

'Supranational atomic authority?' from Die Welt (3 December 1955)

Caption: On 3 December 1955, the German daily newspaper Die Welt outlines the importance and the implications of European political cooperation for the establishment of a European Atomic Energy Community (EAEC or Euratom).

Source: Die Welt. Unabhängige Tageszeitung. 03.12.1955. Hamburg: Die Welt. "Supranationale Atombehörde".

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Supranational atomic authority?

Topic of the week

Cooperation necessary

But no coercion to be used - Opportunities to be created for free development

In the nuclear industry, we are now already facing important decisions. It is true that we do not yet know when and where the first power stations producing energy from nuclear fission are to be built in West Germany. We still do not have a clear idea of how high the cost will be of large atomic reactors or how expensive will be the electricity that can be generated by using them. Nor can we have more than a vague notion of how the development of a nuclear industry will affect the rest of the business world.

Notwithstanding this, however, fundamental decisions will soon have to be taken, so that we may all clarify what form of cooperation can take place between the states of Western Europe in the development of the nuclear industry.

For a number of politicians in Bonn, the decision seems already to have been taken. They are giving their support to the development of a supranational atomic authority on the model of the High Authority of the Coal and Steel Community. Various events could almost be taken as an indication that, in some government departments, a firm decision has also already been taken that the Federal Republic is definitely going to participate in the development of an atomic authority of this kind — for which the name ‘Euratom’ has already been found. However, the problems associated with this, which will be of crucial significance for the future of the West German economy and for that of the whole of Western Europe, have not yet been considered, and their scope is not yet really fully known.

For the politicians, it is a question of pushing forward the unification of Europe at all costs. It is because progress in the political area is not completely satisfactory, because the military alliance is in need of underpinning and because the price of bringing the nations of Europe closer together in the field of culture must be necessarily slow that there is a desire to compel them to enter into a more rapid and closer union on the economic front. Everyone knows that the industries of all the countries involved are in favour of working together and that there is, therefore, a wish to create as rapidly as possible institutions that, in future, will make any isolated action on the part of an individual state impossible. This economic interlinking is intended to give the nations of Western Europe the guarantee of cohesion that the political institutions are unable to offer them. The effort to make this unification a reality at ‘any price’ — a price that would have to be paid by the economies of the Western European countries — is not to be accepted lightly, however. There is a possibility here that it could result in over-hasty, ill-considered steps being taken, steps which would not necessarily lead to the desired objective of healthy cooperation which would be welcomed by all those involved.

The politicians are keen to cite the example of the Coal and Steel Community and point out that voices were also raised in criticism and objections raised by industry before that institution was established. Now, however, the Community functions so well that nobody would now want to abandon it. However, it is precisely this example that ought to provide a warning with regard to a similar measure in the field of the nuclear industry. Of course, no one would want to recreate the situation in the Western European coal and steel industry that existed before the High Authority was set up, but the economic experts of the Coal and Steel Community have had to invest a great deal of skill and a lot of good will before they could use the instrument given them by the statesmen in order to achieve some useful work. It has surely been universally recognised that the treaty has been kept too rigid and inflexible and that a greater degree of flexibility and better opportunities for creativity would be necessary if the present powers are to develop more freely.

The jurisdiction of the Coal and Steel Community covers old industries whose structure and laws of development are already known. In the case of the nuclear industry, we are faced with a completely novel branch of industry whose possible development and effect are still completely unknown. Here, it would be an error that could never be rectified if a particular course were to be prescribed at this stage and organs to direct this future development were now to be put in place.

Close and effective cooperation between the Western European states in the nuclear industry is absolutely essential. It is only through continuous exchange of expertise, joint research and, perhaps, also through joint construction of fairly large power stations, together with a harmonised and coordinated economic system for the exploitation of the energy generated, that it will be possible to ensure that the eventual performance is productive and holds out promise for the future. It is, therefore, essential that a joint Western European authority is created as quickly as possible — and it is perfectly in order for it to be given a name such as ‘Euratom’. What is important is that, in this authority, there will be an opportunity to pool experience, plans and all the practical work involved.

However, it would be wrong to give this common authority powers to influence policy, because, after all, it is not yet possible to foresee in which direction the nuclear industry will develop and along what path it most usefully should be directed. An attempt to restrict the scope of an atomic pool of this kind to the Member States of the Coal and Steel Community might well have a detrimental effect, because close cooperation would also be necessary at least with Great Britain and Scandinavia; in other words, the pool would have to be geared to the area of the OEEC from the outset. What is more, it would have to be structured in such a way that it could work together as a unit with countries outside the OEEC, above all with the United States and Canada, and also so that cooperation by its individual Member States with individual states or groups in industry from outside its membership area would not be adversely affected. Belgium, for example, which has a special position because it is the major supplier of uranium from the Belgian Congo, would hardly be willing to bow to a set of rules which would restrict its freedom of action.

It is important, overall, that there should be absolutely no question of any coercion involved in this cooperation to which the Community aspires, at least until it becomes easier to discern the direction of developments in this new industrial sector — by that time, however, one, two or even more decades will probably have passed. It would be best to leave the organisation of the atomic pool largely to the economic experts of the countries involved. This will then produce results that are more likely to promote cooperation among the European countries than if attempts are made to force the issue unnecessarily on the basis of politically motivated decisions.