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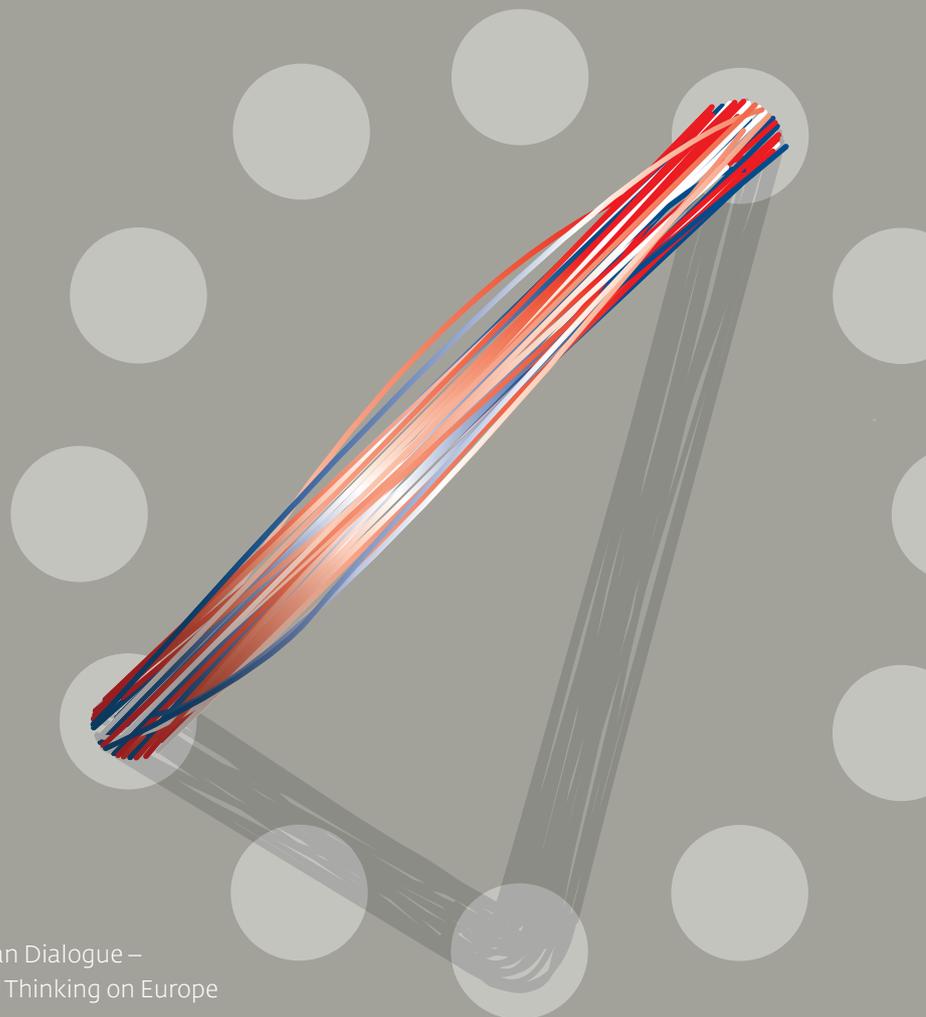
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**The Third Side of the Weimar  
Triangle: Franco-Polish Relations  
in the Trilateral Context**





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## Executive summary

Historically speaking, Franco-Polish political relations have been less conflictual than their Franco-German or German-Polish counterparts. How can we therefore account for the fact that relations between France and Poland have been good at some levels and during certain periods while remaining tense or unsatisfactory during others? In recent years, relations have become burdened by a range of difficult issues in key sectors, which are reinforced by a series of stereotypes. In such a context, is there anything that could be done at the national and European level, or perhaps within the scope of the Weimar Triangle, to breathe new life into Franco-Polish relations? Can President Emmanuel Macron's first official visit to Warsaw and Cracow, which finally took place in February 2020, as well as the Weimar Triangle summit organised by France, reportedly in Paris on the 14<sup>th</sup> of July 2020, serve as real game changers for wider cooperation between the two countries?

There are a number of political, economic and strategic reasons that explain why Franco-Polish relations remain the weak side of the Weimar Triangle. In foreign policy, the two countries have diverging priorities with respect to security, in which France privileges the development of European capabilities and cooperative frameworks while Poland focuses on strong bilateral relations with the United States and NATO. Their common goal, however, remains to preserve peace on European soil and to contain Russia at the EU's borders, but the means adopted to reach this common goal currently do not go in the same direction. France and Poland should improve their respective strategic communication, develop bilateral and even trilateral cooperation at the lower, less political levels, use windows of opportunity to cooperate in international organisations, and adopt pragmatic »transaction approaches« in the military.

Economically, the two countries entertain much weaker trade links with each other than with Germany, partly due to the fact that they do not share a common border and are geographically more distant. The question of Poland's accession to the eurozone is an »elephant in the room« in current reflections and one that would have significant economic implications as Paris would no longer be able to blame Warsaw for being a free-rider of European integration. Paris and Warsaw should try to identify win-win solutions, at least in the economic domain, for example by ensuring that the EU's new focus on the transition to a low-emissions economy. The development of new technologies would also benefit the »peripheral« member states, and would therefore support the convergence objective – rather than necessarily going in an opposite direction.

Cooperation in the areas of education, science and culture is particularly strong and can clearly be considered to be a Franco-Polish success story. French and Polish states and governments must continue to promote relations and cooperation in the cultural, educational, academic and scientific fields, as they did for example during the Polish-French Year of Science in 2019. The development of ties at a decentralised level (regions and cities) and the creation of a Franco-Polish youth office, modelled on its Franco-German or German-Polish equivalent, could further strengthen ties between the populations and the youth of these countries.

# Introduction

Franco-Polish relations are generally considered to be the underperforming part of the Weimar Triangle<sup>1</sup>. While Franco-German and Polish-German relations are well developed and strongly institutionalised compared to Franco-Polish ones, it is worth asking whether the Weimar Triangle, in practice, remains a simple angle. According to a recent study on the views of Europe's professional political class, France and Poland are both among the EU member states that the German government would generally contact most with regard to matters of European policy. Paris and Warsaw, however, usually do not think of each other as sharing the same interests in EU policy. There are also high levels of disappointment in France with Poland as an EU member – and the same is true in the opposite direction. This, paradoxically, may point towards potential for cooperation. Both countries may be hoping for each other's support in EU affairs – but their efforts may have simply been frustrated as of late<sup>2</sup>.

In exploring the relations between France and Poland, especially since the fall of the Iron Curtain and recent developments in the past decade, this paper is an invitation to examine Weimar cooperation from a different perspective. There are a number of political, economic and strategic reasons that explain why the Franco-Polish relationship is indeed the weak side of the Triangle. Historically speaking, Franco-Polish political relations have been less conflictual than their Franco-German or German-Polish counterparts<sup>3</sup>. A

wide range of academic publications testifies to the strength of Franco-Polish historical relations<sup>4</sup>, and recent policy analyses state that »the lack of historical disputes between Poland and France is therefore a big advantage of this bilateral cooperation«<sup>5</sup>. How can we therefore account for the fact that relations are (and have always been) good between France and Poland at certain levels while remaining tense or unsatisfactory at others?

At first sight, this relationship has become burdened in recent years by a range of difficult issues in key sectors, which are reinforced by a series of stereotypes. Economically, the two countries entertain much weaker trade links with each other than with Germany, partly due to the fact that they do not share a common border and are geographically more distant. Moreover, they have developed two different visions of the EU's single market over the years, which makes it difficult to cooperate on several points of the EU's agenda and can easily lead to disputes (e.g. on the issue on posted workers). In general, they have diverging priorities with respect to security, in which France privileges the development of European capacities and cooperative frameworks, while Poland focuses on strong bilateral relations with the United States (US) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)<sup>6</sup>. These orientations are, with certain variations, largely independent from the political party in power in Paris and Warsaw at any given time – although the current configuration

<sup>1</sup> Bogdan Koszel, *Rola Francji i Niemiec w procesie integracji Polski ze Wspólnotami Europejskimi/Unią Europejską*, Instytut Zachodni: Poznań, 2003, and Bogdan Koszel, *Trójkąt Weimarski*. Geneza. Działalność. Perspektywy współpracy, Poznań 2006; Martin Koopmann, *Europe needs Weimar: Perspectives on the Weimar Triangle in Times of Crisis*, Genshagener Papiere, no. 18, July 2016, [http://www.stiftung-genshagen.de/uploads/media/Genshagener\\_papiere\\_18\\_web\\_englisch.pdf](http://www.stiftung-genshagen.de/uploads/media/Genshagener_papiere_18_web_englisch.pdf), retrieved on 15 January 2020; Francis Masson, *L'Allemagne, la Pologne et la France: qu'est-il advenu du Triangle de Weimar?*, in: *Allemagne d'aujourd'hui*, no. 228, February 2019, pp. 107-122.

<sup>2</sup> EU Coalition Explorer 2018, European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR), November 2018, <https://www.ecfr.eu/eucoalitionexplorer>, retrieved on 15 January 2020.

<sup>3</sup> For a recent analysis of German-Polish relations, see Thomas Serrier/

Pierre-Frédéric Weber, *Allemagne-Pologne au XXI<sup>ème</sup> siècle: une normalisation inachevée?*, in: *Allemagne d'aujourd'hui*, no. 228, February 2019; Agnieszka Łada, *From foe to friend. Bringing Poles and Germans together*, in: *New Eastern Europe*, no. 2, 2016, pp. 103-108.

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Christophe Laforest/Andrzej Nieuważny, *De tout temps amis: cinq siècles de relations franco-polonaises*, Paris: Nouveau monde éditions, 2004; Marc-Stanislas Korowicz, *Dix siècles de relations franco-polonaises*, Paris: Librairie polonaise, 1945.

<sup>5</sup> Łukasz Jurczyszyn, *Current French-Polish relations. Turning points, elements of convergence and the biggest challenges for the future bilateral and European relations*, Prague: Europeum, 2019, p. 2, [http://europeum.org/data/articles/V4FR\\_PP16.pdf](http://europeum.org/data/articles/V4FR_PP16.pdf), retrieved on 15 January 2020.

<sup>6</sup> Amélie Zima, *La construction politique de l'Atlantisme en Europe centrale*, in: *Études internationales*, no. 49, Printemps 2018, pp. 393-420.

of La République en Marche (LREM) in Paris and the Law and Justice (PiS) government in Warsaw makes seeking meaningful forms of cooperation particularly difficult. Voters of the ruling parties in Poland and France are often positioned at the two extremes of the European electorate on some of the EU's central issues, such as enlargement in the Western Balkans, the leading role of the EU (rather than of the nation states) on international trade, and – last but not least – the choice between investing in NATO or in the EU's defence capabilities<sup>7</sup>.

In addition to this, there are a number of prevailing clichés and stereotypes on both sides, at political and societal levels, which can be easily operationalised while serving as further obstacles to political rapprochement. Many Poles still remember that they could not rely on France in the Second World War, while they could rely on the US, which continues to be the motivation behind Poland's *modus operandi* with respect to security in Europe. In turn, the French tend to consider the Poles to be a source of cheap labour, and often a threat to their labour market, as well as free-riders of EU integration. While these stereotypes are strong enough to prevent close political cooperation, unfortunate events in the area of strategic investments and political positions have often made this harder still. We only need to mention the unrealised purchase of Mirages, Caracals or Airbus planes – all for various reasons, but which were incidences in the course of which Warsaw disappointed Paris<sup>8</sup>. We also remember

the »Polish plumber« hysteria in France in the context of EU enlargement in 2004, Chirac's bad-tempered response to Poland's engagement in Iraq, and Macron's use of Poland as an »ugly duckling« ahead of European elections – in which Paris antagonised Warsaw.

In such a context, is there anything that could be done at the national and the European level, or perhaps within the scope of the Weimar Triangle, to breathe new life into Franco-Polish relations?

On a more positive note, all the events mentioned above – which are among those most reported in the media – have not prevented France and Poland from accomplishing a great deal together in the past two or three decades. The level of French investments in Poland remains impressive. Poland is integrated with the French supply chains, notably in the automobile sector, which partly explains why Polish exports to France increased so rapidly. The two countries also cooperate on several points of the EU agenda, and this happens not only when a clear alignment of interests occurs – such as in the case of external trade, or the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), in which both tend to defend the interests of their rural sectors. The two countries are also able to identify novel areas of cooperation such as, recently, the EU's competition policy and in the scientific domain. What is more, most importantly, the search for areas of cooperation did not cease even in politically challenging periods such as the one we are witnessing right now.

**As explained in greater detail in the study, the recollection of past tensions and disappointments is still**

<sup>7</sup> Susi Dennison, Give the people what they want: Popular demand for a strong European foreign policy, ECFR, September 2019, [https://www.ecfr.eu/publications/summary/popular\\_demand\\_for\\_strong\\_european\\_foreign\\_policy\\_what\\_people\\_want](https://www.ecfr.eu/publications/summary/popular_demand_for_strong_european_foreign_policy_what_people_want), retrieved on 15 January 2020. Pawel Zerka, Tricks of trade, ECFR, 13 September 2019, [https://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary\\_tricks\\_of\\_the\\_trade](https://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary_tricks_of_the_trade), retrieved on 15 January 2020.

<sup>8</sup> On the Caracals: »Th[e] agreement [refused in October 2015] was concluded by the previous Polish government, beaten in the legislative elections in October 2015 by the eurosceptic Law and Justice (PiS) party. Airbus had been then preferred to the American Sikorsky and the Italian Agusta Westland, both of which have manufacturing sites in Poland [Translation and additional words by the editors].« Cited from Pawel Sobczak, La Pologne

renonce à acheter 50 Caracal à Airbus Helicopters, in: Capital, 4 October 2016, <https://www.capital.fr/entreprises-marches/la-pologne-renonce-a-acheter-50-caracal-a-airbus-helicopters-1171908>, retrieved on 15 January 2020. On the other issues, see Marcin Zaborowski, Poland and European Defence Integration, ECFR, 25 January 2018, [https://www.ecfr.eu/page/-/poland\\_and\\_european\\_defence\\_integrationFINAL.pdf](https://www.ecfr.eu/page/-/poland_and_european_defence_integrationFINAL.pdf), retrieved on 15 January 2020. Poland, like other CEECs, was not the only country to prefer an US offer over that of France or another EU member state.

salient today, hampering, to some extent, the development of constructive relations at the level of political leaders. However, despite appearances and beyond the mediatic limelight, Franco-Polish relations are often surprisingly good. Officials enjoy a wealth of exchanges at various technical levels while business, culture, academia and civil society in general, remaining less dependent on the political context, continue to be involved in bilateral initiatives. Cooperation in the areas of education, science and culture is particularly strong and can clearly be considered to be a Franco-Polish success story.

In this study, we explore perspectives for strengthening relations between France and Poland by focusing on three areas: first, European, foreign and security policies; second, economic cooperation; and finally, cultural and scientific relations. Our objective is to engage policy-makers, academics, business, think-tanks and other stakeholders in a constructive debate about ways to convert the Weimar Triangle into a solid triangle of robust cooperation. While we acknowledge the limitations of this exercise, we argue that the potential of this cooperation has so far remained largely untapped<sup>9</sup>.

<sup>9</sup> This study draws on previous own academic and expert studies, complemented by interviews and other sources. Part I was mainly drafted by E. Tulmets, part II by P. Zerka and part III by J. Heurtaux.

# I. European, foreign and security policies: conflictual issues only?

A brief glance at relations between France and Poland in the field of European as well as the foreign and security policies of the last three decades creates an impression that these two countries are encountering a growing number of conflictual situations<sup>10</sup>. These situations are in perfect contradiction with their common longer past, which was characterised by a range of positive examples. As a matter of fact, France and Poland never fought or waged war against each other, but, throughout their history, developed strategic alliances at the elite level, symbolised by official weddings between royal and also aristocratic families, as recorded in the history books<sup>11</sup>. Contrary to other European countries, France's Napoleonic period is remembered as a rather positive element in the Polish collective imagination. This age heralded the dawn of Enlightenment, civil rights and their effective implementation in Poland, for example in the form of codes of law. For many Poles, France is therefore still thought of as the country that helped to oppose Russian domination at that time, even though many soldiers laid down their lives in a number of dramatic wars<sup>12</sup>. Some years later, French soldiers also helped Poland during its decisive victory in the Polish-Soviet war at the Battle of Warsaw in 1920. As explained in section 3, it was often Paris that was chosen as a destination when the (domestic) political situation became too difficult for the Polish elite to remain in Poland. It was, for example, at Maison-Lafitte that Jerzy Giedroyc drafted his foreign policy ideas for the Polish government in exile.

In the 1990s, France – together with Germany – supported Poland's integration into organisations addressing human rights and security in Europe. While it saw multilateral cooperation as a way to prevent the

emergence of possible conflicts in Europe, the French socialist government of the early 1990s was still rather sceptical of Poland's integration into the EU. In the long run, however, France concentrated its support to the Central Eastern European Countries (CEECs) mainly on Poland's political and economic transformation and then accession to multilateral organisations and the EU. The Fondation France-Pologne was created as early as in 1989 to enhance bilateral societal and cultural relations<sup>13</sup>. However, the measures mobilised by Miceco<sup>14</sup> from 1990 to 1993 and then by the various ministerial assistance structures (some now coordinated by Expertise France) did not match the level of financial and human resources that Germany had mobilised in the framework of its transition assistance or »Transform programme«<sup>15</sup>. They mainly remained focused on societal and economic cooperation, measures of »soft security«, such as the promotion of human rights and core EU values, as well as cooperation between regions and voivodships (administrative units in Poland). The fact that a dedicated Franco-Polish political dialogue was launched in 2004 and 2005 was a positive development in the context of EU accession.

These positive aspects did not change the fact that Franco-Polish relations remained rather cold when Jacques Chirac and Aleksander Kwaśniewski were

<sup>13</sup> See French Senate, Questions écrite n° 27761, 21 September 2000, <https://www.senat.fr/questions/base/2000/qSEQ000927761.html>, retrieved on 17 January 2020 and French Senate, Question écrite n° 33068, 17 May 2001, <https://www.senat.fr/questions/base/2001/qSEQ010533068.html>, retrieved on 17 January 2020, as well as the work of Dorota Dakowska on this foundation.

<sup>14</sup> After the launch of the PHARE (Pologne-Hongrie, Aide à la Restructuration Economique) programme with French support at the Arch Summit of June 1989 in Paris, France developed its own technical and financial assistance through Miceco (Mission interministérielle pour la coopération avec l'Europe centrale et orientale). Céline Bayou, La présence économique française en Europe centrale et orientale au seuil de 1993, in: *Courrier des pays de l'Est*, no. 379, May 1993, pp. 3-37.

<sup>15</sup> Dorota Dakowska/Elsa Tulmets, Transnational Relations and Foreign Policies. The Interactions between Non-State and State Actors in the German Assistance to Central Europe, in: Anne-Marie Le Gloannec (ed.), *Non-State Actors in German Foreign Policy*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007, pp. 70-94.

<sup>10</sup> Lena Strauß/Nicolas Lux, European Defence – Debates in and about Poland and France, *SWP Journal Review*, no. 1/2019, February 2019.

<sup>11</sup> See references in footnote no. 5.

<sup>12</sup> Pierre-Frédéric Weber, *Französisch-polnische Freundschaft in Theorie und Praxis*, ein Essay, in: *Dialog Forum*, 6 December 2018, <https://forumdialog.eu/2018/12/06/franzoesisch-polnische-freundschaft-in-theorie-und-praxis-ein-essay/>, retrieved on 15 January 2020.

president of their respective countries. This was not only because Chirac privileged a rapprochement with Berlin and Moscow, but also due to the fact that – for different reasons – Poland gave priority to the US F16 planes (rather than French Mirages) for its armed forces in 2002, and to Boeing (rather than Airbus) for its civilian airlines in 2005. Furthermore, Poland supported, together with other CEECs, the US-led »coalition of the willing« in the war in Iraq, which France (and Germany – both against an intervention in Iraq) viewed with contempt. During the accession period, France was hardly Poland's ally on specific issues, such as in the budget discussions ahead of Poland's accession – fearing for example a possible rivalry on agricultural funds.

In the field of foreign and security policy, many Poles (still) consider that, despite the dominant role of France and of the UK in the pre-Brexit EU, Atlanticism remains fundamental for them. Historians often remember the fact that the US re-established peace in Europe on two occasions after leading the Allies' military interventions in the First and Second World Wars. Several episodes testify to these different world views regarding European security, leading EU member states to defend opposing positions. During the war in Iraq in 2003, the signing of the »letter of the eight«<sup>16</sup> (also known as the »Vilnius letter«) in support of US military engagement in Iraq encouraged the French President to speak out, calling on the newcomers »to remain silent« in situations where EU unity is required. The signatory countries had adopted a pro-US stance, while France (not back to NATO military structures yet) and Germany had decided to remain opposed to the US intervention<sup>17</sup>.

<sup>16</sup> Including Poland.

<sup>17</sup> David Cadier/Elsa Tulmets, French Policies toward Central Eastern Europe: Not a Foreign Policy Priority but a Real Presence, DGAP Analyse no. 11, May 2014, [https://dgap.org/system/files/article\\_pdfs/2014\\_11-cadier\\_tulmets.pdf](https://dgap.org/system/files/article_pdfs/2014_11-cadier_tulmets.pdf), retrieved on 28 February 2020; Marceij Raś, Foreign and Security Policy in the Party Discourse in Poland: Main Features, in: UNISCI Journal, no. 43, January 2017, pp. 117-141, <https://www.ucm.es/data/cont/media/>

After this episode there followed the saga of the »Polish plumber« triggered by anti-European politicians during the EU's Eastern enlargement as well as the great disappointment experienced by the French when Poland chose US military and civilian airplanes over French ones, in the course of which relations between France and Poland largely deteriorated, at least at the highest political level. When conservative President Nicolas Sarkozy came to power in 2007, he had an ambition to turn a new page by signing bilateral strategic partnerships with most CEECs between May and June 2008. He announced in Warsaw in May 2008 that the French labour market would be open one year ahead of schedule. The rather cordial relations between Nicolas Sarkozy and Lech Kaczyński made discussions on further cooperation possible, mainly in the areas of defence and aviation, energy (including nuclear energy with the company Areva), and infrastructure, as well as the signing of the Treaty of Lisbon.

However, several Central and Eastern European political leaders, including Kaczyński, took a critical view of the way in which the French EU presidency had managed – although successfully – the ceasefire of the war that flared up between Georgia and Russia in August 2008<sup>18</sup>. Having come to power in 2012, the socialist President François Hollande also signalled to the CEECs that he would reinforce cooperation with them, in particular with Poland. The number of official meetings multiplied during the time in which the pro-European Center-Right Civic Platform (PO) government was in power (from 2007 to 2015). It was also the time when the US announced that it would disengage from providing security in Europe and when Poland decided to support the establishment of a Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP). The beginning of this period was also marked by the US reset in relations with Russia

[www.pag-91857/UNISCIDP43-7RAS.pdf](http://www.pag-91857/UNISCIDP43-7RAS.pdf), retrieved on 17 January 2020.

<sup>18</sup> Elsa Tulmets, East Central European Foreign Policy Identity in Perspective: Back to Europe and the Eastern Neighbourhood, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014, p. 178.

and the PO government's attempts to develop a constructive dialogue with Moscow, by organising commemorations of the Katyń event, for example. The crash of the Polish presidential plane at Smolensk, with 96 people on board (including the President and his wife, various ministers, generals, officers and parliamentarians of different political parties), casts a very different light on the endeavour. While Polish-Russian relations continued, for a time, to be promising in terms of reconciliation, very emotional debates opened up from 2011 onwards, and remain very much alive in public discussions in Poland.

The Polish government was also very supportive of democratic reforms in the European Neighbourhood Policy, in particular in Ukraine – also through European institutions<sup>19</sup> – and then of the Maidan revolution, which took place in Ukraine in 2013. When PiS came to power once again in 2015, the above-mentioned attempts to promote dialogue with Russia were rebalanced in favour of a pro-Atlanticist and anti-Russian stance, a more critical policy towards Ukraine on historical issues (mainly for domestic reasons), and a reserved approach to EU foreign and security policy. These issues are situated at the exact opposite of traditional French foreign policy approaches. Colder relations with Russia were already encouraged by the war in Ukraine, which started after the annexation of Crimea by Russia in March 2014 in breach of international law. The German, Polish and French Foreign Ministers had managed nevertheless to improvise, under a Polish proposal, a Weimar Triangle meeting in Kyiv in February 2014 to bring pressure to bear on the pro-Russian Ukrainian government. Another official trilateral meeting that was to take place in Poland in October 2014 was, however, then excluded from the negotiation format that developed among France, Germany, Ukraine and Russia during the anniversary of

the end of the Second World War in Normandy in France. The so-called Normandy format, which led to no less than 12 meetings between November 2014 and May 2016, was seen in Poland as a »new French-German directory« in Europe. It was also during this time that Poland and other CEECs decided to launch the Three Seas Initiative with the US in order to inject impetus into cooperation on energy and digital affairs and as a counterweight to the German Nord Stream 2 initiative. The Polish refusal to finalise the contract regarding the purchase of Caracal helicopters in 2016, which it had agreed on with France, led to a further cooling of official relations between the two countries.

Many issues already discussed during the EU accession process became particularly conflictual at the bilateral level, and also made themselves felt at the EU level in general. The strong Polish and Visegrád 4 position taken in the debate on migration policy after the refugee crisis that arose in the summer of 2015 and the misunderstandings that emerged in the relations with France and Germany prove how difficult it is to build common European policies and to develop national narratives that would automatically include the European level<sup>20</sup>. The issue of the respect for and projection of EU values and the rule of law abroad – at the core of the EU's »soft power« – became extremely political when the EU institutions decided to use the infringement procedure (Article 7 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU)) against the Polish government in July 2017 and 2018. Most official declarations made by France and Poland between 2015 and 2018 show very different views on common values and procedures such as the proper functioning of democracy and active participation in community projects comprised of political, socio-economic and security aspects<sup>21</sup>.

<sup>19</sup> Christian Nitoiu/ Monika Sus, The European Parliament's Diplomacy – a Tool for Projecting EU Power in Times of Crisis? The Case of the Cox Kwasniewski Mission, in: Journal of Common Market Studies, vol. 55, n° 1, 2017.

<sup>20</sup> Elsa Tulmets, Le transfert d'expérience de l'Europe centrale et orientale vers le voisinage européen: rhétorique ou réalité? Les cas polonais et tchèque, Les Etudes du CERF, no. 193, May 2013.

<sup>21</sup> Alexandra Bzozowski, France and Germany pile pressure on Poland and Hungary over rule of law, in: Euractiv.com, 10 April 2019, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/justice-home-affairs/news/france-and-germany->

The above-mentioned issues, which are only the most salient and mediatised ones, have worsened bilateral relations to a great extent. The PiS government has become particularly critical of the role played by France and Germany in Europe and the French government has adopted an increasingly critical stance with regard to Poland, with the result that high-level Weimar Triangle meetings did not take place from 2014 to 2019, with the exception of celebrations marking the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the format in August 2016. France and Poland endeavoured to maintain diplomatic relations instead of promoting trilateral meetings. However, it is only since 2018 and especially since 2019 that bilateral meetings have taken place in a more constructive manner, for instance between the ministers of European and foreign affairs, and especially between economic affairs ministers. These have focused on such issues as the renewal of the Franco-Polish strategic partnership, the future EU financial framework, the rule of law and Brexit. The first visit by President Macron to Warsaw, accompanied by four ministers, finally took place in February 2020 and confirmed the will of the two countries to cooperate more closely on European military and also cyber-security issues.<sup>22</sup> President Macon also expressed a wish to hold another Weimar summit in France, reportedly on the 14<sup>th</sup> of July<sup>23</sup> in connection with the French national holiday, which met with a warm reception from the Polish side.

pile-pressure-on-poland-and-hungary-over-rule-of-law/, retrieved on 15 January 2020.

<sup>22</sup> Alain Auffray, *A Varsovie, Macron joue la défense*, in: *Libération*, 4 February 2020. Three days before the French visit, the Polish government announced, however, that it had purchased 32 US F35 planes worth 4.6 billion US dollars (4.1 billion euros). Jakub Iwaniuk, *Après plusieurs années de tension, Macron en visite de déminage en Pologne*, in: *Le Monde*, 3 February 2020.

<sup>23</sup> *Szczyt Trójkąta Weimarskiego już 14 lipca w Paryżu? Macron zaprosza Dudę do udziału*, in: *Dziennik Gazeta Prawna*, 4 February 2020, <https://www.gazetaprawna.pl/artykuly/1452224,szczyt-trojkat-weimarskiego-14-lipca-w-paryzu-macron-zaprosza-dude-do-udzialu.html>, retrieved on 26 February 2020.

Varying perceptions of security issues, however, driven by different historical, doctrinal and trauma experiences, have implications on foreign policy strategies that can hamper foreign policy coherence. After the terrorist attacks in 2015, France focused on crisis management and the fight against terrorism, while Poland, more concerned by the Georgian and Ukrainian conflicts, mobilised partners, invested in territorial defence and was keen to reinforce NATO's Eastern flank<sup>24</sup>. In the context of Brexit, Poland was therefore first and foremost concerned with the future of security in Europe. France and Germany relaunched European security initiatives such as discussions on a European army, the creation of PESCO (Permanent Structured Cooperation, supported by the PO government in 2011) in December 2017, and the launch of the European Interventions Initiative (EII or E12, outside of NATO and the EU), initiatives from which Poland was either absent or felt that it was not taken seriously. While the PiS government was reluctant to support PESCO as it considered it to be an alternative project to NATO, it sought to secure Germany's support to enter the EII project initiated by France, without success. In the context of Brexit, it has commenced negotiations on a bilateral agreement with the UK<sup>25</sup>. Important divergences can also be observed with regard to relations to Russia, especially after Macron's initiative at the July 2019 meeting in Brégançon to build a new »architecture of trust and security« between Europe and Russia, also including Turkey, in order to make Europe less reliant on the US for its own security<sup>26</sup>. Finally, the different French, German and Polish reactions to the debate that opened up at the end of 2019, after the US retreated from Syria and the Turkish government started to intervene militarily in the country, had the effect of damaging strong cooperation on security issues in the

<sup>24</sup> Barbara Jankowski/Amélie Zima, *France and Poland facing the evolution of the security environment*, *Etudes de l'IRSEM*, no. 59, July 2018.

<sup>25</sup> See the publications by Amélie Zima on this subject.

<sup>26</sup> *Macron veut réinventer une architecture de sécurité et de confiance entre UE et Russie*, in: *Le Figaro*, 19 July 2019.

near future. Despite the more constructive declarations by Presidents Macron and Duda on these issues in February 2020, greater confidence-building efforts in relations between the three countries continue to be badly needed.

The EU, which is facing a wide range of crises, is therefore experiencing a more complex integration process than has been the case for several years, which requires a more complex dialogue and better coordination procedures. This is also what economic and financial issues tend to illustrate.

## II. Economic cooperation: a glass half full

If relations at the political level are often tense and fragile, economic ties offer a more nuanced picture. The fact that both France and Poland are EU members sets the core framework of economic relations between the two countries. On the one hand, mere access to the European market has, over the past 15 years, provided a powerful boost to the development of business relations between France and Poland. On the other, economic relations between Poland and France have moved far beyond trade and investments, encompassing key areas of the EU's activity: from the euro-zone to the single market, energy, climate, competition, external trade, cohesion, the Common Agricultural Policy and the EU budget. Two main issues that are tackled in this paper are trade and investments as well as cooperation on the EU's economic policies. However, prospects for a balanced bilateral relationship in either of these areas are limited, not least because France is the world's seventh-largest economy – more than five times the size of Poland, and much more competitive than the latter<sup>27</sup>.

### Trade and investments

The rapid rise in Poland's exports to France has been one of the most notable events in the economic relations between the two countries after 1990. Poland benefited from EU accession, which not only provided it with full access to the single market, together with its four freedoms, but also helped to promote macroeconomic stabilisation and improved the country's credibility and attractiveness in the eyes of foreign partners. Besides this, the rapid rise in Poland's exports to France was partly a reflection of the country's growing integration with international supply chains, notably in the automobile sector, and thus was also the result of French investments. In nominal terms, Poland's exports

to France increased six-fold between 2000 and 2018, while France's exports to Poland have risen by the factor of three<sup>28</sup>. Prior to 2005, Poland had a trade deficit with France – but it has steadily increased its surplus ever since.

At the same time, however, France's share in Poland's overall trade has not improved over the past 15 years. France is currently Poland's fourth-largest export partner, just behind the Czech Republic and the UK, ahead of Italy, the Netherlands and Russia, but far behind Germany. Since 2004, France has steadily accounted for around 6% of Poland's overall exports, comparable with that of the UK. In the meantime, the share represented by Germany has never dropped below 25%, and it actually reached 28% in 2018. What is more, the French share of Poland's overall imports, measured by the country of origin, actually dropped from over 6% in 2004 to less than 4% in 2018. As Poland's fifth-largest import partner in 2018, France was behind Germany, China, Russia and Italy, and just ahead of the Netherlands. In turn, Germany's share during that period has never fallen below 21%. In many ways, sheer distance, the size of the partners' economies as well as the fact that they share a border play a crucial role in explaining why Germany is so much more important than France as a trading partner for Poland.

Trade relations between Poland and France remain strongly asymmetrical. In 2018, Poland accounted for just 2% of France's overall exports and imports, in both cases as the country's tenth-largest trading partner, ahead of Turkey, Japan and Russia, but far behind Germany<sup>29</sup>. While Germany is a privileged trading

<sup>28</sup> The analysis of Poland's trade relations is based on data from Statistics Poland (GUS).

<sup>29</sup> If Poland is a less important trading partner for France than the other way round, then this has partly to do with France's lower degree of dependence on the European market in general and the fact that it is more open to global markets. 79.7% of Poland's exports go to other EU countries – the corresponding number for France is just 58.8%. Statistics Poland (GUS), Foreign trade. Poland in the European Union, Warsaw, 2018, pp. 110-111.

<sup>27</sup> Klaus Schwab, The Global Competitiveness Report, World Economic Forum, 2019, [http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF\\_TheGlobalCompetitivenessReport2019.pdf](http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_TheGlobalCompetitivenessReport2019.pdf), retrieved on 15 January 2020.

partner also for France, it does not dominate as much as in the Polish case. In 2017, Germany accounted for 13% of French exports and 17% of the country's imports<sup>30</sup>. However, what these numbers do not show is the qualitative improvement in trade relations between Poland and France that has occurred over the past two decades. It has progressively included a greater number of processed and technologically advanced products, especially in the context of Poland's exports to France.

French investments in Poland are one of the highlights of economic relations between the two countries. Their cumulated value reached 81 billion złoty (around 20 billion euros) in 2017, making France the fourth-biggest foreign investor in Poland – after the Netherlands, Germany and Luxembourg, if the headquarters of direct investors are taken into account. However, if we look at the country of origin of majority shareholders, then France turns out to be the second-biggest foreign investor in Poland, behind Germany (17%) and *ex aequo* with the US (11%)<sup>31</sup>. In 2017, 1,092 companies in Poland were controlled, at least in part, by French entities. They were responsible for creating almost 190,000 jobs, making France the third-biggest foreign employer in Poland after Germany (350,000) and the US (200,000). By way of comparison, Polish investments in France reached 2.1 billion złoty (around 500 million euros) in 2017, 40 times less than French investments in Poland.

This looks like a rosy picture, and could easily overshadow the fact that the history of French investments in Poland has been rather complicated. French companies were relatively slow to enter the Polish market in the

1990s, mistrustful of the country's handicaps in transportation and telecommunication networks, and often choosing other Central European countries for their investments. There was no clear political signal from the top. François Mitterrand believed that France should assist the Polish transition, but for a long time he did not expect the country to join the EU for decades to come. Thus, rather than investments, there was initially a greater focus on technical support, for instance in setting up the Warsaw Stock Exchange.

This situation changed only at the end of the 1990s and the beginning of the 2000s when Poland was already a stable economy on its way to joining the EU – and when several new privatisation opportunities arose. At the end of 1990s, France briefly became the largest foreign investor in Poland<sup>32</sup>. However, if there was any kind of business honeymoon between Poland and France at that time, it soon slacked off in response to political tensions or disappointments. Firstly, Paris felt offended by Poland's choice of US aviation and defence producers over French ones, as was discussed earlier. Secondly, Jacques Chirac prioritised a rapprochement with Berlin and Moscow, and, in the context of traditionally strong links between political and economic spheres in France, his cold relations with Aleksander Kwaśniewski signified much less focus on doing business in Poland. To be sure, this did not stop other French companies from investing in Poland<sup>33</sup>. However, while France remains one of the biggest foreign investors in Poland, it is hard to avoid an impression that the potential for business cooperation has remained partly untapped (notably in the aviation, defence, nuclear

<sup>30</sup> Both France and Poland are important trading partners for Germany, but France is more important among the two. In 2017, France accounted for 7.8% and Poland for 4.1% of German exports. At the same time, the share of the two countries in German imports was 6.4% and 5.0%, respectively. For more information, see OEC Country Profile Germany, <https://oec.world/en/profile/country/deu/>, retrieved on 17 January 2020.

<sup>31</sup> This is based on the most recent data available from the National Bank of Poland, which illustrates the situation in 2017.

<sup>32</sup> In this period, major French retailers – such as Auchan, Carrefour and Leclerc – entered the Polish market. Pernod Ricard took over Wyborowa (Polish vodka) and France Telecom bought up the controlling package of shares in Polish Telecom, later rebranded to Orange Polska, which remains the most valuable French investment in the country. Credit Agricole entered the Polish market in 2001.

<sup>33</sup> Jan Cienski, ExxonMobil ends shale gas tests in Poland, in: Financial Times, 18 June 2012, <https://www.ft.com/content/5e883fdc-b94c-11e1-b4d6-00144feabdco>, retrieved on 15 January 2020.

energy and automobile industries), and that politics has been one of the barriers.

Under PiS, in particular, politics has added new obstacles to a smooth economic exchange. This applies, first and foremost, to regulatory stability and transparency, which have deteriorated on the Polish side. In 2019, this was considered a major challenge by over two thirds of French investors active in the country – more than twice as many as five years previously<sup>34</sup>. French (as well as other) banks active in Poland have become the target of a tax on bank assets introduced by the PiS government in 2016. In turn, major French supermarket chains such as Carrefour, Auchan and Leclerc will likely be affected by a new tax on large retailers now that the European Court of Justice (ECJ) ruled in May 2019 that this move did not contravene with the EU's state aid rules<sup>35</sup>. Their revenues had already suffered after the Polish government introduced the Sunday trading ban in 2018; although we should also mention that, when compared to several other retailers, the French companies (notably Carrefour and Auchan) have been notorious for their tax avoidance practices, according to official data from Poland's Ministry of Finance. The issue here is therefore not to question Warsaw's tax sovereignty, notably since PiS understandably needs to safeguard sources of revenue for its generous social policy programmes. It is rather to highlight a simple mechanism in which regulatory instability may be limiting the interest shown by foreign investors in expanding their activities in Poland, as the feedback from French investors appears to indicate. The economic nationalism displayed by PiS – as exemplified by the process of »re-polonisation« of banks – may be another issue of concern.

However, while businesses may be able to adjust to new regulations, there is a far bigger issue – namely the rule of law in Poland – that risks obstructing business relations between France and Poland in the years to come, notably if the courts are perceived to lose their independence and effectiveness. The issue is not simply a bilateral one now that the European Commission and the European Court of Justice have taken action against the Polish government. However, it is no longer just a dispute between Warsaw and Brussels: when the Polish government openly defies ECJ rulings, as it is currently doing, this erodes the EU's legal order – and, as such, also the business of its member states' governments.<sup>36</sup> It is no longer a purely political matter either now that foreign investors can start to see legal uncertainty as an obstacle to doing business in Poland, as was already signalled by Jyrki Katainen when he was still the EU's Commissioner for Jobs, Growth, Investment and Competitiveness. It is still too early to fully grasp the practical implications of the ECJ's ruling of 19 November 2019 in which the court clarified the criteria that should be taken into account when evaluating whether the member state's judiciary is independent from political influence<sup>37</sup>. However, several of the bodies reformed or newly created by PiS (such as the Disciplinary Chamber of the Supreme Court, which was the subject of the ECJ's ruling) may find it difficult to fulfil these criteria, as was confirmed by the Supreme Court's ruling of 5 December 2019. Several legal experts have warned that, if these rulings are not respected by the Polish government, the independence, stability and reliability of Poland's judiciary system could be called into question, which – among other consequences – could ring alarm bells among foreign businesses.

<sup>34</sup> KPMG and CCI France Pologne, 25 lat polsko-francuskiego partnerstwa. Inwestycje francuskie w Polsce, 2019, p. 34, <https://en.calameo.com/read/00460114935e237ce7d31>, retrieved on 15 of January 2020.

<sup>35</sup> EU judges say Poland's retail tax is not state aid, in: Reuters, 16 May 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-eu-poland-retail/eu-judges-say-polands-retail-tax-is-not-state-aid-idUSKCN1SM16F>, retrieved on 15 January 2020.

<sup>36</sup> Pawel Zerka, Final call: Macron goes to Poland, ECFR Commentary, 30 January 2020, [https://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary\\_final\\_call\\_macron\\_goes\\_to\\_poland](https://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary_final_call_macron_goes_to_poland), retrieved on 21 February 2020.

<sup>37</sup> Court of Justice of the European Union, Press Release No 145/19, Luxembourg, 19 November 2019, <https://curia.europa.eu/jcms/upload/docs/application/pdf/2019-11/cp190145en.pdf>, retrieved on 15 January 2020.

## Cooperation on Europe's economic policies

Poland and France have acted as strategic partners on issues relating to the EU's key economic policies only on sporadic basis in the past decades. As a non-eurozone member and a huge beneficiary of the EU's structural funds, Warsaw has often been considered in Paris as a free-rider of European integration, benefitting from EU membership without taking full responsibility for EU affairs. It has also been seen as an economic rival, for instance with respect to access to EU funds (in the context of which France is the second-biggest net payer while Poland has been the largest beneficiary) or in offering products or services in the EU single market. The two countries' attitudes to the single market have also been very different. Poland has supported the liberalisation of services in the EU, seeing this as a necessary condition for the bloc to take full advantage of market integration. It has also expressed the view that it would be better to tackle social policies at the national rather than the European level. In turn, France has advocated the harmonisation of social standards across Europe, which has often led it, among other things, to denounce disparities in wages for services provided across borders as instances of »social dumping«. Nevertheless, these differences have not prevented the two countries from maintaining a regular dialogue on a long list of economic issues that form part of the EU's policy agenda. This occurred even in periods of strained political relations, such as at the beginning of 2000s, or from 2015 to the present.

This has sometimes simply been based on shared economic interests. For example, the two countries are currently expected to support one another in

maintaining a large budget for the Common Agricultural Policy in the EU's next multiannual financial framework – even if cooperation in this area has not always been straightforward. Ahead of the EU's 2004 enlargement, France considered Poland mostly as a rival in terms of access to agricultural funds. The two countries cooperated more closely in the negotiations for the 2007–2013 Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) in which both of them defended a generous 40% for CAP in the overall structure of the budget. Finally, strong mutual support was crucial for the agreement on the 2014–2020 MFF. Poland supported France on CAP, and France agreed to generous transfers to Poland from Cohesion Funds. Similarly, the governments of Poland and France share many common concerns in the EU's common external trade policy. For example, in the EU's negotiations with Mercosur, which were concluded in 2019 after two decades of talks, they both supported lower quotas for Latin American agricultural products.

More significant, however, are those instances of cooperation in which the nexus of interests was not obvious – and which could therefore serve as potential »ice breakers« in wider political relations. Competition policy, as well as, more broadly, industrial policy, are currently the leading case in point; they are also an area of increased activity within the framework of the Weimar Triangle. In July 2019, the economics ministers of Poland, France and Germany presented a joint outline for the modernisation of the EU's competition policy. The proposed changes would make mergers of European companies easier in the face of rising global competition<sup>38</sup>. The new international context – notably the so-called »weaponisation of trade« by the US, as well as rising competition from China – has surely created scope for such a joint initiative. However, the

<sup>38</sup> Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Energy, Modernising EU Competition Policy, 4 July 2019, <https://www.bmwi.de/Redaktion/DE/Downloads/M-O/modernising-eu-competition-policy.pdf>, retrieved on 15 January 2020.

fact that it was announced by the three members of the Weimar Triangle (and not by Germany and France alone, for example) was a surprise that gave rise to widespread speculation. The initiative may have helped Warsaw to demonstrate that it is a loyal European country, in spite of the uneasiness of some of its Europe partners about its close bilateral ties to Donald Trump. Poland may also be hoping, tactically, that it could temper protectionist temptations in the approach to the single market on the part of the other two partners, notably France. In turn, from the perspective of Paris and Berlin, getting Poland on board could serve the broader goal of unblocking the Weimar dialogue in many other areas.

There have been a few other instances of such unexpected cooperation between Poland and France on economic policies in the past few years. Under Mateusz Morawiecki's government, Poland has apparently become more aligned with France in the area of external trade policy, advocating greater assertiveness on the part of the EU vis-à-vis other global players, including the US or China. This reflects not only Warsaw's acknowledgement of the changes taking place in the international context, but also stems from the centralist undercurrents in the current government's economic policy. Both countries were also, until recently, among the strongest advocates of taxing the internet giants (known as the GAFAs companies), participating in the relevant talks at the EU and also OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) levels, and both being in favour of a global solution to this issue. At the same time, in February 2019, France changed its position on Nord Stream 2<sup>39</sup>, supporting Poland (against Germany) when amendments to the EU's Gas Directive were negotiated<sup>40</sup>. Last but not least,

while it is hard to talk about an alignment between Warsaw and Paris on energy and climate, the fact that, over the past few years, the two countries have maintained intense talks on these issues is far from insignificant.

Nevertheless, despite alignments or rapprochements here and there, Poland and France continue to hold diverging positions on various points of the EU's economic agenda – and prospects for their cooperation are therefore often limited. There are three major reasons for this.

Firstly, Poland is a non-eurozone member with no plan to adopt the common currency in the foreseeable future. As a result, Poland has not played any meaningful role in the EU's discussions on the eurozone budget<sup>41</sup> and economic governance more broadly, despite the importance of these issues for the direction of European integration in the years to come. Secondly, as already explained, the governments of Poland and France have held two different conceptions of the single market, largely as a result of differences in the socio-economic models of the two countries. Their opposing perspectives were laid bare when the revision of the posted workers directive was discussed in 2017 and 2018. On that occasion, Macron managed to win the argument. The revision was agreed by the European Council in April 2019, with just two countries – Poland and Hungary – voting against it. While the practical implications of that event were largely overblown by politicians<sup>42</sup> and the media, it confirmed the

others believe that this was just a temporary – and only tactical – change motivated by the French need to put pressure on Germany in other areas. Besides, we should note that the French group Engie (formerly GDF Suez) is among the project's financial investors

<sup>41</sup> Interestingly, Poland did not oppose the establishment of a budgetary instrument for convergence and competitiveness for the euro area in the context of the MFF when it was discussed at the European Council in December 2018. However, Warsaw is calling for this instrument to be restricted and governed by all 27 EU members, fearing that Paris may be tempted instead to build a new circle of European integration around it.

<sup>42</sup> See, for example, Emmanuel Macron's Sorbonne speech Initiative for

<sup>39</sup> France now against Nord Stream 2, in: Euractiv.com, 8 February 2019, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/energy/news/france-now-against-nord-stream-2/>, retrieved on 15 January 2020.

<sup>40</sup> Some observers considered this to be Paris' nod to the security concerns of Eastern European countries, which may therefore serve as another »glimmer of hope« in wider Franco-Polish relations. However, several

different approaches of Poland and France to economic integration in Europe and, consequently, the limits to their possible cooperation in EU economic affairs. At the same time, it was a bitter repetition of a story that had played out over a decade previously. In 2005, the so-called Bolkenstein directive on the liberalisation of services in the EU's internal market was met with a harsh reaction in France. It was in that context that right-wing leader Philippe de Villiers coined the term »Polish plumber«, although the directive (eventually adopted in 2006 in a truncated version) was also heavily criticised by the French left. The approach to these issues – and to the single market more broadly – remains an open question.

Thirdly, different strategic orientations tend to get in the way of economic cooperation between the two countries. France focuses on European strategic autonomy, whereas Poland, as was explained previously, privileges the transatlantic alliance and bilateral relations with the US. As a result, even if other EU members are clearly Poland's key economic partners, it is not always easy to understand whether Poland can be fully trusted on issues where its two identities – the European and the transatlantic one – face a potential clash with one another. Poland's abandonment of a plan to introduce digital services tax (as unveiled by Mike Pence during his visit to Warsaw in September 2019<sup>43</sup>) was one of a series of events that demonstrated just how far Warsaw is prepared to go in order to please its transatlantic ally. This event may also put a question mark over the significance of Warsaw's decision to join France and Germany in calling for a reformed EU competition policy, or of its interest in a more assertive

EU external trade policy. At the same time, geopolitics has an impact on Poland's purchasing decisions in strategic areas, such as energy, defence and aviation. The French have already experienced what that means in practice when Poland, on a number of occasions, chose US offers rather than French ones. As a consequence, despite Poland's current plans to modernise its military forces and its apparent renewed interest in developing nuclear power plants<sup>44</sup>, expectations that French investors could benefit from these opportunities are, at best, limited.

Europe in: Ouest France.fr, 26 September 2017, <http://international.blogs.ouest-france.fr/archive/2017/09/29/macron-sorbonne-verbatim-europe-18583.html>, retrieved on 25 January 2020.

<sup>43</sup> White House, Remarks by Vice President Pence and President Duda of Poland in Joint Press Conference, Warsaw, 2 September 2019, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-vice-president-pence-president-duda-poland-joint-press-conference-warsaw-poland/>, retrieved on 17 January 2020.

<sup>44</sup> During Andrzej Duda's official visit to Washington, DC in June 2019, Poland and the US signed a Memorandum of Understanding on nuclear energy cooperation. See PAP: Memorandum z USA o energii jądrowej może być zapowiedzią szerszej współpracy, in: Biznes Alert.pl, 13 June 2019, <http://biznesalert.pl/pap-memorandum-z-usa-o-energii-jadrowej-moze-byc-zapowiedzia-szerszej-wspolpracy/>, retrieved on 17 January 2020.

### III.

## Cultural and scientific relations: a long and productive tradition

Probably more resilient than political and economic relations, Franco-Polish cultural and scientific relations are alive and well. To celebrate the centenary in 2019 of the restoration of their diplomatic relations, the French and Polish authorities decided to launch a »French-Polish scientific year«<sup>45</sup>. This event can be interpreted as a strategy for keeping up appearances in a deteriorated diplomatic context, but it shows, above all, that the coldness of political relations does not prevent cooperation in other sectors, in particular in education, culture and science. Scientific and cultural cooperation between the two countries is long-standing and partly independent of the state level. These relationships, composed of diverse exchanges, regular transfers and joint projects by non-state actors (artists, researchers, intellectuals, etc.) are not limited to official »cultural diplomacy« as pursued by the countries' governments<sup>46</sup>.

Franco-Polish cultural relations have, historically, been a substitute for the easing of political relations, either because they were impossible owing to the absence of an independent Polish state, as was the case in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, or because they were frosty because of strategic or ideological differences between the two countries. The three partitions, which dismembered Poland in 1772, 1793 and 1795, and the failure of the Polish uprising against Russia in 1830, triggered the »Great Emigration« of young Poles from the intelligentsia<sup>47</sup>. This migration has fostered the circulation of knowledge between the two countries in the visual arts, music, literature and photography. In the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup>

century, a whole community of Polish artists and painters was formed in Paris. This emigration was favoured at the time by the particular status of the French language, considered to be a language of high culture much valued among the Polish aristocracy. At the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Count Michał Jan Borch of Livonia published the 36 volumes of his complete works in French, although Polish was his mother tongue. Later, at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the number of Polish artists visiting France increased, at a time when Paris was the nexus of transnational circulation between countries in Europe. At that time, France was one of the main countries hosting Polish students, such as the future winner of the Nobel Prize in Chemistry, Marie Skłodowska-Curie. The »Great Emigration« of the 19<sup>th</sup> century injected a great deal of fresh impetus into strong cultural relations between the two countries, which the political upheavals of the 20<sup>th</sup> century did not fundamentally call into question. The Polish bookshop and the Polish library in Paris, which appeared in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, are lasting traces of this, paving the way after 1945 to the initiatives of the Polish dissidence, which saw Paris as a refuge and an arena for anti-Communist opposition. Jerzy Giedroyc's »Kultura« Literary Institute, for example, was based in France, and many non-state actors, including film directors, actors, intellectuals, researchers and writers in particular, formed an »alternative diplomacy«<sup>48</sup> in the 1980s. Several historians, such as Witold Kula and, of course, Bronisław Geremek, maintained privileged links with their French colleagues Fernand Braudel and Jacques Le Goff. Furthermore, France also welcomed students and academics expelled from Poland following the anti-Semitic campaign in 1968.

<sup>45</sup> In this context and with regard to the 80th anniversary of the French research agency Centre national de la recherche scientifique (CNRS), it was noted that cooperation with Poland was among the most dynamic partnerships.

<sup>46</sup> Marie-Christine Kessler, Chapitre 15. La diplomatie culturelle, in: Thierry Balzacq (ed.), *Manuel de diplomatie*, 2018, Paris: Presses de Sciences Po, p. 263.

<sup>47</sup> For more on Polish migrants in France, see Janine Ponty, *Les Polonais en France: De Louis XV à nos jours*, Monaco: Le Rocher, 2008; Michael Esch, *Parallele Gesellschaften und soziale Räume. Osteuropäische Einwanderer in Paris 1880-1940*, Frankfurt/Main, 2012.

<sup>48</sup> According to Catherine Kozinski, *Les relations franco-polonaises dans les années Solidarité*, in: *Bulletin de l'Institut Pierre Renouvin*, <https://www.cairn.info/revue-bulletin-de-l-institut-pierre-renouvin-2009-1-page-71.htm>, retrieved on 16 January 2020.

The 1980s played an obvious role. After the proclamation of the state of war on 13 December 1981 and during Solidarity's period of underground, links between Polish and French civil societies were strengthened<sup>49</sup>. The School of Higher Studies in Social Sciences (EHESS) displayed intellectual and political solidarity with Polish dissidents<sup>50</sup>. This history of non-state relations and exchanges in the cultural and scientific field has resulted in improved mutual understanding. French historical research on modern and contemporary Poland, for example, underwent significant development during this period.

The collapse of Communism in 1989 therefore strengthened a cooperation that has become more balanced over time, and has concerned several sectors such as performing arts, museums, education, languages or academic research, at the national level as well as in the form of decentralized cooperation. Science is a particularly dynamic sector. Among other cooperative projects, EHESS set up a social science research training workshop with the Polish Academy of Sciences and the University of Warsaw, thereby consolidating academic links between France and Poland<sup>51</sup>. In the same field, a centre for French civilisation and French-speaking studies has been part of the University of Warsaw since 1958, while the Sorbonne hosted a centre of Polish culture in Paris. And since Poland's accession to the European Union in 2004, bilateral cooperation is now articulated at the European level. It has become just as normal for a French student to apply for a grant from the Polish government as the other way round, as Poland is increasingly touting the attractiveness of its

campuses. In order to build expertise on Europe in Central Europe and on the Eastern part of Europe, a College of Europe was opened in Natolin, in Warsaw, as a second campus of the College of Europe in Bruges. Courses there are taught in English and French. There are also 15 institutes and chairs of Romance philology, four schools of French law, 70 dual French-Polish diplomas and about 20 Erasmus Mundus Master's courses with a French-Polish core in Poland. The Polish Academy of Sciences is present in Paris and the two countries are cooperating in the field of hard sciences, and also in human and social sciences, in particular via the Centre for French Culture and Francophone Studies at the University of Warsaw and a Centre of Polish Culture at the Sorbonne University. These two universities are also part of a European university alliance (following the initiative of French President Macron proposed in his speech of 26 September 2017) which includes Heidelberg, Prague, Milan and Copenhagen. The Universities of Paris 1 and Jagiellonian Krakow have also joined forces in another European university alliance.

French-Polish cooperation, however, is not everywhere as pleasing as the above-mentioned aspects may indicate at first glance. Firstly, this is because the unwavering friendship between the two peoples as invoked by political leaders is, if not partly a myth, at least difficult to translate into reality. Overall, Poland is of little interest to the French public, and the French media rarely cover it, mostly when the news about the country is negative. By the same token, France has lost in the eyes of a large Polish public, and also among the intelligentsia, the attractiveness that it used to have in the past. Some authors are translated and read in Poland, but Polish academia now feeds mainly from several other sources, particularly from

<sup>49</sup> Marcin Frybes, *Dziękujemy za Solidarnosc*, Warsaw: Adam Mickiewicz Institute, 2005.

<sup>50</sup> Patrick Pleskot, *Intelektualni sasiedzi: Kontaktow historykow polskich ze srodowiskiem « Annales » 1945-1989*, Warszawa: IPN, 2010.

<sup>51</sup> Rose-Marie Lagrave, *Voyage aux pays d'une utopie déçue: Plaidoyer pour l'Europe centrale*, Paris: Presses universitaires de France (PUF), 1998. See also Bronisław Geremek/Marcin Frybes, *Kaléidoscope franco-polonais*, Éditions Noir sur Blanc, Warsaw: Adam Mickiewicz Institute, 2004.

English-speaking countries. The demonetisation of French prestige is taking place in an extremely competitive context, as cruelly illustrated by statistics on student mobility. According to UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) sources, France is the third-biggest host country for Polish students with regard to degree mobility (excluding Erasmus), after the UK and Germany, and the trend has been downward for the past ten years or so. This is due to the relatively low internationalisation of French universities, the limited number of courses in English and a scholarship policy in decline. In the end, according to the French Ministry of Higher Education and Research, France lost nearly 1,000 Polish students in ten years (only 2,314 students in 2017-18).

This development does not apply to the Erasmus + program, which is constantly growing. But with only 7.8% of Polish students, France ranks fifth among European countries hosting Erasmus students after Spain (17.4%), Germany (15.1%), Italy (10.3%) and Portugal (9.8%), and the increase in overall numbers, observed between 2005 and 2015, was slower than in the other four countries (see Table 1).

**Table 1.** Host country and country of origin of students benefiting from Erasmus + program in 2015 (Data: European Commission)

<b>Host country of Erasmus + students from Poland</b>			
Country		N	%
1	Spain	2,812	17.4
2	Germany	2,447	15.1
3	Italy	1,668	10.3
4	Portugal	1,579	9.8
<b>5</b>	<b>France</b>	<b>1,268</b>	<b>7.8</b>
Total		16,158	100

<b>Country of origin of Erasmus + students in Poland</b>			
Country		N	%
1	Turkey	3,804	26.0
2	Spain	3,314	22.7
<b>3</b>	<b>France</b>	<b>1,266</b>	<b>8.7</b>
4	Italy	1,261	8.6
5	Germany	1,086	7.4
Total		14,616	100

On the other hand, Poland has established itself as a popular destination for French Erasmus students. Their numbers more than doubled between 2006 and 2016, reaching the average of Polish students in France. This equilibrium is to be welcomed. But if France is the third-biggest country of origin of Erasmus students in Poland (8.7%), it only comes 18<sup>th</sup> in terms of non-Erasmus degree mobility. These developments are taking place against the backdrop of a massive decline in French language learning, with only 1.9% of Polish students taking French as a first foreign language course, far behind English (87.5%), German (9.4%), Russian (3%) and Spanish (2.6%)<sup>52</sup>. While it has not lost all of its prestige as an elite language, French has a reputation for being of very little use in the labour market.

Not surprisingly, misunderstandings multiply between the two countries, or even turn into frank disagreements. Cultural relations between France and Poland have been characterised by ambivalence for several decades, be it the impact of opinions on France's abandonment of Poland in 1939 or on the success of post-war French Communism; on the French side, on Polish anti-Semitism and on the country's authoritarianism in the interwar period among other repulsive views<sup>53</sup>. These old negative visions have fuelled some of the criticism that have emerged in recent years in the political sphere and which the currently ruling PiS has helped to feed in areas such the issue of abortion («Black Friday» movements), European values or the culture of remembrance concerning the Second World War and issues relating to the Shoah.

With their very long history, Franco-Polish cultural and scientific relations remain strong. If they are affected by political relations, their impact is limited. They may even represent a form of alternative diplomacy, which would not be limited, moreover, to the cultural diplomacy strategy undertaken by the countries' respective governments. Even if cultural relations have recently been dogged by forms of mutual misunderstanding, the governments would benefit from continuing their efforts to support these relations, regardless of the state of their political relations.

<sup>52</sup> Source of data: French embassy in Poland.

<sup>53</sup> Krzysztof Pomian, *La persistance des stéréotypes*, in: Collectif, *La France, la Pologne. Au-delà des stéréotypes*, Paris: Institut d'études slaves, 2004, pp. 19-23.

## IV. In lieu of a conclusion: some ideas for future constructive relations

Despite their apparent differences on **European, foreign and security policy** issues, France and Poland have a great deal in common. Their shared goal remains to preserve peace on European soil and to contain Russia at the EU's borders, but the means adopted to achieve this aim currently do not go in the same direction. Furthermore, their different attitudes towards the US and NATO have a decisive impact on bilateral, trilateral and also European cooperation formats. In the field of defence, France remains an inescapable partner – whose role will be further strengthened after Brexit – but an effective European foreign policy cannot exist if a country such as Poland is bypassed. France and Poland should therefore explore possibilities of cooperation on both approaches, the one that France – focusing on the CSDP – and Poland – maintaining strong transatlantic relations – give priority to. In the context of the Weimar Triangle, this neatly fits with German foreign policy goals which, for decades, have focused on both of these approaches that are, according to the German mindset, not mutually exclusive. In keeping with the French orientation towards European defence integration, Germany will serve as a key partner for Poland so as not to jeopardise the transatlantic dimension of Europe's security. In this context, confidence-building efforts in a Weimar Triangle context are particularly important.

- New reflections could, for example, be launched on the role of the Weimar Triangle battleground in Europe, drawing on past negative and positive experiences on European soil, and reflecting on the common or antagonistic positions of the three countries with respect to NATO.
- Negotiation strategies should definitely be revisited regarding strategic and military investments, both on the Polish and French side. It is not the first time that French strategic investments have fallen short of

their goal in Poland and also in other CEECs. Greater intercultural knowledge is urgently needed during strategic negotiations on both sides. The focus on lower-scale projects could also lead to confidence-building activities, proceeding to larger projects at a later stage, such as, in the sphere of aid policy, the transition from national technical (assistance) projects towards European ones already have.

- Bilateral and even trilateral cooperation at lower, less political levels should continue to be supported, be it between ministries and their respective administrations or between agencies active in the field of foreign policy and security, as well as European issues. Cooperation between regions could also improve the exchange of knowledge on sensitive issues, promote the circulation of policy ideas and widen exchange on the more cultural side of professional aspects.
- Regarding CFSP issues and common cooperation in PESCO (which has, to date, concentrated on armament issues), recent analyses in the military field suggest adopting pragmatic »transaction approaches« – as was already the case between France and Estonia – which can help to bridge differentiated threat perceptions and priorities, like combating terrorism, as well as other threats in the South (for France) and ensuring territorial protection from Russia in the East (for Poland)<sup>54</sup>.
- Cooperation within the framework of international organisations could also improve on issues of common interest, especially when specific formats favour cooperation, such as was the case in the United Nations in 2019 with the simultaneous Security Council membership of France, Germany and Poland (in permanent and rotating positions). These opportunities can open unique windows to act in concert and should be paid particularly close attention. Common

<sup>54</sup> Pierre Haroche, France, Poland and the Relaunch of EU Defense Cooperation, in: Barbara Jankowski /Amélie Zima, see footnote no.24, pp. 83-84.

reflection should, in particular, take place regarding issues related to NATO (such as securing the Mediterranean or supporting the African Union, in addition to the Enhanced Forward Presence on NATO's Eastern flank), the future of which have become an issue of debate.

- Finally, both countries should look for positive examples, despite the tendency to refer to negative events from the past (be it in the media or in private and professional conversations) in order to change their perception of one another and provide opportunities for new political openings. For example, the centenary of the Battle of Warsaw, during which both Polish and soldiers halted the advance of the Red Army in Europe, could become a good opportunity for Poland and France to engage in more open and benevolent discussions about security and defence cooperation in Europe.

Regarding **economic relations**, the question of Poland's accession to the eurozone is an »elephant in the room« in the reflections presented so far. Such an event would amount to a political decision *par excellence*, but would also have significant economic implications. The business community would no longer face transaction costs relating to the use of two different currencies. Moreover, the dynamic of Franco-Polish cooperation on the EU's economic policies would likely change radically as the two countries would become stakeholders in eurozone reform, participating in discussions about the eurozone budget, harmonisation of fiscal policies or social policy standards. Paris would no longer be able to accuse Warsaw easily of being a free-rider of European integration.

Under the current government, Poland is unlikely to join the eurozone anytime soon<sup>55</sup>, which may further limit Poland's influence in Europe in the years to come. Nevertheless, this does not mean that economic relations between the two countries cannot improve somewhat in the meantime. Warsaw and Paris should continue to seek innovative areas of possible alignment, as they did on the e-car battery alliance – in which Poland joined France and Germany in July 2019 – or on the EU's competition policy and industrial policy. Energy efficiency – an area in which a number of French companies are technologically advanced – could become another area of fruitful cooperation, as has been confirmed at the recent 1<sup>st</sup> Polish-French Future Industry Forum, hosted by ministers of economy Bruno Le Maire and Jadwiga Emilewicz during Macron's visit to Poland in February 2020. On that occasion, Le Maire invited Poland to join another Franco-German alliance, on hydrogen technology. Cooperation agreements have also been signed: on clean air (between the Polish government and Orange Polska) and the circular economy (between Air Liquide and Grupa Azoty). A few days before Macron's visit, the European Commission gave the green light for the French railways (SNCF) to advise Poland on the development of high-speed rail. Initiatives of this sort are a crucial part of nurturing the culture of cooperation in times of difficult relations at the highest political level.

The February 2020 visit has demonstrated that conciliatory gestures from both capitals are conceivable under the current leadership in Warsaw and Paris; however, the big question now is whether they can be followed up with concrete actions. On the one hand, the

<sup>55</sup> In April 2019, just ahead of the elections to the European Parliament, Mateusz Morawiecki reiterated that »adopting the euro would not be profitable for Poland today«. Mateusz Morawiecki: warto opierać gospodarkę na swojej walucie. Nie oplaca się dziś przyjmować euro, in: Polskie Radio 24.pl, 14 April 2019, <https://polskieradio24.pl/5/1222/Artykul/2294211,Mateusz-Morawiecki-warto-opierac-gospodarke-na-swojej-walucie-Nie-oplaca-sie-dzis-przyjmowac-euro>, retrieved on 17 January 2020.

Polish government should demonstrate that it treats foreign investors (including French ones) seriously and is interested in keeping them in the country as well as attracting new ones. That would require an earnest approach to regulatory stability and transparency – as well as to the independence of the judiciary more broadly. On that last point expectations are rather low, however, given the ongoing presidential campaign in Poland. Andrzej Duda signed the latest controversial bill, which makes Polish judges dangerously dependent on the executive, just hours after Macron's departure from Poland, which may have undone much of the progress achieved during that visit in terms of improved mutual trust. It remains to be seen to what extent Macron's *déclaration d'amour* constitutes a real opening to Poland, which would be justified by the context of Brexit and the EU's new geopolitical challenges or whether this is just a tactical move aimed at extending France's room for manoeuvre during the ongoing MFF negotiations in the EU. In other words, is this really about a strategic partnership, as the programme of cooperation signed by the two ministries of foreign affairs suggests, or is this just a question of re-establishing channels of communication – a much more modest goal? It is also unclear to what extent this bilateral rapprochement, as well as the revival of the Weimar Triangle, can really penetrate into the economic domain beyond the initiatives that have already been announced.

In its dealings with Warsaw, Paris would certainly have to maintain red lines on democracy and the rule of law, but this should not prevent it from seeking cooperation with its Central European partner in various areas of EU economic policy as well as in other forums (such as the UN and the OECD). In turn, Warsaw should acknowledge that France's power within the EU may be on the rise – given the cumulative effect of Brexit, the upcoming change of leadership in Germany, and the fact that Macron will remain president until at least 2022, if not 2027. This should also encourage it to demonstrate a

greater willingness to seek common ground – and more caution not to strain the mutual trust which is only now being rebuilt with the French partners.

However, at least two circumstances – the negotiations on the EU's new MFF and renewed discussions about the liberalisation of services – may, in the coming months and years, position the two capitals in opposing camps and, if their politicisation is not avoided, prompt them to reheat old stereotypes – to the detriment of both political rapprochement and strengthened economic cooperation. Franco-Polish relations may also easily get trapped in a wider divide that seems to be emerging in the EU at the present<sup>56</sup>, between countries of the South and the East (such as Poland) that continue to nurture a vision of the EU as predominantly an »economic convergence machine« and the EU's western member states that have largely turned their backs on such thinking. In turn, the West and North are increasingly focused on strengthening the EU's position in the global political and economic order, which implies the implementation of a new economic model (based on low emissions and new technologies) and a strong focus on the rule of law as a condition *sine qua non* for the bloc's internal cohesion. Discussions about rule of law conditionality, to be introduced in the next MFF, are currently underway. However, in the next few years, we could also witness further steps in the integration of the eurozone, which would widen the gap between its members and non-members. The priorities of the new European Commission – which Ursula von der Leyen has herself labelled a »geopolitical Commission« – are largely a reflection of this new way of thinking about the EU, which is welcome in Paris but, in many respects, can hardly be shared by the current government in Poland. Nevertheless, Paris and Warsaw should try to identify win-win solutions, especially in the economic domain. They should, for example, ensure that the EU's new focus on the transition to a low-emissions

<sup>56</sup> Szymon Ananicz, *Unia sprzecznych modeli*, Warsaw: Batory Foundation, 2019.

economy and the development of new technologies also benefits the »peripheral« member states, thereby supporting the convergence objective – rather than necessarily heading in an opposite direction. In order to expect that, however, Poland would first have to demonstrate more willingness to engage with the EU's green agenda.

As far as cultural and scientific issues are concerned, French and Polish states, governments and regions must continue to encourage relations and cooperation in the cultural, educational, academic and scientific fields, as they did, for example, by deciding to organise a Franco-Polish scientific year in 2019.

Bilateral, trilateral and European cooperative projects, such as the ones developing at the College of Europe in Natolin (Warsaw) and Viadrina European University on the German-Polish border in Frankfurt (Oder), should be further promoted by both governments. Bilateral relations can indeed be strengthened when they are part of a broader framework, in particular in the context of the Weimar Triangle.

The fact that several European university projects involve French and Polish institutions, which can strengthen the links between the two countries, is a welcome development. The European level is indeed an excellent vehicle for stimulating bilateral relations between member states.

We must, at long last, allow the development of relations not framed by the states, because it is also this second track diplomacy that strengthens Franco-Polish ties in the long term. At the decentralised level, for example at the regional or city level, there are many

twinning arrangements between Polish and French cities (274 by 1997), such as Lille with Wrocław and Krakow, Marseille with Gdańsk, and Nancy with Lublin. The creation of a Franco-Polish youth office, modelled on its Franco-German or German-Polish equivalent, could also strengthen ties between the youth of these countries. The Polish language should also be taught to a greater extent in France, as well as other Central and Eastern European languages. Multilingualism is enriched when all languages are treated equally.

Finally, the Weimar Triangle would benefit from becoming a reality in the cultural and academic context. While one of the European university alliances (4EU+) includes, among its initiators, an important university from all three countries (the Sorbonne, Heidelberg and Warsaw), other mechanisms, based on existing institutes (French research institutes abroad, German historical institutes and branches of the Polish Academy of Sciences abroad), could also be envisaged. This could enhance student and scientific mobility, and, in particular, give rise to new and interesting intellectual projects. Moreover, this would offer scope for focusing on matters of common history and reflecting on the state of our present-day relations for the benefit of all concerned.

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