

# De Gaulle finds his “Master”. Gerhard Schröder’s “Fairly Audacious Politics” in the European Crisis of 1965–66

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This article discusses the European politics of the Federal Republic of Germany in the context of the empty chair crisis of 1965–66. The global financial crisis since 2007 and the dramatic financial situation of member states such as Greece, Ireland, Portugal and Spain have strained solidarity and aggravated existing tensions within the European Union (EU). In these times of crisis, the sovereignty of member states is up to debate again and member state governments show an increasing national reflex. The crisis thus crystallises the conflict between communitarian and re-nationalisation trends in EU and member state politics. In a contemporary historical perspective, we observe the same basic conflict when analysing the major constitutional crisis in the history of the European Communities (EC).<sup>1</sup>

The so-called empty chair crisis of the European Economic Community (EEC) occurred after a serious disagreement between the European Commission, France and its EEC partners over the financing of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) during 1965–70. In its spectacular proposals of March 1965, the Commission had linked a CAP financing to a strengthening of EEC supranationality. It had proposed to create a European budget and to give the European Parliament (EP) a crucial role in the budgetary procedure. France’s EEC partners supported these proposals partly by heart, partly for tactical reasons. Provoked by the Commission, annoyed by the partners’ quid pro quo politics and encouraged by his geopolitical vision of an intergovernmental European cooperation, Charles de Gaulle started a boycott of the EEC at the beginning of July 1965. During his press conference of 9 September 1965, the general made clear that the ambitious Commission had to be disciplined and that a veto-right had to be established in the Council of Ministers to underline the sovereignty of member-states. France’s partners resisted the French politics of the empty chair, refused any modification of the EEC institutions or procedures and invited the French government to an extraordinary Council session to discuss these political matters. It was only after de Gaulle’s re-election as President of the French Republic in December 1965 that the French government accepted this invitation. At the Luxembourg conferences in January 1966, France unilaterally declared that unanimous decisions were obligatory when “very important national interests” were concerned, whereas its partners maintained that voting was possible. After France’s return to the EEC in February 1966, Community work was resumed and a package deal over agricultural financing negotiated. However, “Luxembourg” became the lock-in point of a combined consensus/veto-culture, which characterised the decision-making of the EC for

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almost two decades. Nevertheless, the empty chair crisis is widely acknowledged as an experience of catharsis, consolidating the EC and preparing them for the institutional reforms of the 1990s.<sup>2</sup>

This article focuses on the French-German power struggle inherent in this major constitutional crisis of European integration. More specifically, it analyses the European politics of the Federal Republic and in particular the role of Foreign Minister Gerhard Schröder. Taking into account the complexity and interactions between national and supranational diplomacy in the “hybrid system of the EEC” (N. Piers Ludlow), the article explains why the Federal Republic could not prevent France from provoking the crisis, why Schröder was predestined to become de Gaulle’s rival in terms of power politics and how the Foreign Minister dominated the crisis management and outcome of the struggle. Without denying the importance of other EEC members like Italy and Belgium or the complexity and contradictions of Federal European policy, Schröder can be identified as the focal point of resistance against de Gaulle’s empty chair campaign.

The empty chair crisis was meticulously researched and controversially evaluated. The same applies to the Federal Republic’s European policy and the political biography of Gerhard Schröder.<sup>3</sup> However, Schröder’s bargaining in Brussels was mainly analysed in a national and biographical context without sufficiently highlighting his importance for the evolution of the empty chair crisis. As a result, Schröder’s European policy and the French-German power struggle as part of the empty chair episode were widely underestimated. Based on new national and supranational archival evidence, the empirical analysis of this article addresses these deficiencies and demonstrates how the Federal Republic assumed the leadership role in the management and overcoming of the crisis.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, this article does not serve as a biographical approach to the empty chair crisis or as a “men making history” perspective on supranational diplomacy. Rather, it underlines that the European strategies of indi-

2. J.-M. PALAYRET, H. WALLACE, P. WINAND (eds.), *Visions, Votes and Veto. The Empty Chair Crisis and the Luxembourg Compromise Forty Years On*, Peter Lang, Brussels, 2006; N.P. LUDLOW, *The European Community and the Crises of the 1960s. Negotiating the Gaullist challenge*, Routledge, London, 2006; W. LOTH, *Crises and Compromises. The European Project 1963-1969*, Nomos, Baden-Baden, 2001; J. NEWHOUSE, *Collision in Brussels: the Common Market Crisis of 30 June 1965*, Norton, New York, 1967; M. CAMPS, *European Unification in the Sixties. From the Veto to the Crisis*, McGraw-Hill, New York, 1966.
3. H. TÜRK, „*To Face de Gaulle as a Community*“: *The Role of the Federal Republic of Germany during the Empty Chair Crisis*, in: J.-M. PALAYRET, H. WALLACE, P. WINAND (eds.), *Visions, Votes and Veto. . .*, op.cit., pp.113-127; T. OPPELLAND, *Gerhard Schröder (1910-1989). Politik zwischen Staat, Partei und Konfession*, Droste, Düsseldorf, 2002; T. OPPELLAND, “*Entangling Alliances With None*” – *Neither de Gaulle Nor Hallstein. The European Politics of Gerhard Schröder in the 1965/66 Crisis*, in: W. LOTH, *Crises and Compromises . . .*, op.cit., pp. 227-243; U. LAPPEN-KÜPER, *Ein Europa der Freien und der Gleichen. La politique européenne de Ludwig Erhard (1963-1966)*, in: W. LOTH, *Crises and Compromises . . .*, op.cit., pp.65-91.
4. Sources mainly come from the Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes, Berlin (PAAA), Archiv des Deutschen Bundestages, Berlin (ADB), Archiv für Christlich-Demokratische Politik der Konrad Adenauer Stiftung Sankt Augustin (ACDP) and the French Archives Nationales (AN) and Archives Diplomatiques des Affaires étrangères, Paris (MAE).

vidual actors like Schröder were embedded in a broad political context and demonstrates how the ideological preferences that Schröder shared with de Gaulle decisively influenced his negotiating style and objectives. Thus, this article advocates a revised and more nuanced understanding of the “checks and balances” of the empty chair power play and in particular of the mechanisms of French-German rivalry and co-operation.

## 1. Framework Conditions: The Burdens of Federal European Policy in 1965

Four closely interconnected and complex problems dominated Federal European policy in 1965 and strictly limited the manoeuvring scope of German diplomats and politicians on the European level rather than allowing for a flexible and pragmatic negotiating style. These problems were a crucial part of the power struggle between France and Germany and explain why the Federal Republic was unable to prevent the French government from provoking the major constitutional crisis in the history of the EEC. Thus, they are the Federal Republic's responsibility in the outbreak of the crisis.

First, the German philosophy of “synchronised progress” within the EEC had become the *leitmotif* of Germany's European policy and the central element of its negotiating tactics. When the common price for cereals – widely acknowledged as the cornerstone of the CAP – was agreed upon in December 1964, this crucial decision accentuated the one-sided (agricultural) progress of the EEC during the preceding years, the poor economic benefit of member-states like Italy and Germany, as well as the overall lack of a European Political Union. Since the agricultural marathon negotiations of December 1961 and January 1962, the CAP had made very good progress, while non-agricultural fields of integration had threatened to stagnate. France in particular had benefitted enormously from the CAP and had been able to dominate the agenda of the EEC. However, when de Gaulle had provoked his partners by unilaterally refusing British entry into the EEC at the beginning of 1963, Schröder had countered by presenting an EEC “work program”, which strictly demanded “synchronised progress” in non-agricultural fields such as the customs union, the fusion of the executive institutions, the EP strengthening and the GATT negotiations for tariff reduction. The Federal government's insistence on parallel progress, its rejection of anticipated concessions and its expectation that German concessions of the past were reciprocated added an element of extreme distrust and rigidity to the EEC negotiations of 1964-1965. Schröder refused an “isolated” agricultural financing, as wished for by France, and would only allow for a global arrangement securing parallel progress. This clash of incompatible French-German interests played a major role in

the outbreak, management and solution of the empty chair crisis, as will be demonstrated below.<sup>5</sup>

Second, the year 1965 was a year of parliamentary elections in the Federal Republic. Long before the voting actually took place, the strategies of state- and non-state political actors were dominated by electoral considerations. Schröder in particular was attacked for his atlanticist foreign policy by former Chancellor Konrad Adenauer and by political rivals both within the government and in the opposition parties, demanding his replacement after the following elections. Schröder reacted tactically: Though being naturally critical of EEC supranationality and of European Political Union, he adopted a Europeanist stance to thwart the arguments of his political adversaries and to secure his reappointment as Foreign Minister. He cultivated a “fervent European” image by defending the EEC against de Gaulle’s nationalism, underlining German sacrifices to France, welcoming the supranational Commission proposals of March 1965, demanding renewed efforts for a European Political Union and supporting the EP strengthening. However, this artificial European label prevented him from negotiating flexibly with the French, who strictly opposed EEC supranationality. Thus, crucial misunderstandings over the EP strengthening occurred in the French-German negotiations prior to the outbreak of the crisis and were central to the eventual breakdown of the negotiations. Schröder’s tactical approach to EEC supranationality remained a characteristic of his policy throughout the crisis, as will be demonstrated below.<sup>6</sup>

Third, closely connected with “synchronised progress” and electoral considerations were German plans for a revival of the European Political Union, as suggested by the Federal government in its proposals of 4 November 1964. What the EP strengthening meant for Schröder, the Political Union signified for Chancellor Ludwig Erhard: a prestigious political project that Erhard wanted to have his name attached to in order to strengthen his pro-European profile well before the elections. He ignored the fact that no EEC partner had a serious interest in renewed efforts for Political Union and that the project was thus dead long before any attempt for revival. Schröder even warned Erhard that the project stood no chance. What followed was a series of French-German “insults and injuries”: After Erhard was convinced to have received de Gaulle’s “oui” at the Rambouillet conference in January 1965, the general cancelled the envisaged Venice conference and made Political Union dependent on an agricultural agreement. Even Paul-Henri Spaak now believed that de Gaulle “was fooling Erhard”. Though having been humiliated by the general, Erhard acted against any political rationality and maintained the idea of Political Union in the French-

5. For the imbalance of the EEC development see K.K. PATEL, *Europäisierung wider Willen. Die Bundesrepublik Deutschland in der Agrarintegration der EWG 1955-1973*, Oldenbourg, Munich, 2009, p.291; N.P. LUDLOW, *Challenging French Leadership in Europe: Germany, Italy and the Netherlands and the Outbreak of the Empty Chair Crisis of 1965-1966*, in: *Contemporary European History*, 2(1999), pp.233-244; for Schröder’s program of “synchronised progress”, see T. OPPEL-LAND, *Gerhard Schröder ...*, op.cit., pp.548-550.
6. For Schröder’s artificial European label see T. OPPEL-LAND, *Gerhard Schröder ...*, op.cit., pp. 627-633; T. OPPEL-LAND, “*Entangling Alliances ...*”, op.cit., pp.237-238.

German negotiations prior to the crisis. The Political Union quarrel appears as yet another symptom of the overall weakness of Chancellor Erhard who, despite of his "Richtlinienkompetenz", was unable to formulate a clear European policy line and hardly managed to control the Agricultural Ministry and the Christian-Democrats' coalition partner, the Liberal Democrats. As a result, the German European policy suffered from a "ministerial sectionalism". This was the main reason why Schröder could seize almost full control of the Federal Republic's European policy during the empty chair crisis, bypassing the Chancellor, competing ministries and cabinet colleagues.<sup>7</sup>

Fourth, the collapse of the "proven and tested" mechanisms of French-German compromise and accommodation was central to the outbreak of the empty chair crisis. On the part of the Federal government, this was mainly due to Schröder's insistence on "synchronicity", Erhard's wishful thinking that a revival of Political Union was still feasible and the above-mentioned "sectionalism" within the Federal government. Throughout the first half of 1965, French-German expert consultations had suggested that a compromise over technical and political questions was possible between Paris and Bonn. When it came to official consultations on 11 and 12 June 1965 near Bonn, the promising negotiations suddenly ended in a disaster because the experts had overseen fundamental incompatibilities. The foreign policy officials Rolf Lahr and Olivier Wormser tried to undo the statesmen's failure ten days later in Paris, but failed as well because they misunderstood each other and reported incorrectly to their governments.<sup>8</sup>

In the Council of Ministers in Brussels at the end of June 1965, the above preferences and constellations were added to an already explosive negotiating situation. While France insisted on an isolated agricultural financing and strongly opposed any consolidation of the supranational structures, its partners desired a larger arrangement and wanted to force the French government into a quid pro quo. The Commission on its part tried to play the game of supranational diplomacy and exploited the deadlock for tactical reasons. However, the overall evidence suggests that the general had wanted the EEC crisis "sooner or later" for geopolitical reasons and had instructed Maurice Couve de Murville to provoke the failure of the negotiations. Few days after the breakdown of the negotiations, the French representative retreated from the EEC and France declared the beginning of a boycott. However, only after the summer pause did de Gaulle and Couve spectacularly escalate the crisis by demanding the

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7. For the Political Union plan see C. GERMOND, *Les projets d'Union politique de l'année 1964*, in: W. LOTH, *Crises and Compromises ...*, op.cit., pp.109-130; H.v.d. GROEBEN, *Aufbaujahre der Europäischen Gemeinschaft. Das Ringen um den Gemeinsamen Markt und die Politische Union (1958-1966)*, Nomos, Baden-Baden, 1982, p.242; for Schröder's warning see Bundesarchiv Koblenz [BAK], B136 6408, Schröder to Erhard, 09.03.1965; for Spaak's comment see *Akten zur Auswärtigen Politik der Bundesrepublik Deutschland 1965*, Oldenbourg, Munich, 1996, Doc.183, Telex Siegfried (Brussels) to Foreign Office (Bonn), 14.04.1965; for the "ministerial sectionalism" see K.K. PATEL, op.cit., pp.285-286 and 513.
8. P. BAJON, *Europapolitik "am Abgrund". Die Krise des "leeren Stuhls" 1965-66*, Steiner Verlag, Stuttgart, forthcoming 2012, pp.102-105.

downgrading of the ambitious Commission and the abolition of voting when “vital interests” were concerned.<sup>9</sup>

## 2. “Why We Fight”: Schröder’s Mental Map

During the empty chair crisis, German Foreign Minister Schröder became the general’s principal opponent, building a coalition against France and decisively shaping the outcome of the crisis. This does not serve to deny Schröder’s obvious affinity to the political conception of general de Gaulle. On the contrary, the argument here is that this peculiar affinity was the critical element, which made Schröder particularly suitable for the role of de Gaulle’s rival in terms of power politics. The following paragraph thus discusses Schröder’s driving forces, hidden convictions and underlying preferences, as well as the framework conditions of his European policy during the crisis; in short: his mental map.

First, the Foreign Minister and his collaborators understood the empty chair campaign as a fundamental challenge to the political status quo of West Europe, which they actively responded to. Generally, the German political establishment including Erhard and Schröder was eager to trivialise the situation. In their comments designed for public consumption, they repudiated a political or French-German crisis and pointed out that only an agenda-problem had slowed down the EEC negotiations. For Erhard, the crisis was “a little [technical] mishap”<sup>10</sup> and he reassured Giuseppe Saragat “that de Gaulle’s daring venture should not be taken seriously, because already in 1964 the general has given up his plan of a Fouchet-styled “French Europe”.<sup>11</sup> According to his “fervent European” label, Schröder rhetorically deescalated and displayed himself as a pragmatic and optimistic statesman and crisis-manager. His notes for interviews during those days clearly summed up his tactics: “No fuss, no drama, no threat, no counter-threat”.<sup>12</sup> However, what was happening behind the stoic facade? Actually, there was confusion in the Federal government as to whether de Gaulle really sought a crisis over European integration or simply wanted to force his partners into an agricultural deal profitable for France. With an eye to the parliamentary elections, the Chancellery in particular wanted to avoid any talk about crisis and any controversy over European matters before the voting. In contrast, it was mainly

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9. For the Council deadlock see N.P. LUDLOW, *De-Commissioning the Empty Chair Crisis: The Community Institutions and the Crisis of 1965-66*, in: J.-M. PALAYRET, H. WALLACE, P. WINAND (eds.), *Visions, Votes and Veto* ..., op.cit., pp.86-89; for de Gaulle’s geopolitical considerations see e.g. A. PEYREFITTE, *C’était de Gaulle*, Gallimard, Paris, 2002; M. COUVE DE MURVILLE, *Une politique étrangère*, Plon, Paris, 1971; for the escalation by de Gaulle see C. DE GAULLE, *Pour l’effort 1962-1965* (Discours et Messages IV), Plon, Paris, 1970, pp.372-392.
10. MAE, CE-DE, 1111, Telex 4171/75 Seydoux (Bonn) to MAE, 05.07.1965.
11. AAPD 1965, Doc.269, Meeting Erhard-Saragat, 07.07.1965, p.1124.
12. ACDP, Deposit Schröder, 01-483-142/1, notes for interview with Norddeutscher Rundfunk, without date.

in the Foreign Office that analysts understood as early as July 1965 that de Gaulle was not simply playing games and that a fierce confrontation over constitutional questions lay ahead. With this interpretation, the Foreign Office prepared for the struggle and underlined its leading position in formulating the Federal European policy.<sup>13</sup>

Second, Schröder's understanding of European integration was close to the general's European conception. He shared the Gaullist preferences in terms of sovereignty of the nation-states and agreed with de Gaulle that the governments remained the "Masters of the Treaty" controlling European integration. As a result, EEC supranationality and Commission ambitions had to be limited, and unanimity had to be the natural mode of EEC decision-making. Like de Gaulle, he rejected an evolution of the EEC towards more supranationalism as wished for by Walter Hallstein and stressed the need to "interpret" the Treaty provisions regarding majority voting pragmatically.<sup>14</sup> Talking to US-Ambassador George McGhee about majority voting, Schröder's language reflected his notion of sovereignty:

"He could imagine a gentlemen's agreement interpreting the relevant Treaty provisions in a politically reasonable way, because this is the only realistic proceeding not to bind sovereign nation-states by Brussels decisions against their will".<sup>15</sup>

Despite of his "European" polish, he thus remained committed to a classical notion of state sovereignty. Thus, he was obliged to do a balancing act between his pre-election profile and his true political convictions. For example, while he pointed out to the German radio that "[t]he EEC is a creature, a creature which in many regards is independent of member-states [...] and unfolds his own action and living and obliges member-states to act in a communitarian way",<sup>16</sup> he openly admitted before German MPs that "[t]he Community [...] has no consistency going beyond the will of the member-states. This insight might surprise the one or the other".<sup>17</sup>

In addition, from Schröder's view, Gaullist policy was "much ado about nothing". Though he generally acknowledged that de Gaulle's foreign and European policy were *grosso modo* based on geopolitical considerations, he was convinced that the general's impulsive and dramatic campaigns were carried out without a concrete

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13. For the Federal government's confusion see e.g. BAK, B136 2591, note by Praß: Vermerk für die Kabinettssitzung, 06.07.1965, p.3; R. LAHR, *Zeuge von Fall und Aufstieg. Private Briefe 1934-1981*, Knaus, Hamburg, 1981, p.428; for the Chancellery's pre-election policy see in particular the analyses and correspondence of August 1965 in BAK, B136 2592 and H. OSTERHELD, *Außenpolitik unter Bundeskanzler Ludwig Erhard 1963-1966. Ein dokumentarischer Bericht aus dem Bundeskanzleramt*, Droste, Düsseldorf, 1992, p.216; for the more stringent Foreign Office line see P. BAJON, op.cit., pp.246-249.

14. For Schröder's overall European conception see T. OPPELLAND, *Gerhard Schröder* ..., op.cit., pp. 635-636 and the below mentioned talks with US Ambassador George McGhee on 13 September and 9 December 1965.

15. AADP 1965, Doc.348, Meeting Schröder-McGhee, 13.09.1965, pp.1429-1430.

16. ACDP, Deposit Schröder, 01-483-142/1, Schröder on Deutsche Welle, 27.07.1965.

17. ADBT, 3104, 5<sup>th</sup> Legislative Period, Prot.2, p.9 [Foreign Affairs Committee of 8 December 1965, Schröder].

program of how to proceed and what precisely to achieve. From his perspective, all the eccentricity and caprice of Gaullist European politics could not disguise the fact that it was conventional power politics aiming at “less integration” and “French grandeur”. He was also convinced that de Gaulle tried to copy the “Kremlinology”, an astrological speculation about the aims and objectives of the Kremlin officials, and encourage a similar phenomenon in France, which Schröder sarcastically labelled the “Élyséologie”.<sup>18</sup>

However, Schröder’s affinity with and pragmatic approach to Gaullist politics did not make him a friend of general de Gaulle but predestined him for the role of de Gaulle’s rival in terms of power politics. Because the French politics of the empty chair appeared to Schröder as “much ado about nothing”, as conventional “power struggle” and cold-blooded “war of nerves”, he was prepared to pursue a more aggressive policy towards France than Paul-Henri Spaak, Amintore Fanfani, Joseph Luns and Pierre Werner: Spaak, as “Père de l’Europe”, was too much personally “involved” and dependent on his Walloon electorate; Emilio Colombo could hardly compensate the confusion of Fanfani’s European policy as will be shown below; and Luns’ and Werner’s countries were too small to play the role of arbiter. In contrast, Schröder was prepared to crystallise standpoints, provoke controversies, unmask the French politics and take maximum advantage out of the legal situation, highly unfavourable to France. What de Gaulle and Couve regarded as their legitimate and long overdue attack on the malignant excrescences of a degenerated European Union process was an attack on the “soul” of the Community from Schröder’s view. He not only turned to European integration for electoral reasons, as demonstrated above, but he also defended the integrity of the EEC Treaty to “rescue the nation-state”,<sup>19</sup> namely the Federal Republic. Schröder feared that the general’s victory in this power struggle would destroy EEC and NATO integration and establish a French hegemony in Western Europe. This interpretation of the empty chair politics was also shared by the German Commission president Hallstein and by the foreign policy experts of the Lyndon B. Johnson administration, who clearly signalled Schröder that the struggle with de Gaulle had crucial importance for the Federal Republic’s future. To hold the line against de Gaulle, the institutions and procedures of the EEC had to be defended and parallel progress had to be secured. Although a reinforcement of EEC supranationality did not seem opportune to Schröder during the 1960s, he acknowledged that the sheer possibility of such a reinforcement was an integral element of the EEC Treaty. This was why Schröder, though sympathising with de Gaulle’s highly critical attitude towards EEC supranationality, eventually stood by the Treaties, institutions, procedures and also the “human resources” of EEC integration.<sup>20</sup>

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18. AADP 1965, Doc.348, Meeting Schröder-McGhee, 13.09.1965, p.1429; AADP 1965, Doc.452, Meeting Schröder-McGhee, 09.12.1965, p.1867.
19. In allusion to A.S. MILWARD, *The European rescue of the nation-state*, Routledge, London/New York, 2000.
20. For Schröder’s interpretation of the empty chair as a power struggle see P. BAJON, op.cit., pp. 260-267; for the attitude of the US elite see e.g. the analysis of General Director for External Relations Axel Herbst in PAAA, B1 214, Vermerk für Herrn Minister Rey [...], 30.09.1965.

Third, Schröder has to be seen as a "Statesman of Interdependence".<sup>21</sup> No de Gaulle-like myth shall be supported here of a "detached" statesman taking lonely decisions. Schröder's policy line evolved from a close interaction with foreign governments – both foe and friend –, with colleagues, political rivals, MPs of the opposition, experts, lobbies and public opinion. Only the most important foreign and domestic influences on his policy line shall be mentioned here: Schröder's pragmatic understanding of Gaullist foreign policy was mainly bolstered by German Ambassador to France Manfred Klaiber, who explained the policy of the empty chair – bluntly spoken – as part of the general's election campaign, designed to strengthen de Gaulle's foreign policy profile. Klaiber in particular underlined de Gaulle's unofficial but reassuring signals to the EEC partners that France would not leave the EEC and had no interest in the destruction of the Community. Furthermore, French deputy Ambassador to the EEC, Maurice Ulrich, told the Federal Foreign Office in private that de Gaulle was domestically isolated and that the French high administration was extremely critical of the policy of the empty chair. All this was grist to Schröder's mill. The US-administration on its part was for the first time unwilling to forgive France's eccentricity and made clear that it would not allow a political dam bursting because it feared any attack on what it regarded as the political foundations of the "Free World". Thus, the US representatives told the (West) Germans that they would be the first victims of such a development. The US foreign policy establishment and the European Commission were also the first who insisted that Germany accept the leadership role against France and a trustee responsibility for the EEC-5 during France's absence. Hallstein was eager to exploit his excellent contacts to Federal government circles to secure that his institution was not the big loser of the empty chair campaign. At the same time, he feared that Schröder might embark on a "crusade" against de Gaulle and that defeating the general was more important for him than saving the EEC and its institutions. Hallstein was supported by the (West) German industry, which was critical of EEC supranationality but pointed out to Schröder on numerous occasions that the Commission was nevertheless the "engine" of European economic integration and had to be safeguarded against any Gaullist attack if German interests were to be secured. Within the provisional EEC-5, Schröder closely interacted with his Foreign Minister colleagues. Generally, Schröder's policy line was hardened by Luns, who announced that he would negotiate "adamant[ly]" and not allow any revision to the institutional status quo.<sup>22</sup> On the other side, Spaak moderated Schröder's élan on a number of occasions and remained in close contact with the French government in order to calm the emotions.<sup>23</sup>

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21. In allusion to F. DUCHÈNE, *Jean Monnet. The First Statesman Of Interdependence*, Norton, New York, 1994.
22. BAK, Deposit Hallstein, 1119, Note by Narjes: Gespräch mit Botschafter Tuthill, 15.07.1965.
23. For Klaiber's reports see PAAA, B20 1322 and 1323; for Ulrich's indiscretions see e.g. BAK, Deposit Hallstein, 1187, Gespräch mit Herrn Ulrich, 21.09.1965; for the attitude of the German industry see e.g. the documents about the conference of the *Deutscher Industrie- und Handelstag* on 19 October 1965 in Karlsruhe in PAAA, B20 1323, 1324 and 1325; for the US policy line see the documents in PAAA, B1 214 and BAK, Deposit Hallstein, 1187; for the Commission's fear see J. NEWHOUSE, op.cit., pp.134-138.

Fourth, Schröder was aware that his scope for manoeuvre was extremely limited. A number of legal expertises by the Federal government and by the Commission had revealed that from a legal perspective, the situation was highly advantageous for France's partners: France was clearly breaching EEC law and since France's action was legally qualified as "volitional obstruction", France's absence was no obstacle to voting and not even to unanimous decisions within the EEC-5. Schröder did not hesitate to spread this analysis within the Community to gain a psychological asset in the struggle with de Gaulle. However, not only judicial expertises were taken into consideration but also political analyses. The latter clearly indicated that there was no alternative to an EEC-6 including France. Thus, the only pressure instrument left to Schröder was to threaten France to pursue a "European policy without France" until the point where the Community broke apart and France would appear as sole responsible for this political disaster. This was what Schröder implicitly or explicitly did, as will be demonstrated in the following analytical chapter.<sup>24</sup>

### 3. The Power Struggle: De Gaulle finds his "Master"

The argument of this article is that Schröder and the Federal Republic progressively assumed the leadership role, thus shifting the balance of power within the coalition of the five countries resisting the French politics of the empty chair. This shift of power and the Federal leadership role have not been clearly identified by historiography. In the following, the major steps of this process shall be discussed in more detail.

First, the Federal Foreign Office played a leading role in thwarting the French "war of nerves" tactics of July 1965. The French government had started its boycott without presenting any concrete demands. De Gaulle wanted to test his partners and provoke initiatives for mediation favourable to France. Alain Peyrefitte openly admitted that the French aim was "to dramatize the situation while our partners were trying to de-dramatize the situation".<sup>25</sup> This was a highly promising tactics since Belgium and Luxembourg were extremely worried by the European situation and would try to reach a settlement with de Gaulle at almost any price. The small Benelux countries generally worried that the Federal Republic was not sufficiently counterbalanced in an EEC-5 and also feared that de Gaulle's nationalism could easily spread to West Germany. The choice was thus between paralysis and capitulation on the one hand and some sort of Community routine on the other hand (although a normal EEC functioning was in any case impossible). Though maintaining his European label in public, Schröder organised a classical diplomatic concert in cooperation with Italy

24. For the judicial and political expertises see PAAA, B20 1322, Expertise by Ophüls: Fragen der Beschlüffähigkeit [...], 16.09.1965 and PAAA, B20 1323, Expertise by Ophüls: Mögliche Lösungen der EWG-Krise, September 1965.

25. A.PEYREFITTE, CdG, 2002, p.886, Peyrefitte on 01.07.1965.

and the Netherlands to counteract the French tactics. Against the preferences of Belgium and Luxembourg, they secured the integrity of the Community method and institutions in July 1965 thus preventing an easy victory of Gaullist politics: the Council routine formally continued and the revised Commission proposals of 22 July 1965 remained the basis for discussion. De Gaulle was upset, stating “[t]hese meetings, that's enough now. Our partners need to understand that it is unaccommodating that their secret gatherings take place in our absence”.<sup>26</sup>

Second and central to the argument of this article, the Federal Republic clearly replaced the Italian EEC presidency as lead-nation of the so-called *bloc des cinq*. Schröder's Foreign Office seized the initiative and issued foreign policy instructions, called “*Runderlass*”, to all EEC partners on 29 September 1965.<sup>27</sup> The claims and instructions of the Runderlass were all but new. However, the Federal Republic confronted the partners and France with a concrete German position and obliged them to define their position and consult with each other. The momentum of initiative was important, and both the Commission and the US government were fairly happy with Schröder's step. Indeed, the four partners of the bloc reacted instantly and affirmatively and also let it be known that they would appreciate a leading role of the Federal Republic.<sup>28</sup> At the same time, the Italian EEC presidency had tried to organise a first and semi-official gathering of France's partners and French representatives on the occasion of the UN General Assembly in New York. However, when Fanfani and Italian EEC-Ambassador Antonio Venturini met Couve on 29 September, the distrust was such that the path of conciliation seemed to be blocked. The Italian crisis management was seriously suffering from Fanfani's eccentric and egomaniac handling of Italian foreign affairs and thus lacked the essential solidarity required in the confrontation with de Gaulle.<sup>29</sup> Fanfani seemed to be aware of this, because a few days later he sent Venturini on a secret mission to Bonn, where the latter told Erhard that the Federal Republic should now seize the “*Führerstellung*” and confront France playing the role of “the spokesman of the Five”.<sup>30</sup> Although Erhard was clearly reluctant, the casting in the empty chair tragedy (or comedy) was clear from now on.

However, the Federal Republic soon exploited its leadership role in a way, which was all but appreciated by the partners and which is controversially evaluated by historiography. This happened in the forefront of and on the EEC-5 Council meeting

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26. Ibid., p.891, de Gaulle on 28.07.1965; for Schröder's diplomatic concert see H. TÜRK, „*To Face de Gaulle ...*”, op.cit., pp.116-117; J. NEWHOUSE, op.cit., p.133.

27. PAAA, B20 1323, Circular Telegram: Deutsche Haltung zur Lösung der EWG-Krise, 27.09.1965.

28. For the partners' reaction see the telegrams collection in PAAA, B20 1323 and the PAAA, B20 1165, Protocol of State Secretaries' Committee for European Affairs of 8 October 1965, 11.10.1965.

29. For the Italian EEC presidency's initiative see MAE, CE-DE, 1112, Telex 2389-96 Couve (New York) to MAE, 30.09.1965; MAE, CE-DE, 1112, Brunet to Wormser, 05.10.1965.

30. BAK, B136 2592, Note by Geberth: Besuch von Botschafter Venturini [...], 04.10.1965; PAAA, B20 1323, Note by Lahr: Besuch des Ständigen Vertreters Italiens [...], 08.10.1965; AAPD 1965, Doc.379, Meeting Erhard-Venturini, 04.10.1965, pp.1572-1575; H. TÜRK, „*To Face de Gaulle ...*”, op.cit., p.121; A. VARSORI, “*The Economy First?* Italy and the Empty Chair Crisis (1965-66), in: J.-M. PALAYRET, H. WALLACE, P. WINAND (eds.), *Visions, Votes and Veto*es ..., op.cit., p.106.

of 25 and 26 October 1965, on which the Five should have agreed on a common negotiating position regarding both agricultural financing and political questions. In their Council communiqué, the Five insisted on the integrity of the Community institutions and procedures and they invited France to a special Council session in the absence of the Commission to discuss these political controversies. This proceeding had been proposed in the famous “Spaak Plan”. However, no agreement on agricultural financing was found and presented to the French government because Schröder was reluctant to give up the German demand for parallel progress. The overall impression was that of an egoist and obstructionist Federal policy, weakening the coalition of the Five and seriously limiting the Federal Republic’s leadership capacity. This image was adopted by the historiography. Certainly, the parliamentary elections, the struggle over competencies of the Federal ministries and the pressure exerted by agricultural and industrial lobbies played a role when Schröder maintained the demands. However, the argument here is that quite another motive, completely neglected by historiography, was Schröder’s driving force: The German Foreign Minister wanted the Council debate to be centred on political questions and avoid any in-depth technical discussion on agricultural financing with all its dangers of disagreement, confusion and tactical disadvantages. Be it obstructionist or not, Schröder succeeded and made the most important EEC-5 Council a political event. After the Council, he explained to German MPs:

“This [...] was one of the most difficult conferences I ever participated in, although from an outside perspective it seemed to be a child’s play. The situation was far from being a child’s play. The problem was that our four partners wanted to elaborate an offer for agricultural financing to accommodate France while our interest was to bring the political controversy on the negotiating table”.<sup>31</sup>

Counterfactual speculation may be allowed here what would have happened in case that the agricultural financing had been the central topic: the Council would have been completely dominated by complex technical debates and would have lost its political character. Furthermore, in case that the Federal Republic had given up its demand for “synchronisation”, it would have lost its face in a domestic and foreign policy perspective, thus unable to assume any leadership role.<sup>32</sup>

Between October 1965 and January 1966, no solution to the crisis could be found because of the formation of the new Federal government and the French presidential elections. However, France exploited its bilateral contacts to divide the coalition of the Five by telling different things to different governments. This psychological warfare brought the Five to a dangerous point on the NATO session of December 1965 in Paris, when Fanfani and Colombo tried to organise an *ad hoc* informal meeting of the EEC-5 Foreign Ministers excluding the Commission, in short: an intergovern-

31. ADBT, 3104, 5th Legislative Period, Prot. 2, p.33 [Foreign Affairs Committee of 8 December 1965, Schröder].  
 32. For the October Council see P. BAJON, op.cit., pp.281-286; K.K. PATEL, op.cit., p.304; H. TÜRK, „*To Face de Gaulle ...*”, op.cit., pp.121-122; N.P. LUDLOW, *The European Community and the Crises ...*, op.cit., p.81.

mental EEC-5 Council in the capital of the boycotting member state. Schröder stopped this and thus secured the integrity of the Community procedure.<sup>33</sup> On Christmas 1965, the French government then accepted the invitation to the extraordinary Council session in Luxembourg in January 1966. However, to raise the price for French concessions, the French government refused to participate in the budgetary procedure of the Communities for 1966 and thus threatened to paralyse the functioning of the EEC. This quarrel over the Community budget was presumably the most dangerous moment of the empty chair crisis because preparations began for a special budgetary Council, which would decide a 1966 budget in France's absence, thus definitively excluding France in the most vital question of the Community.<sup>34</sup> In this situation, Schröder pursued a policy of brinkmanship *à la de Gaulle*. Supported by the Dutch, he let the French government know that his patience had come to an end and that he was prepared to force France out of the Treaty framework in case of continued obstruction. No doubt, there would be no survivors after the sinking of the HMS "EEC". The Elysée papers clearly stated:

"[...] our Ambassador in Bonn believes that Schröder will insist that a solution to the political problems will be found on short notice so that the Council can without delay decide on urgent questions like the budget 1966, the agricultural financing and the Kennedy-Round negotiations. In case we were not prepared to participate in these deliberations, these would take place among the Five. The Federal government is fully aware of the severeness of this process once triggered. However, it would be easy, one says in Bonn, to make France appear as the sole responsible of the disaster".<sup>35</sup>

Prior to the second Luxembourg conference at the end of January 1966, Schröder was virtually "built up" for the showdown with de Gaulle. After the French press had attacked Schröder, the foreign minister sought the backing of the German parliament for a more robust negotiating style in Brussels. A parliamentary debate in support of Schröder was highly controversial and particularly disliked by a number of Schröder's Christian-Democratic cabinet colleagues. In contrast, crucial support for this debate came from the political opponent: the Social-Democratic MPs. Behind the scenes, they enforced this debate thus overcoming the resistance of the Christian-Democrats.<sup>36</sup> On 27 January, Schröder went to the speaker's desk and explained that the Federal government wished "to share with the Honourable House its concerns and to receive its advice and as far as possible its support". With a good portion of sarcasm, foreign policy specialist Herbert Wehner replied in the name of the Social-Democrats:

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33. For the NATO meeting see documents in PAAA, B20 1326 and in particular ACDP, Deposit Schröder, 01-483-274, Note for Schröder, 15.12.1965; BAK, Deposit Hallstein, 1119, Note Klaus Meyer: *Ratssitzung am Montag*, 17.12.1965.
34. For the quarrel over the budget see N. P. LUDLOW, *The European Community and the Crises ...*, op.cit., pp.95-96; P. BAJON, op.cit., pp.226-233.
35. AN, 1AG5, 248, Note on diplomatic situation by the Presidency of the French Republic, 14.01.1965.
36. For the intervention of the Social-Democrats see C. FRANZ (Ed.), *Die CDU/CSU-Fraktion im Deutschen Bundestag. Sitzungsprotokolle 1961-1966* (Vol.11/IV/2), Droste, Düsseldorf, 2004, Doc. 329, p.1706 [Rainer Barzel before Parliamentary Group on 25 January 1966].

“We want the members of the Federal government to proceed in Luxembourg with the backing – in case there is a back which can be reinforced – with the backing of the German parliament, we are prepared for this backing”.<sup>37</sup>

Schröder made allusion to this peculiar political constellation some months later, when he praised his “fairly audacious politics” before German MPs and explained:

“In the last moment of the negotiations, the German parliament acted more statesmanlike than the Federal government itself. [...] This enabled us to adopt an attitude in Luxembourg, which brought us the appropriate result”.<sup>38</sup>

Crucial support came also from Washington. Until that day, the French government had blocked any EEC position that the Commission would defend in the Kennedy Round negotiations for tax reduction, thus using the Kennedy Round as a pressure instrument *vis-à-vis* Bonn. A day after the parliamentary debate, a secret paper of the US government was passed to the Federal government, stating:

“The United States is negotiating in the Kennedy Round with the Commission acting on behalf of the Community. Whether the Commission’s instructions come from six member states or from five acting for the Community is an internal matter for determination by the EEC members involved. If the five members should decide to give the Commission instructions enabling it to resume effective participation in the Kennedy Round, the United States would be prepared to proceed with negotiations on that basis”.<sup>39</sup>

A Commission mandate by an EEC-5 would have created a complex and precarious situation. However, the US paper primarily had a symbolic value since de Gaulle lost his pressure instrument.<sup>40</sup> Thus, Schröder appeared to be extremely self-assured before the second Luxembourg conference. An ancient close collaborator of Adenauer and a critic of Schröder, Heinrich Krone, noted:

“We [the Federal cabinet members] had to talk to Schröder and keep him in check so that he would not carry those negotiations in Luxembourg with France and the other Four to extremes. [...] Schröder doesn’t like the French. Schröder’s thinking and acting is nationalist and protestant”.<sup>41</sup>

Not only Krone but the French government as well feared Schröder’s incalculability and potential extremism. Thus, before the second Luxembourg conference, Couve sent Ulrich on a highly conspirative mission to tell the Federal government that France wanted to avoid “at all costs ‘war of religion’ over Treaty doctrine” and was extremely

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37. Federal Republic of Germany Parliamentary Debates, 5<sup>th</sup> Legislative Period, Stenographic Report, 17<sup>th</sup> Session of 27 January 1966, pp.673-695.
38. ADBT, 3104, 5<sup>th</sup> Legislative Period, Prot.17, p.63 [Foreign Affairs Committee of 25 January 1966, Schröder]
39. PAAA, B1 214, Secret Paper of US-Embassy for State Secretary Neef, 28.01.1966.
40. For the Kennedy-Round see L. COPPOLARO, *The Empty Chair Crisis and the Kennedy Round of GATT Negotiations (1962-67)*, in: J.-M. PALAYRET, H. WALLACE, P. WINAND (eds.), *Visions, Votes and Veto* ..., op.cit., pp.219-239.
41. H. KRONE, *Tagebücher Volume II: 1961-1966*, Droste, Düsseldorf, 2003, p.451.

interested in a pragmatic solution to the crisis. Schröder's show of force had its desired effect.<sup>42</sup>

In the end, France and its partners negotiated a Luxembourg arrangement which was closer to Schröder's preferences than to de Gaulle's conception, especially given the French "investments" during a half-year period of diplomatic warfare: Schröder could live conveniently with the French unilateral declaration that unanimity was obligatory in "vital interests", while France's partners counter-declared that unanimity was desirable yet facultative. This meant that voting was possible and the Treaties' integrity secured. Nothing was left of the French plans to have the ambitious Commission downgraded to an EEC secretariat. Schröder was even able to implement a "stopping of the clock" for the agricultural decisions of 1965, in short: an agricultural veto to secure German interests. The resumption of Community work in 1966 took place according to the conception of "synchronisation" – which was called "drawer theory" in this case – and led to a package deal agreement *à la* Schröder in summer 1966.<sup>43</sup> Could all this not have been achieved a year earlier and without an empty chair campaign? To put it bluntly, Schröder seems to be the principal profiteer of the general's campaign, while the latter had invested too much and gained too little.

Not surprisingly, Schröder was extremely self-confident after the Luxembourg conference. His crisis management was praised, in particular in the United Kingdom and the US. The UK Ambassador to the EEC, James Marjoribanks, reported to London: "The success of the meeting is almost entirely due to the German Foreign Minister. Dr. Schröder dominated the whole scene. He gave a masterly performance".<sup>44</sup> However, Schröder's hubris, so bitterly noted by Krone, was also why the Foreign Minister's star was waning soon. After France's announcement of March 1966 to withdraw from NATO integration, a fierce conflict occurred over the deployment of French forces on German territory, in which Schröder acted without political instinct and isolated himself.<sup>45</sup> In the quarrel over the EEC Commission presidency from spring 1966 onwards, Schröder insisted that Hallstein remain Commission president even when the Commission presidency began to rotate. As a result of Schröder's inflexibility, the fusion of the Treaties and executive institutions did not take place, thus seriously paralysing the EEC.<sup>46</sup> Finally, the Grand Coalition replaced the Erhard government in December 1966 and Schröder had to hand over the Foreign Office to Willy Brandt. The empty chair crisis was thus one of the highlights of his political career and at the same time the beginning of its end.

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42. For Ulrich's secret mission see PAAA, B20 1331, Telex Tuthill (EEC) to US State Department, no date.

43. A discussion of the negotiating results in P. BAJON, op.cit., pp.346-350.

44. PAAA, B1 214, Ambassador Blankenhorn (London) to Schröder, 02.02.1966.

45. T. OPPELLAND, *Gerhard Schröder ...*, op.cit., pp.663-673.

46. H. TÜRK, *Die Europapolitik der Großen Koalition 1966-1969*, Oldenbourg, Munich, 2006, pp. 36-38 and 44.

## Conclusion

This article pursues a triple objective. First, it reviews the framework conditions of the Federal Republic's European policy in 1965 and its consequences on the level of supranational diplomacy: the inflexible conception of "synchronised progress", the fatal trend towards an exaggerated "Europeanness" encouraged by electoral considerations, the political weakness of Chancellor Erhard maintaining his project of Political Union. These factors explain why the "proven and tested" mechanisms of French-German conciliation collapsed, why Federal European policy failed to prevent France from provoking the major constitutional crisis of the EEC and why, consequently, Foreign Minister Schröder was able to seize almost exclusive control over the definition of the Federal European policy line.

Second, before this background of framework conditions, this article focuses on the importance of Foreign Minister Schröder who became the focal point of resistance against de Gaulle's empty chair campaign. The discussion of his "mental map" and of his ideological preferences serves to explain why Schröder was almost ideally suited to become the general's principal rival in terms of power politics. The empirical analysis underlines that de Gaulle found his "Master" in Schröder, who secured a German leadership role within the coalition of France's partners and pursued a policy of brinkmanship *à la* de Gaulle to force France back to the negotiating table. In the light of these findings, the arrangement at the very end of the empty chair crisis came closer to Schröder's preferences than to de Gaulle's conception.

Third, this in-depth empirical analysis leads to a re-evaluation of the Federal Republic's role both with regard to the empty chair crisis and to the history of post-World War II relations between France and the Federal Republic. Generally, the analysis underlines the evolution of the empty chair confrontation from a geopolitical conflict over European integration towards a highly tactical powerplay. Whereas historical accounts describe the coalition of the Five resisting the French politics as either well balanced or even as dominated by Belgium or Italy, this analysis suggests that the Federal Republic actually played the central role in managing and overcoming the crisis of the empty chair. The concrete political duel was more between de Gaulle and Schröder than between de Gaulle and Hallstein.<sup>47</sup> This leads to a more nuanced understanding of the empty chair crisis as possibly the most serious confrontation between the reconciled "hereditary enemies" France and (West)Germany in the post-war era. Ironically, a contemporary observer of the 1965—1966 clash between Paris and Bonn remarked: "In that sense the war would appear to be over".<sup>48</sup> However, the empty chair confrontation also deserves more attention as an experience of catharsis within the French-German relations, since the overall settlement of the crisis during 1966—1967, in the long run, cleared the way for a revival of French-German coop-

47. W. LOTH, *Hallstein und de Gaulle: Die verhängnisvolle Konfrontation*, in: W. LOTH, W. WALLACE and W. WESSELS (eds.), *Walter Hallstein. Der vergessene Europäer?*, Europa Union, Bonn, 1995, pp.171-188.

48. J. NEWHOUSE, op.cit., p.184.



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