

'Impasse in the Saar' from Het Parool (24 October 1955)

Caption: On 24 October 1955, the Dutch daily newspaper Het Parool analyses the consequences of the rejection by the voters in the Saar of the European Statute for the Saar as part of Western European Union (WEU), as provided for by the Paris Agreements of 23 October 1954, and considers the future of Franco-German relations.

Source: Het Parool. Vrij Onverveerd. dir. de publ. Van Norden, W ; Réd. Chef Koets, P. J. 24.10.1955, n° 3.309; 15. Jg. Amsterdam: Het Parool. "De impasse in de Saar", p. 1.

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Impasse in the Saar

Sound sense often surrenders in the face of powerful emotions, and a slogan appealing to the instincts has more chance of getting a hearing than sober argument.

The plebiscite held yesterday in the Saar confirms that once again. There were fears that those voting against the European Statute would form the majority, but few thought that it would be such an overwhelming majority.

The one crumb of comfort in the verdict is that it at least has the merit of complete clarity. Over 90% of those entitled to vote availed themselves of their right and, thanks to the surveillance of a neutral commission, voting took place in complete freedom. Influenced by the misleading propaganda of the pro-German parties, many were clearly convinced that by voting 'no' they would be doing their patriotic duty as Germans. Yet the fact that by acting in that way they would be doing a disservice both to the German Federal Republic and to Europe as much as to France entirely escaped them, to judge by the result.

What now? Before the vote Paris had let it be known that, if the Statute were to be rejected, the status quo would be maintained and that there could be no question of new Franco-German negotiations to extract further concessions from Paris. Of course the French Government cannot now take up a different position. Yet surely no one in Paris can imagine that it will be possible to act as though nothing had happened and that just because of that the situation as it has existed since 1945 can continue. That is logical, but not a policy. For in fact such an understanding would mean, for example, that the elections for a new *Land* Assembly, which would have been held in a few months' time on the adoption of the Statute, might now not take place. But the present Government of Prime Minister Hoffmann has in the meantime done the only thing that was possible after yesterday's result: it has resigned. And is there anyone so foolish as to think that there might be others who could take over Hoffmann's task in these circumstances and could continue the conduct of affairs on the same basis?

That indicates just one of the difficulties. There are a great many more. Franco-German relations are again being severely tested. Another blow has been struck against European unity. Are there any French politicians who in this context might reflect on the well-known German verse according to which the curse of an evil deed is that it must always bring forth more evil? For the rejection of the European Defence Community by the French National Assembly at the end of August last year is certainly one of the main reasons why Europe is now left to pick up the pieces in the Saar.

It therefore strikes us as of the utmost importance that the Saar question should not be seen at this stage as a matter of concern only to the countries directly involved but, on the contrary, as one which concerns the whole of Western Europe. Therefore the sooner the situation now created is discussed within the framework of the Western European Union, the better that would be in our opinion. This will require a maximum of statesmanship and tact from all parties. From France and Germany of course in the first instance, but also from the other countries that might be called upon to play a mediating role.

May the realisation that this open wound in the body of our continent cannot, in all our interests, remain open lead to a situation in which the endeavours to escape from the impasse of the moment will be guided by sound sense and pragmatism and a sense of what is really important, and may such an approach prevail over disappointment and irritation on the French side and overheated nationalist feelings on the other side of the Rhine.