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23 January: Konrad Adenauer and Charles de Gaulle sign the German-French Treaty of Friendship

The Thirty Years War, the Nine Years' War (often called the War of the Grand Alliance), the War of the Spanish Succession, the Seven Years' War, the Coalition Wars, the Napoleonic Wars, the Franco-Prussian War of 1870/71, the First World War, the Second World War – the Germans and French have been waging war against one another for centuries. Prior to the twentieth century wars, the majority of these offensives took place on German soil as a result of French aggression. After the catastrophe of the Second World War, any relationship between the two nations is initially – to say the least – shattered. The immediate experiences of the second invasion of France by German troops within the space of just decades, concentration camps, captivity in prisoner of war camps, forced labour, the brutal and horrendous battle against the Résistance, and war crimes, such as the total massacre and obliteration of the village of Oradour-sur-Glane by the Nazi Waffen-SS: these are horrific realities that cannot be easily forgotten by any French citizen. However, older historical experiences against one another also stand between these two peoples. No Frenchman has forgiven the losses and damage inflicted by the Germans in the North of France in the First World War. Memorials commemorate the French dead from the Grande Guerre in every village and community. And yet, at the same time, the wars waged by Louis XIV and Napoleon, the Occupation of the Ruhr, and the two-time division and protectorate of the Saarland, are also most definitely, at the forefront of collective memory for Germans.



Two men resolve, however, to bridge the wide gap of the so-called 'traditional enmity', and to introduce a new era of peace between the two nations, to establish 'German-French Friendship': The first German Federal Chancellor, Konrad Adenauer, and France's President de Gaulle. These two leaders are unified by their mutual core conservative convictions and their experiences of resistance during the Nazi Regime: De Gaulle had been the head of the French Resistance against the German occupation during the Second World War, while Adenauer had been removed from the office of Mayor of Cologne by the Nazis.



In July 1962, Adenauer travels to France, where he is given, without exception, a friendly reception wherever he goes. The highlight of this visit occurs when the Chancellor travels to Reims. The paths of German and French history have crossed time and again in Reims over the preceding centuries: It was here that the first king of the Franks, Clovis I, was baptised in the fifth century, French kings were crowned in the Reims Cathedral, and yet German troops bombarded the

..... imposing church during the First World War. The two devout Catholics, de Gaulle
..... and Adenauer, participate together in the celebration of a Peace Mass in the
..... Reims Cathedral. Just six months later, the German-French Treaty of Friendship,
..... also known as Élysée Treaty, a treaty of friendship between France and West
..... Germany is signed at the Élysée Palace in Paris. In the following years, the Élysée
..... Treaty has a significant impact on further development and future progress
..... between the two nations. The treaty envisages close cooperation in all important
..... political, cultural and economic matters. Regular consultations are to be held at
..... the governmental level with the aim of achieving joint action in all key areas of
..... international policy. Young people are to be brought together through exchange
..... programs. The creation of the ‘German-French Youth Office’ also plays an
..... important role in breaking down mutual prejudices. Furthermore, increased
..... emphasis is placed on the teaching of these neighbouring countries’ language in
..... schools. In today’s Europe, the close relationship between France and Germany
..... is an important factor in the successful functioning of the European Union (EU).

Translated into English by Heather Rae, proofread by Maria-Philippa Wieckowski



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