

Franco-German relations

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Over and above the international context, the success of European revival and the Val Duchesse negotiations depended to a large extent on the political determination of the six partner countries and, in particular, on relations between France and the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG). Achieving a final settlement of the Saar issue was a key factor in their relations. The status of the Saar had been a thorny issue in Franco-German relations since 1950, but it was not until 23 October 1954 that France and Germany finally succeeded in reaching agreement on the matter. Once the idea of the Saar becoming a European entity had been dropped, the referendum of 23 October 1955 opened the way for the Saar to be restored to Germany on 1 January 1957. The bilateral negotiations conducted in 1956 ironed out any remaining difficulties. In exchange for the return of the Saar to Germany, France secured a promise of substantial deliveries of coal and a commitment to make the Moselle River navigable, a measure that Lorraine industrialists had been demanding for years. At the same time, trade between France and the FRG was developing, to such an extent that Paris and Bonn agreed on joint development programmes for certain French Overseas Territories. Normalisation of Franco-German relations helped to form stronger links between the FRG and Western Europe as a whole. Many of the psychological barriers disappeared and a new climate prevailed between the two countries. That, in turn, made it easier for European issues to be addressed. In October 1956, the French Premier, Guy Mollet, and the German Chancellor, Konrad Adenauer, met in Paris to settle outstanding differences. Both countries were keen to give new impetus to European integration, in the form of either the Common Market or Euratom. They were consequently prepared to make the necessary concessions so that the Treaties establishing the European Economic Community (EEC) and the European Atomic Energy Community (EAEC or Euratom) might be approved.