

N O V E

THE AACHEN TREATY

Franco-German treaty of cooperation
24 JANUARY 2019

OVERVIEW

Following the signature of the 2019 Aachen Treaty between German and France , NOVE has produced this note detailing the content of the treaty. Overall, the Aachen Treaty is somewhat lacking in ambition and concrete proposals but does demonstrate the willingness of these two key Member States to work together. The implications of the accord for the European Union remains, however, unclear.

CONTEXT

On 22 January, President Emmanuel Macron and Chancellor Angela Merkel signed a [“treaty of cooperation”](#) between France and Germany in Aachen, Germany. The treaty aims to deepen the relationship between the countries and complement the first Franco-German treaty of friendship, the Élysée Treaty, signed fifty-six years ago by French President Charles de Gaulle and German Chancellor Konrad Adenauer. Fifteen [“priority projects”](#) have been proposed to support the implementation of the objectives of the treaty.

CONTENT

The Aachen Treaty commits the two countries to a wide-ranging cooperation and collaboration on various issues.

On **Europe**, France and Germany will work together to finish the single market and the single currency and to move toward economic, social and fiscal convergence. However, no concrete proposals have been put forward to support this goal. The two countries also set the goal to create a high-quality regulation of financial market, especially on sustainable finance, at the European level.

On the **economy**, the two states set a common objective of creating a Franco-German economic zone with common rules and setting a priority for the "harmonisation of business laws." To achieve this goal, a "Franco-German council of economic experts" made up of 10 independent members will be set up to make recommendations for economic action.

On **new technologies**, France and Germany will encourage research and innovation on artificial intelligence by setting up Franco-German initiatives backed by common funding (which would be open to cooperation at the European level) and by creating a network of researchers and entrepreneurs. They will also work together to promote the development of guidance at the international level on the ethics of new technologies such as AI. Finally, a group of Franco-German experts, which will include social partners, will be set up to make recommendation on the future of work.

On **climate change and energy**, the two countries commit to helping each other in the transition of both economies towards a more sustainable model and to joint action to combat climate change. They plan to cooperate on the energy transition by adding a common Franco-German approach to their national energy and climate plans (NECPs) and by creating incentives to help each country achieve its energy goals.

On **diplomacy**, the admission of Germany "as a permanent member" of the UN Security Council is a priority of Franco-German diplomatic efforts. The two countries will coordinate their positions within the UN and facilitate EU "unified positions". Furthermore, they will use the two countries' upcoming consecutive

presidencies of the Security Council (in March and April 2019, and May and June 2020) to consolidate this approach.

On **security**, France and Germany will "deepen their cooperation in foreign policy and internal and external defence." They commit to providing aid and assistance in case of aggression against each other's territories and to a greater cooperation between their armies and defence industries. A Franco-German Defence and Security Council is to be established as the political body directing these reciprocal engagements. The aim, Merkel said, is to build a "common military culture" that "contributes to the creation of a European army." The two countries will also develop a common approach to the export of arms produced through joint projects.

On **culture**, the two countries want to bring their education systems closer together through "the development of mutual learning of each other's language." To achieve this goal, a "Citizens Fund" will be established to support city partnerships and cross-border initiatives ranging from bilingual child care centres to public transport links. The youth mobility programme between the countries will also be widened to include apprentices and interns, and a digital platform with audio-visual content in both French and German will be created.

REACTIONS

Overall, reactions to the treaty have been mixed. Most political commentators agree that it is limited in its ambition, with cautious realism having held back agreement on a bold vision of the future.

At the European level, the treaty is seen as a way forward for the EU, albeit with a lack of concrete actions. European Commission President Jean Claude Juncker welcomed the deepening of the cooperation between France and Germany, stating that their friendship was a 'guarantee for the peaceful future of Europe.' S&D group leader MEP Udo Bullmann welcomed the spirit of the treaty but called for concrete joint initiatives on digital taxation, on the creation of a Eurozone budget, and regarding the defence of European values against populism. ALDE group leader MEP Guy Verhofstadt lauded the support of President Macron and Chancellor Merkel for the idea of a European army, claiming it will allow the EU to protect its borders from Putin's Russia.

By contrast, some EU countries, particularly those in central and eastern Europe, are wary of the Franco-German partnership. For ECR *Spitzenkandidat* and MEP Jan Zahradil (ECR, Czechia) the treaty confirms conservatives' fear that the EU project will work to the advantage of the two biggest players after the departure of the UK. European Council President Donald Tusk warned that this cooperation should not be 'an alternative' to, but a driving force for, European integration.

In France, the news of the signature of the treaty has been mired in a disinformation campaign by far-right populist political parties. Marine Le Pen, leader of the far-right *Rassemblement National*, falsely claimed that France will lose its seat at the Permanent Council of the United Nations to Germany and become 'a second-tier nation on the international stage'. MEP Bernat Monot (EFDD, France) from far-right party *Debout La France* also falsely claimed that the treaty sells the regions of Alsace and Lorraine to Germany.

In Germany, the treaty has faced criticism for its lack of depth and ambition. MP Anton Hofreiter, head of the Greens in the German *Bundestag*, characterised the treaty as 'cooperation on the back-burner'. Former European Parliament President Martin Schulz was also somewhat critical, urging the German government to do more with France to propose an ambitious programme for Europe.