

'Even Paris needs Brussels' from Die Zeit (9 July 1965)

Caption: On 9 July 1965, the German daily newspaper Die Zeit puts forward several possible interpretations of General de Gaulle's policy, which sidelines France vis-à-vis its partners in the European common market.

Source: Die Zeit. Wochenzeitung für Politik-Wirtschaft-Handel und Kultur. Herausgeber Müller-Marein, Josef. 09.07.1965, Nr. 28; 20. Jg. Hamburg: Gruner GmbH. "Auch Paris braucht Brüssel", auteur:Stolze, Diether , p. 1.

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Even Paris needs Brussels

Without the EEC, farmers and bombs would be unaffordable

Brussels, early July

At three minutes past midnight, the lights went out in the *Palais des Congrès* in Brussels. The Ministers of the six EEC countries assembled there were left sitting in the dark. Anyone who saw that as a bad omen was quickly vindicated: once the short circuit had been repaired, it took only another 107 minutes until the negotiations collapsed. On 1 July, shortly before two in the morning, the Common Market was plunged into its gravest crisis yet. Since then, EEC officials in Brussels and governments in the capitals of the EEC countries have been racking their brains to figure out why France provoked this trial of strength.

The French are certainly in the right from a formal point of view. During the discussions in the Council of Ministers, they stood by the programme which provided for completion of the agricultural and industrial market by 1 July 1967. The main obstacles to a rapid agreement were the Dutch and, in the final hours, the Italians, too; for various reasons, these countries wanted to play for time. In the afternoon of 30 June, when the mood was still confident, a Dutch EEC official stated in no uncertain terms that it would be a bad thing if an agreement were reached that same day. It was also noted that the German delegation under Foreign Minister Gerhard Schröder was not making any unduly strenuous efforts to ensure that a compromise was achieved.

These observations, however, cannot alter the fact that Paris alone bears responsibility for the present threat to the existence of the Common Market.

Maurice Couve de Murville, the French Foreign Minister, rejected the proposal made by Commission President Walter Hallstein that, in accordance with established EEC tradition, the 'clocks be stopped', in other words that the negotiations simply be extended by a few days. Couve de Murville also refused the German request that the Six make a fresh bid to reach agreement as soon as possible. And, since then, France has been doing its utmost to exacerbate the crisis more and more. Its cabinet ministers speak of the EEC in the past tense, lament the 'shattered hopes of Europe' and offend their EEC partners by accusing them of a lack of goodwill. With its 'empty chair' policy, whereby it has stopped taking part in the ministerial discussions, Paris is operating on the very brink of violation of the Treaty.

These tactics run counter to the economic interests of France. The completion of the agricultural market would ultimately have secured for France, as the most prolific source of agricultural produce in the Community, a market of 180 million consumers as well as several thousand million in grants from the common EEC treasury.

So what has prompted General de Gaulle to slam on the brakes so close to this desirable objective and to swing round in the opposite direction? Three different answers to this question have been suggested.

The first version is that de Gaulle is waging a war of nerves in order to extort the best possible deal for himself. The Dutch and Italians in particular believe that the General wants to exert pressure on his partners and the Commission so that a minimum of rights have to be ceded to the European Parliament. Essentially, however, de Gaulle is determined to preserve the European Economic Community because of its inestimable economic benefits.

According to the second version, de Gaulle has engineered the crisis in order to thwart any attempt to strengthen Professor Hallstein's Commission and the European Parliament. German observers are inclined to endorse this assessment. Although the General is prepared, they say, to see the completion of the EEC and would even accept majority voting, if it were tempered by means of a 'gentlemen's agreement', he is not prepared under any circumstances to accept an increase in the supranational powers of the Community beyond those granted to it by the Treaty of Rome. Only a political compromise can save the EEC. The dispute on the substantive issues, according to this version of events, was only used as a facade because

Mr Couve de Murville did not wish to fall into the Dutch ‘trap’. The French had let the negotiations founder on matters of detail because the Government in Paris was ultimately unable to face up to the country’s farmers and explain to them that it had sacrificed de Gaulle’s notions of national independence to the European agricultural market.

The third version is that de Gaulle has engaged in this trial of strength in order to mould the EEC Treaty to his own pattern. From circles close to President Hallstein, there have been suggestions that Paris wants to prevent at all costs the transition to majority decision-making, which is due to take effect next year in some areas of European policy. According to the pessimists’ theory, the General has realised rather belatedly that a completed economic union would take too much sovereignty away from him; for this reason, they say, he wants to let the EEC wither away into a mere customs union.

At the present time, no one can say which version is correct — whether the General’s ultimate aim is a compromise or a trial of strength. One thing, however, is already clear: the Common Market will not be able to exist indefinitely in the limbo into which this crisis has thrust it. Although the French have stated that they do not repudiate the progress that has been achieved — meaning, for example, that they do not intend to restore higher customs tariffs, an intention that seemed to be implied by many of the initial statements from Paris — there is already talk in other countries of a ‘revision’ of agricultural agreements, which would give Paris the opportunity to accuse other countries, such as the Federal Republic, of treaty violations. Decisions that are vital to the Community are, moreover, being blocked: decisions relating to the Kennedy Round of trade negotiations and to the EFTA countries, not to mention the continuing process of tariff reduction and the agricultural regimes which are due to be put in place. And, in the last analysis, nobody would expect Paris to comply with majority decisions that were taken in its absence in 1966.

The decision must therefore be taken quickly, no later than the end of this year. The EEC Commission and France’s five partners should present a work programme that offers a universally acceptable way out of the crisis. Dealings with General de Gaulle should be governed by the precept that the Community must stand its ground but must not make demands that will seem unreasonable to him. Despite many sceptical predictions, France has hitherto complied consistently with the Treaty of Rome. So let us adhere to the Treaty, permitting no less supranationality than is enshrined in its provisions but, in the meantime, no more either — until a more favourable moment comes along.

All is not yet lost for the EEC. For Charles de Gaulle, as for Ludwig Erhard, embarking upon an election campaign over the ruins of the European unification project cannot be an appealing prospect. The ‘revolt of the Europeans’ in France will have shown him how unpopular a return to isolationism would be in his own country. Not only have the farmers hastened to raise the alarm, which was only to be expected; industrialists too have been openly critical of de Gaulle’s rigid stance.

There is too much at stake for France — the only conceivable market for its farm produce, the growth of its industry, which has yet to attain the same status in the world market as the Germans, let alone the giant American corporations, and the economic growth which only a large expanding market can offer.

Lastly, even de Gaulle’s pet project, the *force de frappe*, is endangered. A completed agricultural market would provide France with two to three thousand million deutschmarks in EEC subsidies, which is about half the cost of the French nuclear force. How could Paris finance the *force de frappe* if it had to pay out thousands of millions in farming subsidies from its own pocket and give up its scientific and technical cooperation with Bonn (as part of *Euratom*, for example)?

It is possible, albeit improbable, that, in spite of these benefits, General de Gaulle’s antipathy towards any form of supranationalism will drive him to destroy the EEC, and it is possible, albeit improbable, that he will mercilessly sacrifice the economic future of his country to his notion of *grandeur*. His partners, however, must not facilitate such a step for him through disunity and ineptitude or through a lack of willingness to compromise. If the Common Market were to fail, it would have to be made perfectly clear who bore responsibility for that disastrous development.

New avenues of economic cooperation in Europe would then have to be sought. The EEC could not survive as a torso, nor could France simply be replaced by Britain. Harold Wilson is currently beset by economic difficulties and, besides, is no less averse than de Gaulle to European integration. A large free-trade area would probably be the direction in which things would move; this would comprise the remainder of the EEC, EFTA and, no doubt, France, too, which would otherwise most probably languish in economic isolation. In the negotiations on the necessary new order, the Federal Republic, as an industrial country with a liberal external-trade policy, would be in a strong position; France, as an exporter of agricultural products, would have a weaker hand. It is a fact of life that there are more customers in Europe for our cars than for de Gaulle's wheat.

But we must not delude ourselves. A free-trade area could only cushion the direst economic consequences of the collapse of the EEC, but it could never be a substitute for the economic union of the six States, a union in which such high hopes have been placed. As Walter Hallstein said, 'If the EEC fails, the chance of political unification will be lost to our generation.'

The failure of the EEC would also shatter a dream that General de Gaulle himself has always evoked, namely the dream of making Europe 'the most prosperous and influential community of nations on earth.'

Diether Stolze