

Note from Pierre Pescatore on Luxembourg and the empty chair crisis (Luxembourg, 14 October 1965)

Caption: On 14 October 1965, Pierre Pescatore, Secretary-General of the Luxembourg Ministry of Foreign Affairs, sends a note to Georges Wagner, Luxembourg MP and President-in-Office of the Benelux Interparliamentary Consultative Council (CICB), in which he informs him of the efforts being made by Luxembourg, together with Belgium and the Netherlands, to find a positive solution to the empty chair crisis.

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Luxembourg's position in the crisis affecting the European Communities

1. Since the crisis began on 30 June 1965, the Luxembourg Government has sought to make a balanced assessment and to maintain a very moderate stance. It took the view that political considerations had been introduced, without any real necessity, into a debate that actually concerned the implementation of undertakings given either under the terms of the Treaty of Rome or in the course of its application; it therefore tried to keep the discussion focused on the practical problems that development of the Common Market poses, deferring problems of a more political nature, such as the Commission's financial autonomy and the powers of the European Parliament, to a later stage. For the time being, these problems could have been acknowledged in a declaration of principle.

2. General de Gaulle's press conference of 9 September 1965 broadened the debate to include institutional problems, namely the role of the Commission and the principle of majority voting, which, it was already apparent, played a latent role in French thinking but which, hitherto, had not been formally raised. At that point, the crisis became more fundamental and more acute, and the partners found it necessary to review and redefine their positions.

Consultations on the subject are ongoing among the governments concerned, in particular those of the Benelux countries. For its part, the Luxembourg Government is very keen to coordinate its attitude to the crisis with the stance taken by the Belgium and Netherlands Governments.

3. Already we may say that a number of common principles have been established, namely:

- the need to seek a solution to the crisis on the basis of the treaties and within the framework of the Community institutions;
- opposition to any rethink of the Communities' institutional structure – upon which, in fact, their success clearly depends;
- the need to ensure that the Common Market may be administered and to provide continuity in the institutions until France resumes its seat.

4. Efforts have already been made – notably as a result of the Belgian Foreign Minister's initiative and his acute political sensitivity – to find an approach and a framework for reopening dialogue with the French Government, the first task here being to establish that Government's real intentions. The Luxembourg Government will lend its unstinting support to any such effort, provided that the procedure chosen does not involve any abandonment of the principles that underpin the Communities.

The Government also takes the view that no worthwhile procedure can be established until we can at least sketch out more practical solutions to the basic problems, namely:

- the problem of financing the agricultural policy which, in turn, has to be seen as part of a smooth progression towards full implementation of the customs union and of economic union in every sector;
- the institutional problem. To resolve this problem, we need to distinguish between apparent and real difficulties and to establish, before entering into any discussion, how a balance between government prerogatives and the powers of the Commission may actually be achieved and how the majority voting rule will work in practice, taking into account the interdependent nature of all our interests here.

We need to study and reflect on all these problems at greater length before embarking, with any hope of success, on a conversation with the one government of the six that is currently abstaining from participation in the Community institutions' work. The Council of Ministers' meeting scheduled for 25 and 26 October next will certainly give us an opportunity of clarifying the problems and will enable us to work towards

establishing common positions.

5. As things stand, how could the Benelux Interparliamentary Council contribute to a resolution of the problems outlined?

a. The Interparliamentary Council would be performing its rightful function by affirming the value of united action on the part of the three Benelux countries in this situation of crisis in European affairs. United action of the kind envisaged can emerge only from detailed consultation.

b. If we analyse the causes of the crisis that surfaced on 30 June last, we have to acknowledge – and we say this objectively, without seeking in any way to pass judgment – that the demands formulated by certain national parliaments, and particularly that of the Netherlands in relation to an extension of the powers of the European Parliament, played a part in bringing us to the current situation. Clearly, this stance has also made it considerably harder for the governments of the three Benelux countries to coordinate their position on the substance of the problems.

The Benelux Interparliamentary Council could be of real assistance here – not only in furthering unity of purpose among the three Benelux countries but also in resolving the European crisis – if it worked to promote awareness of current political realities, thereby helping the governments to keep the debate within a framework that is likely to yield a solution, namely by renouncing any condition liable to be unachievable in today's Europe. This would not mean abandoning, as a longer-term aspiration, the political ideal of a democratically constituted Europe.