

Letter from Étienne de Crouy-Chanel to Maurice Couve de Murville (The Hague, 3 March 1962)

Caption: On 3 March 1962, Étienne de Crouy-Chanel, French Ambassador to the Netherlands, informs Maurice Couve de Murville, French Foreign Minister, of the political reasons for the rejection of the Fouchet Plan by the Belgian and the Netherlands Governments.

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As the Department is aware, the most recent meeting of the Foreign Ministers of the Six in Luxembourg was preceded by a flying visit to The Hague by Mr Spaak ¹, during which the Belgians and the Dutch finalised the following day's statement and established the basis of a joint position.

Let me briefly remind you of this position. Whereas Mr Spaak is now giving stronger and more forthright support than before to the Dutch position that favours British accession to the Six on the basis of a political organisation with the state as its basic building-block, the Dutch favour, more clearly and openly than before, a supranational approach to the new political organisation of Europe in the event of Britain's not acceding. The choice set out as one between having the United Kingdom without integration or the Six with integration is now seen as a proposal supported by the two founder countries that represent a sort of Brussels–The Hague axis within the Six.

This proposal has the merit of appearing, at first sight, to be straightforward. However, on reflection, it does not throw any more light on the prevailing confusion in the debate now taking place between the Six and does not resolve the contradictions between the positions supported by the parties involved and their underlying aspirations. It should be said that this confusion and contradiction are to be found not only in the positions held by Belgium and the Netherlands.

It is therefore interesting to try to analyse what exactly lies behind this Belgian-Dutch convergence and what it signifies.

Although not stated quite as clearly as last year, in tactical terms, there is no shadow of a doubt that, given the Baden-Baden interview and the agreement concluded between Paris and Bonn, this represents a tit-for-tat response. But there is surely more to it than the desire to demonstrate the solidarity of the twosome. It is typical that the aim of the accord is to reject the compromise arising from the Franco-German entente, although that compromise opens up possibilities of further integration in the future, while also leaving the door open for the position espoused by Britain's friends. It is as though the solution was being rejected not on its own merits but because it derives from the Franco-German agreement, and this is a way of opposing that agreement.

The Department knows the Dutch position on this. We are told here, diplomatically, of course, but in no less certain terms, that, while French *leadership* in Europe might be acceptable, Franco-German hegemony will be countered forcefully and with determination. The people with whom we are in talks are not perturbed by any demonstrations or protests. Only one argument seems to make them hesitate a little. That is that, despite all the goodwill that might exist towards Great Britain, on two occasions its hesitation and wavering allowed two major conflicts to break out. So, we are told, let us create a small and well-knit group and, with some nostalgia, they talk of France's traditional policy of surrounding itself with small and medium-sized states and basing its great power status on their support rather than on the inevitably reluctant and envious agreement of its peers.

This fear of Franco-German hegemony, whose echoes reverberate as far as Switzerland, is essentially a reaction that harks back to the period of Lotharingia. This fear has remained alive here in Belgium, gripped as it is by memories from the distant past which have curiously outlived more recent events, and, while it is more blurred, it is always below the surface. What is new here is that this fear appears to have outweighed Mr Spaak's misgivings because of his fear that Britain's accession might undermine the efforts by the Six to construct a supranational entity. Of course, it is possible to point to minor differences between the Belgian Prime Minister's position and that of Mr Luns ². While they are both calculating that their opposition to the Franco-German compromise will win them time, the Belgian probably believes that this will lead to a

softening of the French position, in a way that would favour the creation of an integrated Europe, while the Dutch are hoping that the negotiations with Britain can be finalised. These minor differences, even this misunderstanding, if you like, between the two partners are probably real. It is still the case that the agreement reached in The Hague looks clearly like systematic opposition to France and Germany making all the decisions alone. It tends to show that Paris and Bonn, even acting together, cannot impose their will, and, under current circumstances, it is not clear what could weaken that opposition. Neither the reticence of Luxembourg (far more dependent on Franco-German cooperation) nor Italy's support could shake these two men who are known to be obstinate and who are supported by a public that is just as obstinate. Even if they were shown to be isolated from their other four partners, I am convinced that this would not lead them to give way to what they consider to be a show of overweening power.

Of course, with time and effort, the latent misunderstanding between Brussels and The Hague could no doubt be exploited. In the past, Mr Spaak seemed aware of the drawbacks that British accession might have for the institutions of the Six. The fact that he has overcome those concerns does not mean that they have gone away. Perhaps he is counting on this opposition to secure concessions towards his view of Europe.

The situation here is more complicated. Apart from the political notion of an equilibrium within Europe that makes British accession to the Six desirable, the business world and the large Anglo-Dutch companies definitely want Britain and the sterling area to join the Common Market in order to broaden their scope for business and avoid traditional trade flows being severed. It does not follow that they want accession at any cost, quite the reverse! British demands seem to them to be totally exaggerated, and they are in no way prepared to pick up the bill. On the contrary, they intend to profit from it.

Moreover, apart from political union and British accession, our approaches and those of the Netherlands are drawing closer together in other areas. On subjects such as the association of the Overseas Territories, tropical products and raw materials, agricultural policy and the EEC's external relations, bilateral talks have been held between senior French and Dutch officials and even between Ministers dealing with technical issues. I must point out how highly we valued the personal relations that were established between Mr Baumgartner ³ and Mr Zijlstra ⁴ and the importance of Mr Giscard d'Estaing's ⁵ pursuing them. These contacts have had beneficial effects, even where they have not yet brought our positions closer together. It appears, in particular, that the Dutch side was pleased to see that, on major global economic problems, France had broad and flexible views and more open than some British ideas. That encourages them to consider our positions in more detail and with a positive attitude.

These are all positive elements that may be exploited.

Of course, we need to act at bilateral level. Developing Community procedures presents unquestionable advantages and, as Mr Hallstein ⁶ always says, they save time. Many questions that would otherwise be intractable can be solved in this way. However, there are issues that are better suited to one-on-one discussions and clarifications that are difficult to give with six countries around the table. The issue of political union is currently all about that very number.

(Europe. European international issues. Political issues. European Political Union. Study committee.)

1. Spaak (Paul-Henri), Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Belgium.

2. Luns (Joseph), Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands.

3. Baumgartner (Wilfried), Minister of Finance and Economic Affairs of France who resigned on 28 January.

4. Zijlstra (Dr Jelle), Minister of Finance of the Netherlands.

5. Giscard d'Estaing (Valéry), successor to Wilfried Baumgartner at the Ministry of Finance.

6. Hallstein (Walter), President of the Executive Commission of the Common Market.