

'Germany and France' from Die Zeit (3 November 1949)

Caption: On 3 November 1949, the German weekly Die Zeit publishes an interview with German Chancellor, Konrad Adenauer, in which he expresses the necessity of Franco-German cooperation.

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Germany and France

'Die Zeit' interview with Federal Chancellor Dr Adenauer

At the same time as the Council of Europe Ministerial Committee was meeting in Paris, Federal Chancellor Dr Adenauer explained to a member of our editorial staff, Ernst Friedlaender, the basic principles of his policy towards France.

Die Zeit: Mr Chancellor, what significance do you attach to Franco-German relations in the context of pan-European politics?

Federal Chancellor: The utmost significance. I am, as you know, from the Rhineland, and I have always seen my home region as a natural bridge between France and Germany. I am well aware that there is much historical undergrowth obstructing the views of both peoples and making it difficult for them to come together. But, in today's Europe, there is simply no place any longer for 'inherited enmity'. I am, therefore, determined to make Franco-German relations a central issue in my policy. A Federal Chancellor has to be simultaneously a good German and a good European. And, since I wish to be both, I have to aspire to Franco-German understanding. Such a policy must not be misinterpreted as being pro-French or possibly even anti-British. It is certainly not our aim to play one foreign power off against another. Our friendship with Britain is as essential to us as our friendship with France. However, friendship with France requires greater efforts because it has been obstructed more strongly in the past. It will be a central issue of our policy because it is also its weakest point.

Die Zeit: Do you think that such a policy will receive the full support of the German nation?

Federal Chancellor: The German nation is made up of very different individuals. One can never count on the approval of everybody. However, I think I may say that the creation of an understanding with France is more popular in Germany today than at any other time before 1945. It was maybe even more popular immediately after the collapse of the Third Reich than today. In the past four and a half years, much has happened that could have given rise to new obstructions and misunderstandings. But the basic trend in Germany has remained the same. The younger generation, in particular, here, as in other countries, has grasped with gratifying clarity the need for European unification. Especially young Germans know that such unification is impossible if France and Germany cannot reach an understanding. I am therefore convinced that a constructive policy pursued by the Federal Government towards France will evoke a favourable response from the German people.

Die Zeit: In your opinion, what specific obstacles hinder Franco-German understanding?

Federal Chancellor: There is of course the Saar. But let me just leave that issue to one side for the moment. You see, the Saar problem, too, only becomes comprehensible when seen in the overall context of the French need for security, and the same is true, for example, of the dismantling of German industry. The security question is indeed the central issue of Franco-German relations. It also includes the real, specific obstacles to an understanding. This is essentially a matter of proportion, and there is a risk that both sides will lose their sense of proportion. If France demands too much security, without taking account of the most urgent German requirements, our position, too, will harden. If, on the other hand, we are willing to offer too little security, France will not reach an understanding with us. It all depends therefore on finding the proper degree of security.

Die Zeit: What could Germany do to establish that proper degree?

Federal Chancellor: We must, first of all, neither flatly deny nor trivialise the security question. It is irrelevant whether we actually are dangerous; what matters is whether France considers us harmless. Psychology always lags behind the actual historical development. Whether the current French need for security seems outdated to us, whether it really is outdated, that is not the point. Even if France is wrong, its desire for security is psychologically present and is therefore a political reality that we have to take into

consideration. It is therefore wise for us to accept concepts of security that we consider superfluous, as long as they do not seriously threaten our existence. There is no need for us to suspect a source of humiliation in everything. The less we do this, the less our reactions show excessive national sensitivity, the sooner France will agree not to exaggerate its own demands. Our policy has to be flexible, not rigid. And there is no better example for this than the possibilities that arise for us out of the statute of the Ruhr.

Die Zeit: What connection do you see between the statute of the Ruhr and Franco-German understanding?

Federal Chancellor: The connection is rather close. From our point of view, an international monitoring authority for the Ruhr would either constitute shameful humiliation for us or else the first step towards regulation of the entire western European heavy industry. The second concept would, in my opinion, be more meaningful and more promising. I also believe that the Ruhr Authority has to be considered a political reality that deserves more than just an emotional response. Sulking is no answer to a political reality. If we simply show a negative response towards the statute of the Ruhr and the Ruhr Authority, France will interpret this as a sign of German nationalism, as an act of defiance rejecting all surveillance. Such an attitude would appear to be passive resistance against security itself. And that above all must be avoided.

Die Zeit: Do you think that we should be represented by a full delegate in the Ruhr Authority?

Federal Chancellor: Absolutely. I believe that, as well as the High Commissioners, the Authority itself really wants us to participate in the Ruhr Authority. And we can improve our position only by being represented in the Ruhr Authority. It is only within the Authority that we can effectively assert our vital interests in the Ruhr, and we can do this only if we have a representative with full voting rights and one who is not just an observer, as is currently the case. There is no need for us to assume from the outset that our delegate, with his three votes out of a total of fifteen, would always be outvoted. It would simply be foolish to view the work within the Ruhr Authority as a united front of all against one. Our willingness to cooperate will probably become a touchstone for our goodwill in the security question. France is well aware of that. And I can assure you that the Federal Government is equally aware of that and will act accordingly.

Die Zeit: You just mentioned the Saarland. Would you reject German membership in the Council of Europe if the Saarland were to become a member of it?

Federal Chancellor: I find it deeply regrettable that the question of the Saar has been linked to the European question in the first place. We were not responsible for that. I think it is essential for those two questions to be kept separate in future. I would not deem it wise if France made Germany's admission into the Council of Europe dependant on the simultaneous admission of the Saarland. But it would be equally unwise for us to declare that membership for the Saarland would preclude German membership. These memberships should not become the subject of horse-trading hedged around with conditions. It is only through a peace treaty with Germany that the question of the Saar can be definitely resolved, and, in any case, the Council of Europe is not empowered to anticipate such a resolution. I could rather imagine that direct Franco-German contact would bring the Saar problem closer to a solution.

Die Zeit: Do you see a parallel between our membership of the Council of Europe and our representation in the Ruhr Authority?

Federal Chancellor: There is undoubtedly a parallel between the two. At all events, in so far as I am certain that Germany, in its own as well as the European interest, has to be unreservedly prepared to cooperate in the Council of Europe. If Germany were invited to join the Council of Europe, the Federal Government would undoubtedly accept such an invitation. I am convinced that this would benefit Franco-German relations in the same way as would cooperation within the Ruhr Authority. And I see Strasbourg as an especially hopeful symbol for the understanding between our two nations.

Die Zeit: What is the position on the issue of equal rights in the event of German membership of the Council of Europe?

Federal Chancellor: Whether we cannot be represented in the Council of Europe's Ministerial Committee while we have no foreign policy and no Foreign Minister of our own, is not absolutely certain. In the Consultative Assembly we would have equal rights. In the Council of Europe as a whole, however, we would count as an 'associate member' while we did not sit on the Ministerial Committee. I take the view that this difference is less important in so far as the focus of true European federalism is to be found in the Consultative Assembly. 'Associate membership' must not give cause for national sensitivity. And the less sensitive we are, the fewer security fears we are going to provoke. We are not dangerous. Why should we, merely for vanity's sake, pretend to be otherwise?

Die Zeit: What could be done in the cultural field to bring about better mutual understanding between the two nations?

Federal Chancellor: There can never be too many Franco-German encounters, never too many Franco-German cultural exchanges. I do not mean by that cultural propaganda such as the campaign pursued by France in the French Occupation Zone during the first few post-war years. The political element was too obvious, and the connection was too one-sided. True cultural friendship with France would also have to cover the whole of Federal Germany. Every initiative in that direction will receive my wholehearted support. My first thoughts in this respect are, of course, the exchange of lecturers in higher education and students, concerts and lectures, measures to make private journeys easier. But the word 'culture' must not be seen too narrowly. I could also imagine, to a certain extent, a 'workers' exchange' that would indirectly benefit the culture of both countries. Too little has been done so far in all these areas. And I would also have no objections to American capital flowing into Germany via France. A similar involvement of France in German economic ventures would also bring both nations closer together and, at the same time, remove many security fears.

Die Zeit: Are we right to interpret your overall attitude to Franco-German relations as optimistic?

Federal Chancellor: I am a practical politician. And it is precisely for that reason that I am convinced that the momentum of the entire European movement will also advance Franco-German relations. Besides, as an old man, I have learnt the virtue of patience. We must not expect too much to happen overnight, and we must not be disappointed too quickly. I firmly believe that, on the security issue, with enough goodwill from both sides, the proper proportion can be found. And, once it has been found, a new and better era will start for relations between both nations. There you can see my optimism.