



Does the Franco-German couple have a future on defence and security issues?

military-Earth thinking notebook

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Three recent events may leave the reader perplexed about the improvement of Franco-German relations in the field of defence cooperation. First of all, the ceremonies marking the 50th ^{anniversary of} the Elysée Treaty, which was signed on 22 January 1963, were not the subject of any sensational declarations. Secondly, the announcement on 21 October 2013 of the dissolution of the 110th infantry ^{regiment} belonging to the Franco-German brigade (BFA) cast a chill. Finally, the new government coalition emerging across the Rhine, SPD and CSU, does not augur well for many positive developments in the field of defence.

And yet a lot has been achieved since the reconciliation of our two countries sealed by General de Gaulle and Chancellor Konrad Adenauer. That was yesterday, and it took great political courage at the time to take the step.

Franco-German cooperation has been developing for more than 50 years and is a real achievement that should not be neglected today. This cooperation remains an absolute necessity, not only for historical reasons, but mainly for reasons of European construction. The two countries, which are capable of courageous initiatives in economic terms, must become more involved in security and defence issues. If Germany still suffers from chronic difficulties in defence matters due to a difference of opinion on the use of military forces, it is because it is still living in the trauma of the post-war period and continues to cultivate a pacifist, even anti-militarist spirit. It must be remembered that we imposed this behaviour at the time for obvious reasons. The Germans need time and we must be patient.

Even if the dissolution of the 110th Donaueschingen infantry ^{regiment} will not jeopardize the future of the BFA, it still sanctions the disappearance of the last regiment based across the Rhine. The BFA will remain the strong symbol of Franco-German cooperation. Created on 2 October 1989, it is the result of an initiative launched by Chancellor Helmut Kohl and President François Mitterrand. It has made it possible to improve mutual knowledge of the armies of the two countries and to make them more interoperable. On the operational side, the BFA has been engaged in the Balkans and Afghanistan. It now includes Belgian and Spanish elements in its structure. Composed of 4,800 men, it can be used for either NATO or the European Union. Its headquarters are located in Müllheim, and the brigade is composed of two German battalions and two French regiments. On 31 October 2013, German Defence Minister Thomas de Maizières made this reassuring statement: "Germany and France agree that the special significance of the brigade remains a high priority for Franco-German relations... My colleague has promised to maintain the full capability profile of the BFA through the assignment of a regiment stationed in France". On the French side, our Minister of Defence reaffirmed France's commitment to the BFA as early as 21 October: "The Franco-German brigade, an indispensable tool of cooperation, is not called into question...a new regiment with superior capabilities of action will be attached to the BFA". He added that France would also maintain a level of personnel stationed in Germany equivalent to that of the German forces stationed in France, i.e. about 500 people.

But this is only one aspect of the multi-faceted cooperation with Germany initiated by the Elysée Treaty signed on 22 January 1963 between General de Gaulle and Chancellor Adenauer, sealing the reconciliation between the two countries. It was on the 25th ^{anniversary} of the treaty, in 1994, that the Franco-German Defence and Security Council (CFADS) was created. And, as part of the so-called "Blaesheim" process, the President of the Republic and the Head of the German Government have become accustomed to meeting every two months.

On the operational side, in addition to the BFA, a Franco-German army corps with a European vocation was mentioned as early as 1991 and the following year gave birth to the Eurocorps, whose headquarters moved to Strasbourg on 1 July 1992. Declared fully operational in 1995, it was engaged in Bosnia (1998), Kosovo (2000) and Afghanistan (2004-2005 and 2012-2013). The Eurocorps is composed of five framework nations (Belgium, France, Germany, Luxembourg, Spain and France) with four associate nations (Greece, Italy, Poland and Turkey), with Romania and the United States intending to become associate nations.

On the equipment side, Franco-German cooperation has had a prosperous period in terms of armaments programmes, the first of which even predate the Elysée Treaty (Bréguet-Atlantic, Transall, Ratac). This cooperation developed with the Milan, Hot and Roland missiles, then the Tiger (1987), the Cobra (counter-battery) and finally the NH 90 in 1992.

At the same time, numerous initiatives were launched: in 1984, creation of the Franco-German training centre for advanced air traffic controllers (CFAA Nancy); in 1991, creation of the Franco-German naval force (FNFA); in 2003, creation of the Franco-German Tiger Schools (EFA), based in Nancy, France; in 2004, creation of the Franco-German Tiger School (EFA), based in Paris, France. In 2003, the Franco-German Tiger Schools (EFA) were established, based in Le Luc, France, for tactical and flying training and in Fassberg, Germany, for technical training; in 2007, the military Erasmus programme was created to facilitate exchanges of young officers.

More recently, in the framework of the so-called extended Weimar initiative, the foreign

ministers of France, Germany, Italy, Poland, Spain and Germany had decided to establish the Military Erasmus programme for the exchange of young officers. declared on 15 November 2012 that they wanted to promote an ambitious European policy in the field of defence and security, that it should be based on a common European defence and security policy and that it should be based on the principles of the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP). establish civil-military structures capable of planning and conducting operations, encourage initiatives for pooling and sharing capabilities , work towards better coordination of national defence plans and develop a viable, competitive and self-sufficient European defence technological and industrial base.

This comprehensive review shows the interest and willingness of the two countries to continue a collaboration that began more than 50 years ago and whose results are edifying.

And yet there are several signs that the momentum is running out of steam. No large-scale armaments cooperation has been launched since 1992. Germany's involvement in various operations, whether NATO or EU, has often been so constrained that its effectiveness has been affected. The German position, close to the veto, was a great disappointment to the Allies and France in particular at the time of Operation Harmattan in Libya in 2011.

Germany continues to adopt an ambivalent position, a legacy of the consequences of the Second World War. Since then, and because we wanted to, it has developed a strategic culture based on two basic principles, pacifism and multilateralism. Deeply traumatized, the German population has become pacifist. This affects all generations, even the youngest. Thus, Germany has only been able to rebuild its military tool within the framework of cooperation and multilateralism, mainly within NATO.

The situation is such that, for the first time in 2014, its defence budget will exceed that of France in volume. It is caught in a dilemma in which it will have to choose between extreme multilateralism in terms of delegating its defence to the United States and the European Union. It is caught in a dilemma in which it will have to choose between extreme multilateralism in delegating its defence to an organisation, NATO, and taking national responsibility for the defence of its national and European interests.

Although Germany has gradually intervened in external operations, it has only done so within an extremely restrictive and limited framework, imposed by strict parliamentary rules, so as to maintain a reassuring image of peacekeepers in the minds of the public. And the German citizen reacts badly when he suddenly discovers with horror that his army is waging war in Afghanistan. There is currently a phenomenon of rejection and a return to an anti-militaristic attitude in the German class. So much so that, on the west bank of the Rhine, some people do not hesitate to speak of an army of "non-employment" and show their willingness to turn to other partners.

Maintaining and further developing Franco-German initiatives, mainly in the field of the Common Security and Defence Policy, is a vital necessity for the future of Europe. There should be no fear of talking about Franco-German co-leadership at continental level. To that end, it is necessary to maintain and intensify bilateral contacts, whether or not they

include Poland's neighbours. Making the most of what already exists must be a permanent concern, mainly for the BFA and the European Corps. Consideration should be given to the specialisation of national operational headquarters, with Germany in the eastern neighbourhood and France in the southern neighbourhood, for example. Working bilaterally on the cross-approach of national risks, threats and issues will make it possible to identify points of convergence and, above all, divergence that need to be worked on. Finally, the success of a body such as the European Air Transport Command, the EATC in Eindhoven, a Franco-German initiative, should be proposed as a model for future operational cooperation. While the main emphasis is on operational aspects, it is their success coupled with a shared political will that will make it possible to relaunch armaments cooperation in the future.

More specifically, the project for a rapid reaction force based on the use of battlegroups (EUBGs) would make it possible to relaunch a process of bringing our defence tools closer together. But it will still take a great deal of political will and time to dispel doubts and fears on both sides of the Rhine.

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