

'The Saar is German' from Die Welt (25 October 1955)

Caption: On 25 October 1955, following the result of the referendum on the Saar Statute, the German daily newspaper Die Welt analyses the implications of returning the Saar to Germany and recalls the importance of maintaining good relations between the Federal Republic of Germany and France.

Source: Die Welt. Unabhängige Tageszeitung. Hrsg. SCHULTE, Heinrich ; Herausgeber ZEHRER, Hans. 25.10.1955, n° 249; 10. Jg. Hamburg: Die Welt. "Die Saar ist deutsch", auteur:Ahlens, Conrad , p. 2.

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The Saar is German

by Conrad Ahlers

The result of the referendum

Profession of faith in German unity

The Saar: a bridge between Germany and France

It is impossible not to feel emotional on seeing the outcome of the referendum held on the Saar. A small German population, finally granted an opportunity to make a free democratic decision, has made an unmistakable profession of faith in Germany. Left to fend for themselves, faced with a decision between an uncertain future and a more secure sense of comfort, these people have followed the voice of their hearts.

The German people, still ripped to shreds, has reason to acknowledge this decision with gratitude. It came about despite a well-founded recommendation by the Bonn Government that the Saar Statute should be adopted. It came about against the strong pressure of the interested governments of other states and despite the influence exercised by the well-organised public opinion of the Western world. Even in the last few hours before the referendum, the head of the European Control Commission contravened his duty of independence by attempting to make clear the benefits of casting a Yes vote.

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But all the interventions failed to produce the desired result. They could not succeed because France's attempt to split off the Saar had been started by a unilateral act of violence and continued by undemocratic means. On top of that, France itself had dealt a severe blow to the idea of European unity in the past year by rejecting the European Defence Community and had consequently precluded the possibility of the Saar question being settled as part of a genuine European solution.

The Saar Statute which has now been rejected was, moreover, the result of a threat by the French Government not to sign the Paris Treaties if the Federal Government did not agree to it. Its value for Franco-German understanding was, therefore, impaired from the outset. When the Federal Chancellor nevertheless honoured to the very limit of what was possible the signature he had once given, this was the most irrefutable evidence of German compliance with the treaties. As time passes by, it will also be acknowledged in the Saar that it would have been difficult for the Federal Government to have acted any differently.

In addition, the agreement between Bonn and Paris on the Saar Statute included the possibility of a referendum and, consequently, opened the door for freedom to enter this region. The pro-German parties could become active. At the same time, the No vote brought the resignation of the Paris-backed Hoffmann Government and the calling of free elections for a new Landtag (State Parliament). The 'fat man', as Hoffmann was disrespectfully known, was able to make a good exit thanks to this prompt recognition of the popular will. It is heartening to note that France, too, despite the declarations made beforehand that, in the event of a No vote everything would stay the same as before, does not wish to turn back the clock and keep Hoffmann in office.

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The conclusion to be drawn from its decision to allow matters to rest is that the French Government will sooner or later be prepared to start fresh negotiations, once the first storm of indignation in Paris over the result of the referendum has abated. We can take the French at their word and repeat the view that they have always held that the Saar question may not be an obstacle to Franco-German understanding. It goes without saying that the German side will continue to do its utmost to remove this obstacle as well. The German parties in the Saar have already made a start on this with their declaration following the announcement of the

result. This is conditional, however, on the referendum in the Saar being correctly assessed. On Sunday, the people expressed their determination to be and remain German. This determination must be respected, although some time will have to elapse before the Saar is reintegrated. There are innumerable ways of making the transitional period which is now beginning tolerable — for example, the borders between the Saar and Germany could be fully opened and, at the same time, the Saar Germans granted German citizenship.

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All the German parties have acknowledged that France has significant economic interests on the Saar. Germany will always be prepared to take account thereof and be as accommodating as possible to France. There are sufficient opportunities for compromise in this area, for an agreement by which the Saar can become an economic bridge between Germany and France. The Governments in Paris would do well to realise now, however, that their economic interests in the Saar will be safeguarded only if proper and legitimate political relationships prevail in this region. At all events, the attempt to safeguard an economic claim to power by political measures has failed. The sooner this fact is recognised the better.

In this instance, neither Franco–German relations, nor efforts towards European unification, nor the requisite unity of the West are adversely affected by the No vote on the Saar Statute. It is regrettable that a large proportion of the foreign press is tainting the result of the referendum as a ‘victory for German nationalism’. Not only do such attacks fall wide of the mark, the referendum itself and the German response to it have shown that Germany is far removed from neonationalism. In addition, they reduce the trust in the partnership between Germany and the West, the preservation of which must be the most important task of joint policy.

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No new conflict must occur in the Western camp a few days before the Geneva Conference of Foreign Ministers. Perhaps it is fortunate that the referendum was held at this particular time, when preserving a united front is so vitally necessary. The French Prime Minister, Edgar Faure, recently declared that the outcome of the Saar referendum would not bring about any change in French policy on German reunification. If this spirit of understanding prevails, there will be no need to worry about the consequences of the result of the referendum.

We ourselves must make sure that German Saar policy in the immediate future shows both patience and firmness. No silly experiments must be carried out, nor must any rash demands be made. We must always keep in mind that the process of German reunification, of which the Saar question also forms part, runs slowly and laboriously and is bound up with the major problems of world politics. The same applies to efforts seeking German unity. The goal remains: ‘A reunited Germany which is integrated into a European community.’