

## Letter from Louis Armand to Victor Larock (19 June 1958)

**Caption:** Letter sent by the President of the Commission of the European Atomic Energy Community, Louis Armand, on 19 June 1958, to the President of the Council of the European Economic Community, Victor Larock, on the occasion of the position taking of the presidents of the institutions of the European Communities concerning the choice of the seat of the Communities.

**Source:** Lettre de Monsieur L. Armand, Président de la Commission de la Communauté Européenne de l'Énergie Atomique, en date du 19 juin 1958, à Monsieur V. Larock, Président du Conseil de la Communauté Économique Européenne, Objet: Avis des Présidents des Institutions des Communautés Européennes concernant le choix du siège des Communautés. 600 f/58. Bruxelles: Conseil de la Communauté économique européenne; Conseil de la Communauté européenne de l'énergie atomique, 19.06.1958. 3 p.

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Brussels, 19 June 1958

Mr President,

In your letter dated 31 May 1958, you reminded me that the Ministers for Foreign Affairs had agreed, at their meeting held in Paris on 6 and 7 January 1958 with a view to choosing a seat for the European Communities, to seek my opinion on the applications submitted, which are set out in Chapter II of the Report of the European Committee of Urban Planning Experts.

I have pleasure in giving my opinion in this letter.

Following the Council of Ministers' decision, it was agreed that all the European organisations representing the six Member States would be based in one place as soon as it was practicable to move them.

The practical imperatives which require these Communities to be located all together in the same place, a place which it would appear, at first sight, must necessarily be an existing city — the only structure able to meet the immediate requirements — should not cause us to discount the very solid arguments in favour of a new structure. There are, in fact, considerable advantages to a centre which is essentially purpose-built, chosen on the basis of rational criteria and built to the latest urban planning standards, whilst the drawbacks of a solution of this kind are, in fact, less serious than might initially be thought.

This purpose-built centre will need to be designed in a manner which allows for expanding requirements in terms of office personnel and housing, and, from this point of view, the advantages of a new centre far outweigh those of an existing city, however large and able to satisfy immediate needs such a city might be.

This new centre would not be built in a remote area; it would have to be located close to a major city, but separate from it. Thus, whilst it was growing, it would be able to depend on an existing city before it became viable on its own. This proximity would ensure, either ultimately or throughout its construction, that the centre had the essential resources that it needed to play its role properly. It would be served by adequate road and air transport links. The Institutions, together with officials and their families, would benefit from public and local authority services. Being close to a major city would also mean opportunities for culture and the spread of ideas, and leisure facilities.

If, in addition, the layout of this region were such that housing could be spread out to a certain degree, with residential developments or detached houses being added to existing localities rather than a whole new artificial city being built en bloc, the serious drawback of segregation would be avoided.

Furthermore, a situation of this kind located away from major urban centres might bring people closer together, foster mutual understanding and put them in a position to adopt optimum working methods. In an age when it is no longer necessary to prove the harmful effects which urban density has on physical and mental health, a well-designed new centre would generate both the benefits of living close to a city and the relative isolation which is most conducive to satisfaction at work.

There are financial arguments against this solution. Construction on a single site of a centre requiring not only work premises but also housing for officials and all the facilities needed for their everyday living would be more expensive than absorbing them into a city which is already there. But if we look at the problem as a whole and with an eye to the future, the difference in the cost of these solutions is not all that great. Immediate installation in an existing city would very probably mean that services would remain scattered over several buildings, and it would very soon be necessary to build in order to bring these scattered elements together. What needs to be measured against the cost of building a new centre, therefore, is the cost of the operations which would very quickly become necessary. But above all, the chief benefit from designing a purpose-built centre is that the return, in the most noble sense of the word, on it is better: departmental productivity is greater, and so is efficiency.

Given these circumstances, and given that a meeting of departments must be held to ensure trouble-free operation, my view is that a decision should be taken very soon in favour of a district close to a city. Of all the applications submitted to the Council of Ministers and considered by the European Committee of Urban Planning Experts, only the proposed district in the Oise *département* seems to have the right characteristics. But, if a decision is taken in favour of this type of solution, other districts would undoubtedly be possible candidates.

Yours faithfully,

(sgd) Louis Armand