

'The Saar will no longer be "a European region"' from Combat (1 June 1954)


Caption: On 1 June 1954, the French daily newspaper Combat voices its concerns at some of the objectives of the plan drawn up by the Netherlands Delegate, Marinus van der Goes van Naters, rapporteur for the General Affairs Committee of the Consultative Assembly of the Council of Europe, which seeks to make the Saar into a European territory.

Source: Combat. De la Résistance à la Révolution. 01.06.1954. Paris: Combat. "La Sarre ne sera plus « européenne » mais placée sous un condominium franco-allemand", auteur:Millat, Roger.

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AFTER TWO VERSIONS OF THE VAN NATERS PLAN

The Saar will no longer be a 'European' region but will be governed by a Franco-German condominium

by Roger Millat

In the midst of all the eye-catching yet confusing controversy prompted by the recent discussions between Teitgen and Adenauer on the Saar, at least one thing seems certain: a major new item has been added to the inextricable Saar 'case'.

The text drafted in Strasbourg may have been inspired by the Deputy Prime Minister of France, who may or may not be empowered to commit his government. It may, on the other hand, come from the offices of the German Chancellor, exhausted by the futile to-ing and fro-ing of Professor Hallstein. Or it may really be the work of 'European figures keen to see a swift conclusion to the negotiations'. But the cut and thrust of denials, Mr Adenauer's cautious satisfaction, Mr Teitgen's angry outbursts and the ill temper of the Quai d'Orsay make no difference to the fact that from now on it will not be possible to find a way of settling the Saar question without taking into account the Strasbourg 'document', whose material existence no one actually disputes.

Indeed, had Bonn not been quite so hasty and enthusiastic in its approval, which immediately made the whole initiative suspect in the eyes of the French public, (provisionally) frustrating the Saar 'agreement', we would certainly now be favoured with a Franco-German 'joint statement' which amounts to a completion of the dreaded '*préalable sarrois*', the obstacle which is preventing the parliamentary debate on the European Defence Community from getting started.

Moving towards a common market

Rather than indulging in acrimonious speculation about the circumstances, uncertainties or indeed the value of the Strasbourg '*compromis*', we would be better employed taking realistic stock of the current state of the Saar problem, by reviewing both the economic and the political progress achieved in the last nine months at the instigation of Mr van der Goes van Naters.

1. — On the issue generally seen as being most troublesome, the draft resolution submitted by the Dutch delegate to the Council of Europe on 11 September 1953 provides for 'a common market to be maintained between France and the Saar' by means of a treaty on economic cooperation concluded for a period of 50 years, which involves, in particular, monetary union and the corresponding customs arrangements. But at the same time the Dutch Socialist's proposal posits the principle of a single market between the Saar and Germany, its establishment being conditional on gradual integration of 'the various sectors of the European economy'.

However, these provisions, which prompted certain reservations among the French, subsequently set out in the 'protocol' of 9 March 1954, were immediately ruled out by the Government in Bonn. Mr van Naters consequently had to reframe his proposal substantially, to such an extent that the economic chapter of the recommendation adopted by the General Affairs Committee of the Council of Europe on 26 April did not go anything like as far as the initial text.

The latest 'arrangement' sketched out by Mr Teitgen and Mr Adenauer accepts that, on the basis of the principles that currently govern the Franco-Saar Economic Union, the primary aim of the future tripartite convention will be to develop economic relations between Germany and the Saar 'similar to those existing between France and the Saar'.

Although the latest adjustment to the Saar market is subject to several waivers, designed in particular to prevent 'the re-establishment of a customs frontier' at Forbach, Mr van Naters, in person, took the trouble to point out, on 27 May, that the only real limitation was designed to prevent the Saar from 'buying more in

Germany than it sells there', a stylistic adjustment that is patently not sufficient to protect French interests.

Definite decisions once more provisional

2. — Just as significant is the change in the political content of the Saar Statute. The first version of the van Naters plan, without going so far as to make the Saar a new national state, nevertheless referred to it as a 'European territory' enjoying autonomy in internal affairs. This international solution, which confirmed the Saar's separation from Germany, was supposed to be final, endorsed by a joint guarantee by France, the Federal Republic of Germany, Great Britain and the United States.

This clear definition did not survive the laborious negotiations that produced the text adopted a month ago by the Strasbourg Assembly. Although it still states that 'the Saar will become a European territory', this will only happen after the European political community has been set up!

So the German point of view seems to have prevailed, but the authors of the draft nevertheless add that as from 'the interim period' the Franco-Saar conventions will be replaced by 'ersatz-Europeanisation', making the Saar a specific authority under international public law, lacking a precise definition, open to discussion and precarious in nature.

What makes the inconsistencies and risks inherent in the proposed wording a more serious matter is the fact that Bonn will only undertake to 'support and guarantee the European status of the Saar' until 'the conclusion of a peace treaty or the reaching of a settlement in lieu', 'the acceptance of this solution as final' by the Western Allies obviously carrying no weight in the absence of formal recognition by the Federal Republic.

Meagre consolation for the French

This brief outline makes it quite clear that the positions defended by France have gradually been eroded to almost nothing. What remains of the extravagant statements by Mr Bidault regarding the inviolability of the Franco-Saar union or the permanent character of the future status of the Saar? In fact there is no longer any question of achieving a proper European settlement. The Saar will quite simply be placed under the control of a Franco-German economic condominium.

Meanwhile Bonn has not committed itself to anything at all. Not only that: it will be free to revert to the question of what happens to the territory when the borders of a reunited Germany are finally settled. In the meantime, under cover of a fake 'European' mantle, it is carving itself a path to the Saar market, which will enable it, with the backing of the 'German parties', to prepare the ground calmly for the return of the Saar to the Fatherland.