“Weimar Plus”

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In 1991, the Weimar Triangle was established as a forum for trilateral consultations between foreign ministers of France, Germany and Poland. Born out of the collapse of the Soviet system in the region of Eastern Europe, its priorities were anchored in promoting German-Polish reconciliation, strengthening dialogue and political cooperation amongst the three countries, and integration of Poland into the wider European framework, particularly NATO and the EU. The cooperation is largely confined to ministerial meetings and summits. Consequently, the alliance has not matured into a concrete mechanism and has rather remained dormant for security and political coordination.

In February 2025, a joint statement was issued by key actors including Germany, France, Poland, Italy, Spain, the United Kingdom, the European External Action Service and the European Commission, which altogether comprise the Weimar Plus group. Subsequently, the coalition has had follow-up meetings in Madrid, London and Rome, respectively.

The members have endeavoured to mediate a cohesive response to the intractable Russia-Ukraine war by reaffirming their shared commitment towards Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity and upholding the common responsibility of Europe's security and the revisioning of the transatlantic order.

As a result, the alliance now signals a growing security cooperation among European powers rooted in consensus-building to enhance Europe's resilience against rising geopolitical risks. In addition, the coalition has emphasised enhancing defence production and capabilities to augment the European industrial and technological base.

The Paradox of Trump's Diplomacy: US Abandonment of Europe

For years, the transatlantic alliance between Europe and the United States served as the bedrock of the relationship until Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine became a bone of contention. And rightfully so, the recent geopolitical shifts marked by strategic and political realignments spurred the alliance into action.

In particular, the oscillation between engagement and retrenchment in US foreign policy during President Trump's administration has aggravated European allies' geopolitical anxieties. Since the beginning of his term, President Trump's remarks on the conflict have been stirring a lot of controversy. His erratic moves over the security dilemma created a deadlock in which decisions failed to translate into concrete action, deepening mistrust.

While he was gravitating towards securing a peace deal during the Trump-Putin talks at the Alaska Summit, he later questioned the necessity of a ceasefire during his meeting with President Zelensky and European leaders, despite their support for the move. Moreover, another dramatic shift in his policy surfaced, followed by his meeting with President Zelensky on the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly, as he showed his propensity to play on both sides by suggesting the possibility of a military action whereby Ukraine can "win back all territory from Russia." Without robust US support, however, such an action leaves the onus on Europe. "With time, patience, and the financial support of Europe and, in particular, NATO," Zelenskyy added, "the original borders from where this war started are very much an option."

Amid shifting U.S. signals, its pivot to the Indo-Pacific, and a growing preoccupation with strategic competition against China, the United States appears increasingly inclined toward either strategic ambiguity or regional

disengagement. This dynamic pushes Europe to advance its quest for strategic autonomy, recalibrating trust in European minilateral frameworks —most notably the revitalized Weimar Plus—as potential mechanisms to address the emerging power vacuum in the geopolitical landscape

Is Weimar Plus a Gamechanger?

As a minilateral format—small-group cooperation among a limited number of states—Weimar Plus is emerging as a prominent form of collective action, offering greater agility and flexibility than traditional institutions such as the EU, which often remain constrained by inefficiencies in decision-making and policy implementation.

In addition, Weimar Plus can serve as a complementary format that elevates strategic coordination in the region. The group of six major countries, supplemented by the EU's representation, carries immense political weight and normative scope for policy formulation, enabling it to act as an intermediary in facilitating rapprochement and negotiations as potential interlocutors between Ukraine, Russia and the United States.

Moreover, with a formidable arms industry, the group can play a vital role in harmonising procurement strategies for industrial cooperation in defence through the development of concrete deliverables for strategic partnerships, materialising in joint projects, intelligence sharing, interoperability efforts and fostering technological innovation in the military domain, extending beyond conventional capabilities.

A synergy of member countries' potent capabilities integrated with the EU's institutionalised frameworks can transform into extensive strategic ties. For example, the European Long-Range Strike Approach (ELSA)—an ongoing project between France, Germany, Italy, Poland, the UK and Sweden—is intended to fill the capability gap by developing long-range conventional strike options through indigenous technologies. Similarly, with the expansion of the Weimar Triangle, Eurocorps, a multinational headquartered in France and Germany, can come to the forefront and reassure member states as initiatives of this nature are essential to be reinvigorated in a concerted effort to synchronise intelligence sharing, defence capabilities, and logistical interoperability. Moreover, the EU's Readiness 2030 Initiative can provide financial muscle to the strategic ambitions of the coalition.

Furthermore, credible deterrence capabilities and expeditionary forces demonstrated by France and the United Kingdom are displayed through the UK-France Combined Joint Expeditionary Force to facilitate rapid deployments. By virtue of naval superiority, Italy and Spain have expanded their maritime reach and power projection through Navantia and Fincantieri, complementing the Blue Water Navies of France and the United Kingdom.

In addition, Germany leverages its industrial and financial capacities whereby it leads projects such as the European Sky Shield Initiative (ESSI),

involving Poland and the United Kingdom, which offers a protective shield to the airspace of participating nations, neutralising aerial threats. Poland's forward posture as a vital security contributor proves instrumental in securing NATO's eastern flank through consistent modernisation efforts to accelerate land power interoperability with initiatives including Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) and EU Battlegroups.

The EU can also provide platforms to participating countries in tackling non-traditional threats. Horizon Europe is one initiative that factors in research, development and innovation by allotting a €175 billion budget, dedicated to four pillars, particularly dual-use technologies with civil-military applications in the domains of artificial intelligence, cybersecurity and defence technologies.

The Weimar Triangle's existing forums for trilateral cooperation also serve as an impetus for multidimensional collaboration in Weimar Plus, such as the Green Weimar Triangle, which is focused on climate cooperation and sustainability-driven initiatives. The EU's Copernicus Earth Operation Programme, for example, leverages the Copernicus Climate Change Service (C3S) and the National Collaboration Programme (NCP) to develop specialised climate services suited to meet individual state requirements. This improves communication on climate change and associated risks while facilitating innovative applications of climate data.

Weimar Plus countries also constitute a significant amount of Europe's defence spending in tandem. According to SIPRI, Germany's military spending increased by 28 per cent, reaching $88.5 billion in 2024 from $67.2 billion in 2023, whereby it stands as the largest defence spender in Central and Western Europe. Similarly, Poland's military expenditure grew by 31 per cent to $38.0 billion in 2024.

Nevertheless, half of the member countries have not managed to reach the minimum GDP defence spending threshold, which was initially termed the "Weimar Agenda", calling for a boosting of defence spending to 2 per cent. As of now, Poland's defence spending represents 4.2 per cent of its GDP, which is the highest compared to Germany (1.9%), France (2.1%), Italy (1.6%), Spain (1.4%), and the United Kingdom (2.3%).

In addition, the format is faced with headwinds as it lacks a formal and institutional structure, risking a lack of enforcement mechanisms and inconsistency. The practical implementation is heavily dependent on EU frameworks which are sluggish owing to bureaucratic hurdles. Consequently, the alliance has inherited systemic challenges leading to internal dissonance that impedes unified strategic posturing owing to diverging national interests that determine the level of commitment of national governments.

The differing goals can lead to fragmentation, diminishing the cohesion of the Weimar Plus grouping. France prioritises European strategic autonomy, whereas Poland emphasises the maintenance of the transatlantic relations between the United States and Europe, particularly opposing the

exclusion of American companies from the European defence industry landscape. Similarly, the UK's post-Brexit strategic orientation is focused on the "NATO First" policy, limiting the contours of cooperation with the EU. The diverging threat perceptions among member states are another cause of friction. There is a common perception among the majority of the participating countries, including Poland, Germany, Italy, France, and the United Kingdom, that Russia is a primary threat or aggressor. However, only the United Kingdom and Poland believe that Ukraine should be supported until it wins the war, while the rest of the countries lean towards supporting diplomatic efforts to cease the war. Nonetheless, France, Poland, Germany and the United Kingdom firmly believe in providing military support to Ukraine, as opposed to Italy, which favoured the provision of humanitarian assistance. Apart from migration challenges, the dispute between the European Commission and Poland over the judicial reform held significance as France and Germany sided with the former.

These differences sometimes lead to tangible policy conflicts. In 2016, for example, a diplomatic rift between Poland and France led to the cancellation of a Caracal helicopter contract. In April 2025, Warsaw showed openness to stationing French nuclear weapons in efforts to secure France's nuclear defence guarantees for Poland without a full appreciation of the difficulty of adapting France's nuclear capabilities and nuclear doctrines that this would entail. Another diplomatic row is likely to spur between Germany and France as the French company Dassault has stated that it has the capability to develop the sixth-generation fighter jet without Germany's assistance.

Such fragmentation can be further amplified by domestic considerations. In 2022, Germany's former Chancellor Olaf Scholz announced massive defence investment but failed to consider the legal obstacles, such as the parliament's involvement in approving the procurement procedures, compounded by the pacific mindsets cautious about hefty military expenditures and aggressive defence policies. The recent dialogues and discussions that have taken place since February 2025 have been largely symbolic as opposed to substantive. Similarly, electoral dynamics and political fluctuations could lead to polarising effects. Under the Tusk government, the revival of the Weimar Triangle has gained traction after the end of the right-wing rule of the Law and Justice Party, undermining Poland's relations with the EU. Contrastingly, the wave of far-right politics risks engulfing the alliance with emerging right-wing leaders like Jordan Bardella in France, showing a sceptical attitude towards deeper European cooperation and integration through minilateral groupings like Weimar Plus. Hence, a far-right win in the upcoming 2027 elections could undermine the Weimar Plus alliance.

The solidarity between the member states of the alliance is also influenced by the chemistry between politicians. Olaf Scholz and French President Emmanuel Macron had a complicated relationship, while relations appear to be improving with the new chancellor, Friedrich Merz. Likewise,

since the meetings take place between the foreign ministers of the member countries, the frequent domestic rotation at the ministerial level hinders the formation of a long-term strategy. Ambitious political declarations are mired in the push-and-pull of the dynamism of European politics.

Conclusion

The potential states of Weimar Plus have been active in the political sphere, but it is premature to assume that their union will revolutionise the European security architecture and emerge as a diplomatic and strategic instrument for policy coordination. Thus far, the coalition has not been fully capitalised with a great deal of its potential left unrealised.

Its success hinges on its ability to translate its ambitions into cohesive outcomes and adapt to emerging challenges in the form of psychological and information warfare and cyber threats. It needs to cultivate a strategic culture less restrained by the multistakeholder bureaucracy of the EU and NATO. If so, it can serve as a supplementary framework with a significant degree of relative autonomy.

It is imperative for the coalition to build flexible engagement mechanisms and procedural transparency while ensuring equitable representation. Moreover, the coordination needs to be strengthened by developing systemised parliamentary exchanges between member nations, boosting regional connectivity and municipal relations. It is also essential to ensure the inclusion and empowerment of the civil society elements that contribute to enhancing the policy effectiveness of the platform in reinforcing democratic institutions as well.