



BULLETIN

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COMMENTARY

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French-German Cabinet Meeting

Jakub Kumoch

France and Germany adopted 4 February an agenda for co-operation between the two countries up to 2020. The document does not mention ambitious proposals for closer integration including introduction of a joint French-German minister. The failure of this initiative seems however to have a positive impact on mutual relations between Poland and Germany as well as on the three-side co-operation within the Weimar Triangle.

French-German Cabinet, the body which met in Paris for 12th time in its history is a form of co-operation created in 2003 to mark the 40th anniversary of the Elysee Treaty. Yesterday's Paris session, attended by French president Nicolas Sarkozy, German chancellor Angela Merkel and key members of both governments, was the first one since the new centre-right German government was formed and since the Treaty of Lisbon came into power.

Both sides approved a plan for development of mutual relations over the next decade, with the working title of Agenda France-Germany 2020. It mainly focuses on political and economic co-operation and provides for coordination of the efforts with regard to climate change and teaching German and French as foreign languages in both countries. It does not foresee however the essential elements extending beyond the scope of the countries' co-operation up to now.

First of all there are no references to the idea of a "French-German Minister," joint cabinet member which would be the first example ever of such far-reaching institutional integration of two EU member states. This would also represent the only case in the modern world of one person being a member of two governments simultaneously. The idea had been promoted by the French side for several months while Germany proved to be much more reluctant on the issue. The German side stated that its federal law exclude the possibility of a foreigner serving in the government of the Federal Republic.

The French-German Cabinet also failed to make any decision about the Airbus A400M transport aircraft, one of the most prestigious projects of EADS aerospace corporation, aimed to assist the armies of six EU and NATO countries plus Turkey in their military operations outside Europe. Doubts seemed to arise as to the chances for mass-production of the airplane at the end of 2009 when the company demanded an additional fee of more than €5.3 billion (at that time the total price for an order of 180 airplanes was 20 billion, while the principal customers—Germany and France—had ordered 60 and 50 airplanes respectively). Germany refused to contribute, while France was willing to find a compromise. Following the summit both sides announced that further talks would be held.

Germany's disinclination towards closer integration of the two countries as well as the fact that the idea of a joint minister was solely French initiative, confirm the opinion that French and German visions of future co-operation are beginning to differ. France seems to be in favor of substantial intensification of the process and tries to find new institutional solutions. Germany however is not interested in going beyond the traditional forms of co-operation.

From Poland's point of view German refusal will probably have favorable results given that Germany's present government has been trying to raise the prestige of co-operation with Poland. In this situation, if Germany were to accept French proposals, the disproportion between the level of its relations with France and with other neighbors would increase in a natural way.

Preserving actual status quo between France and Germany, will also make it easier for Poland to develop partner relations with both countries within the three-way co-operation.

The same document, French-German Agenda 2020, mentions Poland in the context of co-operation with the framework of the EU in civilian and military crisis management. France and Germany declare their will to seek this aim, "in particular with (their) Polish partners as part of the Weimar Triangle."