

# Global Britain Briefing Note

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## The 1963 Franco-German Treaty of the Elysée

*The sort of reformed, looser EU that the British political class  
affects to believe in is a constantly-receding mirage*

On 22<sup>nd</sup> January 1963, just eight days after de Gaulle's magisterial Paris press conference in which he rejected Prime Minister Macmillan's application to join the EEC, General de Gaulle, President of France, and Dr Konrad Adenauer, Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany, signed the Treaty of the Elysée.

The Treaty is now (2015) 52 years old. It was – and still is – a bi-lateral treaty between France and Germany, outside and independent of the then six-year-old EEC. Although the text of the treaty makes passing references to the then “European Communities” and the “Common Market” and “European political cooperation”, it also refers to East-West relations in general, NATO, the Council of Europe, the (now defunct) Western European Union, the OECD and “the United Nations and its specialized institutions”.

The text<sup>1</sup> is quite short, and begins with a Joint Declaration, the key part of which states that “*a reinforcing of cooperation between the two countries constitutes an indispensable stage on the way to a united Europe....*”

The treaty sets out main areas of co-operation: Foreign Affairs, Defence, Education and Youth. The Heads of State and Government of France and Germany are to meet at least once a year. The two Foreign Ministers are to meet at least every three months, and their officials every month, alternately in Paris and Bonn (then the capital of Germany). The Defence Ministers and the Education Ministers are to meet at least every three months, and their officials every two months. Although not spelt out in the treaty itself, a number of civil servants from each country are to be temporarily “embedded” in the others' ministries for long periods.

Paragraph 5 of the chapter on Foreign Affairs says that the two Governments “*will study jointly the means of reinforcing their cooperation in...agricultural & forestry, energy...communications and transport and industrial development within the framework of the Common Market.....*”

The second section of the treaty’s last chapter, “Final Arrangements”, states that “*The two governments will keep member-governments of the European Communities informed of the development of Franco-German cooperation.*” Translation: “we’ll decide and tell you afterwards”. Were eyebrows raised in the Foreign Office when they read that ?

### **The significance of the Treaty today**

It is clear from the text of the 1963 agreement that France and Germany were - and are - treaty-bound to “stitch-up” the rest of the EEC/EU to suit their own interests and objectives. So it has turned out. Franco-German solidarity - for better or worse - continues to be operational.

Half a century on, the dynamics of the Franco-German relationship have inevitably changed. In the 1960s France was clearly the senior partner, a nuclear power with a growing economy and, not least, an outstanding leader. Germany was divided by the Iron Curtain from East Germany and Berlin. Today, a re-united Germany, the most powerful economy in Europe, is more influential than France.

Meanwhile, as the EU’s structures “tighten”, Europe’s and the EU’s economic, military and diplomatic “weight” in world affairs is proportionately diminishing. Fifty years on, English has become the global *lingua franca*. You are more likely to come across a French student serving coffee in Melbourne than in Mannheim, and a German girl *au pairing* in Dallas than in Dijon. Happily, for this generation, the Second World War is as remote as Waterloo. And - *pourvu que ça dure*<sup>2</sup> - the British economy is performing well.

The sort of reformed, looser EU that the British political class affects to believe is available is a constantly-receding mirage. There is no such “Europe”. As German and French governments continue to make clear, their goal continues to be a united Europe, achieved primarily through the mechanism of the single currency, the euro, with a single budget and a single government. That is still the plan. That is still the aim. In terms of its ability to “shape Europe” the UK was never going to be more than a distant third behind Germany & France, and so it has turned out. The case for London - and Washington - to look reality in the face and act accordingly is stronger than ever.

1 [www.cfr.org/franco-german-jointdeclaration-elysee-treaty-january-1963](http://www.cfr.org/franco-german-jointdeclaration-elysee-treaty-january-1963)

2 “*provided it lasts*” - attributed to Napoleon’s mother on being told of another conquest

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