'Euratom' from Le Figaro (19 January 1956)

Caption: On 19 January 1956, commenting on the negotiations in progress on Euratom, the philosopher Raymond Aron publishes an article in the French daily newspaper Le Figaro in which he sets out the difficulties standing in the way of European cooperation on nuclear issues.

Source: Le Figaro. dir. de publ. BRISSON, Pierre. 19.01.1956; 129e année. Paris: Le Figaro. "Euratom", auteur:Aron, Raymond.

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Euratom

by **Raymond Aron**

The name has been found: the institution that has been prematurely baptised still needs planning and organisation. Never, in terms of European cooperation, has there been such far-reaching agreement over any issue as there has been over the peaceful use of atomic energy. In theory, everyone recognises that the amount of investment necessary is more than any one nation can manage. Consequently, only the pooling of resources can allow the Europeans to keep up with the super-states, the United States and the Soviet Union, able to devote millions of dollars per annum to this new energy source.

If 'old Europe' were to be left behind in the race towards nuclear energy, it would be destined to an irreversible decline. Unfortunately, these facts, although incontrovertible, may well conceal the enormous difficulties involved. The goal has been set — European cooperation as close as possible — but now people should know the challenges involved. It would be fatal to repeat the mistakes of the EDC: to make an immediate start on the project without first assessing the risks and difficulties.

What are the fundamental difficulties facing European cooperation in matters of atomic energy? After studying different technical reports, I would offer the following conclusions:

1. *It is almost impossible to isolate the atomic energy sector as was done with the coal and steel sector.*

The coal and steel industries represent a relatively well-defined sector, closely linked to the whole economy of each nation but whose suppliers and end-users, techniques and products are well known. Progress continues to be made, techniques now allow coke to be made from coal, unthinkable a few years back, and there are increases in productivity in the blast furnaces. Progress follows a relatively well known path, and certain functions of national ministries can be transferred to Luxembourg without submitting the rest of a nation's industry to a supranational authority, without conferring on that authority the power to take decisions shot through with uncertainties, with the possibility of spectacular or catastrophic results.

The same cannot be said for the atomic energy industry. No one can say for sure where this sector is heading. Already most of the Ministries — Industrial Production, Education, Public Health and Hygiene, Overseas Development — have expressed an interest in one or other aspect of the atomic project. The technology for the peaceful use of atomic energy is in a state of flux. Decisions have to be made as to which kind of nuclear plant to use and which methods should be used for separating isotopes. Some paths are fruitful, others not. How will the various countries share out the cost of failures, the profits of success, seeing as the success of one is perhaps conditional on the failure of the other?

2. *The six countries of 'little Europe' are not at the same point in their research, nor are they diplomatically in the same situation.*

Of the six countries of Western Europe, France is by far the most advanced, although it is 18 months behind Great Britain. It has a budget for atomic research that is four times as big as that of all its European partners put together. Germany will certainly catch up in a few years, and France is willing to share with the Community its know-how and equipment. But France's partners must also play fair.

For example, Belgium, *a few weeks ago*, renewed an agreement with the United States and Great Britain under which it agreed to sell them 90 % of the uranium from the Congo in 1956 and 1957 and 75 % during the following three years. It agreed not to sell the remainder without consulting its US and UK allies on the political significance of the sale. In compensation, it would receive from the United States as much enriched uranium as it needed for production of electricity, as well as *technical secrets that it is not allowed to pass on to its future European partners*.

This agreement, *renewed last November*, is barely compatible with a European atomic pool. The European ties of Paul-Henri Spaak are not in doubt, but the Belgian industrialists, who have the upper hand in the

Atomic Energy Commission, prefer direct cooperation with the United States than with Euratom — which, as far as the Belgian national interest goes, is understandable. The Netherlands has specific agreements with Norway and with the US and the UK, but they are less significant than those of the Belgians. The pooling of raw materials — the essence of the whole idea — is not in keeping with the current agreement between Belgium and America.

3. *The various countries of Europe do not have the same basic idea of the roles of the State and private enterprise.*

The French system is much the most state-controlled. Belgian and German industrialists are fighting hard to prevent the spread of the French system on a European scale. However, if one wants to create an atomic pool, on the model of the coal and steel pool, a common doctrine must be established, whose details would have to be set out in the treaty itself. It seems to me impossible at the moment to establish such a common doctrine, so we need to envisage a kind of European cooperation which allows for different national regulations. This lack of conformity will cause friction. With regard to the pooling of certain patents, one comes up against opposition from both the State and private enterprise. Our American friends will undoubtedly propose that public patents be pooled, but not the private ones, because all the French patents are public and most of the Belgian and German ones are private.

4. *The separation of the use of atomic energy for peaceful and for military purposes is in fact impossible.*

The plutonium, which the French reactors are going to produce in quantity, is also suitable for atomic bombs. The American rules of secrecy will probably forbid the sharing of important information that could be used for both purposes. Lastly, and most importantly, Germany, in the Treaties of Paris, abandoned the manufacture of atomic weapons. A European atomic pool would either oblige Europe to give up the right to manufacture atomic weapons or allow Germany, on the basis of equal rights, to regain the freedom to manufacture them.

That is clearly the dilemma: as part of a pool, France either restricts its own freedom of action in the hope of prolonging forever the restrictions on Germany, or it gives back to Germany the rights which it voluntarily forsook.

If these are the issues at stake, what solutions can we envisage?

Raymond Aron