

RESEARCH

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RECOMMENDATIONS

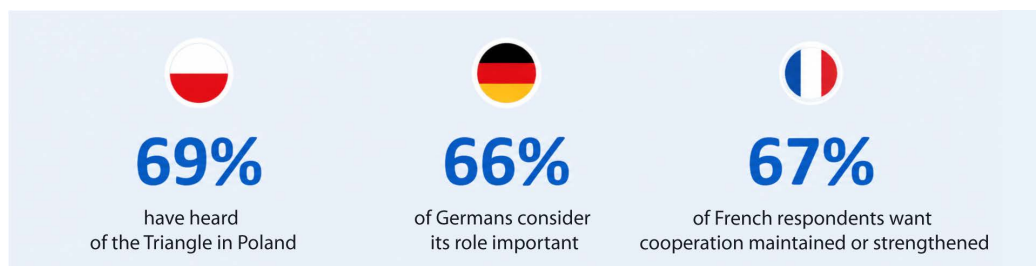
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MORE COOPERATION TANGIBLE RESULTS

KEY SURVEY FINDINGS ON THE 35TH
ANNIVERSARY OF THE WEIMAR TRIANGLE



After 35 years, the Weimar Triangle has a public mandate. It must now demonstrate its value. The latest public opinion survey reveals a paradox: awareness of the format varies widely, yet a majority in all three countries supports continuing the cooperation.



THE TRIANGLE AFTER THIRTY-FIVE YEARS: FROM SYMBOL TO A TEST OF AGENCY

On 28 August, the Weimar Triangle marks 35 years since its establishment. Anniversaries invite reflection, but the survey findings suggest that reconstructing the past matters less today than asking what function and form trilateral cooperation should take in the future. The Weimar Triangle was founded to support Poland's accession to European Union after the end of communism and the Cold War – and today Poland is the success story in Europe and one of the most important members of the EU. But citizens in Poland, Germany and France are not waiting for another anniversary declaration about the past. They support cooperation provided it is visible, practical and capable of translating three national perspectives into European decisions for the future.

In each of the three countries, at least two-thirds of respondents want cooperation to remain at its present level or become stronger: 67% in Poland, 75% in Germany and 67% in France. Those who favour much looser cooperation or abandoning the format are a clear minority: 9% in Poland, 8% in Germany and 10% in France. This is not unconditional enthusiasm. It is, however, a rare asset today: a cross-border mandate that extends beyond any single national society.

That mandate varies in intensity. In Poland, the most common preference is for stronger cooperation –around 46%, compared with 21% who want it kept at the same level as now. In France, the gap between supporters of stronger cooperation and those favouring the status quo is narrower: 39% to 29%. In Germany, the two

positions are almost evenly balanced: 38% want stronger cooperation and 37% want it maintained. Warsaw therefore gives the format its strongest momentum for expansion, Berlin expresses the clearest preference for continuity, while Paris combines openness to further development with a large group that has yet to form an opinion.

ONE EUROPE, THREE PUBLIC MOODS

The Triangle operates within the European Union, so its potential cannot be separated from public attitudes towards European integration. Interest in European and international politics is highest in Germany, at 82%, compared with 65% in France and 62% in Poland. EU membership is supported by 63% of Poles, 61% of Germans and 53% of French respondents. France is therefore the least unequivocally supportive of EU membership, although supporters there still outnumber opponents by more than two to one.

At the same time, in all three countries the prevailing vision of the EU is based on cooperation among the governments of the Member States rather than on transferring further powers to EU institutions. The intergovernmental option is chosen by 50% of Poles, 59% of Germans and 50% of French respondents. Stronger EU institutions are preferred by 21%, 24% and 27%, respectively. This is a particularly important cue for the anniversary narrative: the Triangle can be used as a forum in which three important member states cooperate to help shape the future direction and to strengthen Europe together.

The three countries also share a pragmatic understanding of Europe. Freedom to travel traditionally ranks highly among the benefits of EU membership, but security, defence capabilities and influence over decisions made at EU level matter as well. For respondents, being European is not merely an identity; it is also a measure of collective agency. This creates space for the Triangle precisely where the three capitals can carry more weight together than separately.

WELL KNOWN IN POLAND, CONSIDERED IMPORTANT IN GERMANY, INSUFFICIENTLY VISIBLE IN FRANCE

The greatest differences concern awareness of the format itself. In Poland, 69% of respondents have heard of the Weimar Triangle, compared with 48% in Germany and just 30% in France. Yet only around 22% of Poles, 11% of Germans and 5% of

French respondents say they know very well what the term means. Even the Polish result therefore indicates familiarity mainly with the name, not necessarily an understanding of the mechanism, its objectives and achievements.

Awareness of the format in Poland is also distinctly generational: it rises with age, while among the youngest respondents it is particularly common never to have come across the term. In France and Germany, the problem is broader – the Triangle has not entered mainstream public awareness despite strong interest in European affairs, especially in Germany. This is a valuable diagnosis: low awareness need not indicate indifference towards Europe; it may instead reflect that there is not enough visibility for a political product carrying the ‘Weimar’ label.

More striking still is the gap between awareness and assessment. The role of the Weimar Triangle in the further integration of Europe and in shaping the EU’s political agenda is considered important by 53% of Poles, 66% of Germans and 55% of French respondents. The format therefore enjoys the broadest legitimacy in Germany, even though awareness there remains moderate. In France, 67% have never heard of the Triangle, yet once its purpose is explained, 55% consider its role important. The Triangle’s potential is therefore greater than the strength of its brand.

Comparative table: the Weimar Triangle’s public standing

INDICATOR	 POLAND	 GERMANY	 FRANCE
Have heard of the Triangle	69%	48%	30%
Consider its role important	53%	66%	55%
Want stronger cooperation	46%	38%	39%
Want cooperation maintained or strengthened	67%	75%	67%
Support joint educational programmes	46%	52%	48%

Percentages have been rounded to whole numbers. ‘Maintain or strengthen’ is the sum of two responses to the same question; one-point differences may result from rounding.

SECURITY: A SHARED DIAGNOSIS, DIFFERING LEVELS OF URGENCY

The Triangle also has a natural geopolitical rationale. Russia is seen as a military threat to the EU by 80% of Poles, 70% of Germans and 76% of French respondents, and as a political threat by 76%, 66% and 71%, respectively. The shared diagnosis is therefore clear, but the Polish perception is the most acute – which is not surprising, given Poland's direct neighbourhood to Russia's war against Ukraine. For Warsaw, security remains an immediate experience; in Berlin and Paris, concern is held by a majority but is more often filtered through party preferences and broader attitudes towards the EU.

Differences also emerge in assessments of the United States. The US is viewed as an economic threat by 38% of Poles, 63% of Germans and 68% of French respondents, and as a political threat by 36%, 53% and 54%, respectively. French and German public opinion is therefore more alert to the costs of transatlantic asymmetry, while Poles are traditionally more likely to regard the United States as an important partner. A common European policy cannot conceal these differences. It should turn them into complementary roles: Poland's sensitivity to the Russian threat, Germany's focus on the economy and France's emphasis on European autonomy can reinforce one another if incorporated into a single plan of action.

FROM SUMMIT DIPLOMACY TO COOPERATION PEOPLE CAN SEE

The public is most inclined to support initiatives that are open, educational and tangible. Joint educational programmes are backed by 46% of Poles, 52% of Germans and 48% of French respondents. Increased funding for cultural and media projects receives 39%, 36% and 36% support, respectively, while joint festivals and cultural events receive 36%, 39% and 36%. This convergence is remarkably strong: the three societies rank the social instruments of cooperation in almost exactly the same order.

This is an important corrective to a diplomatic culture that too often measures activity by the number of ministerial meetings. Respondents choose a different kind of visibility: schools, universities, culture, exchanges and a shared media space. Younger people in France and Germany are particularly open to grants, exchan-

ges and digital tools, whereas in Poland it is precisely the younger groups that are least familiar with the format. The conclusion is straightforward: the anniversary should launch a new cycle that strengthens cooperation on the level of civil society and that makes the Triangle part of the lived experience of a younger generation.

The same cross-cutting patterns recur in all three countries. People who are interested in politics, have higher levels of education, support EU membership and are familiar with the Triangle are more likely to consider it important and to favour stronger cooperation. This does not mean that knowledge automatically produces support. It does show, however, that lack of information primarily produces indecision. The Triangle's greatest adversary today is not mass opposition, but not enough visibility.

HOW TO TURN THE ANNIVERSARY INTO THE BEGINNING OF A NEW CHAPTER

If the format is to become a genuine political instrument rather than remain a façade, differentiated action is required at multiple levels, beginning with the highest political authorities. Heads of state and government should move beyond broad declarations and establish a short, focused set of commitments. Any anniversary declaration should therefore contain three to five precisely defined common objectives, each with a clear deadline, assigned responsibility and a requirement for public progress reviews. This core agenda could cover areas central to Europe today: European security, economic and energy resilience, greater competitiveness, and a coherent policy towards the EU's eastern and southern neighbourhoods. The overriding test should be whether, one year later, citizens can readily identify what the Triangle agreed and how those agreements changed the reality of European policy.

For ministers and government administrations, the challenge is to establish a permanent coordination mechanism that begins operating before EU decisions are taken. Regular trilateral working groups should be created to prepare joint strategic options papers and coordinate consultations ahead of key meetings of the European Council and important sectoral Council formations. This mechanism should provide a platform for aligning positions wherever there is genuine scope for compromise. Difficult issues must not be avoided. Areas of evident disagreement – such as differing assessments of transatlantic relations or security priorities – should be communicated openly and addressed through substantive negotiation, not artificially concealed beneath formulaic statements of complete unity.

To become a lasting pillar of Europe's political architecture, the Weimar Triangle also needs a strong parliamentary foundation. This would give the cooperation continuity regardless of political cycles and changes of government in Warsaw, Berlin or Paris. The three parliaments should therefore establish a permanent forum of relevant parliamentary committees. Annual debates on the state of Weimar cooperation and joint expert hearings would further reduce the risk of the Triangle becoming a political project dependent solely on the parliamentary majority of the day. The survey findings reveal substantial party-political differences in assessments of the format, but also show that the public mandate to maintain cooperation extends far beyond the most pro-European core of the electorates. The Triangle therefore offers excellent ground for building a broad national consensus, insulating Weimar cooperation from day-to-day party politics and turning it into a shared public good, regardless of political affiliation.

Equally important – and perhaps crucial to long-term success – is taking action beyond the central government level. For local and regional authorities, the recommendation is to move Weimar initiatives beyond the capitals. One effective instrument could be a small-grants programme – a 'Weimar Fund' – supporting partnerships among towns and cities, schools, local libraries, cultural institutions and civil society organisations. The fund should require the involvement of partners from all three countries and give additional weight to initiatives implemented in smaller towns and rural areas. The survey indicates high levels of indecision and low interest in Weimar cooperation among social groups that are less engaged in the ongoing debate about the European Union. It is therefore essential to cultivate local ambassadors for the Weimar idea and support projects that respond to concrete, grassroots needs, thereby breaking the monopoly of elite events confined to Warsaw, Berlin and Paris.

Education is an exceptionally important arena for building lasting trilateral ties, and this is strongly confirmed by respondents in all three countries. Education ministries, higher education institutions and civil society organisations should jointly launch a comprehensive initiative under the working title 'Weimar Generation'. The survey clearly shows that joint educational programmes are the public's top priority. To succeed, the initiative should include trilateral modules in curricula, expanded exchange schemes for teachers, school pupils and university students, innovative civic laboratories, international placements in public administration, and projects for promising young journalists. A fundamental condition for success is that these should not be three separate national programmes running in paral-

lel, but a genuinely shared experience that brings together – and places in dialogue – the perspectives of participants from Poland, Germany and France.

Public-service media and the cultural sector also have an important role to play in building mutual understanding and bringing the three societies closer together. Their task should be to co-create a shared trilateral space for debate and cultural exchange, free from political propaganda. Cooperation in this field should include international film and television co-productions, support for translations of literature and public-affairs writing in all directions, exchanges among newsrooms, and public debates that do not avoid difficult subjects or the open presentation of contested issues. The ultimate goal is to deepen the three societies' knowledge of one another and strengthen people-to-people ties, not merely to create another channel for institutional government promotion. The credibility of the Weimar format will grow naturally when the public sees that the discussion addresses both shared strategic interests and genuine differences arising from the distinct circumstances of each country – and does so in a spirit of constructive dialogue among equal partners.

AN ANNIVERSARY WITHOUT COMPLACENCY

After 35 years, the Weimar Triangle is not a rejected format. It is an unfinished one. Poland contributes the highest awareness and the strongest support for deeper cooperation. Germany provides the broadest recognition of the format's political importance and the strongest mandate for continuity. France, despite the lowest awareness, shows considerable readiness to embrace the format once its purpose is clearly explained.

The common ground is stronger than the differences: citizens in all three countries want cooperation among states that enhances Europe's capacity to act, but they expect proof that it works. The anniversary on 28 August should therefore close the era of the Triangle as a diplomatic promise and open the era of the Triangle as a publicly accountable instrument for shaping European policy. The best anniversary gift will not be another declaration about the format's exceptional character. It will be the first shared outcome that citizens in Poland, Germany and France can name without prompting.

Methodological note

The data come from a representative survey commissioned by the Institute of Public Affairs as part of the 'Weimar Triangle – Public Opinion Survey' research project, conducted in cooperation with the Heinrich Böll Foundation in Warsaw. Ipsos carried out the survey from 24 July to 4 August 2026 using the CAWI method in France, Germany and Poland, drawing on representative quota samples of people aged 18–75 from an online panel (France N=1,004; Germany N=1,014; Poland N=1,074). Quotas covered respondents' gender, age, size of place of residence, region and education. Values have been rounded to whole percentages. For multiple-response questions, percentages do not add up to 100%.

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