

Luxembourg Government reaction to the empty chair crisis (Luxembourg, 12 November 1965)

Caption: On 12 November 1965, Pierre Werner, Luxembourg Prime Minister and Foreign Minister, informs the Belgian Foreign Minister, Paul-Henri Spaak, of the guiding principles of the Luxembourg Government regarding some of the issues raised by the empty chair crisis.

Source: Archives Nationales du Luxembourg, Luxembourg. Affaires étrangères. AE 15436.

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Luxembourg Government reaction to the French ideas

1. Procedural question. We share Mr Spaak's concerns about a process involving bilateral talks. It cannot be rejected as such, given that bilateral contacts have, since the early days of the Communities, prepared and accompanied multilateral procedures; but we must do our utmost to prevent the solidarity among the Five from being eroded by the taking up of unilateral positions. We believe that, in this situation, the Italian Government has a natural coordinating role to play since it holds the Presidency of the Council. That method would have the advantage of situating the procedure in the Community framework.

2. Council meeting. With regard to the special Council meeting, we believe that the prime consideration is to recognise that it is taking place in a Community context. Here, sufficient flexibility must be shown, so that the procedures that are most likely to result in success are selected.

3. Majority rule. We are concerned about the general nature of the protest made in this regard, which — if our information is correct — seems to concern the very principle of the application of the majority voting rule in the Council. At the same time, we are rather reassured by the fact that, in the final analysis, France does not seem to be insisting on a formal revision of the Treaty. That leaves some room for negotiation. On the substance, we remain of the opinion that, to a large extent, this is an imaginary problem and wonder whether it would not be possible to find a solution consisting of:

(a) reassuring the French Government about the real meaning of the majority voting rule, since that might allow us to overcome the hurdle of the third stage; and

(b) giving France the option of raising the matter again during the work being undertaken in connection with the merger of the Communities.

4. Commission. We are reassured to note that the protest is actually directed at the style and conduct of the current Commission and not, it would seem, at its institutional position. As we have repeatedly said in the past, the appointment of the new Commission will, quite naturally, mark a new departure on new foundations. The French Government's comments on some aspects of relations between the Commission and the governments do, indeed, raise problems that merit reflection.