

Letter from Jean Monnet to Hendrik Oosterhuis (6 March 1956)

Caption: On 6 March 1956, Jean Monnet, President of the Action Committee for the United States of Europe (ACUSE), sends a letter to Hendrik Oosterhuis, Chairman of the Dutch Trade Union Federation and member of ACUSE, in which he comments on the US decision to sell part of its enriched uranium abroad in order to encourage the development of the peaceful use of atomic energy and emphasises the repercussions of this action for European industry in view of the debates on the establishment of Euratom.

Source: Internationaal Instituut voor Sociale Geschiedenis, Amsterdam. NVV - J.G. van Wouwe 1945-1973. Stukken betreffende Europese en internationale organisaties. Stukken betr. het Comité Monnet. 1955-1970, 138.

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Last updated: 06/07/2016

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Dear Mr Oosterhuis,

I should like to inform you of the new developments which, to my mind, arise from the statement made recently by President Eisenhower and of certain conclusions which we must draw from it for ourselves with regard to the development of atomic energy for peaceful purposes in our countries. As you are aware, the United States has allocated 40 tonnes of uranium-235 for the development of the peaceful use of atomic energy: 20 tonnes for the United States and 20 tonnes for the rest of the world.

This statement is of exceptional importance.

1. — This amount of 40 tonnes represents only a fraction of what the American uranium enrichment plants (which use almost as much electricity as the whole of France) have produced or will produce. There is not a single plant of this kind on the continent of Europe. There is one single plant in the UK which, it is estimated, has less than 10 % of the American capacity.

2. — The improvement in living conditions in our countries is currently dependent on ever-increasing imports of American coal and oil from the Middle East. Therefore, our countries urgently require a new source of energy. Together, they must provide the resources required to create such a source in Europe by applying discoveries made in the nuclear field.

The statement made by President Eisenhower will enable European industry itself to perfect the reactors required to generate electricity in large quantities and at sufficiently low prices (which it has previously been unable to do). The time required for our countries to be able to generate electricity from nuclear sources may now be reduced by several years.

The jointly-operated plant planned by the experts in Brussels should be able to produce one and a half tonnes by 1962/63 and three tonnes from 1965 onwards. The plants which France is building in Marcoule, at great cost, should provide 100 kg per year as of 1958/59, which amounts to 100 kg of uranium-235.

In order to give an impression of the significance of these 40 tonnes of uranium-235 and the resources which we in Europe must provide, it is sufficient to compare them with the existing orders of magnitude.

Forty tonnes of uranium-235 provides enough atomic fuel to generate approximately 150 billion kWh, or the same quantity of electricity as is generated each year by all the existing thermal and hydroelectric power stations in Germany, Belgium, France and the Netherlands combined. This amount of uranium-235 is sufficient to supply programmes for the industrial use of atomic energy with atomic fuel for two or three years. It is many times greater than the British atomic power station programmes for 1955/1965 and those of the Soviet Union for 1956/1960.

3. — It is clear that, with the establishment of Euratom, which will have control over the peaceful use of atomic fuel, negotiations with the United States will be possible on the ownership by Europe of the fissile raw materials supplied and not only on the 'lending' of it by the United States.

These 40 tonnes of uranium-235 have been produced because the United States has extensive industrial resources. They do not exist in our countries. Together, we can create such resources and ensure that European technology can make a contribution to general progress. Never before have we been given, in a more resounding, direct and specific manner, confirmation of the need for our countries to join forces, set their aims high and adjust the pace of their contributions in order to bring about, through the use of atomic energy, an improvement in living and working conditions in the near future.

Yours sincerely,

Paris, 6 March 1956. Jean Monnet