

Euratom: Atomic Agency Foundering Amidst Squabbles of Its Partners

Brussels. Euratom was established in 1958 to help develop atomic energy in the Common Market. Today, despite enormous research and development expenditures through Euratom and individually among the six European Community nations, Europe trails the United States by far in this booming and increasingly lucrative field of technology. And as for Euratom, it is a declining, dispirited organization, operating on sharply cut, makeshift budgets, while its sponsors wrangle over programs and costs and deal sharply on the question of common interest versus opportunities to turn a national profit. It is, of course, widely held that most things in the Common Market are bound to be moribund as long as President de Gaulle endures. But Euratom's troubles run deeper than French intransigence; and, amidst Europe's lamentations over the "technology gap," it is instructive to examine these troubles, for technology, as it turns out, is the one element that certainly is not lacking.

European Nuclear Effort

A few statistics serve as a useful background to the misfortunes of Euratom, which was set up to run its own research programs and also to harmonize nuclear research in the member nations. When expenditures on these cooperative and national programs are put together, it turns out that the Common Market nations do not lag far behind the United States in spending for peaceful nuclear energy. Euratom puts the U.S. figure for 1967 at \$937 million; the total spent by the Euratom nations is estimated at 80 percent of this, but since the Euratom figure does not include support for nuclear space applications and high-energy physics, it may well be that the Six are spending as much as the United States on activities directed toward the development of nuclear power. Furthermore, the figures show that the European Community nations have assigned a relatively high priority to this field, for it absorbs some 20 percent of their total public expenditures for research and develop-

ment of all types. By comparison, atomic energy takes only about 6 percent of total R & D expenditures in the United States. This being the case, it might be assumed that the Common Market nations would compare well with the United States in realizable prospects for getting electricity out of the atom, especially since a strong motive for doing so is provided by the much higher costs of conventional energy in Europe. But the fact is that at present, though the United States and the Common Market nations are neck and neck, with 15 and 17 atomic power plants, respectively, generating approximately the same amount of power, the United States is now building or planning 87 units, while the figure for the Common Market is only 16. Finally, 12 firms are sharing, or trying to share, Europe's nuclear construction program, while there are only four or five to divide up the much larger U.S. program.

Against this background stands the unhappy story of Euratom, which, ironically, was created—at the very start of the Common Market—not only to promote the development of atomic energy but, more important, to demonstrate the possibility of European cooperation in an expensive and technically difficult field. With the Suez crisis creating the prospect of still higher fuel costs, and the future of atomic energy looking bright, some of the Market's founding fathers foresaw European union naturally following from what they fully expected to be a brilliant performance by their atomic agency.

The difficulty, however, is that political cohesion has shown itself to be a prerequisite for a massive technological effort, rather than a product of it. Operating on a 5-year budget of approximately \$215 million, Euratom, at the outset, appeared to be fulfilling the expectations of its founders. Eventually, a Joint Research Center was built up at a capital cost of some \$150 million, with facilities at Ispra, in northern Italy; Petten, on the Dutch coast; Geel, in Belgium; and Karlsruhe, in Germany. Some signs of difficulty

had begun to appear as early as 1961, when De Gaulle brought about the ouster of Euratom's first president, a Frenchman, Etienne Hirsch, apparently on the grounds that Hirsch was taking the European concept too seriously and was not sufficiently concerned with what Euratom could do to further France's own nuclear ambitions. But, when it came time to provide a new 5-year budget for Euratom, the six partners apparently were pleased enough to raise the sum to \$430 million.

Fighting over Funding

However, the period in which this was to be spent, 1963–67, saw a decline of fervor for European union and a simultaneous realization that nuclear power research was approaching the point where some money might be coming out of it. Furthermore, \$430 million was a sum sufficiently plump to cause the Six to ponder whether they were getting a proper return on their individual contributions, and "fair return" became the subject of an increasing number of squabbles. The Euratom secretariat, dedicated to the concept of a united Europe, could argue that short-term imbalances were inevitable if the community as a whole were to prosper, but its pleas were not always sympathetically received by those who were responsible for the affairs of individual nations, especially in the field where it seemed likely that a big financial return might be on the horizon. In 1965, with agriculture the precipitating issue, France carried out a nearly 1-year boycott of the Market's various institutions to force acceptance of its demand that unanimity, rather than majority vote weighted according to national contributions, should govern the common affairs of the Six. The issue was resolved by requiring unanimity for "major" issues, but the meaning of "major" was never defined. Early in 1967 a large crisis developed when the United States decided to sell, rather than lease, 180 kilograms of plutonium for Euratom-financed work on the French fast reactor at Cadarache. The Euratom Supply Agency asked France to pay the additional cost, \$2.8 million. France refused on the grounds that it was up to Euratom to supply the fuel. Euratom capitulated, with the Italians complaining that France was monopolizing the most commercially promising work, while her partners helped share the costs.

In the meantime, West Germany was

going off on its own fast-reactor program, duplicating much of what the French were doing. In 1967, when the time came to agree upon a new 5-year budget for Euratom, France balked; and, with the Euratom staff, totaling some 2700, simmering in despair, it was finally agreed that Euratom would be given approximately \$90 million—the amount it had been given annually during the newly expired 5-year budget—to carry on through the year. An assortment of irritations then proceeded to intrude into this already acrid atmosphere. Squabbles broke out over the languages that should be employed in Euratom proceedings, with the French, and now and then the Germans, insisting that their rights were not being observed. And some scientists and engineers in the national establishments of the Euratom nations pointed out that Euratom salaries, fringe benefits, and perquisites tended to exceed theirs. At that point, Euratom was not doing very much on its own to further European nuclear development. Its own budget represented only about 12 percent of the total nuclear spending of the Six. And, as the orchestrator of the Common Market nuclear effort, it was not doing too well either, for, among the Six, there were no fewer than four fast-reactor projects, four heavy-water projects, and an assortment of odds and ends, many of them duplicates in one way or another. During 1968, various efforts were made to agree upon a new budget, but France continued to insist that some radical revisions would be necessary before it would continue to support Euratom.

Among these revisions was the reduction of Euratom's research staff from 2700 to below 1000—a proposal that brought talk of strike at the Ispra center, which employs the bulk of Euratom's staff. France's motives are never viewed with charity by her five partners, and in this case it was speculated that the move to slash the Euratom staff was related to difficulties that the government was having in cutting back some of the overswollen and underutilized staffs in France's own nuclear establishments. If France led the way in axing Euratom, so the reasoning went, she would be in a better position to apply the same process to her own nationals. Support for this interpretation was said to exist in the respectful interest that French officials were showing in Britain's successful start at cutting back its own nuclear

research centers and redeploying them to various nonnuclear, industry-related objectives.

Finally late last year, with France holding out against West Germany, Belgium, Italy, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg, a compromise was reached—almost wholly on French terms. A new concept would be introduced into the affairs of Euratom: two cooperative and complementary programs, each of which would receive about \$24 million—for a total just a bit more than half of the current annual budget. Under this arrangement, the Six would share the cost of certain Community-wide activities, to the amount of \$24 million; at the same time, the Six together would provide another \$24 million, but the activities supported by this sum would be on an a la carte basis, with each nation deciding just which activities it wanted to take part in. But, at the same time, it was decided that the Six would have to agree on a new long-term program by mid-1969, or everything would come to a halt. So far, there has been no agreement; and, at this point, the most pressing problem is to round up a few million dollars to provide salaries for 415 staff members, mainly at Ispra, who are not covered by the two \$24-million budgets. Complicating the problem is that, after a 2-year probationary period, employment with Euratom is accompanied by a fairly airtight tenure arrangement, but no one seems to know how this is affected by a situation in which there is no money.

While Euratom is foundering, there is growing support for the idea that it might be desirable for the Six to

find new areas for cooperation in science and technology. The idea for this goes back to 1967, when a committee of the Six singled out possible areas for such cooperation: data processing, telecommunications, new means of transport, oceanography, metallurgy, pollution, and meteorology. For a time, further examination of the proposal was blocked when the Dutch said they would not participate unless the British, though not holding membership in the Market, were invited to take part in the new program. Finally, the French agreed, and studies are now proceeding on what to do next. Whether the British want to participate, however, remains to be seen, for Britain is more and more rigidly linking its scientific and technical policies to activities that produce a commercial payoff. In this connection, Britain has agreed to take part with West Germany and the Netherlands in the development of a centrifugation process for producing enriched uranium. Amid its various difficulties, this agreement is no source of happiness for Euratom. At present, the United States is the principal source of enriched uranium for the nuclear activities of the Six, but the demands for nuclear fuel are growing so rapidly that Euratom estimates that U.S. production facilities will be taxed by the mid-1970's. As a consequence, Euratom has been proposing that the Six get together and construct a plant, but if the three-nation centrifuge project turns out to be a success, it will once again be the case that fragmentation, rather than European-wide cooperation, is the governing force in European nuclear affairs.—D. S. GREENBERG

Oral Contraceptives: Government-Supported Programs Are Questioned

Last year a VISTA volunteer in Alaska watched in dismay as an Eskimo woman being treated in a federally financed birth-control center was handed a sack of oral contraceptives, given no counseling on how to take them, and told to come back in a year.

At a time when questions are being raised about the safety of the pill, the federal government has become one of

the major distributors of the oral contraceptive in family-planning programs for the poor. Some doubts have been expressed about how safely these programs are administered. Officials within the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) have suggested in the past, for example, that its parent, the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW) has been lenient in monitoring