

**A new form of parliamentary integration in Europe:
Understanding the motivations behind the establishment of the Franco-
German Parliamentary Assembly**

Work in progress
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This qualitative case study demonstrates the motivations behind the creation of an international parliamentary assembly between Germany and France in March 2019. A group of parliamentarians from the German Bundestag and the French Assemblée promoted the idea of the Franco-German Parliamentary Assembly (FGPA) which consists of 100 MPs from both countries. They aimed at deepening and consolidating Franco-German friendship at parliamentary level. Secondly, they created the FGPA as a counterweight to governmental relations and thus see themselves as guardians of the Franco-German treaties. Following the sociological institutionalism approach, this study identifies the firm belief in Franco-German friendship and the norm of parliamentary democracy as driving forces for the creation of the bilateral assembly. It also finds that a favorable political context, the pioneering spirit in the group, the consensus-oriented and non-partisan working practice motivated the Franco-German working group during the founding process. Based on a comparative analysis of the MPs' personal backgrounds and interviews with them, this study contributes to better understand why and how new international parliamentary assemblies are created.

Keywords: Franco-German relations, international parliamentary assemblies, parliamentary democracy.

Introduction

“And in this situation, our parliaments have taken the initiative for a joint parliamentary assembly. The constitutional traditions are fundamentally different and so are our parliamentary cultures, but nevertheless our assembly has been made possible by the strong will on both sides.”¹ (Speech of President of the Bundestag Dr. Wolfgang Schäuble, 2021)

This paper focuses on the creation of an ambitious international parliamentary assembly between Germany and France. During the year 2018 German and French parliamentarians met several times and negotiated a unique form of bilateral cooperation. In March 2019, after a year

¹ Original German quote: „Und in dieser Situation haben unsere Parlamente die Initiative zu einer gemeinsamen parlamentarischen Versammlung ergriffen. Dabei unterscheiden sich die Verfassungstraditionen grundlegend und unsere Parlamentskulturen auch, aber dennoch ist unsere Versammlung möglich geworden durch den starken Willen auf beiden Seiten.“

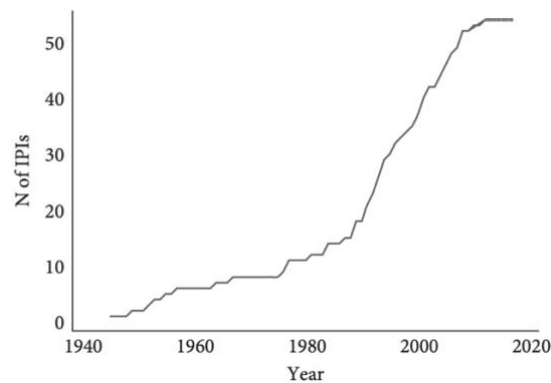
of preparations, the German Bundestag and the French Assemblée nationale adopted the Franco-German Parliamentary Agreement. At the heart of this cooperation lies the Franco-German Parliamentary Assembly (FGPA) which consists of 100 representatives, and which convenes at least twice a year (Heimbach & Nguyen, 2019; Schade, 2019). This young assembly puts the bilateral relationship, a motor for European integration, on a higher and more integrated level (Uterwedde, 2019). Before, the relationship consisted mainly of the close institutionalized ties between the governments (e.g., the Franco-German Council of Ministers). A parliamentary equivalent did not exist as parliamentary exchanges took mostly place in an informal and ad hoc way. Given the fact that interparliamentary cooperation is time consuming and costly, and existing international parliamentary assemblies (IPA) are rather weak institutions (Schimmelfennig et al., 2021), this paper aims at answering the following question: *Why did German and French members of parliaments engage in the creation of the bilateral assembly? What motivated them?*

The purpose of this qualitative case study is to demonstrate the motivations of German and French parliamentarians to establish the Franco-German Parliamentary Assembly. This paper presents first results of a larger doctoral study on the topic of the establishment of the FGPA. It is based on a pre-selection of six interviews with members of the German Bundestag and the French Assemblée that elaborated the Franco-German Parliamentary Agreement and on a comparative quantitative analysis of biographical and professional data of 21 MPs. This study aims at understanding parliamentary involvement in international affairs as the number of international parliamentary assemblies increases and the phenomenon of international parliamentarization becomes more prominent. It applies sociological institutionalism as a theoretical approach to understand the motivations guiding the parliamentarians. In doing so, the study will also help to understand democratic legitimation and democratic deficits of governance beyond the nation state. This is particularly important in light of the multiplication of bilateral and multilateral cooperation at the intergovernmental level, which initially facilitate executive dominance, and which eventually require a parliamentary counterweight.

Placing the Franco-German Parliamentary Assembly in its context

The Franco-German Parliamentary Assembly is part of a significant growth of international parliamentary assemblies worldwide (Schimmelfennig et al., 2021). The spread of international parliamentary assemblies is a relatively young phenomenon in international politics. Traditionally, international politics are mainly shaped by national governments and through

their cooperation in international organisations. The same accounts for the Franco-German bilateral relations. The development of international parliamentary assemblies started slowly in the late 19th century, increased after the Second World War and gained momentum in the last 30 years after the fall of the Wall. In 2017, 54 IPAs exist worldwide and include at least three or more democratic and less democratic member states (Schimmelfennig et al., 2021, p. 61).



*Figure 1: Development of international parliamentary institutions (IPAs).
Source: (Schimmelfennig et al., 2021)*

As a bilateral assembly with only two member states, the Franco-German Parliamentary Assembly differs from the above-mentioned IPAs in the number of member states. There are only a few binational assemblies known to the author such as the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly founded in 1990. This study mainly relies on the theoretical and empirical findings of studies on multinational IPAs (Eppler & Maurer, 2017; Kraft-Kasack, 2008; Verdoes, 2019) as there is not much research on binational assemblies.

This leads to the question of why national parliamentarians engage in interparliamentary cooperation at all. The powers of IPAs are very limited compared to national legislatures. For example, in most of the cases, IPAs cannot take legally binding decisions (Marschall, 2005, p. 13). The European Parliament is one of the exceptions (Kreppel, 2001; Rittberger, 2012). IPAs mainly serve as forum for exchange between MPs from different countries. Nevertheless, national parliaments and their MPs invest time and energy into cooperation with other parliaments. The German Bundestag and the French Assemblée decided to set up a new international parliamentary assembly that draws on important resources. It is puzzling to observe the increase in IPAs in the last thirty years compared to the competencies they have and the resources they need.

The literature on interparliamentary cooperation identifies several reasons for national parliaments and parliamentarians to participate in interparliamentary cooperation. First, parliaments and MPs adapt to the increasing importance of international politics (Stavridis & Jancic, 2017, pp. 1-4). They want to become an active player and not a bystander in international negotiations. As the world becomes more and more globalised, the significance of international politics and cooperation increases. Especially in the European Union, national politics become more and more Europeanised. For parliaments, this is a challenge that risks eroding their effectiveness and influence: Traditionally, international politics is in the competences of the executive. Governments engage in international organisations such as the European Union, the World Health Organisation, or the United Nations. Parliaments are left out, which is illustrated well by the debate on whether European integration has gone hand-in-hand with deparliamentarization despite the creation of a European Parliament as co-legislator (Maurer & Wessels, 2001; O'Brennan & Raunio, 2007). When exercising parliamentary scrutiny in the field of international politics, parliaments rely mainly on their governments' reports about international activities. This creates an information gap that is a major challenge, especially for opposition parties (Raunio, 2011, p. 304). With the creation of IPAs parliaments aim to extend their function as a watchdog of the governmental action to the international level.

Second, MPs intend to overcome information asymmetries regarding their governments (Marschall, 2005, p. 333). The exchange with MPs from different countries allows for another channel of information and a deeper understanding of other national positions and preferences of parliamentarians and parties. These are the functional benefits of interparliamentary cooperation. Third, the creation of IPAs has also a normative reasoning. Democratic countries try to externalise and diffuse democratic norms (Schimmelfennig et al., 2021, p. 36). Parliaments representing the people are at the core of democracy. It is not surprising that democratic parliaments and governments engage in the development of IPAs. Fourth, governments support and create IPAs as a means of strategic legitimation of their international activities. Schimmelfennig et al. argue that governments establish weak look-alikes of their parliaments at home in order to create democratic legitimacy for decisions they negotiate in the context of an international organisation (Schimmelfennig et al., 2021, p. 10). Fifth, interparliamentary cooperation and negotiations can be used to overcome problematic international relations when national governments cannot reach an agreement or solve a conflict among them (Stavridis & Jancic, 2017, p. 3). This list is not extensive but gives a good

overview on why international parliamentary assemblies matter to national parliaments and governments despite they are weak institutions.

Defining international parliamentary assemblies

There is a huge variety of different forms and levels of interparliamentary cooperation ranging from informal party contacts, friendship groups to fully institutionalized legislatures such as the European Parliament (Eppler & Maurer, 2017). Due to this broad range of cooperation forms, it is necessary to define important key terms of interparliamentary cooperation and narrow down the scope of this study.

Drawing on Marschall 2005, Sabic 2008 and Schimmelfennig 2021 I define an *international parliamentary assembly as a transnational, non-hierarchical organisation that comprises (in)directly elected members of national parliaments*. It is strictly parliamentarian and does not include governments representatives or societal actors. Members are equal and not superordinate and subordinate to other members. Membership is not voluntary but the consequence of delegation by the national parliament. A certain degree of institutionalisation is necessary to count as IPA. This means that formal rules and procedures must exist as well as a bureau or secretariat. Regular meetings must take place. IPAs can be affiliated to an international organisation (IO) or exist within themselves. This study agrees with Sabic 2008 that it needs a slightly broader definition of IPAs which includes what parliamentarians actually do in these IPAs which is “*co-operate with a view to formulating their interests, adopting decisions, strategies or programs, which they implement or promote, formally and informally, in interactions with other actors, by various means such as persuasion, advocacy or institutional pressure.*” (Sabic, 2008, p. 258). Most research on IPAs set the premise of at least three member states without explaining why a binational assembly such as the Franco-German Parliamentary Assembly should not match the features and functions of multinational IPAs. As there are no obvious reasons to exclude bilateral IPAs, the definition also applies to binational assemblies.

Theoretical framework based on sociological institutionalism

Based on this brief review of the existing literature, the theoretical framework and hypotheses for the empirical work will be developed. I will introduce sociological institutionalism as the

specific theoretical anchor point for this study, and the hypotheses for the empirical work will be outlined.

The creation of the Franco-German Parliamentary Assembly can be understood as a process of institutional creation and institutionalization. Therefore, it is meaningful to consider institutionalism theory for this study. Institutional theories aim at explaining the origin, the change, the functions, and the effects of institutions. Here, institutions are understood as “*comprised of regulative, normative and cultural-cognitive elements, that, together with associated activities and resources, provide stability and meaning to social life.*” (Scott, 2014, p. 56). The FGPA is a parliamentary institution that corresponds to all three elements at this stage of institutional development. First, it has a regulative dimension with limited rule establishing and monitoring activities (but no sanctioning capacities). Second, a strong normative dimension relates to the idea of being a watchdog over the activities of the governments and of creating democratic legitimacy. Third, a shared understanding of Franco-German friendship reveals a strong cultural-cognitive dimension. The creation process is a form of institutionalization of Franco-German parliamentary exchange. Therefore, we should define what is meant by institutionalization. March and Olsen (1998, p. 948) provide a useful definition:

“Institutionalization refers to the emergence of institutions and individual behaviors within them. The process involves the development of practices and rules in the context of using them and has earned a variety of labels, including structuration and routinization, which refer to the development of codes of meaning, ways of reasoning, and accounts in the context of acting on them.”

Interestingly, the main focus of institutionalist theory and research is on existing institutions, less on the origins, the reasons and motivations for institution building (Harty, 2017, p. 52; Scott, 2014, p. 113). Especially, in the transnational realm institution building is a new research topic as well as “*one of the most active construction arenas as we enter the 21st century*” as Scott (2014, p. 142) puts it.

The author considers sociological institutionalism as most suitable institutionalist approach among the different currents. Sociological institutionalism (SI) originates from organizational sociology and looks at the reasons for the specific design of an institution and at how the diffusion of institutional practices takes place, for example through mimesis or institutional isomorphism (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). SI argues that actors do not follow a logic of consequences alone, but of appropriateness. Cultural and socially accepted norms and identity

play a major role in forming the preferences and goals of actors. Moreover, shared experiences and cognitive frameworks have a strong impact on actors (Hall & Taylor, 1996; Saurugger, 2013). Creating (social) legitimacy is thus an important driving force when new institutions are built.

In the context of the creation of Franco-German Parliamentary Assembly there are two norms and shared understandings that stand out in particular: Franco-German friendship (1) and parliamentary democracy (2). First, Franco-German relations are strongly based on the shared understanding of *Franco-German friendship*. It refers to the friendly relationship between the two nation states Germany and France on various levels (e.g., between governments, policy makers, economic actors, and citizens) and comprises a narrative of former “hereditary enmity” between the two countries. Having caused several violent wars, this enmity was overcome by a reconciliation process after the Second World War (Defrance & Pfeil, 2012). Since their rapprochement France and Germany have developed ever close ties and they understand it as their central task to ensure peace and prosperity in a united Europe (Demesmay et al., 2013). In being an indispensable motor for European integration the bilateral relationship must be cultivated and deepened. In this narrative, the creation of the Franco-German Parliamentary Assembly is seen as a necessary and logical step towards the consolidation of bilateral ties. Taking this into account, the first hypothesis is developed: *H1: The shared understanding of Franco-German friendship was a major motivation for the creation of the FGPA.*

The second norm assumed to be influential for the establishment of the FGPA is *parliamentary democracy*. It relates to a democratic system of governance in which the executive is held accountable before the parliament. The government receives democratic legitimacy by the support and trust of the legislative body. This relationship is well-defined and established for the nation state. In international relations this is not the case as elaborated above. International negotiations and agreements made by governments often lack democratic control exercised by parliamentary bodies. The same is true for the Franco-German political relations which are dominated by the two governments. In this sense, French and German parliamentarians “fought back” (Raunio & Hix, 2000) and established the Franco-German Parliamentary Assembly as a counterweight to the intergovernmental relations. Thus, the second hypothesis is the following: *H2: When founding the Franco-German Parliamentary Assembly, MPs believed in the norm of parliamentary democracy that needed to be extended to the bilateral level.*

Methods and operationalization

The aim of this qualitative case study is to explain the motivations of German and French parliamentarians when establishing the Franco-German Parliamentary Assembly. As the research question focuses strongly on the actors' motivations, the methodology follows this logic, too. Therefore, the author applies two key methods: a comparative analysis of the MPs personal background (1) and an in-depth qualitative data analysis of interviews with the parliamentarians (2).

First, a quantitative analysis compares the biographical and professional background of 21 French and German parliamentarians who have been members of the parliamentary working group that elaborated the bilateral agreement in 2018 leading to the Franco-German Parliamentary Assembly. The idea is here to find similarities and differences regarding the personal background of the MPs that were engaged in the creation process. Finding patterns helps to understand the motivations of the key actors. This comparative analysis is inspired by Malang (2019) who conducted a quantitative study on the motivations of German MPs to participate in international parliamentary assemblies. In this case study, "membership in the Franco-German working group" is the dependent variable. The explanatory variables are for example *age*, *gender*, *party affiliation* or *electoral district* (see figure 2). The personal information was mainly collected from the MP's personal websites, the parliamentary websites and from interviews. This comparative analysis can bring about surprising parallels or differences between the founding actors.

Age	Gender	Nationality
Government/opposition	Position in party	Position in parliament
Party affiliation	Membership in parliamentary committee	Number of terms in parliament
Experience as Member of European Parliament	Electoral district (close to French-German border or not)	...

Figure 2: Explanatory variables that are the basis for comparative analysis of the MPs personal background.

Secondly, this approach is complemented by the analysis of semi-structured interviews with the key actors, namely the members of the working group. This paper presents first results from the analysis of six interviews. The interviews were selected from three German and three French MPs, with two government MPs and one opposition member selected in each country. In this way, both countries as well as government and opposition parties are represented. In order to reach for a deeper analysis, qualitative data analysis with the computer programme MaxQDA is applied to the transcribed interviews. The qualitative data analysis mainly follows

John Creswell’s (2007) and Richard E. Boyatzis’ (2009) ideas of structuring content and transforming qualitative information into codes and themes along a thematic analysis. In this way it is distinct from methods such as grounded theory, ethnographic or phenomenological research approaches. More concretely, I encoded and analysed recurring motives, reasonings and narratives that the MPs used to explain their participation in the working group and in the creation process of the bilateral assembly. This study uses Creswell’s proposition for a case study coding scheme which presents an excellent framework that structured the analysis of the case study and helped to find patterns and to interpret the data (2007, p. 163). The interview data is approached from a mixed deductive – inductive standpoint. This means that the data was searched for deductive codes that were developed out of the literature, and more codes were found inductively by going through the data. To capture the whole idea in one code, the segmentation criterion “idea regardless of length” was used. In this study, a code is a data segment that delivers meaning and information for answering the research question. A theme comprises several codes and reflects a concept. Relating to the hypotheses, Franco-German friendship and parliamentary democracy are themes. They refer to codes such as historical reconciliation, town twinning or for the second theme “parliamentary control” and the idea of “strong parliaments”.

Theme 1 “Franco-German friendship”	Theme 2 “Parliamentary democracy”
Codes (e.g.): -historical reconciliation (<i>deductive code</i>) -town twinning (<i>inductive code</i>) -... -...	Codes (e.g.): -parliamentary control (<i>deductive code</i>) -strong parliaments (<i>inductive code</i>) -MPs want to extend democracy to the international level (<i>deductive code</i>) -...

Figure 3: Deductive and inductive codes used in the qualitative data analysis.

The table lists different themes and codes that were applied in the qualitative data analysis. They form the basis for the analysis and the findings.

Empirical findings: firm beliefs of Franco-German friendship and parliamentary democracy

The first analysis of the empirical material confirms the hypotheses relating to the actors’ motivations and has brought about additional aspects. This means that the concepts of Franco-German friendship and parliamentary democracy were important driving factors for the founding actors of the bilateral assembly. The political context and the personal background of the MPs involved have also strongly influenced their motivations.

Contextual factors

The Franco-German Parliamentary Assembly was constituted on 25 March 2019 after a year of negotiations in the Franco-German working group. It was established at this point in time because the aftermath of the French and German national elections in 2017 created a window of opportunity for a group of parliamentarians to push forward the idea of a parliamentary agreement.

In May 2017, the pro-European Emmanuel Macron won the French presidential elections, and the parliamentary elections ensured a pro-European majority in the French Assemblée nationale. The election results were largely followed by a sigh of relief among pro-European governments and parliamentarians. After the Brexit vote in the United Kingdom in 2016 and the participation of the anti-European and far-right candidate Marine Le Pen in the French presidential run-off election, many have feared a further disintegration of the European Union. The German elections in September 2017 confirmed chancellor Angela Merkel in office but did not give a clear sign what governing coalition to form. The two elections brought many new MPs to parliament, especially to the French Assemblée. This is also reflected in the working group where there was a third of the members in their first parliamentary term. Alongside experienced MPs there was a large share of MPs that did not know yet about the usual parliamentary proceedings, traditions, and limitations. This might have contributed to a certain openness towards new initiatives.

One third of working group members were new to parliament

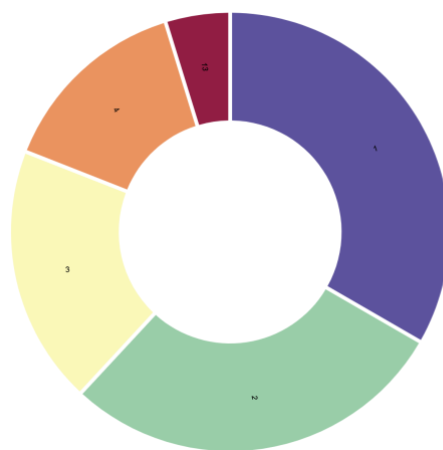


Figure 4: Number of terms in parliament. Violet = first term, green= second term, yellow = third term, orange = fourth term, red = 13 terms.

Only two days after the German elections, newly elected French President Macron delivered an influential speech on Europe at the French university Sorbonne (Macron, 2017). He calls

for more Europe and a stronger Franco-German relationship and proposes a renewal of the Elysée Treaty which laid the basis for the strong and institutionalised bilateral relationship back in 1963. Due to the prolonged exploratory talks and coalition negotiations and thus the absence of a German government, there was no response from the German government to Macron's proposal. More than five months later a German government was formed. During this time of German political vacuum, the initiative for institutionalising Franco-German parliamentary relations was launched. It started with a parliamentary response to Macrons proposal of a new Elysée Treaty which was published as an opinion piece by three German MPs from the Conservatives, the Greens and the Liberals in the newspapers Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung and Le Monde in November 2017 (Jung et al., 2017). They called for a new Elysée-Treaty and made concrete policy suggestions. Shortly after they got in touch with French MPs. *“This then developed into a motion on the anniversary on 22 January 2018 on Franco-German cooperation. And that was when we first proposed the idea of a Franco-German Parliamentary Assembly. That was the starting point.”* (Interview German MP 1, 2022).² The remarkable common resolution of the French and German parliament claimed on the one hand the renewal of the Elysée Treaty and on the other hand it installed a bilateral working group that should elaborate a Franco-German parliamentary agreement in one year time.

Since the beginning the work of the parliamentary working group was closely related to the renewal of the Elysée Treaty that the two governments started in early 2018. The group members met six times in France and in Germany. It organized two public hearings of experts from Franco-German relations and from the Franco-German border region and incorporated the results into three position papers on the new Elysée Treaty. The position papers were handed over to the German and French governments. The new Franco-German Treaty was then signed by the French and German government on 22 January 2019 in the German city of Aachen, giving it the title Aachen Treaty (The Federal Republic of Germany & the French Republic, 2019). Two months earlier in November 2018, the chairpersons of the parliamentary working group officially handed over the finished draft of the parliamentary agreement to the two presidents of parliament, Wolfgang Schäuble and Richard Ferrand, in Paris.

² Original quote from interview with German MP 1 2022: „Daraus entwickelte sich dann ein Antrag zu dem Jahrestag am 22. Januar 2018 zur deutsch-französischen Zusammenarbeit. Und da war erstmals dann von uns der Vorschlag aufgenommen worden, eine deutsch-französische Parlamentarische Versammlung zu machen. Das war der Ausgangspunkt.“

The centerpiece of the parliamentary agreement is the Franco-German Parliamentary Assembly. It is to institutionalize the cooperation between the German Bundestag and the Assemblée nationale. The Assembly shall consist of a total of 100 members (50 members of the German Bundestag and 50 members of the Assemblée nationale), who meet in accordance with the strength of the parliamentary groups and the national majorities. The Assembly is to have a broad competence and, for example, watch over the provisions of the Elysée Treaty of 1963 and the renewed Franco-German Treaty, called Aachen Treaty and signed on 22 January 2019. It should also closely follow the Franco-German Councils of Ministers and the implementation of the decisions taken at these councils. At the same time, the Assembly shall accompany international and European decisions of common interest. The Assembly should be able to pass resolutions and propose joint resolutions to the German Bundestag and the Assemblée nationale. Within the framework of their respective national procedures, both houses are to deal promptly with the resolutions of the Assembly passed in the sessions, which are then to be taken up, discussed and, if necessary, implemented in the respective parliaments. In addition to the Parliamentary Assembly, the Bundestag and the Assemblée are to meet every four years for joint plenary sessions. Cooperation at committee level is also to be strengthened (Bundestag & Assemblée nationale, 2019).

The political context in late 2017 was favorable for the creation of the FGPA. The Sorbonne speech from Macron gave an important impetus and motivated MPs to advance their idea for more interparliamentary cooperation. The political vacuum in Germany in autumn and winter was an important condition for German MPs to become active instead of their not-existing government. It also gave German MPs time and energy to launch the initiative and elaborate the common resolution from 22 January 2018 without being trapped in the daily parliamentary business and in the logic of government/opposition.

Actorness

Actorness and cross-countries and cross-party interaction by the working group' members played a crucial role for the creation of the Franco-German Parliamentary Assembly. Moreover, the personal background of the MPs as well as the working practice of the group led to the success of the working group. The working group consisted of 18 MPs, 9 from each country and was strongly supported by the three presidents of parliament Wolfgang Schäuble of the German Bundestag, François De Rugy and since September 2018 Richard Ferrand of the French Assemblée. The working group represented all parliamentary groups of the French

Assemblée and the German Bundestag which delegated MPs to it (see figure 5). A core group of around six German and French MPs who initiated the common resolution from 22 January 2018 figured in the working group and three of them became chairpersons organizing the work of the group. The other members were either appointed or asked for being appointed by their parliamentary group.

France	Germany
La République En Marche (2) <i>governing party</i>	Christian Democrats (3) <i>governing party</i>
Democratic Movement and affiliated (1) <i>confidence and supply</i>	Social Democrats (2) <i>governing party</i>
The Republicans (2) <i>opposition</i>	Alternative for Germany (1) <i>opposition</i>
Socialists and associated (1) <i>opposition</i>	Free Democratic Party (1) <i>opposition</i>
Act Together (1) <i>confidence and supply</i>	Left Party (1) <i>opposition</i>
La France Insoumise (1) <i>opposition</i>	Alliance 90/The Greens (1) <i>opposition</i>
Democratic and Republican Left (1) <i>opposition</i>	

Figure 5: Parliamentary groups represented in the working group (indicating the number of parliamentarians and of national governing or opposition parties)

The personal and professional profiles of the working group members reveal surprising parallels that also provides insight into their motivations. When looking at the MPs constituencies, the proximity to the French-German border is striking. Half of the MPs have their constituency directly at or close to the Franco-German border. Two members of the working group have their electoral district at the Swiss and Polish border. One French MP put it this way: “At the beginning, they had sent Alsations from all the political parties, saying ‘it’s a thing with Germany, we’re sending the Alsations.’” (Interview French MP 2, 2022).³ Alsace is the French region bordering Germany.

Half of the MPs had their constituency at or close to the Franco-German border

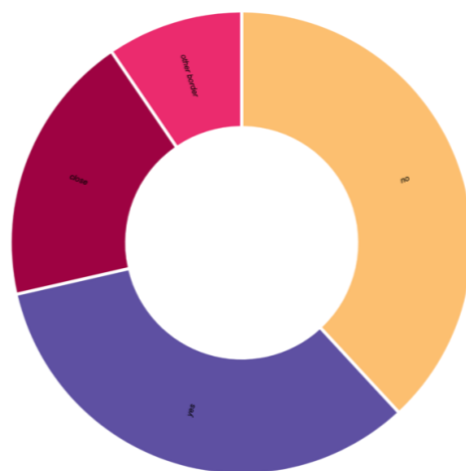


Figure 6: Constituency near Franco-German border.

Yes = violet, close to border = red, border to other country (e.g. Poland, Switzerland) = pink, no = orange.

³ Original quote from interview with French MP 2, 2022: “Au début, ils avaient envoyé des Alsaciens dans tous les partis politiques, en disant ‘C’est un truc avec l’Allemagne, on envoie les Alsaciens.’”

It becomes clear that MPs from the border region had a special interest in pursuing a cooperation with the other country and parliament. Most of them are regularly confronted with cross-border issues and problems raised by cross-border commuters for example (Ross, 2021). A stronger interparliamentary cooperation could help to raise awareness for cross-border issues on the national and binational level and might solve some of the urgent problems.

There is another insightful aspect regarding the profile of the members that points to the committee membership of the MPs in their home parliaments. Interestingly, half of the founding members are foreign policy experts. They were members of the EU, Foreign affairs, or Defense committee in their home parliament. The other MPs – importantly two chairpersons - came from a variety of parliamentary committees such as Finance or Environment (see figure 6). A strong focus on foreign policy experts is not surprising as we deal with international parliamentary relations. The more it is worth mentioning that the other half of the group had a domestic policy focus. This should be kept in mind when looking at the motivations of the MPs. The interest in international parliamentary cooperation by a foreign policy expert is more plausible than from a domestic policy expert.

Half of the MPs are foreign policy experts

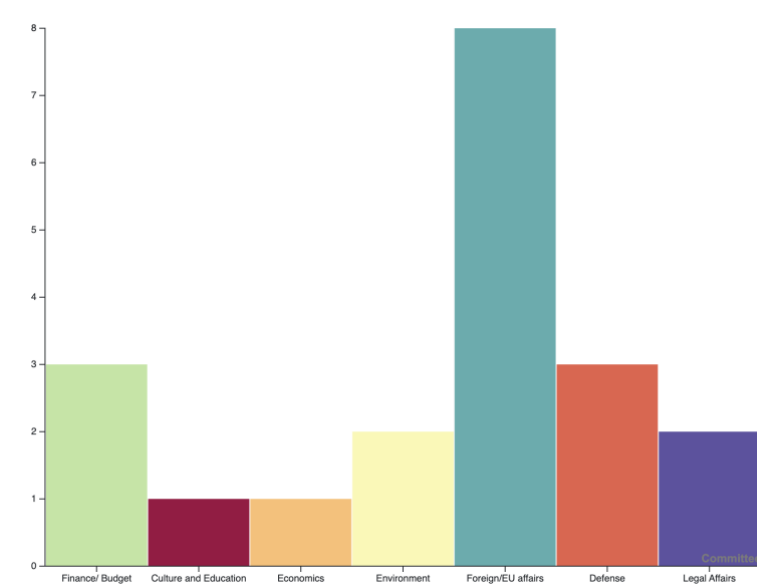


Figure 7: Committee membership of MPs. Half of the founding members were part of the EU, Foreign affairs, or Defense committee. The other MPs came from a variety of parliamentary committees such as Finance or Environment.

There is another important point for understanding the motivations of the actors which is the working practice in the group. First, the exchange among the parliamentarians was

characterized by a strong group spirit. One German MP paints a good picture of the atmosphere in working group:

“It was really characterized by a pioneering spirit. It was a great work. We didn't discuss the Germans here and the French there. That's also the idea of the assembly, but it was all over the place. We had ideas and visions, and that was actually very gratifying, because you rarely have the opportunity to create or develop something completely new. [...] And I think we all found that to be a special experience, across parliamentary groups and national borders. [...] It was a really creative working atmosphere, in the context of which we also strengthened contacts that we had already had before, made friends, which we can then build on in our work.” (Interview German MP 1, 2022)⁴

This working practice in the group built on mutual trust and openness to each other. Here the language competencies played an important role. The working language alternated back and forth between German and French, as many MPs spoke the other language. Country borders and difference of opinion between government and opposition MPs also became blurred and the work was perceived as being non-partisan. Opposition MPs were listened to and respected: *“Even La France insoumise, even Monsieur Mélenchon who doesn't like the Germans. He sent someone. And this person did not find herself alone and did not find herself ridiculed.”* (Interview French MP 3, 2022).⁵

The aim of the working group was also to achieve a broad consensus among the group members in the negotiation rounds. Already the common resolution from 22 January 2018 was built on a large consensus. This approach was maintained when elaborating the parliamentary agreement having in mind that such a far-reaching treaty needs the support of a large majority in the two home parliaments to work properly and successfully. The consensus-oriented approach and the pioneering spirit in the working group were able to flourish because the group united many like-minded people that were involved in Franco-German matters before and that developed friendships. *“But a lot of Franco-German things started with a friendship. But Andreas and I also know that we are just passengers. And if we want to continue beyond that,*

⁴ Original quote from interview with German MP 1 2022: “Es war wirklich geprägt von Pioniergeist. Es war eine ganz tolle Arbeit. Wir haben nicht hier die Deutschen, dort die Franzosen diskutiert. Ist ja auch der Gedanke der Versammlung, sondern es ging quer durcheinander. Man hat die Ideen, Visionen und das war eigentlich etwas sehr beglückend ist, weil man ja selten die Möglichkeit hat, was völlig Neues zu schaffen, zu entwickeln. [...] Und das haben wir, glaube ich, alle als besondere Erfahrung empfunden, über Fraktionen und Landesgrenzen hinweg. [...] Es war eine wirklich kreative Arbeitsatmosphäre, in deren Rahmen wir auch Kontakte, die wir davor schon hatten, sehr verstärkt haben, Freundschaften geknüpft haben, auf die wir dann in der Arbeit aufbauen können.”

⁵ Original quote from interview with French MP 3, 2022: “Même La France insoumise, même Monsieur Mélenchon qui n'aime pas les Allemands. Il envoi quelqu'un. Et cette personne ne s'est pas retrouvée toute seule et ne s'est pas retrouvée ridiculisée.”

we must institutionalize things.” (Interview French MP 3, 2022).⁶ All of this increased the motivations to take part in the working group meetings, to act in a constructive manner and sometimes even defend the working group against the own parliamentary group.

Convictions (1): Firm belief of Franco-German friendship

After having presented the contextual factors and the MPs personal background that have strongly influenced the motivations of the founding actors, the next sections describe the convictions and shared understandings that have guided the MPs work. The empirical research mainly confirms the hypotheses H1 and H2 stating that the actors’ motivations were informed by a shared understanding of Franco-German friendship and the norm of parliamentary democracy.

The shared understanding of strong Franco-German relations was crucial for the motivation of the actors. This conviction connected the founding members like an invisible bond. The concept was often referred to and not questioned by most of the group members. Many interviewees mentioned important aspects of this concept such as the historical reconciliation, bilateral rapprochement after the Second World War or the integrating role of Franco-German relations in the EU.

“And the Assembly, because when the idea came up, which we found really fascinating, that after all the wars of the past, after our common history where parliaments approved war credits to wage war against each other, we now come to have a common Assembly. That is unique in the world, still. And we found that a fascinating idea and therefore took it up or raised it and pushed it forward.” (Interview German MP 1)⁷

Moreover, many MPs recalled their personal relationship to the other country and pointed to their family history that is marked by Franco-German events. A strong signal is also the fact that a French MP is German who lived for more than 30 years in France and was elected to the Assemblée nationale. Other MPs emphasize that they feel Franco-German.

“It's because I'm the deputy of the Saarland in the National Assembly [laughing]. No, frankly, I am Franco-German, I only have French nationality, but I have a grandfather on the German side and a grandmother on the German side.” (Interview French MP3, 2022)⁸

⁶ Original quote from interview with French MP 3, 2022: “Mais beaucoup de choses franco-allemandes, elles ont commencé par une amitié. Mais Andreas et moi, on sait aussi qu'on est que des passagers. Et si on veut que ça continue au delà, il fallait institutionnaliser les choses.”

⁷ Original quote from interview with German MP 1, 2022: “Und die Versammlung, weil als der Gedanke aufgekommen war, der von uns als wirklich faszinierend empfunden wurde, dass wir nach all den Kriegen der Vergangenheit, nach unserer gemeinsamen Geschichte, wo Parlamente Kriegskredite genehmigt haben, um gegeneinander Krieg zu führen, jetzt dazu kommen, dass wir eine gemeinsame Versammlung haben. Das ist einzigartig auf der Welt, nach wie vor. Und das haben wir als einen faszinierenden Gedanken empfunden und es deshalb aufgegriffen oder aufgebracht und vorangetrieben.”

⁸ Original quote from interview with French MP 3, 2022: “C'est parce que je suis le député de la Sarre à l'Assemblée nationale [rire]. Non, franchement moi, je suis franco-allemand, je n'ai que la nationalité française, mais j'ai plus grand père d'un côté allemand, une grand mère de l'autre côté allemand.”

“In fact, for me, it is first of all a conviction that I have very strongly held. A European conviction first of all, and a conviction that the future of Europe depends on the Franco-German impetus. [...] And imagine what my grandfather would have thought if he had said to himself that my grandson would be on the rostrum of the Assemblée nationale to invite all his colleagues to vote massively for this rapprochement between the two peoples through their representatives and their elected representatives. So, obviously, for me, it had a very strong personal connotation.” (Interview French MP 2, 2022)⁹

Only the French member of the working group who is from the far left questioned the concept of Franco-German friendship and criticized that Franco-German relations are dominating the European Union. She was afraid that the FGPA would affront other EU member states and undermine the European parliament (Interview French MP 5, 2022).

The interviews with the founding actors showed that the shared understanding of Franco-German friendship was a very important driving force for the work of the working group, thus confirming hypothesis H1. The findings suggest that Franco-German friendship can also be described as a firm belief system that is shared by many French and German decision-makers and parliamentarians. There are also hints in the interviews that the concept enabled the founding actors to convince government representatives and decision-makers in the parliaments such as parliamentary whips of the necessity of a Franco-German Parliamentary Assembly. Or in other words, it was difficult to say something against Franco-German friendship. It would be worthwhile to deepen the analysis of the interviews to see if the MPs used the concept of Franco-German friendship strategically to pursue their goals.

Convictions (2): Norm of parliamentary democracy

When it comes to the idea of extending parliamentary democracy to the bilateral level, the analysis of the interviews show that parliamentary exchange and control of the Franco-German relations was often stated prominently as a reason for creating the Franco-German Parliamentary Assembly.

“Yes, but the basic idea was to create a parliamentary accompaniment of Franco-German events, which had previously only been defined for the executive, and to strengthen this parliamentary accompaniment.” (Interview German MP 4, 2022)¹⁰

⁹ Original quote from interview with French MP 2, 2022: “En fait, moi, c'est d'abord une conviction que j'ai très fortement chevillée au corps. Une conviction européenne d'abord, et une conviction que l'avenir de l'Europe passe par l'impulsion franco-allemande. [...] Et imaginez ce qu'aurait pensé mon grand-père s'il s'était dit que mon petit fils serait à la tribune de l'Assemblée nationale pour inviter tous ses collègues à voter massivement pour ce rapprochement des deux peuples au travers de leurs représentants et de leurs élus. Donc, évidemment, pour moi, ça avait une connotation personnelle très forte.”

¹⁰ Original quote from interview with German MP 4, 2022: “Ja, aber der Grundgedanke war eine parlamentarische Begleitung des deutsch-französischen Geschehens, das bisher nur für die Exekutive definiert war, zu schaffen und diese parlamentarische Begleitung auszustärken.”

“The first objective is to exercise a kind of joint control between the two executives to check that the treaty [Aachen treaty; author’s note] is fully applied because there are many treaties that remain a dead letter and we must be the parliamentary spur. [...] We must be the spur that allows us to make progress and to check towards a kind of joint control of the parliaments on the implementation of the treaty.” (Interview French MP 2, 2022)¹¹

But the strong formulation of parliamentary control of government relations, which appears in Article 6 of the parliamentary agreement (Bundestag & Assemblée nationale, 2019, p. 6), is mentioned only by a few and only cautiously by others when asked about the objectives of the Franco-German Parliamentary Assembly. Skepticism about the type and scope of controlling or legislative powers of the bilateral assembly came mainly from the German far right and the French far left members of the working group.

“I don't think it's possible, in fact, even constitutionally, to give legislative power to an assembly other than our Parliament. This kind of assembly in itself has no place in the legislative system in France in any case.” (Interview French MP 5, 2022)¹²

They see the added value of the FGPA above all in parliamentary exchange.

“But we are a group that always likes talking. [...] In the case of the parliamentary agreement, we said, ‘Come on, this is a chance to discuss things with others.’” (Interview German MP 6, 2022)¹³

Still, the majority of the interviewed working group members underlined the importance of strong parliamentary relations as a counterweight to intergovernmental relations. They said that Franco-German parliamentary relations should be more than “*organizing coffee and cake*” (Interview French MP 3)¹⁴ and that it should have a political dimension (Interview German MP 1). The interviews thus confirm hypothesis 2 which states that the motivations of the founding members of the Franco-German Parliamentary Assembly was influenced by the norm of parliamentary democracy that needed to be extended to the international level.

Conclusion

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explain the motivations of German and French parliamentarians when creating the Franco-German Parliamentary Assembly in the time period 2017 to 2019. A group of 21 parliamentarians from the German Bundestag and the French Assemblée pushed forward the idea of a bilateral Assembly in order to deepen and consolidate

¹¹ Original quote from interview with French MP 2, 2022: “Le premier objectif, c'est d'exercer une espèce de contrôle conjoint des deux exécutifs pour vérifier que le traité [Aachen treaty; author’s note] est pleinement appliqué parce qu'il y a beaucoup de traités qui restent un peu lettre morte et on doit être l'aiguillon parlementaire. [...] On doit être l'aiguillon qui permet de faire progresser ça et de vérifier vers une espèce de contrôle conjoint des parlements sur la mise en œuvre du traité.”

¹² Original quote of French MP 5, 2022: “Je ne crois pas que ce soit possible, en fait, d'ailleurs, même constitutionnellement, qu'on puisse donner un pouvoir législatif à une autre assemblée que notre Parlement [...]. Ce genre de l'assemblée en soi, elle n'a pas de place dans le système législatif en France en tout cas.”

¹³ Original quote from interview with German MP 6, 2022: “Aber wir sind ja eine Fraktion, die immer Reden gut findet. [...] Beim Parlamentsabkommen haben wir gesagt: ‘Komm, das ist noch mal eine Chance, da kann man auch mal mit den anderen diskutieren.’”

¹⁴ Original quote from interview with French MP 3, 2022: “Organiser des cafés gâteaux”.

Franco-German friendship at parliamentary level. Secondly, they created the FGPA as a counterweight to governmental relations, thus seeing themselves as a watchdog of the Franco-German treaties and of intergovernmental activities. The in-depth analysis of interviews with the founding members of the FGPA as well as the comparative quantitative analysis of the MPs' personal backgrounds stated clearly that the norm of parliamentary democracy that needed to be extended to the bilateral level and the shared understanding of Franco-German friendship were important driving forces. The empirical research revealed additional aspects that motivated the parliamentarians such as the favorable political context after the French and German elections in 2017, the pioneering spirit in the group, the consensus-oriented and non-partisan working practice of the Franco-German working group that negotiated the parliamentary agreement in 2018.

This first analysis of the interviews also brought up new questions relating to the motivations of the founding members. Firstly, there are indications in the interviews that the firm belief of Franco-German friendship was also strategically used to convince important stakeholders and decision-makers of the creation of the Franco-German Parliamentary Assembly. Especially in Germany, the concept of Franco-German friendship seems to be so uncontroversial among the political actors that there is almost no possibility of forming an opposition to it. This is less the case in France, where there are anti-European and anti-German political currents (Mélénchon, 2020). In this context, it can be helpful to look into the theory of actor-centred constructivism that addresses the strategic use of norms (Saurugger, 2013).

Secondly, the comparative analysis of MPs' backgrounds has revealed that some of the MPs made a career move in or shortly after the time of the creation of the Franco-German Parliamentary Assembly. It could be worthwhile to find out if there is a link to the engagement of the MP in the Franco-German working group. This question can be addressed by a third hypothesis on the actors' motivations: *H3: Parliamentarians engaged in the creation of the FGPA in order to advance their political career.* This hypothesis is based on a rational choice approach. It assumes that the MPs involved in the creation process were thereby aiming to maximize their personal benefit (contacts, networks, travel to other country, becoming a foreign policy expert etc.). Especially, this last point will be important to complement the picture on the motivations of the founding actors. These two questions open up possibilities for further research and will be addressed in the ongoing doctoral project on the Franco-German Parliamentary Assembly.

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Interviews

- Interview German MP 1 - 17.2.2022
- Interview French MP 2 - 2.2.2022
- Interview French MP 3 - 3.2.2022
- Interview German MP 4 - 9.3.2022
- Interview French MP 5 - 16.3.2022
- Interview German MP 6 - 16.2.2022