

Note from the Luxembourg Ambassador to France on the empty chair crisis (Paris, 2 August 1965)

Caption: On 2 August 1965, Nicolas Hommel, the Luxembourg Ambassador to Paris, sends a confidential note to Pierre Werner, Luxembourg Prime Minister and Foreign Minister, in which he gives his account of the reasons which led France, under General de Gaulle, to boycott Community activities in Brussels.

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Paris, 2 August 1965

CONFIDENTIAL

The Luxembourg Ambassador to France
To
His Excellency
Mr Pierre Werner
Minister of State
Minister of Foreign Affairs
Luxembourg

Subject: Common Market Crisis

Over recent days I have endeavoured to discover whether France deliberately precipitated the crisis of 30 June and how it intends to follow it up.

A very well-informed source has given me the following information on both those matters:

When, in December 1964, General de Gaulle accepted the arrangement on the common price level for cereals and related issues, he did not realise that he had strayed into the quagmire of supranationality. He began to become more attentive to it shortly thereafter, and his New Year speech, in which he forcefully stated that France intended to remain her own master 'rejecting all systems which, in the guise of supranationality or integration or Atlanticism, would hold France under we knows who's sway', echoes that new awareness. Since then, the continually repeated statements of France's determination to remain independent have confirmed that dismissal of supranationality. Moreover, a previous conversation between Fanfani and Couve de Murville did not give any indication that Italy would take such a strong stance on the French argument concerning the Commission proposals on the financial regulation. Furthermore, a conversation between Mr Lahr and Mr Wormser had given France the impression that an arrangement in keeping with its line of argument would be possible. In any event, Mr Couve de Murville had only a very narrow negotiating mandate in that there were to be absolutely no supranational aspects to any arrangement. When during the negotiations it became clear to Mr Couve that he would be unable to achieve a result meeting that criterion and that he would be pitilessly disowned by the General, he halted the negotiations. What Mr Couve did not know, however, was that, the day after the crisis, the General, enraged, would be so vigorous in his reaction that he would go so far as to recall his Permanent Representative to the Common Market. Subsequently, Mr Couve seems to have mollified him a little and succeeded in getting France to attend some meetings of a purely managerial nature.

As to the future of the Common Market, concerns of the most serious nature are justified. Everything points to the conclusion that France will resume dialogue on agricultural funding arrangements only if the five partners also agree to abandon all supranational aspects and, indeed, any future possibility of supranationality. France is in favour of a 'Common Market of States'. It is unlikely that a solution of that kind will be acceptable to the other Member States.

Such circumstances would spell the end of the Common Market. General de Gaulle, on the advice of Mr Wormser, is not particularly perturbed by that possibility, which almost everyone views as having extremely serious economic consequences. An alternative solution would be for France to reinstate the free-trade area, although Mr Wormser has been one of its most enthusiastic opponents.

It is unlikely that General de Gaulle wants the break-up to be complete before the presidential elections. That would put him on inauspicious electoral ground. The small farmers, whose initial reactions were very subdued in the wake of the Brussels crisis, are beginning to be concerned, are getting restless and are starting to demand a Community solution to farming issues. If the General is forced to take a position before the elections, he will try to offload responsibility onto others. If he were to succeed in having the French line

accepted, his prestige would know no bounds in France.

Off the record, I have already been told that the latest version of the Fouchet Plan is no longer acceptable to France.