

Saarbrücken Declaration on Franco-German Cooperation in the Border Regions

In 2013, France and Germany are celebrating the 50th anniversary of the signing of the Élysée Treaty, which sealed their reconciliation after the two World Wars which had marred the first half of the 20th century. Held in Berlin, the 15th Franco-German Council of Ministers adopted a joint declaration on 22 January acknowledging the comprehensive significance of cross-border cooperation and regional integration. The declaration also states that, “Coordinated by our Commissioners for Franco-German Cooperation, Germany and France will work to see the Franco-German border areas move closer together, particularly in the areas of business, job markets, healthcare, education, vocational training and security.” This shared determination demonstrates our conviction that the European Union needs to be constructed for its people and with its people. Thanks to their history and geography, the Franco-German neighbours can constitute a model, a point of reference and a trump card for Europe as a whole.

After the painful conflicts of the past, the people of the border regions play a very special role in developing the Franco-German friendship and are breaking new ground in many areas. They have made a valuable contribution to reconciliation between our nations. Without their committed input, we could never have achieved the intensity and quality of relations that we enjoy today.

Nowadays, Germany and France are the engine room of the European Union. Their collaboration in the political, economic, social and cultural spheres is particularly close and dynamic. The border region is where the key work of constructing Europe takes place. Here, the advances in integration manifest themselves very tangibly for people. Especially during such times when many seem to be turning away from the idea of Europe, cross-border cooperation is a concrete example of the added value that the European Union generates. Many of the solutions that are part and parcel of every-day life for all Europeans today were originally initia-

tives and ideas that came from cross-border cooperation, and so prove how valuable it is to those regions' inhabitants and to the European Union.

Following the creation of the European single market and the conclusion of the Schengen Agreement, the possibilities for forging closer ties have become more numerous and varied in the last ten years. This development has resulted in new opportunities and possibilities. That said, however, it also confronts us with fresh challenges. Since 2009, the Franco-German dialogue on cross-border cooperation has served to look into the essential questions needing to be addressed at all levels of regional administration in the two countries.

The particularly close cooperation and intensive exchange between the border regions have reached a high level. Nonetheless, there are new tasks that have to be undertaken.

It was in light of this that the Commissioners for Franco-German Cooperation, Michael Link and Thierry Repentin, met in Saarbrücken at the invitation of Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer, Saarland Minister-President and Germany's Commissioner for Franco-German Cultural Affairs, and agreed on the following as guidelines for the work to come:

1. Education and training

Increased exchange in the field of education and training lies at the heart of our continued development of Franco-German cooperation in the border regions, as it is an essential precondition if young people are to be brought on board.

- a. We welcome the establishment of a cross-border exchange programme for dual-system vocational training in the Strasbourg/Ortenau Eurodistrict. The relevant authorities have found pragmatic solutions to make this possible, not least with respect to difficult funding issues. We urge their counterparts in other border regions to follow the example of the Strasbourg/Ortenau Eurodistrict and develop analogous programmes using the dual system of vocational training by the end of 2014.
- b. We welcome the agreement between the département of Meurthe-et-Moselle's chamber of industry and commerce (E2C Lorraine) and TÜV Nord Bildung Saar on establishing the first cross-border second chance school. This school offers young people from France and Germany who have no school-leaving qualifications a training pro-

gramme (30% of which is taken up with Franco-German projects) that will enable them to find a place in the working world.

- c. The aim of setting up Franco-German streams in vocational colleges is to be pursued in France and Germany's border regions, along the lines of the Franco-German aeronautics stream at Latresne vocational grammar school (Académie de Bordeaux). A Franco-German vocational stream for jobs in the automobile industry is already being planned for the Greater Region.
- d. Progress has been made on recognition of further training undertaken by professional drivers who cover cross-border routes. The German side is prepared to create an addendum to the existing regulations and introduce a special certificate of driving qualifications by 31 December 2014 at the latest. The French side will alert its monitoring personnel to the special situation of professional French drivers on cross-border routes during the transition period.
- e. Learning one's neighbour's language is a basic precondition of mutual understanding. The teaching of French in Germany and of German in France should therefore be starting at primary-school age, especially in the border regions, as of 2014 at the latest. There also needs to be significantly more language-learning in vocational training. This alone will ensure that people later really have the option to work on both sides of the border.

2. The labour market

Integrating our two labour markets offers considerable opportunities for growth and jobs on both sides of the border and is helping to transform the regions into one unified economic area. The initial findings of the Franco-German employment agency set up as a pilot project in Kehl have been encouraging. In order to move towards our goal of joint labour markets in the border regions, we need to prioritize the following measures:

- a. Efforts should be made to set up new Franco-German employment agencies by mid-2014, particularly in the département of Moselle and in the Saarland, where an agreement to establish cross-border desks at the Sarreguemines employment agency in France and the Saarbrücken Federal Employment Agency in Germany is to be signed in September 2013.

- b. The existing EURES (European Employment Services) networks, which promote labour-market mobility in the Franco-German border regions, are of central importance to the continued integration of the two countries' labour markets. Germany and France will push for suitable funding in the upcoming negotiations on the implementation of the European Union's new multiannual financial framework.

3. Police cooperation

The French and German police forces' cooperation under the Prüm Treaty and the Mondorf Agreement is a success story. It enables efficient collaboration on both sides of the border while sovereignty is preserved and both countries' constitutional arrangements are respected. It must be noted, however, that the border regions, like other areas, are facing fresh challenges, which may warrant the development of new, ambitious and integrated forms of cooperation. In light of this, we need to prioritize the following measures:

- a. We call for pragmatic use of the full scope of existing possibilities for action, and for their extension with due consideration to the ongoing work and future recommendations of the joint working group and the group of experts of the Mondorf Agreement. A report on these matters will be drafted in preparation for the 5th meeting of the Franco-German dialogue on cross-border cooperation, to be held in 2014.
- b. The Franco-German river police unit on the Rhine is a good example of successful Franco-German cooperation. It is currently in its test phase. We welcome the major progress made in the negotiations on an agreement to establish the joint river police unit on the Rhine more permanently, and we call for these negotiations to be concluded during 2014 so that the project has a secure legal basis for the long term.

4. Cross-border transport

Reliable and easy-to-use long-distance and local transport facilities are indispensable pre-conditions for cross-border mobility and community life. In light of this, we need to prioritize the following measures:

- a. Improving rail links between Paris and Frankfurt am Main via Saarbrücken is an important project for both sides. We therefore hope to surmount the technical obsta-

cles that are hindering track development and security arrangements by the end of 2018.

- b. Both sides will dedicate particular attention to cross-border rail transport and strive to create good economic and financial conditions for its future expansion.
- c. Aiming to promote cross-border local passenger transport, we will strive to simplify decision-making procedures, while leaving intact the powers of all those involved, and support community initiatives in this regard. We call for an investigation, to be completed by mid-2014, into whether the European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC) would be a suitable instrument for this task.
- d. Another precondition for greater integration of the border regions is uncomplicated cross-border taxi transport. The relevant authorities in both countries should identify pragmatic solutions on this issue, with due consideration to national and European legislation on free movement of persons, at least in time for the 5th meeting of the Franco-German dialogue on cross-border cooperation in 2014.

5. Energy

Enhanced energy-sector cooperation in the Franco-German border region can enable us to meet the economic and environmental challenges of the future. In light of this, we need to prioritize the following measures:

- a. The TRION network for energy and the climate on the Upper Rhine is an exemplary energy-efficiency and renewables project. We advocate that this network be kept in place beyond June 2015 so that the Upper Rhine region can become a real model for the transformation of Germany's energy system.
- b. The issue of nuclear facilities located close to the border and the security thereof is something that worries people on both sides of the border. Germany and France will continue to deepen their exchange on these matters.

6. The cross-border healthcare sector

Unfettered cross-border healthcare provision makes life easier for people in many ways and can furthermore help us make better use of existing resources. Ever closer cooperation can save lives. It is therefore vitally important to keep expanding cooperation in the healthcare sector. In light of this, we need to prioritize the following measures:

- a. We call for yet more development of out-patient care, particularly in rural areas. To that end, we are endeavouring to see the first cross-border medical practices established as soon as possible.
- b. Work should continue on promoting staff exchanges between healthcare professionals.
- c. The cooperation agreement on cardiology which is in place between the SHG (Saarland Heilstätten GmbH) clinics in Völklingen and CHIC (Centre hospitalier inter-Communal) in Forbach signifies a step in the right direction. It makes it possible, for example, for the Völklingen cardiology centre to admit patients from Lorraine who need emergency treatment for heart attacks. Following the example of this cooperation agreement, further cooperative schemes to continue improving the medical care available to inhabitants of the border regions should be agreed by the end of 2014.

7. Taxation issues

Germany and France are keen to overcome taxation-related obstacles to cross-border commercial activity. The rules governing the taxation of German social insurance pensions, as altered at the initiative of Germany's Federal Constitutional Court, have also resulted in changes for former cross-border commuters living in France. The ongoing negotiations between the German and French finance ministries on the possibility of amending the Franco-German double taxation agreement should be intensified with a view to reaching a consensus by the end of 2013 if possible.

8. The Upper Rhine region and the Greater Region

The Trinational Metropolitan Region of the Upper Rhine and the Greater Region are models of cross-border cooperation for the whole of Europe. In them, Germany and France collaborate alongside Switzerland, Luxembourg and Belgium in all areas of public life. The continuous and dedicated development of cross-border cooperation is assured by close dialogue

between private individuals, politicians and administrative authorities from all of the countries and regions involved. The two Commissioners expressly support these efforts.

Saarbrücken, 15 July 2013