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Nicole Colin · Claire Demesmay
Editors

Franco-German Relations Seen from Abroad

Post-war Reconciliation in International
Perspectives

 Springer

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Foreword

On 22 January 2019, on the occasion of the 56th anniversary of the historic Élysée Treaty, French President Emmanuel Macron and German Chancellor Angela Merkel signed a new Franco-German Treaty in the city of Aachen. This “Treaty of Aachen” stipulates even closer cooperation between France and Germany in their bilateral and international relations, including between the German and French ministries, border regions and civil societies. Born in Saarland, a region steeped in Franco-German history, I am particularly grateful for the close and trusting relationship between the two countries. Who could have imagined that, after three wars since 1870 and just 75 years after the end of the Second World War, a united Germany would be a fully sovereign member of the European Union? After the German war of aggression had devastated large parts of Europe and claimed millions of victims, who would have expected that Germany would so soon be welcomed back into the community of civilized nations? Courageous and visionary Europeans in France and Germany, but also in Italy, Belgium, Luxembourg and the Netherlands paved the way for European cooperation and reconciliation. The key to this development lays in the willingness of the French to reach out their hand to Germany through the Franco-German rapprochement, a process which ultimately led to true reconciliation between the two countries.

The Élysée Treaty of 1963 was a historic step in the reconciliation process between France and Germany. It rejected the notion that the two countries were sworn enemies and represented a clear affirmation of Franco-German friendship and the further advancement of the European project. Although we have often had differing perspectives on various European topics, and still do today, it has always been possible to reach compromises that have also found support among our European friends and partners. Reconciliation was possible because both parties not only looked ahead, but also undertook an honest examination of their common past and acknowledged their joint responsibility for peace and stability in Europe and beyond.

The close bilateral cooperation between France and Germany, carried out in a spirit of mutual trust, has also contributed to improving multilateral cooperation. In 1975, on the initiative of French President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing and German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt, the heads of government from France, Germany, the USA, Japan, the UK and Italy gathered at the Château de Rambouillet to find shared and coordinated solutions to the oil crisis. This was the founding moment of the G7 (at that time the G6, with Canada joining one year later). While the forum was initially founded as a platform for discussing economic policy issues, it soon broadened its focus to include foreign and security policy. Today, France and Germany are once again pushing for more multilateral cooperation. Together, we are the spearhead of the "Alliance for Multilateralism", which advocates global cooperation at a time of increasing nationalism. And we contribute jointly to peacebuilding and reconciliation projects in third countries, such as Mali or Ukraine.

Too often, however, we focus on political history, forgetting that Franco-German reconciliation has been achieved first and foremost by the citizens of the two countries. Civil society is the backbone of our relations. As early as 1950, Ludwigsburg and Montbéliard established the first of today's 2200 Franco-German town twinning partnerships. Since then, innumerable encounters between French and German citizens have ensued. The work of the Franco-German Youth Office brings the younger generation closer together and helps to challenge and overcome national stereotypes. This is why the Treaty of Aachen makes ever closer civil society exchange a priority.

What can be learned from the process of Franco-German reconciliation with regard to other conflicts in the world? This is the question guiding this excellent research project. Looking at different conflicts around the world and comparing them through the lens of the Franco-German experience are a highly effective approach. Conflicts are of course always unique: culture, history, religion and geography make them difficult to compare. Nevertheless, the experience of Franco-German reconciliation can still provide very useful insights into crisis resolution in general. It is a source of inspiration and an example of a successful practice that can be adapted to the respective context. This project is also invaluable as it prompts us to ask ourselves what France and Germany can still learn from analysing current conflicts. It is an important reminder that Franco-German reconciliation cannot be taken for granted and that we have to keep working hard each day to sustain and further develop our cooperation.

In July 2020, Germany has taken over the Presidency of the Council of the European Union, with France set to assume the role in January 2022. The EU currently faces immense challenges and has endured a decade of crisis, which has led to rifts appearing between North and South, and East and West. The way we overcome the current COVID-19 pandemic over the next few years, both in terms of health policy and socio-economic solutions, will be decisive for the future success of the European project and our common vision of a "Europe united". The couple franco-allemand must now build on the experience it has gained in recent decades and set its sights on reconciling the different perspectives and approaches

within the EU and between member states and strengthening European sovereignty. We cannot afford to understate the value of the European Union or lose sight of what it is: the most successful peace project in history.

Berlin, Germany

Heiko Maas
Bundesminister des Auswärtigen

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