

A vision of Europe: Franco-German relations during the great depression, 1929-1932

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Abstrak

A Vision of Europe analyses a little-known collaborative effort by France and Germany to secure a durable peace between the World Wars, through European integration organized around a Franco-German axis. Received wisdom has it that the era of Franco-German rapprochement depended from 1925 on a close personal relationship between the French and German Foreign Ministers, Briand and Stresemann. With Stresemann's death in 1929, and the simultaneous onset of the interwar Great Depression, Germany in particular allegedly turned its back on this process of rapprochement several years before Hitler took power. However, A Vision of Europe challenges this view of Franco-German relations during the Depression years. Upsets and setbacks notwithstanding, a sustained mutual effort drew on political will, diplomatic rationale, economic synergies, cultural affinities, and various peace movements to agree a Franco-German customs union which had European union as its ultimate goal. These efforts were formalized in the Franco-German Berlin Accord of September 1931, with the diplomacy surrounding this event forming the heart of this book. By mid-1932, however, rapprochement had all but failed. An unforeseen crisis in trading relations, the impact on French opinion of a media scandal surrounding the publication of the late Stresemann's memoirs, and the disruptive impact of domestic party politics in both countries derailed a process that had been conceived by France and Germany's diplomatic, political and economic elites. Nonetheless, this first modern attempt at European unification reflected a deeper process and logic that survived Hitler and informed the creation of the contemporary European Union.