

***Statement by Prof. Dr. Mathias Jopp  
vis-a-vis the outcome of the British referendum***

**Brexit: the need to maintain EU-27 unity**

Today is a sad day for Europe. The British electorate unequivocally voted to leave the European Union. Populistic slogans on the repatriation of national sovereignty ostensibly resonated with the public, even though sovereignty in the interdependent world of the 21st century can only be exercised effectively in a collective. Even a powerful state of the size of the UK faces a diminishing clout in the global economic and political system.

The Brexit damages the European reputation and thwarts its political weight in the world. Likewise, it implies immediate consequences for Germany. The current balance of power between the big three – London, Paris, and Berlin – is unsettled. Germany loses a partner, who has been a crucial contributor to the EU budget, rallied to limit EU-expenses, and insisted on rules-based behavior. As leading free trade nations, the UK and Germany frequently pursued overlapping interests regarding the single market and trade policies. The UK now has to renegotiate all free trade deals with third countries, most likely from a weakened position.

What does that mean for the EU as a whole? Europe, the six founding members as well as the other twenty-one EU-member states, must stand together. It now requires negotiating an agreement on the exit of the UK from the Union swiftly and preventing a longer lasting ailing UK-membership. This ought not to drag on to prevent diverting the attention of the EU institutions from other pressing issues such as stabilising the Economic and Monetary Union, safeguarding the EU's external borders, and dealing with the foreign political challenges in the eastern and southern neighbourhood.

Now more than ever, Germany and France constitute the backbone of the EU as the largest member states. A closer bilateral cooperation between the two, as well as within the structures of the Weimar Triangle and with Italy is paramount. The other member states should, likewise, be incorporated into common initiatives. In the medium term, the Brexit should also be seen as an opportunity to push for further integration and rectify the current flaws, as blatantly revealed by the sovereign debt and refugee crisis. Opportunities for

enhanced cooperation and more efficient law-making should be materialised within the confinements of the treaties to make the EU work better for everyone, counteract the centrifugal forces, and strengthen the unity of the EU.

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