

Note from the Secretariat General of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs (21 December 1956)

Caption: On 21 December 1956, the Secretariat-General of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs drafts a memorandum in which it considers the impact of the Euratom project on the development of civilian and military nuclear energy programmes in France and Europe.

Source: Ministère des Affaires étrangères; Commission de publication des DDF (sous la dir.). Documents diplomatiques français. Volume III: 1956, 24 octobre-31 décembre. Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1990. 642 p. p. 576-579.

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Note from the Secretariat General on the Euratom negotiations (Paris, 21 December 1956)

[...]

I. Euratom and the French programmes

Given that France enjoys a lead over its partners in the technical field and that the results of prospecting suggest that its atomic energy production will develop and grow, the issue to be resolved now is whether the launch of Euratom will hinder or help our programmes.

1. The Euratom provisions on *supplies* are designed to ensure equal access to resources and a common supply policy. The low production levels of the Belgian Congo will no doubt disappoint many. However, the Community plans to put together a coherent prospecting policy so that other minerals may be exploited, apart from the minerals provided by those who have prospected on their own territory, in order to ensure that long-term energy production programmes can be fulfilled.

If the provisions on supplies are understood correctly, then they should not cause any serious difficulties in Parliament. However, it is also quite clear that these provisions cannot fully satisfy those who are calling for an integrated community nor those who think that the only way to safeguard our programmes is to keep our reserves and our production outside the Community.

Lastly, any criticism will be tempered by the fact that the system will operate for only ten years, at which point the Council of Ministers must approve its renewal.

2. *The exchange of know-how*

The Treaty was not designed to provide for the comprehensive exchange of know-how, which would have required not so much a control structure but a veritable network of industrial spies. It does, however, provide for a large budget to pay for joint research. Obviously, the Treaty guarantees that any scientific or technical discovery resulting from research conducted jointly would be disseminated. Euratom's greatest practical benefit in the medium term will most likely be generated by joint research projects.

3. *A joint undertaking*

In the light of the new price for American uranium-235, it is unlikely that our partners would want to undertake the construction of an isotope separation plant. Our view is that abandoning this project would mean losing one of the main attractions of Euratom.

4. *The military programme*

The Treaty safeguards France's freedom to act as it sees fit in law and in fact.

II. The political consequences

1. Born of the idea of the revival of Europe, will Euratom attain that goal?

Euratom will promote the development of atomic energy in Europe in the following ways:

— inventory of mining resources and development of production;

— strengthening of Europe's bargaining position through the establishment of a Euratom supply agency that will be the sole body handling external relations for minerals and fissile material;

— establishment of a joint research centre and several joint production units.

Euratom's supply monopoly will guarantee that Germany will not be able to make use of its industrial might to develop nuclear power outside the supervision of its European partners, for example, directly with the United States. Euratom should also help to ensure that the development of atomic energy by Germany is not a mere replica of, or adjunct to, American programmes. Otherwise, France, which refuses to halt its nuclear weapons production, would have to take matters into its own hands. Our programme could be implemented, but it could also one day be superseded by better and more productive programmes in neighbouring countries. And the European idea would lose one of its basic pillars, with the affairs of our continent then becoming unduly influenced by the United States.

2. Relations with the United States

Insomuch as the Americans want to see the European idea move ahead, the signing of the Treaty will be a source of satisfaction for them. However, there is a wide range of opinion as to the sincerity of Washington's wishes and the expected results.

The new price set for the sale of uranium-235 has been a heavy blow to the plan to build a European isotope separation plant. At best, the new price shows that there is not much inclination to encourage Europe to attain independence in this field. At worst, the decision is designed to promote the export of American reactors.

A further political problem has emerged concerning the American position on the control and ownership of fissile material.

Rightly or wrongly, some people in France, and some of our partners, believe that if Euratom controls were modelled on those of the International Atomic Energy Agency, the United States would consent to sell us raw materials or fissile material and would agree to those controls being conducted by Euratom staff instead of US inspectors. The result is that we have control arrangements that are very different from those that would normally be agreed by equal partners, one of whom reserves the right to manufacture weapons.

Similarly, in a bid to give Euratom the best chances for success in cooperating with the United States, the President of the Council asked Chancellor Adenauer to agree to the idea that Euratom should be the rightful owner of its fissile material. Evidently, such a notion is absolutely foreign to the German way of doing things. But, if that agreement were forthcoming, then the material used to make an explosive or submarine fuel would belong to the Community, and Germany would also be part-owner of any atomic weapon that the Community manufactures. Some would regard that as a step towards a European atomic arsenal, while others would see it as a threat to our freedom to manufacture and use such weapons.

From the political standpoint, the desire to draft a treaty that the United States can approve will further worry those who are apprehensive about the US pressuring France to relinquish its freedom to develop its own weapons. A 'perfect' treaty, from the US point of view, would be resolutely clear on this point. Consequently, we fear that the Americans and our partners will press us to drop the only provision that would prohibit cooperation.

[...]

The creation of Euratom will be a step forward in European politics. But it will not be a decisive step for reasons not to be found in the shortcomings of the Treaty but rather in the fact that nuclear energy does not yet play in the national economies a role which would enable it to convey a major political vision.