

GERMANY, FRANCE, EU: ACTING TOGETHER

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On the eve of the fiftieth anniversary of the Élysée Treaty, the Franco-German relationship needs to be put into a European perspective: it is the purpose of this Viewpoint of *Notre Europe - Jacques Delors Institute* co-signed by Mathilde Durand, Daniela Schwarzer and António Vitorino.

The fiftieth anniversary of the Élysée Treaty binding France and Germany prompts three main considerations: the treaty has certainly made it possible to develop unparalleled dialogue between the two countries, but at this juncture the Franco-German relationship needs to be rebalanced in order for the EU to be able to better rise to the challenges that it is called on to face today.

1. Permanent dialogue, the Élysée Treaty's real contribution

While the Élysée Treaty, designed to establish close cooperation between France and Germany, was only signed on 22 January 1963, the rapprochement between the two countries actually began in 1945, with particularly strong involvement on the part of civil society in both countries. It continued in a European context with an initial, crucial stage: the "Schuman Declaration" of 9 May 1950 which, to quote Hannah Arendt, offered Germany "forgiveness" for the past and the "promise" of a common future, and which was to serve as the foundation stone for the establishment both of the ECSC and then of the EEC.

The primary aim of the Élysée Treaty was to strengthen the dialogue between the two countries, and in that sense it has been a fully-fledged success. Within an EU based on a [peaceful settlement of disagreements](#) and the production of political convergences, France and Germany are the only two European countries to have forged such strong bilateral links. We all remember the pictures of Charles de Gaulle and of Konrad Adenauer in Rheims cathedral, or of François Mitterrand and of Helmut Kohl at Verdun. We are less aware that exchange officials are also present in the cabinets of the Prime Minister/Chancellor and of several ministers, among other that of Foreign Affairs. Ministries of Finance of both countries settled a common work unit to prepare ministers to speak most often as possible with one single voice during EU Councils. Secretaries General for Franco-German Cooperation, who also perform the

function of Minister for European Affairs in either country, have been put in place to ensure the proper functioning of this cooperation, their deputies being a representative of the partner country.

In thematic terms, however, the record of the Élysée Treaty's functioning is somewhat less positive. Despite a certain amount of progress, for instance with regard to young people, including the establishment of a Franco-German Youth Office (FGYO) which is due to celebrate its fiftieth anniversary in July 2013, the Franco-German University or Franco-German television station ARTE, there has been a constant decline over the past few years in the number of people learning their neighbour country's language. Where foreign and defence policy is concerned, the two countries sometimes have opposite views (for instance, regarding the intervention in Libya) if they did not make sufficient efforts to find a common position, what is contrary to the Élysée Treaty. The Franco-German Defence and Security Council, the Franco-German Economic and Financial Council, or the Franco-German Council for the Environment sometimes contributed concretely in that sense. Franco-German Agenda 2020, adopted in February 2010, contained some eighty proposals designed to improve the Franco-German relationship, many of them backed up with real figures, yet even at this early stage we must already begin to ask ourselves questions regarding the possibility of implementing those real new proposals in concrete terms between now and 2020.

2. A "Franco-German couple" in search of a balance

In the early days of Franco-German reconciliation, France could still be considered the "dominant partner", but the situation has changed and the balance within this "couple" has altered. With its reunification, Germany has won back full sovereignty, and it has also rediscovered a central role in geopolitical terms, in the wake of the

EU's enlargement to include the countries of Central and Eastern Europe and thanks to its growing willingness to contribute to military interventions.

Thanks to its structural reforms in the early 2000, Germany has proven capable to strengthen its competitiveness and it is currently benefiting from a far more favourable economic situation than that afflicting an overwhelming majority of other EU member states. In the context of the management of the debt crisis in the euro zone, it has also agreed to provide huge financial guarantees to ensure solidarity and to contribute actively to the setting-up of rules and mechanisms for an improved budget and economic coordination. Despite this progress, however, it is now necessary to pursue the dialogue to re-establish on the long term an action capacity, confidence and stability within the euro zone. This is true notably on deepening the banking union and on euro bonds, in connection with which France is displaying a more dynamic approach than its German partner, which is justified in asking for strong compensation to go further.

In parallel, France is currently making a major effort to rebuild its budgetary credibility, its competitiveness and a balanced trade balance: it must pursue this effort without letting up, both in its own interest and in order to rebalance its relationship with Germany. And indeed this process appears to have kicked in ever since François Hollande took office. It is particularly striking to note that, ahead of the European Council in June 2012, Mr. Hollande turned to Mr. Monti rather than to Mrs. Merkel to display a convergence of points of view, as there were more profound disagreements with her at the beginning.

However, the two countries need each other: together they stand for 47% of the guarantees and the capital in the stability mechanisms and none of both countries can be the only contributor. Both countries remain one of each other's main trade partners and direct investment in the partner country is very strong. Moreover Germany needs France in order not to appear hegemonic in Europe, while France, on the other hand, needs Germany in order to bolster its influence within the EU.

3. A Franco-German relationship in the service of the EU

France's and Germany's different ways of perceiving some issues must be tackled constructively so as to re-establish the balance in their relationship and to contribute

to the proper functioning of the EU as a whole. Thus each member state must absolutely "put its house in order", as Germany demands, but, as France has rightly pointed out, that is not sufficient to ensure that the Community as a group can function properly.

For instance, interdependence among European member states is far too strong: during quite a long time, Germany has been much less aware of that fact than France. This was particularly striking during the management of the crisis in Greece. Berlin and Paris disagreed regarding the risk for the rest of the EMU of a state bankruptcy or of a country to leave the euro zone. To ensure a proper cooperation with the EU and the euro zone, it is of advantage for Germany and France to work in harmony with the other member states of the EU and with the Community institutions rather than adopting a dominant position as far as they reach a bilateral consensus and to place them before the *fait accompli*, the way they did back in the days of "Merkozy".

The two countries and the EU would be well advised to take advantage of the fiftieth anniversary of the signing of the Élysée Treaty to adopt a few concrete projects, over which a consensus has yet to be forged. Thus, despite pursuing diametrically opposed energy policies, they might pledge to bring their positions closer together and to move, with their EU partners, towards the [European Energy Community](#) backed by Jacques Delors and by Jerzy Buzek.

Another major project might concern the reflexion on the EU's political aims: France has reacted with little enthusiasm to the various proposals put forward by its German partner in this connection, whether we are talking about the "hard core" suggested by Karl Lamers and by Wolfgang Schäuble, about Joschka Fischer's address to Humboldt University, or even about Angela Merkel's recent [proposal for political union](#), and it hardly suggested any ideas in that sense. The time has now come to move on, going beyond the obstacles linked to its unitary political ethos and the trauma occasioned by the negative referendum on the constitutional treaty.

France and Germany cannot allow this commemoration to be nothing more than a historical or symbolic act. They need to launch an ambitious project capable of mobilising the EU for the years to come. What could be more crucial than saying: "Mrs. Merkel: Let us think of the political union now!"

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