

The Weimar Triangle and Poland–Germany–France cooperation in the context of the EU's future

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ABSTRACT AND PRIMARY THESIS

In the public space, we observe the debate over whether the Weimar Triangle is the core of a European defence system or an "eternal empty shell" (Dessberg, 2026). Some also say that, compared to other alliances, the Paris-Berlin-Warsaw one is burdened with many unfulfilled expectations. (Bednarska et al., 2025).

The main issue with the Weimar Triangle has been its failure to make full use of this alliance's potential, especially in the shaping of the European Union. Indeed, France, Germany and Poland represent the three leading military powers in the European Union. Their population accounts for nearly 42% of the EU's citizens (Eurostat, 2026) and their joint GDP correspond to one-third of the total GDP of the EU (World Bank, n.d.). However, this potential has been dispersed. France was mainly focused on NATO's Southern flank and on expeditionary operations. Germany timidly invested in the military. Poland was focused on the Eastern flank.

The biggest challenge facing the Weimar Triangle is speaking with a unified voice on crucial intra-EU issues. Examples such as the EU-Mercosur agreement, reactions to American threats regarding Greenland, the European Army project, and relations with external powers like the United States and the Russian Federation clearly demonstrate the lack of coordination between Warsaw, Berlin, and Paris.

To survive, gain greater importance within the European Union and shape EU policy, the Weimar Triangle needs to consolidate the policies of France, Germany, and Poland (Lohse & Bolouri, 2025). Undoubtedly, this cooperation will yield benefits for all three nations provided each respects the interests of the others. Trust must be the key word of this alliance. Indeed, to establish policies based on common interests, all three countries need to feel that future projects will benefit them equally.

ANALYSIS

A lack of trust and differing national interests are closely interconnected, with political and historical contexts playing a crucial role in shaping mutual trust.

POLAND

An example of shifting political interests occurred after the parliamentary elections in Poland in 2015, when the new government adopted a more pro-American and Eurosceptic stance. This shift was a primary driver behind the cancellation of the Caracal helicopter contract with France in 2016, causing severe diplomatic friction. A similar situation occurred in 2002 when Poland decided to buy American F-16 fighter jets instead of French Mirages in 2002, a move driven by the desire to lock in U.S. security guarantees (Dessberg, 2026).

Warsaw has consistently maintained a pro-American orientation since its democratic transformation, frequently participating in U.S.-led military missions such as operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. The primary reason for Poland's strong commitment to the United States is its desire for a robust American military presence and defence guarantee. As the most powerful Army in the world with the biggest expenditure, possessing the world's most powerful military and highest defence budget, Washington is viewed by Poland as its strongest ally. In contrast to the European Union, which cut defence spending for decades to reap the "peace dividend." Consequently, Warsaw often prioritises the United States over EU framework initiatives. While Brussels seeks to cooperate with Washington and maintain cordial relations, individual member states prioritising the U.S. over the EU ultimately reduce the Union's strategic efficiency. Certain European commentators have even referred to Poland as the "Trojan Horse of Europe." (Makarian, 2019)

GERMANY

Meanwhile, Germany, after years of economic stagnation, needed to boost its industrial competitiveness. Both Germany and the broader European Union felt they were falling behind the United States, China, and the other global powers. Consequently, Berlin leveraged its industrial and political base to strengthen economic relations with the Russian Federation.

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Moscow needed to open its economy to globalisation to acquire technology, know-how, and foreign investment. During the 2000s, the Russian economy expanded remarkably, largely due to trade with the EU and Vladimir Putin's state restructuring. In exchange, Russia supplied cheap hydrocarbons. At the time, many experts believed a shared economic space "from Lisbon to Vladivostok" was viable. An idea Germany viewed as a key opportunity to revive its economy.

Unfortunately, Russia's actions in 2014 proved it was unprepared to align with or integrate with European values. However, the European Union and Germany, as the continent's industrial core, were too dependent on Russian resources to impose severe consequences on Moscow.

This deep-seated dependency is a primary reason why Poland lacks trust in Germany, often viewing it as a "difficult partner". To illustrate this point, when the Nord Stream and Nord Stream 2 pipelines were built, Warsaw perceived a direct threat, feeling that German and Russian interests bypassed Poland and compromised regional security. Certain political factions in Poland went so far as to draw historical parallels between these projects and the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact.

FRANCE

France, for its part, operated under a fundamentally different strategic paradigm that often alienated its eastern partners.

Guided by a Gaullist tradition of military independence, Paris championed the concept of "European strategic autonomy," trying to develop self-reliant EU defence capabilities. However, this worldview clashed directly with Poland's strategic priority of maintaining strong ties with the United States and NATO as its ultimate security guarantee. (Dessberg, 2026).

This strategic divergence was further compounded by a mismatch in threat perceptions; while Warsaw remained acutely focused on the immediate danger posed by Moscow, France's attention was traditionally divided, with Paris prioritising security challenges in more distant regions, such as Africa and the Mediterranean.

Furthermore, France's reliance on its domestic defence industry stood in stark contrast to Poland's urgent need for rapid, off-the-shelf military acquisitions, which Warsaw frequently fulfilled by purchasing equipment from the U.S. and South Korea.

Rather than treating the Weimar Triangle as an equal platform of three partners, Paris has consistently preferred to coordinate its most important European policies through its bilateral relationship with Berlin, treating the Weimar format as merely auxiliary or symbolic. (Bednarska et al., 2025).

RECOMMENDATIONS

First and foremost, the members of the Weimar Triangle should establish a permanent secretariat that will monitor the progress of the implementation of common agendas or policies. The organisation should also dispose of a budget permitting it to finance actions modelled on the Visegrad Fund (Schäffer et al., 2025). The spending should be intended to finance sponsored student exchange scholarships among member countries, fund regional think tanks, and invest in joint defence and technological startups. These investments would build credibility and raise the public profile of the alliance while complementing broader EU initiatives.

The Weimar Triangle should develop existing initiatives such as the "Weimar Agenda" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Republic of Poland, 2024). All three should maintain the 2% of GDP defence minimum. Additionally, to increase the European Union's defence autonomy, the Weimar Triangle, as the core of the European military power, should organise regular joint military exercises and common security missions within the European Union, for example, by stationing together on the eastern NATO flank. These measures will increase the importance of the alliance and build trust among the member states of the European Union and the Weimar Triangle. For Poland, it will be an opportunity to increase the security and the importance of the regional alliances like the Bucharest Nine. For France and Germany, however, it will allow increasing their importance in the European Union and on the international scene. The "Digital Weimar Triangle" is a positive step towards integrating the alliance. Same as adding the "shadow fleet" to the EU sanctions list.

The Weimar Triangle should officially integrate France into the existing Dutch-German-Polish Military Mobility Corridor (initiated in January 2024) to streamline and accelerate the transborder movement of troops, heavy equipment, and ammunition across the West-East axis of Europe. To support a forward defence posture on the Eastern Flank, Poland, France, and Germany should work together to expand the NATO Central European Pipeline System (CEPS) fuel network directly to Polish territory to secure supply chains for conventional forces.

The Weimar Triangle should cooperate to implement the guidelines of Europe Readiness 2030 and the Rearm Europe Plan. Leveraging their combined economic and defence potential, the three countries should act as the primary engine for these plans, ensuring that the interests of each nation's domestic defence industry are balanced fairly to avoid conflict.

The "Weimar + Ukraine" format should be actively used as an informal, quiet forum to resolve highly sensitive, divisive issues (such as agricultural trade/grain competition and historical grievances) before they reach formal EU enlargement negotiation tables, preventing public resentment and procedural blockages. The help for Ukraine should be discussed together, and equipment should be bought together to decrease costs. The Weimar Triangle should propose a reconstruction plan and defence warranty to reinforce the position of the alliance and of Ukraine during negotiations. In exchange, the alliance should work together to acquire the Ukrainian military experience and technology.

The alliance should compose a clear, public list with all common interests and goals of each country. It will be easier for the Weimar Triangle to implement common Policy in the European Union. The Weimar Triangle can have a strong position during votes because of its population. In consequence, the Alliance

should be the engine of Europe by proposing common solutions. The accomplishment of commitments from this list will be verified by the permanent secretariat.

The Weimar Triangle, after declaring common interests, should cooperate in another format to increase the power of the voice of the alliance, for example by expanding to the format Weimar+ with Italy and Spain. This also means combining Germany and France's influence within the G7, and Poland's tight integration with the Nordic-Baltic Eight (NB8) to run unified diplomatic campaigns. The cooperation with global powers should not interfere with Weimar Triangle common interests.

CONCLUSION

The Weimar Triangle stands at a critical juncture in European geopolitical history. The alliance has long been constrained by divergent strategic paradigms, misaligned threat perceptions, and a lack of trust. Yet the three countries concentrate the European Union's top-tier demographic, economic, and military endowments, and their potential remains far from fully unlocked. Today, the EU faces unprecedented external security threats and a drastically changing transatlantic relationship, so it can no longer treat this mechanism as a vague symbolic platform.

The Weimar Triangle can be activated by establishing a permanent institutional framework, coordinating defence strategies, integrating core logistics capabilities, and building it into a core driving force for EU initiatives. This activation would bridge Western Europe's calls for strategic autonomy and Eastern Europe's demand for robust deterrence.

If Warsaw, Berlin, and Paris commit to mutual trust and shared institutional goals, the Weimar Triangle will not only secure its own members' vital interests but will also act as the indispensable voting bloc and strategic engine driving a resilient, unified European Union into the future.

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