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[Dachzeile]

Looking Back at the First Years of the Franco-German Forum for the Future With Gilles de Margerie

Gilles de Margerie, who has led the French government's policy analysis institute France Stratégie since 2018, has served as the French Co-Director of the [Franco-German Forum for the Future](#) since its founding in 2020. As de Margerie's term of office as Commissioner General at France Stratégie draws to a close, his German counterpart Frank Baasner spoke with him about the Forum's achievements.

You helped to lay the groundwork for this new initiative for Franco-German cooperation, which was established under the Treaty of Aachen. What highlights from the Forum's first years stand out for you?

The Franco-German Forum for the Future was established in response to far-reaching and profound transformations occurring in both countries. These transformations, which take place away from the spotlight and so often go unnoticed, play an important role in determining the landscape on which future political reforms will unfold. However, there is little public awareness of them, which hinders engagement and reduces their impact.

In light of this, it was important to create new forms of dialogue that would enable citizens of both countries to perceive their role as agents of cooperation between the two states, their governments, and all their public institutions. And it is equally important that we bring successful experiences to the attention of those responsible – the Franco-German Ministerial Council and the Franco-German Parliamentary Assembly and its chairs – so that these successes can inspire their actions.

What has been achieved through the bottom-up approach taken by the Forum?

Our experiences over the first two work cycles have confirmed the intuition that inspired the founding of the Forum for the Future. Once the theme for an annual cycle has been defined, the teams at the Forum's co-secretariat set about identifying interesting projects that are supported by local actors – usually local authorities – and approach their leadership with an invitation to take part in the exchange process. Once a few projects have been selected in each country, their stakeholders meet to share experiences and identify common problems and solutions, which are subsequently reviewed and implemented. This phase is of crucial importance and determines the success of the entire process. It was a pleasant surprise to learn that communities in both countries grapple with similar concerns and that their solutions are often also comparable. While the institutional, legal and cultural parameters certainly differ, the issues and the ways of dealing with them are alike.

In each work cycle, the outcomes of this first phase inform the work of the core group. Comprising around 50 members, the core group includes representatives from the organising bodies, drawn equally from the two countries, who meet in a so-called "resonance space". This transdisciplinary and

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binational group convenes in person three times for an extended exchange that explores the experiences of regional authorities in both countries in order to distil suitable policy recommendations. This process requires a great deal of commitment and spans two two-day seminars on location as well as multiple video conferences to discuss specific issues in between these seminars. Here, too, the quality of the exchange has been excellent and we have been able to establish a strong rapport between the actors, experts, and representatives of civil society and public administration, who come together in the resonance space. The recommendations that have been developed on the two themes to date – firstly, the role of local authorities and their citizens in the ecological transformation, and secondly, initiatives for sustainable urban development – are both ambitious and credible.

In what areas has the Franco-German dialogue made an especially important contribution?

The Forum for the Future has established itself as an important facilitator for dialogue at the interface of social transformations and their institutional implementation in France and Germany – and as a dialogue that generates recommendations for action. In this respect, the Forum for the Future differs from the traditional forms of exchange between civil society organisations in the two countries. However, it also differs from the various forms of institutional dialogue and is not subject to the same constraints.

The topics addressed in the first two work cycles touched on policy areas in which Germany and France differ significantly, but where some common ground exists. The dialogue initiated by the Forum for the Future succeeded in highlighting similarities in the challenges faced by communities and opportunities for their resolution, thereby increasing their scope and relevance.

The third cycle, which has only just begun, will focus on the energy transition. This is clearly a far more complicated matter as it encompasses issues on which the governments of France and Germany have very different positions, such as the future of nuclear power, for example. At the same time, much can be done at the local level to improve energy efficiency and sufficiency and to promote innovative low-carbon solutions, and local authorities in both countries are doing a lot in this area. And while this does not negate potential differences between the two countries, it reveals a larger and more nuanced picture. The Forum for the Future has taken on a challenging topic for its third work cycle – and an opportunity to add real value.

What three topics stand out for you among the recommendations elaborated by the Forum for the Future?

The work cycle on the role of local and regional authorities in the ecological transformation has highlighted the many ways in which they can make a concrete contribution. One particularly clear example is the role that local authorities play in the area of nutrition, especially in school canteens and other forms of institutional catering. Food services of this kind offer opportunities to foster good eating and consumption habits that favour local producers, acknowledge the environmental impacts of food production, and deliver better health outcomes.

In the area of sustainable urban development, it quickly became clear that the development and use of the urban environment – from residential areas to manufacturing, offices, stores, and public services – is significantly shaped by the way we design public spaces. The careful design of public spaces can help communities to move towards greener cities, promote softer forms of mobility and improve citizens' quality of life. Achieving this requires the early integration of transportation planning, urban development, and greening expertise and initiatives in the planning process.

The first two work cycles revealed a common factor: the need for municipalities to find ways to meaningfully involve citizens in decision-making processes so that no one feels excluded and they can be completed within a reasonable timeframe. Elected representatives – who ultimately have the final say within their respective remit – must have the opportunity to make decisions under conditions that are broadly recognized as democratic and thus legitimate.

Looking ahead to the future, what opportunities do you see to improve this important instrument of Franco-German cooperation?



Those involved in the Franco-German dialogue know the Forum for the Future and appreciate its work. Experts in the fields of socio-ecological transformation and sustainable urban development have taken note of its recommendations. Our next task is to broaden this audience while also strengthening and extending our existing ties in both countries. We must aim to maintain close connections with all of the local authorities that have engaged with the Forum for the Future since its inception – and this will involve a wider circle than the key players of the first three work cycles. We must expand this emerging network, keep it alive, and bring in more and more stakeholders – these are all possible future prospects. The Forum for the Future has developed a solid foundation for its work. Now it needs to be brought to life and its approach and results publicized in both countries.

This interview was first published on the website of the [Franco-German Forum for the Future](#).