



THE TREATY OF AIX-LA-CHAPELLE: A FRAMEWORK FOR COOPERATION IN NEED OF REFOCUSING ON A PEACE LOGIC

Pax Christi France and Pax Christi Germany speak up on the Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle of 22 January 2019

1. Fifty-six years after its signature, the Elysée Treaty between France and Germany (1963) was supplemented by the Treaty of Aachen of 22 January 2019. We should not forget that the origins of the Pax Christi movement were inspired, to a large extent, by the deep desire for reconciliation between peoples, in particular between the French and German peoples after the crimes and devastation of World War II. We therefore greatly appreciate the Treaty's provisions on culture, education, research and mobility (chapter 3), the commitments on regional and transfrontier cooperation (chapter 4), the sections on sustainable development, climate, environment and economic affairs (chapter 5). These provisions lay solid foundations for progress in the shared future of our two countries. Accordingly, we support ratification of this Treaty. Refusal to ratify would gravely damage trust between France and Germany and, as a consequence, the European project itself. Nevertheless, it is primarily a framework for cooperation that will need to be implemented in practice. This practice can be led by the new Franco-German parliament, established in conjunction with the Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle.

2. The areas pertaining to the envisaged cooperation in foreign policy and defence, which appear under separate headings in the Elysée Treaty, are dealt with in the Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle in a single chapter on peace, security and development (chapter 2). As regards cooperation in the field of defence, the Treaty explicitly mentions the strengthening of the capacity of action at the European level, the commitment to deliver mutual assistance in the event of armed aggression, the setting up – to the extent possible with other European partners – of common defence programmes, cooperation between defence industries and a common approach to weapons export as regards joint projects.

Our position

3. Accordingly, the military dimension of peace, security and development policies is given exaggerated attention. France and Germany envisage forming an avant-garde of military cooperation within the European Union's common foreign and security policy (CSDP). We, the French and German Pax Christi movements, observe that the setting up, in full conformity with the 1988 protocols, of a Franco-German Defence and Security Council as a political body (chapter 4) is a further step towards a core military capacity at European level.

Such a military capacity poses a fundamental challenge to the European Union itself. From our point of view, the EU should essentially be committed to a policy of civil prevention of crises, conflict-management and post-conflict peace-building, in Europe and worldwide.

4. Chapter 7 deals with a strong partnership between Europe and Africa. We welcome this plan as a tool for strengthening civil society initiatives for peace building and conflict resolution.

However, in view of the negative consequences of the use of military means for conflict-management (human victims and casualties, bewildering of soldiers and populations, physical destruction, hindrance to the development of democratic societies, environmental disasters...), recourse to military action must be approached with "healthy mistrust", even if executed under the aegis of the UN. For Europe, any kind of military intervention in Africa should be weighed against the enormous disruptions it would provoke in already fragile and barely sustainable societies. It would gravely undermine the moral imperative to develop tools and capacities for a non-violent transformation of conflicts. Instead of seeking justifications in "just war" theories, "just policing", if seriously implemented, could provide a practicable as well as justifiable alternative.

5. Moreover, as with all Franco-German and European treaties to-date, the Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle is silent on the French nuclear arsenal and does not mention the role of the French "nuclear deterrence" in European security. Nor is it more explicit on the presence on European soil of American nuclear weapons and their planned "modernisation". Nuclear disarmament, which should be a priority of Franco-German cooperation, is not mentioned either.

The idea of securing peace through nuclear deterrence cannot any longer be regarded as ethically acceptable. We decidedly plea for the gradual and universal elimination of nuclear weapons under effective international supervision taking fully into account the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW), passed on 7 July 2017 by the UN Conference created for this purpose. We also express our deep concern over the present erosion of arms control and disarmament arrangements (demise of the INF Treaty for example) and we deplore the current nuclear and conventional arms race which the European Union should endeavour to stop instead of participating in it.

6. Chapter 2 of the Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle develops a logic of military security. Pax Christi sees in that the seeds of possible future “militarisation” of our two countries, of the European Union and of our relations with neighbouring States of Southern and Eastern Europe. Pax Christi prefers to see the evolving of the European Union into a political entity, of which Franco-German cooperation would be a central pillar, subject to democratic debate with all member states – instead of emerging from a succession of bilateral arrangements that would create a series of “faits accomplis” for the other States. In this context, the contribution that the United Kingdom could make to “common defence” after Brexit should also be debated democratically. The role of NATO and of American hegemony with its current dangerous overtones should also be addressed. Europe must not, due to its lack of autonomous defence capacity, be drawn either into dubious military campaigns or into a fresh rearmament drive.

And not least, this debate must take up the aforementioned necessity to put the main emphasis on a civil reorientation of the desired cooperation towards peaceful goals. This is the only way the EU would fulfil the expectations arising from being awarded the Nobel Prize for Peace in 2012.

7. The provisions of the Treaty on future cooperation concerning weapons’ exports are also a source of concern given that they may undermine (current) German policy which is known for being stricter than France’s given the risks that such exports create for the maintenance of peace and respect for human rights. We are concerned that exporting weapons objectively contributes to the impoverishment of client States, the destabilization of Europe’s neighbouring areas, the increasing of tensions and ultimately the massive immigration flows which we witness today. The Arms Trade Treaty has apparently not delivered all its expected results. A common Franco-German and European “démarche” towards the United States and the Russian Federation is absolutely necessary if this trade is to be moderated.

Conclusion

8. Pax Christi deplores that in its wording the Treaty, after mentioning “peacekeeping”, sees the common security and defence policy exclusively through the lens of enhanced military planning and action. The Treaty is regrettably silent on conflict prevention, active peace promotion, humanitarian assistance and reconstruction of countries and societies devastated by war and undeclared conflicts. It does not however prohibit Franco-German cooperation from extending to these areas nor from making them one of its priorities. Practice can therefore redirect cooperation towards projects that aim at safeguarding and building just peace.

9. Pax Christi wishes that our two countries and all member states of the EU should continuously develop in a spirit of common security and cooperation, among themselves as well as in their relations to neighbouring states and continents. In the long term, only collective security can and should replace collective defence.

We recall that the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), which emerged from a process culminating in the 1975 Helsinki Conference to lay the foundation for a European security architecture after the end of the Cold War, may still serve as a good example of this approach to security and peace affairs.

10. On the eve of ratification by the parliaments of the two countries of the Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle, we invite parliamentarians to consider the implications of such a Treaty in the light of our comments and invite the French and German governments to refocus their current and future, enhanced cooperation in order to further these goals.

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