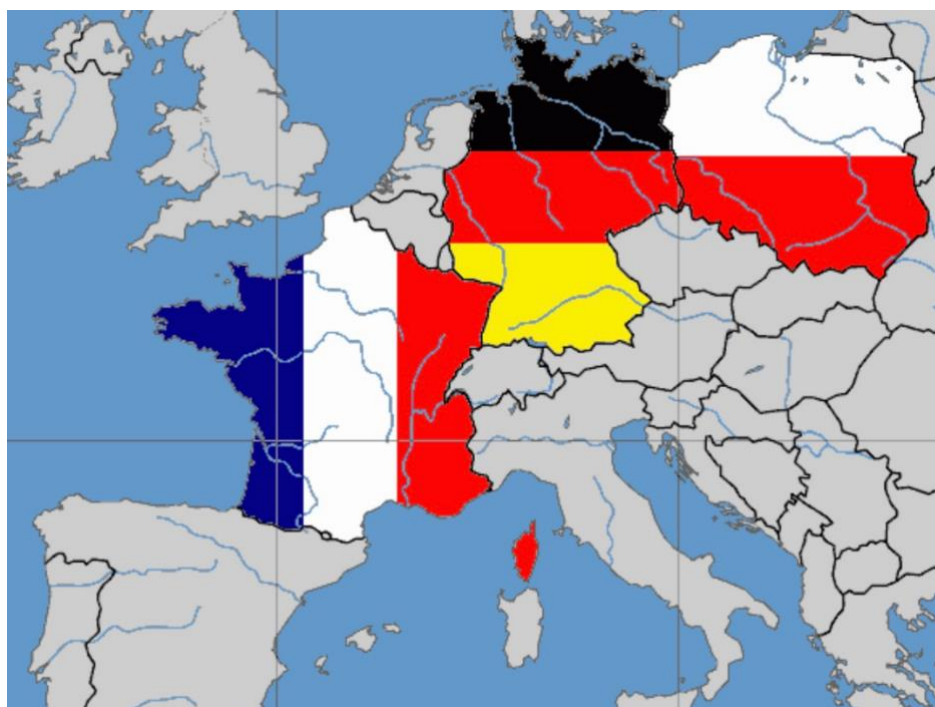


## Report

# THE WEIMAR TRIANGLE IN THE TEST OF WAR

## DEEPENING DEFENSE COOPERATION & RETHINKING OUR COMPLEMENTARITIES

Lessons of the tripartite France-Germany-Poland seminar  
organized by Synopia on March 28<sup>th</sup>, 2023, in Paris



June 2023

*In collaboration with*



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## SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

Objective: Strengthening the *Weimar Triangle* format, a true space for dialogue, to maintain the spirit of mutual understanding and openness to compromise.

1. Organizing meetings between the ministries concerned and the military industrial companies of the three countries to set up a reliable, long-term policy concerning industrial purchases and innovation fields, including precise specifications.
2. Going further on the use of the European instruments, especially with the European Defense Agency, to advance in *the Capability, Armaments & Technology division* on the development of cyber defense capabilities or satellite communications.
3. Agreeing on a common framework for the *Weimar Triangle* on areas of European and international procurement preferences, to harmonize the conduct of military spending.
4. Facilitating transversality and interoperability of national programs by launching a thorough tripartite study on the projects developed without interconnection. The objective is to simplify the procedures and regulations between the countries and eventually at the European level.
5. Instituting meetings between the staffs and political representatives of the member countries of the *Weimar Triangle* prior to EU or NATO meetings/summits, in order to agree on common positions as much as possible.
6. Multiplying exchanges of military personnel and civil servants from the three countries, in order to encourage interculturality and promote transfers of skills that benefit everyone. This would also increase interoperability between the national armies.
7. Defining a decision-making model between the three *Weimar Triangle* states for decisions concerning equipment purchases and identify a consensual definition of key concepts that today remain subject to varied interpretations, such as strategic autonomy or European sovereignty.

## INTRODUCTION

The invasion of Ukraine, which began on 24 February 2022, served as a wake-up call in Europe. It marked a break in the political and military strategies of the member states, which now seem to be aware of the fragility of the lasting peace, including in Europe, and are strengthening their defense tools. The countries of the *Weimar Triangle* - France, Germany, and Poland - are among those who are now at the forefront of this strategic break. Their convergence on security and defense issues is growing, despite an often-different vision of the concept of strategic autonomy, the point of convergence for industry, politics, or the assessment of the international situation.

On March 28, 2023, Synopia, in collaboration with the German Genshagen Foundation, GICAT and GIFAS, organized a tripartite reflection seminar in Paris, attended by French, German and Polish personalities: political representatives, manufacturers, think tanks and civil society. This note summarizes the main points of the discussions and provides additional insights to answer the question: how can we deepen cooperation in the field of defense and rethink our complementarities?

### I. THE WEIMAR TRIANGLE: TOWARDS A NEW CONVERGENCE OF INTERESTS

#### a. A long-standing cooperation, strengthened by the European framework

Political relations within the *Weimar Triangle*, especially bilateral ones, are historically strong. The Franco-German couple became stronger after the 1963 Élysée Treaty, which institutionalized meetings between the ministers of the two countries. France and Germany are thus at the origin of many joint projects in the European context. The Franco-German exchanges of civil servants, the establishment of a Franco-German Chamber of Commerce and Industry, and the creation of the Franco-German Parliamentary Assembly are only a sample of them.

For their part, France and Poland share a long-standing relationship of friendship. Following the collapse of the USSR, deepening bilateral ties has been a priority. This closeness was further enhanced in 2020 with the Franco-Polish Declaration on Cooperation in European Affairs, which focuses on cyber security and industrial cooperation<sup>1</sup>.

Germany and Poland, on the other hand, have a relationship based on sustained economic and commercial exchanges, as well as institutionalized cross-border cooperation. Indeed, at the regional level, the Oder Partnership brings together, since 2006 in the framework of an informal network, German Länder and Polish cities<sup>2</sup>. This network aims to strengthen the territorial and political integration of the German-Polish cross-border area. The cooperation between cross-border urban communities is also strengthened in many twinning such as the Województwo Lubuskie – Brandenburgia program<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> On February 3rd, 2020, the French and Polish presidents Emmanuel Macron and Andrzej Duda met to renew the Strategic collaboration between the countries. This partnership precludes a framework agreement to deepen the cooperation in numerous strategic areas: diplomacy and defense, economy and trade, digital and innovation, industry and transportations, infrastructures and energy, climate and environment, education and research, integration and neighborhood policies in the EU, etc.

<sup>2</sup> Länder of Berlin, Brandenburg, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, and Saxony, the voivodeships of Wielkopolska, West Pomerania, Lower Silesia, and Lubuskie, as well as the Polish cities of Szczecin, Gorzów Wielkopolski, Zielona Góra, and Wrocław.

<sup>3</sup> The main objective of this program is the joint development of the territory and the reduction of "border" effects. It aims to promote the sustainable development and economic competitiveness of the border territory through an integrated cross-border approach. More specifically, it aims to improve local infrastructure and the environmental situation, as well as to support cross-border economic development, promoting economic links within the scientific community, and by supporting SMEs in cross-border marketing actions.

The creation of the *Weimar Triangle* on August 28, 1991 corresponds to the will of the three countries to go beyond mere bilateral cooperation<sup>4</sup>. The French, German and Polish heads of state therefore undertook to meet, as soon as the USSR fell, in order to encourage Polish economic recovery and facilitate its integration into the European Union. In addition, the constitution of the *Weimar Triangle* aimed to promote German-Polish reconciliation, which had been undermined during the Soviet occupation. In 2004, Poland officially joined the EU, thus demonstrating that the objectives set when the Triangle was created thirteen years earlier have been achieved. However, informal meetings between ministers and heads of state of the three countries have continued, even after 2004, to maintain a privileged space for dialogue. Synopia can only emphasize the importance of dialogue in a disrupted geopolitical context, where the power balance is unsettled.

### **b. An effective industrial cooperation**

Numerous military programs have been developed in close collaboration between industrialists, particularly in the automotive sector, for example through the technological and industrial partnership between Renault-Nissan and Daimler in 2010. These cooperative ventures are mainly between carmakers and equipment manufacturers, as in the Bosch and PSA partnership of 2008 on hybrid diesel technology.

In the aeronautics sector, cooperation is even more advanced. The Airbus group is a Franco-German manufacturer with operations in France, Germany, and Spain, and is active in both civil and military aviation. The A400M military aircraft is a product of this successful cooperation, as is the Eurofighter Typhoon. The Airbus Group is also an important global player in the space sector, for example with its Ariane launchers and the M51 ballistic missiles. Other companies base their business model and success on the structure of an industrial Europe. Thales, MBDA, Safran and many others benefit from this European stature, which is the basis for winning international markets.

These examples demonstrate the usefulness of the informal framework created by the *Weimar Triangle* in deepening industrial cooperation between the three countries. Moreover, their common membership of the EU favors a culture of dialogue and a habit of compromise between national interests. Industrial cooperation between France, Germany and Poland has thus been greatly facilitated by the implementation of programs at the European level - the stated objective in recent years being to strengthen the European defense industrial and technological base. Thus, cooperation instruments designed at the European level provide a framework for most of the projects shared by the three countries.

The OCCAr<sup>5</sup>, for example, allows for the association of states by contracting on behalf of governments for programs requiring interstate cooperation. The European Union is also seeking to facilitate the financing of the material needs of national armies through joint ventures. The EDIRPA tool<sup>6</sup> launched in 2023, which opens a common fund for project financing, is currently in the process of being adopted by the European Parliament.

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<sup>4</sup> On August 28, 1991, the French, Polish and German foreign ministers met in Weimar to create the Weimar Triangle. Their ambition was to identify the fundamental common interests of the three countries for the future of Europe and to develop cross-border cooperation. In a joint declaration, the ministers reaffirmed the major responsibility of the three countries in the European integration process.

<sup>5</sup> *The Organisation for Joint Armament Cooperation* (OCCAr) is an intergovernmental organization in Europe that aims to facilitate the collaborative management of major armament programs. In 2020, OCCAr brings together six member countries: France, Germany, the United Kingdom, Italy, Belgium and Spain.

<sup>6</sup> *The European Defense Industry Reinforcement through Common Procurement Act* (EDIRPA) is a tool to help reconstitute stocks. According to its founding text, the implementation of this tool is based on two essential conditions: joint procurement (which today means procurement by a minimum of three member states) of products, and the orientation of the 500 million euros planned for EDIRPA towards European industry.

In addition to these institutional instruments set up by the European Union, there have also been mergers between major manufacturers. The European Eurodrone project, re-launched in 2022 and led by Airbus, is the result of cooperation between Germany, France, Italy, and Spain. The COBRA project<sup>7</sup> has been operational since 2005. The SCAF project<sup>8</sup>, which includes France, Germany, and Spain, is also an example of Franco-German industrial cooperation and its openness to other countries. Tripartite cooperation also exists within multinational projects, such as the ESSOR project<sup>9</sup>: the regular progress of the program led by France, Germany, Italy, Poland, Spain, and Finland demonstrates that industrial cooperation within *the Weimar Triangle* and beyond, is indeed possible.<sup>10</sup>

### c. A new impetus for convergence with the war in Ukraine

Due to the increase in tensions between Ukraine and Russia since 2014, the *Weimar Triangle* meetings have increased. The leaders of the three countries met in 2014 during the invasion of Crimea, and again in February 2022 just before the Russian aggression, to present common positions. On the sidelines of the last Munich Security Conference, on 17 February 2023, the three heads of state presented a joint declaration defining the terms of an inter-state coordination on economic and defense industry issues to protect Europe. Among other subjects, they affirmed their desire to create a European defense system that is "constitutive and not competitive" with NATO, and to strengthen their joint investments in the eastern flank of the Alliance<sup>11</sup>.

In addition to this convergence of diplomatic positions, the three countries are seeking to strengthen their defense tools by boosting investment in the arms industry:

- On the French side, the 2024-2030 Military Programming Law (LPM) announces a budget of €413 billion in spending over seven years to transform the various army corps, an increase of €200 billion over the previous LPM.
- Germany has made an unprecedented strategic shift. The government and the Bundestag have agreed to invest an additional 100 billion euros in the Bundeswehr<sup>12</sup>. This *ZeitenWende* ("turning point") represents a significant policy shift for a country that has traditionally held back on its diplomacy, and generally advocates for de-escalation or political neutrality. Another striking illustration of this strategic shift is the delivery of Leopard tanks to Ukraine in early 2023.
- For its part, Warsaw has announced that its defense budget will increase from 2.4% of the GDP to 5%, with a target of 300,000 soldiers by 2035 (compared with 150,000 today). In this sense, Polish Defense Minister Mariusz Błaszczak promised in July 2022 that his country would hold "the most powerful ground forces in Europe". By then, the country plans to spend 524 billion zlotys (112 billion euros) on its military. By 2023, total military spending could reach 138 billion zlotys (about 29 billion euros), which is 80 billion zlotys more than in 2022.

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<sup>7</sup> The COunter Battery Radar (COBRA) is a long-range combat radar created by a Franco-German cooperation in OCCAR.

<sup>8</sup> The Future Air Combat System (FACS) is a European project for a set of interconnected air weapons systems involving France, Germany and Spain. The industrial groups involved include Dassault and Airbus Defence and Space.

<sup>9</sup> The European Secure Software-defined Radio (ESSOR). Launched in 2009, it is a permanent structured cooperation project of the European Union for the development of common European technologies for the design of a software-defined radio architecture with a high-speed waveform for secure military uses, in order to ensure interoperability and security of voice and data communications between European Union forces in joint operations on various platforms.

<sup>10</sup> It should be noted that all these projects are undertaken within the framework of the OCCAR.

<sup>11</sup> Joint statement by French President Emmanuel Macron, Polish President Andrzej Duda and German Chancellor Olaf Scholz of February 17, 2023.

<sup>12</sup> This provision is mentioned, and therefore limited, by the German Basic Law in Article 87. Its use is provided for only in exceptional cases; its use is the sine qua non of a break in German military and strategic policy.

These new national strategies are part of a European strategy that has evolved considerably after the beginning of the war in Ukraine, particularly in terms of its assessment of the weapon production. Thus, the EU, through the voice of the President of the Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, and European Commissioner Thierry Breton, is seeking to stimulate its industrial fabric, particularly in the arms industry. In May 2023, the Commission presented a plan to increase the production capacity of the European ammunition industry to over one million rounds per year.

#### **d. Public support for the European defense effort**

All these developments would have been difficult to consider before the war in Ukraine. Indeed, national public opinion, as well as the economic situation, were not in favor of increased spending in the defense sector. However, the outbreak of the conflict in February 2022 created a real shift in public opinion, as well as in the EU and its member states.

Opinion polls show a convergence on the military issue from February 2022 onwards. Indeed, public opinion in each of the countries said they were satisfied with the decisions taken to support Ukraine, whether they were national or European<sup>13</sup>. In contrast to their previous positions, 85% of Poles approve of European choices (78% for the French, 73% for the Germans). In Germany, between 2021 and 2022, there is a 30% increase in support for increased military spending, bringing the total to 69% support by the end of 2022. This significant jump can also be seen in Poland, with an increase from 34% to 59% approval. In France, support for increased military spending has risen from 33% to 45% of the population.

The consensus of public opinion facilitates the strategic consensus within the Weimar Triangle, which is reflected in several positions:

- All three states agree that NATO is an important element of European defense.
- The EU is also recognized as a major strategic actor in the field of defense.
- The two entities (NATO, EU) are thus perceived as inseparable - which is also reflected in the polls, as 86% of Poles believe that the EU is an important actor for regional security and 91% also affirm the primary role of NATO. This balance is also found in Germany and France.

**A consensus thus seems to be gradually emerging on the need to develop a European strategy that complements the strategy of the North Atlantic Alliance.**

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<sup>13</sup> These surveys were conducted by Kantar Public in 2022.

## II. STRUCTURAL OPPOSITIONS, BUT SOURCES OF NEW OPPORTUNITIES

### a. Structural strategic divergences

From the point of view of the defense industry, cooperation is not an obvious decision. Despite the gains that can be made by pooling resources, partnerships and agreements are difficult to create and, subsequently, to implement. Indeed, the large groups are caught up in the game of international competition, and seek to preserve their advantages, both commercial and technological, over their competitors. Thus, cooperation, even though it has been defined as strategic by the States, encounters numerous obstacles and recurrent blocking situations, particularly about the sharing of patents and technologies. This is what led, for example, to the delay of the FCAS project, the Future Combat Air System<sup>14</sup>.

These differences can also be found at the level of individual states, especially since national industrial strategies are the result of a political and military culture and a singular historical heritage, specific to each country:

- In the case of France, a military and nuclear power on a global scale and a member of the United Nations Security Council, its strategy is largely based on the influence of its military and industrial knowledge. It also defends the position of a "powerful Europe" that would not only be an economic giant, but also a major diplomatic actor capable of ensuring its own defense, which presupposes its backing by a credible military capability. France is therefore developing a pro-European discourse and putting the emphasis back on its own military strength.
- Germany, for its part, has inscribed its national defense strategy in its membership of NATO, which is itself enshrined in the German Basic Law<sup>15</sup>. The current challenge for political actors is therefore to overcome the historical strategic restraint, and to assert a national military capability on the international scene, both within NATO and within a Europe of defense.
- Meanwhile, Poland has been campaigning since 2008<sup>16</sup> on the international and European scene for the creation of an effective counterweight to the threat posed by Russia to the eastern territories of Europe. The Polish military institution is defined as an indispensable force for the country, constitutive of its independence and sovereignty. This perspective is translated by the inclusion of the army, its mandate and objectives, in the Polish Constitution.

Three strategic visions that can be seen as competing within the *Weimar Triangle* are thus expressed:

- A vision defending strategic autonomy based on industrial capacity and regional military resources (France).
- A vision that seeks to share the burden of regional defense with a powerful and recognized international organization, NATO, to ensure the presence of the American ally. It is a vision that also asks to temporize the tensions and the bellicose tendencies of the different parties (Germany).
- A vision that wants to put an end to Russia's political, economic, and commercial influence in Europe, and that makes it a strategic objective. Here again, NATO membership is an integral part of the strategy (Poland).

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<sup>14</sup> In this case, Dassault wanted to protect its strategic patents, especially those concerning flight controls and aircraft stealth. This issue was finally resolved, and the project moved into a first development phase. But this example shows the difficulties in industrial cooperation: blockages can, in the long term, lead to delays in orders and thus reduce the attractiveness of defense industries at all levels.

<sup>15</sup> Article 87a of the Basic Law, "For the purpose of strengthening the ability to assume responsibilities within the Atlantic Alliance and the defense capability, the Federation may establish a trust fund with the authorization to issue one-time loans of up to 100 billion euros. This shows that the German army is only envisaged within the framework of NATO.

<sup>16</sup> Since the Russian attacks in Georgia in 2008, Polish discourse has sought to draw attention to the Russian threat in Europe.



At the heart of these visions are also different sensitivities about the threat posed by Russia. In France, 60 % of the population believe that the war in Ukraine may present a security risk for the national territory. In Poland, this percentage rises to 90 %. In Germany, the results reveal a split between the east and west of the country, with a difference of 26 percentage points between the Länder<sup>17</sup>. Thus, because of its recent history, the east of the country perceives the Russian threat as more tangible than the western Länder.

Therefore, territorial proximity, as well as historical experiences, influence the countries' risk assessment and their external strategy in the short and long term. In concrete terms, these differences are reflected in divergent visions of how the conflict should end: Poland wants Russia to be completely defeated, while France wants to focus on a post-conflict situation in which Russia remains an economic interlocutor, following a vision of a regional power balance with the United States and China.

Moreover, another element contributes to these strategic divergences: the decision-making processes of the three countries are very different, which has a direct impact on the way industrial policies in the field of defense are decided, such as the purchase or export of military equipment.

- In France, the President of the Republic is the Head of the Armed Forces and, in constitutional practice, the head of diplomacy. While he takes advice, he decides alone.
- In Poland, the responsibility for foreign affairs is divided between the Prime Minister and the President of the Republic. Nevertheless, responsibility for the armed forces is centralized around the president.
- In contrast, in Germany, the federal process means that strategic decisions are generally subject to a vote in the Bundestag, for procurement and engagement of the forces. Any strategic decision is thus the result of a permanent internal compromise, before any bilateral or regional compromise.

Because of the differences in decision-making models, the speed of decision and the flexibility of the position defended at the interstate level vary from one country to another. **The vagueness surrounding the identity of the relevant interlocutors in each state and the differences in the competencies of the different entities fuel misunderstandings and blockages, both at the strategic level and in industrial partnerships.**

Finally, legal barriers at the national level are also an obstacle to sustainable international cooperation. One of these legal barriers is, for example, the laws inspired by the American ITAR regulation<sup>18</sup>, where any weapon system containing a certain percentage of foreign components can be banned from export to a third country.

These national strategic differences are also obstacles to a common strategic direction at the regional level. For example, remilitarization policies prioritize certain sectors independently of the strategic recommendations issued by the European Union. Indeed, the EU has defined as priority areas in the Strategic Compass<sup>19</sup> the mastery of cyberspace, as well as intelligence. This European strategic orientation defined and adopted in 2022 aims to encourage national investments in these sectors. The objective is to create European expertise and maintain strategic sovereignty. However, Germany, France and Poland have defined other priorities in their military investments. Thus, France favors investment in its nuclear program and in advanced military technologies, while Germany and Poland give preference to the purchase of immediately operational military equipment from non-European countries such as the United States or South Korea, which have such equipment.

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<sup>17</sup> These surveys were conducted by Kantar Public in 2022.

<sup>18</sup> *International Traffic in Arms Regulations, an American regulation that applies to all items produced on American soil.*

<sup>19</sup> The Strategic Compass is a plan of the European Union adopted in March 2022 to strengthen its security and defense policy by 2030. It aims to make the European Union a stronger and more capable guarantor of security. It provides for four components: act, secure, invest and cooperate.

The proportion of military equipment imported into Europe raises questions about European strategic independence. Indeed, repeated purchases from the American arsenal presuppose a certain dependence, and therefore a permanent strategic alignment between the American, Polish and German visions. While this hypothesis remains coherent, it is also important to think about alternatives if the strategic interest of the United States turns away from the European continent, as was the case under the presidency of Barack Obama and then that of Donald Trump. Moreover, the United States' own interests have always been at the center of its foreign policy, whether industrial, banking or commercial<sup>20</sup>.

These differences over the vision of European power and its strategic autonomy are the subject of recurrent debates over the form that the common security architecture in Europe should take, and over the concept of strategic autonomy defended by France. While for the French, this concept refers to a notion of independence, the Germans and Poles understand it more as a desire to diversify partnerships. This second interpretation is the most widely shared in Europe. **Thus, it is the balance between the involvement of Europeans in the framework of NATO and their investment in a Europe of defense that is sought today.**

#### **b. New opportunities**

To respond to the challenges of autonomy raised by the excessive dependence of Europeans on external powers, a common European initiative remains the solution, especially since **there is a real complementarity of military needs within the *Weimar Triangle*.**

At the European level, the Strategic Compass highlights areas where cooperation would allow the pooling of innovations in the space, cyber, maritime and intelligence sectors. This would make national industries more competitive internationally and increase the strategic weight of the three states in Europe and in the world. In the field of cybersecurity, for example, joint initiatives are already being promoted between Poland and France as a result of the bilateral cooperation agreement of 2020<sup>21</sup>. Poland's recent order for French intelligence satellites is an illustration of this.

In addition to the objectives of the Compass, and by analyzing the needs of the three countries in the military field, **joint personnel training programs could be envisaged between the armies to strengthen the capabilities of each. This would also have the advantage of taking a step towards interoperability and/or interoperation.**

Beyond the complementarity of needs, *the Weimar Triangle* stands out in the European security architecture as a group with complementary resources:

- France is a military power with nuclear weapons. Its experience in external operations provides a real expertise in strategic operational planning.
- Poland's geographical position and its aura among the countries of Central and Eastern Europe give it legitimacy for action and strategic positioning. Thus, for the Ukrainians, Poland appears to be a more reliable ally than France. Its rapid military development and alliance network also offer new strategic opportunities.
- Germany's political weight in the European Union and its economic weight in world trade make the country a strategic force of influence on a global and European scale.

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<sup>20</sup> This is what Jimmy Carter recalled in his famous speech at the opening of the "Kennedy archives" in 1979.

<sup>21</sup> The declaration of cooperation motivated a strengthening of Franco-Polish cooperation in cybersecurity, based on their joint support for the Paris Appeal for Confidence and Security in Cyberspace and the NATO Cyber Defence Commitment, with the aim of fostering better coordination at the European level against cyber attacks.

## CONCLUSION

The *Weimar Triangle* constitutes a European "reduced model": it brings together the various sub-regional groupings within Europe. United, it is a reliable interlocutor, representing the European position or the position of the European member states of NATO vis-à-vis industrialists and foreign powers.

Thus, France, Germany and Poland together hold a real power of influence over their European neighbors, as well as on the international scene. If France and Germany, when they manage to get along, are often a driving force in Europe, Poland's involvement allows the implementation of more voluntary policies that are better accepted by European territories, both in the East and in the North.

The Polish presence also consolidates the weight of the alliance in terms of defense. Thus, the *Weimar Triangle* represents approximately 26.6% of military spending in Europe<sup>22</sup>. Therefore, a joint initiative in favor of a better capability coherence and a concerted policy in the field of defense industrial and technological affairs would give birth to a credible embryo of European defense.

Launched by France, Germany and Poland, this initiative would be likely to create an incentive for other EU Member States to join the common effort towards greater European strategic autonomy.

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<sup>22</sup> In 2022, according to SIPRI, military expenditure amounted to \$17.81 billion in Poland, \$54 billion in France and \$56 billion in Germany, for a total expenditure in Europe of \$480 billion. Calculating the sum of the expenditures of the Triangle countries in relation to European expenditures, we obtain approximately 26.62%.

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