

'The Saar and Europe' from Het Parool (26 April 1952)

Caption: On 26 April 1952, the Dutch daily newspaper Het Parool analyses the state of Franco-German relations in the light of the Saar question.

Source: Het Parool. Vrij Onverveerd. dir. de publ. Van Norden, W. 26.04.1952, n° 2 238; 12. Jg. Amsterdam: Het Parool. "De Saar en Europa", p. 5.

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The Saar and Europe

The Franco-German dispute over the Saar is still a serious obstacle to any movement towards European integration. It is no less so for the future development of Western defence systems, now that the German opposition has inextricably linked together the future of the Saar and the involvement of Germany in the European Defence Community. It has demanded in the German Bundestag that the participation of West Germany in European integration should be made fully dependent on a settlement of the Saar question in line with the German position. Erich Ollenhauer, a Socialist, has warned Adenauer not to be too quick to sign the EDC Treaty.

About a month ago, it seemed as though a reconciliation had taken place between Dr Adenauer and Robert Schuman, the French Minister for Foreign Affairs — which is not at all the same as a settlement of the problem. At the time, Dr Adenauer had wanted to bring the matter before the Council of Europe in Strasbourg. A conversation with Mr Schuman led him to change his mind. In Paris it had been agreed between the two men that a Joint Commission would be set up to investigate the whole problem and report to both Governments on the possibilities for a solution. However, the fact that the points agreed were particularly vague has now come home to roost. Mr Schuman subsequently said that representatives of the Saar itself should sit in the study commission on an equal footing with the French and German members. Germany will have none of this. Bonn wants only a Franco-German Commission. A second difference of interpretation relates to the question of whether the negotiations between the parties on a definitive solution should begin immediately or only when the results of the study commission are known. France wants to make an immediate start on the negotiations on a statute for the Saar, even before a final peace treaty with West Germany. Adenauer is not interested in this. Both rely on the points agreed. However, there is no official published document on the discussion between Schuman and Adenauer. Everything is contained in an exchange of correspondence between the two Ministers, which has not been made public.

Finally, there is a third point from the Paris conference which, if that were possible, is even more vague and unclear: the proposal to ‘Europeanise’ the Saar. The Saar would become the seat of the Coal and Steel Community and the European Defence Community, indeed even of the Council of Europe. But would this also mean that the region as a whole would become a European federal territory, like Jakarta at the time of the federation plans before the transfer of sovereignty, or like the District of Columbia in the United States? If that were to happen, would France alone be left to benefit from the economic advantages of the region?

Then we only need to consider accommodation in the city of Saarbrücken and the less convenient rail connections with European capitals. Not without some justification, the Germans see this proposal from Mr Schuman, which has not been formulated in any concrete terms, as nothing more than a propaganda stunt to pull the wool over the eyes of the Americans, and perhaps many Europeans too, and to conceal the real, purely nationalistic intentions of France. France is rather fond of playing games with European plans. The reality of French policy is another matter.

In the meantime, after a final letter from Mr Schuman in which he states that France will not nominate any members of the Joint Commission for the Saar, Dr Adenauer has announced that a settlement of the problem does not seem possible for the time being. In this, he has suffered a not inconsiderable defeat — albeit not entirely through his own fault. Besides, it is hardly possible to expect the West Germans, who are fighting for the territories taken by Russia to the east of the Oder-Neisse line, finally to abandon this region which, in language and culture, is unquestionably German. This argument must also make some impression on Western statesmen. For, by referring to this precedent if it came to pass, Russia would be in a stronger position to uphold its demand for maintenance of the status quo on the present Polish frontier.

It is indeed clear from all the bickering that neither France nor Germany is doing anything other than to pursue national policies, whatever ringing European-sounding phrases they may use to camouflage them. The mistrust between the two nations continues to feed on this problem. Hence the chances for real cooperation between Paris and Bonn, which must constitute the core of any integration in Europe, are lessened. The risks arising in the integration plans already in preparation become commensurately greater. In the meantime, the figures speak their own unmistakable language: German export performance is

outstripping that of France (and Britain). This development will accelerate further if the present situation, in which Germany has no defence commitment of its own while Britain and France labour under a heavy financial and economic burden due to military expenditure, continues for much longer. We do not begrudge the Germans their economic successes, but we would rather see this economic prosperity benefit Europe as a whole, and not just a Germany that has become dangerous through feelings of national inferiority — which continue to be exacerbated not least by the French attitude towards the Saar. Otherwise there is reason to fear that the economic rehabilitation will quickly be put to use in new plans for domination. It could even be that France, through its attitude, is conjuring up precisely what it says it fears, in order to justify that attitude: aggressive German nationalism.