

## **The VFAJ-DFSJ, a Franco-German citizen platform of French and German youth who want a Europe that prepares the future <sup>1</sup>**

**By Sébastien Martin**

and

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### **A long-matured project**

At a time when the European Union is facing important challenges: technological, environmental, importance of the EU in the world, the "*Voix Franco-Allemandes de la Jeunesse / Deutsch-Französische Stimmen der Jugend*" (VFAJ/DFSJ) have decided to launch their initiative. They rightly believe that the bilateral relationship is a driving force in the political construction of the European Union.

After living in Germany for ten years and having studied French and German business law in parallel to his involvement in the Olivaint Conference and the German French Young Leaders, Sébastien Martin proposes, as of 2019, to Christophe Arend, President of the France-Germany Friendship Group of the French National Assembly and president of the French Office of the Franco-German Parliamentary Assembly (APFA), to launch a youth citizen initiative allowing youth concerns to be brought to the attention of political decision makers. The two protagonists had already had the opportunity to collaborate by organizing a Franco-German colloquium in December 2018 that brought together several key interlocutors of the Franco-German couple. The finding was clear and pointed to the lack of future-oriented debates while the challenges are not lacking, as well as the interest of youth in these Issues, more than 300 young people participated in person to the event.

Under the joint High Patronage of the Presidents of the France-Germany Friendship Groups of the National Assembly and the Bundestag, Mr. Christophe Arend and Mr. Gunther Krichbaum, the VFAJ/DFSJ launched an online citizen consultation in mid-March 2021, focusing on the challenges of the world of tomorrow (Green Deal, innovation, education, the place of the European Union in the world, etc.). Closed at the end of July, it received more than 5,000 responses in the space of a few months. At the

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same time, they have set up an association under the French law of 1901, marking their desire to be part of a long-term approach.

A new dynamic emerged, followed by a bottom-up that had to be animated through restitution events in the fall of 2021 and then concrete bilateral achievements. About forty members are involved in the VFAJ/DFSJ, of which Marie Sobing coordinates the German part, as Vice-President.

### **The ambitions of the Franco-German engine**

The aim of the project is to provide a Franco-German response to European challenges by strengthening collaboration between the two countries and by working as a platform to identify major issues and formulate proposals to overcome them. This cooperation involves public institutions as well as companies, schools and civil society. It is certain that through collective intelligence, one will be able to face the bilateral and European challenges, both current and future.

The platform's ambition is to create a bottom-up from the territories to the national, bilateral, European and international levels. Within the framework of the common European reflection impelled by the European Union in its preparation of the Conference on the Future of Europe, the VFAJ-DFSJ wish to relay the voice of Franco-German youth to decision-making bodies such as the parliaments of both countries, the governments concerned, local authorities, companies, social partners etc.

### **A promising partnership, independent of political partisanship**

Receiving the support of several major sponsors such as the Central Bank of France, Airbus, Bpifrance, KfW, Europa-Park, ESCP, Deutsche Bank, Suez, BuyIn, Rödl, the association announces the promise of an action on the European scene. This initiative claims to be politically open by bringing together actors from all horizons and strongly advocates the development of a constructive and inclusive dialogue, decentralized in the territories. Going beyond traditional divisions, the VFAJ-DFSJ demonstrate that in international cooperation, anything is possible for those who know how to listen, understand and federate others.

### **Cutting-edge multidisciplinary expertise and multiple formats**

Moreover, the association wants to be innovative and forward-looking. In addition to strengthening existing Franco-German partnerships, the VFAJ-DFSJ aims to address

issues at the heart of the European debate. Through its podcasts, the association deciphers and raises public awareness of the major issues at stake today, be it the economy, ecology, education, innovation, foreign policy or European values... Even claiming to be a pioneer in the analysis of current events, the association also tackles avant-garde themes such as the EU's technological autonomy, future models of corporate governance, financial innovation and the jobs of tomorrow.

And as the famous saying goes, alone one goes faster, together one goes further. Building a stronger Franco-German relationship will allow Europe to go further.

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#### About the Authors



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**Sébastien Martin**, 24 years old, has a background in French and German business Law, as he lived more than 10 years in Germany, as well as 3 years in Poland. Today, he works as a consultant and is heading towards entrepreneurship. Sébastien is currently public affairs executive & President of the VFAJ-DFSJ, an association creating a french-german platform for the youth to tackle latest European issues and initiate bilateral impulses.



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**Virginie Nahas**, PhD, is Assistant Professor at the American University of the Middle-East (AUM) and member of VFAJ-DFSJ. She is a French researcher, having obtained her PhD in economics from the University of Poitiers. She has been affiliated with several academic bodies in France such as Paris 2 Panthéon-Assas University as a lecturer and a researcher.

Her research interests focus on three main pillars: the financing of SMEs in developing countries, sustainable/green finance and entrepreneurship. In this context, her research examines a key element and a very important aspect of PM which is project financial management, including the processes to acquire and manage the financial resources for projects, particularly in developing economies.

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