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# Grandeur vs Zeitenwende: Convergence and Divergence in French and German Foreign Policy after the Cold War

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# **Grandeur vs Zeitenwende: Convergence and Divergence in French and German Foreign Policy after the Cold War**

## **Abstract**

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, France and Germany, the EU's two leading powers, have navigated the new international landscape with foreign policy approaches that entail both commonalities and differences. This article examines the main aspects of French and German foreign policy after the Cold War, focusing on the concepts of "Grandeur" and "Zeitenwende" as guiding principles of French and German foreign policy, respectively. "Grandeur" embodies France's historical aspirations for international influence and global leadership, whereas "Zeitenwende" reflects a recent shift in German foreign policy towards a more assertive role in security matters. The analysis examines both converging and diverging aspects of their foreign policy choices, highlighting areas where French and German interests align, such as European integration, as well as areas of divergence, especially regarding the European security architecture, relations with major powers such as Russia and the United States, and regional policy towards the South Caucasus. Ultimately, the article seeks to understand how these contrasting, yet interconnected approaches will continue to shape European foreign policy in the years to come.

**Keywords:** Zeitenwende, Grandeur, European Strategic Autonomy, Russia-Ukraine war, South Caucasus

## Introduction

Germany and France, two of the leading powers of the EU, which are often labelled as the motor of the organization, have enjoyed supreme level of relationship in every aspect since the end of the Cold War. It is noteworthy to underscore that despite going hand in hand in the process of the establishment of the EU, the two countries had gone through three bloody wars against each other from 1870 to 1945. The culmination of this long-term hostility occurred during World War II, when France was occupied by the Nazi regime. The war claimed the lives of hundreds of thousands of French people and leveled many cities in France, causing the greatest calamity the country had faced in its history. However, the post-World War II era created certain conditions that contributed to the process of normalization between Germany and France. The factors that led to the Franco-German reconciliation can be listed as follows:

1. Commitment on the part of the citizens of both countries.
2. The founding of the Federal Republic of Germany led by the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) leader Konrad Adenauer who was upholding the ideas of democracy and integration of Europe.
3. USA pressure on France to cooperate with Germany to close ranks in the western block against the possible expansion of the USSR and communism.
4. The Schuman Declaration - In a famous declaration pronounced in Paris on 9 May 1950, Robert Schuman, French Minister for Foreign Affairs, made a proposal about the Franco-German reconciliation through integration via supranational institutions such as the European Coal and Steel community.<sup>1</sup>
5. De Gaulle-Adenauer entente which beefed up the Franco-German relations and brought it to the next stage with the signing of the Élysée Treaty in 1963.

The Élysée Treaty, which is often labelled as the cornerstone of the Franco-German foreign policy, provided a solid and flexible framework for co-operation involving three essential areas, namely politics, the economy and civil society. The treaty along with the integration processes in the Western Europe paved way for the onset of the reconciliation chapter in the French-German history which continued throughout the entire Cold War period. Although both states were committed to building and developing the European Economic Community, they had some

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<sup>1</sup> OSCE Workshop “Towards a Strategy for Reconciliation in the OSCE Area” PC.NGO/29/12 9 January 2013

differences in foreign policy matters, especially during de Gaulle's presidency. De Gaulle's idea of overcoming the Yalta system which divided the world into two competing blocks was in contradiction with FRG's commitment to transatlantic bonds. By withdrawing from the military wing of NATO in 1966, De Gaulle was overtly trying to fend off growing American hegemony in Europe. The flip side of the Élysée Treaty was to drive a wedge between the USA and the FRG with the aim of consolidating the European power as a third block between the USA and the USSR.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, de Gaulle was not able to pull it over, as the FRG did not fall into that "trap" due to the realization of the imminent threat of the expansion of communism and inability of France to guarantee the security of the FRG. The FRG's foreign policy during the Cold War period was mostly limited to transatlantic framework in security related matters, even though economic and trade ambitions emboldened him to be one of the driving forces in the European integration processes. A departure from this trend occurred when the socialist Willy Brandt came to power. Based on his famous "Ostpolitik" he proceeded to normalize relations with socialistic states through the policy of "Wandel durch Handel" thereby deviating from the 15-year-old Hallstein Doctrine. Despite the foregoing fact, the US-Germany relations did not suffer a major blow during this period, whereas the France-US relations were quite bumpy.

### **Navigating a New World: French & German Foreign Policy After the Cold War**

After the reunification of two German states and the collapse of the socialist block which marked the end of the Cold War period, expected major shift in German Foreign Policy did not come to fruition. Major approaches of foreign policy analysis yielded different, sometimes even mutually exclusive predictions for the reunified Germany. Realism stressing anarchy in the external environment, suggested that gains in territory, population, and economic power, as well as the withdrawal of the Soviet Red Army, would trigger a German quest for great power status through seeking autonomy outside established institutions (such as NATO) or seeking influence within those institutions that could be dominated by Germany (such as the European Union). In contrast, liberal institutionalists argued that interdependence

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<sup>2</sup> <https://interaffairs.ru/jauthor/material/1448>, accessed: 15 April, 2024.

<sup>3</sup> Harnisch S. German Foreign Policy: Gulliver's Travails in the 21st Century, Foreign Policy in Comparative Perspective: Domestic and International Influences on State Behavior 2013, p.72.

and the institutional ties that had firmly anchored post-war Germany in the West would continue to hold for the sovereign and unified Germany, because of the huge benefits the country had reaped from its membership in Western institutions.<sup>3</sup>

It's noteworthy to mention that several important factors shaped post-unification policy of Germany. Firstly, one should draw attention to the domestic institutional barriers to the foreign policy of Germany. According to Germany's constitution, the Grundgesetz, the power to conduct foreign and security policy is generally vested in the executive branch. The chancellor has the power to select members of the Cabinet, which is the central body in overall decision making, and to set the course in domestic and foreign policy. However, the composition and majority of coalition governments have often imposed strict limits on the chancellor's ability to conduct foreign policy.<sup>4</sup> Both, the legislative branch (Bundestag and Bundesrat), and judicial branch (Federal Constitutional Court of Germany) play important role in the foreign policy process. Furthermore, in Germany's parliamentary democracy, governments are typically coalitions of two or more parties of varying strength, with Grand Coalitions (two major parties sharing 60 percent and more of the parliament seats) being an important exception to the rule. Over four decades (1970–2010), this setting meant that the junior coalition partners—from which the foreign minister and vice chancellor are usually drawn—had a strong influence on foreign and security policy decision making.<sup>5</sup>

Second factor which underpins the German post-Cold War foreign policy is the culture of military restraint. Guilt-stricken approach to the foreign and security policy emerged due to the large-scale atrocities and devastations caused by Germany during the Second World War. The pacifistic mindset that has prevailed in German society since that time has upheld the political motto of 'Nie wieder Krieg' (Never again war), which envisions non-military engagement in foreign policy. Indeed, even after unification, Germany was not involved in any kind of military actions other than humanitarian interventions in the Balkans and Afghanistan.

Thirdly, economic and trade interests remained decisive in shaping German foreign policy, thereby forcing it to take a more active role in accelerating the process of European integration. However, Germany did not take into consideration common

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<sup>4</sup> Harnisch S. p.79.

<sup>5</sup> Kaarbo. J "Power and Influence in Foreign Policy Decision-Making: The Role of Junior Coalition Partners in Germany and Israel," *International Studies Quarterly* 40, no. 4, 1996.

energy diversification interests of the EU, when socialists (SPD) led by Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder decided to sign a framework agreement to construct a gas pipeline from Russia directly to Germany along the Baltic seabed which would bypass the Baltic states and Poland. The bilateral project was being labelled as a major success for Germany and is so understood by most of the German public. However, the project increased Germany's already excessive dependence on Russia for energy; undercut the European Union's supply-diversification strategy; threw another spoke in the admittedly slow wheels of the EU's common foreign and security policy; and demonstratively ignored the long-standing, publicly expressed concerns of Poland and the Baltic states.<sup>6</sup>

Finally, transatlantic ties that amounted to leaning on the USA and NATO with respect to security-related issues had been the major factor in shaping Germany's post-Cold War posture unless SPD came to power in 1998. Following on the heels of Willy Brandt and his famous "Ostpolitik", Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder decided to resort into the policy of rapprochement with Russia, thereby ignoring the concerns of its longtime ally. The major blow in the German-US relationship occurred when Germany alongside France made a joint declaration that they would veto the UN resolution authorizing the war against Iraq in 2003.<sup>7</sup>

After the grand coalition of CDU (Christian Democratic Union), CSU (Christian Social Union) and SPD (Social Democratic Party of Germany) led by charismatic Angela Merkel came to power in 2005, Germany endeavored to strike a balance between its transatlantic partners and Russia favoring former in security, and the latter in economic matters. During her first years in office, the chancellor sought to distinguish herself from her Social Democratic predecessor, Schröder, while simultaneously maintaining the broad outlines of German foreign policy established during the tenure of Helmut Kohl. Her relations with Russia serve as the best example of this approach. Very soon after her 2005 election victory, Merkel came out in favor of the Nord Stream 1 gas pipeline linking Russia and Western Europe, originally approved under Schröder. But at the same time, Merkel put an end to Schröder's "buddy" policy with Russian President Vladimir Putin.<sup>8</sup> Even though Merkel was a staunch supporter of the USA-Germany ties, she did not shy away from launching

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<sup>6</sup> <https://jamestown.org/program/putin-schroeder-gas-deal-timed-to-german-elections/>, accessed: 16 April, 2024.

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2003/mar/05/iraq.politics>, accessed: 16 April, 2024.

<sup>8</sup> <https://ip-quarterly.com/en/evolution-angela-merkels-foreign-policy>, accessed: 17 April, 2024.

Nord Stream 2 which further increased already excessive energy dependence of Germany from Russia. Therefore, as anticipated, the election of Donald Trump as president led to certain problems arising between Germany and the United States. Berlin's China policy was another factor that heightened tensions between the two countries. Despite Germany's continued emphasis on its long-standing reliance on the United States, Merkel decided to re-energize its partnership with China amid growing tensions with Washington over trade and security.<sup>9</sup>

In France, on the other hand, organization of power is quite different than in Germany. Since the establishment of the Fifth Republic in 1958, the French head of state, who is also commander-in-chief of the armed forces, has enjoyed extensive prerogatives. The president, elected by popular vote, plays a dominant and almost exclusive role in defining the country's foreign and defense policy, which is generally considered to be the 'reserved domain' of that office. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has primary responsibility for implementing the vision expressed by the President. Neither the constitution nor the parliament, be it the National Assembly or the Senate, enjoys any particular powers in the foreign policy domain. Even though foreign affairs and defense committees are active within the two assemblies, French deputies and senators are generally not very involved in world affairs and do not benefit from the advice of dedicated research structures, as they do in Germany.<sup>10</sup>

The end of the Cold War diminished France's role as a potential bridge builder as there were no longer two competing blocks. Consequently, France was compelled to revise its foreign policy to reconcile it with new global geopolitical realities. Unlike Germany, who has mostly supported the EU enlargement, France led by then President Francois Mitterrand had a more skeptical stance on it. Nonetheless, Jacques Chirac did not resist much to the European enlargement in a bid to hinder the Americanization of Eastern Europe under NATO's grip. On the other hand, France under Chirac, sought to ward off the growing dominance of Germany in EU which can be characterized as the flip side of the Franco-German motor that led the integration processes in Europe.<sup>11</sup> Despite his efforts to resist US dominance in Europe, Chirac began making decisive moves towards rapprochement with NATO. In December 1995, the French government announced a partial return to participation in NATO military bodies and consultations. However, it should be added that Chirac's decision

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<sup>9</sup> <https://www.politico.eu/article/merkel-looks-east-as-ties-fray-between-germany-and-us/>, accessed: 17 April, 2024.

<sup>10</sup> Marangé C. and Stewart S. French and German approaches to Russia Convergence yes, EU compatibility no, Chatham House, Russia and Eurasia Programme, November 2021, p.11.

<sup>11</sup> <https://interaffairs.ru/jauthor/material/1448>, accessed: 21 April, 2024.

to move closer to NATO was made on the condition of increasing the role of Europe in both the military and political structures of the alliance. He argued that there should be more intrusive political control over military operations as he wanted to shift more influence over NATO decisions from the U.S. Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR) and the Defense Planning Committee to the alliance's key political decision-making body, the North Atlantic Council.<sup>12</sup> However, Chirac's views on the importance of NATO did little to revive the deteriorating relations between the US and France in the early 2000s, when France did not support the American-led intervention in Iraq in 2003. Moreover, his close ties with Putin and his special attachment to Russia turned out to be a stumbling block in the development of French-American relations.<sup>13</sup>

Sarkozy, on the contrary, more Atlanticist in his views, depicted the future of France in close connection with the USA. Although France has always seen itself as a world power and has tried to resist U.S. hegemony in Europe, during Sarkozy's tenure, it sought to be a partner of the U.S. in leading NATO rather than a competitor. For many, Sarkozy ushered in a new era of cooperation, with foreign policy bringing the country closer to the United States than it had been for decades.<sup>14</sup> The hallmark of Sarkozy's foreign policy orientation occurred, when France decided to return to the military wing of NATO, 43 years after the withdrawal. Since this reorientation marked the turning point in the French foreign policy, many viewed it as the major departure from the Gaullism that promoted the idea of strategic autonomy of Europe. Furthermore, during Sarkozy's presidency, France embarked on Europeanization of NATO which facilitated access of France and other European states to certain important positions within both, civil and military wings of the organization. This turnaround was seen as a win-win outcome for both France and NATO.

Unlike his predecessor, the next president of France, Francois Hollande, took relatively tepid stance on transatlantic relations. Shortly after winning the election, Hollande initiated an early withdrawal of French troops from Afghanistan, thereby causing outrage in the western part of the Atlantic Ocean. He maintained France's nuclear deterrent capabilities and multilateral commitments, and generally

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<sup>12</sup> <https://www.armscontrol.org/act/1997-04/features/french-defense-policy-gaullism-meets-post-cold-war-world>, accessed: 20 April, 2024.

<sup>13</sup> <https://tass.com/world/1080517>, accessed: 21 April, 2024.

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/natosource/sarkozy-s-pronato-policy-is-much-more-than-symbolism-view/>, accessed: 20 April, 2024.



promoted a belief in universal values and human rights. He reiterated his “full support” for the Iran nuclear deal in 2015, and made several executive decisions, including sending troops to African countries such as Mali and Central African Republic. Hosting the successful Paris COP21 climate conference in 2015 can be regarded as the pinnacle of his foreign policy activities.<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, his policies began to fizzle out once Russia and the USA strengthened their positions in the Middle East following the Arab Spring and due to the unsuccessful role of France within the so-called “Normandy format” as a mediator between Russia and Ukraine.

Under the next president, French foreign policy became vague, inconsistent and often worrisome as the global influence of France, one of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council, began to rapidly wane. Even before his election as the new President of France in 2017, Emmanuel Macron's foreign policy declarations generated much controversy regarding France's future role in international politics. In the first year of his presidency, Macron's meeting with President Trump in Brussels and with Putin at the Palace of Versailles could hint at a return to Gaullism in French foreign policy, where France sees itself as a balancing power between Russia and the United States. Moreover, it should be noted that he had an intention to restart the Franco-German “engine” that propelled post-war European co-operation which was codified in the 1963 Elysee treaty by President Charles de Gaulle and Chancellor Konrad Adenauer. The agreement envisaged that the two governments will consult each other on all important questions of foreign policy. A speech Macron delivered in Athens suggests that he sees himself playing de Gaulle to Angela Merkel's Adenauer.<sup>16</sup> Based on the foregoing facts, one can conclude that Macron shares the Gaullist obsession and is willing to restore France's “Grandeur” on the international stage. Despite his ambitions, Macron's goal of restoring France's power in the international system has not only borne fruit, but, on the contrary, has further eclipsed “Grandeur” and left France weaker than before. According to senior researcher of IMEMO, Zueva, Macron's bid to make France great again through more proactive foreign policy had largely failed due to the lack of consistency and robustness.<sup>17</sup> In 2017, he initiated the idea of PESCO (Permanent Structured Cooperation) to deepen integration in the sphere of defense and pave the

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<sup>15</sup> <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/francois-hollandes-legacy-strong-abroad-weak-at-home/>, accessed: 22 April, 2024.

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.ft.com/content/a45681e8-6028-11e8-9334-2218e7146b04>, accessed: 21 April, 2024.

<sup>17</sup> К. Зуева, П. Тимофеев Внешняя Политика Президента Франции Э. Макрона: прагматизм под маской Атлантизма?, Мировая Экономика и Международные Отношения, 2018, том 62, № 12, с. 83–91, p.2.

way for the establishment of a joint European army. This is yet another indication of the willingness of Macron to shy away from the transatlantic framework and create a more autonomous Europe that can ensure its own security. Moreover, through the security-related PESCO project, Macron intended to prevent Germany from dominating the EU, since France did not have sufficient economic leverage to do so.

The argument on Macron's failures to make France great again can be underpinned by several important facts. Firstly, major failures in the regional politics of France caused the decrease of its previous spheres of influence across the globe. In the Middle East, France is openly losing out to competition from Russia in Syria and the United States in Iraq, while its former mandate Lebanon is largely under Iranian influence. Moreover, France's Africa policy did not gain momentum during Macron's presidency. Even though, in his Ouagadougou speech, he promised to renounce from the policy of post-colonialism against Africa, thereby attempting to create a new image of France, his actions in Africa did not live up to his words. His efforts to craft a narrative of change were overshadowed by path dependencies and above all the continuation of military engagements in Sahel. Bellicose rhetoric of France towards Africa during Macron's presidency led to the withdrawal of French troops from Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger. This debacle can be regarded as a historic turning point in France-African relations. All the mechanisms that Macron attempted to leverage to restore France's status in this continent failed as he continued military operations, which undermined his credibility in the eyes of the people. It is worth noting that because of such policies, political and social networks between France and Africa have also been eroding. The younger generation in Africa does not believe in Macron. For members of urban protest movements, France represents focal point of their critiques. There is no other postulate from which political capital can be made more quickly than the one that France must be put in its place.<sup>18</sup> Taking into consideration the above-mentioned, it can be concluded that Paris suffered and will suffer a significant loss of influence in the region no matter what measures Macron takes in the short or medium term.

In a similar vein, Macron's "Third Way" towards the Indo-Pacific region missed the mark as well. His three visits to China from 2018 to 2023 did not produce expected results even though both leaders agreed on various economic projects and explicitly emphasized their antagonism towards American hegemony. Chinese leader

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<sup>18</sup> Tull D.M. France's Africa Policy under President Macron, Good Intentions, Partial Reform and the Fiasco in the Sahel, SWP Comment, No.51 September 2023, p.5.

Xi Jinping's latest visit to Paris dashed Macron's hopes of persuading China to end its support for Putin in Russia's war against Ukraine and to refrain from providing Russia with key military equipment, thereby facilitating a major shift in the balance of power between the sides in the Ukraine war.<sup>19</sup> On the other hand, during his trip to India, Macron spoke about the need to maintain the remaining balance and about India's potential to become France's main strategic partner in the region. Furthermore, by trying to involve Australia to this new Paris-Delhi-Canberra axis, Macron was clearly challenging not only China's but also the US interests in the region. In his Bratislava address, he argued that Washington's increased focus on the Pacific region does not align with the interests of the European Union, suggesting that France's proposed "Third Way" may offer a more suitable alternative. However, his efforts to engage Australia in this new alliance were significantly undermined when Canberra opted to terminate a substantial \$66 billion submarine contract and instead joined the AUKUS partnership with the US and the UK in 2021. Nevertheless, despite the resulting diplomatic tensions over AUKUS, Macron reaffirmed his commitment to maintaining a presence in the region.<sup>20</sup>

During Macron's presidency, the transatlantic relations of France have not been plain sailing either. Tensions between the two countries reached their apex during Donald Trump's tenure as US President. Macron consistently criticized Trump for his views on climate change, and his decision to move the US embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. The tension heightened again in December 2019, when Macron called NATO "brain dead" after the withdrawal of the U.S. troops from Syria. Trump responded that the French president's statement was "very, very nasty" and threatened to add tariffs on French goods such as cheese and champagne.<sup>21</sup> Even though Biden's presidency marked revival in the relations as both countries coalesced around supporting Ukraine vis-a-vis Russia, Macron's ambitions to create a Strategically Autonomous Europe were clearly at odds with American interests in the region. While delivering a speech in Sorbonne, in 2017, Macron revealed his intention to form a more stable and autonomous Europe hinting at the need for a reduced U.S. role in maintaining European security architecture.<sup>22</sup> In 2018, he launched the European Intervention Initiative, a joint military project that now brings

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<sup>19</sup> <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/xis-visit-exposes-fault-lines-in-european-unity/>, accessed: 19 April, 2024.

<sup>20</sup> <https://carnegieeurope.eu/europe/strategic-europe/2021/10/frances-indo-pacific-third-way?lang=en&center=europe>, accessed: 20 April, 2024.

<sup>21</sup> <https://www.newsweek.com/donald-trump-emmanuel-macron-relationship-explained-1737932>, accessed: 21 April, 2024.

<sup>22</sup> Marangé C. and Stewart S. French and German approaches to Russia Convergence yes, EU compatibility no, Chatham House, Russia and Eurasia Programme, November 2021, p.28.

together 14 Western and Nordic European countries outside the framework of NATO and the EU. On the same occasion, he called for the creation of ‘a real European army’, arguing that “in the face of Russia ... which has shown that it can be threatening ... we must have a Europe which defends itself more alone, without depending only on the United States, and in a more sovereign way”.<sup>23</sup> However, his initiative did not receive the much-needed support from most parts of Europe, as many considered it a pathetic display of an attempt to establish French hegemony in Europe. Even Germany, a longtime ally, became irritated and disregarded Macron’s calls.

As for Russia, France’s foreign policy towards this nation has undergone major changes during Macron’s presidency. Although Paris initially criticized Russia for its annexation of Crimea, and Macron and Putin had serious disagreements over Syria and human rights in Russia, the French president invited Putin to Versailles to talk about the future of Europe, thereby sparking outrage among Eastern European members of the EU. Macron’s approach to Russia involved a combination of dialogue and firmness. On the one hand, he supported harsh sanctions against Moscow, on the other, he considered Russia as an important element of the European security architecture. This ambivalence tarnished Macron's status in the eyes of Eastern European states, which perceive Russia as a potential threat to all of Europe. When the so-called Normandy format failed to settle the Ukrainian crisis, Macron once again spoke about sanctions against Russia and support for Ukraine, partly to restore his lost credibility, especially in Eastern Europe. Nevertheless, trying to implement his ideas about European Strategic Autonomy, Macron changed his tactics again in the summer of 2019, when without waiting for the outcome of the European discussions, he decided to switch to a bilateral dialogue with Russia and invited Putin to his summer residence at Brégançon on the eve of the French-hosted G7 summit in Biarritz.<sup>24</sup>

Macron’s ambivalence towards Russia prevailed even after the outbreak of the Russia-Ukraine war in February 2022. In the early stages of the war, his intention was to contact Putin through so-called "telephone diplomacy" and convince him to stop the war. However, his efforts, according to political analyst Dmitry Minich, turned

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<sup>23</sup> AFP via Le Point (2018), ‘Macron plaide pour une “armée européenne” capable d’agir’ [Macron pleads for a European army capable of action], Le Point, 6 November 2018, [https://www.lepoint.fr/monde/macron-plaidepour-une-armee-europeenne-capable-d-agir-06-11-2018-2268997\\_24.php](https://www.lepoint.fr/monde/macron-plaidepour-une-armee-europeenne-capable-d-agir-06-11-2018-2268997_24.php), accessed: 22 April, 2024.

<sup>24</sup> Marangé C. and Stewart S. French and German approaches to Russia Convergence yes, EU compatibility no, Chatham House, Russia and Eurasia Programme, November 2021, p.29.

out to be futile, symbolic, and unilateral.<sup>25</sup> By attempting to contact Putin, Macron, ignored the security concerns of especially, Eastern European states and even further deepened the skepticism towards France within the NATO. Had his efforts made Putin halt the offensive actions, the story could have been completely different. As his policy towards Russia proved unsuccessful and “Telephone diplomacy” failed to achieve anything but ignorance on Putin's part, he decided to change policy and stopped contacting him in September 2022.<sup>26</sup> Since that time, France's policy towards Russia has undergone a profound transformation as Paris decided to abandon “Carrot and Stick” policy by switching to balance of power with Moscow. His change of approach also became noticeable in his address to Ukrainians, on December 31, 2022, when he said: “We will help you until victory”.<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, in February 2023, at the Munich conference, he acknowledged that, it was no longer time for dialogue, that his approach to Russia had changed because of the bellicose rhetoric of Russia and that helping Ukraine was the only way to bring Russia back to the discussion table in a way that was acceptable to Ukraine and to build a lasting peace.<sup>28</sup> In Stockholm, on January 30, 2024, he once again asserted, that Ukraine must be supported at all costs and if Europe did step up, and helped to prevent a Russian victory, the US through NATO could no longer have a monopoly in determining future relations with Moscow.<sup>29</sup> In March 2024, he even took a step further by stating that France was ready to send troops to Ukraine if Russia approached Kyiv or Odessa.<sup>30</sup> The statement which stirred controversies in France and across the globe, seemed to be directed at both the USA and Russia to demonstrate French "Third Way". The Stockholm speech and his remarks in March made it clear that Macron attempts to spearhead the Europe not just against the possible Russian threat, but also against the U.S. domination, that is reminiscent of “Grandeur” policy by De Gaulle. However, it should be noted that this is a dangerous approach which could further lead to the defragmentation of the West, given the predominance of pro-American sentiment among the eastern states of Europe. On the other hand, France needs to be reminded that actions speak louder than words,

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<sup>25</sup> <https://libmod.de/en/network-russia-policy-brief-ukraine-war-france-minic/>, accessed: 25 April, 2024.

<sup>26</sup> <https://vesti.az/politika/francuzskii-ekspert-franciya-pytaetsya-vytesnit-rossiyu-s-yuznogo-kavkaza-intervyu-513716>, accessed: 22 April, 2024.

<sup>27</sup> <https://www.jpost.com/breaking-news/article-726309>, accessed: 23 April, 2024.

<sup>28</sup> <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/time-more-ukraine-support-not-russia-dialogue-macron-says-2023-02-17/>, accessed: 22 April, 2024.

<sup>29</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/jan/30/eu-defend-ukraine-if-us-reduces-military-support-emmanuel-macron-says>, accessed: 23 April, 2024.

<sup>30</sup> <https://www.kyivpost.com/post/29194>, accessed: 23 April, 2024.

and therefore concrete steps must be taken to halt the conflict and extricate itself from this quagmire. Ultimately, given the daily strengthening of Russia both economically and militarily, as well as the further isolation of France within Europe, it can be concluded that Macron's policies have failed on this front as well.

Unlike France, which has consistently prioritized defense issues, German foreign policy has undergone notable shifts since the outbreak of the Russian-Ukrainian war in 2022. Three days after the war broke out, in his address to Bundestag, chancellor Olaf Scholz, described the Russian war as historical "Zeitenwende", which means "an epochal shift" in German. In his article in Foreign Affairs, Scholz explained "Zeitenwende" in the following manner: "The world is facing a "Zeitenwende": an epochal tectonic shift. Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine has put an end to an era. New powers have emerged or reemerged, including an economically strong and politically assertive China. In this new multipolar world, different countries and models of government are competing for power and influence". To put it simply, Zeitenwende is the end of a relatively stable era, and this end happened because of the Russia's attack on Ukraine. In the same article, Scholz, argues that Germany is doing everything it can do defend international order and that is why Germans are intent on becoming the guarantor of European security that the allies expect him to be, a bridge builder within the European Union and an advocate for multilateral solutions to global problems. This is the only way for Germany to successfully navigate the geopolitical rifts of this time.<sup>31</sup> Although the shift in German foreign policy raised concerns about the dangerous path of remilitarization that Germany pledged not to repeat after World War II, and despite this shift being seen by many as a departure from the culture of military restraint that had long guided German foreign policy, Western powers, including the United States, supported Germany's position against the backdrop of the Russian threat to all of Europe.

To meet the new geopolitical realities of "Zeitenwende", Germany decided to conduct more assertive security and military policy, which included several important steps. Firstly, in response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Scholz made an announcement of a creation of the 100-billion-euro special defense fund, which was approved by the Bundestag in June 2022.<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, Scholz explicitly expressed his desire to procure advanced defensive technologies, including the F-35 fighter jet and unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs). He initiated new European arms projects on

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<sup>31</sup><https://www.foreignaffairs.com/germany/olaf-scholz-global-zeitenwende-how-avoid-new-cold-war>, accessed: 24 April, 2024.

<sup>32</sup><https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/german-lawmakers-approve-100-bln-euro-military-revamp-2022-06-03/>, accessed: 25 April, 2024.

tanks and jets in cooperation with France and other partners and decided to expand its military deployments on NATO's eastern flank. Given all this defense-oriented activities, it can be argued that a radical shift has occurred in German foreign policy. Political scientist, P. Mello argues that "Zeitenwende" amounts to international orientation change in German foreign policy that means excessive shift in actor's international role and activities. International orientation change requires the fulfillment of three indicators which are: role change, activities change and change in various foreign policy areas.<sup>33</sup> According to Mello, there has been a modification in the perception of Germany's role, as articulated in Scholz's article in Foreign Affairs magazine, which talks about Germany as the guarantor of European security. Furthermore, Germany's role change was reflected in the National Security Strategy, which was adopted in 2023. In that document, incidentally, Russia is regarded as the biggest threat to peace and security, while relations with USA and France are noted as fundamental.<sup>34</sup> Even though, for some, the NSS failed to fulfill the expectations of "Zeitenwende", as it lacks the ambition to put Germany in a military leadership position on security and defense in Europe, the document, clearly describes a new role for Germany in a changing geopolitical environment.<sup>35</sup>

In addition to role change, it can be argued that the creation of the special defense fund, arms deliveries to Ukraine and deployment of 4000 soldiers to Lithuania are indicators of a change in program and goals of German foreign policy. Regarding arms supplies, it should be noted that Germany has already become one of Ukraine's strongest supporters, since it is the second largest military supplier after the United States. However, the coalition government may not always present a unified front regarding Ukraine. Scholz's recent refusal to supply Taurus missiles to Ukraine, despite strong support from the Greens, is further evidence of this divergence. Nevertheless, this friction does not inhibit much the international orientation change of Germany which was prompted by the Russian war in Ukraine. This raises the critical question of whether Germany's recent defense posture signifies its trajectory towards becoming a new major military power in Europe.

Along with France, the USA is an important partner of Germany. As it was written in the NSS, Germany remains committed to transatlantic ties even more than before, given the looming Russian threat, therefore despite certain differences, the

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<sup>33</sup> Mello P.A. Zeitenwende: German Foreign Policy Change in the Wake of Russia's War Against Ukraine, Politics and Governance, volume 12, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.17645/pag.7346>, p.4.

<sup>34</sup> <https://www.nationalesicherheitsstrategie.de/National-Security-Strategy-Executive-Summary-EN.pdf>, accessed: 26 April, 2024.

<sup>35</sup> <https://www.cfr.org/in-brief/more-strategic-german-foreign-policy>, accessed: 26 April, 2024.



relationship between the two countries during the Biden-Scholtz era was further strengthened. However, this was not the case during Donald Trump's tenure, as fundamental disagreements arose over issues of trade, China, and Iran. Nevertheless, in Germany, many believed that the USA was their most important foreign policy partner, even though both states had disagreements on various issues of foreign policy.<sup>36</sup>

Since its election, Germany's new ruling coalition has laid out a new foreign policy agenda that includes a more aggressive policy aimed at reducing strategic dependence on China through close coordination with the United States. The new foreign policy outlook suggests that the new leaders will be much tougher on China than Merkel's government. The coalition agreement signed by all parties reflects numerous contentious issues with China including the state of human rights, the South China Sea, Taiwan, human rights violations in Xinjiang, and Hong Kong.<sup>37</sup> Such a tough stance on both Russia and China is consistent with that of the United States, which has long pressed Europe to pursue more assertive policy toward both countries. In the past, it seemed nearly impossible for the US to coalesce the European nations around itself, when both Germany and France threatened to veto the resolution permitting the 2003 US intervention into Iraq, and when Germany agreed to implement two Nord Stream projects despite concerns with respect to the rising energy dependence of Germany from the Russian Federation. However, today, Germany is more adherent to transatlantic ties and vehemently upholds the role of the U.S. in Europe's security architecture. Germany's foreign policy apparatus, led by the Atlanticist Annalena Baerbock, acknowledges that Europe alone is unable to cope with the looming threat from the east and therefore dismisses Macron's initiatives for "Strategic Autonomy" of Europe. Germany's strong support for Ukraine stems from the belief that if Ukraine is defeated, it could be next, and therefore American backup is needed more than ever.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Poushter J., Gubbala S., and Lippert J. U.S.-Germany Relationship Remains Solid, but Underlying Policy Differences Begin to Show, Pew Research Center, 2023, p.7.

<sup>37</sup> <https://dgap.org/en/research/publications/new-foreign-policy-germany>, accessed: 28 April, 2024.

<sup>38</sup> <https://neweasterneurope.eu/2024/03/06/german-foreign-policy-is-facing-a-huge-dilemma/>, accessed: 28 April, 2024.



## Franco-German dissonance after the Russia-Ukraine war

As mentioned above, the relationship between France and Germany has evolved into a solid partnership since the end of the Second World War. Today, both countries are considered the main engine of European integration, and while occasional disagreements may arise, it is simply unimaginable to separate them from each other in the context of the EU. In the official website of the Foreign Ministry of Germany, it is noted that “there is no other country Germany has closer ties with than France. We are each other’s most important partners and allies”.<sup>39</sup> While such an attitude may symbolize an unbreakable friendship between the two countries, recent tensions stemming from divergent foreign policy preferences suggest a more nuanced reality. Before delving into these differences, however, it is worth examining the numerous common interests they share.

As previously highlighted, the Elysee Treaty laid the foundation for friendship between France and Germany during the Cold War. In a similar vein, treaty of Aachen (2019) can be regarded as the foundation of the Franco-German partnership in the post-Cold-War period. Signed by German Chancellor Angela Merkel and French President Emmanuel Macron, the treaty was intended to further deepen the cooperation between the two countries, focusing on new challenges such as climate change and digital transformation. The treaty entailed implementation of 15 priority projects, including Franco-German Citizens Fund, Franco-German Cross-Border Cooperation Committee etc. In addition to these institutions, since 2003, the Franco-German Council of Ministers and, since 2019, the Franco-German Parliamentary Assembly have been created to foster better bilateral cooperation. With respect to economic relations, it should be noted that, according to the official website of the Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs of France, Germany is France’s leading trading partner, serving as its main supplier (French imports from Germany totaled €92.5 billion in 2022) and its leading customer (€80.3 billion in exports in 2022), while France ranks as Germany’s fourth-largest trading partner. The French and German economies are extremely intertwined and complementary, and there is much investment in both directions. Some 5,700 French companies are present in Germany, where they employ more than 400,000 people, while around 4,500 German companies employ 320,000 people in France.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup><https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/en/aussenpolitik/europe/cooperation-in-europe/german-french-cooperation/228748>, accessed: 29 April, 2024.

<sup>40</sup> <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/country-files/germany/france-and-germany/>, accessed: 29 April, 2024.

For much of the post-Cold War period, both France and Germany maintained similar positions on many foreign policy issues, most notably foreign economic and trade policies and strengthening the EU's economic pillar. Both regarded the Franco-German cooperation as the main driving force of development of the European Union. Since the beginning of the 21st century, the foreign policy positions of both France and Germany have converged even further on numerous matters. This includes navigating complex relations with China and Russia, as well as a shared vision for European enlargement. It is not a coincidence that the four countries which strongly opposed the US intervention into Iraq were Germany, France, Russia, and China. Despite the United States' frustration, neither Germany nor France was willing to curtail their economic ties with Russia or China, prioritizing trade and energy interests. Therefore, both adopted similar approaches to the integration of Russia into European and international structures after the collapse of the Soviet Union. France's position towards Russia has been mainly predicated on its willingness to facilitate Russian's participation in the European Security architecture, whereas Germany's policies have been driven by trade and energy ambitions.<sup>41</sup>

During Merkel's tenure, Germany and France found common language on many aspects of foreign policy. This spirit of cooperation was evident in their decision to deploy the Franco-German brigade to the Sahel region, and their collaborative efforts on the joint fighter jet project. Merkel and Macron had a shared vision to craft a stronger and more independent Europe, and even agreed that Europe could no longer rely solely on US protection. It is worth noting that because of the specific character of their relationships with Russia, **France and Germany opposed** Georgia and Ukraine's membership in NATO while it was discussed at the Bucharest summit in 2008. Based on these facts, it can be argued that prior to the annexation of Crimea in 2014, both states viewed Russia as a significant component of the European security architecture. Even after their 2014 foreign policy shift due to Crimea, both France and Germany advocated a combination of sanctions against and engagement with Moscow. This also included undertaking a mediatory mission between Russia and Ukraine within the "Normandy Format," despite its limitations in achieving a lasting peace.<sup>42</sup> Nevertheless, after 2014, Germany and France decided to halt military and security cooperation with Moscow. France even went further by

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<sup>41</sup> Marangé C. and Stewart S. French and German approaches to Russia Convergence yes, EU compatibility no, Chatham House, Russia and Eurasia Programme, November 2021, p. 2.

<sup>42</sup> <https://researchcentre.trtworld.com/blogs/a-watershed-moment-for-franco-german-relations/>, accessed: 30 April, 2024.

cancelling the delivery of Mistral frigates to Russia. A dramatic shift in the foreign policies of both France and Germany occurred after the onset of Russia's all-out war against Ukraine on February 24, 2022. This included a much stronger stance on sanctions, increased military support for Ukraine, and a more hawkish rhetoric towards Russia. However, this war revealed not only common features, but also sharp divergences in the foreign policies of Germany and France in the Macron-Scholz era.

While France and Germany share common interests in foreign policy, tensions and disagreements have accumulated over the past two years. Political scientists Marangé and Stewart argue that, particularly during Macron's presidency, the Franco-German engine has experienced setbacks. Due to a growing fundamental divergence in their foreign policy visions, they suggest that this engine is gradually faltering.<sup>43</sup> One can argue that the main reason for this divergence is inconsistency of Scholz's policy of "Zeitenwende" with "Grandeur" of Macron, as both concepts are assertive enough to direct respective states to a leading role in Europe and the world. **"Zeitenwende,"** which aims to end Germany's traditional reticent foreign policy, **is indeed not in line with "Grandeur,"** a concept focused on restoring France's global influence. Since these concepts contradict each other, they can be seen as a major obstacle in filling the gaps in the relationship between the two countries. One of the main elements of the Zeitenwende is the reliance on transatlantic security ties, which France is clearly opposed to. This new concept of Germany foreign policy signals a break with the past when Germany pursued a more restrained military and security policy. During the Cold War period, both France and West Germany were predominantly in the same camp against the Soviet threat, although there were some deviations when the ideas of "rapprochement" and "Ostpolitik" dominated the foreign policies of these countries. The end of the Cold War marked a new phase for both France and Germany as there was no longer a possible threat of the expansion of communism, and therefore a new security architecture of Europe had to be developed. In the early stages of the post-Cold War period, both Germany and France, were inclined to shape this architecture more actively, which would ensure a smaller role for the United States. France's goal in this regard was to reduce European security dependence on the United States, which hampered the development of defense and security components of EU. To this end, France needed Germany's collaboration more than ever, even though Kohl's government was reluctant to dampen transatlantic ties. Subsequently, in June 1992, Foreign and Defense

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<sup>43</sup> Marangé C. and Stewart S. French and German approaches to Russia Convergence yes, EU compatibility no, Chatham House, Russia and Eurasia Programme, November 2021, p. 4.

Ministers of the Western European Union met in Bonn to develop the role of WEU as the defense component of the EU, to strengthen its operational capacity and to define the relations between the WEU and non-member states. In the final document, the Petersberg Declaration, the Council of Ministers agreed to expand WEU functions to include the planning and execution of a range of peace-related operations.<sup>44</sup> Since then, a wide range of measures have been taken to strengthen the EU's security and military foothold. Therefore, it can be argued that the position of strengthening the security of Europe had been anchored in the foreign policies of both Germany and France for much of the post-Cold War period, although Germany had not supported a radical transformation of the EU from a civilian to a military power and has been more cautious with respect to its transatlantic relations. For that reason, weakening of Germany's transatlantic ties, and thereby fostering European security architecture less dependent on the United States, has been one of the dominant lines of French foreign policy during this period. **Despite** Germany's support for security dialogue with Russia throughout much of the post-Cold War period, transatlantic relations remained a priority for Berlin. Therefore, Macron's idea of rapprochement with Russia, his negative comments about NATO and his veto on negotiations on accession to the EU of North Macedonia and Albania were not very well received in Germany.<sup>45</sup> Moreover, Berlin's reaction to Macron's proposals on "European Strategic Autonomy" or policy reset with Russia was tepid, because of the failure of the French side to consult with EU, including Germany.<sup>46</sup> Under "European Strategic Autonomy" concept, France is seen as a balancing power that keeps the Americans at bay. Nevertheless, his efforts on building "Strategic Autonomy" failed, as they did not receive sufficient support either in Germany, or in eastern Europe. It was not until the Russian full-scale attack on Ukraine in 2022, when France finally decided to reconsider its policy towards Russia. The bellicose rhetoric of Russia, on the other hand, derailed Macron's ambitions to build "European Strategic Autonomy", as Germany and the US ended up moving even closer on security issues. Olaf Scholz's current support for Ukraine stems from the belief that Germany could be Russia's next stop and therefore, Germany should rely more on transatlantic ties rather than building new European security architecture.

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<sup>44</sup> Pagani F. A New Gear in the CFSP Machinery: Integration of the Petersberg Tasks in the Treaty on European Union, *European Journal of International Law* 9 (1998), 737-749, p.738.

<sup>45</sup> Puglierin J. and Franke U.E. THE BIG ENGINE THAT MIGHT: HOW FRANCE AND GERMANY CAN BUILD A GEOPOLITICAL EUROPE, *European Council on Foreign Relations*, 2020, p.15.

<sup>46</sup> Marangé C. and Stewart S. French and German approaches to Russia Convergence yes, EU compatibility no, *Chatham House, Russia and Eurasia Programme*, November 2021, p.30.

In addition to varying views on the European security arrangements, Germany and France have different positions on defense cooperation as well. Based on the recent developments, it can be concluded that, the Franco-German defense cooperation has faced numerous challenges. A project between France and Germany to create a next-generation combat aircrafts critical to defending Europe's skies is fizzling out. Germany's continued orders of F-35 fighter jets from the US cast doubt on the Franco-German next-generation fighter project. But even more concerning, there are reports that Germany could potentially abandon the project altogether and join Britain's Tempest program alongside Italy and Japan. This would be a terrible blow to France, reminiscent of Australia's abandonment of its joint submarine program with France in favor of the trilateral AUKUS project.<sup>47</sup> It should be added that beyond the troubled fighter jet project, Franco-German defense cooperation faces additional challenges. The joint next-generation tank program between Nexter and KMW is lagging behind schedule, and France's absence from Germany's European Sky Shield initiative highlights a further disconnect in strategic priorities. Despite receiving support from both the US and NATO, the Sky Shield initiative, which includes 19 member countries, faced public criticism from Macron in 2024.

Nuclear energy is another policy area where Macron and Scholz are very much at odds. France is one of the most nuclear-powered countries in the world, typically producing over 70% of its electricity with its fleet of reactors. Germany, on the other hand, has long pursued and advocated an anti-nuclear policy. French officials criticize German attempt to sabotage the competitiveness of France's nuclear industry, whose cheap electricity could give them a competitive advantage as Germany struggles with high gas prices. In a speech, in August 2023, Macron made his frustration public, calling Germany's position on nuclear energy "a historic mistake."<sup>48</sup>

The war in Ukraine has also led to heightened tension between Macron and Scholz. The recent debate sparked by Germany's refusal to supply Taurus missiles and [Macron's statement on the possibility of Western ground troops being sent to Ukraine](#) have dealt a heavy blow to French-German relations. This could be a bitter scenario for the future of Europe, because at a time when Europe needs to present a united front in supporting Ukraine and defending it against Russia's hybrid warfare, the EU's two most powerful states find themselves in a deep crisis of trust and

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<sup>47</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2023/nov/20/france-germany-eu-europe-future>, accessed: 30 April, 2024.

<sup>48</sup> <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/strained-france-germany-ties-slow-eu-decision-making-2023-10-09/>, accessed: 30 April, 2024.

leadership.<sup>49</sup> Scholz is deeply concerned that Macron continues to make numerous statements without consulting his partners. On the other hand, Paris does not grasp, the cold feet of Berlin with respect to the war in Ukraine. Moreover, Germany and France have varying views on arms exports to Ukraine as Berlin attacks Paris for not sending enough weapons, while France ridicules Germany for refusing to send Taurus missiles.<sup>50</sup> Nevertheless, Macron's criticism of Scholz over Taurus missiles is not well-grounded, as Germany has become the second largest supplier of Ukraine after the US, while France remains distant 14<sup>th</sup>. Apart from the war in Ukraine, the two states have clear differences in their positions on issues such as defense and energy, as well as the future of the European Union. Moreover, Scholz does not hide his irritation at Macron's desire to position himself as Europe's leader. Simply put, Germany, as the EU's strongest economy, can no longer tolerate France's unilateral ambitions, and this scene might point to a new chapter in the competition for European leadership between the two countries. Hence, there is a growing view that the era of Scholz and Macron may reopen a page of antagonism in the history of both countries, almost 80 years after the end of the Second World War. Moreover, France faces a very difficult presidential election in 2027 amid predictions that Marine Le Pen of the far-right National Rally party has the potential to win, and if this happens, the likelihood of the collapse of the Franco-German axis will be very high.<sup>51</sup>

### **Diverging Paths in the South Caucasus**

Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus is another region where Germany and France have profound differences in foreign policy. A common aspect of foreign policy towards this region is that, even though they are both interested in cooperation with the Eastern Partnership countries, neither sees this cooperation as a path to EU membership. Macron's foreign policy towards Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus has not been well received by the most countries in the region, as his special relationship with Russia and favoritism of some countries have raised questions about France's impartiality. Hence, it can be argued that his foreign policy ideas prevented France from improving its relations with central and eastern

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<sup>49</sup> [https://www.lemonde.fr/en/opinion/article/2024/03/10/germany-and-france-are-drawing-two-completely-different-conclusions-from-the-war-in-ukraine\\_6604289\\_23.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/en/opinion/article/2024/03/10/germany-and-france-are-drawing-two-completely-different-conclusions-from-the-war-in-ukraine_6604289_23.html), accessed: 1 May, 2024.

<sup>50</sup> <https://www.politico.eu/article/france-germany-macron-scholz-russia-defense-policy-european-union/>, accessed: 1 May, 2024.

<sup>51</sup> <https://ip-quarterly.com/en/five-illusions-german-foreign-policy>, accessed: 1 May, 2024.

European states.<sup>52</sup> Berlin's position in this regard is less categorical. While focusing on the implementation of association agreements with Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine, Germany is open to proposals on possible ways to deepen cooperation with them, as well as with the other three partner states.<sup>53</sup>

While addressing an audience in Bratislava, in 2023, Macron uttered that he wanted a more collaborative relationship with ex-Soviet states.<sup>54</sup> Although during the speech, he attempted to express his support for Eastern Europe and the Caucasus, it did not change ambivalence and post-colonial rhetoric of France towards the region. Even its longtime ally Germany was irritated by Macron's speech in Bratislava, seeing it as another step towards strengthening France's position as a European leader. For many, it was reminiscent of his famous speech in Ouagadougou, in 2017, where his bogus statements about France moving away from its colonial past stirred anger among people given France's ongoing military activities in Africa.

France's policy in the South Caucasus has not been an exception as well. The year 2020 was marked with fundamental geopolitical changes in the South Caucasus, caused by the military-political outcomes of the Second Karabakh War between Armenia and Azerbaijan.<sup>55</sup> By defeating Armenia on the battlefield, Azerbaijan put an end to nearly 30 years of occupation, which had been the main stumbling block to achieving sustainable peace and stability in the region. Biased position of France came to forth during the war when Macron accused Azerbaijan of using Syrian jihadists without providing any reasonable evidence. Moreover, immediately after the end of the Second Karabakh War, the Senate and the National Assembly of France adopted harsh anti-Azerbaijani resolutions that called on the government to recognize the separatist regime in Karabakh.<sup>56</sup> The same biased rhetoric continued after Azerbaijan successfully implemented local anti-terrorism measures in September 2023, which led to the end of separatism and the restoration of Azerbaijan's sovereignty. Since 2020, France has been vehemently striving to support Armenia in the international political arena, trying to introduce draft resolutions against Azerbaijan to the UN Security Council. Nevertheless, all these attempts

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<sup>52</sup> Puglierin J. and Franke U.E. THE BIG ENGINE THAT MIGHT: HOW FRANCE AND GERMANY CAN BUILD A GEOPOLITICAL EUROPE, European Council on Foreign Relations, 2020, p.31.

<sup>53</sup> Marangé C. and Stewart S. French and German approaches to Russia Convergence yes, EU compatibility no, Chatham House, Russia and Eurasia Programme, November 2021, p.24.

<sup>54</sup><https://www.politico.eu/article/emmanuel-macron-ukraine-volodymyr-zelenskyy-should-get-strong-and-tangible-security-guarantees/>, accessed: 2 May, 2024.

<sup>55</sup><https://brussels.mfa.gov.az/en/news/3669/the-44-day-karabakh-war-has-changed-the-geopolitical-regional-landscape-eureporter>, accessed: 2 May, 2024.

<sup>56</sup> Pashayeva G. "The South Caucasus and Great Power Confrontation: Is There a Silver Lining on the Horizon?" Baku, 2024, p.138.



missed the mark, as international community acknowledged the restoration of Azerbaijan's territorial integrity as a *fait accompli*- a reality that could not be undone. Even though Macron's accusations were rejected in the statements of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan and the reaction of international community did not meet his expectations, Paris continued to conduct destructive policy towards the South Caucasus region. All in all, Macron's baseless allegations against Azerbaijan did not hold water and henceforward he decided to restore France's role as a mediator in the peace process between Azerbaijan and Armenia. However, his mediation efforts were rejected by Azerbaijan due to France's biased pro-Armenian position and destructive role complicating the entire peace process. It should be underscored that Azerbaijan attempted to extend an olive branch for lasting peace in the region by proposing five principles for the establishment of relations between the two countries.<sup>57</sup> On the contrary, it was Armenia that rejected Azerbaijan's outstretched hand for a peace agreement by actively implementing the "3P" policy, prolonging peace negotiations, promoting an anti-Azerbaijani campaign and provoking tension along the conditional border.

In addition to political support, Macron has repeatedly demonstrated an adamant position on providing military assistance to Armenia that can be considered as another breach of neutrality, which is a one of the essential principles of mediation. France's attempt to promote peace while simultaneously arming one of the parties is reminiscent of the famous phrase once uttered by Calgacus: "They make a desert and call it peace".<sup>58</sup> In a joint press conference after a meeting held at the Élysée Palace with Pashinyan on 21 February 2024, Macron stated that his country would continue to develop and expand military cooperation with Armenia. The statement came amid rising tension between Armenia and Azerbaijan over the border incident which occurred on February 13<sup>th</sup>, 2024. Moreover, on February 23, 2024, Pashinyan received a delegation led by French Minister of the Armed Forces Sebastian Lecornu. During the meeting they discussed numerous issues such as defense cooperation, military education, combat training and modernization of the Armed Forces of Armenia. Moreover, the French minister emphasized his country's commitment to supplying air defense systems and armored vehicles to Armenia. All the foregoing facts indicate that France considers arms supply to Armenia as an

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<sup>57</sup> <https://www.mfa.gov.az/en/news/no11722>, accessed: 3 May, 2024.

<sup>58</sup> <https://www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803095542724>, accessed: 3 May, 2024.



important element of its regional policy, thereby jeopardizing peace and stability in the South Caucasus.

It is worth noting that despite its historical lean towards Armenia, France has, in the past attempted to strike a balance between Armenia and Azerbaijan. In the 1990s Azerbaijan concurred with France's mediation within the framework of the OSCE Minsk Group on the condition of neutrality, when Jacques Chirac asked for it. Azerbaijan had normal relationship with France during the presidency of François Hollande, who sold satellites and radar systems to Azerbaijan in 2014 and 2015 respectively. Relations deteriorated after Emmanuel Macron came to power in 2017 due to his overt Armenian support and biased stance towards Azerbaijan.

Several factors underpin France's policies in the South Caucasus and its unwavering support for Armenia. First, the substantial Armenian diaspora in France, numbering around 600,000, wields considerable influence in the country. Second, the warm relationship between Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and French President Emmanuel Macron has fostered closer bilateral ties. Finally, France aims to expand its regional influence by leveraging its partnership with Armenia and capitalizing on Russia's preoccupation with the war in Ukraine.

In contrast to France, Germany's engagement in the South Caucasus has been predominantly driven by trade and economic interests, and, unlike France, Armenian diaspora is not quite influential in Germany. Therefore, Germany's policy towards the region has been characterized by a more balanced and inclusive approach compared to that of France. In 2010, the official website of German Council on Foreign Relations emphasized that “The South Caucasus, and the broader Caspian region, is becoming increasingly more important for European energy, security, and economic interests. Yet there has been a lack of German focus in this region, which ironically has become increasingly interesting for the German private sector, most notably Azerbaijan. Germany should take the unique responsibility and shape a value-added and independent European policy toward the South Caucasus”.<sup>59</sup> The statement clearly indicates that trade and economic interests are the driving factors of Germany's policy in the South Caucasus.

It should be noted that since the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries in 1992, Azerbaijan and Germany have generally enjoyed good relations. Azerbaijan is Germany's principal economic partner in the Caucasus and

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<sup>59</sup> <https://dgap.org/en/research/publications/recalibrating-germanys-and-eus-policy-south-caucasus>, accessed: 4 May, 2024.

Germany's only Chamber of Commerce Abroad in the region is based in Baku. Moreover, Azerbaijan is one of Germany's ten most important suppliers of crude oil. The key exports from Germany are machinery, motor vehicles and components, iron and steel products, and production facilities.<sup>60</sup> In addition to traditional areas of economic cooperation, German companies are now particularly interested in collaborating with Azerbaijan in transitioning to green energy and expanding joint renewable energy projects.<sup>61</sup> With COP29 taking place in Azerbaijan in November 2024, the commitment of both countries to actively implement green policies presents an excellent opportunity to expand cooperation in this area as well. Given the fact that the current German Foreign Minister is a member of Alliance 90/The greens party, which prioritizes environmental policies, a new element could be added to cooperation between the two countries. Based on the foregoing, it can be posited that trade and economic relations have thus far constituted the primary domains of cooperation between the two nations.

Since Olaf Scholz assumed office, it can be emphasized that a new political chapter had opened in relations between the two countries, as Germany had embarked on a more active policy towards the Caucasus region. Scholz's new direction in Germany Foreign Policy, namely "Zeitenwende", also envisaged a new approach to security challenges on the EU's eastern borders. Indeed, the destructive role of Paris, along with the weakening of Russian influence in the Caucasus, represents an excellent opportunity for Berlin to take a leading role and begin active diplomatic activity. Germany's significant economic and political influence, as well as its good relations with both Armenia and Azerbaijan and its reputation for taking a balanced position, make it a good choice to facilitate the peace process between the two countries. For Azerbaijan, the evolving dynamics present a promising opportunity for strategic engagement with the EU while pushing France aside. This scenario will allow Baku to develop closer ties with Germany while strengthening its position in the European sphere. At the same time, as Armenia rebuilds its foreign alliances, Berlin's support would be particularly beneficial, providing the diplomatic leverage Armenia needs to strengthen its ties with Western partners.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> <https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/en/aussenpolitik/laenderinformationen/aserbajdschan-node/azerbajdan/233132>, accessed: 4 May, 2024.

<sup>61</sup> <https://aircenter.az/en/single/azerbajdan-germany-relations-new-avenues-for-cooperation-in-the-south-caucasus-1453>, accessed: 4 May, 2024.

<sup>62</sup> <https://www.commonspace.eu/opinion/opinion-german-diplomacy-move-south-caucasus>, accessed: 4 May, 2024.

Zeitenwende, on the other hand, represents a good opportunity for Azerbaijan to create a counterweight to France, which vehemently supports Armenia. Although not officially stated, one of the underlying goals of this new concept of German foreign policy may be to counterbalance France's ambitions for leadership in Europe. It should be recalled that long ago, the first Secretary General of NATO, Lord Ismay, famously said that the purpose of NATO was to “keep the Americans in, the Russians out, and the Germans down”.<sup>63</sup> Now it can be argued that one of the purposes of the “Zeitenwende” is to keep the Americans in, the Russians out, and the French down.

Germany's active involvement in the political processes in the region began when Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev, Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, European Council President Charles Michel, French President Emmanuel Macron and German Chancellor Olaf Scholz met on the sidelines of the summit of the European Political Community held in Chisinau on June 1, 2023. During the meeting, details of the Azerbaijan-Armenia peace process, including, connectivity, security, the border delimitation, and the peace treaty were discussed.<sup>64</sup> Then, on February 16-18, the leaders of Azerbaijan and Armenia held meetings on the sidelines of the Munich Security Conference. The meeting was of particular significance as it was the first face-to-face meeting between Aliyev and Pashinyan since Azerbaijan conducted local counter-terrorism measures in September 2023. The two leaders held one-on-one talks after attending a trilateral meeting organized by German Chancellor Olaf Scholz. Then, in late February, Germany once again offered its good offices for renewed engagement between Armenia and Azerbaijan as the foreign ministers of both countries met in Berlin and discussed perspectives on the provisions of the draft bilateral Agreement on the Establishment of Peace and Interstate Relations between Azerbaijan and Armenia.<sup>65</sup> Throughout Ilham Aliyev's recent visit to Berlin in April 2024, where he attended the high-level segment of the 15th Petersberg Climate Dialogue, issues of climate policy and the peace process between Azerbaijan and Armenia took center stage. During the meeting, both Scholz and Bärbock emphasized

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<sup>63</sup> <https://www.nato.int/acad/conf/future95/rodman.htm>, accessed: 5 May, 2024.

<sup>64</sup> <https://euneighbourseast.eu/news/latest-news/leaders-of-armenia-and-azerbaijan-meet-charles-michel-olaf-scholz-and-emmanuel-macron-in-moldova/>, accessed: 5 May, 2024.

<sup>65</sup> <https://berlin.mfa.gov.az/en/news/4043/a-meeting-between-the-ministers-of-foreign-affairs-of-azerbaijan-and-armenia-was-held-in-berlin-germany>, accessed: 6 May, 2024.

the importance of peace and expressed Germany's willingness to contribute to this process.<sup>66</sup>

In a nutshell, Germany's South Caucasus policy is much more even-handed than France's, and therefore, it can yield fruitful outcomes in terms of achieving peace and stability in the region. While both Germany and France share an interest in weakening Russian influence in the region and reaping the benefits of the regional energy hub and the Middle Corridor, Germany's regional policy is primarily driven by trade and economic interests. In contrast, France has been pursuing biased, more assertive, and potentially destructive policies by leveraging Armenia to achieve its goals. The geopolitical rivalry between Germany and France for European leadership is entering a new phase in the South Caucasus region, where Azerbaijan seeks to counterbalance France by deepening its cooperation with Germany, while Armenia continues to rely on France to ensure its security amid rising tensions with Russia.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, it should be noted that despite being labeled as the engine of the European integration, the relationship between France and Germany, has not always been plain sailing. On the contrary, the relationship has suffered a major setback over the past couple of years. France and the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), which were on the same front during the Cold War period, decided to be frontrunners of European integration even after the reunification of Germany and the collapse of socialism. Commonalities in their foreign policy setting were primarily driven by the willingness to boost the economic might of the EU and ensure its security. There was a period when both Germany and France had a common vision of integrating Russia into the European security architecture, despite US protests. The joint political stance of both states, alongside the growing economic and energy dependence of Germany and eastern European states on Russia, raised concerns across the Atlantic, as it could lead to a further weakening of the American influence in Europe. Such a scenario played into the hands of France, as it sought to make Europe less dependent on the United States and for this purpose weaken Germany's transatlantic ties. Macron's "Strategic Autonomy for Europe" was designed to achieve this goal by restoring so-called

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<sup>66</sup> <https://president.az/en/articles/view/65638>, accessed: 6 May, 2024.

“Grandeur”. However, after the outbreak of Russia’s full-scale war against Ukraine on February 24, 2022, his plans for “Grandeur” and “Strategic Autonomy” were undermined by Scholz’s “Zeitenwende”, which envisages German militarization and commitment of Berlin to transatlantic ties. Since that time, serious foreign policy disagreements have arisen between Germany and France on issues of defense cooperation, energy policy, the war in Ukraine, the role of the United States, etc. The competition for European leadership between the two has gained momentum not only in Eastern Europe and Ukraine but also in the South Caucasus, where both states are interested in weakening Russia’s position. Differences in policy between the two countries have manifested themselves in this region as well. While Germany's regional policy is largely driven by trade and economic interests, France has taken on a biased, assertive, and destructive role by arming Armenia and thereby jeopardizing the peace process in the region. It is worth mentioning that the growing policy differences and tension between Germany and France could lead to further fragmentation of Europe—an extremely dangerous outcome, especially given that Russia is gaining momentum in its war in Ukraine. The possible return of Donald Trump, who advocates reducing American interventionism in Europe, can also have major implications for Europe. If Trump wins, Europe could find itself alone in an inevitable confrontation with Russia, and the potential foreign policy choices of Germany and France in this scenario raise certain questions. Therefore, the outcome of the forthcoming US elections will be critical in determining the future policies of the two EU powers.

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