

'France victorious, but isolated', from Corriere della Sera (30 January 1963)

Caption: On 30 January 1963, commenting on the French veto of the United Kingdom's accession to the European Communities, the Italian daily newspaper Corriere della Sera relates the course of events that led to the failure of the diplomatic negotiations.

Source: Corriere della Sera. 30.01.1963, n° 20; anno 88. Milano: Corriere della Sera. "La Franci vince, ma rimana isolata", auteur:Bartoli, Domenico , p. 1.

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Last updated: 05/07/2016

France victorious, but isolated

From our special correspondent

Brussels, 29 January, evening.

France has emerged victorious but isolated from its battle against Britain's entry into the Common Market. The Europe of Six is in crisis. These are the two dramatic facts emerging from the meetings in Brussels. France is isolated because the other five countries are firmly in favour of continued negotiations with the British. The Community has been plunged into crisis by this deep rift, and even more so by the general conflict of methods between French diplomacy and the diplomacy of the other five. President Walter Hallstein of the European Economic Commission, speaking this morning at the meeting of the six delegations, took pains to stress the risk of a breakdown within the Community.

French Minister Maurice Couve de Murville was polite, impassive and icy all day. This northern Frenchman, a close cousin of the British in appearance and manner, a skilled negotiator and an expert handler of problems and dossiers, had received clear orders from President de Gaulle and he carried them out inflexibly. The British negotiations were scheduled to finish and indeed they have.

This morning, German Vice-Chancellor Ludwig Erhard and Foreign Minister Gerhard Schroeder made a last-ditch attempt to convince de Gaulle's envoy to accept the compromise formula they were proposing. The attempt failed. Mr Erhard let slip that he had felt that he was in the presence of some bloodless, ice-cold being when making his final representations to the French Minister. The Vice-Chancellor had just received an urgent message, not from President Kennedy, as has been stated, but from Secretary of State Dean Rusk: it was an appeal, a warning of the risks posed by a strictly bilateral, namely a Franco-German, policy. While this final American message, mirroring Mr Erhard's personal inclinations and supported by major currents of German public opinion, was a setback for the agreement signed so formally a few days ago by Adenauer and de Gaulle, it could not change the practical outcome of the Brussels meeting in any way.

Following the negative outcome of the meeting between the German Ministers and the head of the French delegation, there was no hope of a positive result. There was no hope of a change of heart on the part of Mr Couve de Murville, and nor was it possible to imagine that the five would tolerate, in addition to France's veto on British entry, the French formula for the closure of the negotiations. Under the Treaty of Rome, which makes the entry of new members subject to unanimous approval by the Six, General de Gaulle's veto on British entry had to be accepted. Responsibility for the breakdown could nevertheless be clearly attributed, and that is what happened.

The morning's discussions at the offices of the Belgian Foreign Minister were very lively. Work continued to focus on the German proposal: to give a precise mandate to the Commission presided by Mr Hallstein for the examination of the British question. Yesterday, agreement could not be reached on the exact content of the mandate: the French tried to make it as complicated as possible in order to transform it into a long and involved academic treatise. Today they refused to set a final deadline for the presentation of the report by Mr Hallstein and his colleagues. Lastly, and this was the most delicate point, while Mr Couve de Murville was stating that the negotiations with the British should be immediately discontinued *sine die*, the others were keen to restart talks with the British as soon as the report was presented.

It was therefore finally decided this morning in just over an hour that there was no possibility of agreement on the German proposal as reformulated by Mr Spaak. After lunch, at a quarter past three, the delegates met again and the British arrived an hour later. Edward Heath, the Lord Privy Seal, who has conducted the negotiations for the British, entered the portals of the Foreign Ministry at about a quarter past four. He is a likeable man, ruddy-faced and with a ready smile; today, however, he was serious and frowning. In his wake came another two Ministers, Christopher Soames and Duncan Sandys, and a number of civil servants, their huge briefcases bursting with papers.

This was a genuinely bizarre and dismal moment in our recent history. Three British Ministers entered to

hear a sort of death sentence: a statement lacking any Europeanism was read out to them on the initiative of a French general who would not have been famous without Britain's support and hospitality during the war, despite the efforts that had been made on their behalf by enemies whom they had defeated eighteen years ago. As we know, gratitude, or even ingratitude, does not exist in politics, as a permanent sentiment at least. It is difficult, however, to imagine a greater and more dramatic reversal of the situation.

When the British Ministers reached the room, the procedure agreed by the Six took place and Britain's application for entry was buried under the French veto and the tributes of the other five.

The President of the Conference who, by rotation, was the Belgian Minister Henri Fayat, a colleague of Mr Spaak, read the German proposal, stating that it had not been approved as a result of the opposition of the French delegation. He then gave the delegates the floor.

Mr Spaak spoke first, followed by Mr Joseph Luns from the Netherlands, Mr Schroeder from Germany, Mr Couve de Murville, Mr Emilio Colombo, Mr Eugène Schaus from Luxembourg, the President of the Commission, Mr Hallstein, and lastly Mr Heath. Mr Colombo deplored the fact that fifteen months of negotiations had failed to lead to a positive outcome, although 'a large proportion of the matters discussed' had been laid down in specific agreements which, the Minister of Industry added, had been accepted because they strictly respected the spirit and letter of the Treaty of Rome. Italy pointed out that a final agreement could have been reached, whereas today's decision 'delays the process of European integration and also exposes the Community to serious problems whose extent cannot at present be predicted.'

In a statement to journalists, Foreign Minister Attilio Piccioni, chairing the Italian delegation, made it clear 'at whose door responsibility for the closure of the seventeenth session of negotiations with Britain can be laid'. (This is the legal/diplomatic formula for the breakdown). Mr Piccioni had another controversial message for France: 'Those who, like me, think that extreme gestures and actions are futile, not to say damaging, are convinced that the future will show, as history has widely borne out in the past, who is right.'

We have to deduce from this that Italy, while unable to do anything to prevent the breakdown, refuses to accept its political consequences and is prepared to take action against an intolerable approach to European politics. After all, General de Gaulle cannot govern Europe as well, using referenda as a bludgeon.

We can disregard the tail-end of the discussions, which are still under way as we write in the press rooms and embassies of Brussels. The most serious threat is that what we have succeeded in doing in Europe up to now has been compromised. One of the German delegates said sadly today that the Common Market seems set to become no more than a bureaucratic machine and there is little doubt that the impetus for unity is being lost.

Domenico Bartoli