

Letter from Georges Gorse to Maurice Couve de Murville (Brussels, 13 April 1961)

Caption: On 13 April 1963, Georges Gorse, French Permanent Representative to the European Communities, sends a letter to Maurice Couve de Murville, French Foreign Minister, describing the procedure adopted by the Commission of the European Economic Community to finalise the association agreement between Greece and the EEC.

Source: Ministère des Affaires étrangères ; Commission de Publication des DDF (sous la dir.). Documents diplomatiques français. Volume I: 1961, 1er janvier-30 juin. Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1997. 1024 p. p. 457-459.

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Please notify to the SGCI 1

As agreed, Mr Rey met the Permanent Representatives on 12 April in order to explain why the Commission had been compelled to terminate negotiations with the Greek delegation on 30 March and to initial the draft association agreement. The Commissioner declared that the final phase of talks had been extremely long-winded and turbulent and that, on several occasions, the talks had very nearly broken up. He recalled that, on the morning of 30 March, he had made a point of informing the Permanent Representatives of his intention to initial the texts, but he felt that it was preferable not to ask them to attend the signing ceremony so as not to place them in an embarrassing situation. Mr Rey concluded his statement by saying that Mr Battista, the Chairman of the Special Committee set up in the Parliamentary Assembly, had been pressing him to review the draft agreement with Greece so that the text initialled on 30 March could be sent without delay to the Parliamentary Assembly in Strasbourg. While recognising that it was the task of the Council of Ministers to forward the draft agreement to the Assembly, Mr Rey's personal view was that it was better to forward the text forthwith so that the Assembly could study it at its May part-session. For its part, the Greek Government wanted to start the parliamentary ratification procedure before the summer recess.

I immediately took to the floor. After recalling that, from the outset, we had always sought to bring the negotiations to a swift conclusion, I explained very clearly and in the terms prescribed to me by the department that the French Government was very surprised at the behaviour of the Commission. Its procedure, and the accompanying publicity, placed the Council before a *fait accompli*. I pointed out, moreover, that, after a cursory initial read-through, the initialled texts seemed to us to include many provisions that ran counter to the instructions issued by the Council or provisions on which the Council had not had time to take a decision. We felt that, in any event, the Commission had to give an explanation and that, to that end, the Special Committee should be convened without delay. Lastly, I asserted that sending the draft agreement to the Parliamentary Assembly before the Council had had the opportunity even to take a decision on the general thrust of the draft constituted the *fait accompli* to which we objected. It is the task of the Council, and the Council alone, to determine how and when to forward texts.

Mr Rey took note of my declarations and formally replied that the procedure followed was in no way in breach of the Treaty nor of the duties of the Commission. In addition, the Commission made a point of stressing that the initialled texts were not final and that they had to be submitted for approval to the competent authorities of the contracting parties. Consequently, the rights of the Council were perfectly safeguarded. Mr Rey also drew our attention to the serious political difficulties that would ensue if the negotiations were re-opened.

By and large, our procedural protest was not backed by my colleagues, who simply asserted that the draft agreement was still being considered in their respective capital cities and that, for the time being, they could not take a decision. However, they understood the Commission's difficulties during the final phase of the negotiations. Only the Netherlands representative noted that the text adopted by the two delegations included a number of irregularities and therefore needed at least some legal changes. At all events, technical explanations were necessary. In the end, it was agreed that the Special Committee would be convened on 20, 21 and possibly 22 April.

I then took to the floor a second time to remind my colleagues that we should avoid a repetition of the procedural difficulties that we had just had with Greece when dealing with Turkey. We felt that different negotiating methods should be devised and that we should consult the Council on this matter without delay.

With regard to the draft agreement with Greece, I note that our partners do not appear to be very willing, at

least for the time being, to challenge the texts that the Commission has initialled. However, a more in-depth examination of the draft agreement might prompt them to suggest some changes. It might, however, be in our interest to contact the Greek Government directly in order to ascertain precisely the points on which Greece might be flexible. Perhaps in that way we might be able to overcome Mr Rey's unyielding opposition to any change in the draft agreement and, at the same time, do away with the provisions that we feel are most bothersome. Direct contact with the Greek Government could also clarify the nature of our protest, which, if reported via other sources, could be misinterpreted as a change in the French position on Greek association with the European Community.

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1. Secretary General of the Inter-Ministerial Committee (for economic cooperation in Europe).