

Note from the German Ambassador to Paris on the empty chair crisis (Paris, 14 July 1965)

Caption: On 14 July 1965, Manfred Klaiber, Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) to Paris, reports on his talks with Maurice Couve de Murville, French Foreign Minister, on the negotiations of the Six during the empty chair crisis.

Source: SCHWARZ, Hans-Peter (Hrsg.). Akten zur Auswärtigen Politik der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, 1965. Band II: 1. April bis 31. August. München: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 1996. ISBN 3-486-56071-9. "Botschafter Klaiber, Paris, an das Auswärtige Amt", p. 1170-1173.

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Ambassador Klaiber, Paris, to the German Foreign Office (14 July 1965)

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Subject: EEC crisis ²

The Ministers who are here in Paris for the extraordinary session of the NATO Council, ³ Luns, Spaak and Fanfani, held exploratory talks with Couve de Murville yesterday on the crisis in the EEC. I have doubts whether it was the right tactical move to show such a level of activity vis-à-vis the French Government at the present time. There is a danger that it will only further push up the price of France's return to the conference table. ⁴

In order to find out how these 'exploratory discussions' were seen by the French, I requested a meeting with Couve, which he granted me this afternoon, even though it was the French National Day. The slight differences in the views of the three parties to the discussions with Couve could be illuminating.

1) Luns-Couve talks

Whilst Luns was cautiously optimistic in front of the press after his talks with Couve ('I was never very pessimistic, and I am perhaps now less so'), ⁵ the Netherlands Ambassador here ⁶ confirmed to me that the discussion went no further than sounding out each other's views. Couve once again blamed the Commission and Italy primarily for the collapse of the Brussels negotiations and declared that the French Government could no longer accept the Commission as a mediator in the crisis. As agreed with the German Minister for Foreign Affairs in Aachen, ⁷ Luns specifically said that an infringement of the Treaties of Rome ⁸ and of the Commission's powers and responsibilities was not acceptable to the Netherlands. The EEC Council of Ministers would meet on 26 July, where necessary without France, and accept the new Commission proposals that had been announced. ⁹ After reviewing the proposals, they would probably approach France through diplomatic channels after the summer recess and propose that the situation be discussed by the six partners with a view to reaching a compromise. The Netherlands Ambassador also confirmed to me the impression, which is widespread here, that, if the Commission were to be replaced and new members appointed, the French Government would use its veto against Hallstein and Mansholt. Couve told me that nothing new had come out of his discussion with Luns.

2) Fanfani-Couve talks ¹⁰

As the Italian Ambassador ¹¹ told me, Fanfani intimated to Couve that there was a possibility of a compromise on agricultural policy financing with the incorporation of a revision clause. Fanfani also referred to the envisaged Commission proposals and called on Couve to reconsider the decision to boycott the meeting of the Council of Ministers on 26 July. ¹² Couve did not take any clear stance on this issue. Fanfani hoped that it would be possible to continue the conversation at the Saragat-de Gaulle meeting at the Mont Blanc Tunnel this Friday. ¹³

Couve said that he had been surprised that Fanfani was clearly still under the illusion that a French representative might attend the meeting of the Council of Ministers in late July. The French Government had no reason to change its negative decision. Moreover, the talks with Fanfani had only touched on the Brussels crisis. There had been much more extensive discussions about the Mont Blanc meeting and the situation in Vietnam. ¹⁴

3) Spaak-Couve talks ¹⁵

The Belgian Ambassador ¹⁶ told me that Spaak had shown a great deal of understanding for the French stance. He confirmed to Couve that France's partners had not complied with their obligation to take a decision on agricultural policy financing for the entire transitional period by 30 June. ¹⁷ Spaak, too, endorsed France's criticism of the Brussels Commission which, in its supranational overzealousness, had exceeded its powers without taking account of the political situation in France. Spaak had even been sceptical about whether there was any point in the Council of Ministers meeting in late July without France.

Couve bitterly explained to me that, in his talks with Spaak, Spaak had told him that he had been accused of having destroyed the Five's 'united front' against France on 30 June in Brussels. With the French sensitivity and the predisposition of the de Gaulle's character, the idea of such a united front can only harden the French stance.

According to Luxembourg's Ambassador here, ¹⁸ his Government would appear to be following Spaak's line. ¹⁹ He, too, is warning against giving the French Government the impression that an insurrection is being fomented against it.

4) After yesterday's meeting of the Council of Ministers, the French Minister for Information ²⁰ stated, with regard to the EEC Ministers' discussions with Couve, that there had been no change in the situation. ²¹

In a well-publicised statement to *Le Figaro* on 13 July, Giscard d'Estaing said: 'Whatever the immediate international uncertainties may be, one thing is sure: France will not fall back on the fatal protectionism that hampered its industrial recovery and its structural adjustment between the two world wars.' ²²

It should also be clear from this statement that the French Government is far from willing to risk what has been achieved in the EEC to date and, in so doing, to act against its own best interests. Instead, it will wait until the autumn and try to ascertain the right time for a compromise that takes account as far as possible of French agricultural interests and of de Gaulle's political ideas.

[signed] Klaiber

Classified material Vol. 8432 (Minister's Office)

- 1 Submitted by Federal Minister Schröder.
- 2 For a progress report on the EEC crisis situation, see Doc. 276.
- 3 For the special session of the NATO Permanent Council on 13 July 1965 see Doc. 282, Note 1.
- 4 On 2 July 1965 Ambassador Klaiber, Paris, took the view that the French Government should be given time to weigh up its interests. He concluded that 'it would be wrong, in my opinion, if we now pressed for the negotiations in Brussels to be resumed quickly. Experience shows that, in order to win over France, we would just have to pay a high price again. We should not do the French this favour.' See Telegraphic report No 1048; Classified material Vol. 8432 (Minister's Office); B 150, File copies 1965.
- 5 See also the article 'MM. Luns et Couve de Murville se sont bornés à expliquer leurs positions respectives dans la crise de la C.E.E.', *Le Monde*, No 6375, 14 July 1965, p. 13.
- 6 Baron Adolph Bentinck.
- 7 For the discussion on 10 July 1965, see Doc. 276, Note 11.
- 8 For the wording of the Treaties of Rome of 25 March 1957 see *Bundesgesetzblatt* 1957, Part II, pp. 753-1223.
- 9 For the meeting of the EEC Council of Ministers on 26/27 July 1965 in Brussels see Doc. 307. For the compromise proposals on agricultural financing submitted by the Commission on 22 July 1965 see Doc. 303, Note 11.
- 10 On 15 July 1965 Ambassador Herwarth von Bittenfeld, Rome, reported information provided by the Italian Foreign Minister about the discussion with his French colleague: 'Couve was extremely cordial and, as at the meeting with Luns, attached particular importance to invoking the television and press. Materially, there had been no discernible change in Couve's position. Couve expressed the French animosity to the EEC Commission.' Nevertheless, Fanfani went on, he still had, 'as a firm optimist, a hope, however small, that the French would, after all, participate in the Council meeting on 26 [July].' See Telegraphic report No 539; Classified material Vol. 2431 (IA 2); B 150, File copies 1965.
- 11 Giovanni Fornari.
- 12 See also Doc. 267, Note 8.
- 13 The road tunnel through the Mont Blanc massif was opened on 16 July 1965 in the presence of President de Gaulle and President Saragat. See *Europa-Archiv* 1965, No 151. On 17 July 1965 Ambassador Herwarth von Bittenfeld, Rome, passed on information from the Italian Foreign Minister about the Presidents' discussion: 'When he spoke de Gaulle was visibly annoyed at the Commission and blamed it for the collapse of the negotiations. He did not have high hopes for negotiations at the present time, since the positions were too far apart, elections were imminent in the Federal Republic, and Belgium still did not have a government. De Gaulle also said that all the problems faced must be reconsidered, but, for the abovementioned reasons, this would not be possible before the end of this year or the beginning of next year. He, Fanfani, had the impression that the real reason for the French stance on 30 June had been that de Gaulle wanted to prevent the move to the third phase of the EEC with more extensive majority decision-making. Couve de Murville once tried to support him, Fanfani, but the General quickly stopped him.' See Telegraphic report No 545; Classified material Vol. 2493 (IA 2); B 150, File copies 1965.
- 14 On 7 July 1965 Ambassador Knappstein, Washington, submitted the following analysis: 'During the monsoon season, which should last until October, US efforts will be concentrated on holding firm militarily and denying the Vietcong the sought-after military victory. In doing so, Washington wants to secure a strong basis for any subsequent negotiations. [...] Consequently, the focus of the military operations and of US efforts has shifted back to the battle in South Vietnam. The bomb attacks on North Vietnam are continuing to increase slowly but are of secondary importance to the fighting in the South. The number of US combat troops will continue to rise without any upper limit being given. It is consistent with the Administration's tactics to maintain silence on the matter.' See Telegraphic report No 1781; Classified material Vol. 2583 (IB 5); B 150, File copies 1965. For the French position see also Doc. 233, Note 34.
- 15 See also Doc. 283.
- 16 Marcel Henri Jaspar.
- 17 This obligation was laid down in Article 7 of *Regulation No 25 of the EEC Council of 4 April 1962 on the financing of the common agricultural policy*. See Doc. 270, Note 9.
- 18 Nicolas Hommel.
- 19 For Luxembourg's stance in the EEC crisis, see also Doc. 276.
- 20 Alain Peyrefitte.
- 21 See also the article entitled 'Frankreich arbeitet in zwei EWG-Arbeitsgruppen mit', *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, No 160, 14 July 1965, p. 3.
- 22 See the article 'En tout état de cause, notre économie ne retombera pas dans le protectionnisme', *Le Figaro*, No 6491, 13 July 1965, p. 11.