



Defence: The Franco-German couple

G2S File No. 24

Le général (2S) Olivier de BECDELIEVRE

Published on 12/08/2019

Relations internationales

Often highlighted, including in the field of defence, the Franco-German couple presents weaknesses due to certain divergent national interests. It is these weaknesses to which General (2S) Olivier de BECDELIEVRE draws our attention.

The Franco-German couple is rightly considered to be the major axis of the European Union, all the more so as the remoteness of the United Kingdom and the positions taken by several partners make it difficult, in the medium term, to achieve any other balance. However, attention must be paid to certain interests of the Federal Republic of Germany itself, which are undoubtedly underlying, but which could, as a result of the internal difficulties experienced by both France and Germany, return to the forefront and threaten the balance of the couple, or even condemn them to impotence.

1 - Some of the Federal Government's foreign policy objectives in the White Paper 2016.

1.1 - Constants and inflections

The White Paper on Security Policy and the Future of the Bundeswehr, published in July 2016, has been widely analysed. Unsurprisingly, Germany's commitment to the Atlantic Alliance and the Union The European Union is, as it should be, comforted, while the country claims that, because of its economic and political weight, it must take on greater responsibilities on the international stage.

As in the past, Germany considers its military means as one of the components of the means it intends to use to underpin its defence and security policy. Their use remains subject to the process of parliamentary control which, de facto, limits their scope.

Without going back over the general analysis of the White Paper, almost three years after the publication of this general policy document, certain points seem to need to be

stressed which touch on the national objectives and interests of our partner.

1.2 - The national interest prism

The first chapter of the White Paper is logically devoted to the foundations of security policy in the form of a kind of introspection, or "self-perception", followed by a definition of the values and security interests of the Federal Republic.

Germany thus defines itself as "a major economic power that benefits from a stable social climate, a valuable infrastructure and a pool of skilled labour, reinforced by immigration. Politically, it can rely on a close network of bilateral, European, transatlantic and multilateral structures, which give its action effectiveness and legitimacy".

The analysis continues: "In Germany, the welfare and income of the people depend to a large extent on the conditions of a favourable European and global environment".

Further on: "Germany is closely linked to international trade and financial flows. (Our country) depends to a particular extent on secure supply routes, stable markets and functional information and communication systems, a dependence that will continue to grow. Germany's competitiveness as a production location is therefore all the more dependent on constantly maintaining its lead in innovation. Knowledge remains a strategic resource for Germany.

1.3 - Central and Eastern Europe, influence and rivalries

These considerations certainly do not affect Germany's Western anchorage and its repeated commitments to NATO and the EU, but they do prevail in its policy in the East, in particular with regard to Poland and Russia. Eastern Europe is more or less regarded as a zone of economic influence and Russia as a major partner.

Relations with Poland have had their ups and downs. The Weimar Triangle, a forum for discussions between France, Germany and Poland founded in 1991 to normalise neighbourly relations and bring Poland closer to NATO and the EU, virtually achieved these goals in 1999. It continues to exist in the form of more or less regular meetings; it underwent a severe crisis in 2003 when Warsaw was engaged in the Iraq campaign, and instead experienced a brief revival of activity with the Ukrainian crisis in 2014.

The Triangle remains essentially a forum for dialogue and German-Polish relations, mainly bilateral, fluctuate according to political alternation in Warsaw, between governments that are more or less open, or on the contrary resistant, to EU influences. Military cooperation between the two countries has been affected, although Germany, Poland and Denmark are the founders and framework nations of the Multinational Corps Northeast, stationed in Szczecin, while military cooperation between the two countries is also subject to the impact of the EU's influence. Polish-German armaments and equipment cooperation, following the transfer by Germany of a large batch (232 units) of surplus LEOPARD 2A4/A5 tanks, remains active. However, Poland remains a relatively important economic partner for Germany (6th largest supplier and 8th largest customer in terms of trade), whereas, seen from Poland, Germany is by far its largest trading partner.

Another is the relationship with Russia, on which Germany, since its decision to phase out nuclear power, is largely dependent for energy and which has long-standing ties with it, despite political vicissitudes.

The energy dependence on Russia seems to be long-term, both for oil and natural gas.

Oil covers about 32.7% of Germany's energy needs and gas about 22.7%, and Russia supplies Germany with 37% of that oil and 32% of that gas, both of which are expected to remain stable. The construction of NORD STREAM 2, despite European opposition and the threat of US sanctions, demonstrates the German desire to have a cheap supply of Russian gas, independent of third countries and in particular Ukraine. The links of the German political world with the GAZPROM consortium are proven.

These economic links maintain the ambiguity of the German-Russian relationship, which is marked by a certain mistrust of the policy of the prePresident Vladimir PUTIN, not without reason accused of questioning the balance and the borders of the Eastern European space, as well as the principles of the rule of law. But German-Russian relations have long been marked by alternating periods of connivance and repulsion, from the successive partitioning of Poland, Bismarckian Europe, military cooperation in the 1920s to the GDR's special position in the former Soviet bloc.

The question may eventually arise as to how this relationship will develop in the event of an increase in tensions, which Germany is trying to control, especially if internal difficulties weaken the Franco-German couple, an indispensable balancing factor in the current context.

2 - Developments since the 2017 elections and internal political difficulties

The spring and autumn 2017 elections in France and Germany, with the almost concomitant partial renewal of the teams in power, seemed at first sight to be a favourable opportunity to give the Franco-German couple the hoped-for new lease of life. But the persistence of internal difficulties for both partners and concerns for the future of the Union do not constitute a favourable context.

The election of President Emmanuel Macron was welcomed in Germany as a sign of hope for a new start in bilateral relations, bolstered by the essential internal reforms announced during the campaign. The Sorbonne speech of 26 September 2017, calling for "the refoundation of a sovereign, united and democratic Europe", testifies to the preThe Sorbonne speech of 26 September 2017, calling for "the refoundation of a sovereign, united and democratic Europe", testifies to the pre-stellar desire to relaunch the Union at a time when Chancellor Angela Merkel is due to form a new coalition following the federal elections of 24 September.

The "grand coalition" in power since 2013 has in fact just suffered an electoral setback, and the two partners, the Chancellor's Christian Democrats (CDU/CSU) and Social Democrats (SPD), are experiencing a historic setback. The difficulties that surrounded the formation of the government and the re-election of Mrs Merkel probably weakened her position on the international scene.s term of office, the Chancellor paved the way for her "runner-up" Annegret KRAMPKARRENBAUER (AKK), who succeeded her as President of her party on 7 December 2018, taking over the post of Chancellor at the same time. Furthermore, the entry into the Bundestag of the Alternative für Deutschland, a resolutely Eurosceptic party, which became the first opposition party, has upset the traditional balance of power.

In France, the end of 2018 is marked by the social unrest that we know. On 22 January 2019, therefore, two partners who were experiencing internal difficulties concluded the Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle, 56 years after the Elysée Treaty, one year behind schedule, on 22 January 2019, updating and, in some cases, strengthening its main provisions. The treaty recalls the friendship and responsibility of France and Germany within the

European Union and strengthens cooperation between the two states.

3 - New European issues.

The Treaty of Aachen is certainly necessary to reaffirm the reality of the Franco-German couple at a time when the European Union is weakened by the expiry of BREXIT and the development of Euroscepticism in its various forms.

However, we must not delude ourselves, and consider as the fruit of a marriage of love a couple that is the result of a marriage of reason, if not of interest. Franco-German friendship is a reality, cemented by in-depth mutual knowledge through exchanges and twinning, which can never be encouraged enough, fuelled by the reThis is fuelled by joint achievements, particularly in the fields of defence and security, diplomatic action and education, but friendly, even emotional ties cannot form a lasting basis for a policy.

It is therefore a marriage of reason that General DE GAULLE and Chancellor Konrad ADENAUER entered into in 1963 and which has endured according to circumstances. It is worth recalling, in this connection, the Bundestag's reaffirmation of the transatlantic link when it approved the Elysée Treaty, which was thus emptied of some of its substance. This being the case, the two partners have so far been able to stand together in difficult situations, such as the Euro-missile crisis of the 1980s, the reunification process and the challenges posed by the new European Union. This being the case, the two partners have so far been able to stand together in delicate situations such as the Euromissile crisis of the 1980s, the reunification process and the decisions to intervene (or not) in more recent conflicts, including that of Iraq in 2003, while symbolic gestures and meetings have contributed to the affirmation of a common view.

For this marriage of reason to continue in harmony, it must be balanced, so that everyone benefits and common perspectives prevail over divergent interests. Today, Germany seems to have acquired a preponderant weight within the Union, because of its own power, the dynamic in which it leads the "northern" States (Austria, Benelux, Denmark); France seems to be more isolated whereas the Southern" states, in particular Italy and Spain, take divergent or ambiguous positions. Germany has less and less need to reach agreement with France and is in a position to assert its own interests within the Union. Indeed, the recent negotiations (April 2019) on the modalities and timing of BREXIT have enabled the Federal Republic to make its position prevail, to which other partners have joined willingly or unwillingly.

It is, in this respect, interesting to note the German willingness to set the course for the Union, even if it means distancing itself clearly, and without excessive forms, from the vision and proposals of the French partner. The position taken by Annegret KRAMP-KARRENBAUER in her article of 10 March 2019 "Let's make Europe the right way" is a response to the final rejection of the project of "... the European Union". Refounding Europe" developed by President Macron the previous week in his address "to the citizens of Europe". AKK's plea to the nation states is clear: "No European superstate can meet the goal of a Europe capable of action. The functioning of the European institutions cannot claim any moral superiority over cooperation between national governments. Rebuilding Europe will not be possible without the nation states: they are the foundation of democratic legitimacy and the identification of peoples. It is the Member States that formulate their own interests and synthesise them at European level. It is from this reality that the weight of Europeans on the international stage emanates".

Put another way, the question is the capacity of the Franco-German couple to exert a common influence within the Union, overcoming the apparent or real divergences and

leadership quarrels that are currently emerging.

To sum up

Germany's willingness to play a role on the international stage commensurate with its power, and the consideration of its own national interests, which are driving it to integrate itself into the world economy, are the main reasons for its decision to take part in the international arena. Germany's desire to play a role on the international stage commensurate with its power and its own national interests, which encourage it to become more closely integrated into its Eastern European environment, are likely to unbalance the Franco-German couple, which is based on a marriage of reason even if it is not devoid of an emotional factor.

The risk of this imbalance is amplified by the rise of Eurosceptic and populist sentiments in a large part of the European Union, which, over and above the electoral results of the various elections, are not only a source of concern for the French-German couple, but also a threat to their future. The risk of this imbalance is amplified by the rise of Eurosceptic and populist sentiments in much of the European Union, which, over and above the electoral results of the various parties, almost necessarily leads to a hardening of positions and a competition for European leadership in which Germany, despite its difficulties, seems best placed.

If we wish to preserve the asset that Franco-German friendship and cooperation represent for Europe and for our two nations, it seems essential to intensify cooperation on the ground at the lowest levels in order to encourage, when the time comes, joint actions on a larger scale.

Title :	Le général (2S) Olivier de BECDELIÈVRE
Author (s) :	Le général (2S) Olivier de BECDELIÈVRE
Release date	12/02/2021

[FIND OUT MORE](#)

[DOWNLOAD DOCUMENT](#)
