

'Enforced compromise' from the Süddeutsche Zeitung (19 January 1966)

Caption: On 19 January 1966, the German daily newspaper the Süddeutsche Zeitung wonders about the nature of a political compromise which the Six might adopt at an extraordinary Council meeting at Luxembourg with a view to ending the empty chair crisis.

Source: Süddeutsche Zeitung. 19.01.1966. München. "Kompromiß unter Daumenschrauben", auteur:Thoma, Franz.

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Enforced compromise

Not even a patched red carpet was too trivial for the great de Gaulle to use it as an indictment. Several of the diplomats accredited to the European Economic Community had walked on the said carpet — what inexcusable arrogance of an EEC Commission to consider itself a government when it was merely the underling of the governments! The shabby red carpet leads to the centre of the crisis which is to be resolved without endangering the EEC Treaty. Is the EEC an agglomeration of national interests — *or more than that*? It became a nuisance to General de Gaulle the moment that it was intended to move beyond an economic organisation born of expediency and take on the characteristics of a political union, which is not provided for in the Treaty but is an automatic consequence thereof. Anyone who submits to a majority vote — as was to happen on 1 January — gives up sovereignty. De Gaulle does not want that. He has been boycotting the EEC since June and is paying no heed to the Treaty. Although his Foreign Minister is assertively acting the part of prosecutor, it is France itself which, by rights, should be in the dock in Luxembourg.

However, a compromise will *have to be* reached with the accused. Whether the result will be just acceptable or disreputable as a capitulation, the value of the Treaty of Rome is likely to suffer permanently from the fact that its mandatory nature, to which its framers swore, is not now being enforced in that, at the first real test, a partner in breach of the Treaty is being offered concessions so as to avoid the whole set-up being jeopardized. We need merely recall, on the basis of the refusal to allow the British to join, that power is stronger than the will of the majority. Even then, the General made this deplorable state of affairs clear to us in the EEC, particularly since he has a perfect command of the best form of defence, namely attack.

Two bastions attacked by de Gaulle are under fire in Luxembourg, namely the majority-voting principle and the role of the Commission itself. What is at issue here? Hitherto, decisions of the EEC Council of Ministers have had to be *unanimous*, but the fathers of the Treaty were aware that greater integration would make this increasingly difficult to achieve because the more advanced stages would involve vital issues. *Vital interests* — is a dangerous phrase. Majority voting in place of unanimous decision-making was undermined before France's withdrawal from Brussels, by the Member States' verbal gentlemen's agreement to abandon it where vital national interests were at stake. Any issue could be interpreted as such. However, conversely, could the EEC survive if decisions which were contrary to their genuine vital interests were imposed on individual Member States? To think in military terms, could — and this is an absurd thought — the majority Five send troops to Paris because France refused to increase the price of wheat? If one thinks matters through to such an extreme, one can understand precisely why a compromise is required.

A compromise must be found for the role of the Commission, which is now to bring about by bureaucratic means what emperors and power politicians failed to achieve — the unification of Europe. The roles of the EEC institutions are allocated in a carefully considered manner. The Commission has, as a Community institution, the *power to submit proposals for legislation*, and the Council of Ministers has, as an institution representing the Member States, the *power to take decisions*. Opinion-forming within the Commission must, therefore, be kept largely free of influence from the Member States. However, if the Commission is to be decapitated merely because its work is not to the liking of an eccentric member concerned with its own interests, it will, instead, be at the mercy of the interests of the strongest Member State. Then we shall have an EEC ruled by a hegemonic power which has thwarted previous attempts at unification. Such a development could lead to the Treaty being undermined by the back door, as a result of which the fundamental principle of integration will be abandoned and the nation state will be restored as the only valid unit. Therefore, the issue is not Mr Hallstein or Mr Mansholt.

Consequently, the EEC is, in fact, at the proverbial crossroads. Anyone who attacks the substance of the Treaty abandons the Treaty itself. However, anyone who fails to find a solution jeopardises the EEC, whose crisis cannot ultimately be seen in isolation — the interlinking with foreign, defence and nuclear policy is too tight. The EEC without Britain is too little — without France, it would be less still. Time is not necessarily on de Gaulle's side. However, it is not on the side of the Five either. A compromise is urgently required, the question is merely *what form can it take* if it is to be tolerable and inviolable.

