

'The monstrosity' from Der Spiegel (18 July 1956)

Caption: On 18 July 1956, the German weekly magazine Der Spiegel closely follows the debates in France on the implications of a European atomic community, and, in particular, highlights the difficulties faced by France in seeking to assert its authority over the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) while at the same time not falling under its influence.

Source: Der Spiegel. 18.07.1956. Hamburg. "Das Monstrum", p. 32.

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Last updated: 05/07/2016

‘The monstrosity’

Since the summer of 1954, since the day when the then President of France, Pierre Mendès-France, arranged a third-class burial for the plan to create a European Defence Community, the efforts to unite Little Europe have proceeded in a bare and desolate landscape. Only the Coal and Steel Community (the Schuman Plan) has been eking out a constantly threatened existence in a wasteland strewn with the bones of the EDC and other plans for European Union.

In the spring of last year, a new star did, however, rise over this place of melancholy. It was graced with a strangely shimmering name: Euratom. This star was a plan to set up a European Atomic Energy Community along the lines of the ECSC.

France’s National Assembly addressed the Euratom Plan last week and the week before. Initially, the elected representatives were not that interested in the creature. The speakers spoke for hours to almost deserted benches — until Guy Mollet, France’s Socialist Prime Minister, drawing on the intellectual treasures of European astrology, imparted to the gathering an interpretation of the new star.

The essence of his demonstration was that Euratom was, for the Germans, to be a lodestar on the way to the Western ethos and a reference point that would keep them from Eastern deviations. Guy Mollet illustrated the global significance of Euratom with recollections of his recent visit to Moscow.

On that occasion, Mollet explained, Khrushchev had warned him that the Soviet Union might very well one day come to a direct understanding with Bonn on the question of German reunification without reference to the Western powers, from which, Mollet continued, no other conclusion could be drawn than that ‘only the integration of Germany into a single European entity to which Germany would be subordinate and which would have authority over it’ could offer a lasting solution to the German problem.

Mollet’s warning that the Federal Republic might one of these days — casting off all existing ties with Western Europe — reach an understanding with the Soviet Union on its own authority livened up the debate. One after the other, the old soldiers of the EDC and the ECSC — René Pleven, the father of the EDC Plan, Maurice Schumann of the *Mouvement Républicain Populaire*, rank-and-file members Reynaud and Teitgen — hurried to the rostrum with calls to guard against political developments within the Federal Republic, which — in the words of Félix Gouin from the Socialist benches — was galloping towards ‘the post-Adenauer era’.

Antoine Pineau, the French Foreign Minister, went so far as to paint the nightmare picture of a ‘new German–Soviet Pact’, declaring that such a pact ‘would put a seal on the division of the world into two blocs and would severely threaten world peace’.

Voices equally familiar from years of debate on the EDC were, however, also raised in objection. ‘To begin with,’ grumbled the Socialist daily newspaper *Combat*, ‘they tried to force that monstrosity, the European Defence Community, upon us as a cover for German rearmament. Then the Coal and Steel Community brought us within the dominion of the Ruhr. Now they want to surrender our uranium deposits to Germany.’

Speaking from the rostrum, ex-Gaullist and Radical-Socialist Members urged the Parliament not to place France’s national atomic industry under German command. Two ex-Gaullist Ministers threatened to resign if France’s scientific lead over Germany, which could be reckoned at some ten years of research work, were abandoned.

In the face of such concerns, it was to little avail that France’s High Commissioner for Atomic Energy, Francis Perrin, explained in the National Assembly that in the absence of financial assistance from other European countries, especially from Germany, France would not be in a position to achieve significant progress in the production of atomic energy.

As on other occasions in the past, France’s old dilemma — how to ‘exercise authority’ over Germany

without itself becoming subject to German authority — proved the undoing of the Euratom Plan.

Mollet had arranged for some SFIO friends to table a motion for a resolution whose adoption would empower the government to proceed in the same direction as hitherto with the Brussels negotiations on the Euratom Plan, negotiations in which France was engaged with the Federal Republic, Italy, and the Benelux countries. That resolution was the subject of the debate in the National Assembly.

It soon became clear, however, that a majority in favour of this resolution would not be forthcoming. According to the remit to which the French Euratom negotiators had been working prior to this parliamentary debate, the future Euratom Community would, *inter alia*:

- supervise and centrally fund the entire atomic research of all six ECSC countries,
- control the entire atomic energy production of Little Europe.

The Plan provided for the French to bring to the new Community its colonial uranium deposits and its lead in atomic research, while the other countries — principally Germany — would contribute their financial and economic resources. The fathers of Euratom, including Jean Monnet, the first President of the Coal and Steel Community, held this to be a reasonable compromise between France's interests and Germany's pretensions. This compromise was similarly the basis for the Socialist resolution.

But even on the first day of the parliamentary debate the Mollet government was already in retreat. Speaking for the government, the Atomic Energy High Commissioner, Perrin, declared that, in the case of Euratom, 'excessive centralisation' (as in the case of the ECSC) would be avoided. It would moreover, he went on, be 'unjust' if France, which enjoyed a lead in atomic research and was also the only participating country which itself possessed the raw materials for atomic energy production, were not to retain priority in the exploitation of its knowledge and natural resources. His government was of the view that France could justifiably demand, in the Brussels negotiations, that it be allowed to pursue its own national programme alongside European arrangements for atomic research and atomic energy production.

German research and production must on the other hand — as was to be inferred from Perrin's explanations — be fully 'integrated'.

Apart from that, the Mollet government recommended a 'closed, common European market' for the products of the atomic energy industry. Without such a 'closed' market, Perrin observed, the European atomic energy industry would be flattened by the American competition with its substantially lower production costs.

Perrin forgot to mention that such an arrangement would offer France exceptional advantages. The closed market would shield French atomic energy production from American competition. It would, for example, put it another way, prevent West German industry from accepting US bids for, say, the construction of nuclear reactors or atomic energy plants that were lower than the corresponding French bids. And, since France would not be bringing to Euratom its lead in atomic research and its advantage as producer of the necessary raw materials, it would from the outset enjoy such superiority over every other European atomic energy source *within* the closed market that it would be in a position to dictate virtually any terms that it wanted to its Euratom partners.

For German observers in Paris, the new French Euratom Plan was highly reminiscent of Western European Union (WEU), which Pierre Mendès-France had earlier invented as a substitute for the EDC. There too France enjoys the advantage of being allowed to maintain a national army alongside an army placed under WEU authority. And it must surely be an ill omen for the Euratom Plan that, for some time now, France's WEU forces seem to have been suffering from a strange wasting disease, while its national army has been going from strength to strength. Much the same could happen in the case of the projected Euratom Community, with France pouring all its financial energies into its national atomic energy production and

using its Euratom membership solely as a means of maintaining a careful watch over Germany's efforts in this domain.

Having seen the new version of the Plan, France's parliamentarians have this week — understandably enough — succeeded in overcoming their initial fury over Euratom. They gave their blessing to the amended Plan by 342 votes to 183. Of the 183 votes against, most were cast by Communist MPs.