

'The crisis in Europe is indissociable from the much more relevant crisis in NATO' from *Le 20e siècle fédéraliste* (May 1966)

Caption: In May 1966, in the French quarterly newspaper *Le 20e siècle fédéraliste*, Paul-Henri Spaak, Socialist MP and former Belgian Foreign Minister, recalls several rounds of European diplomatic negotiations and dwells, in particular, on France's attitude to the developments in the 'empty chair crisis' and on the adoption of the Luxembourg Compromise in January 1966.

Source: *Le 20e siècle fédéraliste*. Mai 1966. Paris. "La crise de l'Europe est indissociable de celle de l'OTAN qui doit nous mobiliser", p. 2-3.

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The crisis in Europe is indissociable from the much more relevant crisis in NATO

I have always been a European. I remember heated discussions on this subject with my father round the table at home. I recall a book that was published at the time entitled *Europe ma Patrie*, by Gaston Riou. I've forgotten the content, but the title still stirs something inside me. Then there were Briand's attempts, which failed because a rift was beginning to develop between the democratic countries and the fascist and communist regimes. And that was the 1939–45 conflict.

During the war in London I also thought about how the old continent would look in the future. I announced at a conference that Europe would not be created by Hitler and that it would be us who brought it together, and I added, for the benefit of the British, that it would be done with you or without you, or against you.

It was also in London that we dreamed of creating Benelux.

Did the Benelux experience provide useful lessons in European unification?

The circumstances surrounding the creation of Benelux provided useful experience for the establishment of Europe's future structures. Shortly after the liberation of Holland, I went to the Netherlands. During a conversation with the Prime Minister we agreed that we still wanted to achieve the economic union that we had envisaged when we were in exile. Things were being dragged out by the 'experts'.

Politicians often use experts as alibis. When they don't want to do anything or don't know what to do, they decide to 'refer the question to the experts'. But when politicians want to do something and know what they want to do, experts can become valuable colleagues.

Just like me, the Netherlands Prime Minister knew what he wanted. So we told the experts that they had six months to draft the text of a treaty.

That was the first lesson I learned from the finalisation of the Benelux agreement. The second was that the many prophecies that would-be 'competent' people can formulate on the consequences of an economic agreement generally prove to be false, particularly when they are pessimistic. Some people said that Dutch workers earned wages that were, on average, 30 % lower than their counterparts in Belgian industry, and that this would be the ruin of the latter, because they would be unable to compete with the Dutch. Yet who is now the main industrial beneficiary of the Benelux agreement? Belgium rather than the Netherlands.

Finally, a third element to be highlighted is that once Benelux had been set up, no one asked to reverse the process; all those concerned adapted.

The Benelux agreement certainly did not resolve the problem of agriculture, which proved to be a significant obstacle at European level, but it did on the other hand lay the foundations for the beginning of a political understanding, and that first experience was rich in lessons for the future.

A broader view towards Europe was required, however. From the very start you were an architect of European unification. What particular memory do you have of that?

Without going over the history of European integration since the Hague Congress in May 1948, I'd like to cite several events relevant to the current situation.

The first major crisis that we experienced concerned the EDC. It was the French who proposed the setting up of a common army. Their partners accepted the idea in good faith, although I felt that it was a little early for that. Then there was a very serious incident. The French National Assembly rejected the draft, although the parliaments of the other countries approved this French idea, but what was more serious was that there wasn't even a debate about it in the French National Assembly.

So we were really disappointed. True Europeans were helpless. The Council of Europe in Strasbourg was

stagnating. The failure of the EDC then appeared to mark the failure of all our efforts to achieve unity.

Despite all this, there was a turnaround. It was prepared by Jean Monnet and arose out of an initiative taken by the three Benelux Foreign Ministers, among whom the Dutchman Jan Willem Beyen played a very important role. Jean Monnet had suggested broadening the ECSC to include atomic energy, while Mr Beyen said that we should be more daring, and that what had to be established was a genuine Common Market. The term was used again in the final communiqué of the meeting held by the ministers of the Six in Messina, but I don't know whether we were taken completely seriously. If we did finally succeed, however, since the EEC and Euratom were indeed established, it was for two reasons:

— the first was that it was decided to give a politician responsibility for overseeing the negotiations. This task was entrusted to me, and I tried my best to shift the discussions from arguments between technical experts and place them in a broader context;

— the second was that we were fortunate that the six governments were headed by men who were genuinely European and who were driven by the will to extend European integration from the economic to the political arena. It's not possible to take European unity forward if there is no political will, but if there is the political will then all difficulties can be overcome.

The negotiators who drew up the plans for the Common Market were driven by a profound faith according to which they agreed to a certain number of sacrifices to which they would not subscribe today. I remember, for example, endless discussions between experts on banana prices and imports. Losing all hope of seeing any agreement on the horizon, I told the specialists that I was going to call a press conference in an hour, when I would announce that the Common Market had slipped up on a banana skin. [...] Such methods wouldn't work nowadays because, as European sentiments have waned in some quarters, private interests too often prevail.

When do you think the current European crisis began?

On 13 January 1963, the day that General de Gaulle broke off negotiations between the Six and Great Britain. Until then the European Economic Community had functioned normally, in fact better and more quickly than we had hoped, while for us the Treaty of Rome was still not an end but a beginning, with economic integration leading to political integration. We were certainly not at that point, however, though the Common Market was challenged by no one and was beneficial to everyone. The British had asked to join, knowing full well that such a gesture would have political consequences for them. Negotiations, led on the British side by Edward Heath, got under way.

They were long and difficult, but there appeared to be no reason why they should be any longer and more difficult than the ones that had concluded with the agreement between the Six enshrined in the Treaty of Rome. Suddenly, without warning his partners, without informing them in advance and without giving any hint of his intentions, General de Gaulle declared at a press conference that the negotiations had failed.

I am personally absolutely convinced that if the discussions had continued between the Six and the British they would have been successful, and that the issues to be resolved were less significant than those on which agreement had been reached.

More serious still than the failure of the talks, however, were the circumstances in which this failure occurred. France's five partners were faced with a *fait accompli* arising out of a unilateral decision taken by one of their number. This was not only an unacceptable but also a humiliating way to treat them, one of which they would unfortunately experience subsequent further displays.

That day of 13 January 1963 will continue to be the one on which the confidence that existed among Europeans, founded on a common will without disappearing for ever, was very seriously shaken. From then on the Six no longer discussed an issue without an ulterior motive, without asking themselves what they could gain from the concessions that they would have to make. European unity never found its rhythm

again, even if things continued as well as could be expected until the second major crisis of 30 June 1965.

What are your thoughts on that crisis and on the French Government's attitude at the time?

You are aware that my opinion on the difficulties that led to the 30 June crisis did not tally exactly with that of my other colleagues in the Five. I felt that mistakes had been made on both sides and that there was no general attempt to achieve a reconciliation. So I'm all the more at liberty to say that, early last summer, France adopted an attitude that was not only inconsistent with the spirit of the Treaty of Rome but actually contradicted it. The charter of the Six actually stipulated that all the countries had to facilitate the activities of the common institutions. By refusing to sit on the Council of Ministers and to take part in the work of the various technical committees, the French Government acted unilaterally, in formal breach of the commitments that it had made. I would add that if such conduct, which is a considerable step backwards in relation to the rules of international law, were to be emulated, it would be impossible to establish harmonious relations between countries.

Since then, we in Luxembourg have certainly done what we could to ensure a resumption in the operation of the Common Market machinery, but the Six have not restored a genuine climate of confidence amongst themselves.

Personally, what lessons have you learned from the crisis of 30 June and the Luxembourg Compromise?

Three particular themes stand out from the crisis currently affecting European integration, which came to a head on 30 June in Brussels and was not fully resolved in Luxembourg:

First of all, it has now been shown that it is impossible to integrate the economies of several countries without those countries also agreeing on the principle of the rapid creation of political union. Like all pioneers of Europe soon after the war, like all promoters of the coal and steel pool, like all the signatories to the Treaty of Rome, I have never considered the progress made to be anything other than stages along the road to political union.

That is why I have often had to ask myself whether my Dutch colleague Joseph Luns and I were right to promote the Fouchet Plan, which corresponded to Gaullist views of political union. I must admit that I have sometimes wondered whether I was wrong. Nowadays I no longer doubt it and can state, without any ulterior motive, that we were not wrong.

It was the attitude that the French Government adopted subsequently, justifying our previous reluctance, that proved us right. I will cite just three examples: France had refused to include the slightest reference to NATO in the future Treaty on political union, and from then on we were afraid that we might undermine Atlantic solidarity.

We also feared that the new political organisation might be used to try to reduce the supranational powers of the coal and steel pool institutions and the EEC Commission. Finally, we felt that a meeting, three or four times a year, of Heads of Government and ministers who would not apply decisions taken unless they wanted to, once they got back to their respective capitals, was a caricature of political power.

If the development of relations between the Atlantic allies and the accusations made against the Hallstein Commission had not justified our anxiety on the first two points, the lessons learned from two years of applying the Franco-German Cooperation Treaty, based on the principles of the Fouchet Plan, would have been sufficient to show that the formulas that we were being offered at the time were both ineffective and out of date.

We were therefore fundamentally right to say no.

The second major theme for reflection arising out of the 30 June crisis is whether the agricultural policy that

we devised at general level and began to apply in particular areas within the Common Market is a good policy that is consistent with real circumstances.

We have certainly made considerable progress in agriculture, both at European and at Benelux level. But we are now facing agonising problems. The formulas that we envisaged involved thousands of millions of French francs in expenditure, which represents sacrifices that it will be difficult to persuade the taxpayers of several countries to accept if, in exchange, they cannot be shown the advantages arising out of an agreed general policy.

At a time when inflation is threatening on several fronts on the old continent and when the EEC Commission is giving governments justifiably strong advice to be prudent, it seems rather contradictory to be made to raise the cost of living by increasing the prices of certain agricultural products.

Finally, I have a third general comment: is it conceivable that the Common Market should continue not only to develop but also just to exist if some partners, in both the political arena and in defence, fundamentally contradict each other?

I have been voicing my concern on this issue for over a year now. Without minimising the European crisis of 30 June 1965, I would say that it was less dramatic than the crisis generated by the French Government's attitude towards the USA and the Atlantic Alliance.

One final question, Minister: how do you see the future, as regards both the development of European unity and the Atlantic Alliance?

The idea of Europe is firmly rooted in the mind of the general public on the old continent, both in France and in its partner countries. Federalist militants must do their utmost to preserve and if possible develop this sentiment. A resurgence of the nationalist virus in Germany must be avoided at all costs, particularly among the younger generations who did not experience Nazism or the horrors of war.

The Luxembourg agreement certainly confirmed the fact that the Six do not all view the development of the Common Market in the same way, but, while confidence may not have been restored, new progress is possible. We shall certainly encounter difficulties in agricultural policy, with certain aspects possibly even being challenged.

We are still nowhere near political union, and that is why I do not yet see how it would be possible to increase the European Parliament's powers until its members are elected by universal suffrage, which will mean that they will finally be accountable to the electorate.

The economic Europe can therefore get back on track. But it cannot progress in earnest without political impetus, and that is only conceivable if the Six do not clash on diplomatic issues and defence measures. The crisis in Europe is therefore indissociable from the crisis in NATO, and the latter must for the time being be the subject of our vigilant attention and fervent determination.