

## The 'empty chair crisis' (Pathé, January 1966)

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[Reporter] The common agricultural market, that is to say, the European Economic Community, or rather, when it comes down to it, united Europe, may perhaps be about to climb out of the chasm that the Brussels split plunged it into on 30 June 1965. Let us try to clarify an extremely dense and complex issue. In 1957, when they signed the Treaty of Rome, West Germany, Belgium, France, Italy, Luxembourg and the Netherlands agreed on the stages for bringing about economic unification which, by setting up a market of 170 million inhabitants, aimed at raising Europe of the Six to the same level as that of the greatest world powers. The ultimate goal would be political unification. But however clear a Treaty may be in spirit, its implementation always comes up against reality. Since the individual interests of the signatory States did not always coincide with the general interest, the Six were constantly obliged to seek what was known as 'the balance of satisfaction'. For this reason the establishment of the European industrial market satisfied Germany and Italy more particularly. In a wish to re-establish a balance, France multiplied its efforts to set up the common agricultural market, whose first step, the cereals market, was to its advantage. By this means France would be able to sell its agricultural produce to industrial countries with heavily populated urban populations and start modernising its agriculture. But in June '65, in Brussels, Europe of the Six came up against the problem of funding the agricultural market. The Hallstein Commission wanted its own budget funded by revenue collected supra-nationally. Supervision of this budget would have made the European Assembly in Strasbourg a parliament that was above the sovereignty of the individual States. General de Gaulle was not for the moment in favour of supra-nationality. In his press conference of September 1965, he made this clear:

[Charles de Gaulle] 'The European federation would be ruled by an areopagus of technocrats without a country, responsible to nobody. And it is also well known that France is setting against this plan – which truly seems to go beyond the bounds of reality – a plan for organised cooperation between States.'

[Reporter] The agricultural market had become a stumbling block for Europe. However, on 17 January in Luxembourg, a common desire to stick the pieces together again was evident. It was not yet a question of a Community meeting, but of a political conference for the foreign ministers. Couve de Murville's presence demonstrated France's desire to pre-empt the demise of Europe. The atmosphere was far from warm, and at first the conference merely confirmed the existing antagonisms.

The Dutch minister, Joseph Luns, the fiercest adversary of the French arguments, reasserted his position:

[Joseph Luns] The Netherlands holds the view that the future Europe must be based and built upon supra-national principles, on supra-national foundations and within a perspective of integration.

[Reporter] Paul Henri Spaak takes a more moderate position on the implementation of majority voting specified in the Treaty of Rome from the first of January, one of the major obstacles to the agreement:

[Paul Henri Spaak] I believe that the procedure that we have proposed is one that should assure everyone that every effort will be made to avoid the use of a majority vote in order to reach unanimity; the majority vote is only a last resort.

[Reporter] The door remains open and this is the second Luxembourg meeting. This time it will end, if not in an agreement on the basic issues, at least in the expression of a unanimous desire to find common ground. France has accepted to take its place again in February, in the chair that has remained empty for six months in Brussels. Although the European market has not yet been altogether rescued, hopes for a solution are rising.