

Does the franco  
german couple lead  
european union  
economics essay



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## **Does the Franco- German couple lead the European Union?**

Currently, critics have established that the Franco-Germany relationship is in a crisis and no longer capable of providing its primary objective of integrating the European Union. The relationship is believed to be a marriage of convenience largely driven by the fear of losing influence in the larger Europe continent, and to a great extent it is catapulted by national interests rather than the detriment of Europe and European integration. It is therefore true that the Franco-Germany tandem although necessary but it is no longer sufficient enough to drive the European integration (Baumann, 2001).

External changes together with domestic transformations have altered the partnership balance and to some extent it has shifted the stance of the countries involved. The credibility and reputation of this marriage as well as its effectiveness has continued to decrease and seemingly it appears there is no alternative to salvage the relationship (Moravcsik, 1998).

Commentators have observed that if the relationship is to remain relevant and achieve its original goals then France and Germany must reinvigorate the already established system of consensus building combined with regular consultation with other EU member states; refocus on the furthering European interests in association with their European partners; they must also understand that the tandem should be flexible incorporating other EU member states with regard to issues of interest at hand; and finally, they must also acknowledge that the effectiveness of the tandem depends on good relations with the United States, this means that developing a stronger EU must not be at the expense of building counter policies to United States.

This paper seeks to determine whether the Franco-Germany relationship has led to European Union (Cole, 2001).

After World War Two, the Franco-Germany relationship played a significant role in the prosperity of the larger Europe. They facilitated reconciliation and propelled the European economic development and political integration. Although France and Germany governments largely disagreed than they agreed, they managed to forge some common grounds that provided a platform for negotiation for other EU member states (Moravcsik, 1998). The legitimacy and prestige of the Franco-Germany marriage was derived from the acknowledgement of other European states that Germany and France served the interests of Europe rather than their own independent national interests (Gordon, 1995).

With regard to the end of the cold war and enlargement of the EU wholly affected the relationship within Europe, and between US and its European allies (Cole, 2001). This change was also felt within the Franco-Germany tandem. For instance, in recent years, the instability within the marriage has continued to increase because both countries are struggling to get a new stable ground in the effect of the shifting European landscape. It is also believed that Germany's economic strength has deteriorated because of the transfer payments to Eastern Germany coupled with fiscal troubles which are related to or brought about by poor and outdated economic and social infrastructures (Markovits et al. 1997). In addition, Germany government is inclined towards flexing its political and foreign policy strengths something that France is not accustomed to. Another critical factor that has affected this relationship is that, the two countries have never agreed on the EU <https://assignbuster.com/does-the-franco-german-couple-lead-european-union-economics-essay/>

enlargement; France is threatened to lose its influence in Europe while Germany sees greater opportunities in enlarging the latter. With regard to these changes, by the late 1990s the Franco-Germany relationship has stalled (Baumann, 2001).

The weakening of the Franco-Germany tandem is structural; expanding EU to accommodate 25 states has changed considerably the decision making nature in the EU, only two countries cannot probably manage the larger EU by themselves (Pedersen, 1998). Increased membership has also brought about a great degree of diversity of opinions, philosophies, and visions of future Europe something that only France and Germany cannot handle (Gordon, 1995). The new subscribers to EU are economically liberal and thus cannot be beholden by Franco-Germany tandem and hence they are unwilling to the tandem leadership without questioning.

The future success of the Franco-Germany couple will only be realized only if Germany and France will put aside their national interests and foster the European interests. Initially, European integration shared a common vision amongst the EU states, but with advancement of the latter, there is no common vision of Europe. Nonetheless, since France and Germany do not share a common geostrategic and integrative vision it is hard for them to lead other EU member states.

To some extent, due to the shifting balances in Europe, the Franco-Germany tandem will still play a vital role as it is pivotal in supplementing the establishment of coalitions in an integrated EU (Markovits et al. 1997).

However, for the tandem to succeed in its new found roles, it must

significantly show its willingness to serve European interests rather than their national interests. For instance the survival of the Franco-Germany tandem primarily depends on whether it can win back the confidence in Europe (Marsh et al, 2005).

In 2003 during the fortieth anniversary of the Elysee Treaty and the close coordination of Iraq rejuvenated momentum of the Franco-Germany tandem. The drafting of the EU constitutional treaty exposed the willingness of Germany and France to forestall the process if they did not achieve what they wanted (Pedersen, 1998). In relation to this, Germany and France forced the euro area's ministers not to sanction them for violating the growth and stability pact. In addition, the rhetoric of Chancellor Schroder and president Chirac made EU member states to believe that the French and Germany governments are committed to EU integration which was not the factor on the ground (Marsh et al, 2005).

The tension between the US and its European allies with regard to Iraq war exposed the problems within the European Union. New member states to the union were incensed especially when Chirac told them they had missed their chance to shut up during the Iraq Conflict. It was evident that Germany and France opposed the Bush administration's use of military force, and together they claimed that their position represented the views of the larger European Union.

This generated animosity amongst other EU member states; in fact they wrote a letter of eight that strongly and openly supported the US thus exposing the serious internal division within the EU. In particular, the eastern

and central EU member states did not share the common strategic outlook and they did not automatically differ to the Germans and French. In actual sense, the political stability that the Germans and French had cultivated for over a long period of time dissolved with regard to the public recriminations and the open questioning of the Franco-Germany tandem utility grew louder (Baumann, 2001).

Leadership dilemmas within European brought most European leaders to question the effectiveness and validity of the Franco-Germany leadership in the European Union. For instance, there is increasing unwillingness amongst Europe leaders to believe that Germany and France are acting in the best interest of Europe rather than their own nations. Leadership and the European Constitution was a point of contention amongst the EU member states (Gordon, 1995). During the drafting of the EU constitution, the core debate was centered on redistribution of voting powers among the original EU member states and the EU institutions which enlargement to 25 members necessitated.

The convention of 2002 to draft the constitutional treaty was a long process and arduous given that French and Germany governments frequently differed with each other and with other member states of EU. The constitution was finally completed but the EU did not pass the constitution in the December 2003 meeting. Critics and other commentators observed that EU's disagreement on the constitutional treaty was a failure of the Franco-Germany leadership and that it was also a sign signifying the incapability of the Franco-Germany tandem to lead Europe.

In October 2004, the new EU constitutional treaty was signed thereby opening a two year period over which the EU member states to ratify the treaty either through parliamentary vote or through referenda (Markovits et al. 1997). The constitutional process exposed the uneasiness and opposition of EU integration amongst the European publics. The outcomes of the referenda would express the popular expression of ether support or rejection of the EU future integration.

The leadership and stability and growth pact is a critical element in EU integration. In 2003, France and Germany forced majority EU member states to accept the suspension of rules and regulations outlined in the stability and growth pact. This action was interpreted by many political analysts as a clear move by France and Germany to defend their own national economic policies at the expense of other EU member states.

Despite the significant debates about whether there would be any economic consequences for violation of the stability and growth pact by France and Germany, economic analysts observed that there was no other alternative (Marsh et al, 2005). EU regulations that are aimed at enforcing fiscal prudence by establishing strict limits on annual budget deficits are not flexible. This problem was observed by not only France and Germany but also other EU member states which compelled them to violate the stability and growth pact (Moravcsik, 1998).

Rejection of the stability and growth pact's constraints by associate EU member states largely affected the France's and Germany's moral credibility and leadership in the EU. For this matter, other EU member states inquired

as to why they should be held accountable for violating the stability and growth pact constraints while Germany and France persistently infringed the same rules. The acts of French and Germany governments of violating the stability and growth pact, completely affected the integration of the European Union and hence in order to regain confidence in this process, serious commitments to institute reforms undertaking fiscal discipline by all associate member states is needed to salvage the process. For four years consecutively, Germany government regardless of assuring the European Commission, she consistently violated the pact' constraints thus raising the credibility question of the stability and growth pact and the sanction procedures.

The EMU which was regarded as an expansive core was not just for the differentiated integration that embodies, but also for opposing and contradicting French and Germany perspectives with regard to terms of formulation, decision making and implementation. A close study on the European monetary union, two rival advocacy were identified i. e. the monetarist and the economist which were divided on clear relationship between economic convergence and monetary union. Amongst the two advocacies economist convergence was the dominant as it was represented and supported by Britain, Germany, Dutch, and Danish governments together with their central banks. This advocacy envisaged the monetary union as the end result of a long procedure towards the economic convergence.

The economist coalition was countered by the monetarist one which was specifically led by the states like France, Italy and Belgium and supported by <https://assignbuster.com/does-the-franco-german-couple-lead-european-union-economics-essay/>



the Delors Commission. In this case, the monetarist coalition argued that establishment of new monetary institutions will in itself force the process of economic convergence. This is a belief consistent with the traditional community method approach that fundamentally relies on elite socialization into EC institutional structures. Monetarist coalition preferred that a large number of states be able to progress to EMU, meaning that hard-core EMU would be beyond the deutschmark zone thus entrenching Germany hegemony.

With regard to EMU, Germany was the messenger of differentiated integration; all Germany monetary institutions were inflexible insisting that the single currency be implemented in accordance with Germany rules and also EU member states had to earn the right to be an associate of the single currency zone. Because of this, Germany formulated tough convergence criteria to accompany the execution of the single currency. But these rules have since been violated the tough criteria contained in the stability and growth pact.

European foreign and defense policy is also another factor of concern; as in many EU member states observed that possibility of full EU integration can not be without a European foreign defense policy (Hoffmann, 1995).

Although France and Germany agreed to this consensus, they disagreed on the purpose and projection of ESDP. Political analysts observed that the European Foreign Defense policy cannot be possible without the involvement of the UK. In this regard, leadership in the venture will not be a Franco-Germany lone endeavor.

The progress towards a European foreign defense policy faces significant challenges, most importantly defense spending amongst the EU. Despite the small increase in defense spending by UK and France, Germany and other EU member states have shown little or no increase in defense spending. In addition, expenses and duplication of defense spending has raised debates on pooling military resource thus establishing a single European army; few states are willing to relinquish the national control of their military (Pierson, 1996).

Nevertheless, there have been significant steps to advance ESDP. For instance in 2004, EU defense ministers agreed and approved the EU's Headline Goals 2010 objectives; these objectives outlines how the EU can develop and strengthen its collective military capabilities over the next decade (Taylor, 1983). In relation to this, in July 2004, the EU associate members established the European Defense Agency (EDA), which is mandated to identify the gaps and deficits in the European defense capabilities coordinating arms research and development. The EDA is empowered to define EU common defense capabilities, research and development, procurement and armament cooperation, and securing a competitive and fair defense equipment market.

EDA has been appreciated by many Europeans given that efficiency gains will be realized through economies of scale, it will address the resource duplication problem in European armaments research, development and procurement. The Agency's development has been observed as a vital organ in EU's integration because it focuses on defining and constructing a common foreign defense policy (Hoffmann, 1995). Despite the massive <https://assignbuster.com/does-the-franco-german-couple-lead-european-union-economics-essay/>

benefits inclined to EDA, most analysts have observed that the agency will not succeed in pressuring EU member states to increase their defense budgets. However, its existence will lead to consolidation in Europe's fragmented defense industry. Concerns have been raised to whether the EU can reconfigure its defense power to respond appropriately, efficiently and timely to security threats (Cole, 2008).

The treaty of 1963 that called for convergence of strategic and tactical doctrine brought about a platform that favored creation of a common defense identity. With regard to this modest beginning, France and Germany worked hard enough on strategic issues and in 1987 their troops held a joint military maneuvers that culminated into the Franco-Germany brigade which eventually subsumed under the Eurocorps (Pierson, 1996). During the 25th anniversary of the Elysee Treaty in 1988, Germany and French governments announced the establishment of new instruments that were then annexed as protocols to the treaty; one of the instruments was Security and Defense Council (Dyson, 1999). Institutional establishments were spearheaded by France and supported by Germany. For instance the main instigator of the common foreign and security policy was France.

The long standing question of whether EU should have a common ground in regard security and defense matters is yet to be realized (Garto-Ash, 1994).

There are several differences that not only are binding to EU member states but also to new members joining the union; and the concern have been whether Germany and France should be left with the leadership of foreign defense policy. New members joining the EU have no experience or long-

term investment in the Franco-Germany tandem, with regard to this they are <https://assignbuster.com/does-the-franco-german-couple-lead-european-union-economics-essay/>

entitled to question the Franco-Germany leadership in EU (Taylor, 1983). Consequently, these new states are pro-Americans and hence they believe that only the US can provide the kind of security and defense desire and not the EU (McCarthy, 1993). Furthermore, these countries are compelled to oppose any policy that they consider to be anti-American within the EU; in fact these new members will neither support France nor Germany to forge the EU counterweight to transatlantic partnership (Clements, 1998). ESDP is a long term goal which is in the area of defense policy and constellation of forces by necessity will go beyond the Franco-Germany tandem to embrace the wider constellation of EU member states (Mazzucelli, 1997).

The Franco-Germany relations and the United States is another critical factor that has affected the EU integration to a great extent. It is evident that there has been growing differences between Europe and the United States with regard to the Bush administration particularly on the following; death penalty, Kyoto protocol, and international criminal court (Dyson, 1999). The Iraq conflict exposed the consequential crisis in transatlantic relations which culminated not only to divisions between US and Europe but also within Europe as well. The most contested issues amongst US and European countries included utility and application of force, international laws validity and multilateral institutions in the prosecution of nation's interests and in the fortification of its security (Hendriks et al, 2001).

Since time immemorial France has been trying to convince Europe of the importance of formulating counterweight to American power. Germany on her behalf took a mediating role between the US and France. In relation to the Iraq crisis, Germany chose to side with France instead of the US (Garto-<https://assignbuster.com/does-the-franco-german-couple-lead-european-union-economics-essay/>

Ash, 1994). Due to this multiple stands, Germany lost her credibility through its numerous bridging functions that were central to Germany's external relations that included a bridge within the EU member states and a bridge between Washington and Paris. The Germany's moderating role over Iraq crisis could not influence the outcomes within Europe in the transatlantic relations (Jacobs, 2006).

The relationship between France and Germany, and Europe and the US have changed to a great extent because of the stance that Germany took in the Iraq crisis. For this matter if Germany and French governments are to mend the European-American relationship, they must establish an interest-based links with the US (Hendriks et al, 2001). Such relationships are not based on gratitude expectation or moral pronouncements but on coordinated, pragmatic approach to issues at hand. Multinational relationships are primarily based on the ability of each side to accommodate the interests of each other. Without such initiatives conflicts will be the order of the day (Jacobs, 2006).

According to the Europe a new transatlantic partnership entails construction of a Europe that is compatible to work side by side with the US. For instance, smaller and newer EU member states have clearly shown that if the Franco-Germany tandem refuses the US, then the tandem will not function within EU because it will be working contrary to the interests of other EU members (Mazzucelli, 1997). The US on the hand, there is need to redefine its relationship with Europe; for instance, US policy makers have recommended that it should abandon its long-standing support of European integration, especially in the foreign policy. However, analysts have observed that such a <https://assignbuster.com/does-the-franco-german-couple-lead-european-union-economics-essay/>

recommendation is counterproductive because universal threats and terror facing both US and Europe, demand that they work together to overcome such threats. The traditional American pursuit of divide and conquer strategy will automatically work with Europe and undoubtedly will undermine the critical transatlantic cooperation and hence overcoming terror threats will never be realized (Clements, 1998).

In conclusion, to a large extent the Franco-Germany tandem has helped the integration of Europe. However, critics have established that the Franco-Germany relationship is in a crisis and no longer capable of providing its primary objective of integrating the European Union (Webber, 1999). The relationship is believed to be a marriage of convenience largely driven by the fear of losing influence in the larger Europe continent, and to a great extent it is catapulted by national interests rather than the detriment of Europe and European integration (McCarthy, 1993). Rejection of the stability and growth pact's constraints by associate EU member states largely affected the France's and Germany's moral credibility and leadership in the EU. European foreign and defense policy is also another factor of concern; as in many EU member states observed that possibility of full EU integration can not be without a European foreign defense policy. The Franco-Germany relations and the United States is another critical factor that has affected the EU integration to a great extent. In this regard, for EU integration to be a success, Germany and French governments need to amend their relationship with the US.