

'Has the Common Market really broken down?' from La Dernière Heure (9 July 1965)

Caption: On 9 July 1965, the Belgian Liberal daily newspaper La Dernière Heure comments on the causes and possible implications of the empty chair crisis.

Source: La Dernière Heure. Le plus grand journal belge, le mieux renseigné. 09.07.1965. Liège.

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Has the Common Market really broken down?

After the upset caused by the rift between the Six that was deliberately provoked by General de Gaulle, it is necessary to remain clear-headed and not be carried away by the wave of emotions caused by the French Head of State's decision.

That is certainly the only way to draw up an objective summary of this catastrophe, this split in Europe that occurred in Brussels, at 2 o'clock in the morning, on 1 July.

The disagreeable impression we were left with as a result of the French act of sabotage — further accentuated by the recall to Paris of the French Permanent Representative to the EEC — was that the Common Market was at an impasse, that it had broken down and that the situation was all the more serious because there were no spare parts to repair the damage.

But today, just a few days after the split, we have reason to wonder whether this is not actually a small breach or merely a glitch in the works that the huge European machine will be able to overcome, despite everything.

Admittedly, if we go by the dramatic discussions that took place at the most recent meeting of the Council of Ministers of the Six, the diagnosis is a simple one: this is a total impasse, a 'grave crisis', as Mr Couve de Murville put it.

And indeed, the fact that the Ministers have found it impossible to draw up, by the deadline set by the Treaty, a financial regulation for the common agricultural policy for the period 1 July 1965 to 1 January 1970 poses a significant obstacle to the completion of the Common Market, as envisaged by its architects.

But there are two points to make immediately.

First of all, this is not the first time that the 'clock has been stopped at midnight' and vital decisions taken a few weeks later than scheduled. There is nothing dramatic about that. It could even be said to be normal, given the many technical difficulties facing the experts and Ministers whenever there is a major problem to be resolved.

But in this crisis the situation is very different. The Ministers did not agree to 'stop the clock'. Mr Couve de Murville has blown the disagreement out of all proportion and declared that 'for the first time, a solemn commitment on agricultural Europe has not been met'. The French side hinted that it was not possible to renew the dialogue. De Gaulle's chorus sang loudly of a rift and would have liked to see the curtain come crashing down on a final, heart-rending act.

But, on closer inspection, it is clear that however magnificent their voices and extensive their repertoire, they cannot drown the call to reason. This is the kind of reason and wisdom that is gradually strengthening the position of France's partners and dictating that they take an approach that is both dignified and clear-sighted.

In the five European capital cities linked to Paris, there is a determination not to be overcome by anger. Until the reverse is shown to be the case, they are taking this as a big bluff. And they are seeking to call that bluff by countering the hot air from the Élysée Palace with facts that are actually tangible and do not evaporate into the clouds surrounding the man who has decided, once and for all, to take the loftiest of views down on the world.

The facts are simple, and they are as follows:

It is true that the previous financial regulation for the common agricultural policy expired on 3 June. It is also true that, for a week now, there has been no regulation governing agricultural funding. But it is also true that it will be six months before the effects are felt. The fact is that, because of the specific financing

mechanism, the procedures for applying a new regulation cannot be set in place immediately, and they take time to be developed.

And so is there in fact a breakdown? What immediate effect can the General's delaying tactics have? Is it as clear-cut as the French Government believes?

The Common Market Ministers have six months before them in which to try to identify a formula for agreement. It would be very surprising if they failed to do so and if France did not try to reforge relationships with its partners — after all, it is the main beneficiary of the common agricultural policy.

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