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## **Algorithmic Failure? The Weimar Triangle as a Subregional Emulation of Global Governance Structures**

### **Abstract**

This article addresses the issue of discontinuity in the context of the multilevel nature of global governance and the relationship between the determinants of continuity and the sustainability of (sub)regional institutional arrangements. The main purpose of the discussion is to better understand continuity disturbances in the Weimar Triangle. These disturbances are expressed not only in fluctuations in the cooperation levels within the Triangle, but also in increasingly long periods of institutional inertia. The study is based on the assumption that the main reason for the disturbances in the continuity of the Weimar Triangle is the suboptimal emulation of the operating algorithms developed in the G7, that is, the sequences of principles, practices, and knowledge that Germany and France had internalized through their long-term socialization in the G7, and then transferred to the subregional level in order to ensure adaptability and receptiveness in the functioning of the Weimar Triangle.

**Keywords:** Weimar Triangle, Group of Seven, Global Governance, International Institutions

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## **Introduction**

The pace of changes in international relations, commonly referred to as globalization, has been increasing since the 1990s. Due to globalization, the interdependence among various actors involved in the replication of mechanisms, practices and patterns that reflect the heterogeneous nature of the post-Westphalian international community has grown. Yet, critics of intensified globalization interpret the process as an external manifestation of phenomena and processes that actually lead to increased social, political, economic and financial instability. One of them, Dani Rodrik, points to the incompatibility of (hyper) globalization, democracy and sovereignty (Rodrik, 2011). Seen in this light, globalization poses a challenge to all states, regardless of their position in the international community. It particularly highlights individual governments' inefficiency in dealing with the aftermath of crises, as well as their failure to develop an adequate framework of governance that transcends national boundaries. This framework, referred in literature to as "regional/global governance", has come a long way. Initially, in the 1990s, it was understood in a broad sense, as referring to the search for causes of regional and global problems, and to the identification of appropriate measures and methods to respond to them (Finkelstein, 1995, pp. 367–372). A decade later, regional and global governance began to be considered as the normative perspective of regional and global policies, as well as a long-term project of global integration based on traditional multilateralism, development of regional cooperation and cooperation involving a wide range of different actors (Dingwerth, Pattberg, 2006, pp. 185–203). A set of assumptions forms the core of the normative approach to global governance, the first one being that global governance is in no way a form of global government. Global governance is rather viewed as an attempt to build a "confederation of independent republics" (Nuscheler, 2000, p. 310). The second assumption is that global governance is based on various forms of cooperation, coordination and decision-making at different levels of the international system. In this approach, non-state actors should be included in global governance as elements that enhance the legitimacy of decisions and increase the degree of their effectiveness. Last but not least, this approach assumes that global governance is a multipolar structure of world politics. This emphasizes the importance of regionalization as a process that catalyzes further integration and cooperation. Scholars who highlight this assumption point to the need to find a "happy medium" between globalization and sovereign

national policies. They talk about “the paradox of global governance” stressing that political authorities that are indispensable to effectively respond to problems of global importance and scale, and to mobilize the necessary resources to do so, are rooted in the national level, while the sources and scale of emerging problems and potential solutions are transnational or global in nature (Thakur, van Langenhove, 2006, pp. 233–240). Normativists seek solutions to this situation in expanding the formula of global governance by including solutions developed in the process of regional integration, in particular through the establishment of subregional and regional structures operating within the global governance network and aimed at enhancing interstate cooperation (Krickovic, 2015, pp. 557–577).

The Weimar Triangle (WT) can be viewed as such a structure. Established in 1991 by France, Germany and Poland as a forum for trilateral dialogue, it was based on the idea of facilitating Poland’s “return” to the European family of nations on the one hand, and on the pursuit of France and Germany to secure their influence in Central Europe, where democratic transition was under way, on the other. This much is known from the official discourse maintained by experts, for whom the WT is one of the most important achievements of Polish foreign policy, a formula of cooperation enhancing the processes of European integration, or even the driving force behind, and foundation for the security of the modern European Union, (Parzymies, 2004; Miszczak, 2009; Koszel, 2016; Fiszer, Czasak, 2019) which has been weakened by the overlapping consequences of simultaneous and multidimensional crises (Kubin, Stolarczyk, 2018) Far from rejecting this view of the WT, and actually finding it valuable as it highlights the historically shaped social reality featuring the colliding interests of states, this study proposes a different interpretation of the WT. The formula of intergovernmental cooperation in question is presented as a fragment of social reality. The latter exists objectively but is interpreted in terms of the outcomes of phenomena, processes, and deep and evasive structures that do not so much determine this reality as shape it – expanding or narrowing it down.

The main purpose of the considerations here is to better understand the continuity disturbances in the operation of the WT. These disturbances involve not only fluctuations in the level of cooperation within the organization, but also, or primarily, the increasingly long periods of institutional inertia. These periods have transformed from the temporary disruptions in cooperation which could be seen following Poland’s accession to the European Union, to become a new “inertial” reality. The issues of change and continuity are inherent in this new

institutionalism, and are used here to take a closer look at the mechanisms and influences whereby global governance institutions at the regional and subregional levels emerge, evolve and disappear (Pierson, 2006, pp. 3–20). In particular, focusing on the example of the WT allows us to outline a perspective of discontinuity in the context of the multi-level nature of global governance and to answer the question of the relationship between the determinants of continuity and the sustainability of (sub)regional institutional arrangements.

These considerations, dedicated to understanding the disruptions in institutional continuity which the countries of the Weimar Triangle have suffered, also attempt to transcend the dispute between positivism and interpretivism by taking the *via media*, namely the path of epistemological realism. This methodological trend implies going beyond the examination of visible structures and searching for their hidden image, in order to best explain a sequence of social actions that lead to the replication of norms, rules, conventions, and standards that have been devised in the course of history. The WT is presented as a sub-regional emulation of the G7, which is one of the essential informal structures of global governance. The starting point, or hypothesis, of this study is the assumption that the main reason for disturbances in the continuity of the WT was the suboptimal emulation of the operating algorithms developed in the G7, that is, of the sequence of principles, practices, and knowledge that Germany and France had internalized through their long-term socialization in the G7, and then transferred to the subregional level in order to ensure the adaptability and receptiveness in the functioning of the WT. The case study selected to verify the research hypothesis is based on a comparative study of the G7 and the WT, two deliberative structures operating on different levels of global governance as a multi-level normative project.

The first subchapter briefly presents the theoretical and conceptual background for further consideration, focusing on the issues of adaptability and receptiveness in the operation of institutions. This part of the study provides an opportunity to show the G7 as a deep structure of global governance and the original set of institutional cooperation algorithms replicated by the WT as a lower-level emulation structure. The second subchapter addresses adaptability and receptiveness at the subregional level. This part of the study is devoted in particular to the implementation and emulation of institutional continuity algorithms in the practice of the WT. The study is concluded with a summary presenting conclusions from the analysis.

## **Adaptability and Receptiveness at the Global Level**

As indicated above, the emergence of a multipolar structure in global politics and the development of regionalization as a process driving further integration and cooperation were considered central in the normative projection of global governance. Regionalization is ambiguous and difficult to define. It is most often considered as a process whereby regional interactions intensify leading to a region separating itself, or as a bottom-up process initiated by non-state actors (e.g. NGOs) whereby intra-regional interconnections intensify while inter-regional interactions wane. In the Polish literature, an interesting view, inspired by political economy, was expressed by Edward Halizak, for whom regionalization was a process whereby barriers that hinder or prevent intra-regional cooperation were removed (Halizak, 2006, p. 275). This view of global governance was widely accepted at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. Global governance began to be viewed as the sum of all institutions, processes and interactions that take place between different actors at all levels of the political system, which depart from hierarchy and seek to solve global problems through a set of both formalized and non-formalized norms and principles of conduct, the outcomes of which have a transnational impact (Rewizorski, 2015, pp. 129–130). The objective of global governance, identified as resolving constantly emerging conflicts, the mitigation of differences of interest, and the expansion of the range of cooperation between heterogeneous actors, was to be attained through the formation of a multi-level, opaque system based on coexisting institutions, processes, and actors. This arrangement can be compared to a network of equilibrium points. While they reflect the balance of power and interests in international relations, they are formed on an *ad hoc* basis to meet temporary needs and/or respond to sudden challenges. Over time, they may become more or less effective. Using the network metaphor, the phenomenon under analysis can be described as “plugging in and unplugging”. When a crisis or an emergency arise, threatening to trigger a crisis or change in the rules of the game, such as the end of the Cold War, the “great lockdown” that was one of the responses to the COVID-19 pandemic, Brexit, or the 2008+ global financial crisis, it can lead to the network components becoming weaker (e.g. the EU, the WT), disappearing (e.g. Comecon), modifying the way they operate (e.g. OECD, G7), or being replaced by new structures (e.g. G20, BRICS) (Olsen, 2009, pp. 3–32).

In the opinion of some researchers, the advantages of new institutional structures result from their optimal adaptation to the demands of the

environment in which they operate, but scholars note that this adaptation takes place at a specific historical moment. Hence, the adaptation of institutional structures to current external conditions does not guarantee that they will continue to be useful in the long-term perspective. Particularly noteworthy here are the works of Andrew Cooper, Ramesh Thakur, John Kirton and Oliver Stuenkel (Cooper, Thakur, 2018; Kirton, 2013; Stuenkel, 2015). Such “on the spot” adjustments result from the conviction that history is “inefficient”, as emphasized by institutionalists. It means that institutions are rarely (if ever) perfectly adapted to their environment, and that the calibration of institutions as specific structures of cooperation, their behavior and the context in which they happen to operate is stretched over time. Achieving the optimal adjustment level is short-lived and occurs within unstable equilibrium systems. The latter can be viewed as the outcomes of interdependent decisions (Pierson, 2004). On the one hand, the pace of institutional change depends on the institution’s ability to adapt its internal structures and operating mechanisms to external stimuli (demands for change) in the top-down adaptation format. On the other hand, the pace of change results from the bottom-up conduct of the institution that either ignores or modifies the intensity of outside pressure and thus influences the external environment and the demands for change directed from there (bottom-up adaptation) (March, Olsen, 1989).

The above-mentioned lack of any guarantees of an institution’s long-term relevance is due to the fact that its response to the demands for change made by the external environment may not be sufficiently effective. The reasons can be found in the intensity of external (environmental) change, which significantly exceeds the adaptive capacity of institutions (adaptability deficit), or in the misinterpretation of signals coming from the outside, which results in premature or delayed responses by institutions (receptiveness deficit). In both cases, an institution being part of the network of equilibrium points wanes or disappears. In order to survive, a well-designed institution cannot be a static set of ready-made solutions but a constantly evolving process. Scholars emphasize that ensuring the continuity of an institution’s operations depends on maintaining a balance between exploitation and exploration (March, 1991, pp. 71–87). Exploitation requires an operational combination of certain principles, behavioral practices, and knowledge. Exploration, on the other hand, requires courage, manifested in readiness to experiment while applying principles, practices, and knowledge that may or may not result in greater adaptability and receptiveness in the institution’s operations. If exploitation is paid insufficient attention, the institution wanes or

disappears, whereas exploration through constant experimentation can lead to overlooking the moment when it is possible for the institution to achieve the expected benefits.

### *The Case of G7*

The Group of Seven is an example of a deep global governance structure that maintains a balance between adaptability and receptiveness, and thus between exploitation and exploration in terms of adopted principles, operating practices, and knowledge of how to achieve desired goals. Since its beginnings, this structure, ultimately formed in the second half of the 1970s, has functioned as a “club for multilateral international cooperation”. The G7 has long been described as such, dating back to the studies of the American economist James Buchanan in the 1960s (Buchanan, 1965). The “club model” is characterized by the presence of a high-level consultation forum that handles homogeneous issues and involves a small number of highly economically and politically developed countries. According to the Canadian researcher John Kirton, the Group of Seven has become a special kind of club, a kind of pragmatic coalition where the world’s political elite gathers in inaccessible venues (usually resorts) to hold impromptu meetings, enhanced by a friendly atmosphere, joint lunches and proximity, all facilitating informal conversations and building personal contacts (Kirton, 2013, pp. 33–34).

Since the 1975 Rambouillet Summit, where the discussion on collective (global) governance was initiated, the G7 has significantly expanded its scope. In doing so, it has typically addressed the most current phenomena in the international environment. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, the G7 ceased to deal exclusively with monetary issues. The leaders of G7 states began to discuss political and military issues (terrorism, security, Euro-missiles, nuclear weapons and energy, the situation in Afghanistan, institutional cooperation, the future of Central and Eastern Europe, reforms of the UN and IMF), social issues (sustainable development, protection of human rights, debt relief for developing countries), environmental issues (climate change, greenhouse gas emissions) and economic issues (international trade, debt crisis, economic aid, coordination of macroeconomic policies) (Bayne, 2005). After the “tectonic” changes triggered by the 1997 Asian crisis and then the 2008 global financial crisis, a new element in the global governance architecture appeared on the horizon, namely the G20, which had been operating since 1999 at the level of finance ministers and central bank governors, and since 2008 also at the level of heads of state.

Even though the G20 was gradually gaining ground as one of the main deep structures of global governance alongside the UN, the G7



found a place for itself as a deliberative center. Devising the image of “an independent partner” in its relations with the G20, the G7 developed its own agenda after 2009. It focused on issues related to development, security (including food), access to water and energy. Issues of financial stability and regulation, preventing macroeconomic disproportions, and financial supervision were left to the G20, which the leaders of nineteen systemically important countries and of the European Union acknowledged to be the premier forum for international economic cooperation (Schmucker, Gnath, 2010; *G20 Leaders’ Statement*, 2009).

In addition to identifying a set of issues that are always present and largely determine the direction of the G7’s deliberations, the structure has shown considerable receptiveness in its ability to correctly interpret external signals and adapt to them by expanding the range of topics addressed. Since the highly significant summit of G7 leaders at the Bavarian castle of Elmau (7–8 June 2015), organized by the German Presidency, the G7 has focused on the issue of climate change. As concerns climate change, all G7 countries reaffirmed their strong commitment to an ambitious agreement to be adopted at the COP21 summit in Paris in December 2015. In Elmau, G7 leaders also discussed further action on the international agreement on sustainable development and poverty eradication, the Post-2015 Agenda for Sustainable Development, resource efficiency and marine protection. The latter commitment was further clarified in a declaration adopted at the 2018 G7 Summit in Charlevoix (8–9 June 2018), hosted by Canada. State leaders identified increasing plastic debris in seas and oceans as one of the greatest threats to marine ecosystems. Among other things, the summit adopted the G7 Oceans Plastics Charter, in which the G7 countries, with the exception of the United States, pledged to take a series of actions to manage the resource sustainably and efficiently, including by developing a reusable, recyclable alternative to plastic by 2030 (*Elmau Summit*, 2015; *The Charlevoix G7 Summit...*, 2018; *Charlevoix Blueprint...*, 2018). Despite differences in the emphasis placed on different agenda items by successive presidencies, the package of environmental issues has become the core of deliberations in the various G7 consultation formats. Not even the US presidency’s decision to exclude climate change issues from the agenda of the G7 Leaders’ Summit scheduled for 10–12 June 2020 changed this (Holden, 2021). This summit was subsequently cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and the United Kingdom, which took over the G7 presidency in 2021, returned to the path initiated by the German presidency in 2015.

Alongside the development of the G7’s agenda, its working methods have been worked out, which are designed to achieve consensus and ensure



a high level of accountability (Keohane, 2002; Kirton, Larionova, 2017). The G7's hierarchical construction of working procedures is designed to achieve these goals. Despite its informal nature, the G7's deliberations have been divided between the leaders, who delegate work and focus on an annually changing agenda and other deliberative formats. The latter include working groups and meetings of ministers, deputy ministers and senior officials, Sherpas and Sous-Sherpas, and engagement groups of social actors. All these formats are responsible for the implementation of the adopted commitments and their iteration (modifying and transferring them to subsequent leadership meetings).

Working groups, Sherpas and social actors play a particularly important role in the G7's deliberative mechanism, based on multi-level interactions. Working groups, such as the Food Security Working Group (FSWG) and Accountability Working Group (AWG), are instrumental in developing commitments in specific thematic areas. Contacts within respective groups provide an opportunity for mid-level officials from the corresponding ministries in G7 countries to establish and foster cooperation, especially since country representatives in the working groups are appointed by and accountable to members of respective cabinets (or to Sherpas or respective deputy finance ministers) for the arrangements reached.

In addition to the working groups, Sherpas play an important, if not central, role in the G7's deliberative mechanism. In the long-standing practice of the G7, the principle whereby each leader appoints their representatives (Sherpas) has been established. On account of the significant range of tasks assigned to Sherpas, they are usually appointed for more than twelve months. These tasks include holding consultations before upcoming summits, negotiating agenda items, presenting countries' positions, reaching agreement on key issues, and providing advice and assistance to the summit host. Peter M. Boehm, a long-time representative of Canadian prime ministers in the G7, a seasoned diplomat and, as of 2018, a senator, writes interestingly about the role of Sherpas in the G7 (Boehm, 2019). In practice, G7 leaders negotiate only the issues where Sherpas have failed to reach agreement. As concerns the remaining issues under deliberation, the leaders adopt G7 summit declarations including the agreements reached by the ministerial officials in the working groups. The exception to this rule is the final declaration of the G7 Summit in Biarritz, France (24–26 August 2019). During this summit, the leaders not only prepared the preliminary text of the declaration, but also negotiated it directly (*Biarritz progress...*, 2021).

In addition to Sherpas and working groups, the G7's deliberative mechanism is shaped by social actors known as engagement groups.

Their members are civil society and business organizations active in G7 countries. Nearly fifty years after the establishment of the G7, organizations representing business (B7), civil society (C7), trade unions (T7), academia (S7), think tanks (T7), women (W7), and youth (Y7) participate in its deliberations. In line with established practice, each G7 presidency designates specific organizations to lead the work in a particular area. In carrying out their tasks, social actors work closely with Sherpas and the G7's working groups.

The G7's deliberative mechanism has features of a hierarchical system. Its normative core is the principle of accountability, which underlies the relationship between principal and agent (Schedler, 1999). Accountability in an organization concerns the agent's conduct, which the principal analyzes in terms of its justification (external accountability), or the agent generating and collecting information necessary for the principal (internal accountability). The distinction between external and internal accountability is not without significance, since the G7 is an example of a forum where both forms of accountability coexist. The G7's environment generates external stimuli (demands for change) and requires detailed justification of the actions taken by the G7 (external accountability). Members of the G7, on the other hand, focus on the extraction of information, which becomes a key resource in the G7's deliberative mechanism. Following this line of thought, one should inquire about the "audience" to whom the G7 is accountable. In the case of external accountability, the Group's performance is assessed by stakeholders in its environment. In seeking information about the G7's performance (e.g., in adopting and implementing climate change commitments), external stakeholders focus on the Group's legitimacy. For internal stakeholders, on the other hand, the G7's effectiveness is most important, expressed in the collection and generation of information relevant to them.

It seems that an internal approach to accountability prevails in the work of the G7. It primarily takes the form of the agent's reporting the results of their findings to the principal, thus preparing the most comprehensive information in a given area, in order to optimize decision-making and increase the chances of implementing individual commitments. The dominance of internal accountability in the G7 is evidenced by the conduct of ministerial representatives participating in working groups on the basis of authority granted to them by their respective governments, and the practice of reporting the results of deliberations to the principals (Hilbrich, Schwab, 2018).

This combination of an essentially hierarchical deliberative mechanism and internal accountability, accompanied by the G7 accepting the role

of “independent partner” of the G20, which is nevertheless capable of promoting and implementing its own agenda, can be viewed as the normative basis of the Group’s adaptability to the environment in which it has come to operate. Nearly fifty years after its establishment, the G7 has achieved, albeit not without difficulty and far from making it perfect, a relative balance between adaptability and receptiveness, between exploitation and exploration in terms of principles adopted, working practices and knowledge of how to achieve its objectives. Thus, despite the tectonic shifts that have occurred in the international community since 1989, the G7 has maintained continuity as a deep structure of global governance.

### **Adaptability and Receptiveness at the Subregional Level**

The significant political and economic transformations that occurred in 1989 made the G7 turn its attention to Central Europe, recognizing that this part of the continent had become a subregional laboratory for democratic transition. In addition to the United States, Germany and France also emphasized the particular significance of the systemic transformation processes in Central Europe. Largely at the instigation of the French presidency, the Declaration of the G7 Summit in Paris (14–15 July 1989) on East-West relations was adopted as early as 1989 (*Declaration on East-West...*, 1989). The Group’s leaders fostered the process of economic and political reforms in Central Europe, explicitly referring to the examples of Poland and Hungary. They proposed a number of solutions in order to bring these countries closer to Western European integration structures and to further slacken their political and economic ties with the Soviet Union (Fiszer, 2019, pp. 177–205). The solutions included the provision of economic assistance to Poland and Hungary to improve the competitiveness of their economies, a proposal to assign the role of aid coordinator to the then Commission of the European Communities, a commitment to conclude an agreement on a debt rescheduling strategy between the International Monetary Fund and Poland, and support for the Polish side in talks with the Paris Club, among other things. This refers to an informal association of creditor nations formed to find solutions to enable debtor nations to repay their debts, including through restructuring or granting partial relief. It applied only to public sector debt guaranteed by governments. Poland entered into a debt reduction and rescheduling agreement with the Paris Club in 1991. The Paris Club decided then to write off 50% of the debt, of which 30% was to be written off immediately,

while the remaining 20% was to be written off after Poland had completed its adjustment program. (Cudowska-Sojko, 2013, p. 180). Two years later, on 28 August 1991, German Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher invited his French and Polish counterparts, Roland Dumas and Krzysztof Skubiszewski respectively, to a joint meeting in Weimar. On the following day, the meeting was concluded by issuing the Joint Statement of Foreign Ministers of France, Germany and Poland on the Future of Europe, better known as the Weimar Declaration (*Wspólne oświadczenie ministrów...*, 2021). Providing the ideological basis of the Weimar Triangle, the Declaration can be viewed as a culmination of the bilateral cooperation marked by the opening of Polish relations with France (Friendship and Solidarity Treaty of 9 April 1991) and with Germany (Treaty of Good Neighborship and Friendly Cooperation of 17 June 1991), and an attempt to replace bilateral relations with a trilateral forum for dialogue. It is worth noting that the post-Cold War cooperation structure embodied by the Weimar Triangle was not intended by the contracting parties to become an organization in the sense of international law, but “a specific forum for discussion, exchange of views on the most important aspects of international policy,” which “inspired French-Polish-German cooperation in various areas” (Koszel, 2016, p. 66). The WT has been described in the literature as one of the most important achievements of Polish foreign policy; a trilateral, albeit unequal, formula for cooperation that deepens the processes of European integration (Koszel, 2016, p. 81) the driving force behind, and foundation for the security of the modern European Union (Czasak, 2018); and, also, as an imaginary structure aimed at replicating the bilateral relations between France and Germany in German relations with Poland (Vogel, 2008).

It seems that the above approaches to the WT, which are part of the realist and explanatory current in the study of international institutions, should be reviewed in terms of the assumptions of epistemological realism. This methodological trend implies going beyond the examination of observable structures and seeking their concealed image, in order to best present the social activities leading to the replication of historically produced norms, rules, conventions, and standards. In this frame of mind, the image of the WT as a trilateral forum for interstate cooperation can be viewed as the top layer of a camouflaged structure that reflects the deeper structures of global governance represented by the G7 in the 1990s. Understood in this way, the WT, designed by its participants – Germany and France – as a sub-regional emulation of the G7, can be perceived as replicating the functions of another system and seeking to ensure the aforementioned balance between adaptability and receptiveness through

a set of operational continuity algorithms. The role of the designers of the WT, namely France and Germany, can be explained in terms of “practice turn”, a theoretical approach that is interested in the foundations of the actors’ beliefs about the order of the social world which allow them to exert effective impact on that world (Adler, Pouliot, 2011). Taking the approach that focuses on behavioral practices, social order exists through the performance of shared practices, which in turn are based on background knowledge. Importantly, certain mechanisms occur which are based on the socialization of certain behaviors, beliefs or even identities. It should be noted that while France and Germany invited Poland to participate in the trilateral cooperation forum, they nevertheless constructed a structure which accommodated what Emmanuel Adler and Vincent Pouliot called practice, or socially organized and meaningful activities. The operational algorithms acquired and internalized by Germany and France through long-term socialization in the G7 have become the essence of practice.

### *The Case of the Weimar Triangle*

The above operational algorithms developed and replicated in the G7 were adopted and implemented at the subregional level in the early 1990s. They can be described as sequences of principles, practices and knowledge that are emulated (imitated) to ensure adaptability and receptiveness in the operation of the WT. The three decades of this cooperation structure (1991–2021) make it possible to identify the main algorithms that contributed to its continuity over the period from 1991 to 2016. These include the following:

- the WT operating through meetings held in different formats and adopting commitments by consensus;
- internal (domestic) political management;
- deliberation and setting directions for operation.

The first continuity algorithm emulated in the WT concerned the development of its structure as a platform for political, economic, and military cooperation. As in the G7, deliberations in the WT were divided between state leaders and the other formats. Unlike the “original”, however, the WT’s operating method was developed without concern for a high level of accountability. This was due to the imprecise working procedures of the WT. Although after 1998 cooperation within the WT was executed at the highest level (in the format of Heads of State and Government), such meetings were irregular. The last summits at this level was held in Paris on 12 June 2023, over 12 years since the highest level summit in Paris held in 7 February 2011. The WT’s leaders (François Hollande,

Angela Merkel and Bronisław Komorowski) met at a Warsaw Summit in March 2013. The summit was mainly devoted to the new architecture of the Economic and Monetary Union and the EU's budget for 2014–2020. The meeting was a side event to the Visegrad Group (V4) Summit. The leaders of the countries were accompanied by the Heads of Government of Poland – Donald Tusk, Hungary – Viktor Orban, Slovakia – Robert Fico and the Czech Republic – Petr Neczas.

Irregular, but much more frequent, meetings were held under the other WT formats, which included consultations of foreign ministers (1991–2022), defense ministers (1994–2015), ministers and secretaries of European affairs (2003–2023), finance ministers (2001–2023), ministers of labor, justice, culture, environment, and agriculture (1997–2019). It is worth mentioning that cooperation was also developing in parliamentary forums in two forms: the meetings of the lower houses' bureaus and of the EU Affairs committees from the French, German and Polish parliaments. The meetings of the EU Affairs committees were resumed after a four-year break in April 2008 in Warsaw, whereas the first meeting of the lower houses' bureaus was held in Essen in May 2010. The last meeting of EUC from parliaments was 17 June 2021.

Characteristically, the consultations held within these formats were discontinued at the turn of 2015 and 2016, with the exception of foreign ministers, who met at the Paris Summit on 15 October 2020. Contrary to what the Polish head of diplomacy, Zbigniew Rau, said: “the perception of security issues, the future of the EU and the fundamental matters is very similar” between WT countries (Krzysztosek, Wolska, 2020), the summit was more of a courtesy meeting held in the shade of Polish-French chilly relations, significant differences in approaches to the rule of law and migration, as well as the different views Poland, France and Germany had on the issue of sovereignty. In this context, the words of French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian that, despite the four-year “freeze” on meetings between heads of diplomacy, “there are formats for cooperation in the EU that allow Europe to move forward. The Weimar Triangle is such a format”, and those of the German representative, Heiko Maas, who pointed out that “those who have buried the Weimar Triangle have proof that the Triangle is still alive and can be very useful”, can be interpreted not so much as an affirmation of the vitality or continuity of the WT, but rather as a somewhat desperate attempt to deny the “creeping” discontinuity that could lead to the permanent abandonment of this structure.

Irregular consultations are coupled with the relatively low accountability of the WT. The emulation of the G7's deliberative mechanism is weakened by the unclear task division between the leaders, who should delegate



tasks, concentrating instead on the regularly evolving agenda, and the other consulting formats responsible for the implementation of WT commitments and their iteration (modifying and transferring them to subsequent meetings). Leaving the agenda aside, it should be noted that the WT's deliberative mechanism has developed a weakness of giving insufficient consideration to social actors, or engagement groups. As indicated above, in the G7, NGOs and business circles are represented. The increased significance of the social factor in the WT was expected to result from youth exchange programs and regional cooperation, initiated in 2005/2006. Yet scholars point out that the political dimension of the Triangle, including the security-related "high politics" issues first and foremost, came to dominate the trilateral cooperation, displacing other issues which had to be addressed under bilateral programs (Fischer, Czak, 2019, p. 257).

The second continuity algorithm France and Germany embedded into the deliberative framework of the WT was internal (domestic) political governance. As in the case of the G7, also in the Triangle, this type of governance is manifested in the prestige associated with hosting summits and participating in them, since these are the subjects of discussion and interest in the host country. This can be seen in the documents, especially the joint declarations and statements adopted at the end of each summit, as well as in the increased interest in the event on the part of the national public. This interest may translate into a better electoral outcome for a party that can point to the seamless organization of summits and of conducting talks as a significant political achievement. An efficient host seeks to take advantage of not only the political, but also the economic and social benefits generated by the organization of summits. In this sense, the algorithm under discussion has a symbolic meaning, consisting of the representatives of the summit countries being viewed as important actors who are either global (G7) or regional (Weimar Triangle) political "players". This is accompanied by a carefully orchestrated setting, not unlike a media spectacle, which targets public opinion at home and abroad. By actively promoting their image, politicians gain popularity in opinion polls, participating in a continuous election carnival.

Among the numerous examples of political domestic governance associated with the organization of Weimar Triangle summits, the dynamics of Weimar cooperation during its best period, i.e. 1996–1998, can be mentioned first. At that time, the Triangle, as a platform for political cooperation, became one of the most important indicators of Poland's rapprochement with the West, a postulate Aleksander Kwaśniewski had voiced during the presidential elections in the fall of 1995. The intensifying

trilateral cooperation resulted not only in parliamentary cooperation having been established in 1996, but also in the status of consultations having been elevated to that of meetings of Heads of State, when Jacques Chirac, Helmut Kohl, and Aleksander Kwaśniewski met in Poznań on February 21, 1998. The Weimar Triangle became an important element in shaping relations with France and Germany for the latter politician, but also played a fundamental role in the foreign policy of the Solidarity government of PM Jerzy Buzek. Neither the change of the party in power, nor the cohabitation (of the AWS-UW government and President Aleksander Kwaśniewski, 1997–2001) damaged the Weimar trilateral cooperation, which Jerzy Buzek called “the backbone of Europe” in his 1997 exposé. Bilateral relations with Western European countries became an inherent part of our integration strategy” (*Exposé Prezesów Rady Ministrów 1989–2019*; Marszałek-Kawa, Siemiątkowski, 2021, p. 189).

Deliberation and direction-setting in intergovernmental cooperation can be viewed as the third sequence of principles, operational practices and knowledge developed in the G7 and emulated to ensure adaptability and receptiveness in the Weimar Triangle. This algorithm, present in the consultative practice of the WT, consisted of the desire to simultaneously broaden and deepen the agenda of the Triangle, including in particular the pursuit of a thematic niche and, more broadly, its embedding within the regional system. Let us note that while the G7 developed cooperation mechanisms between 1975 and 2015 to achieve (albeit to varying degrees) all the above objectives, the Weimar Triangle achieved them to a very limited extent between 1991 and 2023. This state of affairs followed from the lack of recurrent meetings making up the political calendar, as well as from the absence of a specific agenda, whereby at least some issues would be periodically discussed in different formats and reinforced by collective commitments. The example of the G7 shows that the adoption and implementation of such commitments would facilitate the assessment of the WT’s effectiveness (internal accountability).

Moreover, ensuring thematic continuity and providing information about the WT’s operations to the outside (e.g., regarding the adoption and implementation of commitments related to the EU’s Eastern policy, the migration crisis, the development of European security structures, etc.) would enhance the legitimacy of the WT (external accountability). The regulatory deficits of the Triangle regarding its organizational and thematic aspects were likely to have contributed to its operations narrowing down and to this consultative forum being deemed to be reactive to Polish-German and Polish-French bilateral relations (Fiszer, Czesak, 2019, pp. 248–286).

That the implementation of the algorithm in question in the operation of the WT was far from perfect was further evidenced by the failure to find a thematic niche, a kind of specialization of the Triangle, and the lack of its broader embedding within the regional system. As concerns the former, it should be noted that the theme of security, initiated by the meetings of the WT's defense ministers in the first half of the 1990s and then developed through a series of initiatives, including the Weimar Battlegroup initiative (Stańczyk, 2009) raised some hopes for thematic specialization. However, as Polish-French relations deteriorated, Poland took a distinctly pro-Atlantic orientation and became distrustful of the development of European defense capabilities, underpinned by historical concerns about Western European states treating the eastern flank of NATO as a periphery, the security theme which laid the foundation of trilateral cooperation became a source of serious misunderstanding. The Weimar Triangle never became firmly established in the regional system, either. In other words, it did not find a role it could play after 2004. According to some scholars, there would have been an opportunity for the WT to focus on European security, to develop cooperation with Russia within the framework of the Kaliningrad Triangle Initiative as part of the Polish-German-Russian dialogue (Bieleń, 2012), and to initiate and maintain the Weimar Plus formula (Formuszewicz, 2011), whereby representatives of countries outside the WT could attend ministerial meetings. All these initiatives proved to be very unsustainable and did not translate into the Weimar Triangle being perceived as an effectively operating sub-regional structure of global governance.

## Conclusions

This study takes a look at the Weimar Triangle from a global perspective and attempts to examine it in terms of an imperfect emulation of the G7, one of the most important – albeit far from ideal – deep global governance structures, which has existed for almost fifty years. Thus, a different interpretation of the German-French-Polish subregional dialogue is offered than that prevailing in the literature. By relying on a combination of theoretical tools (the normative approach to global governance, new institutionalism, and the “practical turn” which is close to constructivism) and methodological tools (epistemological realism), as well as empirical material, it was possible to positively verify the hypothesis put forward in the introduction, which proposes that the main reason for the disruptions in the continuity of the Weimar Triangle's operations was the suboptimal emulation of the operational algorithms developed in the G7, i.e. of the

sequences of principles, operational practices and knowledge Germany and France had internalized through long-term socialization in the G7 and then transferred to the subregional level to ensure adaptability and receptiveness in the operations of the Weimar Triangle. The verification of this hypothesis naturally leads to the question of how to modify the algorithms of institutional continuity on which the deliberative mechanism of the Triangle has been based. In the context of these considerations, it seems that at least the following necessary conditions can certainly be identified: (1) ensuring regular dialogue in all formats; (2) increasing the degree of accountability of the WT; (3) setting a specific agenda, with some of the issues forming a thematic niche; (4) embedding the Weimar Triangle more firmly within the regional system by expanding this cooperation formula; and, finally, (5) taking greater account of social actors, especially engaged groups, which represent civil society organizations and business circles.

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