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INTERVIEW

EURATOM – Community in a Crisis

Interview with Dr Fritz Hellwig, Vice-President, Commission of the European Communities, Brussels

The founders of the European Atomic Energy Community (EURATOM) acted "in the conviction that only a concerted action... offers the chance to achieve a performance which corresponds to the creative forces of its members". This sentence is still anchored in the treaty of the Community, but it seems to disappear from its activities. National egotism has oppressed stronger and much earlier than in the EEC the work of EURATOM. The dispute about the research programmes is followed by the quarrel over the finances. Lack of determination to make decisions and adherence to national competences are endangering the existence of the Community. We discussed with Dr Hellwig, who is competent in the EEC Commission for the sectors of energy, research and technology, the destiny of EURATOM.

QUESTION: Dr Hellwig, the Council of Ministers of the European Communities recently adopted the Euratom budget for 1969. All we got was a compromise, as a result of which the budget was divided up into two halves. For the time being at any rate, a five-year programme is out of the question. Do you feel that the present budget constitutes a basis for the continuation of activities extending over a fairly long term or is it in fact the beginning of the end of Euratom?

ANSWER: The present budget will enable us to carry out a research programme which, unfortunately, is not the first section of a new five-year programme, but merely an interim programme for 1969. The Commission has willy-nilly accepted such an interim programme because it at least opens up the possibility of continuing the negotiations on a more promis-

ing multi-annual programme. As regards the scope of the programme which has now been approved, a certain status quo is ensured in the activities conducted hitherto, especially those of the Joint Research Centre. Compared with the 1968 interim programme, the Community will devote itself more to activities which transcend the sphere of nuclear energy, especially in the fields of biology, radiation protection and controlled nuclear fusion. This represents a definite improvement on the 1968 budget.

The decision to divide the budget up into a Community programme and a so-called complementary programme can only be regarded as a make-shift measure to bridge this interim period. It is the Commission's view that Euratom's research programme must in the future again be a genuine Community programme, since the so-called

complementary projects contain the seed of disintegration. This seed will spring forth not only in the research sector but also in other fields in which the Community is actively engaged if the Member States alone are allowed to decide what their joint interests are.

I only need to mention the common agricultural policy as an illustration of what happens when the motto "L'Europe à la carte" is applied to other fields also.

Complementary Programme

QUESTION: Under the present interim budget about 50 p.c. of Euratom's projects are financed by five of the states concerned. Isn't this just a mock battle, against the backdrop of the European ideologies in the Strasbourg Parliament, designed merely to paper over the collapse of the Community?

ANSWER: This interpretation is not quite correct. With regard to the second half of the Euratom research programme, the so-called complementary programmes, it is not always the same five countries which finance the individual projects. France is participating in several projects under the complementary programme, and in one case it is Belgium which is refusing the backing. Participation in the complementary programmes therefore varies. Admittedly France is not collaborating in the majority of activities under the complementary programmes. I would describe these not as a mock battle, but rather as a very earnest attempt on the part of the five Member States to overcome the difficulties which exist in France at the moment with regard to the future orientation of nuclear research and for a limited period, in this case for only one year, to use the existing facilities in order to carry out a reasonable programme of work. In the meantime it may prove possible to conduct negotiations with France under more favourable circumstances.

QUESTION: Do you think that France will make its full contribution again?

ANSWER: I have no reason, at the very outset of negotiations concerning a future multiannual programme, to assume that one of the partners is totally unwilling to cooperate. Should such tendencies exist, however, it would be best to come to some clear decision as soon as possible, at Council level, in order to clarify the question of political liability for such a decision. However, the Commission has no desire to lend itself to attempts to cover up the reluctance to take political decisions at government level.

Cutbacks in the Staff

QUESTION: Are the Euratom authorities fully aware that, in

view of the present uncertainties in the financing of the joint programmes, the best scientific and technical personnel are being forced to seek employment elsewhere?

ANSWER: That is precisely our own fear. On the one hand, the absence of a decision concerning a multiannual programme is a cause of very understandable unrest among our staff, but on the other hand the large majority of them have a legal prop in the form of their Statute of Service, which offers them a considerable amount of security, even in the event of cutbacks in the staff of the European Communities.

QUESTION: In other words there is nonetheless a danger of dismissals?

ANSWER: Yes, but the procedures applied in such a case serve to protect the interests of the personnel. The Commission for its part would like to emphasise once again that it is not so much the human and social aspect which is responsible for this unrest but rather the lack of a clear political decision. That is also the view of our personnel, who see the absence of a genuine multiannual programme as an ominous political symptom rather than a personal and social problem.

Critical Phase In Nuclear Research

QUESTION: Research in the atomic and technology fields is therefore vital for the economic development of the EEC states and also for their survival in the competition with the major industrial powers, the US and the Soviet Union. The preamble to the Euratom Treaty also makes explicit mention of the need to close the technological gap. Surely, the desire to keep abreast in research constitutes a substantial incentive for the Community to do more in the nuclear field?

ANSWER: My answer to this question will have to be somewhat guarded. A return to national thinking, a tendency to introduce a national element into what was hitherto Community policy, is to be observed in other Community activities — at least there is a trend in this direction. The particular problem of Euratom here is that a critical phase in nuclear research throughout our Member States, accompanied by specific difficulties in the nuclear policies of the individual Member States, has coincided with a European malaise which is in turn the result of a squabble over a political concept. Thus Euratom's problems have arisen at the same time as the fight over the political conception of the European Communities and the debate as to whether priority should be given to their expansion or to their internal development, i.e., whether certain hegemonial tendencies are permissible within the European Economic Community. The political arguments, however, should not blind us to the technical problem involved. With regard to these crises in nuclear research as a whole, which have their origins in technical factors, I should like to point out that for several years now the British have been revamping their excessively cumbersome Atomic Energy Authority, although, admittedly, the more cautious path has been taken of gradual reorganisation on a year-to-year basis. The unwieldy size of the French Atomic Energy Commission is at present an open subject for discussion in all its departments, and there, too, an attempt is being made to redefine the orientation of the national research effort. Even in the US budgetary difficulties have resulted in cutbacks in the funds and staff of the Atomic Energy Commission. If this reorganisation is therefore a world-wide phenomenon at the moment, it is no criticism of Euratom that it has taken due

account of such considerations in planning the scale of its research activities hitherto. In the case of Euratom, however, there is an unfortunate coincidence of such material problems with a political malaise which severely handicaps endeavours to find suitable solutions.

International Recognition

QUESTION: So you would say that Euratom is quite well placed in comparison with the USA?

ANSWER: I should say that, as regards the scope of research to date and its results in the Community and in the individual Member States, we can afford to look the rest of the world in the eye. It is an indisputable fact that we have achieved international recognition in the field of fast reactors, natural uranium reactors, high-temperature reactors and nuclear data processing and logging, to mention just a few areas.

QUESTION: How then do you account for the fact that in Europe the number of nuclear power plants to be built during the next few years will mean only a doubling of the present number of installations, giving a total capacity of just about 6,000 MWe, while the corresponding programme in the USA will lead to a sixfold increase, giving a total capacity of over 70,000 MWe?

ANSWER: This gap in reactor construction is due less to the particular level of research in the two areas concerned than to economic factors. Here the reactor installation is not being built as a research facility but as an industrial plant for the generation of electricity.

If, for example, utilities are not prepared to place orders for nuclear power plants, but are given incentives by the state to order conventional plants, this is only one reason for the gap in the nuclear power plant construction programme. Many

other cases could be cited. Our main worry is the fact that the breakthrough to industrial-scale exploitation has so far not been on as broad a front in Europe as in the US. The reasons for this lie in the fragmented nature both of the potential customers in the form of the utilities and of the suppliers of such installations. There are, for example, over a dozen industrial companies in the Community which would be prepared to build nuclear power plants. In the US, on the other hand, a total of four or five big companies are able to handle a much larger number of orders by using a more standardised technical concept. The volume of business of one single reactor construction company in the US is equal to the total amount of all the nuclear power plant contracts to be placed by the European Communities in the next five years.

Incidentally, the figures quoted by you relate to development up to 1975. The outlook for us in the Community at the present time is far from black. By the middle of last year, we had just as many nuclear power plants in operation, with about the same installed capacity, as the United States. The numbers you quote indicate the difference in the development of the two markets in the future.

Two Opposing Ideas

QUESTION: The old Euratom programme, with particular reference to the reactor construction sector, offered no basis for the elaboration of a joint concept. Those responsible for nuclear policy did not even succeed in bringing pure research to industrial maturity so as to forge a link between research policy, energy policy and industrial policy. Was not Euratom thus from the outset placed in a position of isolation so that today no Member State feels it has any responsibility for Euratom?

ANSWER: You have a point there, namely, that Euratom has concentrated mainly on the research field for too long. The merging of the three European Communities has now given the go-ahead for placing nuclear research in the wider context of a common energy policy and a common industrial policy. Having said that, however, I would immediately add that the Community has as yet neither a common energy policy nor a common industrial policy. The European Executives have time and again put forward proposals on these subjects. But the governments have not been prepared to take any binding decisions beyond the bare minimum prescribed by the Treaties—a state of affairs which the Commission has repeatedly deplored. This is why it has once again taken the initiative and submitted suitable proposals to the Council and the Member State governments.

As regards what you call Euratom's "isolation", I would describe this situation somewhat differently. I believe that, looking back, we can say that Euratom has tried to reconcile two opposing ideas. In so doing, however, it has fallen between two stools. The one idea was that Euratom should carry on reactor research of a purely European character, i.e., independently of the United States. In pursuance of this idea, Euratom set up its own research programme, centred on the development of a natural uranium fuelled reactor of the heavy-water type. Five of the Member States, however, were not prepared to wait until such an "all-European" reactor type could be used for industrial purposes. They did not want to miss the opportunity of obtaining and operating existing American types. Euratom accordingly entered into an agreement with the United States which gave the European reactor construction and electricity industries access to US patents and know-

how. At the same time, arrangements were made for the supplying of enriched uranium. US light-water reactors are geared to the use of enriched uranium, and the only potential supplier was the United States itself.

Now Euratom is being, on the one hand, criticised for having introduced American techniques into Europe and, on the other, reproached by five of the Member States for having entered into competition with the industries of these States by developing a reactor type of its own. That is what I mean by "falling between two stools".

Amateurish Organisation

QUESTION: Euratom's organisation has on occasion been called downright amateurish. After the merging of the Communities, you and Wilhelm Haferkamp, as the two German members of the Commission, had to assume responsibility for energy questions, research and technology, i.e., completely new fields of activity, which, in the initial phase at all events, was certainly not calculated to ease the work of the Commission in this respect. Added to this was the fact that the location of the offices did not make for rational operation. What have you to say about these objections?

ANSWER: I quite agree that if you look at it in that way, the entire organisation of the European Communities could be described as amateurish. One cannot, of course, compare it with that of an industrial firm or a national civil service. For one thing, there is the polyglot aspect of our Community. What private firm would permit itself the luxury of having all its documents and working papers drawn up in several languages? As regards the staffing of the Commission, the Member State governments are unanimous that this is a question mainly of political mandates and not of

scientific and technical skills. That means that, just as in national governments, a politician with certain capabilities or certain professional experience in specific sectors must be prepared to assume responsibility in connection with such fields, even if this initially causes him extra work that has to be performed very quickly. And I do not think that, as far as Mr Haferkamp and I are concerned, the work of the Commission has been held up by our appointment to these new posts. I should like to remind you that the new Commission spent a whole year on the reorganisation of administration as demanded by the merging of the three Communities.

Even so, the redistribution of responsibilities made it possible, with due observance of the time-limits laid down in the Treaty, to submit the draft Euratom programme for 1968 after the Commission had been in existence for only three months, and the guidelines for a new multiannual programme after a further three months. Thus staff reshuffles could not in this case be said to have caused any delays or time-wasting. The time-wasting which has occurred—and I would stress this point—is largely due to the fact that the Council of Ministers repeatedly refused to enter into a dialogue with the Commission at the proper time on the fixing of guidelines for a new multiannual programme. This was what happened in the spring of 1967 with the former Euratom Commission, in November 1967 when our Commission submitted a proposal, and also in March 1968 when the Commission put forward proposals for a new multiannual programme. The Council was unable to agree on the guidelines for such a programme by the time the summer holidays came round in 1968, with the result that the

Commission had only two months in which to submit a draft programme, and on its own responsibility.

QUESTION: Europe's politicians have long been aware of Euratom's woes and problems. Yet so far they have been unable to produce a definite change in its basic concept. How do you see things developing for the European Atomic Energy Community in the immediate future?

ANSWER: No final decision has yet emerged concerning the most efficient way of organising cooperation in various fields of advanced technology and major research. There is a general consensus on the need for co-operation transcending the purely national plane. But not everybody has yet realised that truly effective cooperation also calls for the relinquishing of national sovereignty in these fields. You have said that our organisation is perhaps amateurish. It is undoubtedly amateurish to make the implementation of large research projects requiring several years' continuous work conditional on the unanimous approval of all the parties concerned at every stage. Where there are no clear-cut powers of decision, difficulties arise everywhere. We must have done once and for all with paying lip-service to the idea of co-operation extending to non-Community countries and must be prepared to accept a reduction in our national sovereignty in such organisations. Minority interests in the competent decision-making bodies can be protected in various ways. They cannot, however, be protected by making majority decisions utterly impossible, for otherwise the Community is ousted to make way for unstable groupings. The lessons to be learned here should be applied to the future organisation of research in our Communities.