WHITHER GERMANY? WHY FRANCE MATTERS

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Whither Germany? Why France Matters

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Executive Summary

Over the past few years, Germany's growing power and international assertiveness have been central to academic and policy debates on the country's foreign policy. Berlin's changing roles in the European Union and in the transatlantic alliance have attracted particular scrutiny. Might (or should) a more powerful Germany distance itself from the European and Atlantic frameworks in which its international policies had been embedded since 1945? Or might (or should) Germany's newfound assertiveness be matched by a growing sense of responsibility and the reaffirmation of its longtime European and Atlantic commitments?

Since the post-war era, France's goal has been to anchor Germany in robust European and Atlantic institutions. To be sure, Germany's attachment to both European and Atlantic institutions was always, first and foremost, the reflection of the country's values and interests. Yet because Germany's international role has also been shaped by its environment, not least in the West, the Franco–German relationship (along with the U.S.–German relationship) has historically played a vital role in ensuring the country's European and Atlantic orientations.

Germany's growing power and evolving international policies (compounded by France's current economic weakness and political uncertainties) have led many to question the continuing relevance of the Franco–German partnership and, as a result, to decree the end of France's influence on Germany's international trajectory. However, the Franco–German partnership remains as vital as ever to steering Germany's role and ensuring its enduring commitment to the European project and the transatlantic alliance at a time when both are being tested as never before. Against the backdrop of the still ongoing euro crisis and growing concerns with regard to the future of the Western and international liberal order in the wake of the Brexit vote and the election of Donald Trump, and with major elections coming up in both countries in 2017, the Franco–German partnership matters greatly for the future of Europe and the West.

1 Introduction

Over the past few years, Germany's growing power and international role have fueled a seemingly endless conversation among scholars who have been striving to categorize the country's new position of strength and its trajectory. Labels used range from "reluctant hegemon" to "semi-hegemon" to fully-fledged "hegemon" (granted, in Europe only), and from "geo-economic power" to *Gestaltungsmacht* ("shaping power").[1] For some, a more powerful Germany could be tempted to emancipate itself (whether through self-assertion or abstention) from the various frameworks in which the country's international role has been embedded since the aftermath of World War II — European (above all the European Union), Atlantic (NATO), and global (the UN to begin with). For others, Germany's increasing power and assertiveness can only go hand in hand with a growing sense of responsibility and the reaffirmation of the country's commitments — European and Atlantic first and foremost.[2]

Among Germany's closest partners, France is perhaps the country with the largest stake in — and perhaps influence on — its path (with the obvious exception of the United States). Ever since the post-war era, France's goal has indeed been to anchor Germany in robust European and Atlantic institutions — and it has been successfully attained throughout the Cold War and well into the post-Cold War era. To be sure, Germany's so called *doppelte Westbindung* (i.e., its attachment to both European and Atlantic institutions) has, all along, been the result of Bonn's (and, later, Berlin's) choice — a choice primarily based on the country's preferences, interests, and values. Yet because Germany's international role has also been shaped by the country's environment, not least in the West, it is no exaggeration to say that, historically, the Franco-German relationship (just like the U.S.–German relationship) has played a vital role in ensuring the country's European and Atlantic orientations.

True, Germany's growing power and evolving international policies in recent years (compounded by France's current economic weakness and domestic uncertainties) have led many to question the continuing relevance — if not the very existence — of the once famed Franco-German "tandem" (or "couple") and, as a result, to decree the end of France's influence on Germany's international trajectory. Yet the Franco-German relationship remains as vital as ever to steering Germany's trajectory and ensuring its enduring commitment to the European project and the transatlantic alliance at a time when both are being dramatically tested. Against the backdrop of the still ongoing euro crisis and the growing concerns with regard to the future of the Western and international liberal order in the wake of Brexit and the election of Donald Trump, the partnership of Paris and Berlin still matters greatly—perhaps more than ever. With major elections coming up in both countries in 2017, the future of the Franco-German "tandem" may even be decisive for the future of Europe and the West.

The Franco-German relationship remains as vital as ever to steering Germany's trajectory and ensuring its enduring commitment to the European project and the transatlantic alliance at a time when both are being tested as never before.

[1] For recent examples of the discussion, see H. Kundnani, *The Paradox of German Power* (London: Hurst & Company, 2015) and G. Hellmann, "Zwischen Gestaltungsmacht und Hegemoniefalle. Zur neuesten Debatte über eine 'neue deutsche Aussenpolitik'," July 11, 2016, http://www.bpb.de/apuz/230569/zur-neuesten-debatte-ueber-eine-neue-deutsche-aussenpolitik.

[2] See e.g. Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik/German Marshall Fund of the United States, "New Power, New Responsibility: Elements of a German Foreign and Security Policy for a Changing World," October 17, 2013, https://www.swp-berlin.org/fileadmin/contents/products/projekt_papiere/GermanForeignSecurityPolicy_SWP_GMF_2013.pdf.

2 From the Cold War to A New German *Sonderweg?*

Looking Back on the Cold War Era

In order to discuss the contemporary (and future) significance of Franco–German relations and their possible influence over Germany's international role, it is worth looking back briefly on the history. Throughout the Cold War, Franco–German relations were an important component of the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG)'s enduring European and Atlantic ties. This was the case, of course, on the European level: the Schuman Declaration of May 9, 1950 was France's response to the challenge of a re-emerging (West) Germany, and European integration soon became a vital element of the Federal Republic's Western orientation. From then on, Franco–German relations became central to the European process. To be sure, during the four decades that followed, the two countries often had different interests and visions; yet their ability to transcend these differences allowed them jointly to lead the rest of the then-European community. By the mid to late 1980s, the Franco–German "tandem" had become the unchallenged engine of the European project, which was spectacularly relaunched in the wake of the 1986 Single European Act, and a major priority for both countries. The Germans, under Chancellor Helmut Kohl, claimed that relations with France were the "axiom" of the FRG's European policy while boasting that France and Europe — together with the United States and NATO — formed the "indispensable components" of Germany's *Westbindung*, which itself was Kohl's foremost "article of faith."[3]

By the late 1980s, the intensification of Franco–German military cooperation — and the longer-term perspective of a West European defense and security entity — was perceived in Bonn as vital to strengthening the FRG's pro-Western alignment amid Soviet efforts to loosen Atlantic solidarity through "salami tactics" aimed at Germany's possible neutralization.

Franco–German relations also played a significant role in the FRG's Western orientation on the Atlantic level. Here also, the two countries had their well-known divergences: while West Germany, from 1955 onward, was a fully integrated, non-nuclear NATO member, France under Charles de Gaulle became an independent nuclear power; in 1966, France withdrew from NATO's military integration, giving way to an uneasy "strategic triangle" between Bonn, Paris, and Washington.[4] Yet, starting in the 1970s, the two countries set out to bridge these differences and their strategic postures grew closer. In the context of a "new" Cold War that, in the early 1980s, threatened the FRG's Western orientation against the backdrop of the growing pacifist movement which had emerged in reaction to the Euromissile crisis, Franco–German relations proved instrumental in confirming Germany's Westbindung: François Mitterrand's famous January 20, 1983, speech in the Bundestag, where the French president declared in favor of U.S. Pershing II and cruise missile deployment as a response to the Soviet SS-20s, was seen by Kohl as an "invaluable" contribution. By the late 1980s, the intensification of Franco–German military cooperation — and the longer-term perspective of a West European defense and security entity — was perceived in Bonn as vital to strengthening the FRG's pro-Western alignment amid Soviet efforts to loosen Atlantic solidarity through "salami tactics" aimed at Germany's possible neutralization.[5]

[3] Quoted in H-P. Schwarz, *Helmut Kohl: Eine Politische Biographie* (Stuttgart, DVA: 2012), p. 404 and 429.

[4] See H. Haftendorn, G-H. Soutou, S.F. Szabo, and S. Wells (eds.), *The Strategic Triangle: France, Germany, and the United States in the Shaping of the New Europe* (Washington: Woodrow Wilson Center Press/Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006).

[5] Schwarz, p. 354 and 468.

A key factor that made the Franco–German relationship central to Germany's European and international orientation during the Cold War was the existence of a global equilibrium between the two countries. True, their situations were — already — asymmetrical: on the one hand, France, thanks to its status as a World War II victor power equipped with nuclear weapons and a permanent seat on the UN Security Council, kept a margin of politico-military superiority over a non-nuclear, partly sovereign, divided Germany; on the other hand, the FRG by the 1970s had clearly become the predominant economic and — even more importantly — monetary power in Europe. Yet the two countries recognized, and in many ways proved able to balance these imbalances, as illustrated by Mitterrand's musing that, for the FRG, "The deutschemark is like its nuclear weapon."[6] And by the late 1980's, Paris and Bonn had set out to bridge the gaps that existed between them in both spheres by setting the European Community on a dual path toward an economic and monetary union and a common defense and security policy.

Continuity After the Cold War

Germany's rapid return to unity in the wake of the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989 did not change this picture — at least not immediately. Although the notion that France tried to impede German reunification is still a widespread one, this was in fact not the case; French leaders, in 1989-90, were fully aware that such a policy would have run counter, and possibly done irreparable damage, to four decades of Franco–German rapprochement and European integration. Rather, France's policy consisted in making sure that a unified Germany would remain firmly embedded in Western institutions. France thus played a decisive role in the European dimension of German reunification: hence the decision reached at the Strasbourg European Council meeting in December 1989 to launch the European Monetary Union (EMU) the following year (the result of Mitterrand's strong pressure on Kohl) was promptly followed, at the Dublin European Council meeting in June 1990, by the decision to pursue in parallel a political union (this time the result of a joint Franco-German push), leading in 1992 to the Maastricht Treaty and the creation of the European Union. While more discreet, France's role in the Atlantic dimension of German unification was also important: although the French attached less importance to this than to the FRG's continued European commitment, we now know that Mitterrand's Moscow visit in late May 1990 was instrumental in convincing Mikhail Gorbachev that the Soviet Union had no other viable solution than to accept a unified Germany's full membership in the Atlantic Alliance.[7]

Overall, France (and Franco–German relations) absorbed the shock of German unification rather well. In spite of the monetary crises of the early 1990's and at times tense negotiations in the run-up to the EMU's final phase, the single European currency was launched effectively in 1999. The creation of a European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP) that same year seemed to indicate that the politico-strategic leg of the European construction project was also

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[6] Quoted in F. Bozo, *Mitterrand, the End of the Cold War, and German Unification* (Oxford/New York: Berghahn Books, 2009), p. 53.

[7] On this, see F. Bozo,"'I feel more comfortable with you': France, the Soviet Union, and German Reunification," *Journal of Cold War Studies*, Summer 2015, Vol. 17, No 3, pp. 116-158.

Timeline of Franco-German Relations

9 May 1950

With Schuman Declaration, France asks West Germany to partner in creation of a European Coal and Steel Community

9 November 1989

Fall of the Berlin Wall – Mitterrand's key objective is keeping a unified Germany firmly embedded in a European constructiony

7 February 1992

The Maastricht Treaty on European Union is signed

1999

Launch of euro and of European Security and Defense Policy confirms EU's ambition to become a major economic and strategic actor

2009-2010

Eruption of eurozone crisis leads to Franco-German divergences as well as joint willingness to find compromises to save the currency


6 June 2014

Hollande and Merkel establish "Normandy format" of negotiations to deescalate Ukraine-Russia crisis, leading to Minsk II agreement in February 2015

23 June 2016

United Kingdom's vote for "Brexit" leads to Franco-German convergence on the need for London to rapid activate Article 50 of EU treaty

8 November 2016

Donald Trump's election as U.S. president poses new challenge to international liberal order and renewed Franco-German coordination

22 January 1963

De Gaulle and Adenauer sign Elysée Treaty of friendship and cooperation between France and West Germany


8-9 December 1989

At the Strasbourg European Council meeting, Kohl commits to a firm schedule for Economic and Monetary Union

12 July 1994

Germany's Constitutional Court allows participation in out-of-area operations, opening way to Germany's military "normalization" in Kosovo (1999) and Afghanistan (2001)

22 January 2003

On 40th anniversary of Elysée Treaty, Chirac and Schröder jointly reject looming U.S.-led invasion of Iraq


17 March 2011

Germany abstains (alongside Brazil, China, India, and Russia) on UN Security Council Resolution 1973 on Libya, proposed by France

14 August 2015

Eurozone leaders agree on a fifth Greece financial rescue package amidst Franco-German tensions

16 September 2016

At meeting of the EU27 in Bratislava, France and Germany call for strengthening EU, particularly in security arena

May-September 2017

French and German elections in May and September will be decisive for the futures of partnership, EU, and the West


becoming a reality. In spite of the usual frictions between the two countries (in particular during the 2000 European Council in Nice), by the turn of the millennium, Mitterrand's wager on the continuation of the European project as the best response to the challenge of reunification and as the preferred framework to absorb Germany's resurgent power seemed to be validated by the apparent emergence of the EU as an increasingly unified entity in which the two countries seemed destined to converge. In fact, the power balance between them remained quite stable in economic terms in the ten to fifteen years that followed German unification, with France even doing slightly better in terms of economic growth (measured in GDP growth) than Germany.[8]

Convergence between the two countries in the decade and a half following Germany's unification and return to full sovereignty was also visible in the politico-strategic sphere. To be sure, as illustrated by the 1991 Gulf War — in which it participated alongside the United States and the United Kingdom — France in that realm still retained a measure of superiority over a Germany that was still prey to its *Kultur der Zurückhaltung* (culture of restraint). Yet the 1994 ruling by the Federal Constitutional Court in Karlsruhe — in essence authorizing Bundeswehr deployments outside of the NATO area — soon inaugurated the Federal Republic's politico-strategic "normalization," leading to stepped up military engagement alongside key Western allies, not least in Kosovo (1999) and in Afghanistan (2001). France welcomed and, in fact, encouraged this development. Although it diminished French preeminence over Germany in that realm, Bonn's (and later Berlin's) growing willingness to intervene was not only seen in Paris as natural after its return to unity and full sovereignty, but as desirable given the increasing challenges which the West had to face — all the more so because Berlin, as illustrated in Kosovo and Afghanistan, was willing to increase its politico-military profile along lines that were in full harmony with its European and Atlantic partners, not least France.

The year 2003 perhaps marked the highpoint of Franco–German apparent post-unification convergence. In January, against the backdrop of the fortieth anniversary of the Élysée Treaty (the cornerstone of bilateral cooperation since the times of de Gaulle and Konrad Adenauer), both countries, led by President Jacques Chirac and Chancellor Gerhard Schröder, jointly opposed U.S. plans for regime change in Iraq by force — a move that was not so much perceived in Paris as consecrating Germany's alignment on France's (alleged) atavistic anti-Americanism as it was seen as a sign of the now complete normalization of Berlin's foreign and security policy and the increasing closeness between the two countries on politico-strategic matters, including the need for a more assertive European Union within a rebalanced Atlantic alliance.[9] Later that year, France and Germany were both caught red-handed for exceeding

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[8] See J.-F. Jamet, "Les économies française et allemande: un destin lié, des économies à rapprocher," Fondation Robert Schuman, Questions d'Europe No 149, November 2009, http://www.robert-schuman.eu/fr/doc/questions-d-europe/qe-149-fr.pdf.

[9] On France, Germany, and the 2003 crisis with the United States over Iraq, see S.F. Szabo, *Parting Ways: The Crisis in German-American Relations* (Washington: Brookings Institution Press, 2004); D. Dettke, Germany Says No: The Iraq War and the Future of German Foreign and Security Policy (Washington/Baltimore: Woodrow Wilson Center Press/Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009); and F. Bozo, *A History of the Iraq Crisis: France, the United States, and Iraq*, 1991-2003 (Washington/New York: Woodrow Wilson Center Press/Columbia University Press, 2016).

budget deficit limits and breaching the EU Stability and Growth Pact, a fact that seemed to reflect not only the growing similarity between the two countries' economic situations, but their actual agreement on economic policy — in this case, along the lines of France's "flexible" approach to budgetary discipline.

In retrospect, the 2003 Franco-German meeting of minds over Iraq — and the related belief in the emergence of a Berlin–Paris-led EU on the international scene — was delusional, giving way over the following years to pronounced differences.

A Broken Franco–German "Tandem" and a New German Sonderweg?

Yet this feeling of Franco–German convergence proved short lived. The two countries' apparent proximity did not seem bound to outlast the century's first decade: soon, signs of a growing distance, if not estrangement between Paris and Berlin multiplied, calling into question France's continued influence on — if not relevance for — Germany's international role. France was seen as no longer possessing much leverage on its neighbor at a time when Germany was increasingly seen as tempted to go its own way, be it in the Atlantic or the European sphere.

This has been true, first of all, in politico-strategic terms. In retrospect, the 2003 Franco-German meeting of minds over Iraq — and the related belief in the emergence of a Berlin–Paris- led EU on the international scene — was delusional, giving way over the following years to pronounced differences. To be sure, starting with George W. Bush's second term and, even more so, in the wake of Barack Obama's 2008 election, Paris, under Chirac and later Nicolas Sarkozy, and Berlin, under Angela Merkel, seemed to share a key priority, i.e. to restore Atlantic cohesion and reset the U.S.–Europe relationship. Yet both countries soon began to part company in this area — most notably over military interventions. While France took the lead (together with the U.K., and with U.S. support) in intervening against Muammar Gaddafi's regime in Libya in spring 2011, started its own "war on terror" in Mali and the Sahel region in early 2013 (also with U.S. support), called for airstrikes against Bashar al-Assad's regime in Syria later that year (this time failing to obtain U.S. backing), and, starting in summer 2014, took an active part in the U.S.-led coalition against the self- proclaimed Islamic State group (ISIS), Germany was clearly reluctant to intervene with force, as illustrated in March 2011 by Berlin's abstention in the vote on the French-sponsored UN Security Council Resolution 1973 authorizing the use of force in Libya and Germany's non-involvement in the subsequent Franco–British led intervention. Berlin's controversial stance in the Libya crisis seemed to highlight a growing distance between an interventionist France (which now appeared at times even more hawkish than the United States or the U.K., as also illustrated in the Iran nuclear negotiation) and a Germany that now seemed to renege on the military "normalization" that had been in display in Kosovo and Afghanistan in 1999-2001, determined to adopt an abstentionist, if not a neutralist international stance.[10] Were Paris and Berlin, many wondered, now parting ways in politico-strategic terms, and was France in the process of "losing" Germany in that realm?

A sense of Franco–German split, meanwhile, was in full display in the context of the eurozone crisis. Ever since the early stages of the Greek debt saga in late 2009 — and increasingly so as the crisis threatened to engulf the whole of the eurozone starting in late 2010 — it

[10] For an overview of France's international trajectory over the past few years, see F. Bozo, *French Foreign Policy Since 1945: An Introduction* (Oxford/New York: Berghahn Books, 2016), p. 177-92.

was clear that France and Germany were on the opposite sides of the issue: while France, under Sarkozy and later François Hollande, advocated increased financial solidarity and economic integration as the necessary response to the sovereign debt crisis, Germany under Merkel and Finance Minister Wolfgang Schäuble promoted an approach based on fiscal austerity and structural reforms among debtor countries and a strict application of the eurozone rules, starting with no bail-out.[11] Of course, Franco–German divergences over the eurozone crisis seemed to echo an old debate between two opposite visions of European monetary unification dating back to the origins of the project, i.e. France's "monetarist" vison (a common currency as the necessary catalyst of further economist integration) and Germany's "economist" vision (economic convergence as prerequisite for a common currency).[12] Yet it arguably revealed a more profound conflict over European integration in general, with France advocating a Europe of financial solidarity equipped with loose political institutions and Germany favoring a Europe of limited financial transfers equipped with political institutions strong enough to limit the profligacy of its member states. Thanks to its unchallenged monetary and economic dominance, Germany was now seen as de facto imposing its own model for Europe — while at the same time continuing to reap the economic benefits that the country derived from the existence of the eurozone. Was Berlin, it was asked in Paris, now bent on defending its national interest in the narrowest sense and at the expense of the very existence of the european project, which could be dealt a devastating blow as a result of a long period of lethal austerity? Was France, it was asked in other capitals, "losing" Germany in the European realm also?

Underneath the growing divergences between the two countries, another evolution was in play: the deteriorating balance of power between Paris and Berlin, which now seemed to call into question the existence of the Franco–German "tandem." Here too, 2003, in retrospect, had been a delusional moment: on March 14 of that year, at a time when France was in the forefront of the global opposition to the looming U.S. intervention in Iraq — thanks to its status as a veto wielding power at the UN — and once again playing the great power game (or having the illusion of doing so), Schröder was presenting to the Bundestag his "Agenda 2010" reform package, thus clearing the ground for Germany's spectacular economic upturn of the following years. While Germany, once Europe's *Sorgekind* (problem child), henceforth was able to restore its status as the continent's dominant economy while putting its finances in order, France was increasingly seen as the coming sick man of Europe as a result of its sluggish growth and insufficient reforms.

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During the two decades that followed German unification, Paris had been able to maintain an overall — though asymmetrical — balance between Germany's economic power and France's politico-strategic clout, giving credit to the notion that Germany's unification had not fundamentally challenged France's claim to overall parity with Germany. But now, France's increasing weakness and Germany's newfound dominance in economic terms—combined

[11] See P.A. Hall, "The Economics and Politics of the Euro Crisis," *German Politics*, Volume 21, 2012 (4), p. 355-71.

[12] See e.g. E. Mourlon-Druol, "Don't Blame the Euro: Historical Reflections on the Roots of the Eurozone Crisis," *West European Politics*, 2014, Vol. 37, No. 6, p. 1282–96.

with Berlin's growing international political assertiveness as a result of the completion of its post reunification "normalization" — seemed to put an end to the notion of an overall Franco–German equilibrium, and perhaps of a Franco–German "tandem" altogether. Could France retain any significant influence on its neighbor's international options and to contribute in any meaningful way to its continued Euro-Atlantic *Westbindung*?

By the end of the 2000s and the early 2010s, the growing divergences and imbalances between Germany and France and the latter's decreasing influence seemed to echo rising questions as to where Germany was now headed internationally, resurrecting old fears of a new German *Sonderweg*. Two decades after its unification, the country's growing economic strength and self-assurance on the international scene were now for everyone to see, yet the direction it might take from now on seemed uncertain — both in terms of its commitment to multilateralism in general, which seemed destined to weaken as a result of its increased economic power and political "normalization," and in terms of its European and Atlantic orientations, which appeared to be increasingly in doubt. Berlin's intransigence in its approach to, and perceived defense of its narrow interest in, the euro crisis and the growing skepticism towards the EU in Germany were seen as heralding a less European Germany, one, at any rate, that was possibly turning its back on the integrationist inspiration of the European project. Beyond Europe, the combination of Germany's primarily economics- and exports-driven foreign policy — in particular toward Russia and China, as well as toward emerging powers such as Brazil or India — and its military abstinence (on Resolution 1973, Germany had abstained alongside these four countries) seemed to point to a new kind of *Weltpolitik*, leading an influential commentator to ask if Germany would "remain part of the West in strategic terms" and if a "post-Western German foreign policy" was in the making. Hadn't Germany's *Westbindung* become a choice rather than a necessity after the Cold War? Was Germany, in other words, now "tempted to abandon the West and go it alone?"[13]

[13] See Kundnani, p. 3, 113-114. On Germany's pursuit of geo-economics, see S.F. Szabo, *Germany, Russia, and the Rise of Geo-Economics* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015).

3 Germany's Renewed *Westbindung* and France's Role

So where is Germany headed? Are we truly witnessing a serious temptation of a new *Sonderweg* and detachment from the predominantly Western multilateralism in which the country had been embedded during the four decades of the East–West conflict and the two decades following its reunification? And is France fading into irrelevance after two-thirds of a century of constructive influence over Germany's Western choices? It would be premature to jump to such conclusions. Although a few years ago — around the time of the 2011 Libya crisis — Germany's changing posture on the world scene and its policy toward Europe could be observed with some concern, recent developments offer a different picture. Over the past two or three years, against the backdrop of a rapidly changing (and deteriorating) international environment, German foreign policy has seemed to undergo a reassessment in the direction of a renewed Western and European commitment — and Franco–German relations have played a role.

This has clearly been the case in politico-strategic terms, both in Europe and beyond. In Europe, the eruption of the Ukraine crisis in the early months of 2014 — with Russia's annexation of Crimea and its support of Eastern separatists' aggressive moves in the spring, followed in the summer by the death of 298 passengers and crew members in the downing by pro-Russian rebels of Malaysia Airlines Flight MH17 — has created a shock in Berlin, leading to the reversal of the previous policy of accommodation with Russia. With the realization that Moscow under President Vladimir Putin had now embarked on a policy of undermining the post-Cold War political and territorial status quo in Europe, Merkel decided that Germany had to take the lead in organizing the West's reaction, not least through economic and commercial sanctions, while at the same time trying to prevent a further escalation of the crisis — which could have led to the use of force between NATO and Russia. This led to a first agreement reached in Minsk in September 2014 and, after it failed, to the so-called "Minsk II" agreement in February 2015.

True, Germany's turn in Russia policy first and foremost derived from what Berlin believed to be the country's national interest (e.g. defending a rule-based European and international order, keeping Germany at the center of the positions of its Atlantic and European partners, etc.). Yet Franco–German relations were arguably a decisive — though widely under-reported — factor as well: while Paris, at first, seemed somewhat more reluctant than Berlin with regard to sanctions (no doubt as a result of the sensitive issue of the two Mistral-class ships purchased by Moscow, which were about to be delivered when the crisis erupted), alignment between the two capitals was critical in bringing about agreement on this issue within the EU; and while Germany was in the lead in initiating the Minsk process, Paris' involvement in tandem with Berlin was essential, both in terms of efficacy (adding France's political weight to Germany's) and, even more importantly, legitimacy (German-only leadership in the Ukraine crisis would no doubt have been very difficult for historical and political reasons). This was illustrated, in particular, when President Hollande's initiated a "Normandy format" negotiation (a reference to the June 2014 meeting in Deauville of the

Although a few years ago — around the time of the 2011 Libya crisis — Germany's changing posture on the world scene and its policy toward Europe could be observed with some concern, recent developments offer a different picture.

leaders of Russia, Ukraine, Germany, and France on the margins of the celebration of the 1944 landing).[14]

A similar pattern is discernible beyond Europe — with Paris, this time, in the lead. While Germany had remained characteristically aloof from the French-led intervention in Mali starting in 2013 and had abstained from any significant participation in the U.S.-led coalition against ISIS starting in 2014, things have changed significantly since then. After the terrorist attacks in Paris in January and, especially, in November 2015, Berlin — responding to Paris' invocation of Article 42.7 of the Treaty of European Union, the Union's collective defense clause — decided to participate significantly in the stabilization of northern Mali, thus helping France to shoulder the burden of the "war against terror" in the Sahel, and to send reconnaissance aircraft as well as a frigate (operating alongside a French aircraft carrier) to help in the campaign against ISIS, albeit without taking part in the coalition's air strikes. This increased military effort in Africa and the Middle East comes on top of another significant move, Berlin's 2014 decision to support the Iraqi Kurdish *peshmergas*' fight against ISIS by providing weapons and training. While Germany still falls short of significantly participating in combat operations in the hotspots of the West's fight against jihadi terrorism, it has made important progress in the direction of a more active contribution. Granted, here again, Berlin's remarkable shift from its earlier abstention (especially in Libya) derives from an understanding that an increased politico-military profile — one commensurate with its political and economic weight — is in Germany's national interest; yet it is also, to a large extent, the result of a Franco–German dynamic.

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Over the past several years, Germany's responses to the various crises affecting the European Union can also be seen, with hindsight, in more positive terms — and the Franco–German relationship, here too, has been a significant factor. While the still ongoing eurozone crisis makes for an extraordinarily prolonged and convoluted narrative, suffice it here to emphasize that, from the first Greek bailout in spring 2010 to the latest episode of the Greek crisis in July 2015 and from the decision to create a European Financial Stability Facility (ESFS) in spring 2010 (and later a European Rescue Mechanism, ESM) to the signing of a Treaty on Stability, Coordination and Governance in the EMU in spring 2012, the decision to create a banking union, and the ECB President Mario Draghi announcement the following summer that the bank was "ready to do whatever it takes to preserve the Euro," Berlin and Paris have proved able to overcome their initial fundamental differences and at key moments to find the necessary compromises to move forward, in essence saving (at least for the time being), the integrity of the eurozone. True, achieving the latter goal was arguably in Germany's fundamental interest all along; and the point can certainly be made that the compromises reached were closer to the German stance than that of the French. (The

[14] On the importance of Franco–German relations in the context of the Ukraine crisis, see U. Speck, "The West's Response to the Ukraine Conflict: A Transatlantic Success Story," Transatlantic Academy, April 2016 http://www.gmfus.org/publications/wests-response-ukraine-conflict. From mid-2014 onwards, the role of the Franco-German partnership in dealing with the Ukraine crisis became all the more visible because the earlier involvement of Poland (which had been involved through the Weimar Triangle) and the UK had all but vanished — no doubt due to the former's exceedingly hawkish positioning in the eyes of Germany and France, and to the latter's growing disengagement from European affairs.

latest episode of the Greek crisis is a case in point: while Greece was eventually allowed to remain in the eurozone, as Paris wanted, this was at Berlin's fierce conditions on internal reforms). Yet although this, too, is a widely under-reported narrative, there is little denying that, from "Merkozy" to Hollande/Merkel, the Franco–German factor has played a role in influencing Germany's stance in the direction of a more "European" approach.[15]

Beyond the eurozone crisis, other internal shocks within the European Union have, in recent months, also illustrated what can be described as a certain resilience of the Franco-German "tandem." Two of them deserve to be mentioned. The first is the refugee crisis; although, here again, the two countries' initial stances were quite far apart, they ended up converging to a large extent. In summer 2015 Merkel's Germany — without consulting its European neighbors — opened its doors to hundreds of thousands of refugees, mostly coming from Syria. France was reluctant if not hostile for a host of reasons (its domestic political situation, including Hollande's fear of boosting the Front National at home, ranking high). Yet Berlin soon changed course (albeit without clearly acknowledging it), trying to stem the flow of refugees with a nominally EU–Turkey deal, while Paris gradually warmed to the idea, pushed by European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker, of sharing the refugee burden among EU countries. Even more importantly, Berlin and Paris converged on the need to reinforce external EU border surveillance and, to that end, to beef up the Frontex agency. While here again the glass may be seen as half empty rather than half full, the fact is that both countries were able to come together from very different initial positions — and that Germany eventually moved to a more European approach, with France playing a more significant role in this than usually reported.[16]

A second, more recent crisis that has also shown a degree of Franco–German convergence and, arguably, French influence over Germany's stance, is Brexit: while Berlin in the wake of the June 23, 2016 U.K. referendum initially displayed a wait-and-see attitude, Paris pressed for a quick invocation of Article 50 of the Treaty of European Union by London and for a position of extreme firmness on the part of the EU27 in the coming negotiation. Paris, with the support of the EU institutions, ultimately seems to have carried the day, with Berlin adopting a stance that essentially emphasizes the need for an uncompromising defense of the European project faced with the possibility of a U.K. attempt to divide and rule.[17]

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[15] See e.g. J. Schild, "Leadership in Hard Times: France, Germany and the Management of the Eurozone Crisis," UACES Conference, Passau, September 2012, http://uaces.org/documents/papers/1201/schild.pdf; A. Crespy and V.A. Schmidt, "The Discursive Double Game of EMU Reform: The Clash of Titans between French White Knight and German Iron Lady," *Journal of European Public Policy*, Vol. 21, No. 8 (2014), p. 1085-1101. For a recent assessment of the eurozone crisis, see M. Matthijs and M. Blyth (eds.), *The Future of the Euro* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

[16] See e.g. J. Janning and M. Lafont Rapnouil, "France and Germany: Europe's Stalling Engine," European Council on Foreign Relations, April 14, 2016, http://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary_france_and_germany_europes_stalling_engine6088.

[17] See S. Wagstyl, "Brexit: Angela Merkel pushes back on EU pressure for quick divorce," *Financial Times*, June 25, 2016, https://www.ft.com/content/60678b42-3aa2-11e6-8716-a4a71e8140b0; and A-S. Chassany, "Juncker tells EU leaders to be 'intransigent' with Britain," *Financial Times*, October 7, 2016, https://www.ft.com/content/1ba02b24-8c8a-11e6-8cb7-e7ada1d123b1.

4 What Next?

President Joachim Gauck, in his famous speech at the 2014 Munich Security Conference, portrayed a country ("a good Germany, the best we've ever known") that needed to take "more responsibility" commensurate with its growing international profile while sticking to its existing EU, NATO, and UN commitments.

In retrospect, the questions raised earlier in this decade — not least against the backdrop of the Libya intervention and the nascent Eurozone crisis — about Germany's international role and, most of all, its Atlantic and European commitments, have lost most of their saliency. Berlin, over the past few years, has made decisions that point to a continuing European and Western orientation — and Franco–German relations have made a difference. In fact, since 2014, German leaders have been keen to emphasize the country's continued *Westbindung* in both the Atlantic and the European dimensions (and of course its commitment to UN multilateralism) even as Germany gains in power, leadership, and self-confidence: hence, President Joachim Gauck, in his famous speech at the 2014 Munich Security Conference, portrayed a country ("a good Germany, the best we've ever known") that needed to take "more responsibility" commensurate with its growing international profile while sticking to its existing EU, NATO, and UN commitments.[18] Other high profile pronouncements to the same effect have since been made, including the Foreign Ministry's "Review 2014," the 2016 Defense and Security White Paper, and the stated goal of increasing German defense expenditures to 2 percent of the country's GDP in accordance with the NATO stated goal.[19]

So will Franco–German relations continue to matter as Germany seeks, over the next few years, to deliver on these commitments? It is safe to say that they will, to a significant extent. This is the case, first of all, in the politico-strategic dimension. Whether Germany is in effect able to deliver on its pledge to become a more active and engaged Western player in that realm — in particular actually making use of military power when needed — will depend to an important degree on the ability of the two countries to cooperate more closely. This is true in terms of the efficacy of Germany's defense effort: Berlin's willingness (as announced in the White Paper) to upgrade its operational capabilities after more than two decades of reaping the "dividends of peace" will simply not happen overnight; as a result, operational cooperation with a very close partner with tried capabilities in that realm is clearly desirable, and France is an obvious choice. (The reverse is true: with an increasingly stretched military, France is likely to welcome Germany's increased willingness to participate more actively in operations — such as Mali or Iraq/Syria — in which Paris has consistently called for increased burden sharing over the past years).

But this is also true, perhaps even more importantly, in terms of the legitimacy of this effort, whose success over the coming years will ultimately depend on the ability of German leaders to convince a reluctant public of the usefulness of sustained defense spending—and of conducting actual interventions. Granted, NATO — and therefore relations with the United States and post-Brexit Britain — will continue to be an important legitimizing framework given a continuing Russian threat in Eastern Europe, as illustrated by Germany's significant contribution to the Alliance's deployment of

[18] J. Gauck, "Speech to open the 50th Munich Security Conference," January 31, 2014, http://www.bundespraesident.de/SharedDocs/Reden/EN/JoachimGauck/Reden/2014/140131-Munich-Security-Conference.html;jsessionid=CBDC57155E0289941E05F4EAC8073B65.2_cid388.

[19] See, respectively, http://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/cae/servlet/contentblob/699442/publicationFile/202970/Schlussbericht.pdf, http://www.new-york-un.diplo.de/contentblob/4847754/Daten/6718448/160713weibuchEN.pdf, and https://www.bundesregierung.de/Content/DE/Artikel/2016/09/2016-09-07-etat-bmvg.html.

multinational forces to Poland and the Baltic States. Yet the EU — and therefore relations with France — will no doubt play an increasing role, as illustrated by Berlin's response to Paris's invocation of Article 42.7 after the recent terrorist attacks in France. German public opinion is likely in the coming years to feel more at ease with an increased German military role — essentially turning the page on its perennial *Kultur der Zurückhaltung* — within a Franco–German and European framework than within NATO, whose legitimacy is eventually bound to decrease as the Cold War becomes history and relations with the United States grow more distant (this, of course, could well be compounded by the election of Donald Trump). Although it remains to be seen whether France and Germany will effectively deliver on their recent joint calls for a strengthening of the EU military in the wake of Brexit and the U.S. election, such calls already reflect the EU's growing legitimizing function in that regard.[20]

As a matter of fact, France's role in keeping Germany committed to the European project as a whole will be critical in the years ahead. This is true, first of all, when one considers the future of the eurozone. The euro crisis is far from over, and it could be reignited as a result of a multiplicity of scenarios and factors — not least Greece's situation — making a Franco–German understanding once again critical. More importantly, the sustainability of the eurozone beyond the ongoing crisis is still not a given, both in economic terms (what economic model for the eurozone?) and in institutional terms (what governance?). In the long run, neither Germany's concept (a eurozone involving marginal financial transfers and equipped with a governance geared toward imposing fiscal parsimony and structural reforms among member states) nor France's (a financially more solidary eurozone with a governance that does not impair the economic sovereignty of members states) are viable; hence, if the eurozone is to endure and remain the cornerstone of European construction, the need, advocated by many, for a grand Franco–German bargain involving larger financial transfers, increased economic integration, and federal institutions.[21] Without such a Franco–German bargain, the eurozone could well splinter and Germany's continued commitment to the European project be called into question.

Beyond the eurozone itself, and for all the talk of Germany having allegedly, over the past few years, all but assumed the leadership of the European Union as a result of its power, stability, and centrality, the plain fact is that Berlin cannot lead the European Union on its own, be it in terms of resources or legitimacy. (As to the even more fanciful notion — surprisingly widespread among pundits and commentators struggling to recover from the shock of the Trump election — that Germany might become the leader of the "Free World," or what remains thereof, it has been appropriately dismissed as "absurd" by none other than Angela Merkel.) Germany's relative economic and demographic power (not to mention its limited military power) is simply not sufficient to make Berlin the undisputed leader of the EU, let alone its "hegemon." After all, France and Italy combined far exceed Germany in

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[20] See e.g. A. Barker, "Paris and Berlin push for tighter defence co-operation," *Financial Times*, September 12, 2016, https://www.ft.com/content/fd637b0e-7913-11e6-97ae-647294649b28.

[21] See e.g. H. Enderlein, "Brexit: We need a strong French–German signal," Hertie School Research Blog, June 24, 2016, https://www.hertie-school.org/blog/not-good-day-europe-not-good-day-britain/.

both economy and population, and Germany currently represents less than 20 percent of the EU in both dimensions — thus making the parallel that some are tempted to make between Germany in the EU and the United States in NATO farfetched to say the least.[22]

Politically, recent developments such as the refugee crisis have shown the extent to which other member states resent what they perceive, rightly or wrongly, as Germany's excessive influence in, if not dominance of, the European Union. Even if Berlin did want to rule the European Union on its own — a very disputable notion given the reluctance of the German population to see their country exercise such a role, and to pay the financial, let alone the political price for this — it is clear that such a scenario is not a credible one, if only because, historically, the European project was created precisely to avoid a return to such power schemes. That there has been, in the unique set of circumstances of the past few years, a "German moment" — the result of Germany's remarkable economic performance and political stability of the past decade or so and of its centrality in the various European crises — is indisputable; that this situation is durable is a thoroughly questionable prediction.[23]

[22] This parallel is made e.g. by C. Stelzenmüller, "Germany: Between Power and Responsibility," in W. I. Hitchcock, M.P. Leffler, and J.W. Legro (eds), *Shaper Nations: Strategies for a Changing World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016).

[23] See e.g. T. Bagger, "The German Moment in a Fragile World," *The Washington Quarterly*, No. 37:4 (Winter 2015), 25-35; and I. Krastev, "The End of the German Moment?" Transatlantic Academy, September 21, 2016, http://www.gmfus.org/blog/2016/09/21/end-german-moment.

5 Conclusion

Franco–German relations will significantly influence Germany's European trajectory over the next few years. To be sure, a return to the heydays of the Franco–German "couple," which culminated under Kohl and Mitterrand, is not on the cards in the foreseeable future, and that blessed period may well be a thing of the past. At that time, a functioning Franco–German duo was both a necessary and a sufficient condition for Europe to move forward. In an enlarged, divided and crisis-ridden European Union, such a duo is no longer a sufficient condition for a functioning Europe; and, in any case, the equation of Franco–German relations (and of Germany's European commitment) has fundamentally changed as a result of Germany's return to unity and sovereignty. In that sense, former French foreign minister Hubert Védrine is right when he says that "there has not really been a Franco-German 'couple' since Germany's reunification," while castigating the notion that a relaunch of the "couple" would be enough to relaunch European integration.[24]

And yet, an active Berlin–Paris connection remains a necessary condition for the endurance and efficacy of the EU and, as a result, for Germany's continued European commitment. Such a connection is indispensable in terms of both legitimacy and efficiency. In terms of legitimacy, a German leadership of the European Union without — if not against the will of — Germany's foremost partner and the second-largest EU member state is clearly not a viable prospect in the long term. And in terms of efficiency, the two countries' ability to overcome their usually different if not opposite positions in order to make compromises and to obtain the others member states' consent remains vital for the functioning of the European Union — a fact that Britain's decision to leave the EU only reinforces.[25] Beyond the Union, a thriving Franco–German relationship is also an important condition for Germany's continued Atlantic commitment, whose political acceptability and operational effectiveness, as has been argued above, will increasingly depend on the solidity of the European pillar of the Alliance — which the two countries embody more than ever, all the more so after the Brexit vote.

Franco–German relations could, in fact, prove decisive for the future of Europe and the West at large in the years ahead. At a time when the very notion of the liberal international order—if not the existence of the transatlantic alliance—is being tested as never before in the past two-thirds of a century, the Franco-German duo could well be decisive in upholding that order. Because the two countries are historically the co-founders of the European Union community, it is no exaggeration to say that their relationship continues to this day to reflect the historical *raison d'être* of the European project. A breakdown of the Franco–German relationship could thus call into question the very existence of that project; this would leave Germany without strong European ties, to the detriment of both Germany itself (which would lose the considerable political and economic advantages it has drawn from European integration) and of its neighbors, whose suspicions of a hegemonic, freewheeling

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[24] J.H.D. Seux, *Les Echos*, September 2, 2016, http://www.lesechos.fr/02/09/2016/LesEchos/22268-043-ECH_hubert-vedrine----il-n-y-a-plus-de-couple-franco-allemand-depuis-la-reunification-.htm.

[25] See e.g. L. van Middelaar, "France-Allemagne: une incompréhension permanente," and J. Chapoutot, "Entente et mésentente franco-allemandes," *Le Débat*, 2015/5 (No 187), p. 4-20 and 21-35.

Germany would only grow. At a time when the U.S. pillar of the Atlantic alliance is in doubt, it would contribute to the unraveling of the "West" as a whole. The bottom line is clear: while the notion of Germany alone as the only remaining defender of the international liberal order after Brexit and Trump's election and in the general context of the rise of populism in the West is far-fetched, maintaining a functioning Franco–German relationship may well be a necessary (though not a sufficient) precondition to prevent a further unraveling of the Euro–Atlantic construct.

Against this fraught backdrop and with major elections coming on both sides of the Rhine, 2017 will therefore be a decisive year with implications reaching far beyond the two countries' borders. While much will need to be done on both sides to create the conditions for France and Germany once again to be able to fully exercise their joint leadership, the French presidential and legislative elections in the spring will arguably be a key event. The concern that the possible coming to power of Marine Le Pen and a populist takeover in France could be the next cataclysmic episode in the liberal West's self-destruction has been widespread of late. However unpredictable democratic processes have become, such a scenario— which, at the very least, would indeed test Franco–German relations and possibly shake the foundations of the European construct — seems very far-fetched at this juncture. One thing, however, is clear: the French election will be decisive in terms of France's ability to restore what has always been a key condition for a functioning Franco–German relationship — the existence of an overall balance between the two countries. Although the picture of a France in decline and mired in endless crisis is an exaggeration (not to mention France's persistent demographic vigor relative to Germany and most EU countries), the condition for this is, most observers agree, the launching of long-delayed reforms that would allow the country to strengthen its sluggish economy and restore its international clout. If only because of the importance of Franco–German relations, France has become Europe's "swing state."[26]

[26] J. Gallon and J. Lightfoot, "Spotlight France: Europe's Swing State," Atlantic Council, December 13, 2016, http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/publications/issue-briefs/spotlight-france-europe-s-swing-state.

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