

Exercise 1 for course 54808 - The Core of Europe  
*My ideas about the Franco-German couple.*

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The Franco-German “couple” seems to me to be one of the most successful political narratives of postwar Europe. I do not mean that it is simply fake. The reconciliation was real, the institutions are real, and the habits of cooperation are real. But I suspect that the story of the “couple” may sometimes do more work than the partnership itself.

Coming into the course, my working question is whether France and Germany are really the joint “engine” of Europe, or whether that image partly hides a more complicated reality. There is clearly something unusual in the relationship: youth exchanges, town twinnings, parliamentary contacts, joint cultural projects, and regular symbolic gestures of friendship. These things matter. They create routines, vocabulary, and a political class invested in keeping the relationship alive. In that sense, the Franco-German relationship is not just a myth.

But I am less convinced that this automatically means France and Germany function as a unified strategic couple. In recent decades, they have often disagreed on major issues: the Eurozone crisis, energy policy, relations with Russia before 2022, defense, and the role of Europe in the wider world. Sometimes it seems that Franco-German agreement is less the starting point for European leadership and more the minimum condition for the EU to move at all. When they finally agree, the result can look like leadership, but it may also be the product of delay, compromise, and necessity. This is why I find the metaphor of the “couple” interesting. A couple is not necessarily harmonious. A couple can argue, misunderstand each other, need each other, and still remain together because the relationship has become too important to abandon. Maybe that is a better way to think about France and Germany: not as two countries with one shared vision, but as two different states that have learned to manage their differences through a powerful story of reconciliation.

What I am especially interested in is whether the narrative merely describes the relationship or actually helps create it. Does the repeated language of partnership make cooperation easier? Does the public memory of reconciliation force leaders to keep trying, even when interests diverge? Or is the gap between the myth and the reality becoming wider?

The transferability question interests me most personally. If the Franco-German model is mainly about institutions and repeated cooperation, then perhaps it can be applied elsewhere. But if it depends on very specific historical conditions ( defeat, reconstruction, European integration, American protection, and the Cold War ) then it may be much harder to transfer. Before asking whether the model can travel, I think we first have to ask what the model actually is: a real partnership, a useful myth, or something in between.