

'Relief' from the Saarbrücker Zeitung (25 October 1954)

Caption: On 25 October 1954, the regional daily newspaper Saarbrücker Zeitung welcomes the agreement concluded between the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) and France on the future economic and political status of the Saar.

Source: Saarbrücker Zeitung. 25.10.1954, Nr. 248. Saarbrücken. "Aufatmen", p. 1.

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Last updated: 05/07/2016

Relief

As we were preparing our special edition on Saturday evening, the bells rang heralding the start of Sunday. However, on 23 October, the ringing held a double meaning for the people of the Saar. It was not the usual Saturday night ritual preparing people for the arrival of Sunday; instead, mixed in with the chime of the bells was joy that a long-held hope had come to fruition.

It is doubtless too early to comment on the Saar agreement signed on Saturday afternoon in Paris by the Federal Chancellor, Dr Adenauer, and the French Prime Minister, Mr Mendès France, as the details have yet to be made known. However, from the main points of the agreement, which have already been made public, certain conclusions can be drawn, and these conclusions, which can be spoken of without qualms, are the reason for the relief and joy at the emergence of this agreement between Germany and France. Of most significance to the Saar is probably the unambiguous recognition, confirmed equally by both countries, of its autonomy. For the first time, the existence and powers of the Saar Government have received international endorsement. For the Saar Prime Minister, Johannes Hoffmann, this day is his crowning achievement, because the agreement or, rather, the declaration by the two statesmen of France and Germany means that he is seen as the true and only representative of Saar interests. For the people, however, the fact that their security and independence are enshrined in the Statute and can no longer be questioned is of particular importance. They know that, from now on, the wish they have continually voiced for almost seven years, to be able to work in conditions of peace and calm, will be respected and that they can serve increasingly to provide a balance between French and German standpoints. They are aware that a time is beginning in which — in the words of Chancellor Adenauer — they can run their household according to their wishes alone; they are now master of their own domain and free to shape their domestic policy according to the judgment and wishes of the entire population, while foreign policy will be decided in close consultation with the other powers.

The era of questions and uncertainty is over, as is the Saar's previous unfortunate role as a bone of contention between two rival powers and, worst of all, between two competing ideologies. The Saar can now truly bring the two nations together and help to balance the European scales.

That is why the feeling of satisfaction is so strong on all sides. If this political occasion is of crucial importance for the overall interest of European peace and happiness, then from a selfish point of view we cannot help but feel content at the economic successes. We need only think how difficult it was to attract investment in the Saar's industry and economy simply because those who were willing to make this investment in Saar business often backed out at the last minute, having no idea what was ultimately in store for the Saar. The very fact that the Schuman Plan authorities made Luxembourg their provisional seat, with it being possible to declare Saarbrücken the ultimate headquarters only once a European Saar Statute had been drafted, shows the great burden the Saar has had to bear simply because its future was not certain. All the efforts made by Saarbrücken's Mayor, Peter Zimmer, remained a pipe dream as long as there was no agreement on a problem that had been discussed — sometimes to death — for years. The events of 23 October have swept away all these problems and obstacles. Once the agreement has been ratified and the other powers have signalled their approval, then, as we wrote in yesterday's special edition, the road ahead will be clear. The Saar economy can organise itself and plan for the future and, just as the work of the Prime Minister, Johannes Hoffmann, finally bore fruit on this day, the efforts of the Mayor of Saarbrücken and his allies in the service of the ECSC city of Saarbrücken have been rewarded.

If today, without knowing anything further of the individual agreements, we can begin to look back at what has passed, then we must ask ourselves how this outcome came to be achieved. We can begin by stating that France and Germany's mutual willingness to grant concessions is to be thanked for this success. Neither the French Prime Minister, Mr Mendès France, nor the West German Chancellor, Dr Adenauer, has shied away from any hard work or tricky issues in their efforts to achieve, after all the setbacks and disappointments, not only a Franco-German agreement but also peace and happiness for the people of the Saar after years of concern for their future. One cannot help but wonder why this agreement came about overnight after such a fraught period of failures. Without wishing to downplay the breathtaking progress of the last few weeks, we would dare to suggest that what has been achieved today is the uplifting event it is for us only because of the

years of spadework carried out by both Chancellor Adenauer and Mr Mendès France's predecessors. On the other hand, this groundwork would not have been possible had not members of the Saar Government, with the support of both political parties, undertaken all the laborious legwork unseen by the outside political world. For it was they who were able to lighten the load for the successive French Foreign Ministers and, accordingly, the West German Chancellor, because they listened to the voice of the people and, through the legitimacy conferred upon them by the latter under the rules of democracy, they embodied the public will.

When looking back, therefore, we must not forget all those politicians who have belonged and continue to belong to the Saar Government since it came into existence.

At the beginning, we spoke of the bells ringing in Sunday and of the double meaning this sound held for the Saar. It is therefore fitting to conclude with the words written by a Strasbourg friar in the Middle Ages, a certain Thomas Murner, which, in today's language, read something like this: 'When the bells of our churches sound their chimes over the country, they sometimes — perhaps almost always — also signal the relief of a troubled and hopeful soul.' The relief of the troubled soul to which Thomas Murner referred is symbolic of the Saar, which, having waited so longingly for this moment since 1947, is now experiencing a sense of inner release and can resume its work with renewed vigour, because all the doubts, uncertainties and torments now belong to the past.