Speakers in Rome on 20 September.

At the end of the Assizes, a final declaration was adopted that endorsed a number of proposals for treaty reform.