

Germany and France at the service of Europe, today more than ever!

For centuries, our two countries were rivals, adversaries, even "hereditary enemies". The relationship went through its most tragic period during the two world wars, particularly with the crimes committed by the Nazi dictatorship. We must be aware of this historical dimension in order to get an idea of the courage and audacity shown by Konrad Adenauer and Charles de Gaulle in signing the Elysee Treaty on 22 January 1963.

The text of the treaty is short and compact, but its content is almost revolutionary: in it, Germany and France commit themselves to nothing more and nothing less than "arriving, insofar as possible, at a similar position" on all the important economic, political and cultural issues. Fifty years on, the treaty is still just as relevant. The key themes of its preamble - reconciliation, young people, solidarity and Europe - embody the essence of our partnership. Over the years - beyond the vicissitudes of everyday life - it has enabled us to create a closeness and friendship that few peoples share.

Centuries-old enmity can give way to profound friendship: this is the message of the Elysee Treaty, which is of universal significance. For we have successfully carried out reconciliation between the Germans and French. Today, the polls show that more than 85 per cent of our fellow citizens have a good or very good image of the neighbouring country. We have a common history textbook, a Franco-German Brigade, a binational television channel - Arte - and many other institutions of dialogue and integration between our two peoples. Added to these are the close ties between the two countries' peoples. Today there are more than 2,000 twinnings between German and French towns and cities, which decisively help boost our social and cultural exchanges. Our economies are closely linked.

However, we must not give in to the illusion that everything can be taken for granted. What was true yesterday still is today: young people are the key to our common future. Our mission is still to teach both countries' young people the advantages and importance of getting to know their neighbour. The Franco-German Youth Office can take credit for enabling millions of young German and French people to meet. We will continue this effort.

Our friendship is based on a solid foundation of shared values. Both in our countries and in the international framework, we commit ourselves to freedom, tolerance, assistance to the weakest and cultural diversity. However, over the last 50 years Germany and France have sometimes held different positions when it has come to resolving important issues of shared interest. But we have proven that we are capable of understanding each other's positions and ready to find mutually acceptable solutions. In a spirit of solidarity and compromise, Germany and France want to continue tackling together the great challenges of our time, in order to ensure growth and prosperity, encourage innovation and education, protect the environment, guarantee a secure and sustainable energy supply, respond to the new questions of the computer age and act upon our commitment to peace, security and stability in the world. Germany and France share the same determination to work for a free, democratic Mali who decides her destiny. Along with our European Union partners, we shall make an important contribution to the future of that African state.

More than ever, Europe is at the heart of our cooperation. The EU's successes - from the single market and the free movement of people and goods to the single currency - would have been unimaginable without our joint determination and efforts. We want to continue putting Franco-German friendship at the service of this project, and we invite those who so wish to

join us. In the Weimar Triangle framework, Poland has fully committed herself alongside us to European integration. A first group of proactive countries can usefully emerge, but an *à carte* Europe, which would see some claiming the advantages of the EU without complying with the obligations that come with them, is not a conceivable option.

The challenges we have to take up are huge. On the economic front, the priority is still to overcome the crisis and the radical economic changes by consolidating public finances, but also encouraging growth and solidarity, to allow the economic recovery of Europe and bolster its position in the face of global competition. For us to be able to assert ourselves in the multipolar world of the 21st century, we have to be prepared constantly to modernise our economies and our societies, but also, when the time comes, to go on building the European home and make it better able to withstand crises.

We intend to fight the risk of EU erosion. The tendency towards populism and nationalism has increased worryingly with the economic crisis. We are countering this with the Franco-German commitment to Europe. Our relationship, which is generally excellent, can be a driving force for Europe more than ever. As foreign ministers and European citizens, we are convinced that, in another context, the "European reflex" of the war and post-war generations must be maintained and built upon. Faced with the dangers we have to confront, and contrary to what is sometimes said, Europe is not the problem, it has to be the solution. To this end, improvements are essential and we must champion them. We would like to work towards a Europe which fully meets people's expectations, so that rather than appearing costly, it appears first of all as progress, which our fellow citizens enjoy daily in the form of increased freedom, prosperity and security. This is what Konrad Adenauer and Charles de Gaulle would tell us today.

Long live Franco-German friendship!

(Text as published by the French Embassy in Bangkok)