



The Weimar Triangle: leveraging the untapped potential

The Weimar Triangle needs a new opening. More than ever, it can contribute to facing Europe's challenges. However, it should be strengthened first. Launching the International Weimar Fund can be a good point of departure.

The Weimar Triangle, a format created in 1991 by Germany, Poland and France to advance Poland's „return to Europe” and to facilitate her dialogue with the engine duo (GER-FRA) of European integration, had its historical ups and downs. For almost the entire last decade (since 2015), the Triangle has remained silent, overshadowed by the differing visions of European integration among its members.

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The fact that the pro-European government took over the helm in Poland and proved that the democratic slide could be reversed elsewhere is only one of several reasons why the Weimar Triangle needs a new opening. The enlargement of the EU to the East and the South will be the most significant process in decades. It will potentially make the Union comprise more than 35 countries and redraw the geographical boundaries of a European project worldwide. Ukraine's rebuild and recovery will demand political vision in the EU and a way to finance it beyond the regular EU budget. In the meantime, the EU must reinvent itself internally to be ready for such significant changes.

Considering the security challenges on the continent and beyond, the need for a viable European Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) has become an urgent necessity. The risk of Donald Trump's return to power poses additional questions for the EU, such as if it should sometimes act incongruently with the US

when the situation demands. In several important elements of CSDP, the Weimar Triangle can push things up in Europe. The military projects under the heading of PESCO are undoubtedly good examples here. The future of energy and climate policy should also be among the top strategic subjects discussed by the Weimar Triangle.

Not least important, though, are the practical projects that can be developed between Poland, Germany and France on bilateral and trilateral levels. Energy, transport, new technologies, electromobility, or industrial defence-related projects are a few examples of long overdue ventures.

For all these reasons, the Weimar Triangle's current structures are insufficient. Institutionalisation is not a panacea for the lack of political will. It can, however, lay fertile ground for the political will to persist and for the dialogue to hold on in ebbs and flows. The Weimar Triangle has never had a chance to check on institutionalisation. But even more than the dialogue, it should be outputs-oriented. Therefore, the governments of France, Germany and Poland should initiate and endow the International Weimar Fund, which would financially facilitate projects in trilateral and larger formats. It should foster a more common approach to the EU's major challenges. If, for example, the feasibility study of Ukraine's accession to the EU or NATO, is conducted jointly by the experts of WT and Ukraine, it would have a potentially powerful impact on the decision-making process. The Fund can also promote joint industrial, energy, technological or educational projects and ventures. Furthermore, a small secretariat of the Weimar Triangle should be created to manage the Fund and facilitate intergovernmental, interparliamentary and civil society cooperation.

The International Visegrad Fund can serve as a good example. It was established in 2000 by the governments of Czechia, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia, with an annual budget of 10 million EUR. It assists the Visegrad Group (V4) on the practical level. Despite the current decline of political cooperation in the V4 format (because of Viktor Orban's position on Russia and his anti-democratic tendencies), the Fund persists and develops joint projects, exchanges and common approaches among the experts and civil society of the member countries.

The strategic and functional needs for the reinvigorated and viable Weimar Triangle of France, Germany, and Poland are here to stay. The momentum is also there. It should happen before the European and American 2024 elections (June and November) to be ready to act in these new circumstances. The point of departure will be challenging because the basis for such trilateral cooperation has been continuously fracturing for the last few years. There was neither the need for the Franco-German duo nor a real chance to act in the triangle format. Thus, the meetings were only sporadic. Any expert's proposals for the Weimar Triangle reinvigoration, like the one introduced by the Pulaski Foundation, touched the void.

Though France and Germany had a long tradition of institutional cooperation, working through the differences and finding ways to incentivise European integration, today, their partnership is rocky. At the same time, Poland drifted apart and became more of a troublemaker than a problem-solver in European integration.

Nonetheless, one has to admit that before 2015, the Triangle's potential was also untapped, mainly caused by the French reluctance, despite Poland being anchored at the EU core. Now, more than ever, Europe's East had become the EU's core challenge. The differentiated dynamics of European integration demand that France, Germany, and Poland act in unison. For the good of Europe, they should take on more significant responsibilities. It's high time for the trio to mature. The Casimir Pulaski Foundation believes the International Weimar Fund would be a good kick-start.

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