

'The German White Paper on the Saar question' from the Süddeutsche Zeitung (10 March 1950)

Caption: Against the background of the signature of the Franco-Saar conventions by France and the Saar on 3 March 1950 in Paris, the German newspaper Süddeutsche Zeitung examines the origins of the difficult question of the Saar and describes the main measures being considered by the German Government with a view to resolving the issue.

Source: Süddeutsche Zeitung. Münchner Neueste Nachrichten aus Politik, Kultur, Wirtschaft und Sport. Hrsg. Friedmann, Werner; Goldschagg, Edmund; Schöningh, Dr. Franz Josef; Schwingenstein, August ; R Herausgeber Friedmann, Werner. 10.03.1950, Nr. 58; 6. Jg. München: Süddeutscher Verlag. "Das deutsche Weißbuch zur Saarfrage", p. 1.

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The German White Paper on the Saar question

Federal Government bitterly critical of French policy on the Saar / ‘annexation by stealth’ / International Saar Authority and customs agreement proposed

From our Bonn office

Bonn, 9 March 1950

On Thursday, the Bundestag Foreign Policy Committee reviewed the political situation created by the agreement between France and the Saar. Chancellor Adenauer reported to the Committee about the Government’s White Paper on the Saar question, which sets out the German view of the Saar’s position under international law. The Chancellor said that an autonomous Saar Statute would mean a change in West Germany’s borders, although such changes were expressly the preserve of the peace treaty. The Federal Government did not recognise the 1947 elections to the Saar state parliament or the adoption of the Saar constitution as democratic, free and independent. It recommended the establishment of an International Saar Authority — similar to the Ruhr Authority — and a special customs agreement. A special session of the Bundestag beginning at 10 a.m. today will hear a Government statement on the Saar Convention and discuss the Saar problem.

The Federal Government’s memorandum on the Saar question begins with these words: ‘The lands on the Middle Saar are German by history, by language and by custom. Yet, in the course of the past three hundred years, France has repeatedly laid claim to this rich territory, as part of her historic Rhineland policy. The pretexts have changed with the centuries: in the time of Louis XIV, France cited hereditary and feudal rights, and in the nineteenth century considerations of military security. In the twentieth century, the French claim is focused on possession of the Saar coalfield.’

Reviewing the history of the issue, the memorandum recalled the words of Prime Minister Johannes Hoffmann on the day of the 1935 referendum: ‘With Christ for Germany — against Hitler.’ The change of mind that had come over these people was as incomprehensible as the attitude of the French Government, ‘which handed the Saar back to Adolf Hitler and now wants to take it away from Germany in the name of European cooperation’. The memorandum goes on to point out that no agreement on France’s claims to the Saar was ever reached between the signatories to the Potsdam Agreement. On 13 March 1948, Georges Bidault had declared in the French National Assembly: ‘We have asked fourteen times for an agreement on the Saar. The French Government could hardly demean itself by making the same request for the fifteenth time.’

The Federal Government is aware of only two agreements on the Saar between the Americans, British and French, concluded on 27 January and 20 February 1948. Those agreements make it clear that no legally binding convention exists between the three Western powers on the political separation of the Saar from the rest of Germany. Since 1945, the Saar has formed part of the French Occupied Zone. By both constitutional and international law it is part of Germany. Pursuant to the declaration of 6 June 1945 by the four occupying powers regarding the assumption of supreme authority in Germany, that country’s frontiers are as they existed on 31 December 1937. The establishment of the region on the Middle Saar as a separate German Land was merely a matter of defining Germany’s internal borders, never implying any separation of that territory from Germany.

The US State Department memorandum on the Saar question of October 1948 emphasises: ‘Legally, the Saar, which was originally placed under French control as part of the French Occupied Zone, will remain under the jurisdiction of the Allied Control Council for as long as that body wishes to retain its authority over the Saar.’ The creation of an independent Saar state represents an adjustment of the western frontiers of Germany. The Federal Government has inferred from repeated statements by the Allies that any changes to Germany’s frontiers must be the exclusive preserve of the peace treaty.

The Governor’s methods

Political life in the Saar has developed along similar lines to those followed in other parts of the French Occupied Zone. The political parties have similar names and manifestos. The decision reached in the Saar state parliament elections of 5 October 1947 and the approval of the Saar Constitution cannot be considered by the Federal Government to have been democratic, free and independent.

Around April 1946, the French Governor began his efforts to persuade the political parties that the dismantling of the Saar's foundries could be avoided only if the parties gave their consent to union with France. Confronted as they were by unemployment, social hardship and the uncertain course of events elsewhere in Germany, the party leaders were inclined to listen to the Governor's arguments, all the more so as some of these individuals had acquired French citizenship. The question of the political future of the Saar had been forcibly removed from the arena of public debate: instead, that debate focused on the advantages of closer ties with France.

This fateful decision should have been put directly to the vote. Under the French Constitution, any question relating to the acquisition of territory must be put to the relevant population in a referendum. The Governor manoeuvred to avoid any such referendum. Instead, he arranged for the Constitution — and, with it, separation from Germany — to be sanctioned by a state parliament whose composition he could directly influence. Publication of the draft constitution was prohibited by the censors; shortly before the election, 45 000 copies were distributed to individual mayors for them to pass on to interested parties. Fewer than one voter in ten had the opportunity to familiarise himself with the text. Shortly before the election, there were numerous deportations from the Saar.

Deportation as a means of pressure

The residents of the Saar fall into two categories: those with red passes and those with grey. There is no guarantee that all citizens are equal before the law; there are severe restrictions on the right of freedom of expression. Newspapers that express opposition are confiscated and banned; the editors responsible are deported. The radio is under French control. All public meetings are under police surveillance. Political parties can be founded only if the state parliament approves by a two-third majority. The most extreme means of exerting pressure is the deportation order, for which there is no right of review.

In short, the memorandum places it on record that the Saar has been made fully independent of Germany, whereas its dependence on France in all important matters is such as to justify the use of the phrase 'annexation by stealth'.

A final section is devoted to the political effects of the Saar Convention and proposals for resolving the Saar question. The Federal Government is convinced that European cooperation could easily produce ways of solving the economic problems of the Saar. The essential ingredient here could be an International Authority for the Saar, which would constitute a positive extension of the basic principle of the International Authority for the Ruhr. Special customs arrangements could be introduced to effect the economic integration of the Saar with Lorraine and southern Germany, approximately based on those set up in the Saar for the years 1920–25 by the Versailles Treaty.

Be that as it may, the Federal Government must insist — the White Paper concludes — that any special arrangement to be introduced in the Saar, and most certainly any political separation of that territory from the rest of Germany, must be the subject of a genuine plebiscite, to be conducted under the same conditions as the 1935 referendum. Pan-German elections would also have to include the Saar.