

A European Atomic Energy Community

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The idea of a European Atomic Energy Community (EAEC), quickly dubbed Euratom, first saw the light of day in the upper echelons of the French administration, where the sectoral integration of the economy remained top priority, whether it was in the coal and steel industries or in nuclear energy.

Jean Monnet, who had sensationally resigned from his post as President of the High Authority of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) in protest against the failure of the EDC project and so as to be able to participate freely in the European revival, was banking on atomic energy, which remained exclusively in the public sector. He was, moreover, supported by the leaders of the French Atomic Energy Commission and by numerous officials and socialist leaders, who were not keen on pursuing the European adventure with negotiators representing purely private interests. Furthermore, this source of energy was very fashionable in the late 1950s, when environmental and ecological concerns were virtually unknown. It was true that the atomic bombs dropped on Nagasaki and Hiroshima in August 1945 had permanently changed the face of the world and that the nuclear arsenals of the superpowers caused dread amongst the population, but the conviction that there were benefits in the peaceful use of atomic energy had reached its peak. Besides, certain French leaders, who were devoted to its military use, hoped to finance their research on the French atomic bomb from the support offered by the European nuclear community.

At the time, atomic energy was, in fact, often considered to be some kind of miracle cure for the problems of energy supply, which had come to the fore in Europe at the time of the Suez Crisis. For whilst energy needs in Europe continued to grow, output from coal deposits to supply those needs declined relentlessly and Europe's dependence on the supply of petroleum products from the Middle East became more and more striking.

Making the atom the powerhouse for European revival also seemed to Jean Monnet to be one way of wiping out the inglorious failure of the European Defence Community (EDC). Fully aware of the scale of public investment involved, Monnet expected financial and technological support from the United States, which was much more advanced than the Europeans in this field. Lastly, he was anxious to prevent any attempt by West Germany to equip itself with civilian nuclear installations outside a European structure.