


Difficult beginnings (1963–1974)

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In October 1963, Konrad Adenauer, the great architect of the Franco-German Treaty of Friendship, had to step down from the German political scene at the age of 85. Contrary to Adenauer's obvious wishes, [Ludwig Erhard](#), a fierce [opponent](#) of the Élysée Treaty, was elected as second Federal Chancellor on 16 October 1963. The arrival of Erhard — previously [Minister for the Economy](#) and 'father of the economic miracle' — as Chancellor led to a [cooling](#) in Franco-German relations, for Ludwig Erhard's political views were difficult to reconcile, or even incompatible, with those of General de Gaulle. Unlike the French President, the new German Chancellor was a committed [Atlanticist](#), a staunch [pro-American](#), a strong proponent of the [UK joining the Common Market](#) and very much in favour of creating a vast free trade area in Europe and even on a global scale.

Despite the holding of regular [Franco-German summits](#) (seven such meetings were held between General de Gaulle and Chancellor Erhard from 1963 to 1966), as established by the Élysée Treaty and accompanied by declarations of good intent, relations between France and the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) [deteriorated](#) considerably.

Their discord was particularly apparent during the [Bonn Summit](#) of 3 and 4 July 1964, at which Erhard made it clear to his opposite number that the German Government should not have to choose between Paris and Washington — which implied that the Federal Republic of Germany had a clear tendency to favour the United States.

At a press conference held three weeks later, on 23 July 1964, General de Gaulle responded by listing an entire catalogue of differences between West Germany and France. Above all, the French President criticised the Erhard Government's alignment with Washington and its refusal to devise a genuine, independent European policy with Paris.

The organisation of defence in Western Europe and its relations with [NATO](#) were another bone of contention between Bonn and Paris. De Gaulle was concerned at a strengthening of [West Germany's](#) role within NATO and feared that it might obtain access to nuclear weapons by means of the [US Multilateral Force \(MLF\) ¹ proposal](#). The French President put forward the possibility of French protection to the Chancellor on several occasions, but for Erhard, the US was the only country capable of providing his country with a guarantee of security. This resulted in General de Gaulle disengaging from Franco-German cooperation. The year 1965 marked the beginning of a rapprochement between the Eastern European countries and the Soviet Union. [In March 1966](#), France's break with NATO was confirmed: de Gaulle officially announced France's intention to withdraw from the integrated military structure of the Alliance and called for all NATO bases on [French soil](#) to be relocated abroad. SHAPE left Paris and moved to Brussels.

Aside from defence issues, France and West Germany were also clearly opposed on the question of reviving European political unification. In 1965, the latent crisis that pitted France against West Germany and the other partners of the European Economic Community (EEC) became manifest. This conflict was due both to difficulties surrounding the [financing of the common agricultural policy \(CAP\)](#) and also to the supranational nature of the Communities that was advocated by France's partners. The EEC financial crisis and the CAP crisis shook the Community's very foundations. Indeed, the implementation of the CAP did not run smoothly. In 1963, [Sicco Mansholt](#), Commissioner for Agriculture, put forward proposals for the organisation of a cereals market, but Paris and Bonn did not see eye to eye on setting up a common wheat market. France called for prices which it considered to be balanced but not too high so that it could sell a large quantity of its products in West Germany, whereas Bonn opted for much higher prices, because the FRG wanted to protect the interests of its farmers whose output was less efficient. Ludwig Erhard withstood [pressure from France](#). In 1964, several Council of Ministers meetings were unable to come to an agreement on price-fixing for wheat.

In September of the same year, General de Gaulle resorted to drastic measures by threatening to withdraw from the EEC unless a solution for the organisation of a [cereals market](#) was found without delay. Ludwig Erhard was attacked from all sides in his country. He was even rebuked by members of his own party, the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), including the former Chancellor, Konrad Adenauer, who criticised him for jeopardising European integration. On 15 December 1964, the Council of Ministers eventually adopted [prices](#) slightly higher than those put forward by the Commission. Despite everything, prices remained relatively low, and [France](#) was largely satisfied with the outcome.

The proposal on the financing of the CAP, drawn up in 1965 by [Walter Hallstein](#), President of the Commission, marked the beginning of what was known as the ‘[empty chair](#)’ political crisis. The Commission’s proposal was geared towards developing the Communities’ own resources, independently of the Member States, and granted additional budgetary powers to the European Parliament as well as a greater role to the Commission. Furthermore, the progression, on 1 January 1966, to the third stage of the transitional period for establishing the Common Market was to involve the application of majority voting in the Council of Ministers. France was unable to accept such a development, which it viewed as an unacceptable renunciation of sovereignty. In addition, General de Gaulle criticised Walter Hallstein for having prepared [his budgetary proposal](#) without prior consultation of the governments of the Member States. France had found it difficult to persuade its partners to accept the CAP, and feared that a coalition of Member States might challenge the policy, using the leverage of majority decision-making. France held the Presidency of the Council until [30 June 1965](#), and its [stance](#) only exacerbated the latent conflicts between the ideas of the Hallstein Commission and those of the Council of Ministers. By refusing any solution based on compromise, [Maurice Couve de Murville](#), French Foreign Minister in the second Pompidou Government, brought down the negotiations on the financial regulation of the agricultural policy. On 1 July, the French Government recalled to Paris the French Permanent Representative in Brussels and announced France’s intention [not to take its seat in the Council of Ministers](#) until it had its way. This was the beginning of the extremely serious ‘empty chair’ crisis. It was the first time since the entry into force of the Treaty of Rome in 1958 that the operation of the EEC had been [crippled](#) by a Member State.

For six months, France stayed away from Brussels and [boycotted the EEC](#). But it was aware of the risks of prolonged isolation and the impact this could have on the national economy, and eventually agreed to resume negotiations. At [the meetings held in Luxembourg](#) on 17 and 18 and on 28 and 29 January 1966, Pierre Werner, Prime Minister of Luxembourg and President-in-Office of the Council, proposed [a compromise solution](#). This compromise stipulated that when a country believed that its vital national interests might be adversely affected, negotiations had to continue until a universally acceptable compromise was reached. Should no such compromise be reached, France called for compliance with the unanimity rule (i.e. a veto for the minority state), whereas the Five held to the letter of the Treaty. Aware of this disagreement, the Six nevertheless decided to resume Community work. The ‘[Luxembourg Compromise](#)’ fundamentally altered the spirit of the EEC Treaty by creating a new mechanism by which states could exert pressure on the Council, especially since it did not define the vital national interest — this was left to the sole judgement of the state concerned — or provide for an arbitration procedure in the event of dispute. This attitude delayed the extension of majority voting for some time.

On 1 December 1966, following the government crisis in West Germany which led to the resignation of Ludwig Erhard, [Kurt Georg Kiesinger](#) took over at the head of a coalition government between the Christian Democrats and the Social Democrats. The new Chancellor and his Vice-Chancellor and Foreign Minister, [Willy Brandt](#), were eager to improve [relations with France](#), fearing a rapprochement between France and the Soviet Union at the expense of the FRG. Kiesinger and de Gaulle met at five [summits](#) between 1966 and 1969.

During this period, some important issues were resolved, including the [completion of the customs union](#) on 1 July 1968, 18 months ahead of the initial schedule.

However, despite good intentions, mutual misunderstandings and [sticking points](#) prevailed. Thus, when the British Government submitted its second [application to join the European Communities](#) in 1967, the most muted welcome came once again from France, in particular because of the prevailing economic difficulties in the United Kingdom and the country's special relationship with the United States in foreign policy matters, which the French President believed would hinder Franco-German plans for political cooperation. The French President feared that in an enlarged Community, France would not only be at risk of encountering greater difficulties in defending its economic interests, but that it would also be in danger of losing its leadership role to a more Atlanticist policy with the arrival of the new Member States. On 27 November 1967, even before [the accession negotiations](#) with the applicant countries could begin, General de Gaulle held a [press conference](#) in which he declared his opposition, for the second time, to the United Kingdom's accession to the European Communities. The French President's [second veto](#) on the UK's application to join the Common Market put Germany in a difficult situation. While Chancellor Kiesinger was [in favour](#) of the UK's membership, as were Italy and the Benelux countries, the French rejection forced France's partners — who were not prepared to accept this unilateral decision — to find [alternative solutions](#) to break the deadlock and maintain the prospect of accession for applicant countries. But all the proposals came up against the opposition of General de Gaulle; he became increasingly isolated from his partners and even went as far as threatening to leave the EEC if Britain were to accede. The Five's mistrust of France's European policy deepened when, in February 1969, the French President proposed to the British Ambassador to Paris, Christopher Soames, that the United Kingdom accede to a single European free trade area which would replace the Community structures. British Prime Minister Harold Wilson not only rejected France's proposal but revealed its substance to the Five, thus further contributing to France's isolation. Only when Charles de Gaulle's tenure as President of the French Republic came to an end three months later were negotiations able to be relaunched.

When General de Gaulle stepped down in April 1969, the overall picture of the first years since the signing of the Franco-German Treaty of Friendship was mixed. The Élysée Treaty was far from having established real cooperation between the two countries. More often than not, the many meetings led to declarations of intent but failed to deliver any tangible progress. Whether successors would manage to overcome this profound disagreement to get Franco-German rapprochement back on track remained to be seen.

The year 1969 marked a break in West German politics. For the first time since the FRG was founded in 1949, the Christian Democrats were excluded from the government. The social-liberal coalition led by [Willy Brandt](#) from October onwards sought to innovate in terms of foreign policy and break taboos. There was thus a certain shift in balance, but the alliances formed were not called into question. The German Chancellor, Willy Brandt, and his main diplomatic advisor, [Egon Bahr](#), were the main forces behind the new German policy in favour of détente in Europe. On 28 November 1969, the FRG signed the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons with the USSR. The '[Ostpolitik](#)', a policy of normalising relations and encouraging openness towards Eastern Europe, aimed to restore West Germany, a major economic power, to its rightful place on the international scene in the general context of East-West détente. The key to the Ostpolitik was in the treaties with the East, known as the Ostverträge. The first of these treaties was signed by [the FRG and the USSR](#) in Moscow on 12 August 1970. It formed the basis of the entire Ostpolitik in that it paved the way for the normalisation of diplomatic relations and confirmed the territorial status quo. It precluded the use of force between the two states and provided for the respect of territorial integrity and frontiers as they existed at the time. It was soon followed by various trade agreements — the FRG being the Soviet Union's main Western client — and an increasing number of meetings were held between the two countries' leaders. On 3 September 1971, the US, France, the USSR and the UK signed the [Four-](#)

[Power Agreement](#), which particularly helped improve travelling conditions for West Berliners and the Allies on transit routes. On 21 December 1972, the Federal Republic of Germany and the German Democratic Republic (GDR) signed [the Basic Treaty](#) in East Berlin, which enshrined the mutual recognition of the two German states and normalised their political and trade relations. It acknowledged the diplomatic status quo and the inviolability of the [inter-German border](#), while awaiting the prospect of reunification. This paved the way for recognition of the GDR by the Western countries. The FRG and the GDR both became members of the United Nations (UN) in September 1973. Although France officially welcomed this new policy towards the East, in reality it was a cause of concern for Paris, since Chancellor Brandt's Ostpolitik awakened [old French fears](#) of a large Germany overly influenced by the Soviet Union.

In France, Georges Pompidou, elected President of the Republic in June 1969, adopted a more flexible and pragmatic approach than his predecessor, in that he no longer objected as a matter of principle to the UK's accession to the EEC. Pompidou, elected on the basis of a pro-European manifesto, wanted the Community to overcome its state of semi-paralysis that had been caused by certain radical stances adopted by General de Gaulle in relation to specific European matters.

As far as European policy was concerned, Pompidou and Brandt were both eager to promote [European integration](#). The French President needed to galvanise the Communities so as to achieve his political majority and, above all, to secure the financial regulation of the CAP. His counterpart, Willy Brandt, wished to maintain good relations with the European Communities and re-establish cooperation with France in order to pursue his Ostpolitik. [Pompidou and Brandt](#) agreed on a stimulus plan, which involved completing the agricultural policy, pushing ahead with enlargement by opening up negotiations with applicant countries and strengthening the enlarged Europe. The [Summit Conference of the Six, held in The Hague](#) on 1 and 2 December 1969, enshrined this agreement. The decision to finance the agricultural policy by means of the Communities' own resources was adopted in April 1970, and on 1 July of that year, enlargement negotiations were launched. These talks made decisive progress when the French President came together with the [UK's pro-European Prime Minister, Edward Heath](#). The two men agreed to maintain the national identities of the Member States as well as unanimity voting when significant national interests were at stake. Pompidou thereby relied on a Franco-British agreement in order to withstand his partners' more or less federalist aspirations. As regards deepening, Pompidou and Brandt reached an agreement to create an [economic and monetary union](#) in several stages by 1980, but their opinions [differed](#) on how it should be set up. France needed [monetary cooperation](#) to support the franc and wished to remain free from the economic and social policy that was geared towards growth and full employment but tended towards inflation. On the other hand, the FRG, with its strong mark, had no desire to bear the monetary impact of an easy policy that a partner could pursue entirely independently. There were also differences with regard to the supranational character of the institutions of economic and monetary union. The FRG called for a Community decision-making centre and an independent central bank, while France rejected this in the name of sovereignty. Furthermore, in the context of the 1971 financial crisis caused by the inflow of dollars, West Germany floated the mark and France restored exchange controls.

Matters became even more complex when the UK joined the EEC. For example, France and the UK both agreed to oppose any institutional reforms of a supranational nature, while West Germany wanted to develop the Community institutions. When the [Paris Summit](#) held from 19 to 21 October 1972, attended by the Six as well as the new Member States due to accede on 1 January 1973 (Denmark, Ireland, Norway and the UK), decided to create a '[European Union](#)' by 1980, the term was selected as a compromise between 'Federation', suggested by Brandt, and 'Confederation', preferred by Pompidou and Heath. The nature of this Union was not specified.

Dissent intensified between Paris and Bonn on the CAP, which the Germans were beginning to find too

expensive, as well as on the regional policy requested by London and backed up by Paris, not to mention on relations with the US over [the 1973 oil crisis](#). While the FRG supported the US proposal aimed at creating an organisation of oil-consuming countries, the French Foreign Minister, [Michel Jobert](#), was alone in distancing himself from the US, on the one hand to avoid jeopardising his relations with the Arab countries, and on the other to defend the notion of a 'European Europe' independent of Washington.

In early 1974, the impetus given to European integration by the [Franco-German engine](#) was therefore somewhat lacking, and cooperation between Paris and Bonn did not bring about any major progress.

- 1 The Multilateral Force (MLF) was a US proposal devised in late 1960 with a view to setting up an integrated strategic nuclear force within NATO. The proposal dated back to General Norstad and was subsequently brought back onto the table by Kennedy as part of his 'Grand Design'. This was the US response to its Western Allies to restore their confidence in US nuclear coverage in Europe and satisfy their desire to be more involved in decisions on nuclear strategy. But the plan never came into effect.