

'The French representative to the European Communities has been 'invited' to return to Paris' from Le Monde (7 July 1965)

Caption: On 7 July 1965, the French daily newspaper Le Monde analyses the implications of the empty chair policy for the operation of the European Community institutions.

Source: Le Monde. dir. de publ. BEUVE-MÉRY, Hubert. 07.07.1965, n° 6 369. Paris: Le Monde. "Le représentant français auprès des Communautés européennes a été invité à regagner Paris", auteur:Drouin, Pierre , p. 1.

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The Common Market in crisis

The French representative to the European Communities has been 'invited' to return to Paris

The crisis within the Common Market is reaching new heights. To leave no one in any doubt as to its resolve, France has 'invited' its Permanent Representative to the European Communities in Brussels to return to Paris. From Monday afternoon, the French Government decided that its specialists would not for the time being attend meetings of the working groups set up by the Commission of the Common Market to consider 'relations with the Maghreb' and the 'regulation concerning fruit and vegetables'. This absence will concern all sessions dealing with the development of the EEC.

With cold determination, Paris has begun, as expected, to draw the consequences of the breakdown of the negotiations in Brussels which occurred in the early hours of 1 July. The idea at the moment is to put the EEC 'on hold', or more precisely to keep a minimum number of staff in place to maintain what France has already acquired from the European Economic Community but to refuse to cooperate with any further development of the Common Market.

In practice, this strategy will involve the following decisions:

(1) Ministers will for the moment no longer take part in any meetings at the level of the Six. This means that not only will the Ministers of Agriculture and Foreign Affairs, implicated in the 30 June fracas, refrain from joining their colleagues, but also that Mr Giscard d'Estaing will not be going to Stresa for the meeting of the Finance Ministers arranged at their last meeting in Cannes and scheduled for 19 and 20 July. Similarly, the ministers who normally represent France at meetings of the ECSC and Euratom Councils will be keeping away from Luxembourg and Brussels;

(2) The French officials in the group of 'Permanent Representatives' in Brussels will remain but their boss, Mr Jean-Marc Boegner, has been invited to return to Paris. Mr Ulrich, his deputy, has been given the job of 'managing' the group at this lower level in the Belgian capital. However, he will not attend meetings of the 'Permanent Representatives';

Such was Mr Ulrich's explanation on Tuesday morning in Brussels, adding that the French Government would not be sending observers to the negotiations in which the Commission of the Common Market is engaged on behalf of the Six (Tunisia, Morocco, etc.).

(3) The French officials coming under the authority of the EEC Commission can be expected to remain in Brussels;

(4) The itinerant officials who take part in the EEC's many working groups will henceforth be asked to stay in Paris, with some rare exceptions.

No more illusions

Mr Ulrich gave more details on Tuesday morning in Brussels: 'The French delegation will not take part in committees and working groups preparing projects or undertaking studies directed towards the achievement of economic union. With regard to certain technical committees dealing with day-to-day issues, such as the agricultural management committees, the position of the French Government will be communicated at a later date.'

In Brussels, these decisions took everyone by surprise, even though they were a logical step following the statement read out by Mr Peyrefitte at the end of the last meeting of the French Council of Ministers. Admittedly, this is not, formally, the 'recall of an ambassador', implying a complete break in diplomatic relations, but only an 'invitation' to return. But these distinctions no longer provide much solace. People were clinging to the hope that France would not immediately carry out its threats, that it would effect a

tactical withdrawal pending new initiatives on the financing of the common agricultural policy and would not systematically block Community business in other areas.

The latest news from Paris has dispelled such illusions. Since nearly all the Community decisions at Council level have to be taken unanimously, the absence of France will in practice prevent any progress being made in the Common Market and, where specialist groups are concerned, the machinery can be expected to seize up completely. The only way forward now is through traditional diplomatic channels, that is diplomacy between the European nations.

Lack of realism

However, there is nothing to suggest that France is about to take up that option. There is every indication rather that it wants to let the crisis deepen, use this period of confusion to test our partners' attachment to Europe, see how much ground they would be prepared to concede to save the common endeavour and put the issues back on the table 'in every domain'. Such a performance, such a prospect seem in keeping with General de Gaulle's style.

So some of the conciliatory reactions in foreign capitals seem rather out of line with reality, a case in point being the statement which the official spokesman for the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs has just made to the AFP.

'In the past the EEC has gone through serious crises. It has always survived. This is not to say that the 'marathon' approach is to be recommended, 'diplomacy by exhaustion' not being a solution in itself. All the same, Europe has weathered other storms. We shall wait and see. We do not want to criticise a priori the French attitude.' He concluded with a Dutch proverb: 'Let us wait, before judging, until the cat has leapt from the tree in whose foliage it is hiding.' It may be that 'the cat' finds this the most comfortable place to be for a few months.

Similarly, the view expressed by the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* that the 'momentary French sulk' forms part of its 'tactics' seems to understate the intentions of the French authorities.

And in official German circles the affair is beginning to be taken more seriously. However, when Mr von Hase, the Federal Government spokesman, said on Monday in Bonn: 'It is now for the Hallstein Committee to prepare and submit proposals and I am sure we will overcome the present difficulties', one can be forgiven for finding him over-optimistic.

It is not as if the 'executive body' of the Common Market is refusing to work. On Monday in Brussels, its members returned to the highly charged issue of the funding of 'Green Europe', looking for ways of easing the pain. They are due to meet again on Wednesday, but some voices, though still faint, are already arguing in the Commission in favour of waiting and seeing. The problem is no longer one of finding a 'financial solution' and since the crisis will be long drawn out there is no point in coming up with new technical proposals that will not perhaps get back on to the agenda until next October, by which time they may well have fallen into oblivion.

Attention is now turning towards leaders at the highest political level. Mr Saragat, the President of the Italian Republic, arrived in Bonn on Tuesday morning, together with Mr Fanfani, the Foreign Minister. They will no doubt carefully avoid giving the impression that Italy and Germany are forging a common policy as a counterweight to the decisions by the French, but they will at least explore possible solutions to this crisis. Will Mr Saragat, who is to meet General de Gaulle on 16 July to inaugurate the new road tunnel under Mont Blanc, bring fresh ideas on how to come through the tunnel?

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