

Press conference held by Charles de Gaulle (9 September 1965)

Caption: On 9 September 1965, General de Gaulle holds a press conference in the Élysée Palace. He outlines the role that France plays in the process of European integration and gives the reasons behind France's decision no longer to have taken up its seat at the Council of Ministers since 1 July 1965.

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[...]

Question: What, in your opinion, are the causes of the Common Market crisis and how do you think it can be ended?

Answer: What happened in Brussels on 30th June with regard to the agricultural financial regulation has brought to light not only the persistent reserves of most of our partners toward the inclusion of agriculture in the Common Market, but also certain basic errors or ambiguities that appear in the treaties on the economic union of the Six. That is why, sooner or later, the crisis was inevitable.

[...]

But, what we wanted yesterday and what we want today is a community that is fair and reasonable.

Fair: that means that agricultural products, allowing for their own particular conditions, should be included in the Common Market concurrently with industrial goods. Reasonable: that means that nothing which is important at present in the organisation, and later in the operation of the Common Market of the Six, should be decided and, even more, applied, except by the responsible public authorities in the six States, that is, the governments controlled by the parliaments.

Now, we know — heaven knows that we know! — that there is a different concept of a European federation in which, according to the dreams of those who conceived it, the countries would lose their national personalities, and in which, furthermore, for want of a federator — such as, in the West, Caesar and his successors, Charlemagne, Otto I, Charles V, Napoleon and Hitler tried to be, each in his fashion, and such as in the East, Stalin tried to be — would be ruled by some technocratic, stateless and irresponsible Areopagus. We know also that France is opposing this project, which contradicts all reality, with a plan for organised co-operation among the States, evolving, doubtless, toward a confederation. This plan alone seems to France to be consistent with what the nations of our continent actually are. It alone could one day make possible the adherence of countries such as Britain or Spain which, like ours, could in no way accept the loss of their sovereignty. It alone would make the future entente of all of Europe conceivable.

However — and whatever the ulterior motives concerning political theories might have been — it could seem that the very long and meticulous negotiations in Brussels were on the verge of a successful conclusion. Of course, we had the utmost difficulty in persuading our partners to agree in practice to making agricultural products an integral part of the Community. Now, everyone knows that this is a *sine qua non* to us, for, if this condition is not met, we would remain burdened with the very heavy weight that supporting our agriculture represents for us — more than for our neighbours and we would consequently be handicapped in industrial competition. We therefore felt obliged, in January 1962, to agree to pass to the second stage of the Treaty, that is, to a substantial reduction in customs barriers, only on condition that the commitment to settle the agricultural problem be formally entered into by the Six, particularly from the financial standpoint, no later than 30th June of that year, on terms and according to a time-table that were explicitly stipulated. While there were some tears and some gnashing of the teeth at that time, we were able, at the last minute, to gain the support of our partners and we had reason to believe that they would honour their commitments on schedule.

On the other hand, while noting that the very heavy international apparatus built at great cost around the Commission was often overlapping with the competent services of the six governments, as the work progressed we had officially recognised the competence of the Community's civil servants and had noted that they refrained from excessive infringements on the only responsibilities that were valid, that is, those of the States.

It was too good to continue to the end. For, in Brussels on 30th June, our delegation came up against a refusal with regard to final drafting of a financial regulation in accordance with the commitments made. A

little earlier, moreover, the Commission, suddenly emerging from its political reserve, had formulated on the subject of this regulation conditions intended to give itself its own budget, which would have amounted to as much as four billion dollars, with the States handing over to it the levies and customs receipts that would have made it literally a major independent financial power. It is true that, according to the authors of the draft, this enormous budget, which the States would supply at the expense of their taxpayers but which they would not control, would be subject to examination by the European Assembly. But the intervention of this body, which is essentially consultative and whose members have never, in any country, been elected for that purpose, would only aggravate the usurpatory character of what was demanded. Be this as it may, the combination — premeditated or not — of the supranational demands of the Brussels Commission, of the support that several delegations declared themselves ready to give them and finally of the fact that some of our partners at the last moment went back on what they had previously accepted, forced us to bring the negotiations to a close.

I must add that in the light of this event, we more clearly measured the situation in which our country would risk finding itself if one provision or another initially provided for by the Rome Treaty were actually applied. Thus, in the terms of the text, the decisions of the Council of Ministers of the Six would, beginning on 1st January 1966, be taken by majority vote; in other words, France would be prepared to see her hand forced in any economic matter — therefore social and often even political — and, in particular, what would have seemed gained in the agricultural area could be, despite her, placed at stake again at any moment. In addition, from that time on, the proposals made by the Brussels Commission would have to be adopted, or not, as is by the Council of Ministers, without the States being able to change anything, unless miraculously they were unanimous in drafting an amendment. Now, we know that the members of the Commission, in the past appointed by agreement among the governments, are from now on in no way responsible and that, even at the end of their mandate, the unanimous consent of the Six will be required to replace them, which in fact makes them irremovable. We see where we could be led by such a disposal of ourselves and of our Constitution, which stipulates that “French sovereignty belongs to the French people, which shall exercise it through its representatives and by means of referendums”, and makes no provision for any kind of exception.

This is where things stand. Of course, it is conceivable and desirable for work to start again one day on that great undertaking, the Community. But this will happen, possibly, only after a delay whose extent cannot be foreseen. For who knows if, when and how the policy of each of our five partners — considering, of course, certain electoral or parliamentary situations — will finally be adopted to the requirements that have once again just been evidenced?

Whatever the case, France, for her part, is ready to participate in all exchanges of views that would be proposed to her on this subject by the other governments. If necessary, she envisages resuming the Brussels negotiations, once the inclusion of agriculture into the Common Market is truly adopted and there is a desire to put an end to the claims that abusive and fanciful myths are setting against common sense and reality.

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