

## 'A new start' from Le Monde (1 February 1966)

**Caption:** On 1 February 1966, the French daily newspaper Le Monde comments on the substance and the impact of the political 'compromise' which was adopted by the Six, in Luxembourg, on 28 and 29 January 1966, and put an end to the empty chair crisis.

**Source:** Le Monde. dir. de publ. BEUVE-MÉRY, Hubert. 01.02.1966, n° 6 548. Paris: Le Monde. "Un nouveau départ", p. 1.

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## A new start

In the end, the Luxembourg air was beneficial. After seven months of crisis, the Common Market has been saved. It had never been so severely shaken, but, after this experience, it would be dangerous to assume that it was now invulnerable, equally it would be wrong to write it off as no longer corresponding to the ideas of its founding fathers. An undertaking as innovative as that conceived by the Six in 1957 cannot hope to make unimpeded progress. The Six, when they signed the Treaty of Rome, already imagined the dawning of a politically integrated Europe and thought that it would be well under way when the third stage of the Common Market began. If that had been the case, the rather byzantine arguments over majority voting in the Council would no longer have been appropriate. Since things have turned out otherwise, and political union seems to be still a long way off, the main aim was to safeguard the achievements of the European Community.

The decisions taken in Luxembourg did at least succeed in doing that. If the agreement reached on Sunday was in no way spectacular, because, on one of the major issues, it merely registered their disagreement, it did at least allow the Common Market to continue. France sat down at table again with the Six, and no essential part of the machinery of the EEC was damaged. If the Commission is being kept more on the sidelines by the governments on some matters, there was no change in the ingenious allocation of its powers as set out in the Treaty of Rome.

More disturbing for European integration was the request from France to give up completely the majority-vote rule, an intrinsic part of the Treaty. In practice, this issue had already become obsolete. However, on grounds of principle, out of respect for the Treaty and because that 'deterrent weapon' prevented national representatives from hiding behind their right of veto, the Five did not want to abandon it. France declared publicly that it would never use it for its own purposes and consequently 'dissuaded' the others from so doing. There was a clear warning: if France's partners, backed by the words of the Treaty of Rome, brought the majority-vote rule once more 'out of the shadows', where it is currently relegated, there would be a major crisis.

The result was not very satisfactory intellectually, but one must wonder if this two-way interpretation of the Treaty was not, in the final analysis, very clever in the circumstances. At least it prevented any future controversy; the Common Market has already suffered from too many nicely worded agreements disguising real misunderstandings for us not to appreciate the declaration of 30 January.

Ending a crisis is one thing, how it ends is another. France, having been isolated, will feel that this conflict was not pointless if it can now avoid being entangled, despite itself, in the machinery of supranationalism. On the other hand, our negotiators did climb down far enough to ensure that this incident did not develop into a catastrophe for the Common Market. Our partners, too, had to make concessions, but they are aware that the next stage, if it leads to a common agricultural policy worthy of the name, will seal the future of the Six more successfully than any declaration. It will lead sooner or later, but inevitably, to a European authority with political power.