

March 15, 1960

Maurice Couve de Murville to Prime Minister Michel Debré, 'Revision of the EURATOM Treaty,'

Citation:

"Maurice Couve de Murville to Prime Minister Michel Debré, 'Revision of the EURATOM Treaty,'" March 15, 1960, Wilson Center Digital Archive, Maurice Couve de Murville Papers, CM 7 1960, Centre d'histoire de Sciences Po. Contributed by Jonathan Hunt. <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/300474>

Summary:

The French decision to join EURATOM was conditioned on the regional agency not impinging on national nuclear programs. As early as 1955, French Prime Minister Guy Mollet had instructed French negotiators that "Euratom will not be an obstacle toward the possible decision of France ... to build nuclear weapons." While EURATOM's jurisdiction would be limited to negotiating purchases of fissile materials, promoting trade with the United States and the United Kingdom, and exchanging reactors designs and civilian technology among members of the Atlantic community, Couve de Murville credited EURATOM with a fringe benefit: monitoring West Germany. In this spring 1960 letter to Prime Minister Michel Debré about revising the treaty, he warned against the removal of EURATOM controls over raw uranium and thorium or enriched uranium. Their removal, he cautioned, would create a dilemma: "either abandon the idea that German's renunciation of atomic armaments could be enforced or support the enforcement of equivalent controls under the West European Union, which ... would interfere in the direction of our programs and the development of our nuclear weapons."

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On March 15, 1960
POLICY DIRECTORATE
Department of Atomic Affairs
n° 16/QA

THE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS
to
THE PRIME MINISTER

s.a.: Revision of the Euratom Treaty

Per letter No. 52 dated February 19, you kindly asked me to proceed jointly with Monsieur the Delegated Minister and Monsieur the Minister for the Armed Forces to examine the issue of the revision of the Treaty establishing the European Community of Atomic Energy.

This issue calls for some general observations on my part, which I feel I have to share with you now.

The procedure for revising the Euratom regime is defined by Article 204 of the Treaty of Rome creating this institution:

“The Government of any Member State or the Commission may submit to the Council proposals for the revision of this Treaty.

“If the Council, after having consulted the Assembly and, where appropriate, the Commission, issued a favorable opinion on the meeting of a conference of the representatives of the governments of the Member States, such conference shall be called by the President of the Council with the purpose to decide by mutual agreement on the modifications to be made to this Treaty.

“The amendments will enter into force after having been ratified by all Member States in accordance with their respective constitutional rules”.

A conference of member states for a revision of the treaty can therefore only be called if the Council of Ministers of the Community issues, after consulting the Parliamentary Assembly, a favorable opinion on this matter, an opinion which must be taken unanimously. In the current situation, I am convinced that this unanimity is impossible to achieve. The deliberations of the Council would moreover be preceded by a debate in the Parliamentary Assembly, during which, in all likelihood, the same negative feeling would emerge by a very large majority.

I am therefore forced to the conclusion that an initiative by the French Government for a revision of the Euratom Treaty would certainly be doomed to failure. Such a failure, which would necessarily be brought before public opinion, would have no other consequence than to seriously disturb our relations with our partners.

Whatever judgment one may pass on the usefulness of the European Atomic Community, and whatever the embarrassment, incidentally secondary, that certain provisions of the Treaty are causing us, I do not believe that it is our interest to take the initiatives suggested. It is better to continue to strive in practice to limit the disadvantages of the current system in agreement with our partners.

I would add, moreover, that another aspect of the question must be taken into account. As long as the provisions of the WEU Treaty relating to the control of the nuclear industry are not in force, the Euratom Treaty provides the only possibility of controlling the activities of the Federal Republic, as the latter is required to declare the destination it gives to the imports of raw materials or fissile materials which it may carry out. The loss of the control clauses which figure in the Euratom Treaty would place before us the following alternative: abandonment of the idea of

controlling Germany's renunciation of the manufacture of atomic weapons on its territory, or putting into force control of the WEU, of which you know, as well as I do,

the interference it would entail in the definition of our programs and the development of our nuclear armaments.

signed: Couve de Murville