

'The major victim' from Combat (27 July 1965)

Caption: On 27 July 1965, the French daily newspaper Combat expresses its concern over the consequences of France's refusal to attend intergovernmental meetings of Community bodies in Brussels.

Source: Combat. de la Résistance à la Révolution. 27.07.1965; 24e année. Paris: Combat. "La première victime".

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The major victim

It was a unusual session which saw the Foreign Ministers of France's five partner States in the Common Market meeting yesterday in Brussels. They seemed to be holding a vigil for Europe, France's empty chair a testament to the fact that the great adventure born of the Treaty of Rome has lost the life-force which has driven it for so long.

This meeting, held in the absence of France — and nobody will hold it against the other countries that the meeting took place without France — has not done Europe any good. It has revealed the division in broad daylight, fatally stirring up the grudge which France's associates bear it for having upset their carefully laid plans.

Be that as it may, the brief intermission that the members of the Common Market have enjoyed must now come to an end. What now? It will be weeks, or even months, before the group gets back on track, until the French stop sulking. How can Europe find fresh inspiration? The incident of 30 June, which has left deep scars in European consciousness and in the minds of France's partners, has, accordingly, made this inspiration all the more difficult to find.

Aspirations, which were not always completely unselfish but which enabled Europe to move forward, have been crushed. Europe now needs a fresh stimulus. The question which springs to mind is: where will this stimulus be found?

From Walter Hallstein and his Commission perhaps? But France cannot accept that the Commission may break out from the reticence which becomes an executive body. From France's partners? But they, after all, are not the ones who broke away. From France itself? In that case, what was the point of causing a fuss?

Nevertheless, too long an intermission would be detrimental to our country. France is the major victim of the policy that it thought wise to follow. France has not reconsidered its position in relation to the principle of the abolition of customs barriers, and its partners continue to benefit hugely from the advantages of the industrial Common Market.

Moreover, as a result of its refusal to envisage a reconciliation in Brussels, France must bear the financial costs associated with the lack of an agreement — albeit one that would have been a compromise — on the settlement of the common agricultural policy.

This situation cannot drag on for ever, or even continue at all, without serious damage to France. Will our partners make us pay for our gesture of 30 June?

At all events, in the wake of the Brussels meeting at which, it seems, positions were reaffirmed, an analysis of the situation shows that any reopening of negotiations is going to depend on France.

France must certainly make the first move, insofar as our partners are not compelled to do so by their own interests.

In this situation, France risks humiliation. Time may prove our action of 30 June to have been even more pointless than it currently appears.