

# The Contribution of the Fouchet Commission to the Fouchet Negotiations: European diplomacy in the 1960s and the battle between supranationalism and intergovernmentalism

Cas van der Lee  
Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam  
c.k.vander.lee@student.vu.nl

## ABSTRACT

The struggle between supranational and intergovernmental visions on European integration came to dramatic heights with the little-known battle over the Fouchet Plan in 1961-62. This study examines the internal negotiations within the Fouchet Commission, its share in the failure of the Fouchet Plan and how national politicians and interests shaped its negotiations. Thanks to new archival research the understudied influence of the Fouchet Commission has been scrutinised, which provides a new perspective on the failure of the Fouchet Plan, namely the evasion of the members of the Fouchet Commission to discuss fundamental principles as well as their incompetence in reaching compromises, and on the process of European integration, i.e. the decisive role played by national politicians. This supports the integration theory of intergovernmentalism and asks fundamental questions about the role national actors play in European integration. The recent election of French president Emmanuel Macron has given a new impulse to the process of European integration, indicating that besides the European institutions, national politicians play an important role in shaping European integration.

## Keywords

Charles de Gaulle, European diplomacy, European integration, Fouchet Commission, Fouchet Plan, Integration theories.

## INTRODUCTION

European integration has a long history of strife between federalists, those in favour of a supranational Europe, and confederalists, those in favour of an intergovernmental Europe. The failures of the European Defence Community (EDC) in 1954 and the European Constitution in 2005 are prominent examples. A lesser-known attempt to further political integration is the Fouchet Plan, initiated by French president Charles de Gaulle in 1961-62, which proposed a political union with a common foreign and defence policy.<sup>1</sup>

The place of the Fouchet Plan in the historiography of European integration is ambiguous. Scholars have

interpreted the importance of the Fouchet episode for European integration differently and have given various explanations for its failure. While political scientists like Desmond Dinan and Alasdair Blair see the Fouchet Plan as one of many in the history of European integration and explain its failure by the French wish for more intergovernmentalism as opposed to the wish of the other five members of the European Communities (EC) for a more supranational Europe, political scientist Andrew Moravcsik argues that the failure of the Fouchet Plan caused new discussions on institutional reforms within the EC, claiming the plan was a strategy of de Gaulle to secure French commercial interests. This debate is complicated by different integration theories such as neo-functionalism and (liberal) intergovernmentalism.<sup>2</sup>

However, on one issue there seems to be consensus among historians and political scientists: the prominent contributions of national politicians, especially that of de Gaulle, before and during the Fouchet Plan negotiations. The Fouchet Commission's stake during the negotiations is hardly mentioned.<sup>3</sup> This is remarkable, since the commission, composed of one delegate from each member state, was assigned to design plans for a political union. One would expect it to lead in the discussions about the content and the form of the political union in the making. In addition, the Fouchet Plan was heavily criticised by the Dutch and Belgian delegations despite being part of the Fouchet Commission. How was it possible that these delegations were so negative about the plan they presumably co-wrote? The aim of this paper is to analyse the input of the Fouchet Commission during the Fouchet negotiations and to inquire into its internal negotiations to determine the actual contribution of the commission to the Fouchet negotiations.

## SECTIONS

To determine the contribution of the Fouchet Commission, two questions will be answered: first, what was the context of the Fouchet Plan and who were the main actors involved. Second, why did the Fouchet Plan fail and what was the Fouchet Commission share in its failure. First, a short

<sup>1</sup> [https://www.cvce.eu/obj/draft\\_treaty\\_fouchet\\_plan\\_november\\_1961-en-485fa02e-f21e-4e4d-9665-92f0820a0c22](https://www.cvce.eu/obj/draft_treaty_fouchet_plan_november_1961-en-485fa02e-f21e-4e4d-9665-92f0820a0c22) consulted on 7-7-17.

<sup>2</sup> Dinan, D., *Ever Closer Union: an Introduction to European Integration*, London (1999), 43; Blair, A., *The European Union since 1945*, London (2005), 33; Moravcsik, A., *The Choice for Europe: Social Purpose and State Power from Messian to Maastricht*, London (1998), 159, 181-182, 475; Cini, M. and Pérez-Solórzano Borrágán, M., *European Union Politics*, Oxford (2016); Bloes, R. *Le Plan Fouchet et le Problème de l'Europe Politique*, Bruges (1970).

<sup>3</sup> Sutton, M., *France and the Construction of Europe*, New York & Oxford (2007), 96; Vanke, J.W., 'An impossible Union, Dutch objections to the Fouchet plan (1959-1962)' in *Cold War History*, Volume 2, Number 1, 2001, 101; Bouwman, B., "'Longing for London": The Netherlands and the Political Cooperation Initiative, 1959-62' in *Building Postwar Europe: National Decision-Makers and European Institutions, 1948-1963* edited by Anne Deighton, New York (1995), 153; Teasdale, A., 'The Fouchet Plan: De Gaulle's Intergovernmental Design for Europe' in *LSE 'Europe in question' Discussion Paper Series*, Number 117, 2016.

methodological overview will be given, after which these questions will be answered.

### Methodology

This study is based on critically reading primary sources and secondary literature. Academic articles and books by historians and political scientists are used to provide an overview of the debate on the Fouchet Plan. In addition, various primary sources have been used, such as official European and state documents and speeches and memoirs by political actors.

The main primary sources used are telegrams sent by the Dutch delegate in the Fouchet Commission, J.A.G. Baron de Vos van Steenwijk, to the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In these telegrams, de Vos van Steenwijk summarised the committee meetings and explained the Dutch perspective on the Fouchet negotiations. Within the scope of this study it was not feasible to examine the briefings of the other members of the Fouchet Commission, yet this Dutch bias has been taken into account (e.g. by analysing too the diaries of Charles de Gaulle and his foreign minister Maurice Couve de Murville on this subject). In addition, in a more extensive investigation other primary sources might also be consulted, such as personal letters from the delegates, confidential meetings of the delegations and newspaper articles. However, these telegrams, archived in the National Archives of the Netherlands in The Hague, have been chosen because they indicate the official and uncensored view of the Dutch delegation in the Fouchet negotiations. They were available in time for this paper and have proven to be a valuable source of information concerning diplomatic negotiations in the EC. Indeed, to establish the contribution of the Fouchet Commission to the negotiations, it can be argued that inside sources are the most helpful in researching this role.

### Context and Main Actors

The Fouchet Plan and its failure have to be seen in light of the previous efforts towards European integration in the 1950s. The EC, established by the Treaty of Paris (1951) and the Treaty of Rome (1957), were unique in that they established a High Authority, later merged into the European Commission, which was granted decision-making power in certain shared domains between the six participating states. The Fouchet Plan would have been a logical step in this process of an 'ever closer union' by granting more competences to the High Authority.<sup>4</sup>

Moreover, during 1958-62 the tensions in Europe and the world rose to new heights. The Cold War intensified with the Cuban Revolution of 1959 and the Berlin Crisis of

1961. These events sparked a new urge for further European integration, such as the Fouchet Plan, which would establish a common foreign and defence policy. Yet, with de Gaulle returning to power in 1958, preventing a civil war in France and establishing the French Fifth Republic – which granted more weight to the office of president – an ardent opponent of supranational institutions would dominate European politics for the decade to come. De Gaulle's belief in the French people, in France's independence as a nation and in its predestined role as a superpower would be the pillars of his foreign policy.<sup>5</sup>

Other important actors during the Fouchet episode were German Chancellor Konrad Adenauer, supporter of a united Europe based on supranationalism but cautious not to alienate France and invested therefore in an ultimate reconciliation with its former enemy, and Dutch minister of Foreign Affairs Joseph Luns, who saw European integration as a means to secure the influence of his small country in European affairs. In the Fouchet Commission, the French and Dutch delegates Christian Fouchet and J.A.G. baron de Vos van Steenwijk played important roles in the negotiations as highly experienced diplomats and confidants of their superiors.<sup>6</sup>

### The Failure of the Fouchet Commission

The initiative of a European union with a common foreign and defence policy came from de Gaulle, who spoke of the possibility of 'une imposante confédération'<sup>7</sup> which would veiledly undermine the existing communities and NATO. Interestingly, during the negotiations Fouchet denied any of these allegations, which is one of the reasons why the Fouchet Commission would have a marginal share in the Fouchet negotiations.<sup>8</sup> In 1961 de Gaulle initiated the first unofficial European Council meeting where the political leaders of the EC decided to set up the Fouchet Commission.

Historian Jeffrey W. Vanke argues that the Fouchet Plan was doomed to fail from the start.<sup>9</sup> This is partly true: from the start there were considerably diverging interests. Belgium and the Netherlands for example did not want the new union to undermine the existing communities nor NATO. Moreover, from the very beginning Luns wanted to know how the United Kingdom could be involved in the negotiations.<sup>10</sup> This was further complicated when in August 1961 the United Kingdom made an official request to adhere to the EC. France did not want the British to be involved in the negotiations while the Netherlands and Belgium did. This opposition would eventually lead to a Dutch and Belgian 'préalable

<sup>4</sup> Dinan, D., *Ever Closer Union*, 3, 9, 11; Blair, A., *The European Union since 1945*, 3, 17;

[https://www.cvce.eu/en/obj/treaty\\_establishing\\_the\\_european\\_economic\\_community\\_rome\\_25\\_march\\_1957-en-cca6ba28-0bf3-4ce6-8a76-6b0b3252696e.html](https://www.cvce.eu/en/obj/treaty_establishing_the_european_economic_community_rome_25_march_1957-en-cca6ba28-0bf3-4ce6-8a76-6b0b3252696e.html) consulted on 7-7-17.

<sup>5</sup> Merriman, J., *A History of Modern Europe from the Renaissance to the Present*, New York & London (2010), 1155; Blair, A., *The European Union since 1945*, 31; Dinan, D., *Ever Closer Union*, vii; De Gaulle, C., *Mémoires d'Espoir le Renouveau 1958-1962*, Evreux (1970), 177-181.

<sup>6</sup> Grünbacher, A., *The Making of German Democracy, West Germany during the Adenauer era, 1945-65*, Manchester & New York (2010), 198-204; Kersten, A., *Luns, Een Politieke Biografie*, Voorburg (2010), 203, 228, 231; Segers, M., 'De Gaulle's Race to the Bottom: The Netherlands, France and the Interwoven problems of British EEC Membership and European

Political Union, 1958-1963' in *Contemporary European History* Volume 19, Number 2, 2010, 116-119.

<sup>7</sup> <http://fresques.ina.fr/de-gaulle/fiche-media/Gaulle00215/allocation-du-31-mai-1960.html> consulted on 7-7-17.

<sup>8</sup> De Gaulle, C., *Lettres, Notes et Carnets : Juin 1958 – Décembre 1960*, Paris (1985), 382-383; National Archives of the Netherlands (NA), Ministry of Foreign Affairs / Code-Archive 1955-1964, archive inventory 2.05.118, inventory number 1391, telegram number 3150 of 17-3-61, de Vos van Steenwijk to the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

<sup>9</sup> Vanke, J.W., 'An impossible Union, Dutch objections to the Fouchet plan', 95-96, 108.

<sup>10</sup> NA, Min. FA '55-'64, a.i. 2.05.118, i.n. 18753, t.n. 2044 of 11-2-61, Dutch Embassy in Paris to Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

anglais', meaning that if the United Kingdom was not involved, they would stop the negotiations altogether.<sup>11</sup>

In the end it can be argued that the Fouchet Commission had a marginal share in the Fouchet negotiations. First, because the politicians and diplomats involved had ulterior motives.<sup>12</sup> Whereas Fouchet in the first meeting of the Fouchet Commission stated that the French did not want to weaken NATO and did not want to build a Europe without the United Kingdom, de Gaulle had already expressed his dismay concerning the Anglo-Saxon involvement in Europe at a summit with Adenauer in Rambouillet a year earlier.<sup>13</sup> Second, the Fouchet Commission appeared to be more of a forum to discuss and exchange views than a place where decisions were made.<sup>14</sup> This strengthens the intergovernmentalist argument that ultimately, the political actors responsible make the decisions. Third, the incompetence of the Fouchet Commission to come to concrete results and the reluctance to discuss fundamental differences of opinion, such as whether the proposed union should be supranational or intergovernmental.<sup>15</sup> For instance, after the fifth commission meeting de Vos van Steenwijk wrote to the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs: 'As already expected, this meeting has delivered nothing and merely emphasised the existing oppositions'.<sup>16</sup> Fourth, the lack of clarity in the tasks assigned to the Fouchet Commission.<sup>17</sup> During the seventh meeting, for example, the Belgian delegate wanted to postpone the meeting to wait for the next ministerial summit, since he identified several fundamental problems. Fouchet, however, argued that the work to be discussed was within the mandate of the commission and did not want to devolve its work to the ministers.<sup>18</sup> Fifth, too much attention went to various sub-commissions and trivial questions, like for example the name of the present European University Institute.<sup>19</sup> Last, both Fouchet Plans (1961, 1962) were initiated by surprise by Fouchet and de Gaulle. After the ninth meeting, de Vos van Steenwijk wrote to the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs that as a 'coup de theatre' a document was presented which afterwards appeared to be the first Fouchet Plan.<sup>20</sup> The plans were not drawn up by the Fouchet Commission and thus did not represent the interests of all member states.<sup>21</sup> Even though after the second Fouchet Plan there was optimism about finding solutions to the differences in opinion, the Fouchet Plan died a silent death in the autumn of 1962. One could argue there was only one winner of this Fouchet episode: Adenauer, who with the Élysée Treaty

(1963), which resembled to a large extent the Fouchet Plan, had his final reconciliation with France.<sup>22</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The aim of this study was to examine the Fouchet Commission's internal negotiations to determine the contribution of the commission to the larger Fouchet negotiations, thereby offering a new perspective on why the Fouchet Plan failed. By filling this historiographical lacuna, one can give an indication of the stakes national politicians and diplomats had in the course of European integration in the 1960s. Thus, this study contributes to the debate about the different integration theories and consequently improves our understanding of the (still) ongoing process of European integration.

The Fouchet Plan came into being during an intensification of the Cold War. Its initiation in 1961 came from French president Charles de Gaulle, whose national interests dominated his agenda. The French and Dutch delegates in the constituted Fouchet Commission were experienced confidants of their superiors, indicating the importance de Gaulle and Luns granted to the commission. This study has shown, however, that the Fouchet Commission appeared to have made, for various reasons, only a marginal contribution to the delineation of the Fouchet Plan and that the heads of state were the most prominent actors in shaping and deciding the Fouchet negotiations. It eventually failed due to divergent views on the supranational or intergovernmental character of the political union, NATO's place within the union and the involvement of the United Kingdom in the negotiations.

The importance of the failure of the Fouchet Plan should not be underestimated. It was the beginning of a period of stagnation in the process of European integration that would last until 1986 with the signing of the Single European Act (SEA). Moreover, it triggered the development of a new integration theory, namely intergovernmentalism. It is therefore not surprising that the findings in this paper point towards this integration theory.

By examining the internal negotiations of the Fouchet Commission and its effect on the Fouchet negotiations, this study has given insight into the workings and effectiveness of European diplomacy in the 1960s. It appeared to be closed, worked with stereotypes and had its own dynamics in which delegates were prone to blatantly

<sup>11</sup> Vanke, J.W., 'An impossible Union, Dutch objections to the Fouchet Plan', 104-105; Teasdale, A., 'The Fouchet Plan: De Gaulle's Intergovernmental Design for Europe', 33.

<sup>12</sup> De Gaulle, C., *Mémoires d'Espoir le Renouveau 1958-1962*, 207; NA, Min. FA '55-'64, a.i. 2.05.118, i.n. 1392, t.n. 5695 of 23-6-61, Beyen to the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

<sup>13</sup> NA, Min. BuZa '55-'64, a.i. 2.05.118, i.n. 1391, t.n. 3150 van 17-3-61, van De Vos van Steenwijk aan Min. BuZa, 3; Charles de Gaulle, *Lettres, Notes et Carnets : Juin 1958 - Décembre 1960*, Parijs (1985), 382-383.

<sup>14</sup> NA, Min. FA '55-'64, a.i. 2.05.118, i.n. 1391, t.n. 3429 of 25-3-61, de Vos van Steenwijk to the Dutch Min. of FA.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, i.n. 1392, t.n. 4720 of 12-5-61, de Vos van Steenwijk to the Dutch Min. FA; ibid, i.n. 1392, t.n. 5799 of 28-6-61, de Vos van Steenwijk to the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs; ibid, i.n. 28672, t.n. 9435 of 13-11-61, de Vos van Steenwijk to the Dutch Min. of FA; ibid i.n. 28672, t.n. 9435 of 10-11-61, de Vos van Steenwijk to the Dutch Min. FA; Teasdale, A., 'The Fouchet Plan: De Gaulle's Intergovernmental Design for Europe', 34.

<sup>16</sup> NA, Min. BuZa '55-'64, a.i. 2.05.118, i.n. 1392, t.n. 4720 van 12-5-61, van De Vos van Steenwijk aan Min. BuZa, 1. In Dutch: 'Zoals overigens reeds werd verwacht heeft [de] bijeenkomst niets opgeleverd en slechts de (...) naar voren gekomen tegenstelling onderstreept.'

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, i.n. 1392, t.n. 5799 of 28-6-61, de Vos van Steenwijk to the Dutch Min. of FA.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, i.n. 1391, t.n. 3180, de Vos van Steenwijk to the Dutch Min. FA; ibid, i.n. 18754, t.n. 7400 of 6-9-61, Vos van Steenwijk to the Dutch Min. FA.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., i.n. 28672, t.n. 8689 van 19-10-61, van De Vos van Steenwijk aan Min. BuZa, 1.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, i.n. 28672, t.n. 8689 of 19-10-61, de Vos van Steenwijk to the Dutch Min. FA.

<sup>22</sup> Grünbacher, A., *The Making of German Democracy*, 211; Teasdale, A., 'The Fouchet Plan: De Gaulle's Intergovernmental Design for Europe', 48.

deceive one another.<sup>23</sup> Even though the Fouchet Commission's share appeared marginal in the overall negotiations, it does deserve a place in the history of the Fouchet Plan. In addition to the aforementioned reasons, it provided a forum for the exchange of views and it was used in preparation for European summits. The Fouchet Commission therefore deserves more academic attention than it has done as yet.

More research on the Fouchet Commission and national actors will contribute to a better understanding of European integration. This study highlighted both actors in the Fouchet Commission and national actors as it is still unclear to what extent certain individuals determined the course of European integration. It is without doubt that General de Gaulle had a major impact on European integration in the 1960s, but was this because of his personality, because the timing was right, or because of the issues he raised? De Gaulle's successors were less influential in shaping European politics, while with the recent election of Emmanuel Macron France assumes its (rightful?) place in constructing the future of the European Union.

Since the Treaty of Lisbon (2007) there have not been any new treaties or major treaty revisions. Macron, however, shows great enthusiasm to take new steps, in close collaboration with Angela Merkel's Germany, in the process of European integration. National politicians thus play an essential role in the stimulation of European integration. It is imperative that the variables of national interests and national actors be researched within this framework. Case studies, such as the Fouchet Plan, can grant valuable insights into the dynamics of European integration.

#### ROLE OF THE STUDENT

Cas van der Lee was an undergraduate history student at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam working under the supervision of Dr. Ronald Kroeze when this research was performed. The topic was chosen by the student while the supervisor helped with its delineation. The literature and archival study, the processing of these data and the formulation of the writing were done by the student.

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<sup>23</sup> In one Benelux-meeting Belgian Foreign minister Paul Henri Spaak was called 'More Dutch than the Dutch.' by his Belgian civil servants in his

stance regarding the involvement of the United Kingdom in the Fouchet negotiations.