



Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

Workshop “Towards a Strategy for Reconciliation in the OSCE Area”

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FRANCO-GERMAN RECONCILIATION

There is no doubt that France and Germany have achieved a remarkable reconciliation. The Nobel Peace Prize awarded to the European Union in 2012 is a fitting acknowledgment of the merits of the Franco-German partnership. This observation raises two fundamental questions:

- How did two countries notable for their traditional enmity become such real friends?
- Why has the Élysée Treaty on Franco-German co-operation (1963) assumed such importance in the two countries’ foreign policies? Numerous events are planned to commemorate its 50th anniversary.

Stages in and reasons for the reconciliation

Without going too far back in history, it should not be forgotten that from 1870 to 1945, a period of 75 years, France and Germany fought three fratricidal wars. The material, human and moral toll was disastrous. After 1945, France was not well disposed to co-operate with a Germany that had been vanquished, fragmented and destroyed; the Germans were intent above all on their survival. And yet several factors led to a progressive normalization.

1. Commitment on the part of citizens

The people who had suffered most from the war (members of the resistance, prisoners of war and concentration camp deportees) were often among the first to seek reconciliation. They knew that a new conflict would ruin the two countries.

France, a powerful occupant of Germany after 1945, distrusted German adults, considering them to be too marked by the Nazi ideology. They had more faith in the young, hoping to win them over to the cause of democracy and European co-operation. Franco-German youth encounters began from 1946; the first twinning was concluded in 1950.

2. The founding of the Federal Republic of Germany

From 1945 to 1949 there was no German state. Public life existed only at the level of local communities and regions (Länder). France imposed its policies. The situation changed totally with the founding of the Federal Republic of Germany on 23 May 1949. Dialogue at the State level became possible. The Federal Republic was fortunate to have a chancellor like Konrad Adenauer, CDU, a Catholic from Cologne, long convinced of the importance of entente with France.

3. The Cold War

From 1870 and still after 1945, Germany was France's arch enemy. The Cold War starting in the years 1946–1947 was a reflection of Western fear of the expansion of the USSR and Communism. The Federal Republic quickly became a partner in containing this danger. France needed the assistance of the USA for economic reconstruction and to wage war in Indochina. The Americans agreed to help it on condition that it showed a more co-operative attitude towards West Germany.

4. The Schuman Declaration

In a famous declaration pronounced in Paris on 9 May 1950, Robert Schuman, French Minister for Foreign Affairs, made three proposals inspired by Jean Monnet:

- Franco-German reconciliation and the pooling of coal and steel production (essential products for waging war);
- Participation by other European countries in this Franco-German initiative (only four responded positively);
- Renunciation of sovereignty in relation to these industrial products by the member States in the name of supranationality, applied for the first time.

The treaty on the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) entered into force in 1952. It was the first European community. Up to 1945, France and Germany had battled each other in order to dominate Europe; from 1950, they agreed to build it together. Schuman's outstretched-hand policy, just five years after the end of the Second World War, completely changed the spirit of Franco-German relations.

5. The de Gaulle/Adenauer entente

When General de Gaulle returned to power in 1958, Franco-German relations had already largely normalized thanks to the co-operation within the European framework. Following on from the ECSC, the Treaty of Rome on the European Economic Community and the EURATOM Treaty entered into force on 1 January 1958. The main difficulties between Paris and Bonn (the question of the Saar and German rearmament) were resolved in 1955 and 1956. De Gaulle and Adenauer wished to pursue the construction of Europe, but their methods and aims differed. Regular meetings and State visits sealed this new friendship. The Élysée Treaty, signed on 22 January 1963, gave an enduring political and legal framework to a co-operation that would no longer depend solely on the goodwill of the two statesmen.

The utility of the Élysée Treaty

1. Content of the Treaty

- The joint de Gaulle/Adenauer declaration set out the philosophy behind the Treaty. Franco-German reconciliation was a historic event that put an end to secular rivalry. It profoundly changed the relations between the two peoples. Four objectives were defined for the future: reconciliation, co-operation, solidarity and friendship.
- The “treaty on Franco-German co-operation” is divided into three parts: Organization, Programme and Final Provisions. The organization component is based on regular meetings between the Heads of State and Government, relevant ministers and high-level officials. The structures are flexible and easily adaptable to new requirements. The programme component covers three areas: foreign affairs, defence, and education and youth. Sectors that were not covered, such as the economy and culture, would be developed later.
- The Preamble adopted by the Bundestag emphasized that the Treaty should not call into question the fundamental objectives of Germany’s foreign policy. The first veto by General de Gaulle on 14 January 1963 regarding the admission of the United Kingdom to the European Economic Community gave rise to lively discussion.

2. Franco-German partnerships 1958–2003

The Élysée Treaty arose from differing interests, motives and objectives. In spite of the contradictions and ambiguities, it has established itself for governments, political powers, public opinion and the citizens of the two countries and become the cornerstone of French and German foreign policy and a valued instrument for European co-operation. The Franco-German partnerships have thus played a major role in Europe: de Gaulle/Adenauer (1958–1963), Pompidou/Brandt (1969–1974), Giscard d’Estaing/Schmidt (1974–1981), Mitterand/Kohl (1981–1995), Chirac/Schröder (1998–2005), Sarkozy/Merkel (2007–2012). The latest partnership, Hollande/Merkel, is experiencing some turbulence.

3. New co-operation instruments

The scope and diversity of co-operation at the bilateral and multilateral levels have given rise to new instruments to supplement the Treaty. Their aim is to strengthen consultation between the two governments and to develop co-operation in sectors such as defence, culture and universities. Examples include the Franco-German Brigade, the Eurocorps, Arte and the Franco-German university in Saarbrücken.

4. Problems, discussions and difficulties

Franco-German co-operation has never been plain sailing on account of the legacy of the past, the geographical framework, and fundamentally different mentalities and living environments. French centralism and German federalism are not always compatible. The economy, society and culture do not obey the same rules. The views and interests regarding the future of the European Union and the eurozone are not identical. For some years, German

budgetary discipline has been in conflict with the French commitment to solidarity. And yet the points in common between the two countries are still greater than their differences, and the two countries can still therefore conceive of a common European future.

5. Civil society

Franco-German youth encounters, inaugurated in 1946, multiplied during the 1950s and touched all social milieus. Founded in 1963, the French-German Youth Office (OFAJ) is well funded and has considerably developed numerous types of exchange between scholars, students, teachers, young professionals and athletes. The twinning of towns and regions started slowly between 1950 and 1958 and greatly picked up pace after 1963. France and Germany are the two countries that have concluded the most twinings between them (around 2,500). All kinds of co-operation exist between establishments, associations, municipalities, towns and regions. They make the Europe of citizens and of everyday life all the more vibrant for frequently embracing other countries. Co-operation between border regions has grown enormously.

Conclusion

The patient work of reconciliation after 1945 paved the way for the Élysée Treaty, which provided a solid and flexible framework for co-operation involving three essential areas, namely politics, the economy and civil society (with its educational and cultural dimensions). The Franco-German model shows that reconciliation is a complex process. It demands continuous action to ensure that it remains irreversible and adapts itself to the challenges of new eras. It is constantly subject to the interaction between domestic developments and transformations in the European and global context. Franco-German reconciliation and co-operation are necessary but not sufficient to consolidate peace, freedom, democracy, prosperity and justice within the European Union with its over 500 million inhabitants. War no longer casts a shadow over Europe but it is still prowling around it. I call for a veritable Franco-German union in a federal Europe that plays a very active role on the world stage.