

INTRODUCTION

France and Germany Fifty Years after the Élysée Treaty

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The Élysée Treaty turned fifty on 22 January 2013—signed in 1963 between France and Germany, under the watchful eyes of French President Charles de Gaulle and West German Chancellor Konrad Adenauer. Although celebrated every decade, this particular anniversary comes at a crucial time in the countries' bilateral relationship. After a few tumultuous years of disagreement and distance between Paris and Berlin over serious economic and foreign policy issues, German Chancellor Angela Merkel and French President François Hollande have seized the opportunity of the year-long anniversary calendar to work on political rapprochement, in the spirit of one of the original purposes of the Treaty itself.

When the Élysée Treaty was signed half a century ago, the European context in which France and Germany operated was quite different—coming less than two decades after World War II, in the midst of the Cold War, but also in the context of a stable and coherent Western community of nations. As more international and European instability has developed over the decades, both countries have had to deal with possible military involvement from the Balkans to Afghanistan; from Iraq to Libya. Whereas the original focus of the Treaty was on peace between France and Germany as the essential foundation for harmony on the European continent, current times have instead confirmed that both French and Germans must engage more broadly to retain the peace they worked so hard to establish in Europe. Yet, despite these changes, the main goals of the Treaty remain relevant: peace between the two countries and on the continent at large; solid economic development and prosperity; and a friendly, collaborative relationship between elites, as well as reconciliation between the two populations.



Indeed, the promise made with the Élysée Treaty—to institutionalize regular meetings guaranteeing cooperation to achieve successful economic development—cannot be more useful today. As France and Germany collaborated over the decades hammering out joint positions on financial and economic decisions to the advantage of the two countries and the European Union (EU), it has become painfully evident over the last five years how relevant and needed the leadership of the Franco-German axis is. Since the global financial meltdown in 2008, the bickering and disagreement between French President Nicolas Sarkozy and Merkel at first delayed possible joint solutions to the economic collapse of many European economies, prolonging threats to the financial stability of Germany and France alike. The close collaboration envisioned by the Treaty took its time to function in the context of the recent Eurozone crisis, but it did eventually kick in as Paris and Berlin restated their leadership role by adhering to the institutionalized meeting routine established since 1963.

Lastly and perhaps most underappreciated is the reconciliation aspect of the Élysée Treaty. Collaboration in regards to cultural policy, youth initiatives, and educational exchanges was intended to facilitate broader and deeper interaction between the two countries at all levels from the elites to the general populace. These successes over the decades represent a promising strategy for the development of a deeper European identity among citizens who still do not know each other that well.

In light of the ambitions of the signatories fifty years ago, this important anniversary cannot be marked without a penetrating assessment of the Treaty in the context of 2013. How has the special relationship between these two countries changed over the course of five decades and what is the current status of the friendship? Does a special Paris-Berlin axis still matter? Have the countries' expectations of the other evolved? Is there a winner from this alliance? Did the original Treaty accomplish what it planned?

The six articles collected in this special issue address many of these important questions. Looking first at the economic relationship, the issue begins with Joachim Schild's article "Leadership in Hard Times: Germany, France and the Management of the Eurozone Crisis." Schild assesses the two countries' ability to assume leadership in the European integration process in light of the close cooperation established over many years. He argues that it was precisely the system of regular bilateral meetings between the German chancellor and the French president established by the Élysée Treaty that allowed the two countries to respond to the Eurozone crises. Although France and Germany have not quite developed a common, long-term vision for European integration, the use of regular

bilateral meetings to solve the most urgent financial problems has saved the Euro for now. As both Paris and Berlin dealt with divergent positions on how to stabilize the European economies, their eventual leadership intervention—compromises between German preferences for austerity and the French penchant for solidarity—reflected the best possible solution for the EU at large. The tradition of Franco-German leadership became the default method to face the challenges.

Closely tied to Schild's analysis is Jean-Marc Trouille's piece "The Economic and Industrial Cooperation between France and Germany: Assessment and Future Prospects." Trouille's article is an in-depth study of the evolution of the economic gap between the two countries. Starting from a position of parity, subsequent decisions in France regarding industrial policy, budget choices, and economic competition, among many other factors, negatively affected the French side of the relationship. Close collaboration on economic policies set up by the *Élysée Treaty* did not help France keep up with the German juggernaut. Even with regular meetings on common problems affecting the two countries, French deterioration vis-à-vis German economic and financial performance remains unavoidable. Close ties between the French and German governments did not guarantee an equal and parallel development for the two neighbors. Trouille concludes that France's lagging position can only improve with a more meaningful series of economic reforms, which its German counterpart seems to have more consistently pursued.

Next, Yannis Karagiannis' contribution "The *Élysée Treaty* and European Integration Theory" tests the relevance of neoliberal institutionalist approaches for explaining the *Élysée Treaty*. Considering that the European Economic Community treaties were signed before the *Élysée Treaty* itself, Karagiannis employs principles of international organization to question the need for France and Germany to sign such a treaty, which was, in part, a reiteration of the two countries' commitment to European integration and overall close collaboration in many areas covered by the *Treaty of Rome*. Following the established reasoning that engagement in supranational organizations is useful for countries to minimize expected transaction costs and monitor compliance when dealing with other countries, the signing of a bilateral treaty duplicating such expectations for two countries already committed to another supranational organization remains an unexplained puzzle. Other than excessive costs, neoliberal institutionalism cannot elucidate the reasons behind the decision to agree to a bilateral relationship in light of the European community entity. After assessing possible competing explanations, Karagiannis presents a convincing argument regarding why the

Élysée Treaty made sense to both countries as a way to limit uncertainty at the supranational level and avoid possible discrimination by first exchanging and coordinating information bilaterally.

Although uncommon in typical diplomatic treaties between two countries, the Élysée Treaty included a section on the need to achieve reconciliation through coordinated cultural policies. Corine Defrance's article "The Élysée Treaty in the Context of the Franco-German Socio-Cultural Relations" analyzes the impact of coordinated cultural policies on both countries. Political leaders imagined that rapprochement and reconciliation through better communication between French and Germans could be possible if both people would speak each other's language. Educational exchanges, language training, and cultural interaction between civil society associations across the border helped younger generations become more aware of and interested in the neighbor across the Rhine. State support for the development and implementation of these cultural initiatives remained essential for their success. As soon as either state weakened its commitment to social and cultural interaction between French and Germans, reconciliation suffered. The Élysée Treaty can therefore be considered successful in jump-starting opportunities for rapprochement, but the long-term accomplishments in cultural policy are in question especially because younger generations appear less committed to such cultural exchanges.

Francesca Vassallo's piece "Sarkozy and Merkel: the Undeniable Relevance of the Franco-German Bilateral Relationship in Europe" provides a long-term assessment of the relevance of the Treaty with regards to the dominant status of the two countries, the vicissitudes of their relationship, as well as the impact of the partnership on the success of European integration. Although the bilateral relationship has witnessed both good and bad times depending on the contextual challenges and the political leaders, it appears that in the long term, this relationship has greatly supported the construction of the European Union. Judging by the most recent events during the Sarkozy-Merkel *entente*, the fifty-year-old Treaty is still meaningful and significant. The Treaty is especially valid as a crucial bilateral connection between two countries that are equally embedded in a more multilateral organization. Indeed, without a solid Franco-German duo in Brussels, as most recently exemplified by Merkozy, most problems are not solved. The treaty contributed to a strengthening of the link between the two governments when it came to discussions on European integration, supporting a more successful EU in the end.

Finally, Colette Mazzucelli tackles foreign policy in her article "Changing Partners at 50? French Security Policy after Libya in Light of the Élysée

Treaty.” Mazzucelli focuses on the French reassessment of national foreign policy preferences. With President Sarkozy emphasizing the need for France to become more assertive and vocal internationally, including the establishment of multiple bilateral relationships, the preference expressed in the Élysée Treaty for a more exclusive German axis seems long forgotten. The Treaty has proved to be a process-oriented agreement with only a few guaranteed content-related results. In this context, the German reluctance to become more involved in the foreign policy realm is unsurprising. Instead, the almost exuberant French military campaign in Libya and renewed defense collaboration with the United Kingdom appeared as a choice by France to follow its own path in foreign policy, even without the Germans. In this policy area, the Élysée Treaty did not quite deliver the close collaboration and coordination it envisioned.

To conclude, I would like to express my gratitude to a few important individuals involved in this project. As the guest editor for this special issue of *German Politics and Society*, I am very grateful to the five other contributors who agreed early on to come on board, delivered what was promised, and repeatedly demonstrated their scholarly devotion to the study of the Élysée Treaty and Franco-German relations. In addition, thanks go to Mary Einbinder and Marie Lamensch, who provided an invaluable service with the translation of one of the articles. I am equally in debt to Jeffrey Anderson, Director of the BMW Center for German and European Studies at Georgetown University and editor of *German Politics and Society*. He believed in the special issue and the necessity of continued research into the Franco-German relationship. Eric Langenbacher, managing editor of *German Politics and Society*, provided crucial support and guidance throughout the entire process. Finally, the BMW Center for German and European Studies, in collaboration with the French Embassy Network of Centers of Excellence and the German Embassy in Washington, D.C. were also essential in the organization of the conference “The Élysée Treaty at 50” that took place at Georgetown University on February 1, 2013, where most of the articles were presented.

Finally, it is the wish of the many people who worked on this special issue to be able to provoke interesting discussions on the Franco-German relationship, the evolution of the Paris-Berlin axis, and the current state of close collaboration between the countries—regardless of their respective political leaders and in light of the path taken by the two countries with the signing of the Élysée Treaty in 1963. I am sure we will continue to talk about these issues, at the least in conjunction with next big anniversary.