

'De Gaulle continues the empty chair policy' from the Frankfurter Rundschau (26 July 1965)

Caption: On 26 July 1965, the German daily newspaper the Frankfurter Rundschau focuses on France's revision to boycott intergovernmental meetings of Community bodies in Brussels.

Source: Frankfurter Rundschau. Unabhängige Tageszeitung. Hrsg. Gerold, Karl ; Herausgeber Gerold, Karl. 26.07.1965, Nr. 170; 21. Jg. Frankfurt/Main: Frankfurter Rundschau GmbH. "De Gaulle setzt die Politik des leeren Stuhls fort", auteur:Wesemann, Fried , p. 2.

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De Gaulle continues the empty chair policy

No attempt at present to overcome the European crisis / Paris refers to forthcoming elections

PARIS, 25 July. An end to the European crisis cannot be expected before the turn of the year. This is the message coming from French Government circles in the final days before the summer break. Immediately after the failure of the negotiations in the EEC Council of Ministers, Paris had already made clear that the problems arising out of that failure were bound to take a long time to solve. It is now suggested that the discussions will resume in January 1966 at the earliest.

The reasons officially quoted are the upcoming elections in the Federal Republic and in France as well as the still unresolved government crisis in Belgium. The French Government sees little sense and little advantage in entering new negotiations amid continuing uncertainty as to the outcome of the Bundestag elections in the autumn. De Gaulle wants the French presidential elections of 5 December to be preceded by only a short election campaign. For this reason, he is not expected to announce until October whether he will be standing for re-election. Although there can be no doubt about the outcome of this first election, de Gaulle sees it as sufficient justification for postponing the resolution of the European problems until next spring.

According to official statements, France will until then resolutely pursue the empty chair policy in Brussels. Whatever the partners may initiate or offer in the meantime, Paris will strictly follow the President's instructions concerning the boycott at ministerial level of the European institutions. In line with this stance, the French Government is also refusing even to consider the compromise proposals prepared by the Hallstein Commission and forwarded to the six Partners. This confirms that de Gaulle's concerns are by no means limited to the completion of the European agricultural market, from which France stands to gain most.

On the contrary, French government circles are now hinting that de Gaulle wants to tie the partners to the provisions of the Treaty of Rome in such a way that there will no longer be any scope for going back on them. France will only accept the agricultural market for the five years to 1970, and this without the investment clause after two years sought by other Member States. With its proposal to provisionally make do with national contributions to the agricultural fund, the Hallstein Commission is going some way to meeting French demands. If this major Community budget is not drawn up, parliamentary control also becomes less urgent. According to Paris, however, these concessions are far from sufficient to get the EEC up and running again. De Gaulle is directing his efforts more at replacing the Commission's President in Brussels, Walter Hallstein, and the Dutch Vice-President, Sicco Mansholt, whose mandates come up for renewal in January.

The French Agriculture Minister, Edgard Pisani, is continuing in his public addresses to try to allay farmers' worries. He has admitted that the fear that negotiations might not resume weighs heavily on French agriculture. But the fact that there was a crisis did not mean the crisis could not be resolved. These attempts at appeasement, however, ignore the fact that de Gaulle is giving absolute priority to political over economic problems and is clearly prepared to consider a definitive break between France and the EEC if the partners stand by their supranational conception of the Community. The thesis, advocated above all by Hallstein, that the European Communities already form a political Union is refuted by de Gaulle with such vigour that he thinks the time has come to strip the Commission in Brussels and the Council of Ministers of all powers transcending those of national governments.

De Gaulle's advisors seem to have convinced him of what the former Prime Minister, Michel Debré, has already publicly expressed, namely that French agriculture's export problems could also be solved through bilateral agreements. In order to give a fresh start to his deadlocked policy of a 'European Europe', the General is probably considering, for the period after his re-election, the fusion of EEC and EFTA to form a large free-trade zone and customs union, which would automatically deprive the Economic Community of its supranational character.