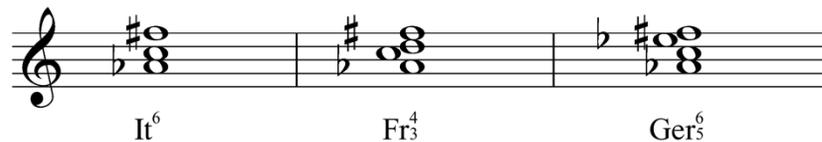




three chords have been given national nicknames. The first chord,  $\text{vii}^{\text{o6}[\text{b3}]}$ , is called the **Italian** chord. When it is in first inversion, as it almost always is, it is called the **Italian sixth**, and written  $\text{It}^6$ . The chord “ $\text{vii}^{\text{o7}[\text{b3}]/\text{V}}$ ” is called the **German** chord. When it is in first inversion, as it almost always is, it is called the **German sixth**, written  $\text{Ger}^6_5$ . Finally, the chord  $\text{V}^{\text{7}[\text{b5}]/\text{V}}$  is called the **French** chord. When it is in second inversion, as it almost always is, it is called the **French four-three**, written  $\text{Fr}^4_3$ . In their characteristic inversions, all three chords feature the interval of an augmented sixth between the bass note  $\text{b}\hat{6}$  and the pitch  $\#\hat{4}$  somewhere above (though not necessarily in the top voice), so collectively they are called the augmented sixth chords. They are identical in major and in minor keys, but in major they require the alteration of  $\hat{6}$  to  $\text{b}\hat{6}$  and  $\hat{3}$  to  $\text{b}\hat{3}$  for the German chord.

The national names are arbitrary (there is nothing historically Italian, German, or French about these chords) but they are standard usage and you need to know them. (See MGTA p. 567 for the origin of these terms.) If you have trouble remembering which is which, the geographic mnemonic on the following page may help.



Regardless of nomenclature (roman numeral vs. nationalities) it is clear that these chords function as applied dominants to V. In fact, in minor keys the augmented sixths are **more** common than “regular” applied dominants to V. This is because the sixth scale degree in minor is already lowered.

**Voice leading.** In all varieties of augmented sixth chord, the augmented sixth interval resolves outward by half steps to the octave  $\hat{5}-\hat{5}$ .<sup>†</sup>

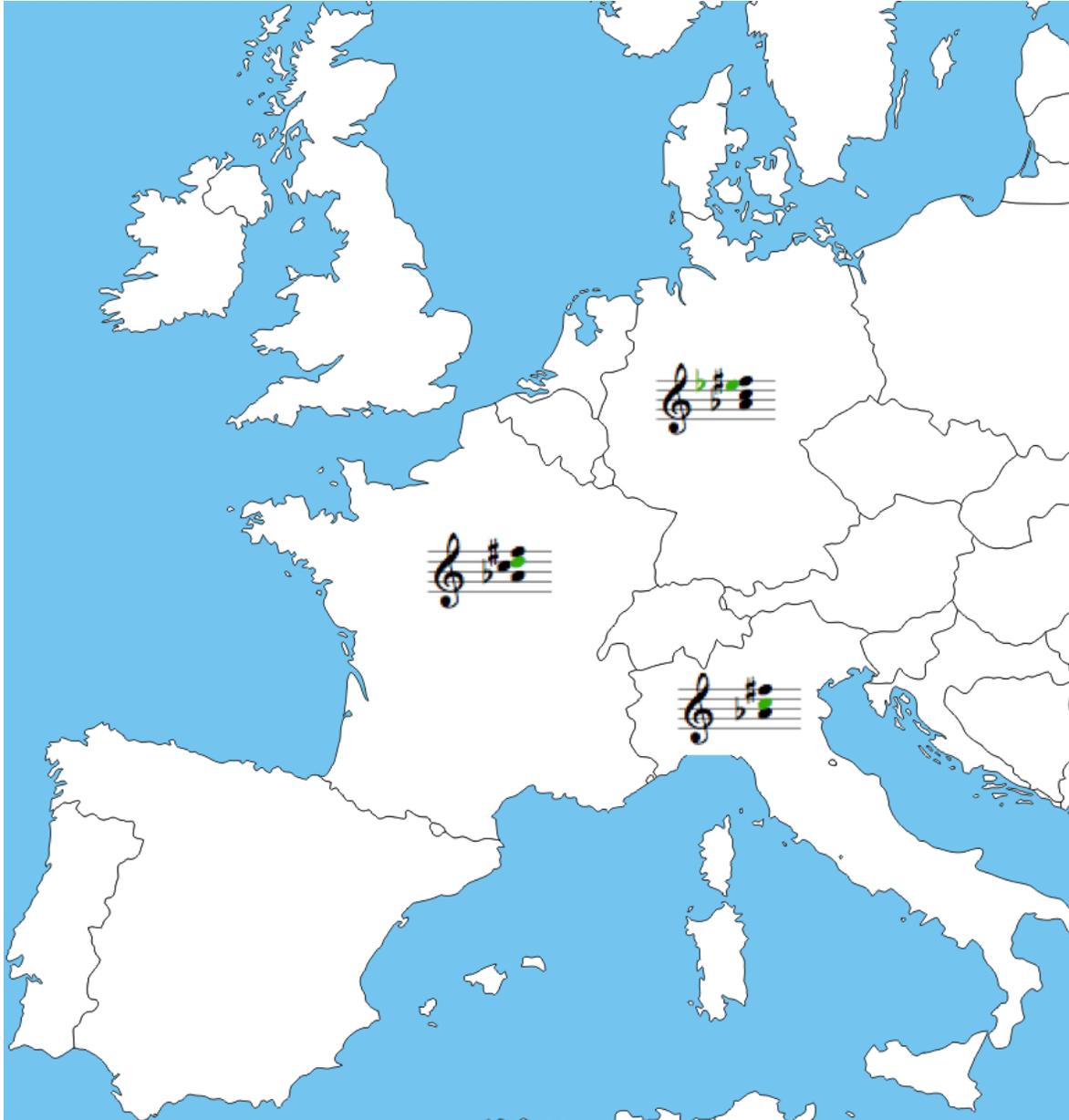
The Italian chord has only three different pitches. In 4-part writing, the third above the bass (i.e. the tonic) is the note to double, because it is the only pitch that is not an altered and active tone. One of the tonic pitches resolves to  $\hat{7}$ , the other to  $\hat{2}$ .

Any of the augmented sixth chords can progress to a cadential  $\hat{6}_4$  before moving to a root position V chord. The  $\text{Ger}^6_5$  **must** progress to a cadential  $\hat{6}_4$  (see the example on the previous page) in order to avoid the parallel fifths that would result from direct motion to V. In major keys, the  $\text{b}\hat{3}$  of the  $\text{Ger}^6_5$  may sustain into the cadential  $\hat{6}_4$  (creating a mode-mixture minor  $\hat{6}_4$ ) or it may rise to  $\text{b}\hat{3}$  at the cadential  $\hat{6}_4$  before descending to  $\hat{2}$ . In the latter case, because it is rising, the German chord may be spelled with  $\#\hat{2}$  instead of  $\text{b}\hat{3}$ .

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<sup>†</sup> However, especially in later usage (Romantic period and beyond) augmented sixth chords sometimes resolve directly to  $\text{V}^7$ . In this case  $\#\hat{4}$  may resolve **down** to  $\text{b}\hat{4}$  instead of up (just as in the progression  $\text{V}^7/\text{V} \rightarrow \text{V}^7$ ). This voice leading is common in jazz and pop, where the German “augmented sixth” chord is usually spelled as  $\text{VI}^{\text{dom}7}$  (i.e. with  $\text{b}\hat{5}$  rather than  $\#\hat{4}$ ). The parallel fifths that result are not a concern in most modern tonal styles.

**Inversions.** As noted above,  $\flat\hat{6}$  is almost always in the bass. However, other positions are used: the most common of these is the German chord with  $\sharp\hat{4}$  in the **bass**. This forms a diminished third with  $\flat\hat{6}$  in an upper voice, and the chord is labeled  $\text{Ger}^{\text{03}}$ .



**Geographic mnemonic.** The Italian chord (with only three distinct pitches) is the “southernmost” chord graphically. As you move up (north) to France, add scale degree  $\hat{2}$ . Moving further north, the scale degree  $\hat{2}$  of the French chord becomes the  $\flat\hat{3}$  of the German chord.