Exploring Franco-German Collaboration in Space & Defence Innovation

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Diana Vegner



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Technology continues to evolve rapidly, and in recent years, our reliance on it has grown significantly. Recognizing the importance of this shift, delegates from various think tanks have begun examining both historical trends and future developments. As a representative of the research alumni network, I had the privilege of participating in the EuroDefense-Deutsch-

land / EuroDefense-France initiative. Four members from the EPIS think tank attended the "Franco-German 'Young & Space' Meeting" — a one-day workshop focused on space, start-ups, and defence innovation. Importantly, these themes are closely intertwined, particularly when it comes to space technologies.

The workshop featured start-ups such as Isar Aerospace, HyImpulse, and Rocket Factory — all working at the intersection of commercial spaceflight and national defence. Organized by the EPIS Think Tank and held on February 5th, 2025, the event took place at the French Embassy in Berlin, in partnership with EuroDefense. We were welcomed with opening remarks from Emmanuel Suquet, Minister Counselor at the French Embassy. The program then continued with a keynote by Ralph Thiele, President of EuroDefense-Germany, who addressed the challenges of Franco-German collaboration in space. Thiele emphasized the critical role of lobbying, competitiveness, and European sovereignty. He argued that Europe must reduce its dependency on foreign powers, such as the United States, in key strategic sectors like space exploration.

Furthermore, Thiele also pointed to specific weaknesses — for example, the slow procurement processes of the German military, and France's limited market size and supply chain issues. These challenges underscore the importance of deepening cooperation between both countries. Defence and security were also central topics. Success in space, Thiele argued, is not science fiction — it is essential to national security, including fields like air defence, robotics, and drone technology. The recent rise in interest around space in Germany, especially after plans for offshore rocket launches were announced, reflects this growing awareness.

The international context was not ignored. The ongoing war in Ukraine and heightened geopolitical tensions have sparked new debates about critical space infrastructure and services, such as Starlink. Europe must now ask itself: how can it ensure its own security in times of crisis? And when did genuine Franco-German cooperation in this field become a shared strategic priority?

Space is inherently complex — especially during times of political and economic instability. Since the onset of the Russia-Ukraine war, the urgency of action has become undeniable. Both Germany and France took on a huge responsibility. Collaboration must go beyond words and be grounded in shared goals and strategic planning.

Yet, differences remain. Academic and institutional structures in Germany and France vary, which can complicate joint projects. Still, progress is being made. Throughout the event, speakers highlighted the growing importance of start-ups, and their vital links to both universities and the military. Before launching any joint space ventures, the speakers urged both countries to explore the kind of ideas and projects they want to pursue together. This brainstorming phase is not optional — it is foundational.

Risk-taking, particularly in areas like cybersecurity and defence innovation, is necessary. Acknowledging these risks is the first step toward managing them. The speakers called for a culture of shared ambition and long-term strategic thinking. Reflecting on past challenges — such as fragmented markets and shrinking defence budgets — provided valuable lessons. Also, the speakers highlighted that France's space sector lacks enough private investment, customers, and industrial support to create a strong, self-sustaining market. As Ralph Thiele noted, understanding historical obstacles can help guide future success. Cooperation through institutions like the European Space Agency (ESA) must not highlight national differences, but instead foster unity.

Finally, there are still many open questions. In the U.S., the political landscape has shifted again with the return of Donald Trump to the presidency. As the panellists pointed out, Europe must not ignore negotiations with the U.S. regarding space policy. NASA's role and the broader U.S. agenda will inevitably influence Europe's strategy. Political engagement is essential. As one speaker aptly put it, "Without political power, nothing will change."

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