'The empty chair crisis' by Georges Levhat (RTL, 30 June 1965)

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Algérie: les accords d'Evian / Euloge Boissonade, Jean-Pierre Farkas.- Oran et Alger: RTL [Prod.], 20 mars 1962. RTL, Paris. - (07:03, Montage, Son original).

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[Reporter] Brussels: this afternoon, the European marathon will be resumed. This is the last day of June, and the Ministers have to approve funding for agriculture in Europe — by midnight tonight, in theory. So I am calling on our special envoy in Brussels, Georges Levhat, for a report on the situation. What is the latest, Georges Levhat?

[Georges Levhat] Less than an hour ago, a French delegate told me: 'All the elements needed for an agreement exist: they just have to be put together. But the real question is: Do we want an agreement?' This is the temperature in the famous 'Salle Europe' in the Palais des Congrès, and you notice at once that it is several degrees cooler than the temperature outside.

[Reporter] Might the agreement not be signed tonight?

[Georges Levhat] It may well not be. It is a possibility that cannot be dismissed, given that there are two positions that are fundamentally opposed. The French are saying: 'We are here to secure an unconditional financial agreement that follows on from the one that all of us in the Six signed on 14 January 1962.' However, the Italians are saying: 'It is not possible to make a commitment today on what will happen when all agricultural products are traded freely throughout Europe and at European prices. Therefore we should block everything at the present level for one year and use this year to finish the job of integrating agriculture in Europe. In a year's time, we shall be in a position to make a commitment based on full knowledge of the facts.' If we add to this the political conditions that the Dutch have attached to any agreement, the Germans' wishes to speed up the industrial, as opposed to the agricultural, common market, and then the Belgian jungle, where they still have no government, you will appreciate that the situation is far from being clear.

[Reporter] To sum up then: in what kind of atmosphere will the negotiations be resumed? Can we speak of a crisis?

[Georges Levhat] No, we cannot speak of a crisis, for everything is going on in a very relaxed atmosphere, and the meal to which, yesterday morning, Edgard Pisani invited his colleagues and heads of the European Commission, Walter Hallstein and Sicco Mansholt, was most cordial, even friendly. The Italian Minister, Mario Ferrari Aggradi, even told him: 'You have chaired the Council of Ministers for Agriculture twice, and a third occasion always follows a second,' which, in passing, supposes that Pisani will be the French Minister for Agriculture in January 1968. The truth is that no one wants a failure, however much they defend their own positions, and they are all searching for a possible compromise. France itself, well aware that the Italian ideological positions are dictated by strictly financial considerations, is prepared to grant Italy favourable terms so that it will have less to pay. Finally, politically speaking, Luxembourg is looking for a formula that will satisfy both France and the Netherlands on the thorny issue of the European Parliament's powers.

[Reporter] So that is the situation at midday in Brussels. We can now let the negotiations continue. We shall return to Georges Levhat this evening for a further report.