

**FRANCE IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS  
OF THE SECOND HALF OF THE 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY  
AND THE EARLY 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY – PRIORITIES  
IN FOREIGN POLICY**

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**ABSTRACT:** After the Second World War France lost temporarily her position as a decision-maker in international relations. Soon enough, though, her diplomacy adapted to a bipolar system. Her foreign policy was to manoeuvre between the USSR, the United States and Great Britain, and to jointly create the structures of future European Union. It was in the EU that France has found the place to strengthen her role of mediator and arbiter. Nowadays, the foreign policy of France has numerous continuities originating from the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the years of 1918–1939, but also some modifications related to new directions in French foreign policy and to the adaptation of its tactics to main purposes in order to secure France's security, her strong position in the EU and in the world.

**KEYWORDS:** France in international relations, diplomacy of France, foreign policy of France, Charles de Gaulle, Sarkozy, Hollande

**T**HE PERIOD OF the Second World War was fundamental to our understanding of the role France played in Europe and in the world in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. At that time, France lost its position of decision-maker in the international relations arena for Great Britain, the US and USSR. Yet, after 1945 France did not drop out from the world policy completely. Its diplomacy adapted to the bipolar system; in its foreign policy France was guided by the tactics of

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manoeuvring between the Soviet Union, the United States and Great Britain; and the structures of a future European Union began to emerge. Let us remind that in 1945 France was given an occupation zone in Germany.

## TOWARDS THE EUROPEAN INTEGRATION

The ideas of European unification for increased cooperation and security date back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century. A great discussion within European political circles was provoked by a book of Count Richard Nicolas Coudenhove-Kalergi *Paneuropa* published in 1923; the author saw the regional union mainly in the economic field. It was this idea of cooperation that was often referred to by French politicians. They regarded European unification ideas as attempts not only to check economic and political influence of the US in Europe, but also as the best way to preserve peace in Europe. The leader of French radicals, Edouard Herriot, in his speech delivered on 11 June 1945 said: “We are small, forty-million nation among the nations of 150 millions, like Russia, and of 120 millions like the United States. What should we do to compensate for this weakness other than to unite?” (Krasuski 1995: 29).

In the interwar period, the foreign minister of France Aristide Briand sought to strengthen the alliance with Great Britain and aimed at the rapprochement with Germany and the USSR. Briand’s plans of united Europe were related to the system of collective security in Europe, based on the Locarno Treaty of 1925, non-aggression pact signed between France and the USSR in 1932, and between the USSR and its western neighbours, including Poland. Thus, in Briand’s concept, the main powers of the united Europe were to be France, Great Britain, Germany and probably the Soviet Union. These states, together with some smaller ones, such as Poland, also in its role of France’s ally, were to be linked by mutual pacts within the system of collective security. The project, however, remained unrealised.

The idea of united Europe was revived after the Second World War. Yet, in the reality of Cold War, the idea could be implemented only in the countries of Western Europe.

The concept of united Europe was especially attractive to France, who wanted to use it to strengthen its position in the continent (each integration means a union of states of various military and political potential) and who sought the protection against Germany by way of anchoring them to the European system.

It should be emphasised, however, that after 1945 the ideas of united Europe were promoted by such famous persons as the former British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, Dutch professor and politician Hendrik Brugmans, former Belgian Prime Minister Paul van Zeeland, French Foreign Minister Robert Schuman, Commissioner-General of the French National Planning Board Jean Monnet, Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany Konrad Adenauer and Italian Prime Minister Alcide De Gasperi. It is worth mentioning that an important part in the process of European integration was played by the European Congress of the Hague, which took place in 1948; the Congress postulated the creation of political and economic union and called for a European assembly to make preparations for the union. One of the elements facilitating the integration processes was the American plan to provide financial assistance for rebuilding Europe and provide a ready market for the United States (enacted by the US in 1947 and implemented in 1948), the so-called 'Marshall Plan'. France participated in the activities of the Organisation for European Economic Co-operation (OEEC), set up in 1948, and in the same year signed the Treaty of Economic, Social, and Cultural Collaboration and Collective Self-Defence – called 'Brussels Treaty' – and in 1949 entered the military political structures of NATO.

On the French side, it was Robert Schuman and Jean Monnet who had the greatest impact on the integration of Europe. In 1950 Schuman proposed the creation of a supranational and supragovernmental organisation whose members would pool coal and steel production in France and West Germany. In 1951, in Paris, a treaty was signed for fifty years, under the name of the Treaty establishing the European Coal and Steel Community (informally called the Treaty of Paris), between France, West Germany, Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg. The treaty came into force in 1952 and expired in 2002. Regardless of France's membership in NATO already in 1950, French Prime Minister René Pleven prepared a plan to create a common European army. Despite the controversy as to the idea of such multinational army itself (it was criticised in Germany, but mainly in the US who wanted to include West Germany to the military structures of NATO), in 1952 France, West Germany, Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg signed in Paris the Treaty of the European Defence Community. It is worth adding that soon afterwards preparations were made for setting up a European Political Community. The only idea that was finally implemented was the European Coal and Steel Community. The members of the Community signed in 1957 the Treaties of Rome which established the European Atomic Energy Community (EURATOM) and the European Economic Community

(EEC), creating a common market and customs union among the members. In 1979, the European Monetary System was established, together with a European Currency Unit, made up of a basket of European currencies. The unification of Europe was closed with the Treaty on European Union signed on 7 February 1992 in Maastricht.

### THE RETURN OF GENERAL CHARLES DE GAULLE IN 1958

In 1958, a new constitution was adopted in France and General Charles de Gaulle was elected President of France. Thus France moved from the Fourth to the Fifth Republic, in which the president was an actual leader of the foreign policy of the country. General Charles de Gaulle was opposed to the vision of bipolar world shaped after 1945, and championed the idea that it were the questions of national interests of individual states that form the essence of social life. In fact, however, de Gaulle sought to increase importance and significance of France. He supported the idea of common Europe, but based on the union of sovereign states. He accepted France's membership in NATO, but only if France had an influence on political and military strategy in the world. In his opinion, France's foreign policy was aimed at two targets: national independence based on a strong government leadership and military potential (France armed with nuclear weapons), and a change of *status quo* in the international relations arena. Although de Gaulle tried to manoeuvre between the two superpowers using the tactic known from the Second World War of balancing an opening towards the USSR against frictions with Americans (his visit to Moscow in 1966), he did not succeed in establishing a partnership with Moscow. For France, it was the period of the war with Algeria, of the Elysée Treaty with Germany, and the establishment of diplomatic relations with China. After 1963 de Gaulle initiated a rapprochement with the USSR, an opening to the world and return to various regions of the world after the decolonisation process, and a withdrawal from the military structures of NATO (in 1959 de Gaulle decided to withdraw the French navy in the Mediterranean from NATO's integrated command during the time of peace, and in March 1966 France left NATO's military structures while remaining its member).

In the historiography, a dispute whether de Gaulle looked at the world through nations, despite hierarchising them (Hall 2005: 578–580), or through superpowers (Roussel 2002: 135–137). As Aleksander Hall (2005: 579) writes,

“De Gaulle had a very clear conception of creating Europe as the world force when in 1958 he once more took over the leadership of his nation. It was based on institutionalised cooperation of national states of Europe. But he rejected the vision of supranational uniformed Europe, created at the expense of the European states, diminished in force and significance, and the creation of European identity through calling into question and relativization of the importance of national bonds. On the contrary, in his concept of Europe, the creation of European action and identity was to be based on aspirations and desires of European nations shaped through the history. In his intentions, Europe organised in such a way (for the time being, only Western Europe) should strive for the creation of world’s centre of power, friendly towards the United States because of shared values, history and belonging to the same Western civilisation, but independent of the US and accepting the role of second pillar – with the US – shared responsibility for the future of this civilisation”. De Gaulle did not realise his vision of political union of Western Europe. But he made every effort to impede any tendency to increase economic unification, as in the case of changes planned for the European Economic Community. De Gaulle’s success in the foreign policy of France, and thus in France’s national security, was establishing good relations with Germany. He succeeded in doing what Briand intended and failed.

The well-known French historian Maurice Vaisse (2005a: 863–898) says that only de Gaulle had a vision of France’s worldwide aspirations. None of his successors was able to realise this vision. Nonetheless, French diplomacy still was very active in all these parts of the world where conflicts arose and tensions broke out (e.g. the Balkans). It was the result of France’s aspiration to the role of arbiter, or mediator. The dilemma of French diplomacy was – according to Vaisse – that France was actively engaged in European processes while at the same time she wanted to play a dominant role in the continent. He closes with the following postulate: France has to solve the dilemma of a medium-size power with worldwide aspirations. The American diplomat Henry Kissinger (1994: 604), however, wrote about de Gaulle that: “Single-minded devotion to the French national interest shaped de Gaulle’s aloof and uncompromising style of diplomacy. Whereas American leaders stressed partnership, de Gaulle emphasized the responsibility of states to look after their own security. Whereas Washington wanted to assign a portion of the overall task to each member of the Alliance, de Gaulle believed that such a division of labor would relegate France to a subordinate role and destroy the French sense of identity”. At the press conference on 11 April 1961, de Gaulle said: “It is intolerable for a great State to

leave its destiny up to the decisions and action of another State, however friendly it may be [...]. The integrated country loses interest in its national defence, since it is not responsible for it” (Kissinger 1994: 605).

## SUCCESSIVE PRESIDENTS OF FRANCE

Georges Pompidou, de Gaulle’s successor as president of France, was elected in June 1969. He was undoubtedly a continuator of de Gaulle’s policy, and the questions of France’s independence and its prestige in the international arena conditioned the main lines of the policy he pursued. Pompidou, however, was looking for a *détente* in relations with the Americans. While cautious towards the idea of European integration in the face of Soviet policy, he nevertheless promoted solidarity of Western European countries (Rials 1977: 18–56; Roussel 2004: 975–982).

The next president, Valéry Giscard d’Estaing, tried to intensify relations with Moscow, and opted for stronger ties within the integrating Western Europe, especially with West Germany. Although Giscard d’Estaing spoke about a change in the traditional thinking about French foreign policy, a continuation of former aims of French diplomacy was evident both in his policy and the policy of his successors, who all sought to secure for France an important and decisive position in the world (Guillaume 2004: 530–536). Similar stance was taken by two next presidents, François Mitterrand and Jacques Chirac, who – despite their different political orientations – in various ways contributed to maintaining the myth of France’s grandeur. In one of his articles, an American researcher from Harvard University, Stanley Hoffmann (2000: 308–310), wrote that the end of the Cold War did not bring about a change in goals of French diplomacy. It was still determined by the European construct, French–German cooperation, relations with the US and matters related to NATO (together with the NATO expansion to include the states of Central Eastern Europe after the collapse of the USSR), as well as the importance attached to the problems of Africa and Near East. There were two issues of paramount importance for the French diplomacy of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, that is Germany and the obsession of France over its decline as empire. For the United States France was still either a partner or a source of constant irritations: diplomatic, cultural and commercial ones. As Hoffmann writes, we can speak about a paradox continuation in French diplomacy. The continuation is the more intriguing that the French policy pursued by de Gaulle’s successors

did not achieve its main goals. Hoffmann wrote his article in 2006. Today, we are justified in posing the question whether and to what extent the actions of the former and actual presidents, Nicolas Sarkozy and François Hollande, are the continuation of French foreign policy, and to what extent they differ from its main line?

## FRANCE DURING THE PRESIDENCY OF NICOLAS SARKOZY

During Sarkozy's electoral campaign for presidency some European issues surfaced, but they were not dominant ones, maybe because in 2007 the French themselves were tired of those matters which had lost their appeal for them. To the preceding president, Jacques Chirac, Europe was mainly a geographical and geopolitical concept. Chirac, although Gaullist himself, departed from de Gaulle's lines in European matters many times (e.g. Maastricht Treaty, common currency unit). Paradoxically, it was Sarkozy who, although was not associated with Gaullism, propagated the idea of common Europe close to the movement that is the protection of national identity and sovereignty of states. Sarkozy repeated that the French rejection of the European constitution in May 2005 was a manifestation of their anxiety for the future shape of the union and their awareness that in the era of globalism Europe did not protect them, but on the contrary, was a source of anxiety. Sarkozy proposed a simple constitution treaty to be ratified by parliaments. He wanted to reduce bureaucracy of the Union and to simplify its mechanisms; he plainly propagated the slogans of 'Europe without politics' (Sarkozy 2007a: 99) – that is, of changes more along the lines of economic community, more adjusted to operations in the globalisation era, of Europe protecting its own members and defending universal values. Yet, all this remained only Sarkozy's electoral slogans, for it was in union that he saw a place for strong France.

In his book *Ensemble* Sarkozy presented a problem of Europe in two chapters: *Le défi de la mondialisation* and *L'Europe et la Méditerranée*, in which he referred to the grand idea of Europe as a project for peace and civilisation. At the same time, however, he added that Europe could not be only a legacy of the past, it had to evolve. He wrote even that Europe had to be 'European', that is in its role of the community of countries of European civilisation (Sarkozy 2007a: 95). Sarkozy was always against the accession of Turkey into the Union because of civilisation differences between Turkey and Europe. Although in his keynote speech on

foreign policy, Sarkozy softened his stance on Turkey and said that France would not block negotiations between the European Union and Ankara over Turkish membership; he stated that he was opposed to Turkey's full membership in the structures of the EU (Sarkozy 2007b). He opted for a 'privileged partnership' for Turkey. It should be emphasised, however, that this speech was met with a favourable reception both in the French press and politicians in Brussels, who stressed a realistic view of the new French president (Sarkozy 2007c).

Sarkozy paid attention mainly to a very important problem of the modern world – matters of the Mediterranean arena. The French president said that states of the Mediterranean region should pursue a common economic policy and create their own system of security. This construct, which Sarkozy called the Mediterranean Union, did not exclude cooperation with the European Union. Sarkozy saw here an important place for France also as Mediterranean state that could play the role of link between these two organisms: the European Union and Mediterranean Union.

What was totally new in the French foreign policy of Nicolas Sarkozy was a change towards the United States. For a long time Sarkozy was said to be 'pro-American'. We have every reason to believe that France attempts to reconcile itself with the US resulted from a cold and logical calculation of international relations, and its position in Europe. This formed a basis for France's attempts to create good relations with the US, which in the globalisation era inspired many of its processes and was its great beneficiary.

For the first time after the May presidential election Sarkozy presented the goals of French foreign policy in the first broad foreign policy speech of his presidency, delivered in the Élysée Palace on 27 August 2007 to 180 French ambassadors (Sarkozy 2007b). He recalled hopes pinned on the fall of the Berlin Wall and collapse of the Yalta order, and pointed out threats to the contemporary world related to terrorism and global economy. He also indicated the failed attempts of politicians to create a new international order after the end of the Cold War that would successfully protect against contemporary dangers. He opted for a multipolar world. And contrary to dominant opinions of his pro-American stance, in his speech he was critical of the imperialistic policy of the United States. To him, the multipolar world should be based on the G-8 states expanded into a G-13 (with Brazil, China, India, Mexico, and South Africa). He was also critical of Russia's brutal methods in its internal policy and problems caused in international relations by its energy policy. In his August speech, Sarkozy devoted much space – contrary to his electoral campaign – to



the matters of the EU, since it was in its structures that he saw a strong France. He pointed out three main challenges facing Europe: the necessity to counteract a confrontation between Islam and the West, the integration of China, India and Brazil – as emerging economic powers – with the new global order, and the need to solve problems related to energy and the global warming. The French president emphasized also the necessity to strengthen European security and defence policy and proposed to begin works on a new security strategy for Europe. To those works he invited Germany, Great Britain, Italy, Spain, Poland and Holland. In order to confront different opinions of the EU members about the future of the Union in 2020–2030, Sarkozy suggested the appointment by all 27 members of the Union of a committee of wise men, consisting of ten to twelve highly respected persons whose task would be to think of the EU future. The plan, however, was never implemented.

Elaborating on the subject of work against terrorist movement, Sarkozy confirmed the strengthening of the French forces in Afghanistan and struggle with the Taliban. Contrary to the famous thesis of ‘clash of civilisations’ introduced by Samuel Huntington (1999), Sarkozy thought, similarly to the former American president Bush, that it was possible for Western states to support Arab countries in order to modernise them; he believed in the dialogue of the West with Islam. To this end, Sarkozy presented his vision of the Mediterranean Union that would prevent the confrontation of those two civilisations. And although he expressed his hopes for peaceful regulation of Israeli-Palestinian conflict, he restated his support for Israel. At the same time, he remained critical of the war in Iraq, and demanded peaceful regulations; and while he said he was troubled by Iran’s nuclear arsenal, he proposed no solution for this problem.

One of the first important problems Sarkozy had to cope with as French president was the beginning of the global financial and economic crisis. In the mid-August 2007, after the crisis in the American housing market, there was a steep decline in stock exchange indices around the world, which caused widespread anxiety-driven panic. Nicholas Sarkozy’s reaction was very quick: on 16 August 2007 he sent a letter to Chancellor of Germany Angela Merkel, the then president of the Group of Seven (G-7), in which he emphasised that authorities, especially of these countries, must be ‘very vigilant’ over financial market corrections. The French president highlighted the importance of financial market transparency and outlined suggestions for change, such as to make more efficient an early warning system to detect impending dangers to the world economy, and first of all, to increase the responsibility of central banks for stability

in financial markets. He indicated some international institutions, such as the International Monetary Fund and Financial Stability Forum, which role was to oversee international economic stability and efficiency of financial system. He also urged banks to improve the functioning of international credit market for which they were responsible (Sarkozy 2007d)<sup>1</sup>. Neither in his letter nor in his other comments did he use the term 'state interventionism', yet he urged the G-7 states to better monitor both the transparency of the markets' operation and the functioning of international financial markets. Although Chancellor Angela Merkel took these symptoms quite seriously, she was far from accepting the French initiative and leading role in attempts to solve global financial and economic problems.

It is worthy of notice that initially Sarkozy included Poland to the group of countries that were to contribute to working out solutions for problems important to the European Union (Sarkozy 2007b)<sup>2</sup>. It is impossible to say, however, if he wanted to strengthen the position of Poland in the EU. First two years of his presidency were marked by not very good relations with Germany and a rivalry with Berlin, typical of the French foreign policy. Thus, the support for Poland was a natural element of the policy pursued by France. Let us remind that in the interwar period Poland and France signed a military and political anti-German alliance which expired during the Second World War, and after 1945, because of Poland's place within the Soviet zone, it was impossible to speak about independent Polish foreign policy. After 1989, France observed the changes occurring in Central Eastern Europe, but it did not seek to strengthen its relationship with Poland. Relations between Paris and Warsaw evolved along various lines and were resultant of the French relations with Germany, Russia and the United States.

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<sup>1</sup> *La lettre de Nicolas Sarkozy à Angela Merkel*. In his letter, the French president writes "the Group Seven countries". Russia, as we know, formally joined the G-7 in 1997. Thus we are justified in concluding that Sarkozy omitted Russia, although he did not omit it in his other comments on the role and function of the largest world states in the contemporary world, for he was speaking about the Group of Eight (G-8).

<sup>2</sup> He spoke, among other things, about plans for developing a programme of new security strategy for Europe. He invited to the programme Germany, Great Britain, Italy, Spain, Poland and Holland.

## FRENCH PRESIDENCY OF THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

On 1<sup>st</sup> July 2008 France took over the presidency of the European Union for eleventh time. The French presidency in the EU, like before, was to strengthen France's position and prestige in the Union and the world. This time, however, the French presidency was dominated by extremely important matters, such as Ireland's 'no' vote against the Lisbon Treaty, the Russian–Georgian conflict and financial and economic crisis. Let us remind that France played an important part in agreeing and signing on 13 December 2007 the Treaty of Lisbon. To Sarkozy, it was in part a personal success, which meant, to a certain extent, the completion of the process of reform in the EU. France also wanted the treaty to be ratified by the EU member states during its presidency. But Ireland, after the referendum on the Treaty of Lisbon held on 12 June 2008, rejected the treaty. There were also some problems on the part of Poland. Nicolas Sarkozy's sharp words to Polish President Lech Kaczyński for delaying the signing of the treaty breached the diplomatic code of conduct. Sarkozy failed to close during the French presidency in the Union all matters pertaining to the Treaty of Lisbon. The Treaty did not enter into force until 1 December 2009.

The conflict between Russia and Georgia was not the first one of its type in the history and, like in 1924<sup>3</sup>, France decided to support Russia. In the arena of international relations there is still one rule to be followed, namely to negotiate with powers at the expense of smaller nations or states. And although France undertook negotiations with Russia in its role of the EU leader, there was a certain continuity in thinking and behaving of the great powers' leaders in conflict situations. It was Russian leaders whom Sarkozy regarded as his partners in talks and negotiations. Let us remind here that during the European Union–Russia summit held in Nice Sarkozy criticised the plans to build the ballistic missile defence system in Czech Republic and Poland, and thus, he supported the Russian stance on the matter.

Soon after the outbreak of the Russian–Georgian conflict, Sarkozy went to Moscow in his capacity of the president of France (at that time he had no EU mandate to lead the negotiations between the European Union and Russia) as

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<sup>3</sup> Georgia announced its independence after the First World War. However, in 1924, when France tried to establish diplomatic relations with the USSR, it withdrew its diplomatic recognition of Georgia.

mediator exerting pressure on Moscow to pull back its troops from the occupied territories of Georgia. During his second visit to Moscow, this time on behalf of the EU, Sarkozy negotiated an agreement with Russian President Dmitry Medvedev to end the conflict, but it did not include an explicit Russian pledge to pull the Russian troops out of the region of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The Georgian–Russian conflict occupied an important place during the French presidency of the European Union. Despite numerous meetings with both politicians from Russia and Georgia, and the Union itself, the EU failed to take a firm stance on the conflict. Thus, we should agree with the opinion of Stanisław Parzymies that “the submissiveness of the French presidency to Russia resulted not only from France’s interests with this gas and oil power but also from the conviction that in the struggle against the world financial and economic crisis the partnership with Russia could prove to be extremely useful for the European Union” (Parzymies 2009: 80).

During France’s presidency in the European Union there was a return to the project that had been promoted by France for a long time pertaining to the policy of security and defence of Europe. It should be emphasised here that France, beside Great Britain and Germany, plays the greatest part in the policy of common security and defence of the European Union, which results from the military potentials of these countries. The French project was guided by the main goal of the security doctrine of that country – the autonomy of the European Union within NATO’s structures, i.e. by the creation of European military NATO’s structures. These plans, however, running counter to the strategic Euro-Atlantic concept on European security, had their roots in the conception of de Gaulle and his associates, although significantly modified in order to create supranational military structures for Europe. Stanisław Parzymies refers to the comments of French European Affairs Minister Jean-Pierre Jouyet made before the French presidency began, on 2 June 2008. Jouyet “announced at the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe that the main goal of French presidency in matters of security and defence will be to actualise the strategy of European security for the coming decade, strengthen civilian and military capabilities in managing crises, build European defence tools, and to increase «the partnership in the area of security» between the Union on the one hand, and NATO, Russia, UN and the African Union on the other” (2009a: 74). And although France proved unable to devote more attention to the problems of European defence and security during its presidency in the Union (despite the fact that those problems were often discussed during various ministerial meetings), it did not abandon

its project. After the Lisbon Treaty was implemented, the questions of security and defence of Europe increased in importance. The Treaty, however, focuses mainly on mechanisms and procedures of functioning of the EU members, and not on its strategic goals. It stipulates, for example, the possibilities to formulate the common foreign and security policy, which could lead to a common defence system for at least nine EU members. The Treaty could also be a starting point for the creation of a common European army, but in that case it would be necessary to establish a common political institution, such as, for example, a United States of Europe (Koziej 2009: 7).

The French presidency in the European Union revealed France's intensifying rivalry with Germany in the Union. Sarkozy, together with some French political circles, wanted to make France the main leader of the EU and to reduce the position of Germany, and especially ambitions and influences of Chancellor Angela Merkel. There was some tension between Paris and Berlin resulting from a different stance of the German chancellor on the French plans for the Mediterranean Union, project of a climate change package or model for preventing and solving financial and economic crises around the world. Despite differences and the rivalry between Sarkozy and Merkel, it was possible to observe an increasing overlapping interests and converging stances between these politicians after the next wave of financial and economic crisis. It was most evident in questions relating to reforms which were to discipline the EU members in financial matters, thus to create mechanism to protect Europe against financial crises in the future. There were also similar stances in matters pertaining to working on energy security in the EU. Especially, the last year of Sarkozy's presidency was characterised by an unprecedented cooperation between Sarkozy and Merkel. Such attitude of the French president provoked various comments, often critical ones, not only in France.

### **FRANCE'S RETURN TO NATO**

On 11 March 2009 President Nicolas Sarkozy announced that after 43 years France wanted to reintegrate into the NATO's integrated command. The French president had already signalled the fact long before, and indicated some modifications planned in French foreign policy towards the US. All this represented a break with tradition and de Gaulle who in 1966 decided to withdraw France from NATO's integrated military and leadership structures (although it rema-

ined in NATO's political structures). It is worth mentioning that in 1958 de Gaulle rejected an American proposal to create a regional defence system with intermediate-range missiles and tactical nuclear weapons to be deployed on the territories of European countries. France would be ready to accept the American proposal only if it had complete control. The Americans did not agree. Therefore, in 1966 France withdrew NATO's integrated military command structure and closed NATO's bases and offices in its territory. This decision, although very important from the military and political point of view, suggested that France was trying to oppose the dominance of the United States in Europe. In consequence, however, especially after the end of the Cold War, this weakened France's position within the international system, in which the US and NATO played the most important parts. From 1995 on, after Jacques Chirac was elected president of France, French political and military circles made attempts to return to the NATO's structures. French ministers of national defence and commanders of the General Staff attended meetings of the NATO Military Committee, France put its forces at NATO's disposal. During the war in the Balkans, France sent its troops to Bosnia and Herzegovina within the United Nations Police Reserve, which was UN-mandated but operationally under NATO's command. The return of France to the military structures of NATO resulted not only from Sarkozy's plans, but it was also a consequence of previous discussions and attempts undertaken by his predecessors to secure France's participation in important international events, and increase the competitiveness of the French arm industry with American one (especially with the new members of NATO). Sarkozy's decision to bring France back into the NATO military structure initially meant the incorporation to the structure of circa eight hundred French soldiers; the assumption of command of the Allied Command Transformation (ACT), with its headquarters at Norfolk, Virginia, by a French officer; and of command of Joint Command Lisbon. In his article *France returns to the NATO fold*, Philippe Leymarie writes: "Aware of Europe's feeble attempts at cooperation in defence matters, Paris promotes a «pragmatic way». Autonomy will develop step by step, creating «a more balanced relationship between Americans and Europeans». However, in private, much more negative thoughts went back to the alliance's top echelons: «The European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) has failed: the French presidency of the EU obtained only scraps. The allies won't act outside NATO. If you want to construct an ESDP that works, do it via NATO»". Leymarie also reminds readers: "Making France's full and final commitment to the alliance in his closing remarks to a conference at the Ecole militaire on

11 March, French president Nicolas Sarkozy declared: «I don't believe that the role of a major responsible power like France is to be halfway between everyone else, since that means France is nowhere». He suggested that France's decision to «resume her full role in NATO» bolstered national independence" (Leymarie 2009).

France's decision to return to NATO provoked various comments. Supporters saw in the return a strengthening of France's position in the international relations arena, while sceptics accused Sarkozy of betraying his Gaullist heritage and accepting American dominance in Europe, thus narrowing down the scope of activity of French diplomacy (Cholewa 2009). Of course, the problem is crucial for France, which is clearly evident in the context of its relations with Russia. In the sphere of security, NATO wanted to tighten cooperation with Russia and was ready to accept (although with a great caution) the Russian proposal for a new collective European security system. The Russian project suggested the incorporation into the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe, also the US, Canada and, of course, Russian Federation. This proposal aroused a lot of controversy, for it threatened to weaken NATO in Europe. In 2010 Nicolas Sarkozy conducted an active policy toward Russia. According to some observers of international policy, he sought to act as mediator, or arbiter, in relations between NATO and Russia, putting forward a proposal to create a "common European–Russian economic and security area" (Bielecki 2010). Tomasz Bielecki quotes the comment by Alexander Khramchikhin of the Moscow Institute for Political and Military Analysis, who said that: "Sarkozy plays a new system of security with Moscow in order to strengthen his position both in France and in Europe, and vis-à-vis the US. But Russia also plays its game with the aim to gradually enter the European political and security system".

It should be added here that during the presidency of Nicolas Sarkozy France did not participate actively in the activities of the Weimar Triangle. In April 2010 the foreign ministers of France, Germany and Poland identified and emphasised the need to strengthen the EU policy in the field of security and defence. Although the Weimar Triangle mainly serves as a forum for consultations and developing common positions on most important European matters, there were projects to initiate a special military unit, so-called Weimar Combat Group, that would be a strategic reserve of the EU capable of taking up rapid responses tasks in every crisis of the EU. Thus far, the Combat Group still remains under discussion.

## FRANÇOIS HOLLANDE – NEW PRESIDENT OF FRANCE

On 6 May 2012 Socialist Party candidate François Hollande was elected president of France, defeating incumbent Nicolas Sarkozy. Opinions of European commentators vary as to the person of new president and his policy. Some wanted to see it as a pivotal shift in French politics, both internal and foreign one (Parzymies 2012). There were voices that Hollande would steer a more independent course from Berlin and that he would realise main points of his presidential campaign, i.e., that he would renegotiate the Treaty on Stability, Coordination and Governance in the Economic and Monetary Union, that is the Fiscal Compact or Fiscal Treaty, now called simply the Stability Treaty; push case for Eurobonds and mobilise unused European structural funds. From May 2012 on, observers of French foreign policy have paid a good deal of attention to the relations between Hollande and German Chancellor Angela Merkel and, more broadly, between France and Germany. It does not mean a real break with Sarkozy's policy of cooperation with Germany, because France neither can afford that nor really wants to, but it could mean broadening the scope of cooperation with other EU members, and blocking some of German proposals in the European Council. We should, therefore, admit that Przemysław Żurawski vel Grajewski was right when soon after the presidential election in May 2012 he wrote about "cracks in the cohesion of the German–French tandem" and expected mass movements within the "European concert of powers" (2012: 20). It is more evident now, especially in the context of negotiations on the European Union's future budget for 2014–2020 or recent visit of the French president to Poland.

There is much continuity in French foreign policy, but also many modifications and changes resulting from new directions developed by France in its foreign policy to guarantee France's security, but mainly to secure its position in Europe within the European Union and in the world as an arbiter and one of the most important powers in the arena of international policy.

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