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The Franco-German relationship - the engine of European integration

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Table of content

1.	Summary	
4		
2.	Preface	
6		
3.	Introduction	7
3.1.	The issue and research interests	8
4.	Franco-German relations 1945-1990	10
5.	Continuity and change aspects in Franco-German relations since 1990	12
5.1.	Continuity aspects	13
5.1.1.	Franco-German cooperation in the field of EU policy	13
5.1.1.1.	The Maastricht Treaty and the establishment of the EU	14
5.1.1.2.	Franco-German initiatives in the Amsterdam Treaty	16
5.1.1.3.	The Blaesheim process	18
5.1.2.	Interim conclusion	20
5.2.	Conversion aspects	21
5.2.1.	German reunification	21
5.2.1.1.	German and French conduct in the reunification process	21
5.2.1.2.	Changes to the fundamentals of Franco-German bilateralism	24
5.2.1.3.	Mutual perceptions in the reunification process	25
5.2.2.	Franco-German cooperation in the field of EU policy	27
5.2.2.3.	The Franco-German crisis in the course of negotiations on the Treaty of Nice in 2000	28
5.2.2.4.	The European crisis as a consequence of the French veto on the EU Constitutional Treaty	30
5.2.3.	Interim conclusion	32
6.	Recent developments in Franco-German relations	33
6.1.	Franco-German relations under Schröder/Merkel and Chirac	33
6.2.	Franco-German relations under the Sarkozy–Merkel tandem	35
6.3.	Franco-German consultations since 2008	36

6.4.	Merkel sets the agenda in the debt crisis	38
6.5.	France's 2012 presidential election, the Franco-German friendship and lines in common European policy	40
6.6.	Interim conclusion	42
7.	Conclusion	43
8.	References	47

1. **Summary**

The end of the Second World War represents a turning point for the two neighbouring countries of France and Germany. France was one of the four victorious powers. Initially, Germany was economically and politically isolated. After the establishment of the Federal Republic in 1949, it was therefore important for these two countries to approach one another again, with Charles de Gaulle representing France and Konrad Adenauer representing Germany. The result is reflected in the Elysée Treaty of 1963. From then onwards, Konrad Adenauer brought his European policy into line in order to uplift the German population, demoralised after having lost the war. The two countries had different concepts of Europe, not only in the immediate aftermath of the war, but also in the 1990s. This was particularly evident in the merger of the two German states in 1990. This event triggered fears in France that the German resurgence could also lead to a departure from Germany's integration with the West. The end of the East-West conflict, however, marked a new era in Europe in foreign and security terms.

German reunification also enabled France and Germany to actively participate in the European integration process. A motor function emerged through the joint cooperation in Franco-German relations in the European Community (EC). This common will continues to be the driving force in Europe, manifested by the Blaesheim process. In this process, Chirac and Schröder managed to settle their disputes from 2000 whilst negotiating the Treaty of Nice. This process also led to the resumption of the long-standing Franco-German friendship and partnership at both bilateral and European levels.

The German Chancellor Helmut Kohl and the French President Mitterand were instrumental in bringing about the conclusion of the Maastricht Treaty, leading to the political union of Europe. However, the two statesmen additionally pursued their own interests. French fears were reflected in the notion that Germany could assume supremacy in Europe following reunification. This fear was not seen by France at the time of the East-West conflict.

The differences between the Member States, as well as between Germany and France, were resolved upon the conclusion of the Amsterdam Treaty on 2 October 1997. The difference between the Maastricht Treaty and the Amsterdam Treaty was that again more importance was placed on supra-nationality. The Franco-German

tandem contributed to this, in spite of having different interests concerning progress in the integration process.

Over the decades, crises have occasionally occurred that had to be overcome. One such crisis was France's rejection of the European Union (EU) Constitutional Treaty of 29 May 2005. This European political crisis became a problem of Franco-German cooperation. The population of France felt that its country would lose its status and soul. They feared the loss of their traditional values due to globalisation, immigration and sometimes European integration. Owing to its positive experience with federal structures, the German population was not afraid of losing its national identity. If the two partners wanted to do justice to their driving role in the integration process, the bilateral differences based on the two countries' conceptions of Europe would have to be overcome.

The change of government in Germany in 2005 also resulted in a change in the Franco-German tandem. Governmental responsibility devolved from Gerhard Schröder to Angela Merkel. In European policy, Merkel consciously supported the new Central and Eastern European countries – especially Poland. Nevertheless, Franco-German cooperation was essential to Merkel as a catalyst. The Chancellor differed from her predecessors. She attempted to embed German interests in a European framework whilst simultaneously enshrining them in transatlantic relations. She disagreed with Chirac on the Constitutional Treaty, the basic structure of which she wanted to preserve.

Nicolas Sarkozy succeeded Chirac as French president. They both advocated improving relations with the United States of America (USA). They both vehemently rejected Turkey's accession to the EU. They both thought positively about being close to their citizens. This was natural to Angela Merkel. Sarkozy, however, clearly stood out from his predecessors in the French presidential office in this regard. However, there were also divergences. This also is particularly reflected in the French position on economic interventionism, which is why Sarkozy also intervened in the economy when it seemed to be under pressure, while Mrs. Merkel felt obliged to separate the state from the economy. In many policy areas, Sarkozy adopted a liberal attitude, despite being aware of the French tradition of having a strong state. This was also his fundamental conviction.

A new President of France was elected in 2012. Sarkozy was voted out of office. His successor was François Hollande. There will be no major change to the Franco-

German relationship because both Hollande and Merkel are pragmatists. As a result of the EU debt crisis, however, Franco-German cooperation envisaged different solutions to economic and budgetary issues, affecting the motor function of Germany and France. The economic weakness of France is becoming increasingly apparent, which could cause the weighting within the Franco-German relationship to change in the long term. Decisions currently being taken in the EU will show whether the imbalance between the two countries can be redressed, enabling them to return to a common line.

2. Preface

The relationship between Germany and France can rightly be described as unique. After all, no other two countries in Europe or in any other continent have such intensive bilateral contacts as Germany and France.

Franco-German relations were and remain the synonym for the progressive integration of European nation-states, the pooling of European policy and Europe's role in the world.

Franco-German relations were first institutionalised in 1963 by the Elysée Treaty, supported by the spirit of reconciliation between the two countries. For the two great statesmen Charles de Gaulle and Konrad Adenauer it constituted a milestone concern and thus a far-sighted commitment, which was supported by common values and a shared responsibility. It has a particular relevance in our times.

On this basis, bilateral cooperation developed into a close and highly successful partnership over the decades – despite occasional political divergences and regardless of government constellations. It was and is referred to as the 'Franco-German tandem', the 'Franco-German engine' or the 'flywheel for Europe'. Bilateral projects and initiatives contributed to the dynamics of cooperation, while common impulses made a crucial contribution to European integration. However, dramatic changes in geopolitics mean that not only France and Germany, but also Europe are faced with a fundamentally new challenge. The epochal shift in the existing world order not only leads to a decline in the importance of the two countries as nation-states, but also enhances the significance of Europe. Some 50 years after the Elysée Treaty was signed, it is therefore all the more important today that further cooperation between Europe's two largest countries continues to be shaped and adapted to changing global conditions.

Especially in times characterised by the difficult and conflict-ridden emergence of a new multipolar world order, enhanced and reinforced cooperation between France and Germany can once again represent a fascinating model for jointly addressing and tackling Europe's growing political, economic and social challenges.

3. Introduction

The neighbouring countries of Germany and France have always had a special relationship; until 1945, however, it was characterised by profound hostility, especially evident in the three wars waged between the two countries. After 1945, the relationship was not always free of misunderstandings. Nevertheless, there was growing consensus on both sides that there was no alternative to the “couple franco-allemand”¹. Reconciliation efforts between the two countries culminated in the Elysée Treaty of 1963, which stated that both governments shall undertake to consult one another in all important matters of foreign, security, youth and cultural policy (Defrance and Pfeil 2012, p. 52). They also agreed to hold special intergovernmental meetings at regular intervals.

Each nation initially attempted to interpret the contract in order to use it to assert its own interests. The French were worried that Germany could approach the Soviet Union. Germany, however, saw the danger of a French policy of détente – to the detriment of Germany. The background of these different perspectives also referred to the preceding Stalin Note of 1952, in which Joseph Stalin offered negotiations on the reunification and neutralisation of Germany to the Western powers – France, the UK and the USA (Bonwetsch 2008, p. 106).

Seen from the French perspective, the Elysée Treaty and associated cooperation between France and Germany meant that the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) was to be detached from the sphere of the USA. It was therefore very difficult to obtain Germany's agreement. The Germans had not forgotten the USA's effective economic and financial assistance under the Marshall Plan. In the end, Germany did approve of the contract, despite strong criticism from the opposition in the German Bundestag and from the USA.

It initially appeared as though the contract would be condemned to failure. The Germans, however, made sure that this was not the case. This preamble included the

1 www.ladocumentationfrancaise.fr

commitment to create close political, economic and defence relations with the USA, Great Britain and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), enabling German unity to be restored. In 1963, Germany and France had no way of anticipating the important role both countries would one day play in the European integration process.

3.1. **The issue and research interests**

After the Second World War, Germany and France went their separate ways – especially in political terms. While France was one of the four victorious powers, Germany was initially economically and politically isolated. Against this historical background, it was understandable that the newly founded FRG considered it very important to establish bilateral relations and, particularly, the Franco-German relationship. Two of these countries' most important statesmen – Charles De Gaulle and Konrad Adenauer – took action, enabling Germany and France to approach one another again. The Elysée Treaty was the result of significant convergence.

Despite this approach, both countries were also key individual actors in the international system. Furthermore, they embraced their own interests. For this reason, Germany and France are a good example of successful bilateral relations also being a prerequisite for successful multilateralism and integration. Germany and France are the two largest economies in the European Union, obliging them to take the leading role in Europe. Such an endeavour would never have succeeded without the strong Franco-German axis.

The European Economic and Monetary Union of the European Union, established later, consequently set itself the goal of coordinating national economic policies and, ultimately, establishing a single European market – in addition to introducing a joint currency.

In this thesis, an examination is undertaken of how Franco-German bilateralism in particular has developed from the time of German reunification to the present day. Here, the focus will be on answering the following question:

Has the Franco-German relationship changed – especially due to German reunification, and does it affect the EU?

The course of history between France and Germany can be outlined very well by this question.

Based on the political events that occurred in this period and the development of the relationship between the two countries, I examine whether German reunification was a catalyst for the integration process of the European Economic and Monetary Union, noting simultaneously that relations between the two countries have not always been smooth.

In the course of my scientific work, I will therefore particularly explore the relationship between German chancellors and French Presidents, and consider the attitude of French politics in the reunification process. The importance of the research question arises from this. I would like to note at this point that I can only investigate and analyse events in this thesis that have in fact occurred. My thesis is situated at the interface between economics, history and political science. It is therefore necessary to consider the specific elements of the respective disciplines. However, the emphasis is on the theoretical framework, and thus on the field of political science.

Since the methodological study of continuity and change will be undertaken in the main part of this thesis, it is divided into three chapters. The first chapter, devoted exclusively to Franco-German relations from 1945 to 1990, serves as a basis for comparison in the second and third chapters of the main part. The particular aspects of continuity and change in bilateral relations in European policy from German reunification in 1990 to the change of government in 2005 are investigated in the fourth chapter. Due to the juxtaposition of continuity and change in this thesis, the fourth chapter is divided into a continuity part and a change part.

Since continuity and change represent a development that can be identified by individual moments, individual historical events are referred to as aspects of continuity and change, which – in their entirety – make a statement about continuity and change in relations between the states. In the fifth chapter, recent developments in Franco-German relations, starting with the inauguration of Angela Merkel in Germany and the French Presidents Jacques Chirac, Nicolas Sarkozy and François Hollande, will be examined for the period from 2005 to the present day. The conclusion offers an answer to the research question and makes a prediction, especially with regard to continuity and change in the Franco-German relationship as well as in the common European position.

Many scientific articles, editorials, books, essays, discussions and official documents issued by the EU, the Konrad Adenauer Foundation, the Friedrich Ebert Foundation

and the Friedrich Naumann Foundation exist on this issue, which were used for this thesis. To be more precise, my thesis is based primarily on monographs by Wichard Woyke and Ulrike Guérot, both of whom are experts on Germany and France.

However, one important aspect of my research is the state of Franco-German relations in the period after the change of government in Germany in 2005. For this reason, it was essential to include print media such as the main German and French newspapers. In particular, I scrutinised the political editorials of the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, Die Welt, Die Zeit and Le Monde. In this context, all relevant aspects are taken into account. It must be noted, however, that not everything can be dealt with in complete detail. Nevertheless, these individual aspects demonstrate how complicated the path towards stabilising the Franco-German relationship can be. And yet this path is necessary if the motor function is to continue to foster the organisation of Europe.

4. **Franco-German relations 1945-1990**

In this section I will describe the course taken by Franco-German relations until German reunification in 1990.

Germany and France share a common history that goes back to the empire of Charlemagne. For a long time, so-called enmity developed in the Franco-German relationship, resulting in a “companions in fate”² for both countries. The term was used in connection with the Elysée Treaty of 1963. This meant that a line was drawn under the “enmity” that had previously led to three bloody wars. Thus, the Treaty established the work of reconciliation between the two neighbours.³ The advent of patterns of perception in the 19th century, mainly marked by hostility, had an increasingly negative impact on the bilateral relationships.

With the Nazi regime under Hitler during the Third Reich, however, the French image of a romantic Germany became less and less important, according to Hans Süßmuth: “While the image of the Germans included positive and negative traits before the Second World War, the war and occupation have destroyed the ‘myth’ of the ‘virtues’ of the Germans” (Süßmuth 1997, p. 230). Consequently, the Franco-

² www.bundestag.de

³ Cf. http://www.bundestag.de/dokumente/textarchiv/2013/42552690_kw04_elysee_sitzung/#

Prussian War of 1870/71, which represented an outbreak of German nationalist aspiration through the German annexation of Alsace-Lorraine and the First and Second World Wars, resulted – according to French perception – in the development of fears of a German ambition to become a great power. That this perception had equal effects on the actions of political leaders in the period after the Second World War can be seen as a logical consequence of France’s experience with Germany in the context of these conflicts.

Different concepts of Europe were therefore also formed in France and Germany after the Second World War. French European policy was no longer directed at protection against Germany. Instead, it targeted controlling West Germany by integrating the country into what was the start of the European integration process (Sauder 1997, p. 206). Due to the division of Germany into two states, France was certain of its safety. From the French perspective, leadership in Europe and the impact on German policy was thereby additionally guaranteed.

Establishing Germany in Western integration networks was the driving force behind France’s European policy. To this day, this aspect is one of the main features of France’s European policy, because besides controlling Germany, another target was to develop Europe as an independent actor in world politics under French leadership. To this end, however, German support was required to secure France’s European policy objectives.

The German conception of Europe after the Second World War pursued the same approach. Its target was to integrate Germany into Europe. European policy was therefore part of this concept. A clear orientation to the West was the anchor of the country’s foreign policy. For the FRG, participation in the European integration process was a means and simultaneously a tool for achieving equality and sovereignty. It was therefore a prerequisite for stimulating the process of normalisation with its neighbours.

Konrad Adenauer’s European policy represented an opportunity to bolster German society, which had become demoralised by the war. It was a measure to return to the family of European nations. For a long time, however, the federal approach towards Europe was diametrically opposed to French ideas in this regard (Sauder 1997, p. 211). Even in the 1990s, there were serious differences of opinion between the two countries concerning the notion of Europe. The most striking difference was that France did not want the two German states (the FRG and the German Democratic

Republic, GDR) to reunify. It feared a resurgence of Germany and thus a departure from integration with the West.

The period between 1945 and the end of the East-West conflict in 1990 can therefore be seen as a phase of reconciliation in Franco-German relations that occurred in stages. The respective presidents and chancellors had a significant impact on this reconciliation. The direction in which Franco-German relations developed at European, security and foreign policy level after the Second World War is the subject of the next chapter, containing a brief outline of bilateral relations.

5. Continuity and change aspects in Franco-German relations since 1990

In light of the end of the East-West conflict, which marked a new era, continuity and change in the Franco-German relationship can be observed in European, security and foreign relations. Frequent consultations between the two neighbouring countries indeed led to the creation of confidence-building measures. Nevertheless, there was always an ebb and flow in Franco-German relations, which must be regarded in the context of important historical and political events. These events were either critical or novel for the relationship. They therefore indicate a change in relationships or had changes in their relations as a result. The desire for mutual cooperation was the logical consequence. This was associated with the attempt to obtain the continuity, for instance, by setting up cooperative initiatives at the European, security and foreign policy level.

The aspects that shed light on the continuity issue are characterised by a state of the convergence of interests of the Franco-German relationship, which was to be maintained by emphasising and advancing the underlying similarities. The events were associated with tensions or even crises in inter-state relations and show a state of divergence of interests, which they attempted to counter by bringing about change accordingly. Such change consisted, for instance, of innovations like the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) project and the European Security and Defence Policy.

5.1. Continuity aspects

The German question was often the subject of international debate from the end of the Second World War. For this reason, the developments, particularly from a French perspective, are addressed in this section.

From the end of the Second World War, the “German question” (Blumenwitz 1989, p. 64) turned out to be a constant problem in international politics. The different political conceptions regarding Germany and the goals of the victorious powers were not only responsible for the emergence of the East-West confrontation, but also for the division of Germany into two states. The GDR, along with the other ‘Eastern Bloc’ countries, was under the tutelage of the Soviet Union.

Hence the ensuing institutionalisation of Europe was a French response to the situation in Germany, which had not then progressed to such an extent that France felt safe. On the path towards Europe, Franco-German relations were a major actor. Finally, intergovernmental cooperation culminated in the signing of the Elysée Treaty (Baumann 2003, p. 73). Owing to this desire for mutual cooperation, a motor function in the framework of the European Community was developed in Franco-German relations. It required concessions from both sides to fulfil this role. Thus, this requirement may be considered as the foundation of Franco-German relations during the East-West conflict. France’s interest in keeping Germany under control after reunification is expressed in numerous French-European initiatives intended to continue Germany’s integration at European level. In terms of time, the conclusion of the Maastricht Treaty represents the first continuity aspect in continuous Franco-German cooperation.

5.1.1. Franco-German cooperation in the field of EU policy

Despite the enormous upheaval caused by the end of the East-West conflict and reunification, there was active Franco-German participation in the European integration process. It was in a sense a challenge for the Franco-German couple, which, under changing conditions, continued to want to act as the engine in Europe: “The dawn of the post-Cold War era presented the new challenge for that Franco-German team, which – although not always free from suspicion, accusations and misunderstandings – had nevertheless become the motor of European construction” (Manfrass-Sirjacques 1992, p. 275).

A continuation of French European policy can be seen in the conclusion of the Maastricht Treaty in the early 1990s and the Amsterdam Treaty in 1997,

characterised by France's rapprochement with Europe under President François Mitterrand. Despite reunification, Germany continued the European policy of the old Federal Republic, which consisted of "cooperative internationalism" (Woyke 2004, p. 36) with strongly pronounced supranational features. Furthermore, continuous Franco-German cooperation at European level was characterised by bilateral initiatives (ibid.). The expression of the common will in Europe to continue its driving force was underscored by the Blaesheim process, which was nothing but an emphasis on the long-standing Franco-German friendship and partnership in a bilateral and European framework. The Blaesheim process is specifically addressed in section 5.1.1.3.

5.1.1.1. The Maastricht Treaty and the establishment of the EU

The path towards the Maastricht Treaty and the political union of Europe was strongly influenced by Franco-German projects. Chancellor Kohl and President Mitterrand in particular showed great interest in ratifying the Treaty. In their joint letter to the Irish Council Chairman, Prime Minister Charles Haughey, written in April 1990, Kohl and Mitterrand put forward a proposal to the other EC Member States to set up a political union in addition to economic union (Defrance and Pfeil 2005, p. 132). This, therefore, addressed the convergent attitudes of the two statesmen and their governments regarding the intensification of European integration.

Other bilateral initiatives followed in the course of negotiations on the Maastricht Treaty. In order to achieve a political expansion of the EU, Kohl and Mitterrand suggested enforcing a "deepening and widening of Community powers" (Woyke 2004, p. 41). They also addressed the establishment of a Council of Interior and Justice Minister. In addition to these initiatives, the introduction of a citizenship of the Union and the joint initiative on foreign, security and defence policy were an expression of Franco-German cooperation at European level.

It goes without saying that both political actors had different motivations and interests in pursuing a deepening of integration. However, it is important that they ultimately turned out to be complementary. France's motivations were based on profound fears of German supremacy in Europe, which were much more realistic following the reunification of Germany than during the East-West conflict. In addition, France feared that Germany would now become the new leading power in

Europe. Françoise Manfrass-Sirjacques described this in the following words: “And Paris feared that a larger and liberated Germany rises due to its economic capacity to the new European leadership. France, however, must take leave of his ambitions and becomes thrown back to the periphery of Europe” (Manfrass-Sirjacques 1992, p. 275).

The detachment of France as the leading power in Europe would have led to the loss of another status symbol for the French episode. The French pattern of perception, shaped by the fear of German strength, emerged in the period before 1990, mainly due to the wars that both countries waged against each other. The Franco-Prussian War of 1870/71, and the two world wars that ensued, created this perception because of German expansionism, which was particularly strong during the Franco-Prussian War and the Third Reich under Adolf Hitler. They therefore influenced French European, security and foreign policy to a considerable extent after the fall of the Berlin Wall. Fear of German supremacy was widespread not only at government level, but also in French society, and ultimately led to the French population’s support for accepting the Maastricht Treaty in a referendum (Herz and Jetzlsperger 2008, p. 33). France was domestically split into two camps, the ‘Maastricht opponents’ and the ‘Maastricht proponents’ (Deubner 1995, p. 75), which meant that France’s discussions on Europe gained a “political-cultural dimension” (Woyke 2004, p. 49) in parliamentary debates.

Jean-Pierre Froehly explained the shift from France’s Germany policy to its European policy with the goal of continuing to control Germany as follows: “Maastricht as a French initiative to limit the ‘uncertainty’ created by eliminating the division of Germany through the new instrument of ‘Europe’, after the traditional instrument of French policy towards Germany, the policy of equilibrium through alliances, was no longer able to find support. For this reason, after the European summit in Strasbourg, Mitterrand accelerated the process that led to Maastricht, which meant concentrating all efforts on a European monetary unit solution” (Wiesberg 2000).

It is thus clear that Mitterrand was aware of the fact that France’s policy towards Germany after the Second World War in this situation caused by reunification would require adaption to realities. This necessitated a stronger integration of Germany in Europe, which also included France’s greater integration. Since Germany perceived these French fears, the country was willing to integrate further in order to allay

France's fears by supporting the conclusion of the Maastricht Treaty. This conduct shows that Germany's consideration of its partners, especially France, grew out of this perception. Thus, this can be regarded as a German pattern of perception that became visible after the Second World War and was due to past German hegemony. While Germany constantly demonstrated to its partners that it was willing to become integrated in Europe, it also made clear its intention not to return to its aspirations of becoming a great power. It was therefore willing to become more closely integrated in the European community, emphasising the objectives envisaged in the Maastricht Treaty for its constant interest in a common Europe. In his speech to mark the 100th anniversary of the birth of Maurice Beaumont in February 1992, Jacques Chirac reiterated that both partners continued to be interested in playing the role of "integration engine": "The fundamental interests of France and Germany agree more than ever. France and Germany thus have a vested interest in mutually exercising as much responsibility as possible" (Barrière and Caro 2010, p. 66).

This statement confirms the integration readiness of both European countries. By ratifying the treaty, Germany and France sent a positive signal for further close cooperation at the European level. It also continued the 30-year development that also helped to strengthen the centre of the EC level (Jachtenfuchs 1992, p. 284). The consensus of EU Member States in relation to the establishment of the EU can therefore be regarded as a result of the changed situation following the epochal changes between 1989 and 1991 (Arnold 1995, p. 24).

5.1.1.2. Franco-German initiatives in the Amsterdam Treaty

The Amsterdam Treaty, signed on 2 October 1997, represents the completion of the Turin 1996 Intergovernmental Conference (IGC), involving numerous disagreements between Member States, including Germany and France, concerning the future structure of the EU and its competences (Ocaña 2013). Despite holding different views, Germany and France were ultimately able to compromise, as reflected in the Franco-German initiatives in the Amsterdam Treaty. The Franco-German proposal to introduce the new structure principle of "flexibility" (Woyke 2004, p. 68) is one example of their compromise. The aim of flexibility was to help EU Member States overcome the growing incompatibility of all interests within the EU. By enabling the EU to allow the majority of EU Member States that wanted it closer cooperation in specific policy areas, France and Germany sought to introduce the structural

principle of flexibility to help prevent blockages, paralysis or even stagnation in the further integration of the EU due to different interests (Woyke 2004, p. 68). The introduction of flexibility also prevented the emergence of a “Europe à la carte” (ibid.). By taking this initiative, Germany and France once again proved their role as an engine for integration.

Another example of continuing Franco-German cooperation is the CFSP, further developed in the Amsterdam Treaty: “The prospects of having a common defence are being extended by the Amsterdam Treaty, especially at Germany and France’s insistence” (Deutschmann and Schmidt 2001). This prospect of common defence is reflected in the fact that the European Council can establish common defence by a unanimous decision by the national parliaments without an intergovernmental conference being convened (Racine 1998, p. 19). In addition, the Franco-German proposal to integrate the Western European Union (WEU) into the EU, made together with Italy, Belgium, Luxembourg and the Netherlands, led to a rapprochement between the two organisations despite its rejection due to opposition by Great Britain. This rapprochement was expressed in the inclusion of the Petersberg tasks in the Treaty on European Union, where non-WEU members are given the opportunity to participate in and also facilitate the use of military force (Ortega 2000). In addition, the Secretary General of the Council should in future represent the visibility and continuity of CFSP as “High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy” (Müller-Brandeck-Bocquet and Rüter 2011, p. 170). This scheme constituted an agreement between the Member States, and originated from a joint initiative of Kohl and Chirac in the form of a joint letter written on 7 December 1995 in which they requested “greater visibility / visibilité” (Müller-Brandeck-Bocquet 1997, p. 25) of CFSP. The background to this joint initiative was the failure of CFSP in the Bosnian conflict (ibid.), which “damaged the international reputation of the European Union to a large extent” (ibid.). This highlights the importance of Franco-German cooperation in the European integration process, and also shows that the active European policy of Kohl and Mitterrand was continued under the Kohl–Chirac tandem, confirming the important motor function of the two countries in Europe (Woyke 2004, p. 70).

The Amsterdam Treaty envisages more supranationalism than the Maastricht Treaty. Regulations such as the appointment of a “Mr. CFSP” (held by Javier Solana from 1999 to 2009) represent an enormous increase in external action by the EU, and

prove the continuity of Franco-German cooperation, based on the numerous initiatives described in the course of the Amsterdam Treaty. When the Lisbon Treaty entered into force on 1 December 2009, the Office of the High Representative of the Commissioner for External Relations merged (the “small double-hat”). This new office was called the “EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy” (Müller-Brandeck-Bocquet and Rüger 2011, p. 142).

5.1.1.3. The Blaesheim process

In 2001, the leaders of France and Germany and their foreign ministers met in Blaesheim, Alsace – symbolically located at the interface between France and Germany – for an informal conversation. Ever since then, they have met there every six to eight weeks to discuss current European and international issues within the “Blaesheim process”. The precursor to the Blaesheim process was a meeting between Giscard d’Estaing and Helmut Schmidt, together with their Foreign Ministers, at the Hotel Au Boeuf Blaesheim on 19 July 1977.⁴

Ten years after reunification, Franco-German relations experienced a crisis. This low point in the relationship since the fall of the Berlin Wall was illustrated by disputes between Chirac and Schröder in 2000 whilst negotiating the Treaty of Nice. These strong tensions between Germany and France triggered a return by both partners to the traditional decades of Franco-German friendship and partnership. It was expressed in the Blaesheim meeting that emerged in a discussion between President Chirac and Chancellor Schröder in the Alsatian community of Blaesheim. Due to deep resentments, the President and the Chancellor agreed to coordinate their positions in future in informal meetings to prepare for EU summits. These meetings were to be held in the presence of the respective foreign ministers.⁵ The goal was to avoid a repetition of the crisis experienced by the Franco-German tandem in Nice. One of the reasons why the crisis broke out was that Gerhard Schröder, who came into office in 1998, had no foreign policy experience as Chancellor.

⁴ Cf. www.france-allemande.fr

⁵ Cf. *ibid.*

When France's President Chirac assumed the EU Presidency on 1 July 2000, he increasingly addressed European policy (Kempf 2003, p. 301). In a nutshell, he embarked on a course that focused primarily on maximising national interests.

Germany, however, had other ideas, which led to a confrontation between the two countries. This culminated in the EU Intergovernmental Conference in Nice in December 2000 (Hölscheid and Miederer 2001/2002, p. 97). The problems that had remained unresolved in the Amsterdam Treaty – also called the “leftovers” (Läufer 2004, p. 54) – were to be finally settled in Nice. One such unresolved problem was re-weighting the votes in the Council. The French position was related to the promise of parity given by Adenauer and Monnet in 1951 (Monnet 1978, p. 506). This promise was to be kept, even though Germany had grown in size following reunification. However, Schröder disagreed, putting a great strain on Franco-German relations for a while. To prevent disharmony between France and Germany in the future, it was agreed to resume talks in Blaesheim. From then onwards, this place was seen as a symbol of the Franco-German friendship. By embarking on this bilateral initiative, Germany and France demonstrated their willingness to further intensify their cooperation. At the 2001 Blaesheim meeting, for example, key Franco-German tensions concerning the details of implementing EU enlargement were resolved before the EU summit was held in Laeken in 2001.⁶ Also, in 2004, after the Iraq War, the informal talks held between Chirac and Schröder were an essential ingredient in Schröder speaking on behalf of the French President before the EU President at the EU summit on 9 February 2004 (Demesmay, Koopmann and Thorel 2013, p. 97).

At the joint press conference after the personal interview between Schröder and Chirac, the French President gave the following statement: “We share the same feeling and have the same attitude towards the European problems that we have addressed. We also have exactly the same vision of the future of economic and financial Europe [...]. Concerning international problems, we also pursue the same approach, which particularly applies to Iraq, where Germany and France represent one and the same attitude. Finally, we spoke about the need to strengthen integration and to proceed further in this area between Germany and France [...]. The Chancellor will speak to the Irish EU Presidency on behalf of both Germany and

⁶ Cf. <http://european-convention.eu.int/pdf/LKNDE.pdf> 2012

France this evening. I repeat: We are in complete agreement” (Demesmay, Koopmann and Thorel 2013, p. 97). This statement by Chirac illustrates on the one hand a convergence of interests between the President and the Federal Chancellor, which had reached a previously unknown degree. On the other hand, this strong agreement expressed a further aspect: it was linked to the symbolism of the bilateral friendship meeting between Charles de Gaulle and Konrad Adenauer. Thus, the continuity of Franco-German cooperation in the context of the Blaesheim meetings lies in linking Chirac and Schröder to the bilateral rapprochement between Germany and France since the Elysée Treaty in 1963.

However, the perception of patterns has changed over time since the beginning of the 1990s, which then influenced the bilateral relationship and the actions taken by political actors. It now expresses progress in bilateral relations, which can be considered an alignment of interests and the awareness of having responsibility in Europe. The impact that the change in epochs in 1989/90 had on Franco-German relations necessitated that Germany and France adapt their roles and relationships to the new circumstances. The Blaesheim process was a step in the right direction. It followed on from the traditional bilateral line of continuity, which began with de Gaulle and Adenauer, enabling the Franco-German couple to act as a motor in the European integration process again.

5.1.2. Interim conclusion

The continuous development of the Franco-German relationship is marked by individual aspects of continuity that make a clear statement about the stability of bilateral relations. In the field of European policy, it was especially highlighted by the numerous intergovernmental initiatives, characterised by the convergence of both partners’ interests. Due to the signing of the Maastricht and Amsterdam Treaties, Germany and France in particular were able to demonstrate their continued function as a motor in the European integration process, which is characterised by a common desire to work together. The prerequisite for good cooperation between the two countries in the integration process is therefore that bilateral relations work. The Blaesheim process demonstrates that the two countries are able to cooperate even after major disputes. The successful attempt at rapprochement has been a fundamental constant in Franco-German relations since the Second World War.

Regular joint consultations are essential to both partners because they promote mutual understanding and make it easier to resolve cross-cultural misunderstandings.

5.2. Conversion aspects

Franco-German relations and the related crises and reforms in the European integration process are discussed in this chapter.

The period from 1990 to the present day was initiated by a change in eras that caused a transformation of the Franco-German relationship due to the end of the East-West conflict and German reunification. The reunification of Germany shifted the foundation of Franco-German relations. Although the Franco-German relationship has experienced continuity from 1990 to date, both countries have also repeatedly diverged from one another on occasions. Experts on Germany and France and numerous historians and political scientists such as Ulrike Guérot talk in this context of a “crisis of Franco-German cooperation” (Guérot 2002, p. 33) that can be linked to Germany and France’s conduct towards one another in European affairs. One such example is the individual steps taken in the reform process of European integration, such as the publication of the so-called Schäuble-Lamers document, the Nice Treaty or France’s rejection of the EU Constitutional Treaty.

5.2.1. German reunification

Viewed in retrospect, Franco-German bilateralism changed following the reunification of Germany, but also initiated an epochal change in European history. The basic structures of the 40-year international relations disintegrated following the end of the Cold War, resulting in a fundamental transformation of the European order. The following section deals in more detail with German and French conduct, its consequences and the mutual perception of France and Germany in the light of existing patterns of perception in the reunification process.

5.2.1.1. German and French conduct in the reunification process

The speed of the German reunification process was characterised by different paces taken in France and Germany. This situation is investigated below.

The different interests of France and Germany and their approaches taken in the reunification process triggered a series of “confusions” (Woyke 2004, p. 28) between the two partners. Germany’s interest in restoring German unity and thus regaining national sovereignty met with a hesitant and fearful attitude on the part of France in

the reunification process. This led to an upset in Franco-German bilateralism, as the two parties disagreed on German unification. This disagreement was visible in the fact that the two countries failed to inform or consult one another about their political procedures, as envisaged in the Elysée Treaty of 1963. The ten-point plan for establishing a German-German confederation formulated by Chancellor Kohl on 28 November 1989 offended the French President Mitterrand, because the plan was presented without the prior consultation of France. There was also general upset on the French side because Kohl failed to make any statements about the prospective territorial boundaries of reunified Germany, nor did he include the competence of the four victorious powers (Schölgen 1999, p. 189).

The German Chancellor's reckless behaviour initially led to confusion on the French side. It simultaneously raised French fears of Germany as a great power or German supremacy in Europe and the related fears of a decline in France's position as a great power. In addition, it raised suspicion of an aspiration for German neutrality. For this reason, France set out to prevent German reunification at the start of the process. Its intention was to maintain the East German state. The FRG disagreed, however. François Mitterrand wanted to preserve the balance of power in Europe. He assumed that the Russian president would disagree to German reunification. From the German perspective, therefore, Mitterrand clearly positioned himself as an opponent of reunification. Mitterrand was unable to imagine "that the Soviet Union would allow Germans to assert their right to self-determination and permit free elections as a step towards reunification, and particularly that the Soviet Union would abandon its bastion of the GDR in Europe and withdraw its troops" (Woyke 2004, p. 32). During the process, however, he realised that German reunification could not be prevented; if anything, it could only be delayed (*ibid.*). In November and December 1989, François Mitterrand held talks with the Soviet and East German governments with the aim of preventing German reunification. Since it was impossible to prevent the rapid reunification process, despite French efforts, Mitterrand agreed, paving the way for reunification: "It was only when German reunification inevitably took shape – especially after the emerging intervention in the USSR – that Mitterrand also had to come to terms with the situation and – in the pragmatic interest of preventing permanent tensions with Germany – had to adapt its strategy to reality" (*ibid.*, pp. 32-33). Above all, this misunderstanding by the French government prevented France from initially participating actively in the German reunification process. The Soviet

Union's agreement to German reunification thus brought about a change in France's dismissive and passive attitude.

The two-plus-four negotiations that began at the Open Skies Conference in Ottawa in February 1990 enabled German unification to develop further. Germany's offer to the GDR of a German-German monetary union and Gorbachev's advocacy of German unification led to an international debate on the German question (Hartmann and Heydrich 2000, p. 124). Especially the USA, which proved to be a strong proponent of German unification after the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989, played a major role in completing the process. By advocating the joint development of the two German states at the conference, they gave them the opportunity to present their ideas on the external aspects of reunification, enabling them to communicate with the four victorious powers (Woyke 2004, p. 26). Mitterrand's active reunification policy began following the People's Parliament elections in the GDR in March 1990, which highlighted the population's demand for national unity. Mitterrand's policy involved the request that unification should take place within the framework of the European integration process, so as not to reinforce "European tensions," (ibid., p. 28). What is more, the victors of the Second World War would have to agree to it. This included Germany's recognition of the Oder-Neisse line as a territorial boundary. Mitterrand therefore also supported Poland's demands for this border (ibid., p. 29).

With the completion of the Two Plus Four Treaty in September 1990, Germany accepted these terms, paving the way for reunification. In the further course of the reunification process, the views of the two partners concerning the future of Eastern Europe diverged. The conflicting ideas of Mitterrand and Kohl on the further development of the EC were mainly expressed in the question of how to deal with post-communist states in the future: "Kohl's enthusiasm for the rapid transformation of relations between the countries of East Central Europe and the EC was in sharp contrast to Mitterrand's idea of a European confederation which was to prevent expansion of the Community to the east" (Wallace 1992, p. 62). This quote illustrates once again how different Kohl and Mitterrand's approaches were in the reunification process. Despite confusion and tension, however, both statesmen succeeded in peacefully completing the "revolutionary change" (Wallace 1992, p. 55) in their bilateral relationship.

5.2.1.2. Changes to the fundamentals of Franco-German bilateralism

“German reunification and the associated complete collapse of the post-war order had indeed fundamentally changed the weighting in the Franco-German tandem” (Manfrass-Sirjacques 1992). Rapid intra-German development in the course of the reunification process created minor cracks in the Franco-German relationship. The international context had changed. The post-war order was no longer valid due to the unification of the two German states and the dissolution of the East-West conflict.

The bilateral relationship between Germany and France during the East-West conflict was now thrown off balance by German reunification. It was also described as the “relationship between the atomic bomb on the one hand and the German mark on the other hand” (Woyke 2004, p. 23).

France, which had emerged from the Second World War as a victor, was able to assert its leadership position in Europe during the Cold War through the protective power function it had for Germany. Added to this, France, like the other three powers, was a member of the United Nations Security Council. It was also a nuclear power, due to the nuclear threat triggered by the Cold War. Due to France’s Germany policy of “controlling Germany through integration” (Kimmel 1992, p. 41), i.e. integrating Germany into Western European structures, France was able to maintain its leadership in Europe. It is a logical consequence of the historical upheavals of 1989/90 that France’s leadership in Europe now seemed to be in jeopardy due to Germany’s ever-growing weighting in Europe due to reunification and the end of the Cold War. The consequence of this was: “The political and intellectual elite of France resisted changes in the political landscape on the European continent. France has pursued the objective – more than any other European country since the beginning of the Cold War – to make the state of the German Federal Republic irreversible – a republic which is militarily, politically and economically integrated into the West” (Schütze 1990, p. 134). This statement confirms France’s lack of interest in German reunification, which would reduce its claim to leadership in Europe. Germany, however, was under the supervision and control of the four victorious powers during the Cold War. It could only assert itself through its economic strength. For France, the division of Germany was a prerequisite for good bilateral cooperation and reconciliation. Germany, however, considered this as an obstacle to the development of its capacities. Following the reunification of the two German states, Germany not

only became the economically strongest country in Europe, it also had the largest population.

Above all, Germany is now a single country once again: the largest state in Europe and the strongest economy, free from all obstacles caused by division. This transformation is evidence of the change in the foundation of Franco-German relations. The end of the division of Germany also brought about the end of the division of Europe, which required a redefinition of Germany's relationship in the Franco-German tandem.

5.2.1.3. Mutual perceptions in the reunification process

The Franco-German relationship is a “special relationship with a strong emotional and moral dimension” (Asholt and Kolboom 1992, p. 179) in which the French perception is often characterised by conflicting fears and fascination. This phenomenon is explained in this section.

The passive, observant conduct of France is based on a traditional French way of thinking. The reunification process is characterised by recognition of Germany's right to self-determination on the one hand and by the perception of a threat to France's rank and position at international level on the other. No other country could understand the desire for unifying the nation better than France. After all, the national sense of identity is of one of the most important values of France's culture. The French public even considered East German democratisation at the time of the German reunification process as “a victory for the French ideas of 1789, which have just been celebrated grandly to mark the 200th anniversary of the French Revolution” (Reichardt 2010). Generally speaking, the absence of such a sense of identity would therefore have unpleasant consequences for French society. Klaus Hofmann developed the following ideas: “France, given its long national history, is basically unable to believe in the divisibility of nations. To France, the nation continues to act as a buffer for emerging identity crises. The French know that this ought to also apply to Germany” (Hofmann 1990, pp. 7-8). This statement underlines France's recognition of Germany's right to self-determination because France sees the unity of the nation as a vital premise of national identity. Nevertheless, the French perception was characterised by a great deal of fears in the reunification process. One of the fears was the knowledge that Germany would become Europe largest nation, economically and demographically, and that France considered its leadership position

in Europe to be at risk. The French also suspected the pursuit of German neutrality, which could be based in the form of an alliance to the east. This was accompanied by the fear that Germany could form an autonomous centre of power, attracting Central and Eastern European countries. The opening of Eastern Europe also aroused old fears in France, relating to German hegemony in Eastern Europe. But also it reminded France of the political and cultural influence it once had in Central Eastern Europe.

France's many centuries of experience with Germany even raised the question of whether Germany would return to its pre- and inter-war power and expansion policies. The existence of this French pattern of perception was understandable from a German perspective. The fact that European neighbours, i.e. also France, were fearful and suspicious of intra-German developments, stemmed from Europe's historical experiences with Germany. Kohl's speedy, energetic advancement in the reunification process, which mainly led to misunderstandings in France and "confusion" about Germany's intentions and goals, was relativised by him retrospectively when he assured everyone that "reunification and integration with the West, Germany policy and European policy were two sides of the same coin" (Kohl 1992b, p. 124). By making this statement, he consciously attempted to allay French fears, confirming the existence of a German pattern of perception that attempts to allay neighbourhood fears as soon as they emerge. When Kohl's action failed, however, he explained his upset over France's distrust at the Strasbourg summit. The Federal Chancellor's disappointment about the French Government's mistrust in him can be explained from a French perspective by France's past experience with Germany, e.g. the Rapallo agreement between Germany and the Soviet Union or the Hitler-Stalin Pact. "The reunification of Germany therefore potentially threatened the French public's perception of the safety and independence of France" (Höhne 1991, p. 75). On the one hand, France became involved more decisively than ever in European integration policy during the reunification process. It insisted on developing a European defence identity. On the other hand, France was simultaneously unwilling to renounce its special role. This can particularly be seen in the fact that it wanted to maintain strict national control of the 'force de frappe'. This way of thinking and acting is a synonym of France's inconsistency (Pestre 2005, p. 87). The way in which Germany and France perceived one another in the reunification process is based on a recurrence of long-forgotten traumas and

stereotypes that Bernard Henri Lévy describes as the return of “old demons of the German past” (Vernet 1991). In addition, the new situation in Germany and France was difficult to tackle, which meant that the same topics were discussed in both countries “back-to-front” based on their own national perception. In any case, the fact remains that the French “trauma of German superiority” (Loth 1992, p. 49) runs deep and has yet to be overcome, otherwise France’s self-image would not have been shocked to such an extent by reunification.

5.2.2. Franco-German cooperation in the field of EU policy

Due to the fundamental changes experienced by Europe at the end of the Cold War, the European integration process developed under new premises, which will now be illuminated in more detail.

Germany and France, which continued to act as a motor in European issues, encountered difficulties in shaping Europe of the future. Different concepts of Europe and national patterns of perception influenced these changes in Franco-German relations. The Schäuble-Lamers document triggered a fundamental debate about the future shaping of Europe in this context. In this position paper from September 1994, two Christian Democratic Union (CDU) politicians – Wolfgang Schäuble and Karl Lamers – addressed the issue of a multi-speed Europe prior to the Amsterdam Treaty. According to the position paper, a group of states was to promote integration within the EU through closer cooperation, with Germany and France taking the lead. Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg were also to be involved in this cooperation. These countries were to “act more community-minded than others and present joint initiatives.”⁷ However, Schäuble and Lamers demanded no formal institutionalisation of the core European countries, stressing that close cooperation should remain open to all other EU countries willing to integrate. It was implemented practically in the form of the Schengen Agreement, European Economic and Monetary Union and the Agreement on Social Policy (the Social Protocol), involving just some of the EU Member States.

Changes also occurred in the intergovernmental relationship following negotiations on the Treaty of Nice in 2000. In this case, German and French ideas were almost contrary. For this reason, the German expert Ulrike Guérot referred to the status quo

⁷ <http://www.cdusu.de/upload/schaeublelamers94.pdf>

of bilateral relations during and after the Treaty of Nice as a “Franco-German crisis” (Guérot 2002, p. 33). Joachim Schild even called this crisis a “low point” (Schild 2003, p. 201) in relations. Although the bilateral approach of Schröder and Chirac gave the situation a more relaxed direction again due to the agreement to consult one another more frequently, France’s rejection of the EU Constitutional Treaty in 2005 caused another crisis in Europe.

5.2.2.3. The Franco-German crisis in the course of negotiations on the Treaty of Nice in 2000

During the Turin IGC, it became apparent that Franco-German relations were experiencing a slight crisis due to their divergent notions of the future of Europe. At least since the negotiations on the Treaty of Nice in 2000, one can therefore speak of a rupture in the Franco-German relationship. This shift in the partner’s relationship that began with the publication of the Schäuble-Lamers document in 1994 continued at the Turin IGC, culminating in negotiations of the Treaty of Nice. At the same time, it represented the low point in European political cooperation between the two partners between 1990 and 2005. Even at the 1999 summit in Berlin, Germany and France disagreed about how to finance agricultural policy and Agenda 2000. This dispute was a poor foundation for holding negotiations on the Treaty of Nice. It was there that, according to Ulrike Guérot, a real “political psychodrama” (Guérot 2001, p. 13) occurred. The real goal, as with any revision conference, was to reform the EU’s institutional system. In preparation for eastward enlargement, the system was to be designed to be “more democratic, more transparent and more efficient” (ibid., p. 14). France’s attitude, however, was influenced to a greater extent by a defence of its national interests and not by a common interest in policy. This can be seen in France’s blockade of the double qualified majority and the demand for a re-weighting of votes in the Council. Both countries had different interests. The French President was unwilling to allow a decline in France’s importance in the European Council, nor did he want Germany’s importance to be enlarged, giving the country “a kind of institutional hegemony in the EU” (ibid., p. 15). Thanks to the “62 percent clause” (Läuffer 2004, p. 54), however, the very opposite occurred. Germany, being the largest and most populous country in Europe, now only needed two other large Member States to be able to block decisions. Thus, France’s attempt to prevent German domination in the Council proved to be an own goal: “France has paid

dearly for France's pointless and symbolic adherence to the same number of votes in the Council as Germany" (ibid., p. 16). Not only did Germany emerge from the dispute as the winner and France as the loser – the relationship between the two countries also became imbalanced. From France's perspective, this was fatal because the state of Franco-German symmetry in the institutional framework of the EU had been the condition for the two countries' role of motor in the EU since the division of Germany after the Second World War. These blockages were caused by several factors in the inter-state relationship. On the one hand, there was a change in government in both Germany (1998) and France (1997) just before Nice. This led to increased misunderstandings in the Franco-German dialogue, because both partners first had to get used to one another and become aware of the importance of Franco-German cooperation in Europe. This, of course, meant that there were no real talks between the two partners, which would have enabled them to vote on important issues in advance. The lack of communication between Germany and France thus resulted from cross-cultural misunderstandings. It led to an attempt to transform national policy to European policy, which in turn prevented dialogue between the two partners. On the other hand, this also explains the blockade in Nice, which was caused by this "intergovernmental negotiation logic" (Schild 2001, p. 56), i.e. the attempt to directly transfer national parliamentary models to the European Parliament. This originated from the existence of two different notions of Europe. As a centralised state, France is mainly interested in strengthening the intergovernmental level, as it guarantees the preservation of national sovereignty. Germany, however, which traditionally has parliamentary governance, wanted to strengthen the EU's supranational level, resulting in a reversal of the classic nation-state. Thus the disputes in Nice had two effects on the bilateral relationship: France feared a Europe that would then be under German dominance due to the 62 percent clause. On the German side, this in turn required political sensitivity towards the French political elite. "For Berlin, there must be a priority of eliminating the unfounded French fears of a 'German Europe'. Such fears had spread throughout Paris after the Treaty of Nice, even among European Federalists" (Froehly 2001, p. 52). The author rightly points out that those French fears were unfounded. Secondly, it shows the unsatisfactory result that the Nice Treaty ultimately constitutes, i.e. a negative balance of Franco-German cooperation at European level. Due to their disagreement, both partners blocked the entire reform process, rendering progress impossible. A

tendency towards renationalisation in Germany and France emerged in Nice, which spread to other Member States during negotiations: “It can easily be shown from the example of the Treaty of Nice that Europe’s paralysis occurs due to disturbances between Germany and France, preventing progress: during the negotiations, each Member State noticeably saw itself as a single nation-state, disregarding the common goal of integration. This summit generally failed to bring the necessary impetus for the continuation of European integration at the beginning of the 21st century” (Brok 2003, p. 17). The lack of both partners’ commitment to develop a common European policy is therefore a further consequence of negotiations on the Treaty of Nice. The results of Nice were therefore referred to as “the maximum of what can be attained” (Hänsch 2001, p. 24) by the Heads of State and Government, although they rather represented “the minimum of what is necessary” (ibid.). In any case, the fact remains that the two countries were made aware of the importance of taking a common approach in order for the European integration process to progress in Nice. In addition, all other Member States were aware – by then at the latest – that the direction pursued by the Franco-German tandem can be decisive for the EU.

5.2.2.4. The European crisis as a consequence of the French veto on the EU Constitutional Treaty

France’s rejection of the EU Constitutional Treaty on 29 May 2005 led to a European political crisis, and therefore also a Franco-German problem (Rüger 2006, p. 34). In addition to the general discontent with the shaping of post-Maastricht European integration expressed by the French, the rejection was also due to the population’s fears about matters such as globalisation, increased competition for goods and labour markets or business relocations to Eastern European accession countries. However, the main rejection point was the neoliberal approach in the EU Constitutional Treaty. The French were concerned about job losses and the erosion of the French social model, which would be directly threatened by the introduction of the free movement of services in the European market. Also, eastward enlargement proved to be the main argument against the European Constitutional Treaty. However, there was no majority for the Treaty in the National Assembly, penalising the government. President Chirac, who tried to present the EU Constitutional Treaty before the referendum as a result of the French Revolution of 1789, took up the problem of the identity of French society. Even if, in his opinion, the French Declaration of Human

and Civil Rights is part of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU Constitutional Treaty, he could not mitigate the threat posed to the collective identity of France, particularly due to part 3 of the Treaty, because profound French fears dominate the impact of further European integration.

The French were afraid of the future. They felt that their country would lose its “status and soul”. In particular, they feared the impact of globalisation, immigration and sometimes European integration. They saw these factors as a threat to their collective identity. They worried that their traditional values would lose their significance. Social progress can therefore lead to terrible regression (Schmittmann 2007, p. 48).

The patterns of the French population’s perception, seeing a risk to the collective identity in a further integration in the European confederation of states, therefore influenced French European policy to a considerable extent. But it also had an impact on Franco-German cooperation in Europe, the cause of which was ultimately an intercultural problem. For many pro-European-minded French citizens, a politically, economically and culturally increasingly heterogeneous EU-25 Plus is an object that it is difficult to identify themselves with. Although Franco-German consultations were reinforced after the disputes in Nice, no solution has yet been found for this fundamental difference between the two cultures. More specifically, a large gap between Germany and France loomed in the constitutional debate, which became apparent in the lack of a Franco-German agreement. These bilateral differences principally exist in the two countries’ different notions of Europe, which would need to be overcome for both partners to fulfil their role as a motor in the European integration process. In this context, it may be said that the contrasting difference between the German and French notion of Europe decreased after the Treaty of Nice and developed into a juxtaposition of intergovernmental and supranational development options. This convergence of the two concepts of Europe was primarily due to the concessions that both governments made to each other. Nevertheless, these serious differences in the notion of Europe cannot be resolved, even given a change in the sense of convergence. This is because the French perception of a federal Europe of nation-states continues to trigger a feeling of unease in France, otherwise the referendum would have been positive. Based on these findings, the rejection of the EU Constitutional Treaty is a blockage of the EU’s political ability to act, and highlights France’s weakened position within the EU. This

lack of democracy was to be resolved by the EU Constitutional Treaty following the unsatisfactory outcome of the Treaty of Nice.

The French referendum that rejected the treaty in the first place, because it called for a more social and democratic Europe, has had a serious impact on the overall political situation in Europe. After all, France is one of the founding states of the EU. The rejection can thus be seen as a change in France's European policy. The stagnation of the European integration process, which occurred after the rejection, represents a change in both the history of European integration and Franco-German relations.

5.2.3. Interim conclusion

The change that Franco-German relations underwent in the course of the 90 years leading up to the year 2000 can be illustrated in the aspects of change mentioned above. In this connection, the first aspect of change is German reunification. Apart from the different behaviours of the two political actors Kohl and Mitterrand, significant changes were taking place in the form of the end of the Cold War and the resulting unification of the two German states. These changes rocked the basis of their bilateral relationship, which had developed positively since the end of the Second World War, while Germany re-entered the European and international stage as a fully-fledged political actor. In European policy terms, changes in Franco-German cooperation were mainly expressed by the different notions of Europe held by the two countries. At times, these changes dominated the European debate and led to conflicts between the two countries. Finally, this conflict led to a "Franco-German crisis" (Guérot 2003, p. 33) during negotiation leading up to the Treaty of Nice. France's rejection of the EU Constitutional Treaty in 2005 highlighted the fact that the problem of having differing views on how to shape Europe and their finality had not been thoroughly resolved, even after this crisis. Against the background of fundamental change in Europe, reunification thus represents the first and most momentous aspect of change. The fundamental changes that resulted from it influenced Franco-German cooperation. National patterns of perception led partly to changes, as was the case with aspects of continuity. This intercultural aspect of Franco-German bilateralism was accompanied by initial difficulties encountered by the newly elected President of France and Germany's new Chancellor.

6. Recent developments in Franco-German relations

6.1. Franco-German relations under Schröder/Merkel and Chirac

This chapter addresses changes at the top of the tandem, the cautious approach of the respective Heads of State and Government and, in particular, the difficulties of France ratifying the Treaty on European Union, which ultimately failed in 2005.

When Gerhard Schröder was voted out of office in 2005, the change of government in Germany resulted in a change of partners in the Franco-German tandem. The East German CDU leader Angela Merkel then became Germany's first female Chancellor. In France, this was initially received with great deal of curiosity. Although Paris wondered whether the change in government would lead to a change of policy, the French government took a wait-and-see attitude. The internal political situation in France was in turmoil following the French referendum in the same year, which resulted in a clear rejection of the EU Constitution. When the new German government came into power, the political situation in France was marked by a change in the form of a "domestically weakened president", (Wiegel 2006, p. 6) who had lost Gerhard Schröder as its loyal ally. After all, in June 2005, shortly after the French referendum on the EU Constitution Treaty, Schröder and Chirac had met during the Blaesheim process and reiterated their wish to continue the ratification process. In this connection, the French President thought that the greatest task was to reconcile citizens with the European project. For this, he received the full support of Chancellor Schröder (ibid.). The extent to which the two leaders agreed is also evident in the statement that they wanted to "consistently continue their close cooperation in all policies despite the difficulties within the European Union"⁸. Schröder summarised this as "unity is strength"⁹, stressing the close, friendly relations that Germany and France and Schröder and Chirac had enjoyed since the beginning of the 21st century.

Since Jacques Chirac realised that he had failed domestically with his European policy and that it was impossible to retain the wording of the EU Constitutional

⁸ <http://www.france-allemande.fr/Die-Burgerinnen-und-Burger-mit,497.html>

⁹ ibid.

Treaty, he had to wait to see which approaches the new head of government in Germany would propose. During their first discussion in Paris, Merkel said to Chirac that she wanted to build on the “spirit of continuity” in Franco-German relations. She also stated: “The European Union is the guarantor of political stability, security and prosperity in Germany and Europe. Germany has a special responsibility for the maintenance and development of European integration work because of its history and its political and economic importance.”¹⁰ Thus Chancellor Merkel made it clear that the new German government would continue to pursue the integration of Germany and the expansion of the EU. Hence no major changes can be detected in Germany’s European policy after almost 18 months in power compared to the Social Democratic government of Gerhard Schröder. However, Angela Merkel’s political style differs from that of Gerhard Schröder, which also has implications for European policy. Due to her origin, however, it can be assumed that Merkel will pay greater attention to the new Central and Eastern European countries, especially Poland, and smaller Member States, when it comes to European policy,¹¹ which was, in fact, the case. Relationships with these countries were intensified, and Germany now plays a role as a mediator and assumes a balancing function. Nevertheless, Franco-German cooperation as a major driver remains indispensable to the Chancellor, and will continue to meet the interests of our partners in the EU.

If we look at the statements about Franco-German relations from a quantitative perspective, it may be speculated that Germany does not wish to focus solely on France, regarding it as less of a privileged partner than was the case of the previous government under Gerhard Schröder. The new government’s foreign policy can therefore be described as follows: continuity, a sense of responsibility and a “less (medium) power-oriented foreign policy” (Hellmann, Schmidt and Wolf 2012). Angela Merkel is attempting to embed German interests in European ones to a greater degree and to enshrine these in transatlantic relations. However, no common denominator could be found for the latest and more explosive issues such as the EU Constitutional Treaty. Chancellor Merkel wanted the Constitutional Treaty to lead to successful European integration and to retain the basic structure of the contract.

¹⁰ *ibid.*

¹¹ Cf. *ibid.*

Chirac, however, wanted to divide it into parts. His proposal to chop the Constitution into “handy parts”, even introducing a “board of directors of the large EU states whose wisdom the ‘small’ states should accept a subordinate role to” (Kohl 2007, p. 35), encountered resistance from the German Chancellor. Essentially, there is only agreement about the fact that the Constitutional Treaty is necessary for the institutional functioning of the EU (ibid., p. 36). Since the referendum was rejected in France and the Netherlands, however, as described above, the contract failed to materialise.

6.2. Franco-German relations under the Sarkozy–Merkel tandem

Nicolas Sarkozy was elected President of France on 16 May 2007, succeeding Chirac¹²; Angela Merkel succeeded Gerhard Schröder as Chancellor of the Federal Republic on 22 November 2005 following premature elections.¹³ Angela Merkel, as chairman of the conservative CDU, and Nicolas Sarkozy, as the leader of the Union pour un Mouvement Populaire (UMP), headed their respective parties.¹⁴ They had many social and economic ideas in common. In foreign policy, they both signified an improvement in the climate with the USA. They vehemently rejected Turkey’s accession to the European Community. They also worshipped their political role models – Charles de Gaulle and Konrad Adenauer – who laid the foundations for the Franco-German friendship.

President Sarkozy and Chancellor Merkel were both pragmatic politicians. They both believed in the importance of being close to their citizens. While this is not unusual for the German Chancellor, President Sarkozy stood out from his predecessors. It therefore comes as no surprise that bilateral similarities were high on the agenda of the German Chancellor and French President.

12 Cf. [http://www.interieur.gouv.fr/Elections/Les-resultats/Presidentielles/elecresult__presidentielle_2007/\(path\)/presidentielle_2007/FE.html](http://www.interieur.gouv.fr/Elections/Les-resultats/Presidentielles/elecresult__presidentielle_2007/(path)/presidentielle_2007/FE.html) 2007

13 Cf. <http://www.abendblatt.de/nachrichten/article139326/Merkel-Von-der-CDU-Chefin-zur-Kanzlerin.html> 2005

14 Cf. http://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2007/03/13/echanges-de-bons-procedes-entre-sarkozy-et-le-promoteur-lasserre-selon-le-canard_882726_3224.html 2007

Apart from the similarities, there are also differences in cooperation (Eucken 1990). This can clearly be seen in France's stance towards economic interventionism. Although Sarkozy had a liberal attitude in many policy areas, he was nonetheless aware of France's tradition of being a strong state. He considered globalisation to be a great opportunity for Europe, but only under the condition that the policy was able to protect the population from unfair international competition. Freedom can be placed above everything else, but France is inconceivable without a strong state – this was Sarkozy's fundamental conviction and the way in which he lived (Claeys 2007). The French have a different relationship to their country, which foreigners are often unable to grasp.

Sarkozy's statements on European policy were therefore sometimes incomprehensible to the German government (ibid.). The idea that free and undistorted competition should not be the goal of the Union is one example of this way of thinking (ibid.). He also criticised the strong euro and therefore the policy of the European Central Bank (ibid.). The German government's opinion concerning the economic and fiscal issues under dispute was diametrically opposed to Sarkozy's ideas. The French President's attitude suggested that France will never renounce its leading role on the international stage.

Despite temporary conflicts, the relationship between Germany and France continually grew stronger. This community is therefore inseparable from the heart of Europe. Common political and economic interests weld together the Franco-German friendship, which is why German and French ministers meet more frequently than other ministers in order to represent their common concerns effectively. One example is Germany's support of the former German-speaking French Finance Minister Dominique Strauss-Kahn's candidacy to lead the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in New York; in return, Sarkozy took a leading role in negotiating the Reform Treaty.¹⁵

Like any new politician who wants to play a central role in the state, Sarkozy was forced to realise that relationships with counterparts are often difficult at the beginning. He realised that long-term commitments also require continuity. His colleagues were then positively surprised about his extremely constructive involvement in European issues. However, whenever there was disharmony in the

¹⁵ Cf. <http://www.nzz.ch/aktuell/wirtschaft/uebersicht/strauss-kahn-wird-neuer-chef-des-waehrungsfonds--1.561984> 2007

Franco-German relationship, the German Chancellor Angela Merkel and the French President Nicolas Sarkozy ultimately went ahead together to set the “House of Europe” on firm foundations.

6.3. Franco-German consultations since 2008

Nicolas Sarkozy and Angela Merkel, the protagonists who were then to deepen the Franco-German friendship even further, failed at first to achieve a good personal rapport with each other. It was easier for her predecessor, because real male friendships emerged in the course of the many discussions that were held. Initially, the relationship between Sarkozy and Merkel was merely a working relationship.

Since they wanted to be seen as being forward-looking, guiding leaders in the EU, they set out to develop a common economic programme to tackle the economic crisis. We need developments and need to coordinate, was Sarkozy’s motto, while Merkel advocated waiting, which cost nothing. They were not close to one another. This was apparent from their style and appearance that they had grown up in different cultures. Sarkozy wanted to intervene in the economy, for example, because he saw the distress it appeared to be in. Merkel had a completely different starting point; she felt obliged to retain the separation of the state from the economy. She did not want to take any distortive measures, waiting calmly. The French President did not like that at all. Sarkozy, who was President of the Council until the end of 2008, wanted a European Economic Recovery Plan to be launched (Landefeld 2008). Merkel instead wanted national programmes to kick in first.

However, Franco-German relations have since improved (ibid.). One sign of this hypothesis is Merkel’s trip to Paris on the day she was re-elected Chancellor on 28 October 2009. Sarkozy soon made a return visit.¹⁶ He and other government representatives of friendly states visited Berlin on 9 November 2009 to attend celebrations marking the 20th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin wall.¹⁷ To highlight this special day in Germany, the event was commemorated at the Place de la Concorde in Paris, organised by the French government.¹⁸ Chancellor Merkel travelled to Paris two days after Sarkozy had attended the event in Berlin. She took

16 Cf. <http://www.bundestkanzlerin.de/Content/DE/Kanzlerkalender/2009/10/2009-10-28-keine-termeine.html>

17 Cf. <http://www.faz.net/aktuell/politik/20-jahre-mauerfall/>

part in France's central commemoration of Armistice Day at the Arc de Triomphe to mark the signing of the armistice at the end of the First World War in 1918 (Lehnartz 2009). In addition to processing the past, policy was also made.¹⁹ On 4 February 2010, the 12th Franco-German Council of Ministers convened in Paris,²⁰ where Agenda 2020 was adopted.²¹ This paper contains 80 outstanding projects of bilateral and European cooperation.

The two countries also excelled in managing the financial and economic crisis, showing their true colours in Europe and the rest of the world. The Sarkozy–Merkel tandem developed and presented many common, ambitious plans for the G20 summit in Pittsburgh and London, and for the European Councils. They had since forgotten the difficulties encountered at the start of their collaboration, finding a way to make well-coordinated policies not only for their respective countries, but also for the EU.

France remains Germany's largest and most important neighbour. Franco-German relations are well-known as the tandem and engine of European integration.²² The success story of reconciliation between the two countries has often been described, making it a role model for neighbourly relations with other states, i.e. Germany's relations with Poland. But the myth should not obscure the fact that Franco-German relations have occasionally been very tense, even in the recent past. The Franco-German struggle for the European Economic and Monetary Union in the mid 1990s is one example of this. Many mutual traumas still play a role:

- "For the French, the large, expanded Germany and the economic giant, as well as the old-new East orientation of Germany and

18 Cf. <http://www.tagesanzeiger.ch/ausland/europa/Als-Sarkozy-an-der-Mauer-kratzte/story/31379820>

19 Cf. <http://www.welt.de/politik/ausland/article5174307/Merkel-verneigt-sich-vor-Opfern-des-1-Weltkriegs.html>

20 Cf. <http://www.deutschland-frankreich.diplo.de/Staatsminister-Hoyer-zu-Besuch-in,5586.html>

21 Cf. *ibid.*

22 Cf. <http://www.oezp.at/pdfs/2003-1-03.pdf>

- for the Germans, a politically strong France with a seat in the UN Security Council, Frances' urge for autonomy from the USA, and France's deadlocking capacity within the European Union" (Guérot 2004, p. 286).

Ulrike Guérot's description accurately portrays the issue repeatedly broached in the long-standing relations between the two countries.

6.4. Merkel sets the agenda in the debt crisis

In December 2011, Angela Merkel and Nicolas Sarkozy met for a coordination talk in Paris. Here, the two countries' line of approach was to be prepared for the EU summit on 8/9 December 2011 in Brussels.²³ Merkel prevailed during this conversation, persuading Sarkozy that rather than talking about euro bonds, the issue should focus on the budgetary discipline of EU Member States.²⁴ Automatic sanctions for deficit sinners were to be introduced as a deterrent.²⁵ Both argued in favour of a new EU treaty – if not for the overall structure of the EU, then at least initially for the 17 euro countries. The permanent European rescue fund, the European Stability Mechanism (ESM) was to be brought forward, but was launched in late 2012, instead of in 2013, as originally agreed.²⁶ Whether the hoped-for breakthrough can be achieved by these changes remains to be seen. In France, however, there was criticism that Sarkozy had given up his position for weeks, following the Chancellor without hesitation. One of the critics was French economist Elli Cohen, who is a member of the Advisory Council to the French government and, more recently, one of the expert staff contacted by Francois Hollande, the Socialist presidential candidate at the time (Neßhöver 2011).

The French President Nicolas Sarkozy was particularly disappointing. "Economically, he failed all along the line," (Bröcker and Kessler 2011) stated Elie

²³ Cf. <http://www.spiegel.de/politik/ausland/eu-gipfel-in-bruessel-briten-verhindern-grossen-euro-rettungsplan-a-802617.html>

²⁴ Cf. *ibid.*

²⁵ Cf. *ibid.*

²⁶ Cf. *ibid.*

Cohen. He also believed that the German government rightly called for greater control of budgetary discipline. He claimed that there was the carrot and stick method to reduce speculation on the financial markets, but that Merkel preferred the whip to the stick. Holger Sandte, chief economist at the renowned investment company WestLB Mellon, also warned in this context: “France is moving from the core to the edge” (ibid.). To him, the reason is clear. “The French have made their economic homework very half-heartedly” (ibid.). The labour market is rigid, there is no competitive middle tier, and many large companies continue to rely on the state. According to many, the French only have a chance if they agree on a strict course of consolidation. That alone can prevent an almost certain downgrade by rating agencies. WestLB Mellon expert Sandte also thinks “that the country has by no means exhausted its economic potential” (ibid.). The inevitable then happened.

In the May 2012 elections, the then 57-year-old Sarkozy was voted of office. Merkel then initially had to expect greater resistance from the French, because Sarkozy’s successor, the socialist François Hollande, also had to integrate the strong left wing into his party with his policies.²⁷ It was therefore difficult for the French to imagine “business as usual”, as experienced with Sarkozy. Merkel’s tough stance during the first weeks of the euro crisis was considered by the French to have intensified rather than placated the crisis. Even economists, who do not immediately call for the state in such situations, were irritated by Merkel’s catalogue of measures. However, the Chancellor was often able to assert her ideas for crisis prevention in France. In her opinion, this was also for Europe’s benefit.

6.5. France’s 2012 presidential election, the Franco-German friendship and lines in common European policy

What had seemed inevitable ever since the election date was announced then occurred. François Hollande was elected President of France with 51.7 per cent of the votes.²⁸ He is the second socialist – after François Mitterrand – to head the Grande Nation in the history of the French Republic. His assumption of office will

²⁷ Cf. http://www.politische-bildung.de/praesidentschaftswahl_frankreich.html

²⁸ Cf. <http://www.france.fr/de/aktuelles/francois-hollande-zum-franzoesischen-staatspraesidenten-gewaehlt>

inevitably disappoint many of his supporters. The change from Sarkozy to Hollande was also due to the major crises that Sarkozy was incapable of solving – just like other European presidents before him. Even France's bourgeois camp ultimately no longer approved of his policies.

The choice of election pledges made by Hollande will be difficult to meet. In a country that is economically ailing, with a public debt of 90 per cent of gross domestic product, that has to cope with an unemployment rate of 10 per cent, it is virtually impossible to implement such a large catalogue of measures (Mathieu von Rohr 2012). There will be disappointments. The issue of unemployment will catch up with him; one needs only think of the children of immigrants growing up in ghetto-like suburbs, left to their own devices. These issues were not discussed during the election campaign, but they are bound to catch up with the newly elected President. His goal must be to thoroughly reform France, which will include making severe cuts. If he makes progress in restructuring the state, people who voted for him will be hit. It is also no longer an option to continue running up debt. He therefore relies on cooperation and solidarity. It will be interesting to see how he plans to address the potential for conflict in his own country.

There will be no major changes in Franco-German cooperation between Chancellor Merkel and the new French President Hollande. They will first have to get to know each other. Since both are pragmatic, however, the previously positive cooperation between the Rhine riparian countries will certainly be continued after a familiarisation phase. This will be challenged, however, by the fact that Franco-German cooperation in economic and budgetary issues – particularly as a result of the EU debt crisis – upsets the balance between the two states. This affects Germany and France in their motor function, which Europe badly needs. There is also the economic weakness of France to contend with. The result is that the two countries are no longer able to meet on equal terms, and the weighting in Franco-German relations could change permanently. At the end of November 2012, a second rating agency downgraded the creditworthiness of France within one year, and simultaneously withdrew the top credit rating of the European rescue packages ESM and the European Financial Stability Facility, EFSF (Demesmay and Kempin 2013). Meanwhile, the rating agency S&P has lowered the credit rating of France to AA, because it no longer believes in the country's will to reform.²⁹

29 Cf. <http://www.welt.de/wirtschaft/article121670802/S-amp-P-senkt-Rating-fuer-Frankreich-auf-AA.html>

The euro crisis is, therefore, far from over. How do two prominent economists consider this issue? The first, the German Hans-Werner Sinn, president of the Information Institute who lectures at the University of Munich, states: “The causes are due to the fact

1. that the euro created an inflationary credit bubble that has deprived Southern countries of their competitiveness.
2. they should not have broken the Maastricht Treaty and agreed to the fiscal rescue packages, but should have allowed the crisis countries to leave the euro.
3. it was a mistake to adopt the euro, but since it exists one should attempt to repair its defects. To achieve this, the ECB’s powers must be restricted and the political union strengthened.
4. if the euro survives, the euro zone will mutate into a transfer union. I consider it unlikely that all countries will remain in it” (FAZ 2013, p. 12).

The second prominent economist is Pascal Salin, an economist and emeritus professor at the University of Paris-Dauphine. He stated:

1. “There should be no European solidarity.
2. The German government –one of very few – initially rightly insisted that there should be no “European solidarity” for poorly managed countries. Unfortunately, it was then forced to follow the irresponsible policies of other countries, particularly the French government.
3. In some ways, the euro zone has become a community of debt. This is a dangerous development. I personally was in favour of introducing the euro.
4. Since we have the euro, though, we should keep it. But if monetary policy becomes too unstable and expansive, I would understand if a country like Germany would want to leave the euro zone again” (ibid.).

These two professors’ hypotheses are provocative. However, the current formation of camps reflects the fact that unequal economies were forced into a joint currency in the euro area. The EU faces enormous challenges. The euro and the sovereign debt crisis is just the most obvious symptom of failures that have accumulated over decades. A “business-as-usual” attitude cannot be the solution for the future. There must be fundamental reforms at the European level, therefore, and pivotal regulatory

decisions must be taken. The promise of “a highly competitive social market economy”³⁰ mentioned in the Treaty on the European Union is owed to future generations of Europeans, and ought to be kept. The two professors’ perspectives – supported by other economists – about the entity of Europe is not just a snapshot. They demonstrate how little time is left to set the right course for the future. Germany and France will therefore have no choice but to allow these ideas to be used to shape the “House of Europe”. Otherwise, they will fail to do justice to their function of acting as a motor.

6.6. Interim conclusion

Recent developments in Franco-German relations since 2005 between the protagonists on the French side – with Chirac/Sarkozy and Hollande – and on the German side – with Schröder and Merkel – show that the constellation of leaders from these two countries could indeed lead to a stronger or weaker convergence or divergence of interests. However, they have not called into question the relationship in general. A rupture in the relationship is unthinkable because Germany and France are two important political actors at the European level. However, their relationship will continue to be characterised by continuity and change in the future. Thanks to their close integration in the European multilateral alliance, however, I believe that a “rupture” can be ruled out.

The fact that Angela Merkel backed smaller EU Member States in European policy terms after coming to power reflects the changing situation in the EU, which should be accepted by France. If Germany and France want to continue playing the role of a motor for Europe, they should not operate a policy of national interests – as was the case under Chirac and Schröder as well as under Kohl and Mitterand. Such an approach would be viewed with suspicion in today’s community of 28 EU Member States. Instead, the two partners should try to integrate their political and economic weight in the EU such that it occurs without insisting on national policies, neglecting the cultural differences that exist. Only then will the two countries be able to successfully exploit their opportunities from a European perspective. The new president of France, François Hollande, who has been in office since 2012, will also have to include himself in this process, too.

³⁰ <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/de/treaties/dat/11992M/htm/11992M.html>

The Franco-German relationship, and hence the EU, must set the course for the future in the months ahead. These decisions, which need to be taken in the area of banking regulation in spring 2014, will greatly influence the future of the EU. What is at stake is nothing less than the question of whether Europe will evolve into a centralised structure, substantially controlled from Brussels, or whether Europe will remain an amalgamation of self-determining states that pool their strengths to gain impetus from the crisis and to become a global economic powerhouse again.

7. Conclusion

The purpose of this thesis was to make a statement about continuity and change in Franco-German relations at the European level, especially since 1990, according to individual aspects of continuity and change. First, Franco-German relations experienced fundamental change after German reunification. After all, the two countries' bilateral cooperation was placed on a different basis to that on which it had been based since the Second World War. Germany and France therefore needed to redefine their relationship. This redefinition occurred, for instance, in the form of new measures initiated by the two countries in the course of European change, which coincided with the end of the East-West conflict. The crisis of Franco-German relations peaked during negotiations leading up to the Treaty of Nice in 2000. This was also a low point in bilateral cooperation between the two countries. The expert on Germany and France, Ulrike Guérot, commented on this by concluding: "The Franco-German crisis before and during the negotiations on the Treaty of Nice therefore arose because the tandem was equally affected by gradual erosion over the entire period of the nineties, which was ultimately clogged with political rhetoric" (Guérot 2002, p. 33). This "gradual erosion" (ibid.) can mainly be attributed to Germany and France's different concepts of Europe, which were marked by a strong divergence of interests. The French security policy concept was based on the "retention of its supposed rank as the third world power and of its defence autonomy by maintaining its nuclear status" (ibid., p. 34). This was particularly evident in the disputes between Germany and France concerning enlargement because France was generally more reserved about it than Germany. It was, therefore, difficult for both partners to redefine the relationship, especially concerning foreign policy. Nevertheless, both sides had the will to continue their joint efforts. The newly-elected Chancellor Angela Merkel therefore decided to continue the policies

practiced by previous governments. However, her political style was quite different. Angela Merkel's vision of continuous European policy was to include smaller European states to a greater extent in the future. To her, this means maintaining an exclusive relationship with France without neglecting contacts to the former Eastern Bloc countries that have since joined the EU.

Based on the study of bilateral relations between 1990 and the present day, it is clear that Franco-German relations are based on patterns of perception that have influenced both governments' policies, especially due to reunification and in the course of several other events. In this context, the French perception pattern is especially striking, consisting of a fear of a new German supremacy in Europe. This was accompanied by the suspicion that Germany may cherish a desire for neutrality, which could be realised in a special agreement between Germany and the post-communist states of Eastern Europe. Germany tried to allay these fears by placing the emphasis of its policy on a strong will to integrate. At the same time, Germany went out of its way to be considerate to its partners, particularly at the European level. After all, it was understandable that France was fearful of the new Germany or even continued to be fearful, compared to the period before 1990. France's fears were based on the country's experiences with Germany at the end of the 19th to the 20th century. The emergence of enemy stereotypes between the two nations in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870/71 and the First and Second World Wars is merely an attempt to explain the development of such patterns of perception. Another approach would be the cultural diversity of the two countries.

France's fears seem to be slightly exaggerated. After all, Germany gave France no reason to worry that it would break out of the European network again and have its own national policy without its European partners during and after reunification. Quite the opposite was the case. The Federal Republic always showed great interest in the European Community and advocated Germany's integration into it. The Schäuble-Lamers paper is just one example that deserves mentioning, because it was fundamentally shaped by a federalist concept of Europe, seeking to overcome the traditional nation-state. It goes without saying that Germany would also lose national sovereignty in favour of European integration following the realisation of this concept. However, the point is that France only advocates federalist concepts for Europe as long as it keeps German power politically under control. As soon as France would have to include itself and depart from the idea of a sovereign nation, it

would contradict both its political interests and its nation-state conviction. The fact that Germany has been requesting France to become increasingly involved at the European level since 1990 proves that the country is attempting to enforce its federalist concept in European terms. It also shows that the German side has a lack of understanding of French traditions and values. After all, France is attempting to maintain its status of being a great power by adhering to national sovereignty, which is an integral part of France's cultural identity.

Although relationships have changed in many ways, they have not been shaken to the foundations. Mutual perceptions in Franco-German relations have always been marked by differences, even recently. The allies of Angela Merkel on the German side, who has been in office since 2005, and Jacques Chirac, Nicolas Sarkozy and François Hollande on the French side are no exception.

With regard to Europe, Sarkozy and Hollande first tried to portray themselves as grand Europeans after being elected as France's President. They intended to also impose their election promises for France on Europe. They finally had to backpedal, because they also had to recognise that Europe's great strength is the historical, economic and political diversity of its nation-states. Diversity enriches not only the culture of the continent, but also makes it possible for governments of individual countries to learn from their neighbours' experience. Intense debate is therefore necessary in the event of diverging interests and culturally related misunderstandings. However, many French citizens are uncomfortable with such a request, as the following example shows: Germany – with its Agenda 2010 – created a concept for reforming the German welfare system and the labour market – previously initiated by Chancellor Gerhard Schröder, and Angela Merkel managed to make Germany economically fit again. In contrast, French policy failed to undertake such important reforms to restore its economic balance with Germany. This will only be possible if the French embrace their present government's reform proposals. France is in a deep depression. President Hollande is attempting to take small reform steps, so as not to alienate anyone by completely changing tack. He has to realise that it is not easy to reform France, because vested interests constantly oppose reform. There has repeatedly been Franco-German confusion since the Elysée Treaty of 1963. Note in particular the French stance towards German reunification. The French perception pattern was initially biased until it was recognised that it would be a great opportunity for both nations to embrace a single approach, simultaneously acting as a

motor for further development of the EU. The same applies today. Both major economies must therefore not neglect their function of acting as a motor for Europe. The European integration process can only progress in this way. The EU now contains 28 Member States. A return to national interest policy would be counter-productive, diametrically opposing the “European idea”.

Meanwhile, the Franco-German Friendship Treaty has been in existence for more than 50 years. During this period, aspects of continuity and conversion have repeatedly shaped this relationship. Due to this long, common path, it can now almost be considered as a normality. What is crucial, however, is that both nations have always ultimately found compromises – especially after German reunification. Otherwise these two states would have been unable to act as a motor for Europe.

Of course, the gradual enlargement of the EU poses new challenges for the two protagonists, with implications for the European Federation of States. A great deal of effort is required to ensure continued balanced cooperation within the EU.

It is therefore vital that the two neighbouring states – both large economies – not only exercise their role as acting as a motor for Europe but also continue to expand it, otherwise the European integration process will come to a halt. It is incumbent upon Germany and France to meet this expectation. Different policies in both countries are currently complicating the pursuit of the common motor role, however. For this reason, France should restore balance with Germany, especially in economic and social policy. Anything else would not lead to the desired result.

8. References

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