

Interview with Jean François-Poncet: the Euratom negotiations (Paris, 16 March 2007)

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[Étienne Deschamps] At that point, two treaties were being negotiated in parallel — the EEC Treaty and the Euratom Treaty. Did you feel that these were two parallel negotiations or, on the contrary, were these negotiations in Val Duchesse directly interlinked and mutually dependent?

[Jean François-Poncet] They were conducted by the same delegation, of which I was the Secretary-General, but since the issues were quite different and the interlocutors, both in France and in the other countries, were not the same, there were two negotiations in one. Euratom was negotiated on the one hand, and the common market on the other. They were not linked to each other, but they both did have to be successfully concluded, and when there were difficulties, we solved the problems of either one; but it cannot be denied that the negotiations that posed most problems and whose implications were by far the most important, were those on the common market. Euratom concerned only one sector and at that time, this sector had practically not been developed. A country that perhaps had done the most in the field of research was France. The others had nothing. In fact, it was the fact that the nuclear sector had not been developed in Europe that had led Jean Monnet to include it in the priorities for negotiation; he thought that, following the failure of the EDC, Euratom would not pose any problems given that no vested interests or rivalry yet existed in an area that was quite new. One could ensure that these nuclear industries would grow at the same time. In his view this was easier to do than for the Coal and Steel Community, where the two countries had interests that were not always similar. Later events belied these expectations because the nuclear industry, particularly in France, very rapidly found itself intimately linked with the military applications of the atom, which could of course only be developed entirely independently. There was no question, at that time any more than there is now, of sharing a nuclear arsenal where there could only be one finger on the button — more than one would be impossible. The fact is that setting up Euratom seemed straightforward; the Treaty presented no important problems, but when it came to implementing it, very soon, especially after the return of General de Gaulle, who speeded up and increased efforts to give France a military nuclear capability, the result was that, little by little, Euratom lost much of its substance.

[Étienne Deschamps] During the negotiations, as far as you can remember, was there any influence exerted directly by the Atomic Energy Commission? Specifically, on the issue of Euratom?

[Jean François-Poncet] Yes, all the more so since the Atomic Energy Commissioner at the time — Guillaumat, who later became a minister and Minister of Defence under General de Gaulle — was the Head of Delegation, or of the part of the delegation that dealt with Euratom.