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Transcript

Big Three or Duopoly? Germany, France and Britain in Europe

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Maurice Fraser:

I'm Maurice Fraser; I'm an associate fellow, Europe, here at Chatham House and professor of politics at the LSE. I promise you light-touch chairmanship for the next sixty minutes, which isn't all that long. Obviously we need to leave time for questions. Please note that the event is on the record.

It's my great pleasure to invite the ambassadors of France and Germany to say a few words, which I shall do in a moment. Then I will ask our three excellent speakers to offer us some remarks – again, they will be short and sweet hopefully. Starting with, on my right, Ulrike Guérot, who is senior policy fellow at the European Council on Foreign Relations in Berlin; Dominique Moïsi, who is co-founder and senior advisor at IFRI in Paris and also visiting professor at King's College London; and Anand Menon, who is also an associate fellow, Europe, here at Chatham House and professor at King's College London. I think you will agree that we couldn't have lined up a better panel of speakers this evening.

As I said, I propose to start by inviting the French ambassador, His Excellency Bernard Émié, to say a few words about the conception and purpose of this event. Then I will ask [German] Ambassador [Georg] Boomgaarden to do likewise.

Bernard Émié:

Maurice, thank you very much. Minister of state, my lords, *Monsieur le Président*, friends, colleagues, ambassadors, ladies and gentlemen: anyone who has been following British politics over the past few weeks will know that only a few days ago, the date and significance of 22 January 1963 and of the Élysée Treaty were largely unknown here, except by experts. You are experts, all of you. But thanks to the prime minister's speech, in which there is a reference to it – which we appreciated deeply – perhaps never in the past 50 years has the Élysée Treaty been talked about so much in Britain. Georg, the German Ambassador, and myself wanted there to be a real celebration in London of the 50th anniversary of this treaty signed by General [Charles] de Gaulle and Chancellor [Konrad] Adenauer, to explain to you more clearly the Franco-German partnership, this very special relationship. As well as this evening's event, there is a series of joint cultural events this week at the Institut français and Goethe-Institut, if you want to know more about cultural affairs from our two countries.

What we are doing is celebrating a relationship which is not exclusive, since it was, is and will be at the service of the European enterprise. We are the

engine of Europe – we are not its directorate or *directoire*, as we say in French. Our alliance is here to serve everyone and is open to everyone. It does not crush; it acts as the driving force.

In particular, we feel we need the United Kingdom in Europe. That's why we wanted to have this conference centred on the three countries. We'd like the UK to make a major and positive contribution to the EU. The French president would like the UK to remain a strong partner within the European Union. We are stronger with her, and our action against terrorism in Mali right now is yet more proof of it.

But we believe that being a member of the EU entails a number of obligations and that you cannot have an *à la carte* Europe. The French president respects the decision to hold a referendum in this country but does not believe Europe can be negotiated in the process. Of course the current European debate, which we welcome, may be a factor of uncertainty but let's remember together Jean Monnet: 'Europe will be forged in crisis.' We are clearly in the midst of a crisis. Europe must be the answer to and not the cause of our current problems, which we must resolve together in this union.

So our discussion this evening – and thank you, Maurice, for chairing it with a light touch – is going to be not only a look back at the past. You may have noted what has been done in Berlin on 22 January – maybe not that many people are aware of the outcome of these celebrations and the statements that were adopted on that day. I do invite all my British friends to read these statements. I know the discussion today is particularly relevant and I know it will be very lively and passionate because there is a great deal at stake for all of us. So thank you to Chatham House for being a partner with us tonight. I am looking forward to your discussions. Thank you all.

Maurice Fraser:

Thank you very much, Ambassador. Now the German ambassador, His Excellency Georg Boomgaarden, will also share some thoughts with us.

Georg Boomgaarden:

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, Bernard, Maurice: certainly a great thank you to everybody who came here from Germany and from Paris to discuss 'The Big Three or Duopoly? France, Germany and Britain in Europe'. It couldn't be a better date. I think de Gaulle and Adenauer must have known that the debate is going on. At the time the two were underwriting the treaty,

Britain was not a member of the EU but the 'ever-closer union' was already in the treaties. Now we will see how the future will be. We certainly have a certain uncertainty. We will see how this works.

As far as the German–French relationship is concerned, for the last 50 years there was a real ever-closer union in the sense of growing trust, growing confidence and – what is very important – reliability. This does not mean that we were not diverse. Sometimes when I read British newspapers I have the feeling that whenever there is a little difference between the two countries, this is seen as 'oh, there is another chance for a big balance of power'. This is pure nonsense, because we live from our rich diversity. Normally when we come from different standpoints we have very good mechanisms in place to come to common standpoints, which normally is a compromise. The basis of this is the Treaty of the Élysée. The basis of this is that statesmen, officials and ministers meet so often that they have no chance to avoid dialogue. They meet; they have to talk about it. There is no way of saying 'let them do what they want'; no way for isolationism. You are always exposed in Germany to the French standpoint and you are always exposed in France to the German standpoint. You do this in a way that is not using the other but taking the other in his human dignity, in his own views, but at the same time looking for common ground.

This is the point where I always tell my friends here in Britain when they talk to me and say, 'But you know, you need us to balance the French.' I say I have too much respect for the dignity of the British citizens, in the sense of Immanuel Kant: 'Never use any human being as an instrument; use him in his own dignity.' That forbids me to use the British people as a balance against anybody. I want to debate with you, speak with you and maybe at a certain time we can build up something which we already reached with France. We started a bit late but we should do the same.

Maurice Fraser:

Thanks very much, Ambassador. I will ask our speakers to keep their remarks brief so that at about seven o'clock we will have time for half an hour of questions.

Without further ado, Ulrike, I'd like to ask you to share some thoughts with us.

Ulrike Guérot:

It's really a great pleasure for me to be here and have the occasion to speak here. I want to start with a very personal remark. I'm nearly as old as the Élysée Treaty – I'm 48. I was born near Bonn and I'm basically born into the legacy of that treaty. Obviously I attended the celebrations in the Bundestag and the Philharmonie. At the end, perhaps you have seen this: we had *Ode an die Freude* from Beethoven. I cried, and I was not the only one. For all those who have been experiencing this, I think, we refilled emotions in the Franco-German relationship. Because many UK people don't sense what it is beyond politics – that there is a very strong emotional tie – sometimes I think you get that partnership wrong in your analysis.

So beyond emotions, I think that when talking about what is really the driving force behind the German-Franco tandem, then it is because it's the yeast – dispute is good in Franco-German relationships. It's a myth that Franco-German relations have always been good. They never have been, in a way. If you go back in history, you start with the Fouchet Plan, you go through euro coal, you go through euro-making, you read the book of Pascal Riché in 1996, *The War of Seven Years (La Guerre de Sept ans, histoire secrète du franc fort 1989-1996),* how France and Germany made the euro – you realize that the relationship, in terms of romanticism, was never good. It was always fighting. But the real thing is that the more fight, the better it was.

This is the misinterpretation, when now everybody is talking about 'Merkozy' and 'Mr [Nicolas] Sarkozy and [Angela] Merkel, it was so good' – it was not good. Symbiosis in the Franco-German relationship is not good for Europe and too much symbiosis kills the European integration project. Therefore I argue that Merkel–[François] Hollande, with more or less different opinions on many things now, is probably going into a very creative moment of Franco-German relations. That's my first point.

Second point: there were a couple of pollings [*sic*] on Franco-German relations and how people perceive each other. I think there is something that Germany especially will need to be very careful about. I mean that there is a sort of narcissistical [*sic*] offence in the French way of looking at Germany, a Freudian sort of *narzisstische Kränkung*. What I mean is that 82 per cent of Germans still think that we are in a peer relationship with France but only 53 per cent of French think the same and 41 per cent think we are not. This reflects, among other questions – and I don't detail more figures here – gives you a strong feeling of inferiority, of current French citizens who see the German dominance, the economic dominance, the whole discourse about the German model and so on. I think Germany will need to be very careful. By the

way, if you read the declaration we had two days ago, you will see that it is a sort of reciprocal approach – as the ambassador said, we learn [from] each other. So I guess we are moving beyond that momentum of narcissistical offence but I think it's worthwhile noting that France, the political landscape today, is in a very fragile situation at large.

The third point is that this fragilization [*sic*] that you can detail comes obviously from an economic lagging behind Germany. But now France has been showing that it is able to undertake some decent passes at structural reforms. We have seen labour market reforms; we have been seeing steps on retirement. So I think there is a discourse now starting in France, which is that France has to undergo some serious structural reforms on the economic side but also political modernization. For those who are interested in going further, read, for instance – I just pick one by Bruno Le Maire, who is developing a very interesting discourse on how to modernize France politically. That is also good for Europe.

What I'm saying here, my fourth point, is that I think that France and Germany are in a way further ahead than the UK in its discussion about Europe. What I mean is both countries have basically overcome their moment of catharsis. Germany had a moment of catharsis in 2010-11, when this country was sort of thinking we can go global alone, we can do BRICS, we can go China – you know what I mean. We had this discussion and we pushed it very far. But we moved back and there was clearly a change in the German policy last year. Now France basically had the same discussion about what is the price we are ready and going to pay for Europe. France is just answering a big yes to that same question that Germany answered yes last year. The southern countries – Greece, Italy, Spain – if you go there, these countries have all answered with a very big yes, that despite all the harm they have to go through – Spain's unemployment, Greece also – they had the catharsis: they all want to stay in. They all gave a bold yes to the question of what price we are going to pay for Europe, because Europe is not for free. They all agreed, after catharsis, we pay a price.

The only country which is left on that argument is the UK. We are going to see the answer.

My fifth point is that in terms of convergence, I think France and Germany are now well underway with much more convergence than we have seen in recent years. You all heard that Merkel and Hollande are both talking about financial transaction tax. There are a couple of very interesting points. I think the French got the message that they need to work on competitiveness; I

think the Germans got the message that they need to do something on social/fiscal wages, domestic demand. I think there is a micro-macro discourse, with Germany lagging behind on the macro level, France lagging behind on the micro level. As it's sort of the capacity of the Franco-German tandem to bring different points together, I think this is what is just precisely happening now.

The second point is what is coming together is very interesting because the form of Franco-German dispute with respect to European integration was intergovernmentalism on the French side versus federalization on the German side. I think we are beyond this discussion now. The next discussion we are having creatively is a discussion between executivism [*sic*] in France – running the European system with a more executive spin, which comes from the French tradition – versus a more parliamentarian-based tradition in Germany. I think that's the new dichotomy in the Franco-German dispute, but I think honestly this is going to work out. I heard the French industry minister a week ago in Berlin talking for the first time openly on this German idea of a eurozone parliament. He was positive. I think that's a good start for a new discussion of how we shape a transnational democracy in Europe.

Last point: I didn't talk about Mali, EADS, or the nuclear question. Obviously we are standing on different poles. There is still this *je t'aime, moi non plus* feature in Franco-German relations on all of them. But as long as we stay in discussion, I think we can work on all these issues always. What we are doing through the euro crisis – I think the euro crisis now, we are touching upon where we are losing a buffer zone of ambivalences. Franco-German relations were 50 years of ambivalences – on security, on NATO versus not NATO, on *gouvernance économique* versus political union. Semantically, we turned around, like a cat around a pot of milk. I think the eurozone reduces the buffer zone of ambivalences. If we go both together through that reality check, we are going to build after 2014, after the German elections, a very strong Europe – independently of what the UK decision is then.

Dominique Moïsi:

Well I am much older than Ulrike, and if I may be personal for the beginning, I would say that I remember vividly what happened in my family when the Treaty of the Élysée was signed. My father, who survived Auschwitz, had imposed an embargo on German products in my family. So my mother and myself, whenever we would buy in a shop, would turn every product to see whether it had the infamous 'Made in Germany' and we would leave it. That

night my father came back and said, ‘The embargo is over.’ It was, in fact, a very dramatic moment. That is what a process of reconciliation is about. He said, ‘History must go on.’ And my mother was able to buy the Miele washing machine she had been dreaming of for the last 16 years.

I think, if I may be personal one more moment – I went to Berlin when the wall fell. I brought a piece of the wall. I wrote a piece speaking to that piece of the wall. In that piece I said that I cherish this moment, which was a moment of reconciliation between my three identities: as a Frenchman, as a European and as a Jew. Again, I asked my father, who was a very old man at that time, ‘Can I write that?’ He gave me his blessing. I wrote it and I had a debate in the world press with Elie Wiesel, who said, ‘I fear what is behind the wall.’ I had said just the opposite, because my values were very much with the collapse of that wall.

I stop being personal. I think what we are celebrating, that treaty, is an event that is a result of a process – a process that remains unique in the world. Travel to Asia, travel to Latin America, travel to the Middle East – when Europe is seen as a model, it is above all seen as a model of reconciliation. What the Asians have not achieved, the Europeans did it. And they did it thanks to the depth of thinking of a few people that came out immediately after the war with a spirit of reconciliation. There is a meeting on a railway station between a man that comes out of a German concentration camp, with both French and German, who was born Jewish and became Christian – his name is Joseph Rovan. Joseph Rovan on that day in 1945 declares, ‘We are going to have the Germany of our merits, the Germany we deserve. If we treat Germany with openness, with confidence, we will be able to rebuild Europe.’

In Germany, there were leaders who understood that message, who were carried away positively by a Christian feeling of repentance. Between 1870 and 1945, there were three wars between France and Germany that led Europe to its suicide and the world to the brink of catastrophe. For the last 70 years, there was no war between France and Germany, and the idea that there could be a war in Europe has simply become absurd.

This process required a certain number of criteria. First, a feeling that we had been deeply defeated, all of us, collectively. Second, of course, there were the ruins surrounding us. We knew what we were coming off; we knew what we did not want to see returning. Then there was the Soviet threat, then there was the enlightened generosity of the United States: specific conditions which allowed the process to take place. It is important to keep in mind that de

Gaulle is the follower, from that standpoint, from Robert Schuman, Jean Monnet and others. He did not create Franco-German reconciliation, he sealed it. It's the culminating point of an evolution. What we are celebrating is a process that culminates on that day, not an event in itself.

Enough for history – let's come now quickly to the present. Three points.

What strikes me today is that in the way the world looks at Europe, there is a huge difference – I would even go as far as saying a divorce – between Europe as a model, which is greeted very positively and admired, and Europe as an actor, which is less taken seriously than it should be. One of the reasons for that divorce is that the French have been used to doing economy and finance with the Germans and security with the British. That kind of schizophrenia is hindering the European future.

I will come – because I look at your face, which is becoming more severe by the minute – I come for a second to the British. I'm not only emotional on the Franco-German reconciliation but I'm an Anglophile. There is one portrait as I work in my library, and it is a portrait of [Winston] Churchill – because he said no to defeat. Churchill is the reason why we can be proud but Churchill is also the cause of why the British are so far away from Europe. Nothing fails more than success. You won the war. And because you won the war, you felt it unnecessary to engage into that process. And when you came in, it was very late, and you lost the reflexes that make 'European' European.

Now I would say, very quickly and solemnly: we need you. Not ready to pay any price for having you, but we need you. We need the mother of democracies. We need the pragmatism which Great Britain brings. And I would say you need us, because London may be the capital of the world but Great Britain is in as poor economic condition as my country, France. So if there is a country in denial on that score, it's you as much as we. Thank you very much.

Anand Menon:

I feel slightly like I'm being blamed for something I didn't do here. But as the Brit on the panel, I suppose it falls to me to say something about events yesterday. What I want to do is talk briefly about David Cameron's speech and try and contrast the way we in Britain do Europe with how the French and Germans have come to do it, and try to draw some conclusions from that.

I thought it was a very good speech in many ways. I thought the first two-thirds of it were one of the most cogent defences of active British engagement

in Europe I've ever heard. I think many of the criticisms that the prime minister made of the European Union were both valid and enjoy pretty widespread support across the European Union.

When he got to the end of his speech, I was put in mind of a speech I heard in this room about a month ago by Tony Blair. Tony Blair opened that speech by saying that there is often a tension between short-term politics and long-term policy. It struck me that that was the tension that lay at the heart of the speech we heard yesterday. It was a speech that dealt with the short-term politics – rather cleverly, I thought. In terms of the political calculations of the Conservative Party, I think the prime minister achieved what he wanted to achieve remarkably well. But in policy terms, I think there are two things that are worth saying and two criticisms worth making, apart from the criticism that I would make on ideological grounds – that it saddens me that the central plank of British policy in Europe is that workers shouldn't have rights.

But the two substantive things I would say about the speech are, one, I think the prime minister is making a lot of very rosy assumptions about the mechanics of renegotiation. Controlling the timing of renegotiation, let alone getting the renegotiation he wants – I think he's being incredibly optimistic there. I'm not sure things will pan out exactly as the speech assumes that they will.

But the second thing, apart from the in/out debate, which I think is equally important, is that this government has put Britain in a situation that no previous British government – since we've been members of the European Community or Union – has put us in, of being absent from key discussions. Of saying to the others: you go ahead, we're happy to watch. That is something that Margaret Thatcher didn't do. John Major spoke about being at the heart of Europe. There is a phrase in French: *les absents ont toujours tort*. It strikes me that that is a phrase that might come to apply rather well to us in our situation within the European Union.

There is a fundamental difference between the way we in Britain see European integration, and what it entails, and what many of our partners – notably the French and Germans – think about it. We see the EU in purely transactionalist terms – in terms of bargains and interests, nothing more and nothing less. In France and Germany the bilateral relationship has been used to change what they think and to change how they act, not simply to get what they want. There's a fundamental difference. It's a relationship that academics have called 'embedded bilateralism'. I'm not saying for a moment that there isn't power involved in the Franco-German relationship – there is.

The great French political scientist Stanley Hoffmann referred to the relationship as 'the balance of imbalances'. Dominique Moïsi himself, in a wonderful piece from I think the late 1990s, spoke of the balance between the Mark and the bomb. There are tradeoffs in the Franco-German relationship like there are in any other, but there is far more to it than that.

There are two specific things about the relationship that strike me as a Brit. One is the sheer intensity of contact between the two states. Intensity of the formal, intergovernmental meetings – they have joint cabinet meetings now, regularly, which is something I don't think many Brits are aware of but has tremendous significance. Ministers, and foreign ministries in particular, are in touch all the time. Diplomats from one country on their exchanges represent the other country in international organizations on occasion. The levels of official contact and unofficial contact are staggering. On top of that you have youth exchanges, language teaching and so on. It has been a 50-year process that has sensitized each country to the other in a way I think we in Britain find it quite hard to conceive of.

The second thing about this relationship that I think leaves many Brits cold is the level of symbolism involved. From the initial signing, the de Gaulle–Adenauer ceremony and the kiss that they gave each other on that date, to the fields of Verdun, when we saw a right-wing German chancellor and a left-wing Socialist French president holding hands by the graveyards, symbolism has been used very effectively and very powerfully. It has been used to make this relationship about more than interests and to make it about feeling a sense of common destiny.

What has been remarkable about that is that in this context of a shared desire to work for the relationship, specific policy differences become an asset rather than a hindrance. It is hard to find, in many ways, two more different countries than France and Germany. As Ulrike has said, they don't work together because they agree, they work together despite the fact that in terms of economics, political structures, views of the world, they could almost not be more different. But because they are committed to trying to work together, their differences have provided a vehicle to allow the European Union to progress. Because quite often in the [European] Council, other member states will say: if the French and Germans can reach a compromise from being so far apart, we can fall in line with this compromise too. It is a strange relationship that is very close but one that is based on difference as much as it is based on similarity.

Perhaps the most striking thing about this relationship for me is it is one within which the participants have accepted the fact that they will on occasion sacrifice their own short-term interests for the longer-term goal of preserving the relationship. This is something that wouldn't come naturally, I suspect, to most British negotiators in most international forums.

But it is because of this ability that the French and the Germans have managed to shape European integration as effectively as they have. It is a relationship that is both institutionalized and that has normative foundations. And I think because of the depth of the relationship it will easily survive some of the vicissitudes of the current relationship, as Ulrike again said. It has survived the end of the Cold War; it has survived changes of leadership in the past and will continue to do so.

It is a relationship, finally, that I think can provide valuable lessons to us in Britain about the way you go about exercising leadership in multilateral forums. Thank you.