

'Europe is unwell ...' from Le Monde (22 July 1965)

Caption: On 22 July 1965, the French daily newspaper Le Monde analyses the differing opinions of the Six on the future direction of European integration, and outlines the implications of the empty chair crisis.

Source: Le Monde. dir. de publ. Beuve-Méry, Hubert. 22.07.1965, n° 6 382; 22e année. Paris: Le Monde. "Souffrante Europe", auteur:Drouin, Pierre , p. 1; 14.

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Europe is unwell ...

I. — Undisguised confrontation

by Pierre Drouin

‘Wisdom consists in remaining as calm as possible’, said Mr Pierre Werner, Head of the Luxembourg Government, a few days after the breakdown of the Brussels negotiations. This advice was heeded. Ministers and diplomats — both foreign and French — are vying with one another in prudent words and deeds in order to prevent the dangerously rickety European edifice from becoming even more unstable. At least this precautionary approach constitutes a common denominator, albeit the lowest one. However, given the position we are now in, we are lucky to have any straw to clutch at.

Yet despite this superficial calm, this resolve to remain calm, we must not delude ourselves. Even if France — which looks more and more unlikely — managed to bring the discussion of the funding of the common agricultural policy back to purely technical terms, i.e. if the leading partners (the Netherlands and Italy) and the Commission gave in to our country’s pressure, this tactical success for Paris would merely postpone for a few months the ‘great debate’ which, this time, will have to take place against the background — much more natural, moreover — of the merger of the Treaties.

The crisis that broke on 30 June is so serious simply because it suddenly highlighted the extent of the disagreement between the Six. The equivocation went on for so long only because the French representatives, who wanted to secure the best guarantees for our countrymen and skilfully took advantage of the coincidence of national interests and objective European interests, had carefully avoided entering institutional questions on the agenda. Better still, by accepting the merger of the executive bodies without fuss, they gave the impression that they were allowing themselves to be drawn along, willy nilly, by the dynamic of the Treaty of Rome. With the bold proposals that it had made in late March, which led to an embryonic federal budget, the Hallstein Commission abruptly dropped the pretence that there was an understanding between our negotiators which had enabled them to work better together. *And it did so before the final act*, before the Six had reached agreement on this final financial aspect of ‘Green Europe’ to which we rightly attached so much importance. It is easy to understand the French Government’s irritation.

The situation would have been quite different if the Commission had dropped its ‘political’ bombshell after the agricultural regulation had been finalised. Then France would have entered the debate in a far more relaxed mood and would have shown, without running any great economic risks this time, that it did not agree at all with the line that the Brussels Commission was taking.

There will, no doubt, be much discussion of the reasons that induced the members of the Common Market ‘Executive’ to take such precipitate action, against the advice of two of them. As for the consequences of this action, they are bad in terms of French economic interests but neutral from a broader perspective, since the Commission has not *created* a crisis situation but simply *revealed* it and drawn attention to the ‘ideological’ split in the Europe of the Six.

Like Mr Hallstein, the French Government has long realised that the very development of the economic communities was leading more and more towards political decisions, but the two sides draw diametrically opposed conclusions from this. The doctrine of the two ‘camps’ is summarised below.

The ‘national bias’

The President of the Common Market Commission is not short of words, nor can he be accused of hiding his true feelings.

In a speech he gave in Kiel, on 19 February 1965, he did not mince words: ‘We want to replace a political bias that has prevailed among Europeans for centuries, which has determined the existing political map of Europe, that is to say the national bias, by a better approach to things; without wanting to sound cynical, I

would call it a better bias: the European bias.’

Now that the goal has been clearly established, the means to achieve it clearly require the political union of Europe, a ‘European federation’, which can be attained ‘through the existing communities.’ (1). In fact, one could say that these communities *are already a political union* in economic and social terms. Thanks to them, we are already half way there. We must continue down two roads:

(1) We must broaden the process of European unification (defence policy, foreign policy and cultural policy). In this regard, the institutions have no formal powers. However, on the basis of its experience, the EEC Commission believes that, if there is to be any chance of success, new structures will have to include a genuine representation of the Community interest, an independent representation.

(2) We must improve the existing institutional structure. Aside from merging the executive bodies (scheduled for 1 January next year), we shall have to merge the communities, taking account of our experience with the new single Executive and improving the distribution of powers among the various Community institutions, which means strengthening the European Parliament’s role.

However, during a speech he made in Düsseldorf on 8 July this year, i.e. one week after the outbreak of the crisis, Mr Hallstein found himself accused of being ‘anti-national’. ‘How many times must we repeat that our objective is not to replace the States’, he said, ‘and to substitute a centralist superstate for them? It seems that the word “supranational” has done real damage here and there. What we want is not the annihilation of the Member States but a living association. Europe means diversity ...’

One against five

Although, to date, General de Gaulle has spoken much less about the future of Europe than Mr Hallstein, like him he has never concealed what he feels about the behaviour of certain Europeans, lashing them with some of the most resounding epithets of his rich verbal repertoire. In his view, the nation will remain both the sole point of reference and the prime mover of political action for a long time to come. All the rest is empty words, a smokescreen, a myth. No doubt it will now have to become part of larger structures, cooperate organically with other nations; but it must never, on pain of losing its soul, delegate significant parts of its sovereignty.

Like it or not, General de Gaulle had accepted the Treaty of Rome provisions to the extent that they served France’s economic interests; but he still hoped, one day, to reduce the EEC Commission’s powers to their simplest form. He believed that he could succeed in this enterprise through the Fouchet Plan for ‘political union’, in which the proposed committee of foreign affairs officials (with no fixed presidency or right to propose legislation) would gradually ‘take over’ from the other one, the Common Market Commission. But the plan fell through on 17 April 1962.

Once again, standing alone against the other five, and this time taking advantage of the ‘accident’ (2) of 30 June 1965, the French Government will, no doubt, in return for ending its veto against the Common Market, seek assurances that the Commission of the European Communities will be carefully ‘contained’ when the three Treaties are merged, an operation due to begin in 1966.

As we know, the President of the Republic believes that the *realities* of Europe are the *States* and that it is, therefore, a malicious misuse of language to refer to the structures in Brussels and Luxembourg as European ‘executive bodies’. The single Commission that will soon be created (but, as things stand, will all the national parliaments join France in ratifying the Treaty on the merger of the institutions?) will therefore have to ‘fall back into line’, i.e. confine itself basically to preparing background documentation for the governments, acting as ‘honest broker’ between them, seeking compromises in the event of difficulties during Ministerial negotiations, and so forth. As both a documentation centre and a ‘lubricator’, the Commission of the Communities should have a major role to play in the technical field. However, in the Elysée’s mind it should not be allowed any political initiatives or acts of authority. As a ‘transnational’ body (the new in-word), the European Commission would usually act as a high secretariat. It could be entrusted

with more important ‘tasks’, if the States deemed this a good idea; but, while keeping at a certain distance from them, it must be subordinate to them. Under no circumstances may the Commission of the European Communities become an embryonic federal government, according to Paris, because it has no political reality.

There is a total divergence between the views of Mr Hallstein, which build on those of the ‘founding fathers’ of the Europe of Six, and the Elysée’s views. The greatest experts in syncretism would not be able to create any coherence between these two points of view. Could it be that the only option open to Europeans now is to preserve the achievements of the Common Market at the price of renouncing the ideas that gave birth to it?

Pierre Drouin

(1) Communication from the Commission to the Council and the Member State governments known as *Initiative 1964*. We shall draw on this document for the main subsequent developments in regard to the Commission’s doctrine.

(2) It is rather unlikely, despite what some have suggested, that France deliberately *sought* this breakdown. But, arguing on solid legal grounds (the promises of 14 January 1962 on the agricultural financial regulation), it did nothing to avoid it in order to take advantage of the crisis, because it had not secured a *technical* agreement on financing Green Europe within the time limit.