



50 years Elysée Treaty ... a cross-cultural retrospection and outlook

Celebrations are taking place in Germany and France. This is why we are dedicating our January news-story to the French-German relationship. We had a look at the French and German press and have discovered a divided picture with respect to the 50 year anniversary of the Elysée Treaty. Spiegel online for example praises the efforts of both countries to „tame the demons of the past¹“. Also the contribution of the neighbouring countries for a unification of Europe is being dignified.

Others, for example in numerous comments in large German online newspapers, criticise the sentimentalism on the occasion of the golden wedding anniversary.

The Elysée Treaty was meant to conquer the demons of the past. Beyond that it was also a conscious and visionary decision by the German chancellor Konrad Adenauer and the French President Charles de Gaulle. A decision to jointly deepen and strengthen the political collaboration all over Europe. The treaty contains concrete commitments and policies which were meant to manifest the Franco-German cooperation. The treaty also contains an important vision for the future:

with the treaty the structural fundament for the Franco-German youth-work was laid. Many of us (French and Germans alike) were fortunate and participated in exchange programs and experienced lively twinned city trips. The Elysée Treaty is a political initiative, and an initiative not only tailored for the political elite, but also the people were meant to be asked on board. Specifically the youth in both countries. The controversial debate of the past weeks about the impact and blessing of the treaty shows that not all people feel that the celebration is their celebration; some even turn their backs.

Why?

Sure the measures of the Elysée Treaty did not reach all people.

But there are also people who have been reached by the measures and filled twinned-city relationships with life and they still see no reason for celebration.

An example:

Katrin Knopf (45 years) from Wiesloch, close to Heidelberg. Together with her family she has participated since the 70's in journeys to Fontenay-ax-Roses, a suburb of Paris. A long-standing friendship connects her family with the family in the twinned-city. They share a lot of joint memories. Katrin's parents and the parents of Cécile Dubertrand, Katrin's French counterpart, don't really speak the language of the other. Katrin and Cécile are nearly fluent in French/German. Katrin said, that within her friendship with Cécile it never played a role if she is French or not. Today Katrin works for an internationally operating company. Her good French language skills played a major role in obtaining the job. She has a leadership role in a French-German cooperation.

¹ Artikel Spiegel online: „50 Jahre Elysée-Vertrag: Freundschaft im Dienst Europas“

In her job she is disappointed by her French colleagues. She is having difficulties working together with „the French“. She complains about the behaviour of her colleagues: they always try to push their ideas through. I have then to execute and do the majority of the work. At the end they sell it as their achievement. They justify this by the fact that it was their idea. Katrin is part of the post-Elysée generation. She has a positive experience with the Elysée measures. But in the working environment she is confronted with cross-cultural challenges, which results in frustration. And because of her positive experience in the first place, this frustration even translate into disappointment.

Katrin describes a phenomenon which we often observe in our cross-cultural work in the business world. It is a phenomenon that is not only applicable in the French-German context. It appears across all cross-cultural constellations.

We call this phenomenon: **„As long as everything goes well“**.

As long as everything goes well, as in the relationship between the two families Knopf and Dubertrand, culture doesn't play a role. You remember: "within her friendship to Cécile it never played a role if she is French or not."

However in the moment when she faces conflicts, everything that doesn't go well is blamed on the other culture. All of a sudden Katrin can't work with - the generalised- „the French“

As you might expect, for sure it is not that simple!

Many factors play a role. And culture does always have an impact on what we do and

how we behave. Our behaviour (which is imprinted by our culture) sometimes is not understood by our colleagues vis-à-vis the way we think he/she would understand our behaviour. This is how a misunderstanding occurs. Often the participants are not even aware of the fact that a misunderstanding is the source of frustration. As a matter of fact, the frustration in teamwork between Katrin and her French colleagues can't be blamed on "the culture" solely. For sure there are other factors. And there are some great tools to analyse situational misunderstandings. This phenomenon in combination with the current way of dealing with the golden anniversary celebrations shows that quite a few people experienced this discrepancy first-hand.

Because of this experienced discrepancy they are fulminating against the celebrations. We believe that one should not only look at the people who have not been reached by the measures. At least equally important are those people who have been reached but have been disappointed in another setting, in our case in the working environment. What to do? First of all it is important to discuss the Elysée Treaty and public responsiveness in daily life.

On the other hand it is important to discuss friendship in relation to countries and also on the interpersonal level. In this context it is crucially important that friendship can't only be understood as harmony but also as conflict!

Finally it is important – not only for French and Germans – to prepare and train people on how to deal with cross-cultural conflicts and challenges. The goal is to use a conflict as a hook that enables you to create harmony. Or let's take it a step further and look at how harmony can grow because of conflict.

So that along the lines of „Freude schöner
Götter Funken“ „alle Menschen Brüder (und
Schwestern) werden. (All people become
brothers (and sisters). Knowing well that
brothers and sisters always live in conflicts in
the desire for harmony.

Understanding the Elysée Treaty as a
willingness to positively deal with conflicts
within a friendship, and not expect an always
harmonious friendship, makes us shout in
deep esteem for the idea from 50 years ago:
Congratulations and „Félicitations“!

Do you want to know how we can enable your
employees in dealing with cross-cultural
challenges in a positive and creative way?
Then give us a call +49. (0)6221 735 13 71 or
drop us an [e-Mail](#). We are looking forward to
supporting you in your strategy development.
An implemented cross-cultural strategy results
in higher employee motivation reduced
frictional loss improved team spirit and
increased willingness to perform.