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Statement on the Brexit Referendum Outcome

On June 23rd, the British people voted to leave the European Union in a close 52%-48% referendum outcome that few predicted. As an organization committed to deepening integration among the world's established liberal democracies as a means to expanding individual freedom, the Streit Council views this development as a step backward. Since joining the European Community in 1973, the United Kingdom has shaped European integration in a direction consistent with its liberal values and interests, making *all* Europeans freer. This has been experienced in many forms, including the freedom to live in peace, greater financial freedom, and freer movement across borders. While these benefits have not accrued evenly across the Union, they nonetheless accrued.

The EU is a work in progress that remains between confederation and federation. As such, it continues to struggle with internal and external challenges. A still-fragile monetary union, energy insecurity, mass migration, and instability in neighboring regions continue to test its effectiveness and cohesion. But it is a *liberal* Union that united former rivals France and Germany and helped make war between them unthinkable. Its Single Market and common currency have raised living standards. Its existence encourages neighboring states to implement liberal reforms to meet the conditions of membership, promoting stability along its borders. The "leave" campaign's fixation on the EU's shortcomings overshadowed these real and substantial benefits that the EU has provided. The campaign's proposed solution – to shift nearly all aspects of governance back to Britain – will elevate British sovereignty at the cost of individual freedom.

As the British government works to set a timeline for withdrawal, the EU faces the prospect of additional referenda and departures. To counter these centrifugal forces and preserve the liberties gained over the course of 70 years, France and Germany must renew their historical role as the "motor" of European integration. It is widely recognized that the EU is in urgent need of integrative leaps to address the aforementioned challenges. A fiscal union of the Eurozone, a unified approach to energy security and migration, and narrowing the democratic deficit in Brussels are among the most pressing needs. But these steps toward a federal Europe require Franco-German leadership that is patient with other EU members as they integrate at varying speeds. It must also challenge the widely held misconception that state sovereignty and individual freedom are synonymous. The history of European integration shows that pooling state sovereignty in common, liberal institutions expands individual freedom. Today, freedom and union still go hand in hand.