

‘An apotheosis’ from Le Monde (3 July 1962)

Caption: On 3 July 1962, as the German Chancellor Konrad Adenauer makes a visit to France, the French daily newspaper Le Monde considers the importance of Franco-German entente.

Source: Le Monde. dir. de publ. Beuve-Méry, Hubert. 03.07.1962, n° 5 429; 19e année. Paris: Le Monde. "Une consécration", p. 1.

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An apotheosis

Chancellor Adenauer has already made about 15 visits to France, but this is the first time that the Republic has accorded official status to a visit and made it such a symbol of esteem and friendship. The purpose of the invitation was to highlight the crowning achievement of Franco-German rapprochement through a whole series of ceremonies and tributes. The Head of State intends to express his appreciation and admiration for the man who, over a decade, has been leading the campaign for this rapprochement. Anyone else but Konrad Adenauer might have been tempted to heed the siren song coming regularly out of Moscow for a new Rapallo. Having chosen the West, he might also have sought to deal directly with the US leader. But while demonstrating unwavering loyalty to Washington, he has consistently expressed his conviction that, within the Atlantic Alliance, a Western European grouping had to be formed, with Franco-German harmony as its main driving force.

It is on this concept, with which the President of the French Republic has demonstrated his full agreement on several occasions, that the good relations between de Gaulle and Adenauer are based. It is accompanied by a shared suspicion of what the Soviets are up to.

There is certainly no shortage of issues for those engaged in talks at the Élysée. Britain's application for accession to the Common Market, how to break the deadlock in talks over political union amongst the Six, not to mention nuclear issues, would all be sufficient justification for the visit. But it would be a mistake to expect spectacular results from this week's talks. The Chancellor has reached an age when his advisers are beginning to hint that he should consider retirement in the near future, and he can therefore no longer take all the decisions by himself, as he was wont to do.

What makes this visit interesting is that it will show the extent to which the French people support the rapprochement policy that its leaders have been pursuing unwaveringly since the launch of the Schuman Plan, in spite of all the domestic trials and tribulations. President Lübke's visit last year went almost unnoticed. Albeit a pleasant man, he was not a familiar figure in France. The same cannot be said of the great citizen of Cologne who has been leading Federal Germany with a firm hand ever since the Allies restored its sovereignty to it.

The Communists are furious at him. It is unlikely that their protests will enjoy much support among the wider population. But on the day that marks the end of the colonial period, how many people in France will feel like welcoming the head of a country that has confronted ours on the field of battle three times in less than a century? Above all, how many will be able to endure the indifference into which, one day, our freedoms may well sink?

Yet it is popular approval that will ensure that the Franco-German entente becomes a lasting reality — irrespective of the two great men who will one day disappear from the stage — and guarantee that history is not doomed to repeat itself. Self-determination for Algeria is perhaps the beginning of a reconciliation between Europeans and Muslims. What a great day 2 July would be if it also marked the apotheosis of France and Germany's unconditional friendship!