

French and German Think Tanks' joint mobilisation for the EU

Autumn 2015 – Spring 2017

The European Union is experiencing an existential crisis that demands stronger mobilisation on the part of the players involved in the public debate in Germany and in France in view of the key role that these two countries play. In connection with such crucial issues as the refugee crisis, external military engagement, the management of the EMU or the energy-climate strategy, our two countries must work tirelessly on convergences that will only be lasting and sustainable if they have the backing of their respective grass-roots opinions.

In this light, a schedule of working meetings bringing together the most important German and French think tanks working in the field of European issues has been launched on the initiative of Harlem Désir, the French Secretary of state for European affairs and Secretary of state for Franco-German cooperation, in an effort to use their potential expertise and freedom of analysis and approach to clarify and dispel the tensions that could cause the "Franco-German" twin engine to seize up and to help impart a fresh boost to the construction of Europe ahead of 2017.

1. The project's goal, players and timetable

1.1. The project's goal is to **bring together German and French think tanks on a regular basis over several quarters** so that they can engage in the kind of in-depth dialogue allowing them:

- to hold a direct and informal debate on the EU's policies and future;
- to adopt common positions subsequently illustrated in several publications;
- and to impart a fresh boost to the public debate on the EU in Germany and France and in Europe as a whole.

1.2. The **think tanks mobilised form a tight group** meeting regularly amongst themselves, albeit while inviting external players relevant to the individual topics being addressed:

- the think tanks involved on the French side are Ifri (Cerfa), Confrontations Europe, the ECFR, EuropaNova, the Jean Jaurès Foundation, the Robert Schuman Foundation, the Jacques Delors Institute, the Montaigne Institute and Terra Nova ;
- the think tanks mobilised on the German side are the DFI in Ludwigsburg, the DGAP, the ECFR, the Bertelsmann Foundation, the Friedrich Ebert Foundation, the Genshagen Foundation, the Heinrich Böll Foundation, the Konrad Adenauer Foundation, the Jacques Delors Institut-Berlin, the SWP, etc.

These think tanks mobilise their expertise and their networks, receiving political, material and financial support from the German and French authorities, who help organise and who also attend the meetings.

1.3. The schedule of meetings **kicked off in 2016** and is due to continue **until the spring of 2017**, at which date the current French and German authorities will be returning their mandate to the political arena – a deadline ahead of which the conditions for imparting a fresh boost to the construction of Europe must be in place.

The project's continuation or otherwise will be deliberated on the basis of a progress report due to be drafted in the summer of 2017.

2. The project's methodology

Each of the working meetings is divided into two parts:

- two half-day sessions behind closed doors addressing two distinct topics;
- a common dinner open to external players and to the media, with the presence of a keynote speaker focusing on the state of the European Union or on topical European issues;

2.1. The **meetings behind closed doors** consist of two thematic debates around a document on the topic under discussion drafted by a French and German member of the group. The group's other members received a copy of the document ahead of the meeting.

On the day, the document's authors have about ten minutes to introduce their positions and conclusions, then a French and German discussant are appointed and given roughly the same amount of time to cross-examine them and to kick off the debate, in which all of the think tank representatives present then take part.

External figures are invited on the strength of their expertise or of their particular qualities in connection with the topic being debated. This offers the group's members a chance to benefit from the contribution of a number of experts and/or political players and to thus enrich their analyses and recommendations. It also provides them with an opportunity to bounce their ideas off political leaders, economic players (business leaders), trade unionists and so forth.

2.2. A **synthesis** of each of the two round tables is drafted by two members of the group in accordance with Chatham House rules and then disseminated on the websites of the group's members.

2.3. At the end of the debates behind closed doors, French and German authors can draft a **statement** that carries their signatures and the signatures of whichever members of the group wish to sign, but that does not commit those who decline to sign it. The Think Tanks Tandem is clearly indicated as the forum in which the statement was devised and developed.

3. The first two sessions

3.1. The **first session** of the Think Tanks Tandem was organised by the Jacques Delors Institute and Terra Nova at the Abbey of the Vaux-de-Cernay, near Paris, on **8-9 July 2016**.

The two round tables addressed the following topics :

1. The refugee crisis and beyond: what European strategy in the field of migration and asylum ([Synthesis](#))?
2. The struggle against Islamist terrorism: diplomatic, social and political responses ([Synthesis](#)).

Joschka Fischer, a former German Foreign minister and former German Vice-chancellor, was the guest of honour at a dinner on the topic: "[Europe after the British vote](#)".

3.2. The **second session** was organised by the Genshagen Foundation in its offices near Berlin on **21-22 October 2016**.

The two round tables addressed the following topics:

1. The future of the Common Security and Defence Policy after Brexit.
2. Stability and security in the EU's neighbourhood.

Ambassador Pierre Vimont, a former Secretary general of the European external action service and a research fellow with Carnegie Europe in Brussels, was the guest of honour at the dinner for a keynote speech on EU-USA relations.