

Opening up the Franco-German Dialogue: How Trialogues Can Enhance European Integration

Edited by Claire Demesmay and Hans Stark

Summary Among the EU's many bilateral relationships, the longstanding Franco-German tandem is without equal. Nevertheless, the highly institutionalized partnership must adapt its driving force to the reality of the enlarged EU (within the context of different crises). After all, a great many dividing lines exist within today's 28-member union – be it the economic north-south divide revealed by the economic crisis, the traditional opposition between large and small member states, or the differences between those who belong to the euro zone and those who do not. In this sense, greater openness to third partners must round out Franco-German cooperation. Here, the authors explore ten such possible triangular configurations and point to an even larger series of potentially productive “trialogues.” The case studies highlight four major themes, reflecting current topics for which common policies are urgently needed: economic policy, foreign and security policy, energy policy, and migration policy. As the EU confronts a heretofore unprecedented number of crises, it is crucial both to reinforce the Franco-German dialogue and at the same time to open it up to other partners.

Acknowledgements

This publication was generously supported by the Robert Bosch Stiftung and the Comité d'études des relations franco-allemandes (Cerfa).

Robert Bosch Stiftung



This study came about within the framework of the Franco-German Future Dialogue, a program for young Franco-German leaders established in 2007 by the Comité d'études des relations franco-allemandes (Cerfa, or the committee for study of Franco-German relations), the French Institute for Foreign Relations (Ifri), and the German Council on Foreign Relations (DGAP), in cooperation with and with generous support from the Robert Bosch Stiftung.

The Future Dialogue opened its doors to other members of the European Union for the first time in 2014 – first to Italy, then to the United Kingdom. The goal was to associate future decision makers from a third country with Franco-German exchanges on current European questions, and in doing so to enrich the discussions. This format proved its worth and is now an integral part of the program.

Since the Future Dialogue is itself experimenting with opening Franco-German cooperation up to other parties, it seemed important to enrich the reflections on forms of trilateral cooperation in the service of European integration. To do this we needed to shake up old habits of thought and show creativity. The exercise was well worth the effort, and the case studies assembled here sketch out many promising directions for further study.

The 2014 participants in the Franco-German Future Dialogue not only experimented with various trilateral formats but also discussed the topic during the program's three seminars held in the course of the year. The fruit of that exchange is published here as an appendix to this collection.

We are grateful to the study's contributors for joining this intellectual exercise. Several of them are former participants of the Future Dialogue. We thank Belinda Cooper and Miranda Robbins for translating from German and French, respectively. We very warmly thank Julie Hamann, who energetically helped us from the project's inception all the way through to its realization.

Finally, we extend our heartfelt thanks to the Robert Bosch Stiftung and Cerfa for providing crucial financial support to this study.

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New Partners, New Projects, New Solidarity

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With contributions by Céline-Agathe Caro, Claire Demesmay, Julie Hamann, Barbara Kunz, Isabelle Maras, Catherine Palpant, Vivien Pertusot, Julian Rappold, Yann-Sven Rittelmeyer, Theresia Töglhofer, and Natasha Wunsch

Introduction

The Franco-German tandem has a double purpose. First of all, it aims to smooth and overcome divergent interests and forge bilateral positions on both sides of the Rhine. In addition to this, it exercises leadership on common agreements that are both acceptable to the other EU partner countries and, to the extent that this is possible, open to them. Since the Treaty of Lisbon's difficult ratification and the 2010 outbreak of debt crisis in the eurozone, however, France and Germany have found it increasingly difficult to fulfill this double role. Experts and observers speak today of an unprecedented "crisis" (unseen since 1949) in the two countries' relations, both in terms of leadership and of mutual trust. The crisis has only been amplified by the dramatic worsening since 2009 of the economies of EU countries bordering the Mediterranean, alongside the accentuation of economic differences between France and Germany both in terms of performance and in the debate over reforms.

Yet when it comes to defending higher values such as peace and security in Europe, Franco-German cooperation has always been present. The reactions of German leaders to the January 2015 terrorist attacks in Paris recently attested to this. So did Franco-German leadership in efforts to solve the Ukraine crisis, which led to the Minsk Treaty a month later. The very existence of negotiations involving Paris, Berlin, Moscow, and Kiev in the framework provided by the Normandy format both at the level of the foreign ministers as well as at the highest echelon serves as a reminder that the EU cannot forego the Franco-German tandem in conducting dialogue with a third country as soon as its vital interests are at stake.¹ The negotiations involving François Hollande, Angela Merkel, and Vladimir Putin have shown that Putin is not in a position to divide the Europeans. They also show that, in matters of war and peace, even the EU's highest

officials (the President of the Council of Europe or the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy) do not carry the same weight as the duo formed by the German Chancellor and the President of the French Republic.

Paris and Berlin, moreover, have a specific interest in reestablishing their duo as a driving force within the European context. Working with France permits Germany to take on an international role that corresponds to its economic power without playing the part of the "lone ranger" – which its partners would not hesitate to label a "will to power." As for France, the partnership allows it to assert that its current economic crisis in no way calls into question its conception of its place in the world and the responsibilities this entails. The Franco-German tandem's role in the Russia-Ukraine crisis, even if it may not ultimately achieve the desired effect, also underlines the extent to which the short-lived idea of divvying up geographic tasks in the EU's neighborhood policy (the south for France, the east for Germany) was erroneous and counterproductive. France does not have the means – if it ever had them – to serve as the sole intermediary between the EU and the countries south of the Mediterranean basin. Former President Nicolas Sarkozy learned a bitter lesson from his projected Union for the Mediterranean. The same is true for Germany, which cannot serve as the sole spokesman toward Russia on behalf of the entire EU; for that scenario would amount to transforming the central EU countries back into *Mittleuropa* and thereby weaken European equilibrium.

Whatever the degree of rapprochement between France and Germany as of early 2015, and whatever the desire of the two countries' leaders to exercise common leadership, the tandem nevertheless faces structural difficulties. Even before the EU was enlarged to the east, Franco-German cooperation was characterized as

“indispensable, but insufficient.” The EU’s shift from 15 to 28 member states has only made this deficit more obvious, which makes it more important than ever to open up the duo to other actors and dynamics. On numerous occasions – whether at the time of the war in Iraq of 2003 or the efforts to save the eurozone during the “Merkozy” era (the neologism formed by combining the names of the two leaders at the time, Merkel and Sarkozy) – exclusive Franco-German bilateralism has met with outside resistance. Sustainable and visible dialogue with partner countries as well as with the European Parliament and the European Commission has become a condition for advancing Franco-German proposals, which are often the result of compromise and born of the initial differences between Paris and Berlin. After all, a great many dividing lines exist within the 28-member EU – whether the economic north-south divide revealed by the economic crisis, the traditional opposition between the “large” and “small” member states, or even the differences at the level of integration between those who belong to the eurozone and those who do not – to say nothing of those for whom an exit from the euro could be possible, or even an exit from the EU itself.

In this sense, greater openness to third countries must in the long term accompany Franco-German cooperation – whether or not these third countries be EU member states. The “trilogue” format should certainly not limit itself to a country like Russia when it challenges Europe’s security. It is also vital for partners with whom France and Germany hold traditionally close ties – ties that are nonetheless not without their friction or tension – such as Great Britain, Italy, or even Poland. This also applies to countries thrust center stage by current circumstances, such as Greece in terms of debt crisis management, or Turkey in the war against the Islamic State. Beyond this, trilateral conversation can and must involve groups of countries that are close for geopolitical reasons to such a degree that despite their differences they genuinely share experiences and interests, even if they do not always share the same positions. The Nordic countries, for example, because of their proximity to Russia, are aware of the destabilizing risk that country represents. Another example are the countries of the Western Balkans, which, as potential EU candidates, are the source of many migrants to the EU.

Holding exchanges in a more systematic manner would help fill many gaps and thereby adapt the Franco-German tandem’s driving force to the reality of the enlarged EU. In doing so, they would help the EU overcome the dividing lines that crisscross the Union despite its charac-

teristic European spirit and willingness to compromise. France and Germany, as central geographic, demographic, and economic EU powers, have particular relationships with each of the EU’s member states, albeit in different shapes and forms. Raising the level of cooperation among France, Germany, and “third countries” could thus ultimately contribute to surmounting these flaws and consolidating the Union as a whole.

Just because they need to open up their cooperation does not mean that Berlin and Paris should abandon their current bilateral relationship and substitute in its place an institutionalized trilateral cooperation that would take up the same codes and mechanisms (joint council of ministers, meetings of members of parliament, exchanges of officials, for example). The tandem must be not only preserved but also consolidated, for it represents a precious achievement based on a culture of exchange and compromise that has been enriched over time. It is more a matter of complementing this cooperation on an ad hoc basis with formats that are more open, flexible, and informal depending on what issues are at stake. There is absolutely no need to create new mechanisms or institutions for this to work. Quite the contrary. What matters here is that France and Germany bring third parties into their discussions. In doing so, they will make their positions more complementary, therefore enriching them, will be able to increase the weight of their respective positions at the international level and finally, and above all, give them more legitimacy in the eyes of their European partners.

This study explores the potential but also the limits of opening up Franco-German cooperation. It would have been neither practicable nor pertinent to sketch all 26 possible triangular constellations that might result from introducing other EU members into the dialogue. Rather, in order to give an account of the complexity of European governance, this publication concentrates on just a few key players. All are very different, and each example points to a particular form of cooperation that might be seen as typical. Most of these involve EU member states, with varied degrees of integration. Some of them participate in all aspects of European policy, starting with monetary union – for example Italy and Greece. Others, like Poland, are outside the eurozone but plan to join it one day. Still others, such as the United Kingdom, rule out this possibility while also keeping clear of the EU Customs Union. Among those third countries most likely to work closely with the Franco-German tandem, we also find states that are not part of the EU but could nonetheless make interesting partners, such as Turkey and the countries of the Western Balkans. Finally, two case

studies explore the opening of the Franco-German duo to the EU's two major institutions: first, the European Commission, whose role has in the course of the past decades been limited by its intergovernmental character of crisis management but which could develop now that Jean-Claude Juncker has taken over its presidency; and second, the European Parliament, a body that is not suited to cultivating privileged relations with member states but is nonetheless an institution in which Germany carries particular weight, particularly compared to France, and in which the informal forums for negotiation could play a stronger role.

To ensure comparability of results, the ten case studies presented here are structured along similar lines. All of the authors consider the same three sets of questions. First, they identify what the trilateral cooperation in question has thus far been able to attain and the compromises reached in the past insofar as this contributed to European integration. They then analyze the positions of their respective trilateral partners, highlighting their traditional differences on particular subjects, and infer the overlapping interests and potential points of conflict within the triangles they have sketched. Finally, they identify the policy areas and specific projects of particular promise for future trilateral cooperation.

As different as these triangular constellations may be, all of the authors arrive at the same two-fold conclusion. For one thing, they note the strong asymmetry between the Franco-German duo on one hand and the third party in question, on the other – at the same time highlighting the high degree of institutionalization within the bilateral cooperation, which has no equal among other intra-European bilateral relationships. Beyond this, they note the various types of asymmetry – above all in terms of historical experience, especially for states that are not EU members or that joined the EU at a later phase, such as Romania, and have not yet achieved integration. Asymmetry also takes economic form, as for example in a country like Poland, despite positive momentum of recent years, or Greece, which is entangled in a crisis that prevents it from developing any constructive cooperation with partners. Finally, asymmetry also touches member states whose engagement in terms of European integration is weak or even regressive, as with the United Kingdom, or a country like Italy for whom EU policy has only limited impact, despite its pro-European attitude.

There is general consensus that France and Germany form the real core around which the European Union will continue to be built in the future. If the authors have not hesitated to recall some of the duo's difficulties formulat-

ing a common vision and giving impetus to integration, they hardly envision an alternative to continued cooperation. They therefore imagine trilateral cooperation in a complementary mode – and this is the second shared consensus. All the authors favor it, even if they tend to temper their optimism with caution. The most pessimistic of the texts, however, is the one touching on cooperation with the United Kingdom. Precisely because of the above-mentioned imbalances, as well as different goals regarding European integration, most of our authors consider the prospects of trialogues to be limited. None of them refers to one ideal trio. At the same time, on very particular issues, they identify potential that is very much worth exploring in greater depth.

Four major themes emerge, all referring to current topics on which member states continue to act in a piecemeal way and for which common policies are urgently needed. Several years after the beginning of the debt crisis, these include first and foremost economic questions, whether relating to the completion of monetary union and to the administration of public debt (Italy, European Commission, European Parliament) or the fight against poverty and social exclusion (Romania, the Balkans), or the deepening of the common market (United Kingdom). Now, with the EU facing growing instability on its frontiers alongside the risk of terrorism, a number of authors call for a global approach to foreign policy and security. It is evident that geography is a determining criterion here. Certain member states (Poland, Romania, the Nordic countries) are more concerned with the eastern neighborhood, while others (Greece, Italy, Turkey) are focused on the region to the south of the Mediterranean. The Ukraine crisis and tensions with Russia have not only revived interest in questions of common defense but have also shown the importance of developing a common energy policy. From this perspective, the goal is to guarantee continuity of energy supply while at the same time meeting the ambitious climate objectives (Poland, Greece, Turkey, Northern Europe, European Commission, and European Parliament). Finally, the studies in the collection regularly mention migration policies, relating both to intra-European migration (Romania, Balkans) as well as the management of the influx of refugees coming from the south (Italy, Greece, Turkey, European Commission), particularly due to the civil war in Syria.

Only rarely have Europeans simultaneously been confronted with so many acute crises, crises touching not only on the internal cohesion of the European Union but also on the international context. This unprecedented situation, coupled with tensions within the Franco-German

relationship, will oblige them to show imagination and to dare to try new forms of cooperation. If it is crucial to reinforce the indispensable Franco-German dialogue, it is also important to open up that dialogue to other partners. From this perspective, it is essential to foster the intersection of different constellations in formats involving three or more states. Such a pragmatic approach would not only permit a deepening of substantive discussions, and therefore advance integration on particular subjects; it would also reduce obstacles that are connected to implicit hierarchies, whether defined by economic power or by

the size of the states. If Paris and Berlin have a particular responsibility here in agreeing to open their dialogue to less experienced parties or parties with lesser degrees of integration, not everything depends upon them. Their partners, too, must be prepared to involve themselves in these exchanges and to play the game of compromise. Only in this way can the Franco-German tandem reconnect with its original vocation.

[Claire Demesmay and Hans Stark](#)
[Berlin and Paris, May 2015](#)

France, Germany, Greece: The Potential for Cooperation Despite the Crisis

Julian Rappold

Greece plays only a marginal role in shaping long-term strategic partnerships among European member states. Both on the trilateral level and in the respective bilateral relationships involving Berlin and Athens and Paris and Athens, there are no regular formats that could lend any weight to joint action on the European level. Not least because of the country's marginal geographic location, Greece has generally had very limited opportunities for long-term strategic cooperation. The prospects for German-French-Greek cooperation will thus continue to remain quite limited in the future – especially because Greece is primarily concerned with overcoming its own economic and debt crisis. Moreover, the German-Greek relationship and, for different reasons, the Franco-German relationship have been considerably impaired in recent years. With the formation of the new Greek coalition government under Alexis Tsipras of the Syriza party, the existing conflicts have once again become more acute. And yet there is potential for joint initiatives – especially on the subjects of European asylum and refugee policy, European energy and climate policy, and the Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP).

Greece's Late Europeanization: from Troublemakers to EU Enthusiasts

Greece did not enter the European Community until 1981 and is therefore a latecomer to the European project compared to France and Germany. In these early years, the Greek government of Prime Minister Andreas Papandreu did not involve itself in European decision-making processes at the European level unless its national interests were at stake. The country's European policy was geared toward the Community's generous financial endowment with money from the European Structural and Cohesion Funds. Not until the mid-1990s, with the prospect of accession to the European Economic and Monetary Union, did a Europeanization process become visible in Greece. This turned Athens into a dedicated advocate of strengthening and expanding the EU (with the exception of actively blocking the accession candidacies of Macedonia and Turkey). It is important to emphasize that Greece, despite resistance, has always participated in every integration step and therefore sees itself as an integral part of the EU.

A similarly “delayed Europeanization” can be observed in Greek foreign policy. Greece's geographic location on the EU's southeastern periphery – long reinforced by the fact that the country had no common internal borders with other EU member states – contributed to destructive Greek behavior on issues of European foreign and security policy at the European level, behavior that was largely driven by its own security interests.² When the Iron Curtain was lifted, Athens no longer shared a common geographical interest with its European partners. In particular, Athens felt that its NATO partners had paid insufficient attention to Greece's historically fraught relationship with Turkey during the bloc confrontations of the Cold War and even afterward. In the Yugoslav wars, Greece's pro-Serbia stance was seen as problematic by its European partners.³ It was not until the mid-1990s that the country's foreign policy began to normalize. Athens engaged more strongly on the European level and thus managed to put Greece's foreign policy interests on the European agenda.⁴

The Greek Economic and Debt Crisis as an Obstacle to Cooperation

The economic and debt crisis that began in 2008 considerably reduced Greece's opportunities for cooperation. From the perspective of Berlin and Paris, there is thus no particular incentive for a German-French-Greek partnership going beyond their respective bilateral relationships within the framework of EU institutions. Even if France and Germany were interested in deeper cooperation, Greece currently does not seem capable of advancing substantive European projects. Greece did bring its EU Council presidency to a satisfactory conclusion in the first half of 2014, despite its economic and political problems.⁵ Nevertheless, any Greek government must now devote its entire political capital to negotiating sustainable solutions with international donors and dealing with the mountain of Greek debt. Only this will give the country long-term economic prospects. Meanwhile, the political environment in Greece continues to seem extremely unstable. Although the political situation has settled down since the change of government in January 2015 to a left-right coalition under Prime Minister Tsipras, the battle lines between Greece and its European backers regarding a lasting solution to the Greek debt problem have been drawn more firmly than ever. But a stable environment is a necessary prerequisite for long-term cooperation.

The crisis not only limits the Greek government's ability to cooperate. It also reflects tensions on the direction

of European economic policy throughout the eurozone, which have of course been a particular strain to German-French relations as well. After long wrestling, Paris and Berlin were able to agree to a common approach in rescuing Greece, but the fundamental question remains: how much solidarity, and what type, does Europe – and Greece in particular – need in the crisis?⁶ For Berlin, solidarity and European action mean above all that each member state works responsibly for an economically strong Europe. For France, solidarity is based on the understanding that all member states depend on one another as parts of a community. These divergent views gave rise to the dispute between Germany and France over the appropriate instruments for coping with the crisis. Both sides have now revised their maximalist demands for “growth” and “austerity,” but the differing emphases remain.

An example of this is the joint demand by France and Italy for a more flexible interpretation of the Stability and Growth Pact. The new coalition government in Athens should actually be a welcome partner for Paris and Rome in gaining the power of interpretation over Berlin on this point. However, the Tsipras government’s forceful behavior regarding the negotiations on payment of the last installment of the bailout package during its early weeks in office at the beginning of 2015 left it isolated at the European level.

Athens generally views Germany’s attitude toward the economic crisis as unyielding. Certainly, bilateral German-Greek relations are now badly strained, especially since the change of government in Athens. The situation has worsened with Greek demands that Germany pay billions in World War II reparations as well as by the vilification of Angela Merkel at demonstrations and in the Greek media. Berlin had sought to step up dialogue and to support the reform efforts of the former Greek coalition government led by the conservative Antonis Samaras. In the initial negotiations on payment of the final installment of the bailout package, Berlin and Athens chose to take a confrontational route, which brought relations to a new low. The new Tsipras government will nevertheless also find that its ability to act requires balancing its recognition of the Greek public’s criticism of the German position with the need to maintain at least a modicum of constructive cooperation with Berlin.

For cultural and historical reasons, too, Greece is oriented more strongly toward France, which significantly helped the country both in 1974 during its return from military dictatorship to democracy and at the time of its accession to the EU in 1981. The bilateral relationship remains generally intact, although Greek hopes that the

election of François Hollande would bring about substantive change in European crisis management have been dashed.

Yet It Does Exist: The Potential for Trilateral Cooperation

There is nonetheless potential for common initiatives by the three states in certain areas. Given Greece’s strategically significant geographical location in the eastern Mediterranean, three particular subjects can be identified: immigration policy; energy and climate policy; and security policy.

One of Greece’s central interests must be to gain German and French support for coordinated action in European asylum and refugee policy. Within the framework of its EU Council presidency, the Greek government already took a stand on this issue, and it has now also appointed the EU Commissioner of Migration, Home Affairs, and Citizenship Dimitris Avramopoulos. Greece has a strong sense of urgency regarding asylum and refugees for several reasons. On the one hand, the numerous conflicts in the Middle East and North Africa have increased pressure on Europe’s outer borders and turned the country into the main gateway for illegal migration into the EU. On the other hand, social tensions within the country are growing due to the economic and debt crisis. The new government in Athens wants to fundamentally reform the country’s asylum and immigration policy, which has repeatedly been criticized internationally in recent years for its inefficiency in processing asylum applications, its inadequate acceptance criteria, and its focus on sealing off its own external borders. Athens is therefore now demanding a common European migration system with rights and duties for all European partners.⁷ According to Athens, this would be accompanied by a revision of the Dublin Process and thus also involve greater financial support for member states at the EU’s external borders as well as fairer burden sharing. Germany and France currently oppose any reforms, however. The French government, in particular, faces massive pressure from the right-wing populist Front National. But given the steadily growing flow of refugees into Europe, uniform regulations at the European level are increasingly urgent. Germany and France have the most asylum applications in absolute terms and should therefore also be interested in raising the standards of the asylum system and harmonizing it throughout Europe.

Another key subject is European energy and climate policy. Against the background of the Ukraine crisis and

the conflict with Russia, the subject of energy security has taken on a new dynamic. Germany, France and Greece have very different contributions to make to the key factors of energy efficiency, renewable energy, and increased diversification, and they should therefore call together for a comprehensive European strategy. From the Greek perspective, renewable energy offers great potential for a sustainable economic recovery. Tsipras's Syriza party would like to exploit this potential even further and thus considerably reduce dependence on fossil fuels. In addition, because of its very favorable geostrategic situation, Greece is a central energy hub for gas supply from the southern corridor of the EU.⁸ It will be one of the transit countries for the Trans-Adriatic Pipeline (TAP), which will transport gas from the Caspian Sea to Europe and thus avoid Russian territory. Furthermore, as the hub in the EU, Greece plays a key role in developing the newly discovered gas deposits off the Israeli coast and Cyprus, as well as in importing liquefied natural gas.

Finally, Germany, France, and Greece have overlapping interests at the security policy level. If Greece is to sufficiently preserve its traditional security interests under pressure of reduced financial means, greater communitization of the Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP), especially with regard to "pooling" and "sharing" military capabilities, is unavoidable. Whether the

new Greek government will actually downgrade Greece's strategic orientation toward the West remains to be seen. Paris continues to be an important shaper of security policy in the EU, despite its strong criticism of the CSDP. In addition, in Germany, too, there is now an intensive debate on increased German engagement in the area of foreign and security policy. The increasing destabilization in the immediate neighborhood of the EU has heightened the EU's need to rethink its current strategy. This also makes it more necessary for Germany to become involved.

These examples show that despite the current crisis mode, Greece can still make a significant contribution to the European integration process. At the same time, however, it is clear that power in the triangle described here is asymmetrically distributed. This is true not only for the dependent relationship between Germany and Greece. France, too, has lost influence to Germany in regard to economic policy. But this is also perhaps the source of the triangle's greatest potential. If the three partners can actually manage to cooperate on one of the areas mentioned above, this would not only be a factual contribution to the European integration process. It would also send a signal to other member states that the rifts created by the economic and debt crisis within the EU can be overcome.

France, Germany, Italy: Enough of Playing Second Fiddle

Claire Demesmay

From a historical point of view, there is a certain logic to imagining a cooperation involving France, Germany, and Italy in European politics. All three were founding states in the European Economic Community and belong today to the eurozone, the European Union's most integrated area. At the same time, however, Italy has up until now kept a certain distance from the Franco-German relationship. While seeking to "avoid a strategic downgrading" (*déclassement*), the country has left leadership to its two neighbors.⁹ The recent arrival of a young and ambitious politician, Matteo Renzi, could change the situation, however. Italy could move from its traditional secondary role and enter into the group of primary actors, as it sought to do during its presidency of the European Council in the second half of 2014. At a time when France is currently too weak domestically to take initiatives, when Germany is dithering on leadership, and when the Franco-German relationship is not particularly productive, would it be possible to re-launch European integration by associating Italy? What (im)balances serve as the basis for this trilateral constellation? What would the motivations for such a cooperation be? And above all, what is its potential?

Asymmetries and Variable Coalitions

A constellation involving the three countries involves a set of unequal bilateral relations. Traditionally, the first coalition opposes France and Germany on one side against Italy on the other. Compared to the strongly institutionalized Franco-German couple, long marked by its culture of exchange and compromise, Italy's relations with its two neighbors has lacked consistency. Above all, those relations have had no equivalent impact on European integration compared to the Franco-German connection. Certainly the Italian peninsula has seen its share of important European statesmen and participated in all of the EU's grand political projects, but unlike France and Germany – who have, together, initiated most of the great European projects – Italy has rarely been a propelling force. The last major project to date, the introduction of the euro, was negotiated between Paris and Bonn/Berlin, without Rome managing to make its voice heard.

In addition to this primary coalition, there is a second one, which aligns itself according to traditional division of northern from southern Europe. Here it is not a

question of institutionalized cooperation but of shared challenges. To varying degrees, both France and Italy suffer from substantial unemployment rates, particularly among young people¹⁰; from high public debt that continues to grow; and from difficulties undertaking structural reforms. From this point of view, the fact that Spain and Portugal have managed to push through difficult reforms in the course of recent years brings France a little bit closer to Italy. Brussels – and Berlin – tend to see them as the worst pupils in the EU classroom. Confronted with these common problems, Paris and Rome also share certain positions, denouncing a policy of austerity that they consider to be counterproductive, or even dangerous, in the middle of a period of economic stagnation and high unemployment.

If there is indeed a double asymmetry, the reality behind it is more nuanced, however. Italy and Germany also share certain socio-economic givens that do not hold in France. Among these, one can cite the fact that the economies of both countries are grounded in a manufacturing system made up of successful small and medium-sized enterprises geared toward exports (mid-range businesses for Italy, high-end ones for Germany). Likewise, these are the two countries in Europe that are most affected by aging demographics, while France remains dynamic in this regard. These factors, which help shape economic policy considerations and set priorities, do explain certain discrepancies between France and Italy.

The fact that Italy is traditionally attached to the concept of European integration should also be considered. Like Germany, it is a federal state, and it is not rare in Italy to regard the EU as a means of overcoming the country's own problems. Certainly, in Rome as in so many European capitals, political leaders and citizens alike are openly critical of policy making in Brussels. In principle, however, the ideas of federalism and of transferring sovereignty do not arouse anything close to the same kind of tension seen in France. Under these conditions, and working within a coalition of willing states, Italy could well be in a position to contribute to re-launching the integration project.

Moving beyond Power Relations

Faced with the difficulty of outlining Franco-German compromises in the context of the economic crisis, Paris and Berlin are regularly tempted to turn to Italy in order to push the boundaries of the debate on Europe – not working in tandem but, rather, on an ad hoc basis, often at the expense of their bilateral relations. Each of them

essentially considers an alliance with Rome to be an occasionally convenient means of adding extra weight to relations with their traditional partner.

President François Hollande, having promised during his campaign to soften the course of EU policy, allied himself with Italy and Spain upon arriving in power. At the European Summit of June 2012, he supported demands made by the Italian and Spanish heads of government to lower interest rates in countries affected by the crisis. In doing so, he ran up against the German chancellor, who was obliged to yield in the face of this strong trio. If the French president has managed since then to avoid confrontation with Berlin, he has pursued cooperation with Italy in order to prevail on those themes on which he disagrees with Angela Merkel – notably how to stimulate growth in Europe. It was in this spirit that he invited leaders of the left to the Elysée Palace before the European Council of June 2014, meeting in advance with Matteo Renzi, who openly challenged Berlin by denouncing the rigidity of the EU's economic policy and demanding that investments no longer be considered in calculations of government debt. Paris hoped – in vain – that such an alliance would give it a bigger voice than Germany.

In this context, the risk for Angela Merkel was that she would appear isolated. Though she flatly rejected the demands coming from Rome, she also showed a willingness to soften the lines of debate. Here, the warm reception she gave Matteo Renzi during his visit to Berlin in March 2014 contrasted with the severity with which Hollande is viewed in Germany. If the Italian prime minister is an inconvenience, he also embodies a dynamic and courageous Italy. His discourse of reform and his domestic popularity – confirmed by his party's extremely good results in the European elections of May 2014 – are appealing to German leaders, who have grown impatient with France's sluggishness in undertaking structural reforms. Since then, the atmosphere has cooled somewhat. While Germans express irritation at the Italian government's slowness, Renzi has declared that he doesn't need to be lectured by Germany.¹¹ Certainly, we should not expect some new motor of European integration that can be conveniently labelled "Merkenzi" (in reference to "Merkozy" – the collective nickname once given to Merkel and Nicolas Sarkozy when those two leaders worked together to steer the response to the European sovereign debt crisis). For Berlin, meanwhile, the cooperation with Italy remains a useful way of keeping pressure on Paris. The French government is perfectly aware that it wants to avoid being marginalized and therefore carefully monitors the announcements coming from Rome.

If this sort of alliance intermittently allows both France and Germany to realize some of their demands, in the long term it creates tensions that are harmful to their bilateral cooperation. Such relations naturally test the two countries' mutual trust, already quite battered by the crisis. By extension, it also damages their capacity to take common initiatives. Rather than treating Italy like a tool in a three-way game of poker, France and Germany should have every interest in incorporating the country into its discussions. This is what the three respective ministers of European affairs sought to accomplish in July 2014, during the Italian Council presidency. Their joint call for more solidarity and competitiveness in the EU reflects the desire to reach a compromise.¹² But the impact of this initiative will remain limited if the baton is not passed at the highest levels of the state. In November it was the turn of the three finance ministers, who demanded a European directive against tax optimization in a letter to the new European commissioner for economic and monetary affairs, Pierre Moscovici.¹³ Considering the profiles of the authors and in light of current events, this initiative may have a greater chance of success.

Potential Areas of Trilateral Cooperation

A number of matters lend themselves to Franco-German-Italian cooperation, starting with economic questions. Their positions on growth have become closer in the course of 2014. Like Paris, Rome has high expectations of the policy of fiscal stimulus coordinated at the European level. Ever since Germany supported the Juncker Plan, there has been no substantial disagreement, unless it is over the actual amount of investment. As for what projects to finance, the lists submitted to the Commission by the eurozone's three largest economies are certainly in competition with one another, but they also present some points of convergence that could lead to cooperation, particularly in the digital sphere, renewable energy, and transport – three areas in which heavy investment is required in the short and long term.

The second major economic topic relates to the monitoring of reforms. Paris and Berlin are at odds on the questions of a contractual obligation of member states and sanctions in instances of non-compliance with EU rules. Under these circumstances, Italy's proposal of reinforcing monitoring – and with it, the supervising powers of Brussels – could serve as an interesting base for negotiation even while still according more flexibility to the states in interpreting the stability pact.¹⁴ Finally, for the three countries, the administration of public debt

remains a topic of central but difficult discussion. On the role of the European Central Bank (ECB) – and notably the question of repurchasing government bonds, which Paris and Rome support but which Berlin opposes – the positions are at odd with one another.¹⁵ This is witnessed by the permanent conflict between Mario Draghi, head of the ECB, and Jens Weidmann, president of the Bundesbank over the issues – which did not prevent the ECB from launching a program to repurchase government securities in March 2015. The disquieting situation in Italy, which had debt amounting to 135 percent of the GDP at the end of 2014, is not going to make these discussions any easier. At the same time, and in a paradoxical sense, it makes Italy's participation in these negotiations inevitable.¹⁶

Asylum and immigration policy are other European matters that urgently call for Franco-German-Italian cooperation. Europeans simply must do something in the face of the steep rise in asylum requests, especially those coming from Iraq and Syria. This is in the interest of a country like Italy, one of the main ports of entry to Europe for immigrants. Some 60,000 refugees arrived there in the first half of 2014 (compared to 9,000 one year earlier).¹⁷ But addressing this is also in the interest of Germany, which had the world's highest number of asylum applications in 2014, has taken in a large number of refugees to Europe, and is calling both for greater European solidarity in admitting refugees and for a political intervention in Libya on the part of the international community. Despite the fact that the issue was made a priority during Italy's Council presidency, the results in this area have been disappointing. The Juncker Commission broadened the post of Commissioner of Migration, Home Affairs and Citizenship, reflecting French and Italian wishes. What now remains is the task of conceiving a coherent common strategy that will curb purely national self-interest. The recent dramas marking the start of 2015, with hundreds of migrants perishing in the Mediterranean, signals just how urgent the situation has become.

Last but not least, trilateral cooperation could be of interest in the realm of foreign and security policy. Here the Franco-German cooperation has always been complicated, largely because of the two countries' very different foreign policy traditions. Despite attempts by the two foreign ministers, Laurent Fabius and Frank-Walter Steinmeier, to act in greater concert, the priorities of the two

countries are far from identical, particularly on the question of outside interventions. The Ukrainian crisis and the tensions with Russia – matters on which Paris and Berlin have been working hand in hand at the highest level – have indeed brought the two countries much closer together, as can be seen by the Minsk accords forged largely by President Hollande and Chancellor Merkel. The fact remains, however, that the intensity of the crisis, even if it has shown the potential for Franco-German leadership on questions of war and peace, certainly involves the association of other partners.

Italy is of course not a foreign policy heavyweight, and its defense budget is limited, but a number of Italian soldiers do take part in international missions abroad.¹⁸ Moreover, the Renzi administration has shown strong interest in coherent external action. Federica Mogherini's appointment as EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, which Renzi had taken up as a personal matter, could reinforce Italy's involvement in these matters. Certainly, such a cooperation would have substantial added value for the Mediterranean region, which Rome sees as a priority – a priority it shares with Paris and, to a slightly lesser extent, with Berlin.¹⁹ But it also has a potential to conduct dialogue with Russia, with whom Italy maintains very close trade relations and which will continue to occupy the attention of Europeans for many years to come – though only if the Italian government resists the temptation to play the Lone Ranger, as Renzi did in March 2015 when he appeared in Moscow.

Re-launching European integration will of course need more than simply substituting Franco-German-Italian cooperation for the Franco-German tandem.²⁰ At the same time, at a difficult juncture for the Franco-German relationship, when it is having a hard time serving as a driving force, bringing Italy in on the considerations and the negotiations – especially regarding the subjects mentioned above – could help move certain issues forward again. It could also help regain trust that was eroded in the game of bilateral alliances. A cooperation of this sort does not need to be institutionalized. Quite the contrary, it should remain flexible and, depending on the subjects at hand, remain open to working with other partners as well. At any rate, Paris and Berlin have every interest in bringing Italy to stand alongside them on the stage.

France, Germany, Poland: Going beyond the Symbolic to Realize Potential

Isabelle Maras

Despite their very distinct political, historical, and economic trajectories, France, Germany, and Poland are connected by the Weimar Triangle, which embodies the growing interdependence of these three countries. Certainly this format has seen difficult times without bearing tangible results since its creation in 1991.²¹ During the outbreak of the Ukraine crisis in November 2013, it returned to the regional and European stage, but only for a short time and only to be eclipsed in the summer of 2014 by the “Normandy format,” a four-part meeting involving Berlin, Moscow, Kiev, and Paris first held alongside the June 2014 ceremonies marking the seventieth anniversary of the Normandy landings.

One of the European Union’s “new members,” Poland has undergone a change of approach in its foreign policy since joining the EU in 2004, consolidating its firm anchor in Europe as a guarantee of its strategic security. Due to various factors – its geopolitical position, its considerable size, and a national history deeply marked by the European upheavals of the twentieth-century – it has progressively become an “actor that matters” within the EU and is seeking to establish a leading position among its neighbors in the east. In the context of the double crisis facing Europe (a crisis of legitimacy as well as an economic one), Poland has adopted a proactive approach in order to play a role in EU developments. In the decade since it joined the Union, the country first experienced extremely strong “Euro-enthusiasm” before Polish public opinion, starting in 2013, began to succumb to pessimism about the European project.²²

Under these conditions, is Poland in a position to free itself from the asymmetry at the heart of its trilateral relations with France and Germany in order to revive the Weimar format and, beyond that, give fresh impetus to the project of European integration? What are the shared interests and points of imbalance affecting the triangle? In what areas could compromise take shape and where can potential be realized?

Limited Economic Cooperation, Marked by Asymmetry

In economic terms, Poland has seen excellent results in recent years. Its economy was the only one in Europe that managed to avoid recession during the financial crisis of

2009. Its rate of growth was strongly positive during the period 2008–12 (cumulative growth of 15 percent between 2008 and 2011), despite a marked downturn in 2012.²³ This should not, however, mask certain structural weaknesses, which include high unemployment and a business model that relies on low wages.

The fact that Poland has not yet joined the monetary union makes cooperation with France and Germany on economic matters rather difficult. Germany has certainly made an important ally of Poland in response to the “the anti-austerity” coalition that unites France and Italy. The two countries moreover share the unhappy experience, albeit to different degrees, of structural reforms undertaken in the past two decades. Despite this, Poland finds itself *de facto* on the outside of all policy discussions held within the eurozone, even as the Franco-German tandem has itself been put to the test on this issue since the crisis began. Warsaw’s influence is all the more limited in that it expressed a critical view on the subject of the banking union in the fall of 2014, accusing it of mobilizing powers that should stay within the scope of member states. Furthermore, despite its hopes for the Weimar format, Poland is not a major guiding force among the countries of central Europe – for those countries often take different approaches.

Foreign and Security Policy: Toward a Lasting Convergence of Interests?

In terms of EU foreign policy, the Weimar Triangle showed some of its potential during the first months of the Ukraine crisis by acting as a “catalyst” for concerted European action, thereby helping Germany and Poland move beyond their rather tense differences. While Warsaw had hoped that Berlin would take a more proactive stance toward the conflict, including imposing more severe sanctions on Russia and delivering arms to the Ukrainian army, Germany never ceased to see diplomatic negotiation as one of the main levers for resolving the conflict, all the while maintaining waves of sanctions and hardening its discourse toward Russia in the fall of 2014. On this issue, France played its Franco-German policy card, even if it considers Poland to be an ally of some weight in the east – an ally that permits it to strengthen its position on Russia against Germany when the need arises.

Beginning in February 2014, the Weimar Triangle’s foreign ministers – Frank-Walter Steinmeier, Laurent Fabius, and Radoslaw Sikorski – met in order to draw up a possible resolution to the Ukraine crisis, breaking

a long period of hesitation and incoherence on the part of the EU's leaders in response to Russian impulsiveness. Their joint trip to Kiev can be seen as proof of the Weimar format's timely capacity to provide a genuine diplomatic – and newsworthy – lever when its members use it as a vehicle for conveying their united efforts.

In the meantime, however, it has not been able to build on that effort. After Sikorski left the Polish foreign ministry, Warsaw was not invited to join the negotiations in Minsk that led to the first cease-fire. The other countries of the Visegrad group (the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Hungary) have brought little to support this matter. For Ukrainians, the European leader is Berlin. Among other factors, Donald Tusk, the new president of the European Council, is still attempting to marshal European leaders toward a common position of consensus. The Normandy format has been privileged since June 2014 – without the participation of Tusk or Federica Mogherini, the EU's high representative for foreign affairs and security policy. It was the efforts of Normandy negotiators that led to the cease-fire of the Minsk treaty of February 12, 2015. Clearly, Franco-German diplomatic activity has eclipsed that of European institutions.

Future initiatives would therefore test the value of the Weimar format's credibility in terms of the EU's eastern policy.

The trilateral constellation could, moreover, be a factor for advances in the EU's external engagements and its defense policy. The Ukraine crisis has highlighted the strategic importance of defense questions and security architecture for its member states.²⁴ Now, Poland's constructive input on European debates (in particular reviving the common security and defense policy, which was a priority during Poland's 2011 presidency of the Council of the EU), with its significant participation in operations and exterior missions backed by France (such as the EU training mission in Mali of January 2013 and the French military operation Sangaris in the Central African Republic in December 2013), is a concrete spurting factor for this policy. Moreover, France and Poland have since 2013 worked in favor of NATO's operational capacity and the interoperability of armed forces, while a deeper bilateral cooperation is geared toward modernizing the Polish armed forces (as in the anti-missile defense system).²⁵ These Franco-Polish projects may contribute to improving the often tempestuous Franco-German discussions about the EU's external engagements, since Germany shows willingness to shoulder more responsibility externally.

Energy and Climate: Complicated but Vital Issues

In the year that the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP21) will take place in Paris, Europe's dossier on energy and climate has also become a matter of primordial importance for the trilateral cooperation.

Despite areas of disagreement, the geopolitical factor of Ukraine as well as the equally critical political instability in North Africa and the Middle East are pushing France, Germany, and Poland to make common cause with their European partners in order to develop a project for the European energy community, an idea that goes back a decade. At the height of the Ukraine crisis, in April 2014, Donald Tusk, Polish prime minister at the time, and President Hollande put forward the Franco-Polish proposal for the European Energy Union, with the goal of securing energy supply and reinforcing the EU's energy independence by putting European solidarity into practice in fulfilling its efforts to fight climate change.²⁶ As a result of these propositions, presented during the European Council of June 2014, the Commission accelerated its plan to launch work on the Energy Union by February 2015.

For Poland, the energy question has a security and strategic dimension that the Ukraine crisis has reinforced. The country is largely dependent on its Russian neighbor – for 55 percent of its natural gas consumption and 93 percent of its crude oil needs. Warsaw, which continues to be very dependent on fossil fuels, has until now held an entrenched position on questions of climate and resisted the transition to renewable energy, taking a leading position among the EU's eastern member states to obtain compensation. This position has complicated its cooperation with France and Germany. In 2014, all the while remaining determined about their climate objectives, Paris and Berlin nonetheless sought to take into consideration the energy constraints of each of the member states. Under their joint pressure, and as a result of the current strategic challenges, Poland seems ready to soften its stance on the goal of reducing CO₂ emissions by 2030. In doing so, it could also secure the support of other eastern European member states in favor of adopting an admittedly ambitious European plan of action on renewables as well as reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

On the European agenda, the issue of energy could take precedence over climate issues after the main European posts were allocated to countries dependent on Russian gas. In the medium term, member states need to make a choice between operations that remain driven by fossil fuels and putting a genuine energy transition into place. On this point, distinct constraints weigh on the three countries. As far as shale-gas extraction is

concerned, the German, French, and Polish positions currently diverge – a parliamentary investigation of environmental risks is underway in Germany; France has a ban on hydraulic fracturing; while Poland has launched its exploration – but they are evolving. By contrast, though Germany has ruled out all compromise on nuclear energy, Poland adopted its national program for nuclear energy in early 2014 and is undertaking bilateral cooperation with France on the matter.

Would it be possible for Franco-German-Polish cooperation to help relaunch the process of European integration? The answer is yes, even if the Weimar Triangle or a looser kind of cooperation involving the three countries is still no substitute for the Franco-German tandem. To be efficient in the meantime, trilateral exchanges should be worked out in concrete initiatives. What is needed is to make this “intelligent political instrument” (in the words of Bronislaw Geremek) into a real forum for working in concert. On an ad-hoc basis, bilateral relations among partners can also help advance certain subjects of com-

mon interest, without damaging the mutual trust established within the trio.

Poland believes that its privileged relations with Germany may help it carry more weight in European politics. In this regard, the nomination of Donald Tusk to the presidency of the European Council could permit him to slowly take on a decisive role in defining the European agenda and thereby modify the internal balance prevailing in the Weimar Triangle. By bringing Poland into their discussions, France and Germany can for their part achieve the elaboration of compromise on a broader basis, by integrating the approaches and constraints that mark the EU’s newer member states. The founding countries – France and Germany – would be able to incorporate into their approach countries that have modest diplomatic influence but could bring more weight within differentiated coalitions – on the condition that Warsaw be ready to defend their points of view and fully play the European role it is capable of playing on the basis of existing power dynamics.

France, Germany, Romania: After Accession, Integration

Julie Hamann

When Romania and Bulgaria joined the European Union in 2007, the regional differences within the EU widened to a degree unprecedented in the history of European integration. The accession of these two countries was often considered problematic in Germany and France. But Romania's image as the chronic straggler in European statistics often obscures the country's potential for cooperation; the EU's seventh largest country in terms of population seems smaller than it actually is. The unexpected 2014 election of Klaus Iohannis as Romania's new president demonstrated the possibility of changing this perception. A regional politician from the once predominantly German-speaking city of Sibiu, Iohannis defied expectations by defeating the prime minister and favorite Victor Ponta. Much is now expected of him, in terms of both the fight against corruption across all political parties and the country's economic and social modernization. This change could well offer Germany and France an opportunity to see Romania through a different lens and to extend its perspective beyond the focus on immigration that has dominated in the past.

At the bilateral level, German-Romanian and French-Romanian relations have a checkered history, but they have in the meantime become a good deal closer and more solid. Germany's cultural connection to the German-speaking minority in Romania stretches back centuries, while francophone linguistic and cultural connections in Romania are also very strong.²⁷ But what role does today's Romania play in German and French policy, and how does it factor into the Franco-German tandem? Is the possibility of trilateral cooperation more than a hypothetical question? Despite (or even because of) the existing asymmetries between the strongest and weakest EU states, cooperation seems important in three areas: first, in furthering Romania's full integration into European structures, which Germany and France can actively promote; second, in overcoming Romania's domestic and economic problems, which indirectly place immigration pressures on Germany and France; and finally in foreign policy, where Romania's Black Sea location on the EU's outer border can play a role.

Romania: EU Accession, but No Integration (Yet)

Romania joined the EU in 2007, during the Union's second phase of its Eastern expansion. Accession solidified the country's integration into European and transatlantic

structures, which had begun when it joined NATO in 2004. Both France and Germany supported its candidacy during the accession process. For the Romanian government, the success of the application process was quite significant, as there was immense public support for the process; important reforms were initiated during the process, and by the time it acceded, the country's economic and political situation had stabilized considerably. Romania was dubbed a "Balkan tiger" for its promising economic growth and attractiveness to foreign investors.

Eight years later, however, the country still faces impediments. The EU Commission continues to regularly assess its progress on reforms, and the latest reports indicate that there are still shortcomings, especially in the areas of justice and corruption.²⁸ EU-wide freedom of movement for Romanian workers was only introduced in 2014, after the maximum seven-year period following accession had passed. It remains unclear when Romania will become part of the Schengen area. Although the country has fulfilled the technical criteria for joining Schengen, the EU interior ministers have repeatedly postponed it, citing its lack of progress in reforming the justice system and fighting corruption. The delay is also the result of resistance on the part of individual EU member states – including the Netherlands and Finland, as well as Germany and France – motivated by (domestic) political concerns, chiefly about so-called poverty migration.

In the past, Germany and France were key players in the debate on whether Romania would join the Schengen area, sometimes as advocates, sometimes as opponents. A joint letter written by both countries in 2010 to the then European Commissioner for Home Affairs Cecilia Malmström opposed the country's planned accession in early 2011 on the grounds of Romania's inadequate reforms. Within Romania this was widely interpreted as an "act of discrimination."²⁹ A year after this rejection, the Franco-German tandem swung in the opposite direction: in a joint proposal, interior ministers Hans-Peter Friedrich and Claude Guéant outlined the possibility of gradual Schengen accession.³⁰ In 2013, however, Friedrich once again distanced himself from this initiative and blocked the accession's implementation. For their part, Romanians have viewed this ever-shifting position on Schengen entry with annoyance and sometimes resignation. The impression has taken hold among the public that they are only second-class members of the EU.³¹ Citizen participation in the European parliamentary elections of 2014 was the lowest among member states – 32 percent – a clear sign that Romanians consider their influence within the EU to be minimal.

With their stop-and-go approach to Romania's Schengen membership, Germany and France have hardly acted as engines of European integration. Both countries have at different points not only allowed but even actively promoted the mixing of their own domestic concerns (about how social and integration policies relate to Romanian migrants) with the implementation of basic European principles such as freedom of movement for EU citizens. Domestic discussion has at times bordered on populism.³² Renewing the Franco-German initiative of 2011 would be an important and timely step toward further integrating Romania into the EU. Romanian citizens proved their political maturity at the presidential polls last year, taking a clear position against political corruption and media manipulation.

Countering Immigration Pressures with Reforms

The debates on freedom of movement brought to the fore the unspoken question of how to address the large disparities of wealth within the EU. This is all the more relevant given that Romania's domestic situation has a direct effect on other member states through internal European migration, be it through the labor market, education, or social policy.

Economically, Romania has confronted major problems since the economic crisis abruptly curtailed the "Balkan tiger's" growth rate. Special loans from the International Monetary Fund were contingent upon internal reforms and budget cuts. Romania's ensuing austerity policies triggered protests in 2012. During this period, the attention of Berlin and Paris was focused on saving the eurozone. In fact, in many areas Romania shared many of the same problems as Spain and Greece: a lack of prospects for well-educated young people, high levels of disillusionment with politics, disappointment about the corruption of the political elite. Because prospects at home are few, the number of Romanians living abroad is high – an estimated two to three million Romanians live abroad³³ – and the picture is correspondingly complex. Seasonal laborers are active mainly in Italy, Spain, and France, while highly qualified workers are to be found throughout the EU. Although disproportionately represented in the Western European public imagination, the Roma community actually makes up only a small portion of Romanians living abroad. A sober, fact-oriented perspective is urgently needed to counteract fears in Germany and France that the social welfare systems are overburdened by Romanian migrants and the Roma population in particular.

In fact, Germany in particular and France, to a slightly lesser extent, could profit from internal European migration through targeted initiatives. Romania has been promoting partnerships in the area of dual education since 2012. These programs have already proven useful on two levels. They are helping to counter the lack of skilled labor in Germany on the regional level, while in Romania they are promoting know-how and making the country more attractive to foreign investors.

However, both economic and political reforms are blocked by the weakness of Romania's political institutions. This is particularly apparent in the rate of utilization of EU funds. Despite improvements in recent years, less than half of the available funds are being utilized. A positive development in this area could be the 2014 appointment of Romanian politician Corina Cretu as EU Commissioner for Regional Policy. Germany and France could play a role through specific support.

Romania as a Foreign Policy Partner

EU involvement in the Black Sea region has proven to be a fragmented juxtaposition of various bilateral and regional initiatives, such as the Eastern Partnership (part of the European Neighborhood Policy, or ENP) and the Black Sea Synergy, which was initiated in 2007. The sustainability of these projects has suffered in past years, first of all from the European economic crisis and the resulting prioritization of different areas of policy, and second of all from a general crisis in the ENP that emerged as a consequence of the "Arab Spring." No substantial strengthening of the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy is likely in the near future. Thus the potential of selective initiatives pursued by France and Germany could be all the more important. Romania under President Iohannis could prove to be a possible partner for both countries in the region.

As has already been noted, Romania's accession to the EU shifted the Union's external borders farther East, all the way to the Black Sea. Considering the region's strategic importance, it is hardly surprising that the US considers Romania to be the most important foreign policy and security partner in Eastern Europe, next to Poland; there have been treaties with Romania for use of military bases since 2005. Given the country's strong orientation toward the US, which became clear in recent years under President Traian Basescu with his oft-cited references to a "Bucharest-London-Washington axis," the EU finds itself on the sidelines.

Of particular importance in connection with Romania is its neighboring republic, Moldova, with which the country has very close but sometimes tense relations. Since 1990 this small Romanian-speaking country has been split between those who favor Moscow and those who would prefer to turn toward the West. Germany and France actively promoted closer ties between Moldova and the EU in the run-up to the signing of an Association Agreement in summer 2014³⁴; Romania is also a strong supporter of Moldova deepening its ties to the EU. The critical question of the secessionist province of Transnistria remains unresolved, however. In 2014, the frozen Transnistria conflict became one of the sites of the Ukraine crisis, a site where Moscow, Kiev and the Moldovan capital Chisinau vie for influence. Franco-German commitment to closer ties between Moldova and the EU would bring with it greater diplomatic efforts by both countries to defuse the Transnistria conflict.

So far, Romania has lacked the institutional resources to develop and expand a visible foreign policy of its own, and the foreign policy discourse within the country is not as yet very well developed. This stands in contrast to Romania's important role in a region that will continue to have great significance for European foreign policy as

a whole. There is potential here for strengthening the EU's foreign policy position and involving Romania as a partner in the region.

Seizing the Opportunity

Romania's example makes it clear that EU accession alone does not spell out integration. Germany and France, which were major advocates of the Union's eastward expansion, could continue to act as motors of actual integration into EU structures even after accession by going from a general level of cooperation to real collaboration. Both countries have strong relations with Romania and share many common interests with it, particularly migration within the EU and economic and foreign policy.

Seldom has there been a more favorable moment for undertaking joint commitments: there are various factors of connection with the new president, Iohannis, not only because he belongs to Romania's German-speaking minority but also because he symbolizes an awakening of Romanian society, especially among the country's youth, which suggests possible greater cooperation in the interests of European integration.

France, Germany, and Northern Europe: A Minor Axis with Potential for Promise

Barbara Kunz

In discussions about “axes” or “triangles” of cooperation in Europe, the constellation formed by Germany, France, and the countries of Northern Europe is rarely mentioned. (Here “Northern Europe” refers to the Nordic countries of Finland plus Scandinavia – Denmark, Sweden, Norway, and Iceland).³⁵ Indeed, there are no ongoing formats, whether trilaterally among individual countries, or involving Paris, Berlin, and (partly) Nordic European organizations such as the Nordic Council, the Arctic Council, or the Council of the Baltic Sea States (in which Germany is a member and France has observer status).³⁶ The Northern Dimension – a joint policy involving the EU, Iceland, Norway, and Russia as partners – leads a shadowy existence.

There are a number of explanations for this. The most important is both simple and obvious: the intersection of interests and the areas of policy relevant to each country below the EU level and beyond pure bilateral cooperation is simply too small. There is no need for a firmly institutionalized, specifically German-French-Nordic format. Nevertheless, of course cooperation does occur among these European countries, whether within the frameworks of the EU and NATO/Partnership for Peace or sometimes bilaterally, especially between Berlin and the Nordic states. On the part of the Nordic states, there is also a certain “autarky” in regard to regional forms of cooperation. Indeed, it was apparent quite early on that Nordic cooperation was more advanced than Franco-German or overall European cooperation. It is thus not necessary for these countries to expand their cooperation radius below the EU level. Much of what is available at the EU level also exists within the Nordic context – for example, programs for academic exchange and cultural cooperation – and it has existed for quite a bit longer. As early as the 1950s, for example, there was already a common labor market and freedom of travel for citizens of member states in the Nordic Council. It is not a coincidence that the five Nordic countries share an embassy building in Berlin. They also share distinct identities as “small states,” so that Germany and France – the European “Great Powers” – are viewed quite critically from the Nordic perspective.

For these reasons it seems unlikely that Germany-France-Northern Europe will become a central axis for European policy. However, greater cooperation is certainly desirable in order to consolidate European

integration. From the Franco-German perspective, there are without doubt areas of policy for which inspiration and “best practices” can be found in the north. These include environmental and climate policy, education, and neighborhood policy. The goal of this cooperation can and should primarily involve developing positions with majority appeal for the European Union. It is nevertheless important to keep in mind that the northern EU members, which seem so similar from a distance, are often not so similar at all. Thus the correct format need not always be “Germany-France-Nordic countries”; a purely trilateral constellation might at times also make sense. For example, the countries differ significantly in their basic foreign policy positions (NATO membership versus literally “freedom from alliances,” i.e., non-alignment) and their relationships with the EU as a whole, from non-EU member Norway to eurozone member Finland; Sweden does not have the euro but takes part in the Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP), while Denmark has decided in both cases to opt out. Nor are the societies of the individual countries necessarily comparable, which is not surprising given their very different histories.

European Challenges, Primarily in Foreign and Security Policy

The situation is different, however, in those areas in which room exists within the EU context for initiatives and advances, or even where new impetus is urgently needed. In this context, the foreign policy dimension is especially interesting. If only for geographic reasons, Sweden and Finland are very interested in Europe’s eastern neighbors – an interest they share with their Baltic neighbors as well as with Poland. Given the crisis in Ukraine and the EU’s ever more fraught relationship with Russia, it is apparent that the EU must change its policies – not only vis-à-vis Russia itself but also in the so-called Eastern Partnership within the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP), which we may recall can be traced back to a 2008 Polish initiative with Swedish support. Even apart from recent events, it is clear that the ENP is in urgent need of reform. In particular, its “separation” from foreign policy – and thus also from Russia policy – has not proven very rewarding. What the EU now needs is a holistic approach to its neighbors to the east.

If new approaches toward the states east of the EU’s external borders must be defined, there will be great interest in Northern Europe. After all, some of these countries are Russia’s immediate neighbors, which leads to different security interests but also to commercial

interests that differ, for example, from those of southern Europe. These are key issues for Germany as well. And even though France traditionally prefers to look to the south, Paris will not want to stay away from an issue of such fundamental strategic significance to the entire EU as Europe's relationship with Russia – for the security, energy security, and economic development of the entire continent depends in large part on it. However, it should be kept in mind that Poland must also be included. Common efforts on this subject could be useful, perhaps in the form of the Weimar Triangle (Poland, France, and Germany) plus Sweden and Finland.

Furthermore, instruments like the Council of the Baltic Sea States (which could justifiably be called “northern European,” given the membership of all three Nordic EU member states – Sweden, Denmark and Finland) could become interesting again, especially at a time when fears of the emergence of a “new Cold War” with Russia are being voiced. Indeed, the Council of the Baltic Sea States offers a forum in which concrete questions, including those of a technical nature, can be discussed among neighboring states. At a time when Russia is not functioning (any longer) as a “strategic partner,” this could be of great value in finding pragmatic approaches to environmental protection, for example, or youth exchange among the states on the Baltic Sea.

In security policy, too, a German-French-Nordic dialogue could be interesting – not least on how to deal with strategic challenges in Europe's neighborhood. While Denmark, Iceland, and Norway are NATO members, Sweden and Finland are “alliance-free.” Particularly in Finland, however, interest in NATO is currently greater than usual. In Sweden, too, in face of the events in Ukraine, a debate on this issue has taken place in recent months – though it did not result in a reorientation of Swedish security policy. In security policy in particular, the “axis” connecting Germany, France, and the north can also be very variable. The Libya example showed that it, too, can function without Germany. While the Federal Republic did not take part in “Operation Unified Protector,” the two NATO members Denmark and Norway did, along with Sweden. Where military intervention is involved, the Nordic countries and France are frequently closer than Paris and Berlin. On the part of the north, however, this can be explained less by geostrategic interests than by a foreign policy discourse strongly influenced by humanitarian concerns.

Energy and Climate Policy: Jointly Pursuing Greater European Ambitions

Finally, a further key policy area is energy and climate policy, here too seen against the background of the Ukraine crisis. The Weimar Triangle and Northern Europe connect a variety of states that have an important role in this context – and that have emphasized very different energy mixes. Everything is represented, from nuclear energy to coal, although Germany and the north have shared a focus on renewable sources of energy. Thus there is a need for talks. The members of the Council of the Baltic Sea States have been discussing the issues of energy security and energy infrastructure since 2008.³⁷ In 2014, Poland once again proposed an Energy Union to the EU. What Europe needs is a comprehensive energy strategy that takes account of climate policy and approaches the subject as a whole. The Ukraine crisis could generate the necessary pressure. At the same time, preparations are currently being made for the climate summit in Paris at the end of 2015, at which a Kyoto follow-up protocol is to be concluded. Political will is now necessary to address the problem over the long term. In this context, too, Germany, France and the north – here too, perhaps with the addition of Poland – could potentially make valuable contributions toward ambitious conference outcomes. Environmental issues traditionally play a large role in the Nordic countries, politically and economically. Germany and France could thus certainly be guided by their Nordic partners, while the north could profit in the negotiations from the greater political weight of Berlin and Paris. It is ultimately in the interests of all Europeans to adopt real measures to combat climate change. A great deal would be gained if Germany, France, and the Nordic states succeeded in raising standards for emissions reductions, renewable energy, or energy efficiency – even within Europe alone – and if they could more strongly integrate countries such as Poland that are dependent on coal (though here Germany, in contrast to France, has not played a leading role).

Differing Perspectives on Europe

In the German-French-Nordic context, however, there is still a great deal of work to be done at the level of “preliminary stages” of cooperation. The idealized German view of the north and France's either indifferent or mythically-tinged view are met on the Nordic side with a degree of skepticism. In public as well as political debates there, reference is regularly made to the so-called Great Powers; from the Swedish point of view, for example, these

include Germany and France, even if Germany in particular might not see it this way. According to this perspective, the German-French tandem has led to a directorate of two great powers that does not always act in the interests of the “little guys.” This stands in stark contrast to the Franco-German self-image as the “motor of European integration.” In addition, the concept of the “European peace project” meets with far less reverence in the north than on the continent. A state like Sweden that has had no foreign troops on its soil for centuries sometimes sees things differently. It would therefore make sense, especially among the younger generation, to start by discussing the various concepts of Europe. Nordic participants in programs for inter-European understanding are often a rarity. Both sides could gain from it: from the northern point of view, deeper insights into continental European mindsets and approaches beckon – especially the realization that the “Franco-German block” is hardly as homogeneous as some believe – while the Germans and French would be forced to look at themselves in a mirror. They may also be able to take the mirror a bit more seriously, since it comes from a region that is at least their equal economically. Northern Europe is indeed a region in which many things function differently than on the continent, but are no worse. (Perhaps it is the only European sub-

region in which this is currently the case.) In a crisis-torn Europe that seeks examples and “models,” looking to the north could be useful in answering important questions for the future (for example, for energy and climate policy or economics and competitiveness). Though small, the Nordic states can, in this sense, meet Paris and especially Berlin as equals, which can only be a good thing for the current difficult debates in Europe.

It is unlikely that “Paris-Berlin-Copenhagen-Helsinki-Stockholm” and possibly -Oslo or -Reykjavik will become a central axis of European policy. Nevertheless, there are areas of policy in which more intensive dialogue, at least, would seem useful. This is especially true for climate and energy policy, as well as the design of EU foreign relations and European policy toward Russia. On the level of international understanding, too, more exchanges between Germany and France, on the one hand, and Northern Europe on the other would be quite desirable. Such a dialogue has barely taken place thus far, since the “expansion” of the Franco-German duo almost never includes the north. On both sides, knowledge of the other appears limited and prejudices are strong. There is thus a great deal still to be done to improve the German-French-Nordic relationship.

France, Germany, the United Kingdom: Little Boom, Mostly Gloom

Vivien Pertusot

The axis connecting France, Germany, and the United Kingdom within the European Union does not immediately stand out as an obvious means of advancing European integration. Differences over the EU abound among these three countries. Germany, although it no longer hesitates to promote its national interests, still portrays itself as the greatest champion of further EU integration, consenting to a high degree of Community method. France has always maintained an ambiguous attitude with respect to the EU. It favors further integration but prefers this to take place on an intergovernmental track. Britain for its part envisages its membership in the EU more as a contract to advance its economic interests than a means of establishing an unbreakable political bond to the continent.

Certainly, the three countries do not aspire to the same level of engagement in EU policies. France and Germany are among the few member states who actively participate in all EU policies, whereas Britain is not in the eurozone, not part of the Schengen area, has opted out on a package of Justice and Home Affairs measures, and has shunned all the recent mechanisms to muster European economic governance, from the “fiscal compact” to the Banking Union.

It is evident at this stage that disagreements overshadow convergence of views. Indeed, an overview of the past forty years is enough to show why this partnership has few prospects of flourishing anytime soon. The more recent past, too, poses serious questions about the role Britain can play within the EU. Seen against this backdrop, can the trilateral relationship play any positive role in the EU’s development? In the foreign and security policy field for example, could the “E3” be an engine for a more ambitious common foreign and security policy?

This chapter explains why a fruitful trilateral relationship is starting to look like a pipe dream. After a brief review of the bilateral dynamics within this triangle, the text will analyze some projects in which the three have taken a leadership role. However, even the emergence of the Single European Act (SEA) and of the Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP, formerly called ESDP) show that any trilateral leadership is also marked by deep structural differences among the three countries, which hinder more sustainable partnership.

Balancing Acts in Bilateral Relations

There has never been steady momentum for a Franco-German-British triumvirate to emerge, neither within the political leadership nor within the academic or think tank communities. History teaches us a lesson here. Each country has always sought to cultivate bilateral relations with one partner in order to balance the influence of the other. Matters have been no different in the comparatively shorter history of the EU.

The Franco-German relationship has been characterized by a high level of institutionalization since the Elysée Treaty was signed in 1963, and European integration has played a central role. Despite differences, the two countries have consistently concurred that further European integration is necessary. The Elysée Treaty succeeded in fashioning an “embedded bilateralism” that has kept Franco-German relations consistently strong, political, and mutually essential in spite of fluctuations in national leaders and international events.³⁸

The Franco-British relationship has rarely made room for a robust third partner. This bilateral logic is grounded in the countries’ parallel strategic outlooks, which provided the bedrock for the Entente Cordiale of 1904. With the Lancaster House Treaties signed in 2010, the joint emphasis on security and defense was further enshrined in the bilateral partnership. The subject of Europe has repeatedly been a thorny issue in the relationship, however.³⁹ This does not mean that Europe is not relevant in Franco-British relations, but the countries seldom promote a joint project and often find themselves on opposite sides – for example, on the reform of the EU budget.⁴⁰ The emergence of the ESDP (now CSDP) may be the only project of “high political stature” in which Paris and London have been in synch. Unsurprisingly, it relates to strategic affairs.

British-German relations are the least institutionalized of the three relationships. The countries maintain good bilateral relations, but the association has never extended to become a cornerstone for one another’s foreign policy. Here, too, the topic of Europe is a difficult matter. While Germany seeks to promote the European interest, Britain is squarely concerned with advancing its own national interests.⁴¹ Moreover, the relationship has tended to fluctuate according to the leaders holding office, making it less predictable than the Franco-German “couple.”⁴² That is not to say that they cannot agree to join forces, as was the case with British-German support for EU enlargement in the 1990s or the present advocacy for the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP).

Clearly, current bilateral relations involving the three countries are not marked by identical levels of interconnectedness, depth, and scope. This does not rule out a robust trilateral relationship in the future, but each of the three countries has a particular approach to the EU, which does diminish the prospect of a sustainable cooperation. Moreover, the triangle continues to be fuelled by balancing exercises. Britain and Germany, for instance, share similar views on free trade, in contrast with a more cautious French line. For their part, France and Germany appreciate the political nature of the European project, which is lost on the UK. Meanwhile, Britain and France would like the European countries to play a greater role in foreign and security policy, an area on which Germany has been blowing hot and cold since signing the Maastricht Treaty.

The Difficulties of Sticking Together

The triangle has only played a peripheral role in European integration. Even when they agree to work together, the countries' objectives diverge. The development of two issues, the internal market and the common security and defense policy, provide cases in point.

Single European Act (SEA)

There may be disagreements over who exactly were the main drivers behind the emergence of the SEA in the 1980s, but it is indisputable that France, Germany, and the UK came together to push for it. The European Commission promoted the SEA in order to reinvigorate the European Community, which was experiencing a wave of "Euro-pessimism." Certainly, however, the SEA would not have seen the light of day without a convergence of national interests and a readiness to compromise on the part of Britain, France, and Germany.⁴³

This joint support for the emergence of the internal market, however, never meant that the three countries agreed on the SEA's final objectives. Britain backed the initiative because it felt that it could imprint more liberalization in Europe. British supporters considered the SEA – and the consequent internal market – as a final destination, not as a stepping-stone toward a monetary union. France, on the other hand, supported the project with the view that it could lead to common social and industrial policies within the European Community and did not expect the process to increase economic liberalization. Germany for its part welcomed the prospect of more liberalization and stronger European institutions, but its core argument in favor of the SEA was that it would lead

to further European integration. The Germans did not anticipate that the process would be so far-reaching.⁴⁴

Today, the triangle could possibly work toward common solutions, especially the establishment of the Digital Single Market (DSM) to adapt the internal market to the growth of e-commerce and e-services. The three have political and business interests, which have yet to converge for them to reach an acceptable compromise – on the DSM's legal framework, for instance. The three have to agree on the level of regulation in this sector or on ways to adapt existing legislation. It will put to the test the "better regulation" agenda all European actors promote. The completion of the Single Market will, however, remain a difficult subject, especially in the energy and services sectors where the three have different approaches. In the energy sector, for example, national policies and energy mixes are so disparate that a common approach at the EU level appears quite far-fetched.

Common Security and Defense Policy (ESDP/CSDP)

The development of the ESDP also shows this trend. France and the UK jointly initiated the EU defense policy in St Malo in 1998, but its institutionalization came about during the German EU Council presidency in 1999. The UK's grounded its decision to embark on this initiative in the perception that NATO was doomed if the Europeans did not become more serious about defense. France had been a longstanding supporter of European strategic autonomy.⁴⁵ Germany had favored a common foreign policy since the Maastricht Treaty, condoning the inclusion of a security and defense element. It would have been inconceivable for the Germans not to participate in the process; the country's Council presidency was therefore timely.⁴⁶ Yet Berlin intended to dampen the ESDP's military dimension in order to underline the EU's importance primarily as a "civilian power" and to maintain NATO as the backbone of Germany's security policy.⁴⁷ Paris and Berlin also pressured London to accept the institutionalization of the ESDP within the EU structures – for instance, with the creation of the EU Military Staff and the Political and Security Committee. Once again, the three countries agreed on a common project, but their objectives differed.

Today, there is little prospect for the three to work together on this issue. Britain has grown too unreceptive to the CSDP, and Germany's priorities remain with NATO rather than with a purely European framework. This means that the CSDP will most likely continue to suffer from lackluster momentum and inconsistent participation on the part of member states.

No Joint Leadership Role

The case studies above illustrate that, despite their diverging interests, France, Germany, and the United Kingdom are capable of acting together on an ad-hoc basis. The balance, however, consistently favors the Franco-German cooperation, because such projects end up fostering further integration – although European defense policy has remained intergovernmental. Britain often falls victim to the idiom that “two is company, three’s a crowd.” Moreover, the possibility of trilateral projects will become even scarcer in the future, for most new initiatives will occur within the eurozone – consequently without Britain – and it would be far-fetched to envision a change in the UK’s attitude toward joining the Economic and Monetary Union.

Indeed, France and Germany are becoming increasingly concerned about the “British question.” Both countries favor the UK’s continued membership in the EU, but

France would probably not hold the UK back from an exit, which would put Germany in an increasingly difficult position. Berlin truly wants the UK to stay, but it, too, is growing frustrated by the British government’s attitude within the EU. The lack of sustained cooperation among the “Big Three” means that there would probably not be a Franco-German effort to keep the UK in. Should Britain want to leave, however, both France and Germany are likely to adopt a tough stance against Britain in the exit negotiations.

It is in both countries’ interest to keep the UK within the EU. So far, they have refrained from partaking in the debate, which they consider primarily domestic. However, should an exit referendum take place in Britain, Paris and Berlin would need to be more vocal about why they think the British people should vote to stay. They should coordinate with the British government on how best to participate in this most sensitive of debates.

France, Germany, and the Countries of the Western Balkans: From Candidates to Partners

Theresia Töglhofer and Natasha Wunsch

The countries of the Western Balkans are not classic candidates for trilateral cooperation with Germany and France.⁴⁸ Relations with the region are largely determined by the EU accession process, the progress and conditionality of which are heavily influenced by both France and Germany. While Croatia can take an equal part in EU decision making, including accession decisions, since its own entry on July 1, 2013, the remaining candidates have faced growing enlargement skepticism toward enlargement in Germany, France, and other member states, and thus significantly stricter conditionality as well. For them, EU accession is a mid- to long-term prospect.

The asymmetry marking German and French relationships with the Western Balkans makes it difficult to cooperate as equals. In many areas these states are more the object of German and French policies than they are partners. Nevertheless, especially against this background, trilateral cooperation – embedded within the larger EU framework – holds promising potential. Possible areas of cooperation consist of expanding economic relations, combatting poverty and marginalization in the countries of the Western Balkans, European security and defense policy, and parliamentary cooperation. Enhancing collaboration in these areas would also mean encouraging a cooperative relationship, which would both facilitate the accession process and lay the foundations for future fruitful partnership involving Germany and France and the Western Balkan countries as EU member states.

Asymmetry as an Obstacle to Cooperation as Equals

It is in the nature of the accession process that the relationship between member states and accession candidates is marked by strong asymmetries. Candidates for EU membership must fulfill the criteria defined by the European Council (Article 49 of the European Union Treaty); because of the unanimity principle in EU enlargement, each member state has a de facto veto and can block accession candidates at various stages of the process. A look at the size and economic strength of the countries concerned further underscores the asymmetry. Germany's population of 81 million and France's 66 million stand against a group of countries with populations ranging from 600,000 (Montenegro) to 7 million (Serbia). For

the candidate countries of South-Eastern Europe, gross domestic product per capita amounts to a third of the EU average, while Germany and France are significantly above that amount.

In addition to these inherent asymmetries, Berlin and Paris are themselves unequal partners in regard to the Western Balkans. Germany generally has closer relations with these countries, which explains its heavier involvement in the region. Some 1.4 million people with backgrounds in the countries of the Western Balkans and the new member state Croatia live in Germany⁴⁹; in France, the figure is only slightly over 100,000.⁵⁰ For the countries of the region, Germany is among the most important trading partners and foreign investors, and in 2012 it provided some 340 million euros in bi- and multilateral development aid to the six states of the Western Balkans.⁵¹ France's economic relations with the Western Balkans are comparatively much weaker; in the case of Serbia, for example, France is only in tenth place for imports and twelfth place for exports compared with the rest of Europe.⁵² In addition, the German military contingent of around 600 soldiers is the second largest in the NATO mission Kosovo force, behind only the United States. France, for its part, has completely withdrawn from KFOR as of June 2014.

The possibility of at least partially overcoming this strong asymmetry by advancing the accession process contrasts starkly with increasing skepticism within the German and French populations about admitting additional member states into the EU. This is a result of both the sobering experience of previous enlargements – especially the accession of Romania and Bulgaria in 2007, which is thought to have been premature – and the EU's economic and debt crisis. In the European Barometer Survey of summer 2014, 69 percent of French respondents and 71 percent of Germans opposed the accession of new countries.⁵³ Germany and France are among the EU states in which euroskepticism is strongest – a mood that both governments must take into account in their positions on future enlargements.

Supporting the Stabilization and EU Accession of the Western Balkan States

Germany and France share a basically positive view of the acceptance of additional EU members from South-Eastern Europe, while emphasizing strict accession conditionality. The prospects of accession for all the countries of the region were underscored at a Western Balkans conference in Berlin hosted by the German government in August

2014, to which the region's government heads and foreign and economics ministers were invited. After Austria hosts the 2015 conference, the 2016 conference will be held in France. For both France and Germany, the region's lasting stabilization and the strengthening of democracy and rule of law there are the most important reasons to support accession. German and French decision makers are in agreement on questions of EU enlargement. Paris and Berlin hold similar views on basic accession issues regarding the Western Balkans and on a range of specific dossiers. For instance, both countries were reluctant to follow the European Commission's recommendations on awarding candidate status to Albania and awaited further reforms before agreeing to grant this in June 2014.

German and French decision makers have made joint trips to the countries of the Western Balkans at both the governmental and parliamentary levels.⁵⁴ During visits by German-French parliamentary delegations to Zagreb in January 2011 and Belgrade in May 2013, the delegates emphasized how Franco-German postwar reconciliation can serve as a model for the conflict-laden region. But the visit to Serbia also revealed differences among representatives of the French Assemblée nationale and the German Bundestag in interpreting the progress of democratic reforms and normalization of relations with Kosovo.⁵⁵

In general, awareness of the strategic significance of EU enlargement to further stabilization of the region is far stronger in Germany than in France. It was not the Franco-German tandem but a German-British alliance that motivated the two central dossiers of enlargement and foreign policy in the Balkans. Germany and the UK prevailed in the Council with their position that Serbia and Kosovo's progress in the accession process required gradual normalization of their bilateral relations, whereas France considered it unfair to link the two processes. In addition, in November 2014 Germany and the UK presented a joint initiative to revive the stalled accession process in Bosnia and Herzegovina; it was ultimately adopted by the Council of the European Union. These examples show that the policy of enlargement into the Western Balkans is currently being pursued with greater urgency in Berlin than in Paris.

Croatia: From Accession Candidate to Partner

Since its EU accession on July 1, 2013, Croatia has been able to participate in formulating enlargement policy toward the accession candidates of South-Eastern Europe. Along with Germany and France, Croatia has become a central advocate for the acceptance of its neighbors into

the EU. However, its accession was overshadowed by the *lex Perkovic*, a last-minute law before its entry through which Croatia attempted to prevent the extradition of former Croatian Secret Service General Josip Perkovic to German authorities, leading to considerable diplomatic upset. Nevertheless, the change in Croatia's EU membership status is an opportunity to change Franco-German policy toward the region such that the Western Balkan states move gradually from objects to equal participants in sectoral cooperation.

France, Germany, and Croatia (which now has an over-thousand-kilometer-long EU external border with its southern neighbors) share an interest in regional stability. The newest EU member state could play a constructive role in solving the serious political crisis in Bosnia-Herzegovina; however, from the German and French perspectives, it would be necessary for it to put aside particularist interests such as support for Bosnian Croats. It is also expected that Zagreb refrain from using bilateral conflicts with its neighbors to slow down or even block their accession, especially since Croatia's accession talks were frozen for many months due to a border dispute with Slovenia in 2008–09.

Croatia's contribution to upgrading a trilateral cooperation involving Germany, France, and the Western Balkans lies especially in identifying concrete areas for cooperation. Croatia's ongoing economic difficulties, for example, demonstrate the importance of initiatives in this area throughout the accession process. Particularly because of their divergent economic models, Germany and France could play a useful role, promoting effective approaches to combating poverty and social marginalization. Developing twinning projects in this area and sending Franco-German expert groups could promote constructive exchange. Targeted preparation of the candidate countries on economic and social issues could also help to reduce popular fears in Germany and France regarding so-called poverty migration and instead support appropriate solutions on the domestic front.

Potential Trilateral Cooperation

Developing trilateral cooperation with the entire Western Balkans would first of all represent a confidence-building measure, reduce existing prejudices, and focus energy on concrete sectoral cooperation projects. Intensification of school and university exchanges could be a first step toward strengthening economies and reducing existing stereotypes about the Western Balkans.

Parliamentary cooperation also plays an important role in this context. Joint Franco-German delegations could go beyond fact-finding missions to seek exchanges with parliamentary representatives from the region and support stronger parliaments in the Western Balkans. The confident participation of legislatures in the political process is a fundamental requirement for further democratization of the Western Balkan region – and thus also for the success of the EU accession process. The existing bilateral parliamentary friendship groups between the Bundestag or the Assemblée nationale and the parliaments in the Western Balkan states offer an appropriate forum for this purpose.

It is in the sensitive field of security policy that the current focus is already shifting from support to cooperation. While the conflicts during the collapse of Yugoslavia made the Western Balkans the central theater for the development of a common European security and defense policy starting in the early 1990s, the countries of the region are now actively contributing themselves. The Western Balkan states participate in EU missions in Africa and in the deployment of EU battle groups, in various UN missions, and to NATO's ISAF operation in Afghanistan. An example of the upgrading of bilateral cooperation is the deployment of a Serbian medical team to the German contingent in Mali.

Future Developments

For the foreseeable future the EU accession process will dominate trilateral relations between Germany and France on the one hand, and the countries of the Western Balkans on the other. A European framework of this type has an advantage over a specifically Franco-German approach to the Western Balkans because it concentrates resources and offers the best guarantee for stabilizing conditions in the region. Nevertheless, the recent accession of Croatia should be used as an opportunity to upgrade trilateral cooperation and supplement the focus on accession with concrete sectoral cooperation. The prospect of accession will continue to be the framework for joint action, but it could be usefully complemented by various substantive projects in the areas of stronger economic cooperation, the fight against poverty, as well as educational exchange, parliamentary cooperation, and joint security missions. Such a move away from an asymmetrical policy toward the Western Balkans and in the direction of concrete cooperation with the region would also lay the groundwork for future collaboration within the EU.

France, Germany, Turkey: A Candidate Country at Work on Behalf of European Integration

Catherine Palpant

In 2013 France and Germany gave their permission for a new chapter to be opened in Turkey's European Union membership negotiations. Up until then, the two states had several times objected to resuming the accession process. In their respective relations with Turkey, this was perhaps the only area on which France and Germany held a similar, if not identical, position. That said, the three countries share numerous topics of common interest, most notably controlling migration, securing energy supply, fighting terrorism, and organizing external action toward regions in crisis, particularly the Middle East. These are, moreover, all subjects of European interest. But on such thorny, rapidly evolving issues, it is difficult for the Franco-German "couple" to formulate a common vision.

If Franco-German relations have historically oscillated between rivalry and cooperation, this is particularly the case with regard to Turkey. The only thing the two states happen to share is a lack of enthusiasm for their Turkish neighbor's potential EU membership – and a long history of blocking negotiations on the matter. In fact, this blocking stance has permitted each of the two states to pursue its own essentially bilateral relations with Turkey, with a focus on trade issues but also energy and diplomatic matters.⁵⁶ Nonetheless the situation improved after the 2012 election of François Hollande in France and the parliamentary elections in Germany in 2013. The negotiation process was once again taken up in the fall of 2013, a factor that contributes to reinforcing this fledgling trilateral cooperation.⁵⁷

In this context, and since the Franco-German couple has lost so much of its traction, it would be interesting to see the development of a trilateral cooperation involving France, Germany, and Turkey – that is, between two original EU member states and a non-member country. At a time when Turkey's prospects for EU membership still seem to be extremely far off, if not hypothetical, what strengths could such a cooperation draw on? How would it help make possible a re-launch of cooperation on matters of strategic importance to the EU?

Turkey: A Diplomatic and Economic World Power Emerges

EU membership was a leitmotif of Prime Minister Erdoğan's rhetoric throughout the first decade of the 2000s.

This perspective has slowly been replaced by the goal of acquiring global power status, as much in economic as in diplomatic terms, beginning with the elections of 2007, which confirmed the power of his party, AKP (Justice and Development), but especially from 2008 on, in the context of economic crisis. This has taken the form of willingness to take on leadership positions within international institutions (membership in the G20 in 1999, first membership on the UN Security Council in 2009, presidency of the G20 in 2015), all while touting the fact that Turkey needs no recourse to outside instruments of economic aid. It also manifests itself in a more and more pronounced willingness to take on mediating roles in order to address diplomatic tensions in the region – even as the tensions between Turkey and Israel, whether in the context of the Mavi Marmara incident or on the Palestinian question, have decidedly reduced Turkish ambition to serve as a peace mediator on this particular topic.

The notion of "trust" has become a recurring topic in Turkish discourse,⁵⁸ as set out by the AKP and sometimes qualified as "neo-nationalism of greatness."⁵⁹ This doctrine draws on the tools of "soft power" and the ability to resolve conflicts. It is based on Turkey's "deep historical roots,"⁶⁰ which confers on it a *mission civilisatrice* and increases its attractiveness.⁶¹ In the overall morose global economic context, this repositioning of Turkey's perception of itself is reinforced by the country's generally positive economic results. Turkey has been able to play successfully both on its ability to establish a certain distance on the subject of EU membership (after decades of frustration) and the Turkish desire to rebalance its relations with France and Germany.⁶²

In the last few years, Ankara has been watching tensions develop in the Franco-German couple with great interest, sometimes with the idea that a crisis in this relationship could reshuffle the European deck and thereby at last enable Turkey to take up its rightful position.⁶³ More broadly, this transformation in how Turkish leaders perceive the country's role leads them to "see, experience, and project a European Union that is quite different from the one that is being proposed to them" and which is presently marked by the Franco-German turn.⁶⁴ In fact, within Turkey's strategy to rejoin Western institutions and acquire leadership positions in them, the EU sometimes seems like the last "club" to which Turkey still needs to be admitted.⁶⁵ The EU has become more a foreign policy target for Turkey than a meaningful and attractive system of rights and obligations (as it was for the countries of Eastern and Central Europe).⁶⁶ Moreover, the repositioning that is now leading Turkey to take direct ac-

tion in certain parts of the world, particularly the Middle East and the Maghreb, disturbs European habits.⁶⁷ The situation of a “powerful candidate” (*puissance-candidate*) is completely unprecedented in the European accession process.

Defense, Asylum, and Energy for a New Balance of Power

More than a deliberate trilateral cooperation, a certain rapprochement of Paris, Berlin, and Ankara is being fostered by the presence of subjects of mutual concern. At this point, however, one can hardly glimpse true potential for European deepening, for the positions do diverge considerably – much more within the Franco-German couple than with regard to Turkey. Two topics, European security and defense and the matter of asylum, serve here as cases in point.

When a potential for cooperation nonetheless does come about – on the issue of energy, for example – it is interesting to note that it exists even though Turkey is not a member of the EU.

What about Common Security and Defense Policy? Today, the development of civil and military means for undertaking effective European diplomacy to influence the balance of global security is considered indispensable. Germany’s foreign minister, Frank-Walter Steinmeier, leads an active foreign policy team and is proving his leadership, especially in Russian and Ukrainian matters. Moreover, he re-launched together with his French counterpart, Laurent Fabius, the Franco-German cooperation on foreign policy. Nonetheless, deep disagreements between the two countries persist, linked to their different traditions and distinct interests. Germany’s position on the Syrian crisis, for example, allows the EU to limit itself in the amount of humanitarian aid it delivers to the refugees, whereas France favors more proactive intervention. This position puts France more in agreement with Turkey, even if the Turkish position and motives sometimes in fact prove to be ambiguous.

This lack of harmony at the heart of the Franco-German couple hardly helps the EU strengthen its influence, and it therefore leaves NATO as the only truly international actor to work on the Syrian crisis. Certainly the two countries have managed to achieve a rapprochement in the past months in the context of the international coalition against the Islamic State (ISIS), but it is still not enough to bring about a major change in European action.⁶⁸ For its part, Turkey is NATO’s second largest contributing army. It participates in European forums for

security dialogue such as European Neighborhood Policy and the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EUROMED). It would be perfectly legitimate for the country to be included in the European Defense Agency (EDA), as called for by the EU, for Turkey already participates in numerous European stabilizing missions. But this issue – and more broadly, the issue of the good cooperation between the EU and NATO (“Berlin Plus”) – is blocked by the persistent question of Cyprus. A trilateral Franco-German-Turkish cooperation in this matter, outside of the NATO framework, could nonetheless permit advances on questions of defense by moving the debate toward concrete considerations, particularly the challenges connected to fighting terrorism (and that supposes strong police cooperation). Turkey is after all the main crossing point for aspiring Jihadists who wish to join ISIS from Europe.

The question of asylum, too, contains potential for trilateral cooperation, particularly since the Syrian crisis. Certainly, all three countries are directly affected. Turkey, as a country of transit toward Europe, took in more than 1.5 million Syrian refugees, while Germany (and France, to a lesser extent) constitute the two EU countries with the highest number of requests for asylum: close to 128,000 and 78,000, respectively, in 2013.⁶⁹ Beyond an inter-European cooperation, which is henceforth managed by the Common European Asylum System, there is therefore a potential for cooperation among these three countries, with a view toward reinforcing solidarity and European aid beyond the borders of the EU, on the one hand, and on the other, permitting each of these states to tackle more effectively the challenges posed by the influx of asylum seekers.

To conclude by looking at the question of energy, the concerns of European and Turkish actors are certainly very similar. From the perspective of the almost exponential growth of energy needs, the need to secure energy supplies is of greater strategic importance than ever, especially in light of the current context: considerable instability of relations with the principle energy providers. Even if it remains the task of each country to determine its own energy mix, the need for enhanced cooperation has become indispensable, despite the profound differences between France and Germany in this sector.⁷⁰ This is what the member states agreed on in opening the way for an “Energy Union” at the last EU Council in October 2014, one of the principal objectives of which is to assure the adequate supply of energy, in cooperation with the crucial transit country of Turkey. The country is a true “energy hub” on Europe’s frontiers, which makes possible the transit of resources coming from the Caspian Sea, the

Black Sea, and Central Asia,⁷¹ without necessarily going through the Russian or Ukrainian provider (as with the project for the Trans-Anatolian Natural Gas Pipeline, TANAP, which was supposed to channel natural gas from Azerbaijan toward Europe). In this context, now that several other projects have been left unfulfilled, a trilateral cooperation involving France, Germany, and Turkey could reinforce the Energy Union.⁷²

Turkey is simultaneously the object and the subject of European discussions about enlargement, on one hand, and about the deepening of European policies on the other. It is indeed contributing to a reshuffling of the cards – a fact strengthened by its intense bilateral relations with France and with Germany. By becoming a necessary partner while at the same time remaining outside of the EU, Turkey could be an important actor – despite its domestic stiffening in recent months – to help move a

number of European strategic issues forward concerning the EU's place and security in the world. The most important issues are energy, migration, and defense/security. These are matters that concern all of the EU's member states, even if France and Germany appear to be divided on them. Addressing them requires France and Germany not only to overcome their differences (which will ultimately happen, given the crucial stakes the two countries face) but, above all, to nourish constructive cooperation with Turkey in the future. A trilateral cooperation could moreover permit real advances in the deepening of strategic European policies, even within the framework of the EU (Energy Union, improved efficiency of the Common Security and Defense Policy CSDP, in conjunction with NATO) – or at closer range. And all of this could take place independent of the issue of Turkey's potential European Union membership.

France, Germany, and the European Commission: A Potentially Winning Combination

Céline-Agathe Caro

In terms of the cooperation involving France, Germany, and the European Commission, one need only think of the mythic trio once formed by President François Mitterrand, Chancellor Helmut Kohl, and Jacques Delors, president of the Commission of the European Communities (which later became the European Commission). Despite the absence of accord on some fundamental issues such as Economic and Monetary Union (EMU), the period from 1985 to 1995 was marked by an unprecedented climate of cooperation among the three, and it has not been matched since. That climate made it possible to reinforce European integration in a number of essential areas. This article seeks to determine the elements that helped bring this fruitful collaboration about, and to highlight the strengths and weaknesses of the trilateral cooperation since the economic, banking, and financial crises struck the European Union, and particularly the eurozone, in 2008. As a new Commission, led by Jean-Claude Juncker of Luxembourg, takes up its duties, this analysis strives to outline the conditions necessary to foster a return to strong trilateral cooperation to help it fulfill its potential on behalf of the European project in the months and years to come.

Mitterrand, Kohl, Delors: “A Windfall for Europe”⁷³

The 1970s and early 1980s were marked by a phase of notable “Eurosclerosis.” In this sense the year 1984 proved a turning point. France held the presidency of the Council of the European Communities in the first semester of that year. President François Mitterrand, a socialist in his position since 1981, chose precisely this moment to give his European policy a new direction and to reinforce Franco-German cooperation in order to move forward at the European level. The Federal Republic’s chancellor, Helmut Kohl, a Christian democrat elected to office in 1982, greeted the initiative. Complementing this duo was the French socialist Jacques Delors, minister of economy and finance between 1981 and 1984, who took up the European Commission presidency in January 1985 with backing from both Paris and Bonn.

At Delors’s instigation and in close cooperation with the two capitals, the Commission set for itself an ambitious agenda and became a key agent of European integration. For this reason, Delors is often considered the

political figure who, next to Jean Monnet, contributed the most substantially to the European project. At the same time, several factors played a determining role, particularly at the level of trilateral cooperation. In fact, the improvement of European affairs was only possible in the mid 1980s with the impetus provided by Delors because the French and German leaders had a strong political desire to make progress and, together, to persuade the other European partners. Their engagement moreover developed within the context of a mindset that understood European integration as a strategic objective superior to the sole pursuit of their own national interests. This was the state of mind that allowed the French and the Germans to reach a certain number of compromises, as part of “decisional packages.” Finally, several witnesses to this period have called attention to the decisive extent to which friendship and mutual trust prevailed during these years among Mitterrand, Kohl, and Delors when it came to making decisions that were important for Europe but were also sometimes quite difficult for the member states.

The Trios during the Crisis

This golden age of trilateral cooperation has not returned for the past twenty years. Certainly, the economic and fiscal challenges that have confronted the EU since 2008 have not helped, particularly since the situation was managed in a very intergovernmental way, and several strategies for overcoming the crisis have emerged outside the European treaties. Accordingly, throughout the past years, the Commission has lacked real driving power, while many initiatives were first developed at the Franco-German level.

This mobilization on the part of Paris and Berlin is hardly surprising, for France and Germany represent the two largest economies in the eurozone and therefore had a particular responsibility for finding solutions to the crisis. Moreover, this mobilization is part of a long tradition of bilateral cooperation. Nonetheless the intensity of the Franco-German dialogue at the peak of the crisis – with very regular exchanges between President Nicolas Sarkozy and Chancellor Angela Merkel – was not always seen in a positive light at the level of the 28 member states and their institutions. Although often quite effective, “Merkozy” was vulnerable to being perceived by its detractors as an overly exclusive and invasive duo, with its numerous joint letters to Brussels and “turnkey” strategies submitted to the other member states for approval without genuine interaction.

In cases of Franco-German disagreement, it was not the Commission or its president, the Portuguese conservative José Manuel Barroso, who could serve as an intermediary but rather Jean-Claude Juncker, then president of the Eurogroup and prime minister of his own country, Luxembourg. This underlines yet again the intergovernmental character of the management of the crisis.

Juncker's contribution was particularly noticeable in the spring of 2012, when François Hollande (a presidential candidate at the time) insisted on a renegotiation of the Treaty on Stability, Coordination, and Governance (TSCG) in order to focus European action more on aiding recovery, even though the Fiscal Compact had already been signed by Sarkozy and 24 other heads of state and government in February 2012. Thanks to Juncker's mediation, it was possible for France and Germany to reach a compromise that later involved the other European partners.

New Commission, New Trilateral Constellation

In his new role as president of the European Commission, Juncker will be able to continue this work of mediating between France and Germany. As a Christian democrat with a clear focus on social issues, it seems he could even be capable of providing the link between the two. The announcement made upon his arrival of a program of 300 billion euros to stimulate investment and growth in Europe constitutes a first attempt to balance Germany's conservative concern for improving public finances, as expressed in the TSCG, with the preoccupations of the French left, which calls for a much more Keynesian approach to the crisis.

The question, however, is whether Juncker will be able to revitalize trilateral cooperation to the extent of turning it into a driving force for the EU. The experience of the past few decades shows that European cooperation works best when the Commission is prepared to work efficiently and when the Franco-German collaboration is strong not only at the technical level of senior officials (as is generally the case) but also at the very top of the executive branch.

Improving the Commission's efficiency is in fact one of the new president's priorities. He reshuffled the institution's traditional organizational chart so that seven vice presidents, for example, will now be responsible for reinforcing the cohesiveness of the institution's work. By choosing to concentrate the Commission's action on a few precise areas with strong prospects for the future

and where European action represents added value (like the euro, employment, energy, and digitalization), Juncker has also indicated that he plans to focus on essential issues, in the spirit of reinforcing the principle of subsidiarity in Europe. Furthermore, in bringing a high number of experienced political figures onto his team, his objective is also to make the commission more political in order to make its action more visible on the European scale.

Even if it is still too early to judge this strategy's effectiveness, it certainly illustrates Juncker's desire to take initiatives and assume a certain leadership, not only in the Commission but also on the level of European cooperation as a whole – an attitude that was characteristic of Jacques Delors in his day. Like the latter, the statesman from Luxembourg is also taking up his duties at a time when the member states must obtain results, particularly in terms of growth and employment. For Delors, too, this situation was a favorable framework for elaborating his agenda and putting ambitious policies into place.⁷⁴

A significant challenge for Juncker will be establishing a relationship with Paris and Berlin that is based on trust. For despite his fluent French and German, Juncker's relations with Hollande and Merkel have been rather distant, as he was not the preferred candidate to lead the Commission. In this sense, despite statements by the press, particularly in Great Britain, Juncker is far from being the puppet of Europe's leaders, least of all of Chancellor Merkel. In Brussels, some feel even that he is one of the few European figures who is actually able to say no to Paris, Berlin, and in general, to demands coming from different EU capitals that are not in the EU's general interest or that contradict the principle of subsidiarity, which he plans to strengthen.

In this context, relations between the European Commission and Paris were particularly strained in the months following the establishment of Juncker's new team due to France's failure to comply with the Stability and Growth Pact. Relations are also complicated by the fact that the French executive branch has difficulty accepting a European tier that is above it, despite the commitments set out in various treaties. Here the cooperation between the Commission and Berlin is much smoother in comparison. The fact that the jurist Martin Selmayr, the head of Juncker's cabinet, hails from Karlsruhe and, more generally, that many Germans were given high-level posts in various cabinets of commissioners, also considerably facilitates communication between the Commission and the Federal Republic. That said, Juncker has announced his plans to work more intensely with national parlia-

ments – a new approach that could help bring the Commission closer to both Paris and Berlin.

At the Franco-German level, there are difficulties associated in particular with their very different perspectives on the eurozone crisis and the best exit strategies, as well as differences on foreign and security policy. Hence, common projects and initiatives are fairly rare at the moment and have been difficult to implement. On the European level, this situation is notably reflected in the tensions playing out within Juncker's new team. Thus, the nomination of Pierre Moscovici – who became European commissioner for economic and financial affairs, taxation, and customs, after serving as French minister of finance between 2012 and 2014 – was vigorously challenged by a number of German political leaders who doubted his ability to carry out his duties. Moreover, Günther Oettinger, the European commissioner for digital economy and society, generated an uproar in France at the end of November 2014 after he criticized French economic policy in the press.

Finding Inspiration in the Past to Prepare for the Future

In conclusion, there is an undeniable potential for improving trilateral cooperation involving France, Germany, and the Commission, and history has proven that this trio can be extremely effective. Jean-Claude Juncker's enhanced mediation between Paris and Berlin could very well help French and German leaders overcome their differences in several areas. A constructive trilateral cooperation would also be a key asset in tackling the substantial challenges currently facing the EU, particularly regarding economic, energy, climate, foreign policy and security issues, as well

as questions regarding migration and the rise of populist and anti-European movements.

For this, the leaders of the EU's member states need to return to a form of EU management that is less inter-governmental and more community-based – that is, in stronger collaboration with the Commission and the European Parliament. It is perhaps now conceivable that the height of the eurozone crisis has passed, and that policy decisions at the European level no longer need to be taken with the utmost haste. This would also contribute to making the EU more transparent and more democratic, a desire often expressed by its citizens. That desire should be taken into account, especially in order to change the minds of those who vote for popular parties and their simplistic Europhobic slogans. As such, Juncker's 300-billion-euro program to stimulate investment in Europe, prepared behind the scenes in close cooperation with French and German officials, is a step in the right direction, even if this program is limited in its impact and needs to be followed by other common initiatives. It also proves that the Commission can serve as a driving force for the EU. This was, after all, one of the keys to the success of the Delors Commission.

For the rest, the secrets of success remain exactly what they were in the 1980s: the art of forging political compromise between France and Germany; of establishing mutual trust among Paris, Berlin, and the Commission; and of finding the political will to cooperate closely in the conviction that, when facing global challenges, European cooperation is a considerably greater asset than the narrow, short-term defense of national interests. There is still much to be done on these three levels, but it is not too late to take action.

France, Germany, and the European Parliament: Opportunities for Interparliamentary Cooperation

Yann-Sven Rittelmeyer

France and Germany are the countries with the greatest degree of representation within the European Parliament (EP). At the same time, their respective amount of influence within this assembly differs radically. Combined with other factors, this imbalance has an impact on potential cooperation involving Paris, Berlin, and the EP, a supranational institution that has consistently affirmed its power and gained prominence in the course of institutional reforms, to the point that it has become an equal partner in the legislative process alongside the Council of the European Union. Despite this development, the EP has up until now hardly entered into the equation of Franco-German relations.

Certainly, considerably different traditions have informed France's and Germany's respective relationships with the EP. From the beginning, Germany supported measures to strengthen the EP, while France preferred to privilege institutions more in line with its semi-presidential system such as the Council of the European Union and the European Council – and national parliaments in terms of democratic oversight. Still, considering the role that the EP has acquired, the richest potential for cooperation is to be found at precisely this level of cooperation involving national parliaments and the EP.

Under these conditions, would it be possible for the EP to in fact become a new partner for France and Germany? The analysis of the situation offered here highlights that the EP as a body is not only poorly suited to establishing privileged relationships with individual member states but that the current imbalance between France and Germany within the EP contributes an additional obstacle. By contrast, interparliamentary cooperation could be strengthened by the increasing involvement of national parliaments, thereby opening up new perspectives on topics like eurozone governance, the transatlantic partnership, and energy.

The EP: Ill-suited to Fostering Special Relationships with Member States

Today the nature of the relationship involving the EP, Paris, and Berlin rests for the most part on the legislative work that takes place within the EP and the Council, of which France and Germany are two components – major

ones, most certainly, but balanced by 26 other European member states.

From its origins as the European assembly, the body's deputies chose to group themselves according to political affinities rather than by nationality. Even if votes between the two political groups remain by agreement the most frequent, politicization has certainly increased, and the left-right split has become more and more visible. The cohesion of the main political groups has grown to such a degree that it is possible to predict how a given deputy will vote on the basis on his or her group membership 85 percent of the time, whereas a deputy's nationality is a useful indicator just half of the time.⁷⁵ Under these conditions, Franco-German cooperation in the EP would have only limited interest.

The rise of Euroskeptical parties in the EP, and the fact that the parliamentary election results of May 2014 led to the parliament's fragmentation by ruling out clear majorities, will most likely lead to a grand coalition – and with it, the elimination of the left-right gap and the polarization underlying it. But if this development comes about, it will above all increase the divide between pro-EU and anti-EU camps rather than increasing national divisions. In fact, national affiliation only surfaces occasionally on certain very sensitive issues, without however being able to sway votes. During the 2009–14 legislature, this was the case with the tax on financial transactions and the opening of negotiations on the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP). At the same time, the French MEPs voted on the “two pack” in a transpartisan way, while, conversely, their German colleagues broadly opposed euro obligations.⁷⁶ But these exceptions were connected to particular cases.

In the EP's current configuration, any cooperation that the French and German governments can hope to establish with the EP will essentially pass through channels of informal negotiation. In this regard, a central role is played by the EP's *rapporteurs*, who negotiate at the “trialogue meetings” with member states, represented by the state currently holding the Council presidency. If there is some potential here for France and Germany to cooperate, it is considerably limited by the major imbalance in influence that currently exists between them within the EP.

The Obstacle within the EP: Imbalance between France and Germany

In the European elections of May 2014, the victory of the Front National party in France had direct consequences for the influence of French legislators within the

EP, where the most substantial French delegation now consists of representatives from the Front National party. Not only are these MEPs decidedly anti-European, but they are unable to find any partners for forming a political group, which would have given them access to financial means, speaking time, and additional institutional roles. Meanwhile, the reduced number of French representatives within the EP's two main political groups – the Party of European Socialists (PES) and the European People's Party (EPP) – considerably limits their weight, while German deputies, in contrast, are overrepresented. The current French government can only count on 13 socialist MEPs, whereas the grand coalition in Berlin can look forward to working with 61 German MEPs hailing either from the country's socialist party or from its Christian democrats.

German influence in the EP is palpable at various levels, most visibly in Martin Schulz's reelection as the assembly's president. Germans head three of the EP's political groups and are consequently overrepresented within the Conference of the Presidents, which provides the EP's political leadership by fixing its positions vis-à-vis other EU institutions as well as setting the agenda for the plenary sessions. Moreover, only two parliamentary commissions are led by French MEPs, compared to the five that are led by Germans. Finally, among the coordinators of the political groups in parliamentary commissions, Germans are four times more numerous than their French counterparts. They participate in the divvying up of texts among different political groups and then assign the editing of legislative reports within their political families and are therefore in an optimal position to influence the legislative process. These nominations are not subject to any kind of weighting by nationality but are determined by political weight and the networks of the deputies. The imbalances between French and German representatives are therefore fully evident.

Apart from the most recent electoral results, France's loss of influence in the EP emerges from a process already begun in the 1990s. One of the specific causes is the consideration that the European mandate accords to political staff. Unlike in France, particular attention in Germany is given to experience and longevity within the EP, the essential elements in terms of influencing European policy. The imbalance that results from these different approaches weighs down Franco-German cooperation within the EP.

Potential for Franco-German Interparliamentary Cooperation

The European Parliament is no longer simply an intermediary of influence for national governments. In the past two decades it has gained autonomy and has at the same time developed and formalized its relations with the EU's various national parliaments. It is on this level that the potential for cooperation involving Paris, Berlin and the EP is most promising.

The Conference of Parliamentary Committees for European Affairs (COSAC) represents an interesting framework here, since it brings together MEPs with those representatives of national parliaments specializing in European affairs in order to promote the exchange of information and potentially to submit contributions to the EP, the Council, or the Commission. Certainly, COSAC's powers have remained quite limited in its twenty years of existence. For a long time, the EP itself guarded against a second chamber emerging from representation of national parliaments, but this position has evolved, notably at the moment of the Convention on the Future of Europe. National parliaments came back into play through their relations with the EP or, in certain states such as Germany, via substantial scrutiny and oversight of the government's European policy. If oversight of EU affairs is less important at the level of the French *Assemblée nationale*, due among other things to its less frequent recourse to the plenary session, it has nonetheless gained importance. However, in contrast to the imbalance illustrated in the EP, the gap in terms of influence between the two legislatures on European policy is smaller, and they are in a better position to cooperate on equal terms.

Echoing this demand for greater involvement on the part of national parliamentarians is a European discourse that favors reinforcing the role of the national parliaments in EU policy. Intended to reinforce a consistent connection between citizens and the European level, this role was recognized in the first protocol attached to the Treaty of Lisbon. Though sought after, the involvement of national parliaments is still limited, and development in the short and medium term has therefore been called for. It is also in the interest of the member states, who will find an indirect means of exerting influence via parliamentary majorities. In this context, COSAC could gain importance, and France and Germany may find in it a promising course of action for the EU's future.

To achieve this, the two countries could draw on their extensive bilateral parliamentary cooperation, which has been cultivated consistently over the past years. French and German representatives could benefit from making

use of such shared formats as the regular exchanges between the two legislatures' European affairs committees, joint sessions of their committees for foreign affairs, and the annual meetings of the offices of the Bundestag and the Assemblée nationale.

Multiple Sites for Trilateral Cooperation

At the institutional level, a cooperation involving France, Germany, and the EP makes perfect sense in terms of governance of the eurozone. In light of its intermediary position as an intergovernmental structure backed by a supranational construction, the eurozone is a particularly favorable site for cooperation involving national and European institutions. The problem of its legitimation and democratic oversight could be addressed by a forum that brings MEPs together with members of national parliaments. France and Germany have already sketched out this necessary dual-level oversight with their joint contribution of May 2013.⁷⁷ They would like to leave the choice of means up to the EP, but their weight in the eurozone and the gap between their respective positions makes them able to point the way toward compromise.

As far as policy areas are concerned, a triangular cooperation could be useful and effective for several high-priority matters in the new legislature. On questions of employment and investment, the virtual imperative for the EPP and the PES to reach agreements will facilitate the search for a compromise resembling what can be found in the Franco-German bilateral relationship. On socio-economic subjects, which will be fundamental to the new legislature, France and Germany could in fact find interesting support in the EP.

At the same time, TTIP already inspired animated debates among member states within the EP at the time of the trade treaty's opening negotiations. In keeping with German views, the EP has in the past years adopted reso-

lutions to put a transatlantic free-trade zone into place. In the resolution of May 2013 it nonetheless mentioned the importance of excluding cultural and audiovisual material from the discussions – a critically important point for France – and followed this by multiplying its calls for greater transparency, to the point that it obtained the publication of the negotiation mandate itself. These positions underline the EP's capacity to bring different positions closer together. This could prove useful in the treaty's negotiations, which will surely be long and complex. Although the negotiations have up until now been led by the European Commission, the EP will surely manage to use its voice and its influence. Before giving their consent to the result, Paris and Berlin would benefit from seeing the attainment of common positions in the EP that meet their expectations in order to influence this process.

Finally, if France and Germany want to show that they are ambitious about reaching energy and climate goals, they will find an ally in the EP, which has regularly been at the avant-garde on this issue. Despite concerns from German industry, Germany is keenly interested in seeing ambitious climate goals adopted on the European level, for this will make its own *Energiewende* (energy policy turnaround) much less difficult and costly.⁷⁸ France for its part will host the international Climate Change Conference (COP21) in 2015 and is therefore very invested in its success. It will need support from Germany and its European partners to contribute to a new dynamic and deliver an agreement on the international level.

These are important issues at the national level, and they figure prominently on the European agenda as well. They could therefore very well be a promising field of activity for multilevel cooperation. Their political sensitivity calls for an appropriate response in terms of democratic legitimacy; this can be provided by involving the national parliaments as well as the European Parliament.

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Notes

- 1 The term “Normandy format” was coined in reference to the meeting of the same leaders in June 2014 during commemorations of the seventieth anniversary of the Allied landing on the coast of Normandy during World War II.
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Appendix

The Franco-German Future Dialogue 2014: New Partners, New Projects, New Solidarity

Why the Franco-German tandem needs to open up in order to address Europe's most critical questions

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The European Union of 2015 no longer has much in common with the 1950s Europe of the European Coal and Steel Community. However, then as now, two principles continue to constitute the core of the European concept: solidarity and willingness to compromise. If the EU wants to find answers to questions of critical importance for its future – issues such as energy supply and how to address the problem of refugees – these principles need to be made more effective. The Franco-German tandem has a particular responsibility here, but it cannot face the challenges alone.

Common interests, similar geostrategic positions, and the desire to draw on the lessons of history initially brought together the founding members of the European Coal and Steel Community. Germany and France were at the very heart of this mutually supportive group, and their reconciliation process was a precondition for European rapprochement in the broader sense. Their weight as political and economic powers and their historical responsibility – but above all their roles as two poles in the European compromise-reaching process – made the two neighbors into the twin motor of European unification. A brokered compromise that balanced German and French interests generally proved to be acceptable to the other member states.

Positions have of course become more heterogeneous within today's 28-member European Union. New members have brought new perspectives to the European decision-making process, and changing neighborhoods harbor new kinds of challenges. Compared to earlier times, tensions among neighboring member states and their diverging interests are more palpable. These strains follow an east-west or a north-south axis. Two particu-

lar points of tension today are the conflict surrounding a common EU energy policy, which plays out primarily along the east-west axis, and the matter of European refugee policy, which is characterized by dissent between north and south. On these issues, which are of such profound importance for the EU's future, Germany and France are no longer able to map out the interests of all member states through bilaterally negotiated processes of compromise. On one hand, the eastern member states tend to take positions that are too independent. These positions are influenced not only by specific sensitivities, often grounded in historical circumstances, but also by concrete economic and security considerations. They have only become more pronounced in light of the current crisis in Ukraine. The southern EU member states, for their part, feel isolated on questions of refugee policy and complain that their eastern and northern partners provide little solidarity. As they see it, neither Germany nor France has represented their interests adequately.

EU efforts to act more effectively on matters of central importance are marked by paradox. On one hand, the shortcomings of purely Franco-German compromise have become more and more obvious in recent years. On the other, much continues to be expected of the Franco-German tandem; many member states continue to regard the Franco-German leadership role as a fundamental principle of continued EU operability. Only these two neighbors will prove capable of escaping this paradox, first by doing justice to the leadership role that is expected of them, and second, by themselves taking the initiative to open up their bilateral mechanisms for agreement.

For only when Germany and France together begin to set new guidelines for redefining Europe's most pressing decisions, working with selected partners within the framework of flexible cooperation formats, will it be possible to clear hurdles and give new momentum to the European decision-making processes.

Here the function fulfilled by the Franco-German tandem will also guarantee it an exceptionally important position in the European decision-making process in the future. This is because Germany and France function as a sort of pivot, guaranteeing a balancing of different interest groups among European member states and paving the way for reconciliation of interests across a variety of policy areas.

The topics of energy and migration could serve as a first test for a new approach to cooperation under Franco-German leadership, with the goal of achieving long-term balance of interests and strengthened European solidarity. Working together with Poland, as a representative of the

**The authors are participants in the Franco-German Future Dialogue, an initiative of the DGAP, the Institut français des relations internationales (Ifri), and the Robert Bosch Stiftung. This text was drafted in the course of the project year 2014.*

EU's eastern states with a particular interest in restructuring its energy infrastructure, Germany and France must define the cornerstones of a European Energy Union, taking into account the interests and concerns of the eastern member states. At the same time, they must work together with Italy on behalf of the southern member states to launch a thoroughgoing reorganization of European refugee policy. The future task of Germany and France – in addition to taking individual responsibility – consists chiefly of furthering compromise in both of these policy areas that goes beyond particular fields; through Italy's mediation the southern member states could be won over to the concept of strengthening European energy solidarity – for example through joint gas

purchases; in return, eastern member states would for their part commit themselves to carrying out a reform of European asylum policy – for example through the introduction of quotas.

Through a close process of coordination and by virtue of their stable bilateral structures, Germany and France can in this sense succeed in redefining their own role within in Europe.

If the Franco-German tandem can open the discussion of certain critically important topics to new partners, and if it accepts its role as intermediary for balancing interests on a pan-European level, it will be possible to initiate new European projects and to lend new luster to the sense of European solidarity.



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Deutsche Gesellschaft
für Auswärtige Politik
German Council on
Foreign Relations

The opinions expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the German Council on Foreign Relations (DGAP).

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Herausgeber / Publisher

Prof. Dr. Eberhard Sandschneider, *Otto Wolff-Direktor des Forschungsinstituts der DGAP e.V.*

ISSN 1611-7034

Editing Miranda Robbins

Layout Andreas Alvarez

Design Concept Carolyn Steinbeck · Gestaltung

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Deutsche
Gesellschaft für
Auswärtige
Politik