

'Match nul (A drawn game)' from the Luxemburger Wort (31 January 1966)

Caption: On 31 January 1966, the daily newspaper Luxemburger Wort comments on the impact of the institutional compromise reached in Luxembourg on 29 January 1966, ending the empty chair crisis.

Source: Luxemburger Wort. Für Wahrheit und Recht. 31.01.1966, n° 31; 118e année. Luxembourg: Imprimerie Saint-Paul. "Match nul", p. 1.

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Match nul (A drawn game)

(eb) The Six came to Luxembourg with the best of wills. Nobody had set their hopes too high, but the delegations felt realistically optimistic as they arrived in the capital to play the final.

The second half of the Luxembourg European Cup is now over. The government teams have returned to their respective capitals to report back to base. Above all, however, to take stock.

Nobody went home an outright winner, which would incidentally have been a poor negotiating outcome.

Europe, in this case represented and defended by the Five, has the satisfaction of knowing that the empty chair in Brussels is once again to be filled, that the engine driving the Community — the Commission, for the time being still with Hallstein at the wheel — has again been started up and cautious attempts are being made to make up for ground lost over the past six months.

Unfortunately, this revival of the European Community has come at a very high price. France now has the chartered right to enforce its own will as it sees fit when it comes to voting. In their final communiqué, the Six affirm that, ‘despite differing opinions (regarding the voting procedure in the Council of Ministers), the Community’s work will resume in accordance with normal procedure’ — ‘On est d’accord sur le désaccord et l’on passe à l’ordre du jour.’ (‘We agree to disagree and can now move on to business.’).

This skilful move by French diplomacy lets Couve de Murville kill two birds with one stone, giving de Gaulle’s political rank and file in the UNR a favourable starting position in the parliamentary elections coming up soon in France. The Five acknowledge France as a loyal partner, worthy of resuming its chair in Brussels. Thus Lecanuet loses a valuable trump card. At the same time, they accept France’s demand to be allowed to defend its national interests through unanimous voting. This card should be enough to regain farmers’ support for the parties now in government, as the wheat harvest, so dependent on exports, is now safe.

After 15 hours of negotiating, many discreet exchanges at embassy-level and innumerable attempts by the Benelux Ministers to mediate, it became clear that there would not be agreement on all points on 28 January in Luxembourg. It was decided to settle for a closing statement offering some semblance of agreement.

So the decisive European Final in Luxembourg ended in a draw.

A doctor made his own personal comments about the ‘case’: ‘The Six agreed on the diagnosis but not on the treatment. The lady from Brussels has made it through an acute crisis; however, the suppurating wound, though diagnosed, went untreated and could trigger inflammation at any time, maybe tomorrow ... which the patient might not survive.’