

## Mind the Gap: **How France and Germany Can Spearhead Joint Foreign Policy Initiatives Now**

*Edited by Claire Demesmay*

In light of the current instability on Europe's borders and uncertainties about the international role of the US under the administration of President Donald Trump, it is high time for Franco-German foreign policy initiatives. With the formation of a new German government, a window of opportunity opens for new joint action by the two countries at the core of the EU. At the same time, differences between France and Germany, both on policy issues and in terms of their strategic cultures, could impede any such cooperation. This study shows how Paris and Berlin can bridge – and exploit – these gaps to facilitate joint initiatives, even in the short term, on four key topics: Russia, transatlantic relations, Syria and Turkey.

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## Introduction

*Claire Demesmay*

Conflicts and instability in the EU's neighborhood continue unabated at the outset of 2018. Relations between the European Union (EU) and Russia have been poisoned by the Ukraine conflict. Uncertainties surrounding the course of the US administration persist – and have increased even further since President Donald J. Trump decided to start a trade war with China in March 2018. The war in Syria still destabilizes the entire Middle East and fuels migratory movements to Europe. As this instability rises, so does the pressure on Europe to act. Germany and France, heavyweights in the EU, have a special responsibility to help reduce tensions and stabilize the EU's neighborhood.

It is high time for joint Franco-German foreign policy initiatives – and with the formation of a new government in Germany, a window of opportunity opens. Despite the urgent need for shared initiatives, however, cooperation between Berlin and Paris remains anything but self-evident. This is for three reasons: First, domestic policy keeps dominating the political agenda and is frequently sidelining foreign policy issues. This is evidenced, for instance, by President Emmanuel Macron's focus on domestic reforms. Secondly, certain foreign policy issues, such as relations with Russia, are very much the subject of political polarization. As such, they are being seized on by opposition actors more and more frequently. In Germany especially, where the Bundestag has a say in foreign policy, it should not be underestimated that decision-making processes may take longer. Thirdly, Berlin and Paris also differ on a number of possible foreign policy solutions which could impede a possible cooperation.

This study shows how France's and Germany's diverging policy approaches with regards to four key topics – Russia, transatlantic relations, Syria and Turkey – should and can indeed be bridged.

The divergences and convergences between France and Germany vary depending on the issue at stake. Their positions today are at their most similar when it comes to dealing with Russia. Focusing on containment and cooperation, both countries condemn Moscow's actions in Ukraine but also seek to keep channels of communication with the Russian leadership as open as possible. Moreover, France and Germany agree on the current state of transatlantic relations: Both Berlin and Paris find that America's weakened leadership requires a new role and

new tasks for European countries – even if they have not clearly defined what this means in concrete terms. As the EU lacks strategic autonomy, both countries continue to seek pragmatic cooperation with the Trump administration.

The positions taken by France and Germany differ considerably with respect to two foreign policy issues in particular. Berlin and Paris not only attach different degrees of importance to the conflict in Syria, but also favor different solutions: Whereas Germany prefers diplomatic means, France is rather set on military action. On Turkey, again, their priorities are reversed: Indeed, it could be argued, that Turkey is for Berlin what Syria is for Paris in terms of historical ties and the density of contacts today. Both countries' bilateral relations with Ankara differ accordingly, even if relations are difficult in both cases. In addition, the French approach is also guided by vested interests, chief among them the fight against terrorism.

France and Germany's divergences on foreign policy highlight the different strategic cultures of both countries. Paris and Berlin have traditionally different views on the use of military power. Furthermore, and again for historical reasons, their foreign policies also differ in terms of geographic focus and preferred diplomatic tools – be it in the form of security policy, soft power or trade. These differences not only stand in the way of ambitious joint initiatives. The fact that Germany and France often do not sing from the same song sheet also undermines the European position on the international stage. Other countries such as Turkey or Russia have shrewdly used this weakness as leverage to evade pressure from the EU.

More than ever before, the worrying instability on Europe's borders demands that Germany and France coordinate their foreign policy positions more closely and work together more systematically. It is commonplace that strategic cultures can grow closer only over time. The view to the long term, however, should not prompt resignation in regard to short and mid-term goals.

First, initiatives are both possible and expedient even within a shorter timeframe. Paris and Berlin could, for example, propose to their partners that a UN peacekeeping mission in Ukraine be launched or an international peace conference on Syria be held. These would be important steps toward conflict resolution on both issues, and they would carry the added advantage of being

moored in a multilateral context. Secondly, differences between France and Germany could even be explored as an asset – provided both countries are prepared to play this trump card. This approach would play on the different strengths Germany and France hold in different areas of international relations: Combining Germany's trading power with France's diplomatic instruments would, for instance, strengthen the two countries' combined clout vis-à-vis countries like Turkey and Russia. Bringing into play a division of roles that takes into account personal relations could be of further help in any joint foreign policy initiative. A Franco-German tandem could, for example, use Emmanuel Macron's good standing in Washington to make its voice heard.

It goes without saying that France and Germany must not and cannot act alone in all of this. On the contrary,

they should rely on those partners who share their interests and/or can contribute expertise, especially if they can bring different perceptions of the respective topic into deliberation. It makes sense, for instance, to involve the United Kingdom in a dialogue with Turkey despite – or precisely because of – its impending exit from the EU. Equally, it will be beneficial to cooperate with the countries of Central and Eastern Europe when it comes to transatlantic relations. The principles of synergy and complementarity also apply here.

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## Russia and the Ukraine Conflict: Toward a Long-Term Strategy

*Laure Delcour & Stefan Meister*

The annexation of Crimea and the beginning of the war in Eastern Ukraine have challenged the post-cold war European security order. Russian actions in the Ukraine mark a fundamental loss of trust in bilateral relations for Germany and France. They had taken the lead on the Normandy format involving Russian, Ukrainian, French and German leaders since 2014, and have been major players through two agreements. As a result, France suspended its substantial political and security cooperation with Russia and abruptly ended the impetus towards economic links of the early 2010s. As for Germany, the dominance of the economy over politics has given way to a dominance of politics over the economy since 2014. Virtually all areas of relations between Germany and Russia are now politicized, and Berlin has become a main supporter of economic sanctions against Russia.

### Containment and Cooperation with Russia: France and Germany United

Both France and Germany aim to contain and deter Russia as much as necessary and try to cooperate with Moscow wherever it is possible. Whilst unequivocally condemning Moscow's actions in Ukraine, French authorities have – since 2014 - tried to maintain a dialogue with Russia, whom they regard as a crucial player in most major international issues. Nonetheless, perceptions and attitudes about Russia have become sharply polarized in French politics. In 2016, the French National Assembly and the Senate adopted resolutions advocating a removal of sanctions against Russia. However, these resolutions did not have any tangible implications, since the legislative branch of power only plays a limited role in French foreign policy and the 2017 parliamentary elections also recorded an unprecedented high turnover. Despite criticisms from the far right and the far left, the firm stance vis-à-vis Russia is supported by the center and also by the majority of the moderate left, as well as part of the moderate right, which form the basis of the new presidential majority. In Germany, the containment-and-cooperation approach is supported by the major parties, CDU and SPD, as well as the Green Party (Die Grünen). It is challenged by the Left Party (Die Linke) and right-wing populists of the Alternative for Germany (AfD) which is now the third strongest party in the Bundestag. These two parties,

which want to abolish sanctions and improve relations with Russia, represent a strong opposition in the new federal parliament and might increasingly challenge Angela Merkel's position on Russia. Furthermore, there are many in the Social Democratic Party (SPD) and amongst their voters, who do not support the former government's critical approach towards Russia.

With such similar positions on the issue, it is not surprising that France and Germany broadly agree on both the stumbling blocks and possible ways forward in relations with Russia. Both governments support extending the EU's sanctions against Russia until the Minsk Agreement is fully implemented. They are doing so despite the fact that their agriculture and machinery sectors have suffered from Russia's counter-sanctions. That being said, the Russian market only counts for between two and four percent of export for big German companies; by comparison, the Chinese market, for instance, represents between 20 and 40 percent for most of them. France's export figures are similar.

In the wake of Emmanuel Macron's election and Angela Merkel reelection, Berlin and Paris have come even closer in their stance on Russia, its aggression in Ukraine as well as Russian fake news campaign against Macron. Despite this general agreement, however, the two countries differ in nuance on how future cooperation with Russia should be conducted. Their differences stem from both the nature of their previous links with Russia - centered on politics and security for France and on economics and society for Germany - and from their respective ability to play a leading role. Berlin has mostly taken the lead since 2014, while France has systematically supported all German initiatives. German hopes that Macron's government would start a new Ukraine initiative in the context of the Minsk process have not come true. Instead, both countries have complemented each other in regard to relations with Russia. While Germany is the economic driving force in the EU and in relations to Russia, France weighs strongly on security and diplomatic matters. In light of these circumstances, what matters most is not whether France and Germany can agree on a common initiative but whether a joint initiative can indeed succeed given the current Russian leadership's limited interest in compromises or engagement.

## Initiatives Toward Peaceful Co-existence Should be Continued

Given the loss of trust and diverging interests with the Russian leadership, France is likely to remain firm yet also seek dialogue with Russia, whereas Germany will likely continue to pursue a peaceful co-existence for the foreseeable future. Several initiatives and developments appear to fall within the remit of pursuing these goals: First, in mid-2016 Germany launched a new initiative on arms control – now joined by France and 14 other OSCE countries – to prevent an arms race between Russia and NATO. With this initiative, former foreign minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier aimed to strengthen the OSCE as a platform for talks on arms control. Secondly, a common EU foreign and defense policy spearheaded by France and Germany appears more feasible in the wake of the UK leaving the EU. PESCO, the Permanent Structured Cooperation, is one major result of this development. Germany has been increasing its participation both in French and EU missions in Africa and also within the NATO framework to protect and reassure the Eastern EU member states vis-à-vis Russia in the wake of the Ukraine conflict. Importantly for France, Germany has further normalized its role as a security player with an increased defense budget and the Bundeswehr's participation in NATO's enhanced forward presence in Lithuania. Thirdly, France and Germany also have a joint interest to maintain ties with Russia in the areas of energy and economic policy. Both countries have shareholders in the Nord Stream 2 project through BASF-Wintershall and ENGIE. This pipeline, which is meant to bring Russian gas to Europe, bypassing the Ukraine, remains highly controversial among EU member states. Even if economic reasons today carry less weight for both countries in their relations with Russia, the French and German governments still consider this area as a possible field for further business with Moscow. Both countries are interested in furthering their energy and business ties with Russia and are unlikely to support any new economic sanctions by the US against Moscow.

Such initiatives are important for any future French-German cooperation in relations with Russia, especially as they entail different time schedules. However, they may encounter obstacles due to a number of domestic and external factors. Among them is Emmanuel Macron's domestic agenda: Since his election, Macron has been very much focused on pushing domestic reforms as well as giving new momentum to the EU integration process. Combined with the fight against terrorism, these two issues are likely to remain his priorities. As a result, it will most likely be left to Germany to take the lead in

any new initiative on Russia. Germany's leadership, in turn, will undoubtedly face domestic controversy in any attempt to increase the military budget during its next term – a scenario rendered even more difficult due to a strong opposition in the Bundestag. Rising anti-American tendencies within German society are bound to add to existing pacifist trends; together, they will strengthen the parliamentary opposition's agenda to push for improved relations with Russia. Since Angela Merkel was re-elected as a Chancellor, the Ukraine will certainly remain a priority for the incoming German government. At the same time, Merkel will be forced to extend considerable energy on preserving a coalition government taut with tension and to pursue a constructive debate on the future of the EU. Russia will, most likely, be less important to her now than in the last term.

As for wider foreign policy issues, France and Germany cannot bank on an unencumbered transatlantic partnership, given US President Trump's erratic foreign policy. Nor can Berlin and Paris rely on the support of other key EU member states. The Weimar triangle, including Germany, France and Poland, could present an appropriate format for an initiative on Russia, yet Poland appears unlikely to support it at least in public in light of Warsaw's shift towards populist and nationalist positions. Furthermore, both France and Germany have underestimated the negative impact Nord Stream 2 has had on relations with Poland and the Baltic states. Any restart of the Weimar Triangle is likely to suffer from tensions on these issues, as well as from the growing rifts, firstly, between Paris and Warsaw on the future of the EU labor market and, secondly, between Berlin and Warsaw on the distribution of refugees within the EU. Traditional historical differences add to this even further.

## Dialogue and a Long-term Strategy are Needed

France and Germany should cooperate above all to reset the dialogue with Russia and to put it on a more realistic and interest-oriented basis. Meanwhile, sanctions should be maintained as long as the Minsk Agreement is not fully implemented. Beyond these measures, however, a long-term approach has been missing since the Germany's Partnership For Modernization with Russia failed. Is urgently needed now: France and Germany should work with other EU member states to develop a long-term strategy for Russia that takes into account both Russia's current, authoritarian ruling elite and the changing Russian society. This strategy should not only address the role of the EU as a potential future model for Russian society, but also Russia's possible role in the European security

system – even if all this sounds unrealistic in light of the current regime in Moscow.

France and Germany will also need to manage the ongoing – and currently unresolvable – conflict in the common neighborhood with Moscow. In doing so, they should include other interested member countries such as Poland, and the Baltic and Scandinavian states. The policy toward Russia must certainly involve the countries in-between, yet this may pose a conflict in itself, but this will stay the main area of conflict between Russia and the EU in the next years. A French-German proposal to the UN Security Council for a UN-peacekeeping mission in Eastern Ukraine, that picks up the Russian proposal for UN blue helmets in parts of Eastern Ukraine, could be a joint way forward toward to end the war in Eastern Ukraine. It would also underline the EU's role as an important crisis manager in the region.

Of course, any Franco-German initiative on Russia needs to take into account that the growing economic crisis in Russia and the mutual recriminations between Moscow and particularly Washington are set to prompt an even stronger lock-in of the Russian leadership. Relations could deteriorate even further due to distrust and the failure to re-open the dialogue. The situation is made even more complex in light of the fact that the current US president is facing a poisonous domestic debate on suspected ties with Russia and apparently has little historical understanding of the context that led to an arms control agreement during the Cold War. Russian elites currently

focus on the US leadership in terms of security policy, and this limits every European initiative on confidence-building measures and arms control.

Russian economic uncertainty, the lack of reforms, increasingly polarized parties in the Ukraine conflict, and a growing rift between Moscow and Washington – all these factors, thus, jeopardize future relations with Moscow. The EU's ability to act vis-à-vis Russia and in the region is, in turn, weakened by its ongoing economic crisis and the debate over its legitimacy and its future. Russia's domestic discourse, indeed, depicts the EU as a failed institution. If EU leaders are not able to solve these internal problems, populist trends within the bloc are set to grow even further and deflect attention from developments in the European neighborhood. Meanwhile, the ongoing Russian disinformation and cyber policy toward the EU is likely to polarize public and political discourse in the EU further and render it even more difficult to rebuild trust and reach a new *modus vivendi* with Russia.

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## Transatlantic Relations: France and Germany Have to Step Up

*Barbara Kunz & Jana Puglierin*

The election of Donald Trump as the 45th president of the United States was seen as a watershed moment for transatlantic relations in Paris and in Berlin. Yet, beyond the rhetoric of Trump's Twitter tweets there seems – at least until now – to be a surprisingly high level of continuity in US foreign policy when it comes to engagement in European security affairs. Nonetheless, America's leadership role in Europe is indeed shifting. With her remarks in May 2017, delivered during an election campaign event in a Munich beer tent, German Chancellor Angela Merkel nailed it by saying: "The times when we could fully count on others are to a certain extent over," adding: "We Europeans must finally take our destiny into our own hands." In his long-awaited speech on Europe at the Sorbonne University in Paris on September 26, 2017, French president Emmanuel Macron also emphasized that the continued European integration was taking place against the background of a "progressive and unavoidable disengagement of the United States." His proposals on European defense need to be seen in this context. What had already started under the Obama administration has now become a certainty under Trump: Europe can no longer primarily outsource their foreign - and especially military - responsibilities to Washington.

While this is seen as a matter of course in Paris, it is a big step to acknowledge for Berlin. The French have always emphasized their "strategic autonomy", yet Germans fear America's disengagement in Europe. However, by saying that the Europeans were carrying their destiny "in their own hands," Merkel made a significant move toward a stronger defense union and a more active Germany to reach this aim. In doing so, she is – at least in principle – responding to French expectations and ambitions.

### Anti-Americanism and Anti-Trumpism in France and Germany

Attitudes vis-à-vis the United States are traditionally polarized, with Anti-Americanism still deeply rooted in France and to a lesser extent also in Germany, especially on the left and right wing of the political spectrum. This was not least obvious in the run-up to the 2017 German parliamentary election, during which Merkel's main opponent from the SPD tried to mobilize leftist voters in part by calling upon traditional anti-American senti-

ments. Donald Trump's remarkable unpopularity in Germany only added to this pre-existing skepticism, yet it has affected the US' image abroad even more. According to a 2017 Pew Research Center poll, in both Germany and France, confidence in Trump "to do the right thing regarding world affairs" is much lower than the ratings enjoyed by his predecessor.

Compared to Germany, issues other than Trump continue to occupy a much larger place in France. What matters, however, is the personal relationship between presidents Macron and Trump. Fueled by a certain pride to see France "back on stage" since the 2017 presidential election, encounters between the two men are followed closely: Their handshake at the G20 Summit in Hamburg, Trump's visit to Paris on National Day or the presidents' "duel by speeches" (*Le Monde*) at the United Nations in September 2017 prompted widespread public and media attention.

Given the stronger emotional ties Germans have with the US, the situation is slightly different in Germany. Here, a certain feeling of losing a valued fatherly friend is at times palpable, especially amongst the foreign policy elite. Simultaneously, public aversion against Trump makes it hard for Atlanticists to argue their case. Whereas the French public was quietly proud to see the two presidents at the Elysée, Merkel had to walk a fine line during the German election campaign: On the one hand, she had to avoid being seen as cosying up too much to Trump; on the other, she also signaled that she was seeking avenues for continued cooperation.

### 'No Relations' are Not an Option

At the Elysée and the Chancellery, political decision makers remain well aware that the US continues to be vital for European security. Berlin is not prepared – nor equipped! – to embrace the role of 'leader of the free world'. Many Germans are still struggling to find their place in an international environment in which old certainties are now in question. During her last term, Merkel tried to find a way for pragmatic co-operation with the Trump administration despite significant and likely lasting disagreements, especially in the areas of free trade and climate change. An Atlanticist at heart, she is likely to continue along these lines – provided, of course, the planned coalition government will ultimately come about and she remains



German chancellor. However, she may face a growing opposition in the German parliament, the media and the public. Across all party lines, many decision makers and influencers believe that Donald Trump has turned the US into a force of global insecurity, and they are calling for more independence from America. Difficult decisions with huge implications for the transatlantic partnership are looming in the current parliamentary term: Among them are the issue of meeting NATO's target of spending 2 percent of GDP on defense, the succession of the Tornado aircraft and its implications for NATO's nuclear sharing arrangements, or the further development of North Stream 2, to name just a few. Merkel's now likely renewed coalition government of conservatives and Social Democrats will certainly try to contain any risk of damage to relations with the US as a result of these issues, hoping that Washington will not cut its security ties with Europe. After the new government is in place, its strategy will likely be to identify areas of continued and new cooperation with the US at various levels, including not only the White House but also Congress, federal states and cities. At the same time, it will seek to strengthen Europe by boosting the EU's economic competitiveness and promoting a European defense union.

French reasoning follows similar lines. In France, a more pragmatic approach to transatlantic relations has gained ground in recent years. This is illustrated, for instance, by France's return into NATO's integrated command structures under president Nicolas Sarkozy. For decades, the establishment of a "Europe de la défense" was seen by many as *the* alternative to NATO and the US involvement in European security affairs. France's return into the alliance thus also marks the end of this approach to European security cooperation. Although the decision was contested at the time, it is no longer called into question today by a large part of the foreign policy establishment. France's Strategic Review, published in October 2017, presents the US as a "fundamental partner". It emphasizes that security and defense interests "converge" and that the bilateral relationship is strong.

The transatlantic trade relationship depicts a similar pattern: Here, too, the US has remained a key partner. The generally vociferous French opponents of globalization were remarkably quiet on the (now presumably defunct) Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP). In a remarkable reversal, large numbers of Germans rather than Frenchmen took to the streets to protest against the agreement. Eventually, Paris officially demanded the end of negotiations on a text deemed "inacceptable" by then Prime Minister Manuel Valls. In Germany, the public protests made worse an already difficult

transatlantic situation as they coincided with the height of the NSA affair. Angela Merkel nevertheless called for reviving TTIP negotiations in 2017.

### Despite Trump: No Big Leaps in European Defense Integration

It seems unlikely, then, that the Trump presidency will prompt a European emancipation from the US with a much increased European autonomy in the fields of foreign policy and defense. This is equally unlikely for Germany and France on their own. Even if the EU were to move swiftly and create a European 'defense union' in the near future, this union would not immediately achieve strategic autonomy – whether this is, at all, a German objective even remains to be seen. Macron's recent proposals for European defense cooperation did not envision a system of collective defense. The European Intervention Initiative – Macron's key idea – is rather outlined as a sort of permanent coalition of the willing outside the EU. It is deceptive therefore to assume that a US policy shift under Trump will mean a big leap forward in terms of EU defense integration. The Europeans, led by France and Germany, have certainly achieved more than expected in their Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP) throughout the past year. But these agreements – among them PESCO and the European Defense Fund – are an addition to transatlantic security cooperation, not a replacement.

Furthermore, France and Germany differ fundamentally in terms of their strategic culture and geopolitical perspective, and these gaps limit the two countries' joint ability to lead European defense integration. Indeed, it still remains to be seen whether this hindrance can be overcome should a sudden need arise to ensure European security. The pending implementation of PESCO will be an important test case for Franco-German security cooperation, and both countries will have to overcome their national perspectives in order to make PESCO a success – a successful "permanent structured cooperation" would increase European capabilities and be a true step forward toward EU strategic autonomy.

Despite these challenges, however, Paris and Berlin would do good to ponder a world in which ensuring European security does not fall primarily to the United States. While the 'Pacific Pivot' under Trump's predecessor Obama ultimately went by without major consequences for Europe – partly due to the increased US engagement following Russia's annexation of Crimea –, the US shift away from Europe may not be reversible this time. It is up to France and Germany, the remaining heavyweights

in the EU, to prepare Europe for the potential gradual American disengagement from this continent. Despite the EU's admittedly remarkable progress on the Common Security and Defence Policy, Europe on its own remains ill-equipped for security challenges in its periphery. France and Germany should launch and lead a strategic dialog, among EU member states and with the UK, on the implications of a post-American Europe. This dialog should be pursued not only at the highest level, but also at the levels of parliamentarians and in track 1.5 formats. It will be particularly important to have Central and Eastern European states on board and to take their security concerns seriously. A joint Franco-German understanding should, however, be a first step, and it should bring acceptance for the two countries' strategic cultures. On this basis, the partners could sketch out the conclusions that are to be drawn from the US disengagement.

France and Germany should also make use of the fact that Emmanuel Macron is highly popular in the White House. Trump's visit to Paris was seen as a huge success in D.C. and both leaders speak regularly on the phone. Whereas the personal relationship between Merkel and

Trump is rather lukewarm, the American President is known to "love" Macron, who is set to be the first foreign guest of state in Washington. It would be in France's and Germany's best interest to ride this Franco-American momentum to ensure that Europe's position, for instance, on the Iran deal or North Korea is heard. If France and Germany work together, they can increase European leverage in the White House and will be able to deal with the US from a greater position of strength. Embedding their unity in a European consensus will make it even stronger.

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## Syria: Associating German with French Initiatives

*Frédéric Charillon & Andreas Rinke*

The conflict in Syria currently stands at the center of much of the international debate because it triggered a destabilization of the entire Middle East region – with the military involvement of a large number of foreign countries and the development of a real proxy war in the country. The armed conflict also sent millions of refugees to neighboring countries and Europe. As a result, Syria swiftly climbed to the top of the diplomatic agenda for Germany and France. Despite the shared urgency, however, both countries have very different views on the conflict: This is due partly to historical reasons, and partly to the fact that France and Germany play different roles in world politics and hold different views on the use of military power. Nonetheless, the time for joint initiatives is now better than ever before – firstly, because both countries share common interests in the Middle East, and secondly, because it might be easier under President Emmanuel Macron in France and Chancellor Angela Merkel in Germany to find a common stance. A common French-German strategy for Syria, and for the wider Middle East, is both possible and necessary, and the EU offers the best framework in pursuing this. Paris made it clear that it wanted to promote new initiatives. Associating Germany with them would be indispensable.

### France and Germany: Different Approaches Toward Syria

Germany and France diverge widely in their approaches toward Syria for at least three reasons. These relate to the two countries' different historical involvement in the region, to their divergent attitudes on the use of military force, and lastly, on the context of current terrorist attacks.

The historical factors at play in the issue date back to colonial times: Unlike Germany, which does not have any colonial background in the Middle East, France used to exert tutelary power in both Lebanon and Syria and has kept strong links with the Levant ever since. Paris' political clout in Lebanon somewhat decreased when first, the Syrian, and then the Iranian grip on the country intensified after the Civil War (1975-1989). But a struggle for influence between the West – mainly France and the US – and the Syrian-Iranian camp remained. Several attacks on the French territory in the 1980s, as well as the assassination of the French Ambassador in Beirut in 1981

and later the killing of French hostages were attributed to Damascus, Tehran and their local allies, such as the Shiite militia Hezbollah. France's traditionally strong relationship with the eastern Christians as well as the personal relationship between Jacques Chirac and the Sunni Lebanese Prime Minister Rafic Hariri in the 2000s led to a lasting standoff between France and Syria under the Assad family. Even before Hariri's assassination in 2005, for which Paris blamed the Assad regime, France had played a major role in passing UN Security Council Resolution 1559 (2004), which called upon "foreign forces" – i.e. mainly Syrian – to withdraw from the country.

The second reason for Paris' and Berlin's divergence on Syria is due to the fact that both countries hold very different views on the use of military force. After World War II and in light of Germany's role in it, German attitudes were dominated by a mistrust of the use of violence. It took decades before Germany actively participated in military conflicts again; its first such involvement was the bombing of Serbian forces in the war in Kosovo in 1999. Even then, however, the use of military force remained deeply unpopular among Germans. Chancellor Angela Merkel has frequently expressed her conviction that most conflicts could only be solved by political solutions. By contrast, the French tradition of military intervention has remained strong during the Fifth Republic, and this was again confirmed under Sarkozy and Hollande. When civil war broke out in Syria in 2011, France was eager to settle old accounts and get rid of the Assad rule. In 2013, air strikes had been planned and Paris was left bitter when it gave up the idea at the last minute after the US ally refused to go along with them. Following the 2011 intervention in Libya by France, Britain and the US, German Chancellor Merkel argued the move exemplified a misguided interventionist policy in which governments who brought about a regime-change had no plan for the further development of that country. The problems which ensued in Libya after the fall of Gaddafi – including general chaos, an increased number of refugees migrating to the EU, and the rise of ISIS strongholds in the country – were seen by Berlin as a proof of its arguments. The recent strike on Syria's chemical weapons storage and research facilities, in a coordinated operation involving the US, France and the UK, provided another example of divergence between the two countries, as Angela Merkel made it clear that Germany would not join the operation.

Although deeming the strikes ‘necessary and appropriate’, she ruled out any German military participation, and instead considered a broad spectrum of other options. In that perspective, Macron’s will to resume diplomatic talks aiming at forging a political solution out of the current chaos, is much more in line with Berlin’s approach.

The third factor separating German and French approaches on Syria is related to France’s immediate experience of terrorist violence. Recent terrorist attacks on French soil have made Syria and Iraq a top priority for France, resulting in a political and military response against ISIS. Germany is in a completely different situation and does not share this priority, at least not to the same extent.

In summary, what is at stake for Paris in Syria is a complex combination of issues, ranging from France’s traditionally strong influence in the Levant, historical and personal ties – possibly even including a motif of revenge relating to Hariri’s assassination – and security issues, which became even more significant following the terrorist attacks. By contrast, the situation in Germany is quite different. Here, the Syrian conflict itself was initially not at the top of the German political agenda. It became significant only when Germany was faced with the refugee crisis that was triggered by the conflict. Germany’s subsequent interest to contain this issue and therefore to stabilize the situation in Syria prompted the recent increase of German diplomatic efforts to secure safe zones for civilians within Syria. Apart from this particular issue, German diplomacy has been rather less involved in seeking a solution to the Syrian crisis. Berlin’s restraint has, of course, also been due to the fact that Russia has clenching the initiative on Syria from the three Western veto-members in the UN Security Council – and thus, from Berlin’s point of view, the military intervention has no real international legal basis.

### **Paris vs. Berlin: The Issues of Military Involvement and the Fall of Assad**

Due to their different stances on Syria, France and Germany have also adopted different strategies of action on the crisis in Syria. Germany has ruled out military involvement to overthrow Assad also with regard to the experiences in Libya. Berlin did join the chorus of the West, when talk of “regime change” became more prominent in 2012/13. However, critics in Germany also admonished that the US, France and Britain were supplying arms to the Syrian opposition but then only went half-way as they refrained from the necessary military engagement to really change the situation on the ground; by contrast,

Russia and Iran were supporting Assad militarily. Possible post-Assad scenarios subsequently also became more difficult as it became obvious that the Syrian opposition was divided and there was no clear alternative who could lead the country in the aftermath of Assad. Since late 2013, when Merkel’s coalition partners changed from the Liberals to the Social Democrats in the wake of federal elections, Berlin has backed away from any calls for regime change.

Germany’s shift away from the prospect of regime change was helped by the fact that the international focus slowly moved from fighting Assad to fighting a strengthened ISIS both in Syria and neighboring Iraq – which the EU also considered as a direct threat because of the attacks. As a result, Germany started in 2014 to train and supply the Kurdish militia in Iraq with the approval of the Iraqi government. In Syria, German forces contributed data analyses to facilitate the bombing of ISIS troops by anti-ISIS alliance forces.

The constitutional proviso that the German army can only be employed with the consent of the Bundestag limits significantly the German government’s option to pursue a Syria-policy involving all elements, including an active military one. If not secured in international law, a “policy by all means”, i.e. military intervention, is considered as impossible. It is highly unlikely that this reluctance will change in the near future if and when Germany’s new government comes about.

Instead, German politics in the Syrian conflict focusses on other aspects - such as the prevention of further influx of refugees and the humanitarian assistance of the population in Syria. The Federal Government also strived to organise aid for Syria’s neighbors, which in turn had taken in large numbers of Syrian refugees. However, Berlin’s view on Assad’s possible future position is less distinct. While there is a consensus that there will be no long-term political solution for Syria that involves him, Germany has also maintained enough space to talk to his government now if necessary.

Meanwhile, France’s insistence, from 2011 up until the end of 2017, that Bashar al-Assad had to leave power before any political solution could be discussed for Syria, has increasingly isolated French diplomacy on Syria. France now appears to soften its stance on this issue somewhat, even if it remains virtually inconceivable that Paris would enter talks with the regime easily. Jean-Yves Le Drian, France’s Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs, reiterated as late as September 2017 that Bashar al-Assad could not stay in power. Paris’ priorities are now a) to regain the political initiative by creating a contact group with the UN Security Council and subsequently with

regional stakeholders, b) to avoid a permanent territorial fragmentation of Syria, and c) to continue the fight against potential new radical Islamist groups.

### A Joint Push for an International Peace Conference on Syria

After his election, Emmanuel Macron clearly expressed his intention for France to rejoin the international process on Syria. He indicated his plan to introduce new initiatives, which were most likely to start with an international conference, possibly as early as 2018. Despite Macron's push for a renewed French involvement, however, any peace initiative would require a more international approach: A 'French only' initiative would have little chance of succeeding. A European move spearheaded jointly by Paris and Berlin, however, would mark the return of Europe as a global actor, and the rise of Berlin as a major player and broker in protracted conflicts. Although Berlin does not consider Syria the most pressing or promising issue for a German-French diplomatic initiative, joint political initiatives are viewed positively since Merkel's re-election as Chancellor. And Merkel herself has recently insisted that Europeans should play a more important role in the region. These would, however, likely be qualified as Germany may be reluctant to engage with regional actors like Iran; equally, Berlin would not consider any form of military engagement for the reasons above. Nonetheless, an international conference for peace in Syria, staged in Europe with Paris and Berlin as key supporters, would send a strong political signal that the two countries are determined to cooperate more often on the international stage.

In light of the US' apparent drawback from international issues – even before US President's Donald Trump's more isolationist proclamations, his predecessor Barack Obama had reduced US involvement in the Middle East region – a joint French-German initiative could actually gain further momentum. Taking advantage of Trump's self-initiated marginalization, a French-German initiative, under European label and backed by the UN, could pave the way for new, if tough talks with Russia, Iran and possibly Turkey. Coincidentally, in Europe, it may also test the concept of a multi-speed European Union in which possibly only some partners like Italy or Spain get involved.

Imposing a timeline to promote a political solution in Syria remains difficult. Even bigger powers such as the US and Russia, with a substantial number of troops on the

ground, have not managed to solve the issue. However, hosting and supervising the process would provide the opportunity for the first time also to engage emerging powers such as China and others. By returning to the Syrian process, France would also regain some impact where neighboring Lebanon is concerned. Germany, in turn, would be able to promote its non-interventionist style, contribute to the stabilization of the region after ISIS' demise, and assume a more relevant role in Europe's Mediterranean region.

Of course, it is Moscow which now holds many keys to the future development of the situation in Syria. If Russia hopes to find any advantage in such an initiative, they need to be prepared for some complex bargaining: France and Germany are likely to link it to the Ukrainian question. Refusing to show any good will on the Syrian issue would diminish Moscow's chance to be treated by Europe as a partner in global security issues.

Germany's well-known reluctance to employ military options will implicitly limit what Europeans could offer or impose. However, Berlin could compensate its restraint on this score, for example, by economic measures or perspectives for Syria's reconstruction in the aftermath of the conflict – the German government is already considering this too.

Any step could begin with a more realistic approach by Macron and Merkel on how to deal with Assad and the whole region. First and foremost, this will require recognizing that Russia and Iran have largely succeeded their military goals in keeping the Syrian President in power at least until now. The German-French-led European initiative toward peace in Syria could then act as a kick-off for a wider vision for the entire Mideast Region. As such, it would complement the ongoing EU commitment to the survival of the nuclear deal with Iran. Germany's intent to step up its economic and humanitarian engagement in Africa and the Middle East, both nationally and within the EU, as a means to stabilize the EU's southern neighborhood would further support this strategy and involve it in a broader framework.

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## Turkey: Cumulating different strengths

*Laura Lale Kabis-Kechrid & Dorothee Schmid*

Relations between the European Union (EU) and Turkey have, without a doubt, reached a historic low. However, despite the tension both Turkey and the EU have no real interest in severing ties altogether as cooperation remains essential in areas of shared interest, such as security and defence, counterterrorism, migration and economic relations.

At the same time, diverging positions on Turkey among EU member states – most importantly Germany and France – weaken their already limited ability to counteract autocratic trends in Turkey and to cope with the country's increasingly unreliable and at times disruptive foreign policy. These differences have also allowed the Turkish government to defame and confront the EU. To break the current pattern, closer cooperation and coordination among European countries, particularly Germany and France, is indispensable.

### France and Germany: Diverging Policy Views on Turkey

Although France and Germany agree that Turkey remains an important partner both bilaterally and for the EU, their perspectives in relations with Ankara differ significantly. This is due to different past relations and levels of engagement with Turkey as well as diverging national interests. While security and counterterrorism cooperation with Turkey is a key interest for both, France places a higher premium on it because of its more active engagement in the Middle East and the high number of terrorist attacks suffered at home. In addition, France's foreign policy aspirations in the region, especially in the Levant and Iraq, and Turkey's role in the region are crucial in shaping France's policy view on Turkey.

Germany, in turn, is much more driven by its economic relations with Turkey, by the political and socio-cultural importance of the Turkish diaspora as the largest minority group in Germany, and finally, by German efforts to control migration. Germany's initiative for the EU-Turkey refugee agreement, signed on 18 March 2016, and France's individual efforts to engage Turkey in the resolution of the Syria crisis are two cases in point.

Germany and Turkey have traditionally enjoyed a 'special relationship', built on unique historical and economic ties as well as a strong history of migration,

especially since the 1960s. Hence, tensions also have domestic repercussions, and the long-running interconnectedness of both countries appears to have amplified frustrations on both sides. Turkey and Germany have sought to improve their fraught relations since the beginning of 2018. Following their meeting in Goslar in January 2018, Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu and then German Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel expressed their desire to resume German-Turkish consultations on security, counterterrorism and other issues. However, the relationship remains far from normalized. Many contentious issues remain, and the Turkish presidential and general elections may tempt Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan to return to an anti-European and anti-German campaign rhetoric.

By contrast, France has been wary to strain its relationship with Turkey, especially as it previously clashed with Ankara on key issues. Paris pioneered the process of recognizing the Armenian genocide in 2006, and former French president Nicolas Sarkozy was an outspoken critic of Turkey's EU accession. Both issues caused palpable friction between the two countries. Sarkozy's successor François Hollande strove to appease bilateral relations and current president Emmanuel Macron has sought continuity, yet tensions have appeared again since the beginning of 2018.

The trials against several professors of the Franco-Turkish Galatasaray University and President Erdoğan's public berating of a French journalist during a press conference at the Elysée Palace during his state visit in January 2018 have sharpened concerns in Paris. Further friction ensued following Turkey's recent military offensive against the Kurdish YPG in Afrin, Syria, at a time when France considered delegating the judicial treatment of French jihadists caught in Raqqa to the embryonic Syrian Kurdish entity. Turkey's operation in Syria also raised worries about NATO's cohesiveness. Indeed, Turkish interests somewhat compete with the objectives of the coalition against the so-called Islamic State (IS). France is one of the most active members of the coalition built by the United States, which has largely relied on Kurdish fighters to regain territory controlled by IS. In addition, Turkey's intention to purchase Russian S-400 missiles was met with particular unease in France.

## Different Interests, Different Instruments

In Germany, domestic pressures weigh heavily on Berlin's decision-making regarding Turkey: This is due to the presence of a large Turkish diaspora and an overwhelmingly negative public opinion on Turkey that was aggravated further by the arrest of several German citizens in Turkey. In July 2017, in the run-up to the German general elections, then German Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel announced a realignment of his country's Turkey policy. The new approach has sought to increase pressure on the Turkish government by using Germany's economic weight as one of Turkey's key trade partners and source of foreign direct investment. In addition, Berlin successfully lobbied to cut EU financial assistance to Turkey under the accession framework. Following the release of several German citizens, most importantly German-Turkish journalist Deniz Yücel in February 2018, Berlin has taken a more reconciliatory stance. Yet many issues remain, and Berlin continues to oppose opening negotiations on modernizing the customs union.

France, in turn, is predominantly guided by its regional interests in the Levant and Iraq. Compared to Berlin, Paris relies more heavily on diplomatic instruments to maintain a working relationship with Turkey. However, relations with Ankara have become a balancing act also for Paris in the wake of its interests in Syria. At the end of January 2018, President Emmanuel Macron warned Turkey not to use its recent military operation in Afrin as an excuse to invade Syria. When Turkey responded with strong criticism, Macron qualified his statement. Since then, the two countries have tried to bridge their differences through direct conversations.

France also wants to reap the benefits of its economic diplomacy, which is used to meet political goals. During Erdoğan's state visit to Paris in January 2018, a contract was put forward with the Franco-Italian Eurosam consortium, a manufacturer of surface-to-air missiles. For now, this contract only covers a preliminary study for defining a possible common missile system, but it could eventually prove instrumental to mending the recent tensions with NATO.

## Opportunities for Complementary French and German Approaches

Turkey has been monitoring divergences between Germany and France closely, seeking to use bilateral tracks as well as exploit European disjunctions strategically. When Chancellor Angela Merkel and Martin Schulz suggested ending Turkey's accession process in statements made shortly before the German parliamentary elections,

France voiced its opposition, reflecting the views of most of the other member states. Paris also authorised Turkish campaign events in France during the Turkish referendum campaign, while the Netherlands and Germany barred Turkish officials from attending such events to Ankara's dismay.

In light of these differences, Germany and France will need to intensify their efforts to cooperate and coordinate policies to avoid showing more divisions. This would also help strengthen the EU's position and facilitate deepening strategic European policies.

Even though it is extremely unlikely that accession negotiations will see any tangible progress in the foreseeable future, they remain vital to keeping diplomatic channels between both sides open. Despite the many internal issues the EU is facing, efforts should be made to steer EU-Turkey relations towards a more conciliatory note. France could act as a mediator to facilitate opening talks on modernizing the customs union – one of the few instruments left to the EU as a framework for pursuing EU-Turkey relations.

Meanwhile, more immediate results could be achieved by establishing a trilateral dialogue between Germany, France, and Turkey as a more flexible approach than the EU framework. Such trilateral channels could be used to work on contentious issues, particularly concerning the rule of law, civil liberties and human rights in Turkey. Equally, they could be employed to improve cooperation in areas such as counterterrorism, military cooperation and energy security, notably with regard to improved information sharing and long-term strategic planning.

While these specific formats should remain under Franco-German leadership, they should be kept flexible enough to include other European countries in matters where these are concerned. Greece and possibly Italy should, for example, be involved in talks on migration and matters relating to border security. The UK could also be an important partner – not only because of its role in security and defence cooperation, but also because Turkey and the UK have been seeking closer bilateral relations in the wake of Brexit.

If France and Germany can agree a coordinated strategy that takes into account their distinct interests, trilateral structures could complement – or offer “provisional alternatives” to – the accession framework. They could also help to transcend a strictly European frame, for example on security and issues related to counterterrorism. This trilateral approach might also prove useful in light of NATO's current internal difficulties, including Turkey's distrust of the alliance following the alleged involvement of Turkish NATO personnel in the July 2016 coup attempt,



and the dispute between Turkey and the United States over the support of the YPG in Syria.

At the same time, the different nature of Berlin's and Paris' bilateral ties with Ankara offers advantages. Turkey's relative economic weakness allows leverage especially for Germany, and Germany should use its economic ties with Turkey to re-balance negotiations. France, in turn, can use its relatively good diplomatic relations with Turkey, and its strategic clout in the Middle East to address political issues more directly. Of course, such a two-fold approach requires close previous and on-going coordination by France and Germany to avoid falling into the trap of getting divided.

Cumulating France's and Germany's different strengths in relations with Turkey is essential to reach more coherent and effective negotiation capabilities toward Turkey. This could also reflect positively at EU level. To be effective, however, any trilateral framework depends not only on Germany's and France's ability to bridge their differences and develop a coordinated strategy. It equally requires Turkey's willingness to engage. Turkish domestic

and regional developments, especially in Syria, will therefore have an important impact. However, such a targeted approach could meet Turkey's need to revive its alliance system and build new instruments of negotiation with the West at a time when its relationship with the United States is under serious strain. In light of that strain, and also given the unpredictability of the current U.S. administration, it may be advisable to disconnect any such initiative from the transatlantic framework.

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