

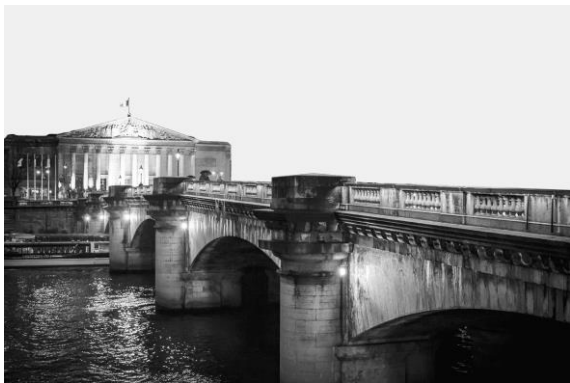
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A WARY WAY FORWARD?

HOW FRANCE IS WATCHING GERMANY'S SELECTION

- In recent years, French governments considered the Franco-German partnership as Europe's powerhouse toward both increased unity and a stronger geopolitical role. The end of the era Merkel therefore raises the question as to whether a successful relationship between France and Germany will prevail despite new leadership.
- Although the CDU underlined the special relationship during their last party conference, the rise of the Green party and the potential for a Black-Green alliance is seen as a possible threat to the future of the two countries' ongoing industrial, military, and international cooperation.
- Given their own elections looming next year, the French political landscape will most likely closely observe the performance of Germany's far right party, the so-called Alternative for Germany (AfD), as a potential upturn in votes could fuel the campaign of the French far-right and its front-woman Marine Le Pen against liberal incumbent Emmanuel Macron.

A strong friendship...



Despite their political differences, the last three French Presidents, conservative Nicolas Sarkozy, his social-democrat successor François Hollande, and current office holder, the more liberal Emmanuel Macron all devoted their first official visit to Chancellor Merkel. This is no coincidence. Neither the fact that Germany is -by far- France's largest economic and trading partner, nor the

shared history of the two countries can alone explain such an attraction.

Under the chancellorship of Angela Merkel, the German political and social model exerted a great deal of influence over policy discussions in Paris. Germany was consistently quoted as a haven for economic success and social stability and was often used as a benchmark for successful economic and social reforms in France.

All governments, regardless of political affiliation, valued the Franco-German partnership as Europe's powerhouse toward more unity and a stronger presence in the geopolitical arena. In Paris, the equation was simple: Germany would be the economic locomotive of the continent while France would lead the push for putting Europe in the global spotlight.

...with new obstacles?

Yet the road towards the 2021 Federal elections comes with questions in Paris, if not wariness.

Besides anxiety over prospective greater instability and unexpected changes in post-Merkel Germany, three main questions are stirring in stakeholders' minds, all mirroring France's own priorities and political dilemmas.

As the CDU congress broke ground, the future of Germany's European policy was on every observer's mind. Policy and business stakeholders alike are eager to ensure that the next German cabinet will perpetuate the current German government's favourable attitude towards perpetuating and deepening the leadership of the Franco-German tandem within the European Union. The weakening of what is considered an exclusive economic and policy relationship with the German Government is not something France can afford as the country faces its most severe economic and social crisis in decades.

A Black-Green question tag

The prospect of a Black-Green alliance is profoundly worrying for the French policy environment. Beside paving the way for more political uncertainty, the steady rise of the Green party – considered as overwhelmingly pacifist and non-interventionist– is seen as a potential threat toward the future of the two capital's ongoing industrial, military, and international cooperation. Both of which are top priorities for French decision makers. However, from a more political point of view, any amount of success for the German Greens would considerably support a still emerging-but growing- environmental movement in France.

An omen for the French election?



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France is also on the road to polls, as it awaits its own Presidential elections in 2022. With current surveys predicting a surge in votes for far-right candidate Marine Le Pen, the upcoming campaign by her German allies the Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) will be highly scrutinized. Besides fuelling Marine Le Pen's own campaign, any success for the AfD will likely be interpreted in Paris as potentially endangering the close relationship between the two countries and therefore, consequently, the European economic and policy agenda.