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Leadership by Credibility
Franco-German Visions
of the Future of the Union

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Franco-German Visions of the Future of the Union

I. Europe at the beginning of a new decade

The first decade of the 21st century has just come to an end. Without having to wait for future findings and interpretations by political scientists, political actors or even historians, one can surely say that this first decade was also a rather turbulent one. On a global scale, the most outstanding developments are linked to the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001, military interventions in Afghanistan and in Iraq and the international financial and economic crisis. In addition, one must also include – from a European perspective – the struggles to renew the treaties of the European Union, the obstacles and challenges to enlarging the Union, a continuing terrorist threat as evidenced in Madrid and in London, and the particular European implications of the financial and economic crisis, culminating in the crisis of the Euro.

Despite this first-glance negative assessment, the first ten years of the 21st century need not be considered a “lost decade” for Europe – if the European Union and its member states draw the right conclusions from these developments, face the challenges of the years to come as opposed to averting them and by pro-actively responding to these challenges.

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II. Four possible futures

The Bavarian comedian Karl Valentin allegedly once declared that, in the past, even the future looked better. Although the turbulent times Europe is currently going through might serve as proof for such an assessment, it should not be forgotten, though, that European integration has already come a very long way: Over sixty years of integration are largely responsible for the abolishment of war between the countries involved, the solidification of democratic institutions and procedures, a substantial and lasting increase in prosperity, for instance, achievements that nowadays are more or less taken for granted. Although the successes of the past can serve as inspiration, with respect to the turbulent years already passed and enormous challenges still ahead, Europeans cannot afford to lean back and be content with what they have accomplished as this is constantly being challenged. They rather need to find – likely new and innovative – ways to navigate through the current shallow and troubled waters.

Responsible policy making must not only look at the short-term solution of acute challenges, but formulate and put in place sustainable policies, practices, and mechanisms in order to ensure the success of European integration in the future. In order to do so, a sober and objective assessment of today's world is paramount; it is at the heart of possible future developments. Based on extensive analyses from a variety of experts (political scientists, economists, engineers), three thematic clusters can be identified as presumably determining the course of European politics and Europe's place on the international stage in the years to come: the social, the economic and the foreign policy field. With regard to the different levels of given *adaptation pressure* and the EU's and member states' *adaptation capacity* in the three distinct fields,¹ four large-scale scenarios can be identified for the

1 Pressure is high in the social field, whereas the Union's capacity of adaptation is rather low in this area. In the economic sphere, pressure is also high; however, the Union's instruments are rather well developed as well, resulting in an almost equally elevated capacity of adaptation. In foreign relations, pressure is medium with Union capacities still being equally medium.

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next ten years by inter-connecting potential developments within the three cluster areas and reducing them to the most plausible combinations.²

The most positive,³ still plausible scenario (Scenario 1) depicts a renewed and pro-active Union, responding to social, economic and international expectations to a large degree. The presumably most likely trend (Scenario 2) rather hints towards ambivalent development perspectives for Europe. Whether it will lead to a better or worse development in the long-run, largely depends on policy-making processes and output. An alternative – rather negative – scenario (Scenario 3) paints the picture of a Europe performing quite well in economic and foreign policy terms but failing to respond to social expectations, deepening the gaps in European societies. The last, negative scenario (Scenario 4) depicts a Union well over its peak, failing to keep up the level of integration as set today because of a decreased likelihood and reduced willingness of member states to think and act “European”.

Scenario 1: The “second founding”⁴ of the European Union

The European Union defines a new, broadly shared *raison d'être* as a result of Union and member states' policies largely responding to current challenges and expectations. Increased international standing – on a solid personal and institutional basis – and an overall positive economic development increase acceptance of European policies considerably in the eyes of political actors and the public.

2 For the individual analyses and a broader discussion of the assessments and assumptions leading to the four scenarios, see: Louis-Marie Clouet/Andreas Marchetti (eds.): *L'Europe et le monde en 2020: Essai de prospective franco-allemande*, Villeneuve d'Ascq: Presses Universitaires du Septentrion 2011; Andreas Marchetti/Louis-Marie Clouet (eds.): *Europa und die Welt 2020: Entwicklungen und Tendenzen* (Schriften des Zentrum für Europäische Integrationsforschung, 74), Baden-Baden: Nomos 2011.

3 The terms “positive” and “negative” in this context refer to the relation of *adaptation pressure* and *adaptation capacity*: If the Union's and its member states' capacity is higher than the pressure exerted, the Union can *positively* be considered as being *pro-active*; if pressure is higher than the adaptation capacity in a certain area, the assessment becomes *negative*, with a Union and member states being rather *reactive*.

4 For the term, see Ludger Kühnhardt: *European Union – The Second Founding: The Changing Rationale of European Integration* (Schriften des Zentrum für Europäische Integrationsforschung, 67), 2nd ed. , Baden-Baden: Nomos 2010.

Conscious of the added value of acting together and the necessary pan-European solidarity resulting thereof, the European Union supports the sustainable transformation of Europe's economy and also acts more coherently and in unison on the international stage. In the medium- to long-term, the Union is also believed to translate the positive economic and foreign policy development into the social sphere. This will be underscored by a cautious – positive – politicisation of European politics, less induced by citizens than by politicians: European Parliament elections will be conducted as real European elections with parties identifying front-runners for high EU offices (e.g. President of the European Commission). Although this is unlikely to lead to a clearly defined and commonly shared identification with Europe, the local, regional and national sense of belonging will be accompanied by an increased consciousness of a – still vague – European identity. This development is facilitated by consistently respecting subsidiarity and the clear identification of the political responsibilities of different levels. Criticism of the EU will therefore be reduced to a realistic minimum, focussing more constructively on concrete and contentious issues.

Due to the increasing relevance of the EU and its growing acceptance, the Union will be, in turn, endowed with more efficient instruments. This will not necessarily lead to a new constitutional debate, but rather – if deemed necessary – to slight modifications of the existing treaties, with a clear preference to use the less complex mechanisms to amend their texts. In addition, rotation in the different formations of the Council will be given up on account of their inefficiency. The financial foundation of the Union will also be improved, either by adjusting the relative share of the Union budget with respect to member states' contributions or by increasing the Union's own resources. In important policy fields, new strategies, considered binding, will be formulated and existing ones updated, particularly focussing on a better coordination between Union and member states' actions; this could possibly happen in various areas from foreign trade over energy and resource security up to security policy and defence. In areas particularly concerning a limited number of member states, these will establish "avant-garde groups" – without questioning the compatibility with the whole of

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Europe. Based on modes of flexibility in the “spirit of the treaties”, in the medium-term even enlargement policy can be revived.

Scenario 2: Europe of (un)limited opportunities

The European Union continues to progress on the basis of the Treaty of Lisbon. The Treaty will prove to be a solid basis for European politics, although the Union will be unable to alter inefficiencies that arise. The “*méthode Monnet*” will remain the guiding principle of the Union’s functioning, despite the importance attributed to “political Europe” in many areas.

The extent to which the Union can really benefit from its relatively good position to realise its potentials will largely depend on its international performance and economic development. Under the conditions of the Lisbon Treaty and the persistence of traditional modes of conducting European politics, given potentials can develop in a positive as well as in a negative manner. Economically, much will depend on Europe’s ability – with political help – to really develop a “new”, i.e. solidly knowledge-based and sustainable economy; internationally, much will depend on whether the Union can exercise international leadership according to its preferred model of constructing a multilateral world. If Europe responds positively to these challenges, the Union’s economic and foreign policy competences will consolidate even further, based on member states’ growing awareness that the Union is the right forum to tackle these issues. This will not lead to a substantial strengthening of the Union’s legal foundations; however, compliance will increase along with “soft” modes of cooperation (coordination, best practices etc.). As this will happen without substantially challenging national sovereignties and member states’ competences, this can – in the medium-term – lead to new formal steps toward deeper integration.

The scenario *Europe of (un)limited opportunities* hints well beyond the second decade of the 21st century: As scenario of transition it can lead to a more pro-active Union (as described) and therefore – also institutionally – even lead to a *second founding*. However, if stagnation or restraint prevail in the areas of economy and international relations, *Europe of (un)limited opportunities* can also see itself driven back, endowed with fewer capaci-

ties, leading to reduced policy output. The EU may prove to remain stable and solid for some time, but could not resist long-term internal and external challenges. Such a negative transition could pave the way for more sombre developments in the third decade of the 21st century. If so, developments along the lines of both *Europe divided* as well as *Volatile Europe* appear to be possible.

Scenario 3: Europe divided

While the Union is advancing internationally and economically, the distribution of wealth becomes increasingly unbalanced and therefore the prosperity gap in European societies widens. This leads to a stronger – conflict-ridden – fragmentation *within* member states as well as *between* them.

Intra-European solidarity decreases considerably, distributive struggles between member states become more and more pronounced. Increasing social tensions trigger a rise in nationalism; this development is accompanied by an analogous “Euro nationalism” (Timothy Garton Ash) to the outside of the Union, allowing a rather positive development in economics and foreign policy in the short- or even medium-term: The Union’s relatively strong position enables it to use its international clout to make the aggregated interests of its member states heard on the international stage. However, with rising interior tensions and a need to satisfy political egoisms, the EU turns aside from the self-conception as cooperative international power; the claim to be a normative actor, playing a role of moral leader, cannot be maintained. In the long-run, such a Europe provokes – with its economically and internationally dominant behaviour – the rejection of “European” norms. Accordingly, it will also find itself more and more challenged beyond 2020. Hence, the scenario *Europe divided* is neither internally nor externally sustainable and therefore also a scenario of transition. In contrast to *Europe of (un)limited opportunities*, it rather heads toward a more negative development after 2020.

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Scenario 4: Volatile Europe

Rather negative developments in the economic sphere and a decreasing international standing go hand in hand with strongly negative developments in social terms, challenging the very existence of the European Union.

Partly due to lacking competences, the Union does not live up to expectations, limiting the trust in its capacity to properly respond to current challenges. Although individual member states do also display deficiencies in their policy-output, they are strengthened by growing nationalism, accompanied by increased xenophobia throughout Europe. Even among political and societal elites, compliance and identification with the Union decrease. The project of European integration is challenged as such, although its structure remains in place to pursue purely national interests – in contrast to the “spirit of the treaties”: Such an EU will also see – formally within or outside the Union framework – the emergence of “avant-garde groups”, aiming to assert their aggregated national interests. Consequently, the EU loses its unifying, over-arching and co-operative fabric, dooming it to become a forum to negotiate non-convergent interests and settle conflicts – at least peacefully – between governments. Growing controversies among EU member states lead to a re-intergovernmentalisation of the Union, based on the extensive use of given possibilities of formal obstruction or the threat to use them. This will lastingly prevent a further elaboration of the EU and its policies in a more integrative sense. Accordingly, the EU is reduced to the administration of given and uncontested policies or the formulation of policies that can even be pushed through against objections. This will result in a one-sided, negative politicisation of the Union: While a variety of issues are subject of severe disputes between member states, public sympathy and participation decreases significantly. European Parliament elections will definitely degrade to second-order-elections, the tendency to give more political power to this institution will be reversed. It likewise remains uncertain whether and to which extent even the Court of Justice will be able to maintain its authority in interpreting the treaties.

Internationally, the EU and its members see themselves increasingly marginalised. With ageing societies, decreasing productivity and growing internal problems, Europe sees itself politically and economically reduced to

its actual geographic scope as Western peninsula of the Eurasian landmass, more and more dependant on other international players that manage to act more coherently and are therefore more resistant and performing.

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Europe is at a crossroads, as highlighted by the Reflection Group on the future of Europe in spring 2010.⁵ Although the scenario *Europe of (un)limited opportunities* is the most likely one, there are also good reasons to believe in a more negative development. With the particular challenge to the European “contrat social” – in the proper sense of the expression – the negative scenarios are less unlikely than one might hope for. In addition, even *Europe of (un)limited opportunities* does not automatically lead to a positive development of the Union: As scenario of transition, it will pave the way for the long-term development of the Union, well beyond 2020.

The sort of the Union depends to a considerable degree on factors outside of the EU. These particularly concern the rise of new international players, the recalibration of international forums and their governance, threats to international security (including proliferation and terrorism), climate change and its repercussions on natural resources, international migration and the availability of energy resources as well as other commodities. Although *a priori* exterior to the Union itself, what kind of impact these factors will have on the European Union and its member states largely depends on the way the Union and its members position themselves with respect to them. At a first glance, the Union’s current international position allows the EU to partly shape developments directly. Probably even more importantly, mentally and legally⁶ the Union possesses also a rather solid –

5 *Project Europe 2030: Challenges and Opportunities: A report to the European Council by the Reflection Group on the Future of the EU 2030*, Brussels 2010, p. 11-14, available at: <http://www.reflectiongroup.eu/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/project-europe-2030-en.pdf>.

6 See Claire Demesmay/Andreas Marchetti (eds.): *La France et l’Allemagne face aux crises européennes*, Pessac: Presses Universitaires de Bordeaux 2010; Claire Demesmay/Andreas Marchetti (eds.): *Le Traité de Lisbonne en discussion: quels fondements pour l’Europe?* (Note de l’Ifri, 60), Paris: Ifri 2009; Andreas Marchetti/Claire Demesmay (eds.): *Der Vertrag von Lissabon: Analyse und Bewertung* (Schriften des Zentrum für Europäische Integrationsforschung, 71), Baden-Baden: Nomos 2010.

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albeit not always efficient – basis to adjust itself properly with respect to external but also to internal challenges. Among the latter, the way politics are conducted and policies are formulated concern the very structure of politics. With respect to policies, economic questions, budgetary and fiscal policies and the pressure exercised on the common currency feature high on today's agenda, supplemented by concerns over the Union's demographic development, education, science and research, strongly interlinked with the transformation of Europe's economy.

Any policy recommendation that intends to highlight potential options needs to particularly focus on the Union's and member states' capacities to positively respond to the challenges ahead. As both the input and output dimension of European politics are of relevance and – at least potentially – under review, different levels shall be considered: the ideational foundations of the Union, the structural dimension of politics and policies, and concrete policy measures.

“An ever closer union”

For the European Union, the creation of “an ever closer union among the peoples of Europe” remains an ideational foundation as stated in the preamble of the Treaty on European Union. However, with the debate about the Union's *finalité politique* closed for the time being, this objective needs refinement in order to impact the current and future course of European integration, preventing its degradation to a mere declaratory phrase. “An ever closer union” can be understood as calling for more formal integration, an interpretation supported by the reform debate of the past decade, although the preamble links the expression directly to the principle of subsidiarity. A pragmatic understanding should indeed focus less on the question of *finalité* but on the *way* European political actors interact and produce policy outputs: If “an ever closer union” is not understood as a static aim but rather concerns the mode of politics and policy-making, it can serve as basic guiding line in responding to common challenges: Do political actors interact closely in the spirit of union? If actors and stakeholders work closely together in formulating solutions to common challenges they will eventually augment the quality of policy output and

thereby political and public acceptance. The respect for the formal rules of procedure is more or less uncontested, however, the rules of the game also need to be applied in the spirit of union. If necessary, naming and shaming can be applied to those resisting such a broad interpretation of the rules of the game. More publicity could also prevent the continuation of some actors' habit of blaming "Brussels" – for decisions taken by the Council with member states' governments' involvement.

If a true spirit of union prevails, even current reluctance to put in place new policies based on forms of flexible integration (i.e. enhanced co-operation) could be reduced, opening new and innovative ways of adapting the Union and its policies, even in cases in which not all of its member states feel equally concerned. As stated in the treaties, such flexible mechanisms must not conflict with the Union's aims and coherence must be ensured with other policies.

More coherence and efficiency

The Union wants to "promote peace, security and progress in Europe and in the world" (preamble, Treaty on European Union): Hence, the Union and its actions have to be judged whether they live up to these ambitions and to expectations raised. A measure to evaluate the evolution of the Union in general and specific political steps in particular can be attained by looking at the development of the Union's and member states' *adaptation capacity* to efficiently respond to current challenges. In order to tackle the *adaptation pressure* present in various fields today, the European Union has essentially two options:

1. It can generate synergies and formulate more *efficient responses* by acting more closely together.
2. It can attempt to *decrease pressure* itself.

This does not necessarily imply more competences on the EU level but rather the formulation of policies in an increasingly Euro-conscious manner. In practice, both approaches should be combined in order to attain favourable results and minimise negative side effects. Along the lines of a pragmatic interpretation of "an ever closer union", the Union and its

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member states will therefore – for the sake of effectiveness and even efficiency – have to ensure the coherence of the entirety of policies. As the European Union is a system of multi-level governance, the demand for coherence concerns at least two aspects:

1. On the level of political decisions and content, *coherence between different EU policies* will need to be ensured. With diverse policies on the one hand and different Council formations and parliamentary committees responsible on the other hand, coordination will not be an easy task. It is thus paramount to ensure lasting positive effects of Union policies and to prevent unintended – negative – consequences. This does not only concern coherence between evidently related policies but all – internal as well as external – policies.

2. On the structural level of politics, *coherence between European Union policies and member states' policies* will have to be realised as well. Currently, the juxtaposition of Union and member states' policies often generates inconsistencies in overall European behaviour as most addressees of policies are not necessarily aware of their particular European, national or regional origin. Especially internationally, the distinction between European Union policies and national European states' policies is rarely made, with both being perceived closely together. In order to prevent particular national policies to undermine European Union policies – or possibly vice versa – member states need to increasingly become aware of their responsibility in European multi-level governance: They are no longer mere *states* but are defined as *member states* of the Union.⁷ Only then, all policies – national as well as European – are likely to generate the aspired effects; otherwise, frictional losses are likely to occur.

Some examples, deriving from the Franco-German study group on the future of the EU and its environment,⁸ can serve to highlight the implications of these conditions and the complexity of issues:

7 Cf. Christian Calliess: “Schlusswort”, in: Christian Calliess/Karl-Heinz Paqué (eds.): *Deutschland in der Europäischen Union im kommenden Jahrzehnt – Kreativität und Innovationskraft: Neue Impulse für Staat, Markt und Zivilgesellschaft*, Düsseldorf: Hanns Martin Schleyer-Stiftung 2010, p. 278.

8 See the reference in footnote 2.

- The Charter of Fundamental Rights, part of the primary law of the Union (Art. 6.1, Treaty on European Union) since the Lisbon Treaty, closely links personal, economic and social rights under one umbrella. With the impact of the economic, financial and budgetary crises and governments' efforts to counter these, tensions have grown severely within as well as between member states of the EU. In the spirit of union, the EU and its member states will have to make clear, beyond mere declarations, that they will tackle the crises together in a socially tenable manner, preventing a further widening of social gaps in European societies. Sooner or later, the Union will have to allow for partial transfer mechanisms to prevent overly pointed distortions; in order to prevent free rides, their development has to be complemented – within the slowly developing *gouvernement économique* – by common processes to at least preview central national decisions with common implications, including economic, fiscal and budgetary policies. Without transferring such competences to the Union, at least “soft” mechanisms will have to be put in place to ensure pan-European compliance and a two-sided (and therefore acceptable) approach to solidarity: strong member states help weak ones; in line with the principle of subsidiarity, weaker ones work as much as possible to tackle their problems.
- In international politics, the European Union strives for a leading role. To do so, it will also have to satisfy demands to take on more international responsibilities. As national budgetary constraints increase and EU member states increasingly lack the “critical mass” to make themselves heard as individual states on an international scale, such a role can only be attained by further developing the full range of Europe's foreign, security and defence policy, making use of substantial synergies by overcoming traditional national reservations. The elaboration of common structures (e.g. External Action Service) will increase intra-European interdependencies but will also help the Union and its members to be more active and therefore broaden their capacity to influence world politics.

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- On various occasions, the Union has highlighted its ambition to act as normative power on the international stage. If the European Union takes this ambition seriously, it needs to ensure that its own conduct – including member states’ – is in line with the normative and moral rules as promoted by the Union. If not, at least parts of the Union’s normative agenda suffer a continuous loss of credibility, hampering a positive impact; e.g. although the Union assumes the role of an international promoter of human rights, some border control practices (either under national authority or even with participation of Union agencies) stand in stark contrast to these. If one looks at the underlying issue of migration, one might even find European Union collaboration with third countries not satisfying core standards of human rights and rights of refugees in particular.⁹ These inconsistencies increasingly call into question the credibility of the Union’s normative agenda, threatening its possibly positive effects. Only if the Union and member states comply with their own standards, they can expect others to – maybe – subscribe to them as well.
- Ensuring the access to energy and other resources has been as high on the Union agenda of the past years as combating climate change and increasing environmentally sustainable practices. Particularly with respect to fossil energy resources, the link between the two issues is evident. However, there are other dimensions interconnected: As the Union applies rather high environmental standards if it comes to the exploitation of European resources, it should – in the sense of a normative actor – also be more concerned with such standards in countries of origin to ensure the sustainability of exploitation. Currently, there is a strong imbalance between the internal and external exploitation of resources, leading to the sub-optimal exploitation of European resources and also to a widening of the gap between high exploitation costs in Europe and considerably lower costs outside the Union. A more balanced policy could increase the attractiveness of European

⁹ In addition, looking at internal aspects, European migration policy also needs to find a new balance between coping with the social implications of migration and satisfying the demographic and economic needs of immigration.

resources as well as ensure a more sustainable exploitation elsewhere by at the same time reducing EU dependency in at least some sectors.

- Generally, the social and environmental policies and efforts of the EU cannot only be limited to the Union itself. With potential long-term effects on international stability and migration, the Union should increasingly consider social and environmental aspects in its trade policies and ensure that a minimum of working rights and working environment standards is being satisfied by products entering the European market, just as they should satisfy a minimum of environmental conditions. This could be promoted by e.g. Union behaviour in WTO or its commitment to have trading partners join and comply with ILO standards etc. Two results can be expected of this, as the Union – one of the most important trading partners for most economies – has the economic weight to promote appropriate change in this area: Externally, the Union would help to improve working conditions and to reduce negative environmental impacts; internally, the Union would be able to reduce the gap between average European production costs (related to its own social and environmental standards) in relation to other competitors.
- Whereas the reform of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) mainly focuses on distributive aspects within the EU, it has major implications on many economies outside of the Union, particularly in developing countries. As subsidised European agricultural goods reduce the comparative advantages of these economies if it comes to agriculture, CAP puts into question certain objectives as defined in the Union's development cooperation. Accordingly, these two need to be considered more closely together. With respect to their interconnectedness the Union might, taking into account some member states' reluctance as well as compliance with WTO rules, opt for a reform of CAP that does not abolish it altogether but at least prevents subsidised agricultural goods from distorting the world market. This would preserve the core of CAP and also benefit developing countries. In addition, the still restrictive market access for agricultural products into the Union

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would need to be reviewed – but the Union should also consider the aforementioned social and environmental standards.

In many areas, the Union has acquired substantial competences over the past decades. With 500 million inhabitants, political stability based on the principle of liberal democracy, one of the largest economies with a strong and competitive industry, the second most important international currency (despite current problems), the Union undoubtedly disposes of considerable political and economic resources and relevance, preconditions to take on a leading role. But with rising scepticism about the Union's capacity to positively forge the future,¹⁰ it can only continue to play a prominent role – in Europe and beyond – if it consistently sticks to its commonly agreed motives and aims *within policies* and avoids inconsistencies *between policies* – much more than up to now. Its formal rules of decision making (input legitimacy) play just as important a role as its performance (output legitimacy). As performance and impact are not only based on objective resources but on political will and the internal as well as external perceptions of Union behaviour, only a *leadership by credibility*, based on coherence in the input- and output-dimension, can considerably advance the Union. Internally, inconsistencies need to be abolished, demanding of the Union and its members to act coherently over the entire range of political actions in order to (re)energize a true and concrete spirit of union, improving the lives of people living in the European Union; externally, the same approach will strengthen the Union's position and impact, as the current – alas justified – argument of double standards could no longer be applied to the Union itself.

IV. The Way Forward: Taking the Lead

Realising a Union leadership by credibility is already an ambitious aim, even more so in a Union constituted of 27 distinct member states. However, this shall not prevent the Union to advance in this direction as the political potential of the concept is appealing: A Union following clearly

¹⁰ See Eurobaromètre 73: L'opinion publique dans l'Union européenne, Vol. 1, Brussels: European Commission 2010, p. 246-249.

defined lines in the wide array of its policies, acting in solidarity and bringing into play not only its physical resources but also its political integrity, will internally and externally be considered a rational *and* reliable player. As powerful and credible actor it will be able to advance its goals and truly work as a force for good in Europe and even beyond. The alternative, a Union following different logics and displaying continuous internal divisions and political contradictions, would sooner or later weaken political Europe and possibly lead to the scenario *Europe divided* or even *Volatile Europe*.

Just as a prominent European role largely depends on resources, relevance and the political will to act in line with the concept of leadership by credibility, leading the Union towards this aim depends on the same set of conditions – conditions realistically only large member states can permanently fulfil. In addition, these member states need to be willing to adapt their own preferences in order to forge compromises. For their formulation, it might – paradoxically at first – be helpful if two or more players’ original positions in concrete policy issues are not similar or even identical. Although this is likely to *complicate the launch of concrete policy proposals*, a compromise between two or three major players possibly already covers a vast spectrum of preferences throughout the Union, therefore *facilitating the eventual elaboration and decision making* at 27.

Looking at European member states and their preferences in central policy fields today, once again France and Germany appear almost naturally as potential leaders in many fields: Firstly, they dispose of considerable resources and political relevance. Secondly, they often do not share the same positions, e.g. in energy policy, fiscal and economic policy, security and defence etc.,¹¹ but regularly already represent the preferences of other member states as well. Thirdly, they are commonly willing to work to-

11 Cf. Claire Demesmay/Andreas Marchetti: *Frankreich ist Frankreich ist Europa: Französische Europa-Politik zwischen Pragmatismus und Tradition* (DGAPanalyse Frankreich), Berlin: Deutsche Gesellschaft für Auswärtige Politik 2010; Andreas Marchetti: “Herausforderungen für das deutsch-französische ‘Tandem’”, in: ZEI (ed.): *Partner Frankreich: Positionsbestimmungen zwischen Krise und Aufbruch* [Documentation of the 13th Europakolloquium], Bonn: ZEI 2009, p. 7-15; Andreas Marchetti: “Deutschland zwischen Ost und West: Die Beziehungen zu Polen und Frankreich fünf Jahre nach der Osterweiterung”, in: Wolfram Hilz/Catherine Robert (eds.): *Frankreich – Deutschland – Polen: Partnerschaft im Herzen Europas* (Discussion Paper, C 199), Bonn: ZEI 2010, p. 57-66.

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gether in view of putting forward propositions on the European level. By doing so, they have to prove constantly that their European policies do not only serve their own specific interests but promote the advancement of the Union as a whole. As long as a leading role of France and Germany is not perceived as a “directoire”, trying to dictate or impose French and German positions on the other members of the Union, their role is acceptable to others and their ability to prepare and positively influence European politics is considerable. In this sense, Franco-German collaboration implies a high European responsibility and therefore cannot be considered exclusive. Other constellations of member states might just as well help the Union to advance common positions and policies. Not without reason there have been repeated attempts to open up Franco-German bilateralism to Poland in the framework of the “Weimar triangle”. However, such a trilateral constellation features an almost geometric problem: On many occasions, one partner might find its position in opposition to the other two, making him reluctant to discuss this particular issue in a trilateral forum. Bilaterally, other couples also display potential for leading roles, e.g. France and the United Kingdom in defence. Nonetheless, both the trilateral “Weimar triangle” and other bilateral formations lack the institutional depths of Franco-German relations ever since the signing of the Élysée Treaty in 1963. Based on a longstanding socialisation of actors and a constantly updated and refined institutional basis, France and Germany are best positioned to assume the role of lead nations in supporting the European Union to assume leadership by credibility.

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