



2nd December 2020

# France, Germany and the future of democracy in Europe

#FrancoGermanDialogue

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

While constituting a core principle of the European Union, democracy finds itself under pressure. The rise of populist parties, the disregard of the rule of law and the resulting democratic backsliding in some member states as well as the COVID-19 pandemic and its repercussions on civil liberties are a stress test for European democracies. The current challenges raise fundamental questions: What does democracy mean in 2020? And **how can we imagine the future of democracy in France, Germany and Europe?**

These questions were discussed in depth during a **virtual panel** discussion entitled **France, Germany and the future of democracy in Europe**. It featured high-ranking representatives from France and Germany such as **Christophe Arend** (Co-President of the Franco-German Parliamentary Assembly, Member of the French Assemblée Nationale), **Franziska Brantner** (Member of the German Bundestag), **Ellen Ehni** (TV chief editor of WDR), **Gaëtane Ricard-Nihoul** (Deputy Head of the Citizens' dialogues Unit of the European Commission) and was **moderated by Thu Nguyen** (Policy fellow, Jacques Delors Centre). The panel discussion was the closing event of the Pariser Platz Conference, which took place online **on 1 and 2 December 2020** and which is part of **the Franco-German Dialogue Series funded by the Federal Foreign Office**.

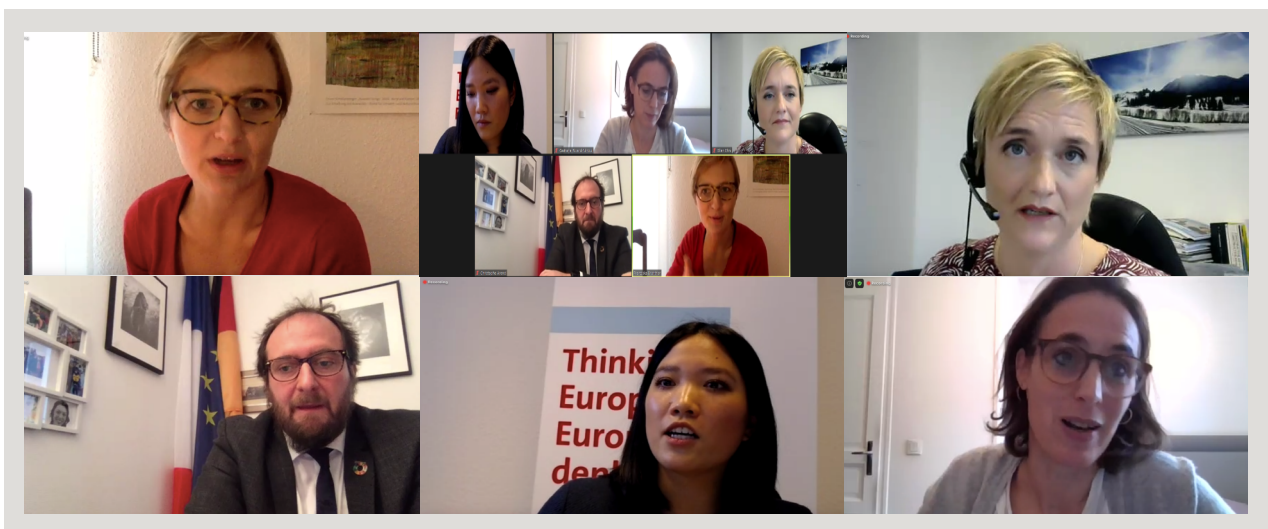
The discussion started with an assessment of the current situation both in France and in Germany, with a particular focus on the **overall mood of French and German citizens**. Both countries have seen the rise of populist contestation movements, with the Gilets Jaunes on one side and the Querdenker on the other, which shows the need for greater transparency and a renewed legitimisation of our democracies. Moreover, the right-wing Alternative für Deutschland and Rassemblement National are also gaining in influence, which will have repercussions on both the German federal election in 2021 and the French presidential election in 2022. Hence, transparent and **inclusive debates are more than ever needed in Europe**, which take into account new digital platforms of dialogue.

Coupled with contestations of the rule of law at the European level coming from Hungary and Poland, it is crucial to **develop a new discourse and transparently justify political decisions**. Clarity on the framing and on the strategies pursued are central for greater legitimacy. In this regard, **the Franco-German tandem can play an important role by finding common priorities**. Another topic of great concern will be the French presidential elections which will take place in 2022. With the multiple crisis the French government is currently facing, with, on the one hand, the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, and, on the other, questions of internal security with the highly controversial law on global security, the probability of a candidate of the Rassemblement National competing in the second round of elections does not seem improbable anymore.

In this regard, there is overall consensus on the necessity of **defining common priorities, both at the European as well as at the French and German level**. More clarity in debates and especially in the media, together with more **participatory and inclusive approaches** are considered key for a successful continuation. One such solution is the coming Conference on the Future of Europe, which tries to reach those who are generally less involved in political debates. It is designed as a deliberative participatory instrument, although its exact format has yet to be decided. Innovative solutions are needed, which involve citizens to a greater extent and allow for more controversial debates.

While on the one hand, crucial steps towards more inclusivity and great examples of European cooperation have been realized during the past months, there seems to be a **growing questioning of European democracy** on the other hand. Such a criticism is often the result of the perceived decoupling between politics and “the people”, requiring further participation and transparency. Nevertheless, one should recognize that this unique **European transnational democracy could also prove to be a source of unprecedented innovation**, allowing for new formats without ever losing sight of our core values. Finally, both **the French and the German Council presidencies** should be used to speak up for those values and to find ways to regain the trust of European citizens.

The public event was finally closed by questions from the public on the topics discussed between the speakers. Once again, the **role of the Franco-German couple was underlined and European values put at the forefront** of any continuation. If the future of democracy in Europe is to be preserved, it not only needs all its Member States, but it also needs all its citizens.



# PROGRAMME

## Panel: France, Germany and the future of democracy in Europe (1:00 –2:15 pm)

The panel discussion went beyond the democratic challenges of today and looked into the future. On the member state level, the spotlight was on the upcoming German federal election in 2021 and the French presidential election in 2022 and their implications also for the EU as a whole. On the European level, expectations of the Conference on the Future of Europe were discussed. Building on citizens' dialogue and consultations, the Conference will provide a platform for citizens and stakeholders to discuss the future of Europe. The Conference can give an important impulse to European democracy – though current COVID-19 restrictions require to develop new innovative forms of citizens' involvement.

This event brought together high-ranking representatives from France and Germany and was held online via Zoom. It is part of the Franco-German Dialogue Series funded by the Federal Foreign Office.

### Discussion with high-level experts:

- Christophe Arend (Co-President of the Franco-German Parliamentary Assembly)
- Franziska Brantner (Spokeswoman for European Politics of the Greens, German Bundestag)
- Ellen Ehni (TV chief editor of Westdeutscher Rundfunk)



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