

‘When Europe emerged from the clouds’ from Le Monde (18 October 1955)

Caption: On 18 October 1955, the French daily newspaper Le Monde welcomes the very open, positive spirit at the Franco–German meeting held the previous day in Bad Neuenahr by the German Council of the European Movement.

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When Europe emerged from the clouds

From our special correspondent **André Fontaine**

Bad Neuenahr, 17 October — The vineyards climb brightly up hillsides dotted with russet trees and little streams. The scene is the peaceful Ahr valley, just near Remagen and the Rhine.

Bad Neuenahr boasts a splendid *fin de siècle* spa beside the river, a haven for gamers and conference delegates. Members of parliament, business people, officials, academics and journalists from France and the Federal Republic of Germany have just gathered here for three days, at the instigation of the German Council of the European Movement. Our guests pulled out all the stops to make us welcome, and the Bonn authorities made a point of demonstrating their support for the cause of Franco-German cooperation. The German President, the genial Professor Heuss, with his white hair and ruddy complexion, opened the proceedings with a call to delegates to ‘resist the past’. The speaker of the *Bundestag*, Mr Gerstenmaier, chaired the second plenary meeting. Mr von Brentano, who was assisting Professor Hallstein, gave a well-attended reception in Bonn and the German delegation was particularly large, although in the absence of their leading lights the Social Democratic representatives did seem a little shy.

The French turnout was smaller than expected, due to the ministerial crisis. But with Mr Pineau, Mr Mitterrand, Mr Raymond-Laurent, Mr Fonlupt-Esperaber, Mr Rochereau, Mr Frenay and the Reverend Du Riveau they made an honourable showing. The participation of Alfred Grosser, who gave a masterly talk on the psychological misunderstandings and opportunities for openings between France and Germany, did much to secure the success of the event.

A very wide range

This meeting differed in its tone from many others. Until now these gatherings would attract the whole gamut of pro-Europeans from out-and-out advocates of union to supporters of the European Defence Community (EDC) and partisans of a constituent assembly, ranging as far as the Left. The Germans seem to have realised that if they carried on in the same vein they would get a completely false picture of the aspirations of the French people. They certainly sent their invitations to a very wide range of people — which must explain the presence of journalists representing *France-Observateur*, *L’Express* and *Le Monde*, as well as MPs who are against the EDC.

Two groups were formed. One, in which we unfortunately did not take part, spent most of its time on a wide-ranging discussion of the Saar, marked on both sides by a high degree of good will. Several German speakers deplored the idea that the referendum might be interpreted as approval or rejection of the past, whereas it should only concern the future. In general they asked that, in the event of its failure, the Saar should not simply return to the status quo, while stressing the difficulties that would be created in that event as regards the ban on pro-German parties. The members of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) vigorously denied the accusations of duplicity levelled at their party and asserted that the Saar was not the only place where the authority of Dr Adenauer was thwarted by local or regional bodies. Everyone agreed that the proposed status was not an ideal solution, but that it would be disastrous if voters rejected it. There also seemed to be agreement that it was something of a paradox to let the Saar population, depending on how it cast its vote, decide the future of European integration, which was a much larger issue.

Little hope of reunification

The second group confined itself to two topics: reunification and continuing the policy of integration. Predictably, it failed to come up with a magical solution for achieving the first goal. Far from it. It was the first time that committed supporters of a Western policy of firmness acknowledged that there was almost no chance of its leading to reunification.

The debate highlighted two points in particular: first, German fears that France might oppose reunification; on the French side every effort was made to reassure them, while emphasising the fact that it was not so much our country as the Soviet Union that held the keys to the problem; and, secondly, the Germans' determination to convince us that they were less inclined than ever before to sacrifice the Western Alliance for the sake of reunification of their country. It has to be said, there is a pathetic side to this desire to tie themselves more closely to the West as a means of guarding against any return of the evil geniuses of the past. It remains to be seen whether there is any real way of anchoring the German vessel other than by the prestige and drawing power of the West. However, we should derive some satisfaction from the insistence with which our opposite numbers focused their attention on us French, testimony to their esteem for a country they readily admit has a vital role to play.

European integration

On the second topic, European integration, things got off to a rather nebulous start, with grandiose dreams of a complete merger and an all-embracing common market that soon turned into interminable speeches. We took the liberty of pouring a little cold water on these fantasies, with an upbeat reminder of certain enduring realities. That this clarification was ultimately well received seemed symptomatic of the extremely open, positive spirit prevailing at this meeting, the primary aim of which was to enable participants on both sides to get better acquainted and gain a better understanding of their counterparts. Détente has not only changed East-West relations. It was quite clear at Bad Neuenahr that the friends of Chancellor Adenauer now adopt a much more open-minded, understanding attitude to people who, in their slightly simplistic dialectic, they used to refer to as accomplices of the Kremlin. Their experience with Mendès-France and the visit to Moscow have undoubtedly played a large part in bringing about this change. This meeting certainly continued the process and it is to be hoped that similar meetings in the future will carry on the good work. Contacts must be maintained, as all the speakers at the closing session agreed, thanking Mr Friedländer, Chairman of the German Council of the European Movement, who not only organised our discussions perfectly but also played a key role in them. The thick mist of the last few days cleared, dispelled by bright sun, bringing out the autumn colours. In the assembly room Europe also emerged from the clouds, to some extent, having parted the black clouds of misunderstanding and the soothing illusions borne on white clouds in a clear blue sky.