

The 'empty chair' policy

Source: CVCE. European Navigator. Étienne Deschamps.

Copyright: (c) CVCE.EU by UNI.LU

All rights of reproduction, of public communication, of adaptation, of distribution or of dissemination via Internet, internal network or any other means are strictly reserved in all countries.

Consult the legal notice and the terms and conditions of use regarding this site.

URL: http://www.cvce.eu/obj/the_empty_chair_policy-en-f6d19361-9a7a-4e39-ae93-of898e652d85.html

Last updated: 08/07/2016



The 'empty chair' policy

The proposal for the financing of the common agricultural policy (CAP), drawn up in 1965 by Walter Hallstein, President of the Commission, marked the beginning of what was known as the 'empty chair' crisis. The Commission proposal was geared towards the development of the Communities' own financial resources, independently of the Member States, and conferred additional budgetary powers on the European Parliament and allocated a greater role to the Commission. Moreover, the progression, on 1 January 1966, to the third stage of the transitional period for the establishment of the Common Market was to involve the application of majority voting in the Council of Ministers. France could not agree to this development, which it regarded as an unacceptable renunciation of sovereignty. In addition, General de Gaulle criticised Walter Hallstein for having prepared his budgetary proposal without prior consultation of the governments of the Member States and for having acted like a Head of State. France was also afraid that a coalition of Member States might, on the basis of a majority decision, challenge the common agricultural policy, which France had persuaded its partners to accept only with great difficulty.

France held the Council Presidency until 30 June 1965, and its stance only exacerbated the latent conflicts between the ideas of the Hallstein Commission and those of the Council of Ministers. By refusing any solution based on compromise, Maurice Couve de Murville, French Foreign Minister in the second Pompidou Government, brought down the negotiations on the financial regulation of the agricultural policy. On 1 July 1965, the French Government recalled to Paris the French Permanent Representative in Brussels and announced France's intention not to take its seat in the Council of Ministers until it had its way. This was the beginning of the extremely serious 'empty chair' crisis. It was the first time since the entry into force of the Treaty of Rome in 1958 that the EEC had been prevented from operating by the actions of a Member State.