

'The uncertainties surrounding Euratom and the Common Market' from La Libre Belgique (27 January 1957)

Caption: On 27 January 1957, the conservative daily newspaper La Libre Belgique considers the proceedings of the Val Duchesse negotiations during the Intergovernmental Conference on the Common Market and Euratom, and highlights Belgium's priorities concerning Europe.

Source: La Libre Belgique. 27.01.1957, n° 27; 74e année. Bruxelles: Société d'édition des journaux du Patriote. "Les brouillards de l'Euratom et du Marché commun", p. 1.

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The uncertainties surrounding Euratom and the Common Market

Will Parliament once again be faced with a *fait accompli*?

Talks continued at the Chateau de Val Duchesse, led by officials and experts from the six countries of 'small Europe', and they closed in an atmosphere of manic activity that is somewhat worrying.

The deadline had to be met at all costs so that the Foreign Ministers could put the finishing touches to the Treaties establishing Euratom and the Common Market before the end of the month, thereby enabling those Treaties to be formally signed in February. The national parliaments would then be requested to undertake, as a matter of urgency and no later than during their current session, the 'formality' of ratifying the Treaties, something which is, in fact, no easy matter.

Nobody can blame the negotiators for having been so attentive to detail and for having worked overtime. Paul-Henri Spaak deserves praise for the vigorous boost that he gave to the Conference (which is what, in fact, it was) in Val Duchesse. Was he so enthusiastic because he wants to take up his post as Secretary General of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) as soon as possible? It could well be.

But it seems that there is another major reason for the sense of urgency that he instilled in the negotiators. He believes that the time is ripe for a united Europe to take a decisive step forward. The international climate is clearly conducive to union. Following the events in Budapest and Suez, there is a clearer understanding of the need to bring the peoples of Europe closer together. This is an opportunity that has to be seized because, some are saying, it might never happen again.

If press reports are to be believed, Mr Spaak described the situation by saying that Euratom and the Common Market had to be established 'while Chancellor Konrad Adenauer and Guy Mollet are still in power.'

If that is what he really did say, it would explain the rather unseemly haste to 'rush through' the final discussions and the determination to complete them by a fixed date, come what may. But this haste, if it goes too far, could lead the contracting States down a dangerous path.

The fate of Europe should not depend on the political fortunes of two statesmen, however important they may be. The future Treaties will be viable only if they are in line with what a significant majority of the people want, both in France and in Germany.

What matters, therefore, is not winning a race by signing any Treaty at any price before the Mollet Cabinet falls or before the next elections in Germany.

What matters is that there should be a clear understanding of the main thrust of the common economic and nuclear policy that does not harm the vital interests of the countries concerned. Therefore, it would be better to continue the talks for a few more weeks, if that would help to avoid misleading provisions — mistakenly referred to as vague verbal agreements — which, at the very first hurdle, might cause serious conflicts.

Where do we stand on the points of disagreement?

While the French National Assembly was able to hold a wide-ranging debate and be briefed by the relevant Ministers, the Belgian Parliament was kept in the dark about the progress of the negotiations.

The PSC members of the Senate Foreign Affairs Committee had due cause to complain about the Government's silence.

Most of the talk is about French objections to the Common Market. France, hidebound by years of protectionist habits, fears the direct effects of the establishment of a Common Market more than its partners. It has demanded guarantees and 'escape clauses' that would protect it, in particular, against threats to its

agriculture. It has demanded 'harmonised wage and salary costs' and that its partners make 'a reasonable contribution to investment in its Overseas Territories'. It has made known its intention to 'maintain its system of state aid and taxes for industries at risk'.

Such claims should be given a fair hearing, but the Belgian public also has a right to know whether this package of concessions would totally rob the future Treaty of its substance and what would remain of the very principle of the indispensable Common Market.

As a traditional supporter of free trade, Belgium could not agree that, at the same time as customs barriers between the Six Community Member States were being abolished (and in a phased and probably incomplete way at that), a common customs tariff should be introduced which would lead to a genuine European protectionist policy being pursued vis-à-vis the rest of the world.

We also need to know what role Euratom will play. Will the interests of Belgium and the Congo, which is a major producer of uranium ore, be sacrificed without due compensation? We know that, in this respect, Germany has insisted on liberal policies, but the Belgian public and its Parliament should be given the full picture.

There is also every cause to be concerned at the apparent desire for the uncontrolled establishment of new, and very costly, 'European' institutions.

We stressed recently that the Parliamentary Assemblies of Western European Union and of the Council of Europe unreservedly endorsed the conclusion of Paul Struye's report, which strongly opposes any plan to create a fourth European assembly. But, if we are to believe the snippets of information being grudgingly handed out, the delegates and government experts are ready to ignore this unanimous position and incorporate in the Treaty a new European Assembly that, it is said, would have 225 Members (three times as many as the ECSC Assembly). To top it all, they also want a new Court of Justice.

This would be one more, totally unjustifiable, case of playing around with huge sums of money to create, for no good reason whatsoever, what is being referred to as the 'international technocracy'.

What is most amusing is that, in government circles, attempts are being made to justify such absurdities by referring to the need to obtain the support of the Republican Socialists in the French National Assembly who are against any extension of the powers and responsibilities of the ECSC's Assembly and Court.

The results of the recent votes in the National Assembly speak volumes. A grand total of three Republican Socialist MPs voted in favour of the Common Market. Is there really any point in needlessly, and at great expense, complicating the work of international institutions simply to secure three extra votes in the forthcoming French elections?

On this, as on other issues, it is high time that our Government made its position known and initiated a wide-ranging debate in Parliament.