

From the meeting at Colombey-les-deux-Églises to the Élysée Treaty (1958–1963)

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The establishment of closer relations between France and Germany in the period from 1958 to 1963 was primarily the result of close collaboration between two men: [Charles de Gaulle](#), President of the French Republic, and [Konrad Adenauer](#), German Federal Chancellor. But General de Gaulle's return to power in May 1958 was initially met with scepticism in the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG). Many remembered de Gaulle's words as the former leader of the French Resistance and the architect of the Franco-Soviet pact concerning Germany at the end of the Second World War. De Gaulle was in favour of the military, economic and political detachment of the Rhineland, the Ruhr and the Saar, and particularly advocated the reestablishment of a confederal Germany. Gaullist efforts to block the ratification of the Treaty establishing the [European Defence Community \(EDC\)](#) in 1954 represented a serious blow for Adenauer, calling into question the European policy he had been pursuing since 1949 with Robert Schuman and Jean Monnet. General de Gaulle's hostile remarks about the [Common Market](#), his intransigence on France's [independence](#), hostility to [NATO](#) and opposition to a [supranational Europe](#) did little to reassure the German Chancellor.

But to the surprise of many observers, a first meeting between de Gaulle and Adenauer put many of these concerns to rest.

On 14 September 1958, the French President welcomed the German Chancellor to his house in [Colombey-les-deux-Églises](#). Adenauer was to be the only foreign Head of Government to be invited to La Boisserie, General de Gaulle's private residence. The two men discussed major international policy issues, including the organisation of the community of Europe, the Soviet threat, the division of Germany and Euro-Atlantic relations. Adenauer's biography speaks of a '[honeymoon period](#)' between the two leaders. In the final communiqué of the meeting, the Chancellor and President reaffirmed their determination to put an end to past hostility and called for close cooperation between the FRG and the French Republic, which they saw as the foundation of the European integration process. This meeting marked the beginning of a personal friendship that would go a long way to helping [Franco-German rapprochement](#). Adenauer and de Gaulle subsequently met 15 times between 1958 and 1963, and wrote to each other on some 40 occasions.

But the honeymoon was short-lived: on 17 September 1958, de Gaulle sent a [memorandum](#) to US President Dwight D. Eisenhower and British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan that was a source of some irritation for Adenauer. De Gaulle recommended the creation of a tripartite directorate for NATO that would place France, the United Kingdom and the United States on an equal footing to pursue discussions on atomic strategy. Adenauer, who had not been consulted or informed, took this initiative as an affront, and began to harbour a degree of mistrust towards his French counterpart.

Ten weeks after the Colombey meeting, on 26 November 1958, the German Chancellor hosted the French President in [Bad Kreuznach](#). During their discussions, General de Gaulle announced to Adenauer that he was keen to speed up the establishment of the Common Market, but in return he asked the FRG to reject [the British plan for a large free-trade area](#). De Gaulle was determined to give his country the economic and monetary resources it needed to participate in the Common Market, which he hoped would encourage the modernisation of French manufacturing.

The French President also pledged his full support for the FRG on the [question of Berlin](#) in the light of Moscow's threat to repeal the city's quadripartite status. The day after the Franco-German meeting, the Soviet leader issued an [ultimatum](#) to Western leaders, giving them six months to turn West Berlin into a free, demilitarised city under UN control. After this deadline, the USSR would hand all its powers over Berlin to the GDR. While the British and Americans initially attempted to secure a compromise to avoid further conflict, de Gaulle was firmly opposed to any changes to the status of

Berlin.

After the meeting in Bad Kreuznach, the two leaders met again on 29 and 30 July 1960 at the [Château de Rambouillet](#). Adenauer was General de Gaulle's guest, and discussions mainly focused on the establishment of a political union in Europe, the problem of European security and the [reform of the Atlantic Alliance](#), which de Gaulle considered to be overly dependent on the United States. De Gaulle saw political and defence issues as being closely linked. He believed that, in order for Europe to become an entity capable of playing a role in international affairs, it needed a coordinated approach to defence, and a reform of NATO was therefore vital.

At the end of this meeting, the President handed the Chancellor a note in which he explained that his primary aim was to build the [Franco-German axis](#), and that Europe would then develop around this central core. He also set out his conception of a European political union and proposed that regular meetings be held between ministers and Heads of State or Government, and that committees of officials and a consultative assembly composed of representatives from the national parliaments be set up. Such an organisation would be enshrined by a European referendum. The idea that de Gaulle had submitted to Adenauer essentially amounted to the establishment of political cooperation between the Six. Despite some hesitations, Adenauer approved many of these proposals. But some members of the German Government believed that the Chancellor had been too conciliatory with General de Gaulle, and a few weeks after Rambouillet, Adenauer was forced to backtrack and distance himself from the French proposals.

De Gaulle's proposals in Rambouillet led to a deeper reflection on the establishment of a European political union. At a [summit](#) in Paris on 10 and 11 February 1961, the Heads of State or Government of the Six appointed an intergovernmental committee, chaired by French diplomat [Christian Fouchet](#), to study 'problems concerning European cooperation, especially those relating to the development of the Communities'. On 2 November 1961, the 'Fouchet Committee' submitted its draft treaty, known as the '[Fouchet Plan I](#)'. This plan proposed the establishment of an indissoluble Union of states that would be strongly intergovernmental in nature.

It provided that the primary institution, the Council, should 'deliberate on all questions whose inclusion on its agenda is requested by one or more Member States', and 'adopt decisions necessary for achieving the aims of the Union unanimously'. The Union would adopt a common foreign policy and a common defence policy, cooperate in the fields of science and culture, and defend human rights and democracy. Under the draft treaty, the Parliament would have merely an advisory role. Finally, a European Political Commission, composed of senior foreign affairs officials from each Member State, would be appointed to assist the Council in the preparation of its discussions and the implementation of its decisions.

France's [European partners](#) rejected this plan; they feared French domination of the foreign policy of the Six and also rejected any strengthening of the institutions' intergovernmental character, which they saw as a threat to the independence and supranational nature of the Community bodies. Faced with opposition from his European partners, de Gaulle hardened his position, and on 18 January 1962, the Fouchet Committee put forward a new version of the plan (the '[Fouchet Plan II](#)'), which this time proposed to grant the Union the economic powers that had previously been the prerogative of the Communities, the latter becoming subordinate to the intergovernmental cooperation body.

But at a time when the Common Market was proceeding to its second stage of implementation, France's partners once again [lambasted and rejected](#) the plan. They drew up [counter-proposals](#) for a more federalist approach, which were, in turn, rejected by the French Government. Consequently, the Foreign Ministers, meeting in Luxembourg on [17 April 1962](#), were forced to admit their failure to reach agreement, and on 15 May, General de Gaulle set the seal on this breakdown in the attempts at

political integration. At a sensational [press conference](#), he condemned European federalist policies and openly criticised the game played by Britain and America. The failure of the Fouchet Plans sparked off a series of crises, characterised by disagreement on the very nature of the European unification process, the powers of the Community institutions, European independence and solidarity with the USA. The Heads of State or Government did not meet again for seven years. This failure did, however, lead to a [strengthening of Franco-German relations](#).

Meanwhile, the changing international climate also encouraged rapprochement between France and the FRG. Adenauer was becoming increasingly wary of new US President John F. Kennedy, suspecting that he was seeking an agreement with the USSR. So the German Chancellor turned to France. Following the erection of the [Berlin Wall](#) on 12 and 13 August 1961, de Gaulle, unlike the British and the Americans, strongly [condemned](#) the Soviet action. Adenauer believed that close cooperation between France and Germany could form a bastion against the USSR.

In July 1962, Chancellor Konrad Adenauer made an [official visit](#) to France. The trip was prepared down to the smallest detail, and was a resounding demonstration of Franco-German reconciliation, with prestigious receptions in Paris, a [mass at Reims Cathedral](#) and a Franco-German military parade in Mourmelon. During their discussions, de Gaulle called for a strengthening of cooperation between the two countries and proposed the idea of a privileged relationship between France and West Germany. Two months later, from 4 to 9 September 1962, the [French President received a triumphant welcome in the FRG](#). De Gaulle was acclaimed by the crowd and gave several speeches, including six in [German](#) that he had learned by heart, in which he welcomed the rapprochement between the two countries. Despite the success of these trips, the German Government continued to raise questions on General de Gaulle's policy.

On 14 January 1963, General de Gaulle held a [press conference](#) at the Élysée Palace in which he stated his opposition to the United Kingdom's accession to the European Common Market. De Gaulle demanded that the UK accept all the [conditions](#) laid down by the Six and that it relinquish its commitments to the countries in its free-trade area. He spoke of the incompatibility between the economic interests of mainland Europe and Britain, which he saw as a [Trojan horse for the United States](#). He believed that British accession would turn a 'European Europe' into an 'Atlantic Europe'. This address dealt a severe blow to the European integration process and relations with the USA, and also put Konrad Adenauer in a difficult position. Many in [West Germany](#) believed that European unity and the alliance with the United States should not be sacrificed for the sake of Franco-German friendship. But despite this criticism, Adenauer pursued his policy of rapprochement with France, and on 22 January 1963, in Paris, the German Chancellor and the French President signed the [Élysée Treaty](#), strengthening Franco-German cooperation in the fields of defence, economic affairs and culture.