

The Treaty of Aachen and the European army

This week President Macron and Chancellor Merkel signed a Franco German Treaty at Aachen. It sets up a governing committee for a common European army, to be based on establishing a common culture in the German and French forces and engaging them in more joint operations. There will be common weapons procurement and an integrated supply industry.

The same Treaty also wishes to erode the distinctions of government and culture in the border areas between the two countries. There will be an overall joint governing structure, encouragement of bilingualism, and joint government programmes. The Treaty in addition sets up an economic council of experts to advise on bringing together economic policies. The two countries pledge themselves to even closer governmental working and more convergence of law and action. France promises to take the common EU line on the Security Council of the UN, and to seek a permanent seat for Germany on that body as well.

They presumably chose Aachen as the resting place of Charlemagne, a great figure in European unification. The Rathaus at Aachen where they met was the setting for the coronation of 31 Holy Roman Emperors, and it houses replicas of the crown jewels of the Emperors. The two leaders wishes to reaffirm their enthusiasm for a political unified Europe.

The Rathaus has also seen other events that remind us of the trials of European history. There was the period of occupation by the French Napoleonic forces, when France tried to unite a large part of Europe by force of arms. There was the 1923 sacking by Rhineland nationalists, and the bombing of the building by the allies seeking to reverse German militarism in the 1940s.

True to form, signing this Treaty to try to unify more, the political forces in France and Germany have included strong criticism from their oppositions. The German populists are concerned that Germany will be dragged into spending more German money on French economic developments. The French opposition is very concerned about giving Germany a role in the government of French border areas. These are all matters for French and German debate, not for UK opinions.

I highlight this event because during the referendum Leave was told by Remain there was no question of a European army, yet the language of this Treaty develops the idea a long way. It is clear again that the main drivers of European integration do wish to have a joint military capability distinct from NATO. This in turn requires a much higher degree of political integration and joint decision taking.