

'Uproar on "Avenue de la Joyeuse Entrée"' from Izvestia (13 July 1965)

Caption: On 13 July 1965, the Soviet daily newspaper Izvestia reports on the decision taken by France not to attend any more intergovernmental meetings of Community bodies in Brussels until its demands relating to the common agricultural policy (CAP) have been met.

Source: Izvestia. 13.07.1965, n° 163. Moskva. "Skandal na ulitse Joyeuse Entrée", p. 4.

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Uproar on ‘Avenue de la Joyeuse Entrée’

There is an avenue in Belgium’s capital, Brussels, with a somewhat strange name — ‘La Joyeuse Entrée’, which translates as ‘The Joyous Entrance’. On this avenue there is an imposing, bright building which houses the executive of the European Economic Community (‘the Common Market’). A strict, business-like atmosphere usually permeates this ultramodern building. However, of late it has become increasingly reminiscent of a topsy-turvy anthill, and its troubled residents are wondering just what the next disaster will be. The reason for this unrest is a serious crisis which is shaking the very foundations of that bulky edifice that is the Common Market.

In the evening of 1 July, Foreign Ministers from the six EEC Member States — France, the Federal Republic of Germany, Belgium, Italy, the Netherlands and Luxembourg — went their separate ways after a long debate when they realised that reaching consensus on the ‘Agricultural Fund’ was an impossible task. The following day, an extraordinary meeting of the French cabinet was held, chaired by General de Gaulle. At the end of it, the Minister of Information, Alain Peyrefitte announced to journalists that the French Government was not prepared to participate in any further meetings concerning the Common Market. It soon became known that France’s permanent European Economic Community representative, Jean-Marc Boegner had been recalled from Brussels. His deputy, Maurice Ulrich announced that the French delegation would be withdrawing from the previously planned sessions of the various technical committees of the European Coal and Steel Community and from talks concerning the association agreements with Nigeria, Morocco, Tunisia, Austria, etc. The press had a field day and started declaring the threat of the total collapse of the Common Market.

So, really, why were passions so enflamed? In January 1962, more than three years ago when the second stage of the transitional phase of the Common Market began, a decision was taken to establish a single market rate for agricultural products and, in particular, cereals. The main party concerned was France — the biggest exporter of agricultural produce amongst ‘the Six’, as it wanted to scoop up the remaining markets for itself, including, most importantly, West Germany. However, right-wing circles in Bonn responded extremely coolly to this proposal: they preferred to import grain, meat and dairy products from countries outside the EEC (USA, Canada, Austria, Argentina, etc.), as these countries spent the proceeds in West Germany buying a large amount of industrial goods. Establishing a single price meant that the EEC Member States importing cheaper goods from the outside would have to pay the difference into the single fund earmarked for the modernisation of the agricultural sector of the Six. Of course, it was France that received the lion’s share of the proceeds from this fund.

It does not take an expert in the problems of European unification to imagine just how many spanners Bonn has jammed into the wheels of the Common Market’s agricultural policy. The French Government twice had to issue an ultimatum and threaten withdrawal from the EEC before the hard-won single price agreement for cereals was finally approved, in principle, on 15 December last year. It seemed that the worst of the obstacles had been overcome; however, it was not long before the main parties to the agreement were bickering again, this time over who would pay how much into the common fund, and who would control it.

The Italian and Dutch representatives were not happy that they would have to pay a lot and demanded that the period of validity of the new treaty concerning the allocation of contributions be reduced by one to two years (it previously expired on 30 June) and that the fund be placed under the jurisdiction of the ‘European Parliament’ where the French would be sidelined. The head of the West German delegation, who had been keeping his cards close to his chest, suddenly expressed support for the demands made by Rome and The Hague. French representatives, who, trusting in Bonn’s earlier promises, had hoped that the new treaty would be concluded by 1970 and that the fund would fall under the jurisdiction of the EEC Council of Ministers, felt betrayed. What transpired thereafter is well documented.

The Western European press took great delight in repeating such explanations at every opportunity. The most serious commentators consider that the real reason for the crisis should be looked for elsewhere. In their opinion, France exploited the disagreement surrounding the agricultural fund as a pretext for slowing down implementation of the Rome Treaties.

In actual fact, when the third and final stage of the transitional period commences on 1 January 1966, the EEC Council of Ministers will no longer have to take decisions unanimously as they have up till now, but by a simple majority. At the same time, customs tariffs on industrial goods, currently at only 30 % of their 1957 levels, will be reduced by a further 10 % (by 1967 they should be eliminated completely). By the same token, West Germany, the main industrial power of the Six, will be granted the most favourable concessions, and France will lose any chance of extorting the oft-promised compensation for its agricultural sector. This will cause widespread discontent amongst the influential farmers in France, whose opinions Paris cannot afford to ignore due to the forthcoming presidential and parliamentary elections.

We must also not forget that the decisive test of strength between the monopolies of Western Europe and the USA is being feverishly prepared in Geneva through the final stage of talks on the mutual reduction of customs tariffs (the 'Kennedy Round'). France insists that the Common Market countries show a united front at these talks, fearing that otherwise West Germany would enter into a separate trade agreement with the USA.

At last, economic issues are now inextricably linked with political ones. Bonn has been rather active over recent months, striving for the speediest possible completion of the political union of the Six. Meanwhile, France has indicated that no summit meetings to discuss the conditions of the political union of the Six will be possible until the discord over the common agricultural policy is resolved. Of course, the partners have completely different ideas: Paris views the union only as a coalition of sovereign states, while in the capitals of the other Member States they are tending towards the creation of a 'supranational' state.

Faced with this situation, France is attempting to give the Common Market countries a choice: either a common platform be developed on all the contentious issues, including agriculture and relations with the rest of the world (first and foremost the USA) before the transition to the third stage, or the third stage be postponed and perhaps even discarded all together.

According to some newspapers, France's President has clearly decided to take this opportunity to destroy the existing Common Market mechanism, revise the Rome Treaties and remove the 'supranational' elements before it is too late. But whatever the commentators' explanations and suggestions may be, the mood at No 23 'Joyeuse Entrée' in Brussels remains depressed and far from joyous.

Yu. Rubinsky