

Interview with Max Isenbergh for the Jean Monnet Foundation, Lausanne.
Washington, D.C., April 20, 1981

L. Tennyson: Max, this interview with you is to try and find out something about your views of Monnet and the period in which you knew him in the '50's. I gather that you met him in Paris, and I was wondering whether you might start out by telling something about the circumstances of that.

Max Isenbergh: Actually, I met him in Luxembourg, where he was still the head of the Coal & Steel Community. I think that our first meeting was in November of 1954. The reason for the meeting was that I was living in Paris, and had come on with letters to Jean Monnet from two very good friends of his who happened to be very good friends of mine.

LT: Who were they?

MI: They were Felix Frankfurter¹ and Philip Graham.²

LT: I see. How did Monnet know Phil Graham? Was he one of those people in that coterie of wartime confidantes in Washington?

MI: Possibly that's a sufficient explanation. Phil Graham was one of those people distinguished for brilliance even in a brilliant community like Washington during the war period, who brushed against nearly everyone. Possibly, since Phil Graham had been Felix Frankfurter's law clerk he had met Monnet that way.

LT: Oh, I see.

MI: But it would be inevitable that Monnet, who always went to outstanding personalities wherever he was, would sooner or later have established some contact.

LT: Did you find yourself in Luxembourg solely with the purpose of introducing yourself to Monnet?

MI: No, I had gotten a year off which allowed me to spend a year just thinking about things. The subject of my contemplation was organizing the world for international cooperation in the development of atomic energy for peaceful uses, an exercise which was quite natural for me to engage in because I had been in the Atomic Energy Commission for a couple of years before that.

LT: And that was just about the time that Euratom was becoming something of a gleam in Monnet's eye, wasn't it?

MI: Yes. I like to think that I had a part in putting that gleam in his eye. I like to think that, but I don't have any feelings of fondness for Euratom because the original conception of Euratom and the actuality were far different. Let me give you the circumstances. On the strength of those letters from Phil Graham and Felix Frankfurter, Monnet invited me to Luxembourg, and I went there, had dinner with him at his house, on a day in November, 1955.

LT: Nineteen fifty-four?

MI: 1954, thank you. It was a time of elaborate pessimism among the people who called themselves the Europeans.

LT: They were still suffering from the defeat of the European Defense Community.

MI: That was the main reason for the pessimism. They were looking for, to use the jargon, "substantive areas" in which to

build up European integration. The next step proposed, after the Coal & Steel Community, was the Common Army.³ They had some reason to believe that they were going to succeed with it, but people will have no difficulty remembering that Mendes-France finally took a stand against it. And the Six, or their leaders, had the impression that there wasn't any place to go. It was in that setting that I had dinner with Monsieur Monnet in Luxembourg. I suggested something which was obvious to me but sounded like pure poetry to him. I suggested that cooperation among the Six in the program for the peaceful development of atomic energy had a better prospect of bringing about integration than the Common Army.

LT: So you were in a sense, as far as you know, the father of the idea.

MI: I think that that may not be true, because it seems to me inevitable that the idea would have emerged. It must have been talked about, but it had probably been talked about in some vague, loose way. The combination of circumstances permitted me to talk about it in a very specific way, because I had spend the few months between my arrival in France and that meeting with Monnet thinking precisely about how to organize internationally for the peaceful development of atomic energy. That was very much on my mind. Therefore it was an obvious idea to me, and what the French call modalités -- ways of doing it -- were on my mind because I had been thinking about it. So, although it is possible, and probable, that somebody had thought of the idea before, I don't think anyone had

presented it to Monnet as a practical step. At any event, Monnet was so excited that he kept me at his house until 2:30 in the morning. Then in his imperious way, he insisted that I remain in Luxembourg, which I did, for the next ten days. It was in those ten days that, I believe, what was later called Euratom was born. It didn't have a name then, and as I said, the concept was quite different from what finally emerged. The original concept of Euratom was an organization for the peaceful development of atomic energy, with anti-proliferation as one of its central tenets.

LT: And a strong supra-national institutional structure?

MI: Oh, yes, the theory was really to have the Six enter this program en commun, an idea which was much more easily achieved than a common army, because all these nations, from time immemorial, had had their own armies. But none of them had an organized program for the peaceful development of atomic energy. So they could start with a clear slate.

LT: Did Monnet know anything about atomic energy, did he have any notion about either the scientific or the economic consequences of it? How was he schooled in this?

MI: I think he knew nothing. In any event, if he knew something, he concealed it. This meeting in Luxembourg was the beginning of a very close relationship with Monnet that had a hiatus after a couple of years and then was resumed again.

LT: As you know, that happened to many people who were associated with Monnet. You were not alone.

MI: Yes. I haven't given you the details of that and maybe I will, but for the moment, to respond to your question, he gave the impression that all these things were far beyond his capacity. This was not only true of atomic energy, but later when I had some occasion to consider with him the possibility of setting up some kind of technological pool for scientists and technologists for the Six, he kept taking the stance "Well, all this is beyond me, and I have to allow you fellows to deal with it." 'You fellows' vaguely referred to people who came to him as experts. I don't know whether he was as ignorant as he appeared to be. But as a practical matter I am unaware of his ever participating in any technical or scientific discussions on the matter.

[hiatus]

LT: Now, you go ahead, Max, I want to hear more about these early days with the unfolding of Euratom.

MI: To get back to the merits of the question. Like everyone else, I suffered from the prevailing economic and technological miscalculation.

LT: How was that?

MI: People really believed that cheap electrical energy was just around the corner.

LT: But everybody believed that.

MI: Yes.

LT: Was there anybody who did not believe that?

MI: I don't know whether there were people who did not, but at

Luxembourg in those ten days when there was that burst of enthusiastic discussion of this new possibility for integrating the Six, Jean Monnet called in the stalwarts of his movement. I remember particularly Pierre Uri, whom I had never met before. I was impressed with his dazzling intelligence, his quickness. I was also greatly impressed with Max Kohnstamm, who distinguished himself from the rest of the company by being very cool and dubious about this proposition.

LT: What were his reservations?

MI: I can't be sure. I think he was just a prudent, cautious person. I remembered it because I think I too was carried away by the enthusiastic reaction, and it was notable that there was one person who didn't share in the enthusiasm. It became memorable because later on, as I recall, he was rather a zealous supporter of the idea.

LT: Oh, yes, he came to the States with the "three wise men" of Euratom on the famous trip in 1957. By that time he was, of course, completely captivated with the notion.

MI: Well, to get back to the development of Euratom. The original concept, with which Monnet seemed to go along, was that the statute or charter -- whatever the constitutional document of the organization was going to be -- was to have a provision that any nation which got assistance from the organization would, as a precondition, have to renounce any testing of atomic weapons. To repeat, the notion of anti-proliferation was in my mind, at least,

from the beginning, and there was no apparent objection to it.

LT: Did people like Monnet and some of his colleagues seize upon the notion of non-proliferation as readily as you, an American, did? Or was it possible that they were less aware of the awesome consequences?

MI: Well, the cat is out of the bag now, because this was the issue on which Monsieur Monnet and I broke, after having a very close initial relationship. It became apparent that the French were not going to be enthusiastic about a Euratom which required that members renounce any military nuclear program. I ought to add that that was by no means a unanimous public opinion in France. Guy Mollet was the Prime Minister, and indeed in the first debate on Euratom in the Assemblée Nationale he got up and said, "As long as I am Prime Minister I will do everything in my power to see that France never makes an atomic weapon" -- although he must have known that France had embarked on a program to make atomic weapons several years before. He added, "And when I stop being Prime Minister, as a private citizen I will do everything in my power to see that France doesn't make any atomic weapons."

LT: Did he in fact?

MI: I don't know. I lost track of his activities. He disappeared from prominence in the French political life not so long after he was Prime Minister.

LT: He was a member, was he not, of the, of Monnet's Committee for a United Europe?

MI: I don't know. But in any event --

LT: The Action Committee.

MI: I do not recall that he was one of the active adherents.

LT: No, he was not.

MI: French public opinion had not been formed on the issue. A few military people went around giving a superficial speech, which carried the day. It ran something like this: "This is an age of power. In this age of power the great power is nuclear power. France has to return to a position of power and the only pathway is nuclear weapons. Vive la France!" That superficial view prevailed. How did it express itself? By the French proposal that the Euratom treaty contain a provision that instead of renunciation of atomic tests by the signatories, there would be a period of moratorium. The first moratorium period suggested was seven years. It was already 1956 when this proposal was made. The French didn't have much chance of making a bomb immediately. Therefore, renunciation of bomb tests for seven years wouldn't have put a crimp in their program. After a while, they decided that seven years might be too long, and they suggested a shorter period -- I believe four years. And finally, when the Euratom treaty was adopted, there was no provision for a moratorium, and no provision for renunciation of testing of nuclear weapons as a precondition of getting assistance from Euratom.

There were other forces at work which helped the French. The principal one was the attitude of the United States. As I said,

there was a general technological and economic miscalculation. Western Europe, as the world in general, thought the United States really had an economically viable technology which would solve the energy problems of the Western world. That gave us tremendous leverage. Instead of using that leverage to get an anti-proliferation plan into the Euratom treaty, we took the position that these were matters for the sovereignty of other countries, and that it was unseemly for the United States to use its influence to get the Six to follow any such policy.

LT: Let's get back to Monnet. What's interesting to know, is when did Monnet decide: "We will not pursue the non-proliferation route... we will not use Euratom as an instrument for preventing the spread of nuclear weapons."

MI: I don't think Monnet ever worked that way. I don't think Monnet had a specific plan and then modified it. I think Monnet had his idea -- his goal -- the integration of the Six. He was indifferent to ways of getting there. He saw that somehow a program of peaceful development of atomic energy would help and that much he could embrace. But matters like proliferation of atomic bombs, although a vastly more important problem than anything else within the contemplation of Euratom, didn't enter his mind affirmatively. So I don't think there was any shift. As soon as he discovered the French were against it, he realized that a provision for renunciation of weapon making was a threat to his objectives. He didn't want to risk losing the French. He was therefore willing to go along with

their desire for freedom to make atomic weapons.

That sounds condemnatory of Mr. Monnet. Well, maybe it is, but it is my view. I recognize that he was a great man, because he had two qualities of greatness. One is that he kept his eye on one objective at a time, and he subordinated everything to that objective. In the French phrase, "il portait des oiellères" -- he wore blinders -- allowing himself to see one thing at a time. And the other great quality he had was that he was never influenced by any personal ambition. Those two things distinguished him from most people right off the bat. But he really didn't have any priorities in his objectives. He was set on the integration of Europe and I don't think he ever stopped to consider whether peace of the world, Europe included, was a more important issue. So he never saw the effort against proliferation of bombs as anything but an obstacle to the achievement of his objectives.

LT: He did say, shortly before he died, in some talk he had with a friend of mine: "I don't know really what has been achieved with this whole business of Europe, except that I'm quite confident that we have prevented war from ever appearing again between the French and the Germans." Of course, having said that, there's still the global nuclear confrontation, which has been, I suppose, according to your tale, neglected or ignored.

MI: I believe so, even if he's right, and he may be, that by getting Germany and France integrated with each other, and with the other four, and now the larger Community, you have greatly reduced the recurring frictions that led to world wars. But there are even

greater problems in the world. Surely proliferation of atomic bombs is one.

LT: Getting to the particular for a moment, do you have anything to say about Monnet's work methods. Obviously you spent a lot of time with him when this business of Euratom was in ferment. Was there anything you noticed about how he proceeded from point A to point B? How he used people? Did you have any insights in the way his mind worked? Maybe that's too generous a question?

MI: I don't know whether there were insights. There's one observation that one couldn't fail to make. He enlisted loyalty from all kinds of people, in a way that I have rarely seen in my lifetime. He, as I said before, was singleminded. He dedicated himself totally to his objectives. He never was influenced in any small way by what was in it for him personally, so to speak. That may not seem remarkable, but I believe it's a great distinction in the world of public affairs. Because he was so thoroughly dedicated himself, and because he stirred up good and useful ideas, he brought the best out of many very able people. There's the famous story about Monnet's needing somebody at two o'clock in the morning for the answer to a problem he was working on at that moment. Knowing that this person was at that hour likely to be in bed with his mistress, he telephoned the mistress' apartment, routed the fellow out, and put him to work on the problem immediately. That may be an apocryphal story, but it needn't be, because that was the expectation to which Monnet held the people who worked for him, and they performed accordingly. He also, while affectionate in a touching

way, could turn off affection completely. I experienced both sides of him. For a long period he was very affectionate, considerate, and thoughtful to me. When we broke on the proliferation issue, he became ruthless.

LT: For example?

MI: He made it known to my principals in the United States, either in the Atomic Energy Commission, the State Department, or both, that he regarded me as an obstacle to the integration of Europe. And that manifested itself in the communications I'd get from Washington. Cables would sometimes use the very same words and phrases I had used in discussions with him. There was no way that that could have occurred to the sender unless Monnet had let it be known that he didn't like my operation and had described my purposes and approach in the terms I had used in talking to him. Then, to speak less personally, when Euratom finally got under way, the United States gave Euratom a birthday present. I understood that it amounted to 240 million dollars.⁴

LT: And what form did that take?

MI: Well, I think that some was actually money, but the important thing was that the Americans were suppliers of fissionable materials for reactors. Now I was in favor of the United States offering nothing unless Euratom as an organization agreed to require members to renounce weapon-making. The United States never took that line. They carried out Monnet's wishes on that. I don't know that the approach I was for would have worked, but I thought passionately then, and still do, that it should have been tried.

LT: I remember back in those days, that the reasoning that seemed to emerge behind Monnet's decision, and I'm reporting this second-hand, was a kind of realpolitik -- that it was too late to get the French to renounce anything, 'they simply won't go along, so we'll have to make do with second-best.' It would have been terribly important to get a non-proliferation clause written into this. You're saying that it was so important that somehow the French should have been brought to the wall?

MI: I believe that. It's possible that you're right, that nothing could have stopped the French from persisting in their efforts to make atomic weapons. I don't know whether that's true. I know that all the time that I was engaged in this range of activities, I had the feeling that there were people within France who were strongly opposed to France's making weapons, and who indeed thought that France's embarking on a program of weapon-making would reduce rather than enhance France's security. As I say, possibly those people, even with some encouragement from the United States and even with the use of what we had to give as leverage, and what we had to give was miscalculated -- people thought we had the gift of cheap electrical energy to give -- it's possible that even if that leverage had been used to bring France around that it would not have worked. All I can say is that it should have been tried. All the way through when the issue was raised it was resolved on the side that Monnet wanted, and his wants and desires were very clear: he wanted no obstacles to the achievement of integration among the Six

by Euratom. At a certain point, incidentally, he thought that Euratom was more important than the Common Market.

LT: Oh, yes, we remember that, it was a very strong feeling on his part that the generalized European Economic Community would not go anywhere, that it simply could not survive a political test. Whereas subsequent events in Europe, as you recall -- the Suez Canal, Hungary -- provided a different atmosphere. Did you, thinking back a little bit now, encounter among any of the colleagues of Monnet with whom he worked those who shared strongly your view of the linkage to a non-proliferation commitment?

MI: I was not aware of having people strongly on my side. I don't think that people strongly opposed Monnet in anything, especially his company of loyal followers. On the contrary, I was aware of having people call on me in Paris, and I won't mention names -- it might be embarrassing to them -- but they were people in important positions in France and other countries. They would call upon me and try to argue against my position. They came as emissaries of Monnet. There were moments, later on, after Euratom was in existence and the idea of proliferation was still very important, that some of those people became conspicuously connected with the notion of anti-proliferation. But by then, they had no more influence on Euratom.

Let me mention a few other things about Euratom, specifically. I mentioned the birthday gift, the \$240 million dollars. When the United States had the opportunity to withhold that, and say, "Yes,

we'll give you the 240 million dollars provided you do something about proliferation." They did not do that. Another question was inspection. There was still a distinction in the Euratom program between a program for peaceful development, which was Euratom's business, and military programs which were outside of Euratom. Now it was very important when you have a peaceful program, that fissionable materials not be diverted to making weapons. The essential assurance against diversion is to have a system of inspection. It was early proposed that Euratom be subject to inspection by teams of the International Atomic Energy Agency in Vienna. There was very strong resistance to this. It was proposed that Euratom have its own corps of inspectors. That surely is an unacceptable principle -- self-inspection. When it was proposed that the International Atomic Energy Agency in Vienna inspect, the position of the Six, the official position, was: "We can't allow the Russians to inspect us. They'll steal our technology." And that argument was accepted with a straight face. "Our" technology didn't exist. The only technology they had was the technology given to them by the United States. And the argument that you can't stand the inspection of adverse parties is absolutely fatal to the possibility of having effective inspection.

LT: You seem to lay quite a great deal of store by the notion that self-inspection is impossible, that nations cannot volunteer to inspect themselves apropos the non-proliferation of weapons. You want to go into this a little bit?

MI: Yes, the reason I put so much stress on the undesirability of self-inspection is this. I regard it as the greatest obstacle to the achievement of nuclear disarmament by the Soviet Union and the United States, that neither will allow the other to inspect on-the-spot. The reason that that is fatal to nuclear disarmament is evident. If you have agreements, like the SALT agreements, which impose limitations on certain defined categories of weapons, you can have the most meticulous adherence to the agreements on both sides and still there will be no limitation on the amount of effort each side can make to develop other atomic weapons. Not only is there no limitation, but both nations, each with prudent concern for its own security, would have to do their utmost to develop other weapons, out of the fear that the other nation was doing precisely that. So at the same time that you have limitations of weapons X, Y, and Z, each nation is entitled to go ahead as much as it wishes with the development of other weapons, something it feels it must do because it cannot run the risk of letting the other nation get ahead of it so far that it will put itself at the other nation's mercy. The result is that we may have ever more successful SALT agreements, accompanied by ever-greater expenditure on armaments, and at the same time no achievement of any increased nuclear security.

LT: Let's get back now to your contention that, had Monnet been aware of the problem, he would have fought for the principle generalized inspection involving not only the two principal countries, but others within a multi-national framework, but he didn't recognize

this? or he deliberately put it aside? What was it?

MI: Well, I know that he was aware of the problem. How deeply he perceived the importance of it, I cannot say. Monnet was never a spokesman for his own organization on technical problems like this.

LT: I don't understand you.

MI: Well, the people who discussed the issue of inspection articulated a position which I cannot say that Monnet was responsible for, because they were the spokesmen for Euratom. In whatever councils this issue came up, their position was, "We cannot accept inspection by representatives of countries from behind the Iron Curtain, because they would steal our industrial secrets in this field."

LT: But did you feel that there was another, deeper reason for their reaction, that this explanation they gave was really a face-saving explanation for something else?

MI: I don't know that you have to look far for an explanation. It was part of the resentment toward the United States, whenever the suggestion was made, that there should be attached to the offer of assistance for peaceful nuclear development with the aid of the United States a condition that the recipient should not engage in any military programs.

LT: That had been formally put forth by the U.S. as a condition for its support of Euratom?

MI: On the contrary. Whatever the informal discussions might have been, as I indicated today, when the moment came for giving

the \$240 million, the United States did not make it a condition that the Six renounce weapons-making or that, since we could have recognized that France had already started on that path, no new programs of weapons-making could be undertaken by the members of Euratom. That condition was never insisted upon by the United States. Let me point out one other thing. It sometimes happened, in those years, that representatives of the Atomic Energy Commission and the State Dept. would come to Paris, would talk to Monsieur Monnet about his problems, and occasionally -- do not believe this is far from the literal account of what happened -- he would be asked: "What can the United States do to help you in your programs?" On one such occasion, when the OEEC had started on a program among the 17 members of OEEC to develop peaceful uses of atomic energy, Monsieur Monnet suggested that the United States use its influence to terminate that activity in the OEEC. Why? A clear explanation is evident to me. The OEEC was prepared to subject this new agency, the European Nuclear Energy Agency, to inspection by teams of the International Atomic Energy Agency in Vienna. I believe that there were people working on Euratom who feared that the United States would withhold its support from Euratom and give it instead to the European Nuclear Energy Agency, because of the Nuclear Energy Agency's willingness to support the principle of adverse inspection, that is, inspection by teams from the International Atomic Energy Agency.

LT: Let me interrupt you to ask you a simple question. Did

you ever sit down with Monnet and confront him very simply and directly with this question that was bothering you? And if you did, what was his reply?

MI: I did. The reply was, "I really don't understand technical matters like that." That was as far as I got in a discussion with him. I would shortly afterwards be confronted by emissaries from him.

LT: Who were they?

MI: I'd rather not say. I would hope that in the course of these interviews one or more of them might recall situations like that and perhaps explain some aspects of it that I was not aware of. But as I saw it, it seemed to me an orchestrated effort to resist the principle of international adverse inspection and to sabotage an institution of the OEEC, namely the European Nuclear Energy Agency, which was prepared to support that aspect of peaceful nuclear development.

LT: I suppose you feel we've sufficiently aired this?

MI: I've gone as far as I can go.

LT: Well, thank you very much, Max.

MI: You're welcome.

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Footnotes

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¹Associate Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court.

²publisher of the Washington Post newspaper.

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³European Defense Community (EDC).

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⁴The U.S.-Euratom agreement for cooperation reads, "The Community will receive approximately \$135 million from the U.S. Government in the form of a loan at low interest. The U.S. will furthermore bear half the expenditure required for the research program provided for under the agreement." The fissionable materials were supplied on a purchase basis.

ISENBERGH, MAX, lawyer, musician, educator; born Albany, New York, August 28, 1913; son [of] David William and Tess (Solomon) I.; Bachelor of Arts Cornell University, 1934; Doctor of Jurisprudence, Harvard University, 1938; Master of Laws, 1939, Master of Arts, 1942; married Pearl Evans, August 10, 1939; children -- Tess, David William, Joseph. Admitted to New York bar, 1938; U.S. Supreme Court bar, 1945, D.C. bar, 1950; fellow Harvard Law School, 1938-39; tutor University of Chicago Law School, 1939-40; various government positions, 1940-48; legal secretary to U.S. Supreme Court Justice Hugo Black, 1941-42; special assistant to attorney general U.S., 1944-48; counsel European operations American Jewish Committee, 1948-50; legal advisor Point Four Program, State Department, 1940-51; general counsel President's Materials Policy Commission, 1951-52; deputy general counsel Atomic Energy Commission, consultant international affairs, 1952-56; special assistant for atomic energy American embassy, Paris, 1956-61; deputy assistant secretary of state for education & cultural affairs, 1961-62; chairman U.S. delegation to UNESCO Conference on Protection Cultural Property, 1962; counsel to chairman Communications Satellite Corporation, 1962-63; professor George Washington University Law School, 1963-65, University of Maryland Law School, 1970 --; visiting professor University of Virginia Law School, 1965-66, 68, 69, Yale Law School, 1966-67, American University Law School, 1969-70, 72, 73 --; consultant Peace Corps, 1966-67; member panel arbitrators American Arbitration Association; professor law Salzburg (Austria) Seminar American Studies, summer 1965; lecturer, TV panelist on arts and law; consultant International Atomic Energy Agency, Vienna, Austria, also European Nuclear Energy Agency, Paris; participated as delegate, adviser, official observer numerous international conferences; executive committee Third Inter-American Music Festival; lecturer, TV panelist on arts, law, atomic energy, 1956 --. Member D.C. Mayor's Task Force Arts and Humanities, 1978. Recipient Rockefeller Public Service Award, 1954. Member American Law Institute, American Federation of Musicians, Phi Beta Kappa, Pi Lambda Phi (past president chapter). Club: Cosmos (Washington). Editor: Harvard Law Review, 1937-38; author articles, book reviews, music and art criticism Clarinetist; concerts in U.S. and Europe. Home: 2216 Massachusetts Ave. N.W, Washington DC 20008. Office: 500 W. Baltimore St., Baltimore MD 21201.