



## Delors: Franco-German alliance is EU's 'tree of life' [[fr](#)]

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Unlike their illustrious predecessors, German Chancellor Angela Merkel and French President Nicolas Sarkozy maintain a "superficial" alliance, former European Commission President Jacques Delors told EurActiv in an exclusive interview.



*Jacques Delors, considered one of the fathers of the EU, was nevertheless excluded from drafting the Constitutional Treaty and the Lisbon Treaty by French Presidents Jacques Chirac and Nicolas Sarkozy respectively. He is also the founder of the French think-tank Notre Europe.*

*He was speaking to EurActiv's Senior Editor Georgi Gotev.*

Please note that the below is a translation of the original interview, which was conducted in French. [To read the original text of the interview in French, please click here.](#)

[To read a short story based on this interview, please click here.](#)

**Mr Delors, MEPs gave you a long standing ovation, last October, during your most recent visit to Brussels. You were applauded for your accomplishments, but also for being very critical of Germany. The crisis is affecting all of Europe very strongly, and you asked whether Germany remained faithful to European values. What is happening in Europe: what is your analysis?**

It seems that the climate is not very good, for reasons that have nothing to do with the quality of this or that European leader. On the one hand, globalisation is spreading fear or even terror

among citizens, and there is a tension between the global and the local levels. And when there is a tension of this type, people who are at the local level try to find things to belong to, reference points they can hold on to. It can be the municipality, it can be the '*Länder*' in Germany, it can be the nation state, but ultimately this does slide towards a bit more nationalism.

The second element is that these societies are very complex and at the same time the media, the Fourth Estate, have taken on a considerable importance, all the while trying to simplify everything.

A worrying divide has grown between what we call the elites, I would say those who have power, because the word 'elite' is a bit pejorative, and the people of the base. This second point makes it hard to explain: why Europe? But in addition it leads to populism and discourses of the far left or the far right in all our countries.

This atmosphere is neither favourable to bringing together points of view between European states on the one hand, nor on the other to creating a feeling among citizens of belonging to something in addition to their nation, which remains essential to this overall ambition and to this common vessel which is Europe.

These are the two fundamental reasons, I think. They can present themselves in different ways depending on the country. And the other day, because it was the anniversary of German reunification and because Germany was on centre stage, I asked the question to the Germans.

But I could just as easily have raised it with the Dutch, the Belgians, the French, the Italians or the Spanish. So my comments were not to be interpreted as a whiff of this anti-German wave, or of suspicion towards Germany that we see in other countries, because the German economy is doing better than those of other countries, because they do exercise an influence that is considerable on economic and monetary questions, as we are seeing in the preparation of modifications to Economic and Monetary Union.

So I was taking advantage of this occasion, without demagoguery. But I would not have done it in France. Because in France, this immediately would have shown support for those who wildly and blindly criticise Germany.

But here it was my role to tell them: so after the fall of the Wall, dear German friends, how did you see your future? Yours and that of your neighbours?

**But behind all this there is the euro. You are the father of the euro.**

One of the fathers of the euro.

**Didn't you, the fathers of Europe, create this economic Europe to avoid the kind of problems we are experiencing now?**

But I did the impossible. It is easy to justify myself. On the one hand if you re-read the report of the Delors Committee, the committee on Economic and Monetary Union, it was a committee created by the European Council in Hannover in 1998, which worked for one year and produced a report, which served as the basis for the thinking of the governments.

Its economic part was much more significant than the monetary part. But it wasn't listened to. In consequence, when we prepared the Treaty of Maastricht, it was in vain that I recalled the necessary balance between the two 'legs', so to speak, the monetary leg and the economic leg.

The monetary leg has prospered. It worked in good conditions. But the economic leg remained inert, so to speak. So I started again in 1997. I was no longer with the [European] Commission, I was a European activist, leading a small think-tank, Notre Europe.

I sent to the French leadership my proposal, because it was question of a Stability Pact which corresponded to the monetary part, so I proposed a pact to coordinate economic policies. No-one supported it. So don't be surprised if it turned out that way!

Because, if you think about it: I say beforehand that the results for ten years, from 1999 to 2008, have been relatively satisfactory: a growth rate of 2.1%, 14 million jobs created, a productivity rate on average equal to the one in the US - it worked well.

But if there had been a coordination of economic policies from 2003-2004, we would have told France and Germany that they had to respect the rules. One needs to remember this rather revealing incident. And then we would have told the Spanish and to the Italians: your private debt is going to put us in trouble.

And why is it going to put you in trouble, if they had asked the question? Because to have a common currency, it's as simple as that, is to have at the same time rights and responsibilities.

We have forgotten our responsibilities. So the euro protected us, even from our own stupidities. So there you have it.

**But if we're missing your tenure, then we're also missing Helmut Kohl and François Mitterrand. There was a very good understanding between those two personalities.**

Yes...I think we've changed generation. Me, I'm a great advocate for renewing dialogue at all levels between the Germans and the French. It is essential. And it is still to be done. I think that the younger generations will have to take care of this. And me, I am ready to bring my support to bear.

But the circumstances have changed. And we can't simply single out Mitterrand and Kohl. We can talk about Giscard d'Estaing and Schmidt. We can talk about de Gaulle and Adenauer. All of them have left their mark on the history of Europe, because at a given moment they overcame their preconceptions towards the other, for a European vision.

This is what made that period great. But since Mitterrand and Kohl have gone, everyone has taken on their old role.

And really their successors, Chirac and Schroeder, were only ever in agreement to say '*Nein*' or '*non*'. Notably for the budget, on the basis of which, therefore, nothing was possible. It was a superficial alliance, as superficial, it seems to me, as the one between Madame Merkel and Monsieur Sarkozy.

In short, hearts are no longer in it. Hearts and the vision. We need to rebuild this. Not because France and Germany must dominate Europe. Certainly not. But because the Franco-German relationship is one of the 'trees of life' of Europe.

**You mentioned the new generation, with a little smile. It is by no means impossible to imagine that we will soon have a socialist chancellor in Germany and a socialist president in France. What change could this bring?**

No doubt they would have slightly different visions on the economic and financial management of Europe and of what could be done at the global level. This is important. But the essential thing, it's above all that the French and the Germans understand each other, accept their different characters, and manage to complement one another for the better.

This means more speaking of both languages on both sides of the border, which means more twinning of schools, universities, towns, regions, and which means a frank discourse, putting things on the table.

We do not ask the other to be like us. Ah, it's possible, says one, if you become like me, he says to the other. No. We are different, but these differences are also the richness of Europe, because Europe is union in diversity. We accept to overcome them, to integrate, for a greater good.

Between us, Merkel hesitated a great deal on the euro. And well, the day when she understood that whatever the current relative economic health of Germany today, if the euro were to disappear, it would also be detrimental to Germany. She understood this.

It is a reflex of fear. And now we need positive reflexes. It's simple. Because when we look at the world around us, for example the significant role played by Brazil in trade negotiations, the development of China in Africa and elsewhere, India and its magnificent workers, engineers and others, Russia which is pursuing its policy, the BRICs: Brazil, Russia, India, China: if Europe continues like this, it will have no other choice: decline.

A gilded decline at first, because we have a relatively high standard of living. But in 25 years we won't exist in the world anymore.

**Mr Felipe Gonzalez, who you know well, said so in his report. They asked him to write a report, but the report was filed away in a closet.**

Rightly so, if you have a detective, look for the report...and the only place where you can find it is in a closet, as you said.

**There is also Europe 2020, the Commission's strategy for sustainable economic growth, but now they're saying that there is no money for it.**

But it isn't a question of money, it's also a question of precision. The text is too general. The text is too general, a bit like the man who prays in the morning, with 25 good intentions...but how many will he apply?

No, texts need to be more precise, more concrete, more related to real things. And I tell you: the two tensions that I indicated at the beginning between the global and the local, between

the 'elites' and the people: these two elements are key political issues, on which our politicians must reflect.

Because it isn't simply a matter of creating Europe: it is a matter of safeguarding a pluralist democracy and responsible citizenship.

**One last question: you know Belgium well. Is Belgium a little Europe? Are the problems encountered in Belgium like those of Europe?**

No. I can say the simultaneous rises of populism and nationalism are in Belgium, but Belgium's difficulty between Flanders and Wallonia goes back much further. It goes back to the post-war period. Having said that, my grandfather was born in Turnhout in Flanders, and so there is no greater lover of Belgian unity than myself.

I follow this every day in the news, and the other day when I saw 35,000 Belgians I think, applauding their national football team, all of them with their national flag, very few local flags, I was encouraged.

I told myself: if Belgian politicians are responsible, they must take this into account. Because politics is also in the heart. It's emotion. It's history.