

WEIMAR YOUTH FORUM 2012 – EUROPEAN SECURITY

PROJECT UNDER THE AUSPICES

OF THE COMMITTEE FOR FRENCH-GERMAN-POLISH COOPERATION
(‘WEIMAR TRIANGLE’)

IN COOPERATION WITH CONFERENCE OLIVAINT AND STUDENTENFORUM IM TÖNISSTEINER KREIS E.V
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THE WEIMAR TRIANGLE TODAY: ORIGINS - FUNCTIONING – ASSESSMENT – EXPECTATIONS

OPENING ADDRESS

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I.) Origins of the Weimar Triangle

In the history of Political Sciences, the Weimar Triangle has a unique position.

- It is not based on a Treaty ratified by Governments or by the Parliaments of the three countries concerned, i.e. France, Germany and Poland.
- It has no institutional framework, i.e. no secretariat structure, no budget, no plan of action,
- Even the name ‘Weimar Triangle’ was coined years after its creation,
- Outside a small circle of politicians, scholars and journalists it is even after more than 21 years of existence almost unknown.

Thus, one of the ‘Founding Fathers’ of the Triangle, the former French Foreign Minister Roland Dumas has labelled it as an *“UFO – an unidentified Flying Object.”* Hans-Dietrich Genscher has labelled the Weimar Triangle as *“a facility, quite independently from the day-to-day concerns of politics to reflect upon the spirit of the New Europe”*. The third founding partner, former Minister Krzysztof Skubiszewski has seen in the Weimar Triangle a *“Community of Interest”* of the three countries concerned.

The history of the Weimar Triangle is quickly told: Hans-Dietrich Genscher, at that time the Foreign Minister of Germany, has invited his two counterparts from France and from Poland on the birthday of the great German poet Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, i.e. on 28 August 1991, to the small town of Weimar in Thüringen. One day later, the three ministers have presented to the public a “Joint Declaration on the Future of Europe”, not as some people seem to perceive, on the future of the French-German-Cooperation. The text of the statement which is the only document laying the foundation of the trilateral cooperation known hitherto as the Weimar Triangle, contains not more than ten paragraphs:

1. The need for France, Germany and Poland to shoulder jointly the responsibility for the creation of lasting neighbourhood structures in Europe,
2. It reasserts the unique chance at hand to develop together the new Europe against the background of solidarity among the countries, common destiny and common values,
3. It pleads for the development of networks among the civil society
4. The text reiterates the importance of the European institutions as framework for stability in Europe. Stability is defined in a wider sense: It includes the political dimension as well as Security policy and economic, social and ecological aspects.
5. Special reference was given to the importance to maintain close North Atlantic Security relations with the US and Canada within the NATO framework
6. Reference was made to the importance of the two bilateral friendship treaties between France and Poland and Germany and Poland signed just a few weeks earlier, i.e. on 9 April 1991 and 17 June 1991 respectively.
7. A plea was made to pave the way of the Central and Eastern European countries into the European structures.
8. Quite modern against the background of the global challenges which are confronting Europe today which are calling for joint European answers a series of common concrete projects were spelled out: Environment, Technology, Infrastructure, Communication, Energy and Culture.
9. A plea was made to create living conditions allowing people to exist in dignity
10. Finally, the three ministers have recalled that the most important asset of Europe is embodied in its cultural diversity and in the creativity of its people. They have pledged for a vast cooperation programme on the fields of Culture, Education, Science, Media and Exchange schemes. It is vital, in their opinion, to facilitate human encounters across the borderlines of countries and languages, wherever possible.

As you can see in hindsight, all vital elements for a close cooperation between France, Germany and Poland have been stipulated by the three visionary Foreign Ministers more than two decades ago. We have to ask ourselves, why have these visions not been put systematically in action? We shall come back later to this touchy question. This years Weimar Youth Forum will, no doubt, attempt to deal with this fundamental question.

II.) The Functioning of the Weimar Triangle: Governmental trilateral activities 1991-2012

Beginning with the first meeting of the three Foreign Ministers in Weimar on 28/29 August 1991 all-in-all 25 different Foreign Ministers have met on 18 occasions, the last meeting took place in Berlin on 29. February 2012 when ministers Westerwelle, Sikorski and Juppé have met. The Agenda has almost a standard setting: European Policy including questions of economic and energy policy, EU Financial Framework, European Neighbourhood policy, in particular Belorussia, Syria.

In addition to frequent meetings of the Foreign ministers and their European Ministers the Defence Ministers have established a framework of meetings and consultations. It has culminated in the creation of a so-called “Weimar Battle Group” with French, German and Polish participation.

As from 1997 the Presidents of France and Poland and the German Chancellor have taken the habit of meeting in irregular intervals within the format of so-called “Weimar Summits”. The last meeting of this sort took place in Warsaw on 7 February 2011 to which President Komorowski has invited French President Sarkozy and Chancellor Merkel. The agenda of these high-level gatherings does not differ basically to the agendas of the ministerial meetings and not much interaction between the two formats seems to take place. However, the Weimar Summit meetings enjoy a much higher degree of visibility and stir more public interest. The absence of an organisational apparatus hinders, unfortunately, the implementation and follow-up of agreed action. This does not prevent, however, that the leaders of the three countries are seemingly favourably disposed towards the Weimar Triangle and are declaring as often as possible their willingness to reactivate the Weimar Triangle.

All-in-all 8 Weimar Summits have taken place.

The French President Hollande has invited for the next Weimar Summit for the 8th May 2013 to France.

III.) Assessment of the Weimar Triangle

Whereas official government representatives usually praise the Weimar Triangle as a unique platform for consultations among three important EU member states of the EU-27, scholars come to a more sobering assessment.

The interest in the Weimar Triangle seems to be rather uneven among the three partner countries.

Whereas France and Germany dispose during half a century over a well-oiled functioning machinery which – in spite of its up’s and down’s – has remained the backbone of the EU, the French-German-Polish cooperation within the Weimar Triangle is seen by many as too ceremonial.

The hopes that the trilateral French-German-Polish setting in the Weimar format could gradually develop into a similar mechanism as the French-German engine set-up by the Elysée Treaty in 1963 have not proven to be realistic.

It is astonishing that the three countries were not able – or not willing – to define a political joint programme ‘for the future of Europe’. The model of the French-German cooperation has demonstrated that in addition of the bilateral governmental cooperation the systematic building up of a network of cooperation schemes involving

the civil society is the guarantee of a sustained cooperation. Up till now proposals of our Committee to develop a French-German-Polish cooperation scheme ('Agenda 2021') with a series of concrete projects has not found the necessary echo and support in any of the three countries. Perhaps the time has come, that the host country of the WYF 2012, i.e. Poland, is taking the lead?

The fact that Poland, unlike France and Germany, does not belong to the Eurozone marginalizes the effectiveness of the trilateral cooperation. Many issues of concern of France and Germany within their policy towards Europe are not of the same importance to Poland.

The current EU middle-term budget negotiations within the EU illustrate this dilemma: Whereas Germany (9, 0 Bill.€) and France (6,41 Mill.€) are the two largest net contributors to the EU budget, Poland is the largest net beneficiary (10,98 Bill.€).

Within the EU budget discussions, obviously, the Weimar partners have different, if not opposing interests.

And yet, the issue of budget discrepancies and the issue of belonging or not belonging to the Euro zone should not result in accentuating the notion of a Europe with different speeds. Poland, therefore, can play an active role within the Weimar Triangle which indeed could set an example within the EU-27 for speeding up the integration process.

As at the days of the Founding fathers in 1991 the success of - or the indifference towards - the Weimar Triangle is to a large extent determined by the personal interest shown by the political leaders of the three countries. The present constellation augurs well: President Komorowski as well as President Hollande both from the beginning of their mandate repeatedly underlined their interest on a revival of the Weimar Triangle.

For the first time at the ceremonies rewarding the Adam Mickiewicz Prize, both the French and Polish Presidents as well as the German Chancellor have transmitted personal messages of greetings to the prize rewarding ceremony which took place on 7 September 2012 at the Presidential palace in Warsaw. Symbols of this sort play an important role in international relations.

IV.) Some reflections for future action

The Committee for French-German-Polish Cooperation ('Weimar Triangle') is a non-governmental organisation. It was created in 2002 under the auspices of the founding fathers of the Weimar Triangle, the former Foreign Ministers Roland Dumas, Hans-Dietrich Genscher and Krzysztof Skubiszewski. The Committee has no financial support. Its members are working *pro bono*.

The Committee has launched a Homepage www.weimarer-dreieck.eu which is the only consistent source of information on all Weimar Triangle initiatives – governmental and non-governmental – brought to our attention.

On the occasion of the 15th anniversary of the Weimar Triangle the Committee has created the Adam-Mickiewicz Prize rewarding merits of individuals or organisations on the field of French-German-Polish cooperation.

Furthermore, the Committee has published a comprehensive Handbook "The Weimar Triangle in Europe"¹ to which some 50 authors from the three countries have contributed.

¹ Klaus-Heinrich Standke (ed.) , Trójkąt Weimarski w Europie - Das Weimarer Dreieck in Europa – Le Triangle de Weimar en Europe, Edition Adam Marszałek, Toruń 2010

The Committee is setting great hopes on the next Weimar Summit which, as already mentioned, will take place on 8th May 2013 in France. To this effect we have elaborated a number of proposals which we do hope will find their way into the agenda to be considered by the Heads of State and of Government:

In our opinion a few carefully selected topics should be selected, for example,

1. Launching of the Weimar Triangle of Innovation. The issue of increasing the international competitiveness through a better use of Research and Development is of vital importance in France and Poland, but increasingly to Germany as well.
2. Special attention should be given to the low level of university mobility between the three countries.
3. Enhanced Energy and Environmental cooperation between the three countries would call for political attention
4. For the Regional cooperation among the 16 Polish Wojwodships, the 16 German Federal States and the appr. 20 French Départements a concept should be developed.
5. The question of systematic contacts between the young people of France, Germany and Poland is a feature on practically all WT summit meetings. The idea was first launched by the founding fathers of the Elysée Treaty in 1963 when creating the Office Franco-Allemand pour la Jeunesse. Something similar was created between Germany and Poland in 1991, i.e. German-Polish Youth Office. If we regard the trilateral dimension however, not more than 600 to 700 young French, German and Polish people are meeting each year. Detailed figures to this effect are contained in Chapter 9.4 of the manual "Trókat Weimarski w Europie".
6. The launching of a Weimar Forum – alternating annual meetings in Poland, Germany and France – similar to the bilateral gatherings between Germany/US (Atlantik-Brücke), Germany/U.K. (Königswinter), Deutsch-Polnisches Forum (which, incidentally, has met in Warsaw on 29 November 2012)– would allow that the elites of the three countries would become better acquainted with each other.
7. A closer cultural cooperation between the three countries should be enhanced. The holding of the next WT summit in France and the reward of the Adam Mickiewicz Prize 2013 in France could be used to give wide publicity to this notion.
8. The multitude of – bilateral – associations of the civil society in France, Germany and Poland should be used for openings to the third partners. To this effect an initiative should be launched aiming to form a joint informal framework for the associations of the civil society of the 3 countries
9. The Homepage of the Committee www.weimarer-dreieck.eu should become a trilingual mechanism.

I would welcome if the WYF here in Warsaw would be able to come out with some additional concrete proposals to this effect which we would gladly support.