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VIVE L'EUROPE **FRENCH EUROPEAN** **POLICY-MAKING** **UNDER EMMANUEL** **MACRON**

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ANALYSE

Imprint

This study, originally written in French before the presidential elections, is the result of a series of interviews and research conducted jointly by Jeanette Süß and Éric Pestel. The opinions and analyses presented are strictly personal.

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Editorial and Acknowledgements

Bold, visionary and disruptive – this is how French President Emmanuel Macron is perceived in Germany. With his speech at the Sorbonne on 26 September 2017, not only did he reach out to his partner on the other side of the Rhine, but he also outlined a broad and ambitious roadmap for European policy-making.

By transcending the once prevailing two-party system of left and right, Macron and his political movement, La République en Marche (LREM), have truly transformed the French political landscape. However, it was unclear for a long time what the nature of this transformation was about that needed further explanation. The Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom met this need with a first study of this new political landscape by situating LREM within the political spectrum of the already existing centrist political parties.

This upheaval continued at the European level, as LREM eventually joined the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE), which rebranded itself as Renew Europe after the elec-

tions of the European Parliament in May 2019. There was no honeymoon period in this marriage, yet the new political group was able to grow together within two years of existence.

The presidential elections in April 2022 brought up the question of the continuity and sustainability of this transformation – on the one hand for France, but also for its partners in Europe. With the end of Macron's five-year term, it seems just the right time to take stock of France's European policy-making under the French President. This is the very purpose of this second study, which is intended for a Franco-German and European audience and is available in three languages. The study is itself the result of a Franco-German collaboration between a French and a German author and thus is a cross-cultural endeavour. The authors would like to warmly thank all those who contributed by sharing their expertise during interviews in Paris and Brussels or remotely – due to the COVID-19 crisis. A special thanks is also due to our intern, Franziska Knubel, who supported us tremendously through her research.

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Executive Summary

Five years ago, the French President, Emmanuel Macron, presented his vision of the European Union in the amphitheatre of Sorbonne University. He called for nothing less than the refoundation, the rebirth of Europe. In order to achieve this, he outlined concrete ways of attaining what he considers to be the key to this renaissance: its sovereignty.

Emmanuel Macron's European thinking is very consistent with French convictions about European integration. However, the observations he made in order to formulate his presidential project led him to theorise and articulate positions on the various economic, financial, security, diplomatic and cultural fields. These observations also convinced him to make this European ambition the focus of his programme in order to engage the French people and to involve Europeans in his project.

By taking stock of the political initiatives launched by the French President and his government, Macron has clearly succeeded in advancing quite a number of political issues. His main achievements are strengthening the European defence policy and convincing his European partners to increase the EU's capacity to act. He has also focused debate on the state of European democracy, aware that this is a long-term task. On the other hand, his ideas for reforming the eurozone and breaking the deadlock on migration policy were met with silence.

On observing the implementation of his policy-making and interviewing members of his entourage, Macron seemed to be following a plan, if not a method, to shake up what he considered to be French and European inertia. He faced obstacles and tires to turn them into an opportunity. He had to start from a blank page, without a political party or history and without an established reputation in France, let alone in Europe. This was to lead him to seek a clear mandate from the French and Europeans, to express himself clearly through speeches and in highly symbolic places and to create a relay network to multiply his message and his actions, which included placing trusted men and women in key positions.

The choices of top jobs in European institutions and the arrival of La République en Marche (LREM) presidential party had a considerable impact on reshaping the power dynamics in Brussels, in particular in the European Parliament. After the French pipedream of a political movement by itself had petered out, the French delegation joined the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE). The latter even gave up its name to accommodate LREM and renamed itself Renew Europe. Although some felt this was a hostile takeover, the French Renaissance delegation succeeded in integrating – not infiltrating – the group, which became the "kingmaker" in policy-making. Indeed, the newly strengthened group has been able to challenge the traditional duopoly of socialists and conservatives in the European Parliament.

Under the French presidency of the Council of the European Union, some of the projects already suggested during the Sorbonne Speech are becoming reality, for instance the Strategic Compass and the Carbon Border Tax Border Mechanism. For some, the presidency is seen as pursuing rather French-centred interests although France's role should be that of an honest broker.

With the new German government in place since December 2021, new initiatives could be launched that build on the vision detailed by Emmanuel Macron. Given the current war in Ukraine, the greening of the European growth model, the digital transformation and the state of democracy in Europe, numerous challenges have to be addressed. A progressive reform agenda therefore needs to be implemented at national and European levels. European policy-making must serve the objective of fully developing the EU's capacity to act, to let the EU become strategically autonomous without falling into the trap of protectionism, to defend human rights and its standards worldwide and to let the EU remain an economic power generating innovations in the green technologies of the future.

After five years of preparing the ground for reforms, it is up to Emmanuel Macron to realise his ambitions by responding to the outstretched hand of the German coalition government, to debate clearly on defence and institutional reforms and to finally convince his compatriots of the benefits of Europe.

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1 Emmanuel Macron's Vision for Europe

Emmanuel Macron has set out his vision for the European Union in numerous speeches and addresses. His vision has shaped his political decisions throughout his five years in office and influenced not only French but also European policy-making. The concepts that guide his thinking often stem from the traditional French views on Europe. Assessing these concepts, as well as the observations underlying these reflections, assists in the understanding of how the French President has adapted to his partners, as well as to unexpected events, while always staying the course.

1.1. The Origin of the Vision

An Assessment of France

"In order to take back control of our destiny, we need Europe".¹ A sense of decline that strikes many French people is the starting point for Macron's reflections on Europe, which he outlines in his memoir "Révolution". He expresses his desire as a European to regain a share of national sovereignty. Four years later, in November 2020, after his election in France and the European elections, he maintains that his course consists of "a strong and political Europe [...] I do not believe that Europe waters down France's voice: France has its outlook, its history, its view of international affairs, but it builds much more useful and stronger action when it does so through Europe".² Indeed, some observers, such as a European diplomat, give credit to the French President for having the boldness to have fostered this new awareness: "before, France believed that the European Union needed France to shine, now it is France that needs the European Union to shine".

But the disenchantment towards Europe is great. According to a 2016 PEW Research Centre study³, trust in the European Union has plummeted from 69 to 38 % in 12 years since 2004. France is the second-most Eurosceptic country, even while the French are still the most in favour of more European integration. This French Euroscepticism seems to be due to a feeling of loss of French influence in Europe. After the founding period of European integration, French leadership covered about 20 years between 1974 and 1995 with two decades under the aegis of the two most European French presidents to date: Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, who helped Simone Veil to become President of the European Parliament in 1979, and

François Mitterrand, who appointed Jacques Delors to head the European Commission in 1985. Since then, the divide within the two governing parties of the left and the right has prevented successive Presidents Chirac, Sarkozy and Hollande from making more ambitious plans for European policy-making by going beyond defending French interests and maintaining the status quo.

This divide dates back to the two referendums in France on Europe in 1992 and 2005. After having opposed the election of European parliamentarians by universal suffrage, Jacques Chirac, once President of France, adopted a more favourable position. However, he was unable to prevent part of his camp from fighting against the first referendum on Europe, on the Maastricht Treaty. This left two opposing lines within the conservative Republican party.

On the socialist side, a similar situation occurred in the 2005 referendum. This time, it was François Hollande, Secretary General of the Socialist Party and officially in favour of what was called the Constitutional Treaty, who was opposed by Laurent Fabius, former Prime Minister, defender of the "no" campaign who won.⁴ François Hollande managed to maintain the unity of the party. But once he became President, he was afraid to engage in bolder European policy initiatives that could split the Socialist Party again. This defeat created a lasting trauma in French society. Some protagonists of the Yellow Vest crisis in 2018 and 2019 even referred to the referendum. Once in office, in May 2007, Nicolas Sarkozy undertook the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty by Parliament. He was quickly accused of denying democracy by his opponents, since the parliamentary procedure bypassed the rejection of the referendum.⁵

In this respect, Emmanuel Macron wants to act in favour of a real "rupture" for France and his assessment is harsh: "In that year, through a referendum, we realised that Europe as it had become might no longer be the Europe for us".⁶ He regrets that, since then, in order to avoid rekindling conflicts, "Europe's advocates [were] [...] fleeing the arena of debate and ideas"⁷, leaving this gaping wound. His assessment of Europe is no more lenient.

1 Emmanuel Macron: *Revolution*, 2017, p. 215. Translation by Jonathan Goldberg and Juliette Scott of the original version: *Révolution - C'est notre combat pour la France*, 2016. Hereinafter: Emmanuel Macron, *Revolution*, 2016.

2 Le Grand Continent: Interview granted to Le Grand Continent magazine by the French President Emmanuel Macron, 12 November 2020, <https://www.elysee.fr/en/emmanuel-macron/2020/11/16/interview-granted-to-le-grand-continent-magazine-by-the-french-president-emmanuel-macron>. Hereinafter: Interview Le Grand Continent.

3 Cf. Bruce Stokes: Euroscepticism beyond Brexit, PEW Research Center, 07 June 2016, <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2016/06/07/euroscepticism-beyond-brexit/>.

4 Cf. Fabius Laurent: Pourquoi il faut dire non à la Constitution européenne, 23 November 2004, https://www.liberation.fr/tribune/2004/11/23/pourquoi-il-faut-dire-non-a-la-constitution-europeenne_500394/.

5 Cf. Le Monde: Traité européen : Nicolas Sarkozy se félicite de l'adoption par voie parlementaire, Le Monde, 10 February 2008, https://www.lemonde.fr/politique/article/2008/02/10/traite-europeen-nicolas-sarkozy-se-felicite-de-l-adoption-par-voie-parlementaire_1009668_823448.html.

6 Emmanuel Macron: *Revolution*, 2016, p. 219.

7 Ibid.

An Assessment of the European Union

In 2016, Macron considers the previous decade as a lost decade for Europe, due to its leaders' lack of political courage. National interests take precedence over European integration such as downsizing the European Commission, originally foreseen in the Lisbon Treaty, or completing the eurozone. The original triple promise of the European project of "peace, prosperity and freedom" is betrayed by the absence of political governance, according to Macron. A sentiment of betrayal also generated Brexit, raising the question of the power of democracy in a globalised world. For Macron, the consequences should not be neglected as in 2005 when the French and Dutch rejected the referendum on the Constitutional Treaty. Brexit not only reshuffles the deck by reevaluating France's role as an indispensable Member State, it is also a moment to rethink who France should rely on as an ally⁸ to carry out the President's ambitious plans.

An Assessment of the World

Emmanuel Macron's desire to make things happen in Europe is confirmed by a more global vision of a new multipolar world. He shares the observation that the numerous challenges such as climate change, digital transition, terrorism, migration and, more recently, the pandemic cannot be solved by a single country. But once again, the institutions set up in the second half of the 20th century are demonstrating their limitations. Macron sees a new relativism of values and principles emanating from the interplay of global powers such as China and Russia, which are out of step with the international human rights framework. For Macron, the answer must be to tame this type of globalisation by any means possible. This can be achieved by dialogue between the different powers to decide together on a new multilateralism with balanced poles, including Europe.⁹ However, during his five-year term, he finds himself increasingly torn between a reconciliatory and a realistic approach, particularly with regard to China and Russia. The investment agreement with China, pushed by Germany during its presidency in 2020, but halted notably under French pressure, illustrates that clearly: "Brussels has gone from being Beijing's 'partner' to a 'systemic rival'".¹⁰ With presidents like Trump and Putin, Macron seems indeed to have "overestimated his power of seduction"¹¹, for example in the negotiation on the Iran agreement. Finally, the once benevolent approach towards Russia will surely be completely revised by the Russian invasion on 24 February 2022, and might change the idea of "balanced poles" into wishful thinking.

1.2. The Guiding Principles: a French Projection on the EU?

Based on these observations, Emmanuel Macron is convinced that Europe must be refounded to recreate a desire for it among its citizens. As shown by his five-year term, the French President has been using the prevailing and typically French concepts and narratives¹² in European politics of "Europe puissance" (Europe as a power) and "Europe qui protège" (Europe that protects), while shaping them as he sees fit. With his recurrent reference to the concepts of European sovereignty and a Europe that protects, Emmanuel Macron is reinterpreting the narrative of a powerful Europe, which has existed since the 1950s in French European policy-making. These concepts should not be mistaken for protectionism: "[W]e wish to be a power that is open to the world, but in which we wish to choose our partners and not depend on them. That is what sovereignty means. It does not mean protectionism," Emmanuel Macron clarifies during his declaration at the Versailles Summit in mid-March 2022.¹³

In his proposals, Emmanuel Macron deepens and solidifies several areas of focus across political fields, such as defence, migration, industrial policy and European democracy. Some of them resonate in particular with the French narrative, some of them in the collective unconscious.

A Sovereign and Autonomous Europe – from Theory to Mainstream

Usually, the concept of sovereignty is attributed to sovereignism and is asserted by nationalist movement defending national sovereignty against supranational power. Emmanuel Macron refuses this amalgam, cultivated by the "Brexiters" and the streams of traditional French parties opposed to the European Union, either right-wing or left-wing sovereignist. Regretting that sovereignism and nationalism are being confused, he claims that "those who truly believe in sovereignty are pro-Europeans".¹⁴ Sovereignty refers to a desire to increase efficiency, imbued with a spirit of independence and voluntarism, with a view to freely choosing one's destiny and being able to protect one's territory: "[S]overeignty is what allows us to decide for ourselves, to decide our own rules, our own future, it is what makes our world".¹⁵

In concrete terms, in his speech at the Sorbonne, Emmanuel Macron breaks down the concept of sovereignty into six keys: security, control of borders, foreign policy, ecological

8 Thus, after Brexit, Macron is, for example, closer to Mark Rutte, spokesperson for the liberal camp in the EU – cf. Joseph de Weck: Emmanuel Macron, Der revolutionäre Präsident, July 2021, p. 128.

9 Cf. Interview Le Grand Continent, p. 3.

10 Emmanuel Lincot: Relation avec la Chine : le bilan très mitigé du quinquennat Macron, Atlantico, 07 November 2021, <https://www.atlantico.fr/article/decryptage/relation-avec-la-chine---le-bilan-tres-mitege-du-quinquennat-emmanuel-macron-xi-jinping-france-paris-pekine-diplomatie-emmanuel-lincot>.

11 Sylvie Kauffmann: Emmanuel Macron, disrupteur stratégique ? Ambitions et réalité, Revue Défense Nationale 841, June 2021, p. 66.

12 A more detailed explanation of these concepts can be found in Claire Demesmay/Julie Hamann: Frankreich und Europa. Zwischen hohen Erwartungen und großen Enttäuschungen, in Corine DeFrance/ Ulrich Pfeil: Länderbericht Frankreich 2021, 08 November 2021, pp. 539-551, p. 542. Hereinafter: Claire Demesmay/ Julie Hamann, Länderbericht Frankreich, 2021.

13 Emmanuel Macron: Speech by President Emmanuel Macron – Press conference at the Versailles Summit, 11 March 2022, <https://presidence-francaise.consilium.europa.eu/en/news/speech-by-president-macron-press-conference-at-the-versailles-summit/>. Hereinafter: Press conference of the Versailles Summit.

14 Emmanuel Macron: Revolution, 2016, p. 223.

15 Emmanuel Macron: Speech by the President of the French Republic in Greece, Athens, 07 September 2017, p. 2, <https://newyork.consilfrance.org/Speech-by-the-President-of-the-French-Republic-in-Greece>. Hereinafter: Speech in Athens.

transition, digital technology, and industrial and monetary economic power. He sets a deadline of ten years for rebuilding this sovereignty, emphasising that this will require a lot of courage.¹⁶ At the time, Emmanuel Macron even proposes setting up a “group for overhauling Europe” with representatives of volunteering Member States – an idea that remains purely theoretical. The idea of reinforcing European sovereignty is not entirely new. Fully addressing it in all its aspects with concrete and detailed proposals represents a new attempt to create momentum by the French President, as well as by his Minister of Defence, Florence Parly and Jean-Yves Le Drian, Minister of Europe and Foreign Affairs.¹⁷

Over time, the term “strategic autonomy” is gaining increasing traction, already used in the 2016 European Union Global Strategy.¹⁸ Macron concedes that “sovereignty” is slightly excessive, since it implies a fully established European power, which is still far from being the case. One should therefore rather speak of “sovereignty [that] is [...] transitive” at this stage.¹⁹ In any case, some Member States are reluctant such as Germany which understands sovereignty, not easily translatable and tangible in German, as a theoretical concept of constitutionalisation. For an encompassing sovereignty in the democratic sense, European leaders should be fully elected by the European people. Emmanuel Macron points out that a form of new European sovereignty is also emerging between the interplay of the Commission, the Council representing elected leaders and the European Parliament, elected by universal suffrage.²⁰

If Europe does not want to “disappear”, a capacity to act is definitely needed.²¹ In his speech to the European Parliament for the presentation of the French presidency to the Council of the European Union, Macron corroborated this perspective: “Sovereignty is a freedom. It is central to our European project. It is also a response to the attempts at destabilisation at work on our continent.”²² The war in Ukraine is to prove him right, as he doesn't hesitate to underscore himself during his declaration at the Versailles Summit in mid-March 2022: “European sovereignty – although a few years back, some may have seen it as a slogan and some as a French fantasy – everyone now understands that it is a necessity.”²³

The European Security and Defence Policy – a Cornerstone of Sovereignty

Defence policy is the most important element of Emmanuel Macron's concept of European sovereignty. In his speech at the Sorbonne, he lays down the foundations for a common European Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) with several concrete proposals. One challenge consists of combining these new ambitions with the existing NATO security framework and other more flexible formats that France often considers more useful in order to react rapidly.²⁴ Defence policy is certainly the area where Macron has been most disruptive and bold and where most progress has been made in terms of initiatives.

In September 2017, he sets a deadline of around five years for Europe to have a joint task force, a common defence budget and a common defence doctrine.²⁵ These three initiatives are becoming a reality with the European Intervention Initiative (EI2), the European Defence Fund (EDF)²⁶ and the Strategic Compass, launched under the German presidency and validated in March during the French Council presidency. Macron also seeks to implement the tool of Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO), which exists since the Lisbon Treaty, but has not yet been utilised.

However, despite this stated ambition and proposed initiatives, Macron and the French approach of a more comprehensive perspective are causing considerable irritation among its partners, especially Germany. For example, the French President's idea of a European Intervention Initiative (EI2) raised the fundamental conflict with Berlin over the best European defence model.²⁷ Berlin perceives this approach as an attack on the CSDP and criticises the fact that EI2 is being pursued outside EU structures. Admittedly, the conflict is defused in June 2018 with concessions on both sides. However, it reflects the perception of other Member States about the French approach to a European defence and security policy: *pragmatic, flexible* or even *unilateral*, without necessarily consulting European partners.²⁸ Another example is Macron's favourable response to Vladimir Putin's proposal for a moratorium on the INF contract, contrary to the position of NATO allies.²⁹ According to the columnist Joseph de Weck, Emmanuel

16 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 4.

17 Cf. Claudia Major: France's Foreign and Security Policy under President Macron, SWP Research Paper 2021/04, 28 May 2021, p. 12, <https://www.swp-berlin.org/10.18449/2021RP04/>.

18 Cf. Barbara Lippert/ Nicolai von Ondarza/ Volker Perthes: European Strategic Autonomy, SWP Research Paper, March 2019, https://www.swp-berlin.org/publications/products/research_papers/2019RP04_lpt_orz_prt_web.pdf.

19 Interview Le Grand Continent, p. 9.

20 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 10.

21 Sylvie Kauffmann: Emmanuel Macron, disrupteur stratégique ? Ambitions and reality, *Revue Défense Nationale* 841, June 2021, p. 66.

22 Emmanuel Macron: French President Emmanuel Macron's Speech at the European Parliament – Strasbourg, 19 January 2022, <https://presidence-francaise.consilium.europa.eu/en/news/french-president-emmanuel-macron-s-speech-at-the-european-parliament-strasbourg-19-january-2022/>. Hereinafter: Presentation of the FPEU, 19 January 2022.

23 Press conference at the Versailles Summit.

24 Cf. Ronja Kempin: The CSDP: An Instrument, but not a Pillar, of France's Security and Defence Policy, SWP Research Paper 2021/RP 04, 28 May 2021, pp. 21-25, <https://www.swp-berlin.org/en/publication/the-csdp-an-instrument-but-not-a-pillar-of-frances-security-and-defence-policy>. Hereinafter: Ronja Kempin, The CDSP, 2021.

25 Cf. Emmanuel Macron: Sorbonne Speech of Emmanuel Macron – Initiative for Europe, 26 September 2017, p. 4, <http://international.blogs.ouest-france.fr/archive/2017/09/29/macron-sorbonne-verbatim-europe-18583.html>. Hereinafter: Speech at the Sorbonne.

26 The European Defence Fund was already pushed by France before Macron's five-year term and was spurred on by former European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker in 2016. However, it has been considerably reduced due to the implementation of the European Recovery Fund, cf. François Pène: Qu'est-ce que le Fonds européen de défense ?, *Toute l'Europe*, 05 August 2021, <https://www.touteurope.eu/l-ue-dans-le-monde/qu-est-ce-que-le-fonds-europeen-de-defense/>.

27 Cf. Ronja Kempin, The CDSP, 2021, p. 22.

28 Cf. Mathilde Ciulla/ Tara Varma: The lonely leader: The origins of France's strategy for EU foreign policy, ECFR commentary, 06 January 2021, <https://ecfr.eu/article/the-lonely-leader-the-origins-of-frances-strategy-for-eu-foreign-policy/>.

29 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 14.

Macron, “always gives the impression of being a bit arrogant. And where the President of France claims to speak on behalf of Europe, he sometimes pursues his national interests without any consideration for the partners of the European Union [...], he often acts in an uncoordinated manner”.³⁰ In addition, the French military industrial elite has reservations about future cooperation,³¹ despite a gradual willingness to move forward with concrete projects such as the Future Combat Air System (FCAS), a joint industrial project between France, Germany and Spain.

Another open question is the relationship with NATO. The objective set in 2017 by Macron is for Europe to have the capacity to act autonomously, as a complement to NATO. His sudden verdict of the transatlantic organisation being “brain dead” appeared inappropriate and caused an unprecedented uproar in the European chancelleries. This incident is considered either his biggest mistake³², or a necessary moment to shake things up. In March 2020, Macron sets a clear course proposing a defence and security treaty that would define the indispensable obligations between NATO and its European allies. It is a response to the criticism he received after his virulent remarks, which he seeks to detail during the French Council presidency. The aim is to present a common European position at the NATO summit in Madrid in June 2022,

with a view to adopting a new Strategic Concept.³³ He also advocates an increase in military spending and a mutual defence clause, as well as the creation of a European Security Council involving the United Kingdom. For once, it is German Chancellor Angela Merkel who advocates for this Council, an idea adopted by the Meseberg Declaration in June 2018, and then taken up by Macron.³⁴ To officially end the NATO controversy, during his speech presenting the programme for the French Council presidency in December 2021, Macron stresses that all NATO-member EU countries should reaffirm their membership in this organisation, which has demonstrated its usefulness and effectiveness.³⁵

Despite these efforts in terms of initiatives towards a common strategic culture and narrative, it seems that the Russian invasion of Ukraine is truly vindicating Macron's vision and providing a genuine new impetus for European defence policy and the relationship with NATO. This is evidenced by the agreement at the Versailles Summit, held in mid-March under the French presidency. In this agreement, European heads of state and government state their willingness to increase defence spending – after Germany's complete turnaround – to invest more and jointly in research, technology and armaments, and to do more to combat misinformation and hybrid and cyber security attacks.³⁶

Table 1 | Macron's key proposals in defence policy

Proposal	Incorporated	Current discussion
Strategic Compass (2017)	✓	Adopted on 22 March 2022 by the Ministers of Foreign Affairs and Defence during the French presidency of the Council of the European Union
European Intervention Initiative (EI2) (2017)	✓	The European Intervention Initiative, which was created on 25 June 2018, now includes 13 states
Strengthening European judicial cooperation to ensure internal security (2017)	✓	The European Prosecutor's Office, which has been active since June 2021, deals with fraud, corruption and money laundering; in 2020, regulations were passed on cooperation between Member States' jurisdictions in the field of obtaining evidence and documents; Eurojust was strengthened in 2018; in February 2022, an agreement was reached on strengthening Europol's mandate
European Security Council (2017) involving the UK	✗	
Permanent European headquarters (2017)/ A defence and security treaty with NATO (2019)	✓	EU-NATO Summit in June 2022 in Madrid on the management of new and disruptive technologies, climate change and security, cyberspace and space challenges, hybrid threats, the Alliance's positioning vis-à-vis Russia and China, preservation of international order

Table based on multiple research.

30 Joseph de Weck: Emmanuel Macron, Der revolutionäre Präsident, July 2021, p. 132.

31 This was the unanimous opinion of the experts at a debate on the FCAS, organised by the Friedrich Naumann Foundation in Spring 2021.

32 This is an assertion with which interviewees, such as Jacob Ross and Andrea Baumgartner of the DGAP, agree.

33 Cf. NATO's Strategic Concept, https://www.nato.int/strategic-concept/up_/fr/index.html.

34 Cf. Nicolas Gros-Verheyde: Set up a European Security Council? An idea to work on, B2 – The Blog of Geopolitical Europe, 16 February 2019, <https://www.bruxelles2.eu/en/2019/02/mettre-en-place-un-conseil-de-securite-europeen-une-idee-du-futur/>.

35 Cf. Emmanuel Macron: French President Emmanuel Macron Press Conference Speech on 9 December 2021, 13 December 2021, p. 4, <https://presidence-francaise.consilium.europa.eu/en/news/french-president-emmanuel-macron-press-conference-speech/>. Hereinafter: Presentation of the FPEU, 09 December 2021.

36 Cf. Informal Meeting of Heads of State or Government, Versailles Declaration, 11 March 2022, <https://presidence-francaise.consilium.europa.eu/en/news/informal-meeting-of-heads-of-state-and-government/>.

A Europe that Protects or a Protectionist Europe?

The corollary of sovereignty is a Europe that protects. It is a strong and traditional hallmark of France, a country proud of its social and economic model that must be protected against the “excesses” of capitalism.³⁷ Macron takes up this narrative but tries to change the perception of Europe, which should no longer represent a threat to the social model, but rather a protective space for all citizens.³⁸

For the French President, the indispensable counterpart of European jurisdiction for free trade agreements is the earlier and more regular involvement of citizens, the European Parliament and national parliaments as a means for increasing transparency. Another endeavour in this sense is a more effective fight against unfair practices.³⁹ To this end, Macron proposes the appointment of a European Trade Prosecutor, responsible for verifying competitors’ compliance with the rules, and for sanctioning any unfair practices.⁴⁰ In the 2019 European elections, protection is one of the three priorities Macron outlines in his letter to the citizens of Europe. The notion of protection appears thirteen times. It covers not only protection in the commercial domain, but also climate policy with the idea of a European civil protection force, more

resolute border protection, European defence capability, the protection of social rights and a more assertive digital policy against foreign interference through a European agency for the protection of democracies against cyber attacks and manipulations.⁴¹

However, Emmanuel Macron's quest for a more protective Europe is likely to provoke irritation in other Member States, especially in the more liberal camp such as the Benelux countries and Germany, which see the European Union's free trade and international exchanges as one of its main achievements. For example, with a rate of 88 % of dependence on exports, Belgium is among the countries concerned about Macron's concepts, which it considers protectionist, according to a diplomat. At the same time, there is clearly a growing consensus among European partners on the French President's vision, when it comes to initiatives to contain foreign interference in the digital domain, as demonstrated by the European Commission's current legislative projects. On the other hand, there is no consensus on a more restrictive trade policy. Another divisive area is the harmonisation of social policy, an idea that runs counter to subsidiarity and the autonomy of the social partners, as argued by the Swedes and the Germans in the current negotiations on the minimum wage in Europe, for example.

Table 2 | Macron's key proposals for a Europe that protects

Proposal	Incorporated	Current discussion
European Trade Prosecutor (2017)	✓	First Chief Trade Enforcement Officer (CTEO) at the European Commission since July 2020
European Intelligence Academy (2017)	✓	First session of the Intelligence College in Europe was held in Paris on 4 and 5 March 2019 with 30 European states
European Civil Protection Force (2017)	✓	Fully operational since summer 2019
Minimum wage (2017)	(✓)	The Council and Parliament have agreed on their respective positions by the end of 2021 on a draft directive on a minimum wage; Parliament can therefore start negotiations with the Council
World Environment Organisation (2017)	✗	Macron is committed to promoting a global environmental pact project, but not in concrete terms to the creation of an organisation
European Public Prosecutor's Office for organised crime and terrorism (2017)	✓	Created in November 2021, but discussions on the scope of its competencies
European Agency for Digital Trust (2017)	✗	No agency to be created, but planned adoption of DMA and DSA
Reviewing the Posted Workers Directive (2017)	✓	Revision of the Directive in July 2020; a European Labour Authority was created in June 2019 to verify compliance with the new rules
Joint control force that ensures food safety (2017)	✗	
European Climate Bank (2019)	✓	Under the Bank's 2021-2025 climate roadmap, approved by EU Member States in November 2020, the European Investment Bank (EIB) is focusing on climate action and environmental sustainability
A European health force (2019)	✓	The establishment of the European Health Emergency Response Authority (HERA) in September 2021

37 Cf. Claire Demesmay/ Julie Hamann, *Länderbericht Frankreich*, 2021, p. 542.

38 Cf. Emmanuel Macron: For European renewal, 04 March 2019, p. 1, <https://www.elysee.fr/en/emmanuel-macron/2019/03/04/for-european-renewal>. Hereinafter: Letter to the citizens of Europe.

39 Cf. Emmanuel Macron: *Revolution*, 2016, p. 226.

40 Cf. Speech at the Sorbonne, p. 16.

41 Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 3-4 and cf. Speech in Athens, p. 3.

Migration and Border Control – an Eternal Deadlock

"[A] sovereign Europe is [...] a Europe that is capable of controlling its borders".⁴² For a long time, the issue of migration and border protection has been anchored in the French political debate and has been constantly revisited by the extreme right. This debate permeates the 2017 presidential election campaign to the point that Emmanuel Macron links this topic with defence and security policy. Once President, Macron considers migration to be one of the major challenges facing Europe, on a par with global warming, the digital transition and terrorism.⁴³ In order to realise the project of a common area of borders, asylum and immigration, Macron stresses the need for the dignified reception of migrants in accordance with European values and the rapid return of those who are not eligible for this protection.⁴⁴ In order to achieve this, President Macron calls for the creation of a true European Asylum Support Office (EASO), which will accelerate and harmonise European procedures. For this purpose, he proposes solidarity funding to create a broad training and integration programme for refugees. To ensure the effectiveness of the European Asylum Support Office, he advocates interconnected files in the EU and securing biometric identity documents. This concerns the reform of the Eurodac regulation, whose outcome remains unclear at the time being. It raises concerns about data protection on the part of non-governmental organisations.⁴⁵

At the same time, he reiterates his wish to gradually establish a European Border Police Force to guarantee strict control and to ensure the return of rejected migrants. His proposals are in line with the 2016 legislative proposals, drafted by the European Commission following the 2014/2015 migration crisis. Yet, with the clear decrease in migration flows from 2016 onwards, "rethink[ing] the Schengen area"⁴⁶, again reiterated by Macron during the 2019 European elections, is being considerably curbed by Hungary and Poland, who continue to block an agreement on the issue of quotas and the relocation of refugees. All that remains is the coalition with Germany, Italy and Malta, who show willingness to distribute shipwrecked migrants that were rescued by non-governmental organisations in Autumn 2020.⁴⁷

This reform inertia leads to a total stalemate that lasts until 2020, when the Commission once again proposes reforms under the "Pact on Migration and Asylum". But the compulsory solidarity that it implies creates another standoff. After Germany fails to reach an agreement on the Commission's pact during its Council presidency, Macron makes migration

the first key priority in his presentation of the French Council presidency in December 2021. While the original motto was "recovery, power, belonging", he puts a strong emphasis on the thorny issue of migration that arouses so many emotions in France, with two far-right candidates, Marine le Pen and Éric Zemmour, who were in the running for the presidential elections. This was undoubtedly the start of the presidential campaign that did not live up to its name. While the Pact for Migration and Asylum was carefully secured in 2020, Emmanuel Macron announced that France would try to dismantle the various proposals one by one, pursuing a more gradual approach.

As part of the Council presidency, Macron builds up on his initial idea dating back to 2019 of an Security Council for Home Affairs, by establishing political leadership through a Schengen Council. Given the political reality since the COVID-19 crisis, the blackmail situation on the part of Belarus and the wave of Ukrainian refugees generated by the Russian invasion, which primarily affects those Central European countries that have most strongly rejected the principles of solidarity, the Schengen Council gets a lot more support than in 2019.⁴⁸ Separating political dossiers is already a reality with the creation of the European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA) to replace EASO and the reform of the Blue Card Directive on highly skilled workers, being the only real achievements in migration policy before the start of the French Council presidency.

To address migration related challenges, a French priority is to work with countries of origin on border management and to combat human trafficking. The partnership with Africa, the subject of a proper summit held in mid-February, should facilitate better migration management, while enabling more legal channels for African citizens – a promise long made by the European Union.⁴⁹

Despite the willingness to move forward on reforming the asylum system, to promote legal migration with partner countries, and to participate in refugee relocation coalitions, French migration policy has moved in a right-wing direction. The emphasis is put on restrictive elements, in line with the "law and order" image of a right-wing Interior Minister Gérard Darmanin. This means abandoning a more comprehensive approach, with measures announced in 2017, such as the Common Integration Fund for refugees. This is certainly due to a gradual awareness of the reality of European politics in a highly polarised policy field, marked by national self-interest in terms of sovereignty.

42 Presentation of the FPEU, 09 December 2021, p. 3.

43 Cf. Speech at the Sorbonne, p. 2.

44 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 4.

45 Cf. EDRI: Intensified surveillance at EU borders: EURODAC reform needs a radical policy shift, EDRI, 08 September 2021, <https://edri.org/our-work/intensified-surveillance-at-eu-borders-eurodac-reform-needs-a-radical-policy-shift/>.

46 Letter to the citizens of Europe, p. 2.

47 Cf. Matthieu Tardis: L'asile et l'immigration. Les enjeux de la présidence française de l'Union européenne, Ifri Briefing, 25 January 2022, p. 3, <https://www.ifri.org/fr/publications/briefings-de-lifri/lasile-limmigration-enjeux-de-presidence-francaise-de-lunion>.

48 Cf. Council of the European Union: Schengen area: Council adopts a general approach on an enhanced evaluation mechanism, 03 March 2022,

<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2022/03/03/schengen-area-council-adopts-general-approach-on-an-enhanced-evaluation-mechanism/>.

49 Cf. Jeanette Süß: Can the European Union deliver feasible options for legal migration? Contradictions between rhetoric, limited competence and national interests, SVR's Research Unit: To The Point 2019-01, January 2019, <https://www.svr-migration.de/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/SVR-FB-Legal-Migration-EU-To-the-Point.pdf>.

Table 3 | Emmanuel Macron's key proposals on migration and border management

Proposal	Incorporated	Current discussion
Refugee training and integration programme (2017)	✗	
A genuine European Asylum Office (2017)	✓	European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA)
Creation of interconnected files and secure biometric identity documents (2017)	(✗)	The Pact on Migration and Asylum, presented by the Commission in September 2020, foresees the amendment of the revision of the Eurodac Regulation that is likely to be adopted
Common Border Police (2017)/ European Border Guard Force of 5 000 (2019)	✓	In December 2018, EU Member States agreed to strengthen Frontex, but with a staggered timetable; It will have 10 000 troops, but only in 2027
European Council on Internal Security (2019)/ Schengen Council (2021)	(✓)	Schengen evaluation and control mechanism, adopted in March 2022 by the European Council, awaiting final adoption
Emergency border support mechanism in case of crisis (2021)	in progress	Announced under the FPEU

Table based on multiple research.

EU as an Economic and Monetary Power – a Partial Success

According to Emmanuel Macron, Europe must become a real economic and monetary power. In order to achieve this, he wants to promote a more assertive European industrial policy and a stronger eurozone with political governance. But Macron's approach to economic and monetary policy meets resistance by several EU Member States, including the Nordic countries, the Benelux countries and Germany. While his idea of an increased steering of industrial policy was largely shared by the former German government, the area of monetary policy is certainly a bone of contention, despite the historic agreement on the European Recovery Plan during the COVID-19 crisis.

Monetary Policy – French Dreams and German Resistance

"How would we resist the crises of financial capitalism without the euro, which is a force for the entire European Union?"⁵⁰ The Euro serves as a shield against currency fluctuations, while providing favourable financing conditions. Given the weakening of the eurozone following the 2008 financial crisis, Macron believes that this is still unfinished business. Accordingly, as of 2016, he proposes a proper eurozone budget, which would finance common investments, assist most affected regions and respond to crises. A eurozone Finance Minister would provide political governance and be accountable to a respective parliament for democratic control. While Germany green lights the introduction of a eurozone budget at the 2018 Meseberg Summit⁵¹, which is taken up by the heads

of state and government in 2019 in the form of a Convergence and Competitiveness Instrument (BICC), more focused on reforms than solidary risk-sharing – the idea is abandoned following the COVID-19 crisis.⁵²

For German liberals in particular, Macron's ideas run counter to a stability-oriented policy that clearly designates responsibility for risks. "Preserving and strengthening the financial responsibility of EU Member States" remains the benchmark and "for this, clear rules are needed".⁵³ The use of euro crisis instruments must not become the norm in a European debt union, so as not to create false incentives to perpetuate future debt pooling.

Despite the Recovery Plan following the unprecedented COVID-19 crisis, leading to a total reversal of Germany's position on debt mutualisation, and despite the efforts undoubtedly undertaken by Macron to reduce France's debt and to undertake economic reforms, the dissonance between France and Germany in terms of monetary and fiscal policy persists. As an example, this dissonance resurfaces during the first meeting of the eurozone Ministers with the new German government in 2022. The President of the European Central Bank, Christine Lagarde, who supports the French desire to exert more political influence on monetary policy, speaks out in favour of a more flexible interpretation of the Stability and Growth Pact. She indeed echoes the words of Macron and his Finance Minister, Bruno Le Maire, who considers the rules of the pact to be obsolete. They also reiterate the need for budgetary capacity at the European level, a demand that Christian Lindner, the new Finance Minister clearly rejects. On this issue,

50 Letter to the citizens of Europe, p. 1.

51 Another important decision concerns the extension of the stability mechanism, cf. Eileen Keller: Von Meseberg nach nirgendwo? Deutsch-französische Impulse für die Eurozone, Aktuelle Frankreich-Analysen 34, Deutsch-Französisches Institut, October 2018, p. 11, <https://www.dfi.de/pdf-Dateien/Veroeffentlichungen/afa/afa34.pdf>.

52 Cf. Magnus G. Schoeller: Preventing the Eurozone budget: issue replacement and small state influence in EMU, Journal of European public policy 28:11, 24 July 2020, pp. 1732-1733.

53 FDP: Europa darf keine Schuldenunion werden, 06 December 2017, <https://www.fdp.de/europa-darf-keine-schuldenunion-werden>.

the German government, as opposed to the French, does not wish to change the treaties and stresses that the existing flexibility of the Stability Pact has proved efficient. The French government seems to have partially understood this message and is no longer considering a reform of the Stability Pact in the immediate future.⁵⁴ While the appointment of

Christine Lagarde can be seen as one of Macron's most palpable successes, he has failed to impose his overall vision of monetary policy at the European level. He will be more successful with his industrial policy approach, in line with the concept of increased strategic autonomy.

Table 4 | Macron's key proposals for the eurozone

Proposal	Incorporated	Current discussion
Eurozone budget (2017)	(x)	Convergence and competitiveness instrument decided in 2019, then abandoned
Eurozone Minister of Finance (2017)	x	
Eurozone Parliament (2017)	x	

Table based on multiple research.

European Industrial Power or Planned Economy?

Macron's vision of industrial policy is in line with the continuity of French Colbertism, which sees public investment as a means of modernising and developing the economy. However, he has a more liberal and disruptive approach than his predecessors. Since he came to power, the French President has favoured private investment, which he has sought to facilitate through tax reforms in France. In order to pursue reindustrialisation and increase competitiveness at the national level, Macron simultaneously calls for massive public investments, in particular to respond to digital, technological and climatic challenges. On this last point, on a European scale, in 2017 he was already proposing the establishment of a European industrial programme to support clean vehicles, and the deployment of common infrastructures.⁵⁵

While Macron advocates fostering a greening of the economy by focusing on climate-friendly technologies and practices, he warns against unfair competition. He wants to rethink European trade and competition policy. According to him, this means sanctioning or banning companies in Europe that undermine strategic interests and core values, such as environmental standards, data protection and the fair tax payment. Hence he supports a Carbon Tax Border Mechanism, approved in mid-March under the French Council presidency.⁵⁶ In strategic industries and public procurement, Macron is ready to assume a European preference, in the same way as his American and Chinese competitors do.

With the CDU in government at the time and Minister for Economic Affairs, Peter Altmaier, who is a close friend of the French Minister Bruno Le Maire, the French vision takes shape through several Franco-German and European initiatives. The former German government adopts previously unthinkable concepts, such as the desire to create "European champions". This is a complete turnaround from its ordoliberal economic culture and an industry based on small and medium-sized enterprises.⁵⁷ For German liberals, "setting up national and European champions not only distorts competition and harms consumers, but may also ultimately lead to taxpayers having to save these fictitious giants".⁵⁸ In 2019, the two countries align on a "Franco-German manifesto for an industrial policy adapted to the 21st century" after the launch of Peter Altmaier's national industrial strategy, which was strongly criticised by some economists and business representatives. It follows the European Commission's industrial strategy under the leadership of French Commissioner Thierry Breton.

After the COVID-19 crisis, another joint Franco-German position is formulated⁵⁹, updating the Commission's strategy in May 2021. These initiatives include artificial intelligence, Important Projects of Common European Interest to facilitate subsidies in automotive battery cell manufacturing, a semiconductor alliance to boost chip production and a hydrogen alliance. Other alliances are expected to follow for cloud applications, industrial data utilisation, zero-emission aviation, the pharmaceutical industry and space projects. Just before that, in his interview in *Le Grand Continent* at the end of 2020, Macron warned against Europe's industrial dependence on others.

54 Cf. Nikolaus Kurmayer: L'assouplissement des règles budgétaires n'est « pas urgent », déclare Bruno Le Maire à Christian Lindner, Euractiv, 14 December 2021, <https://www.euractiv.fr/section/politique/news/l'assouplissement-des-regles-budgetaires-nest-pas-urgent-declare-bruno-le-maire-a-christian-lindner/>.

55 Cf. Speech at the Sorbonne, p. 7.

56 Cf. Cédric Vallet: Taxe carbone aux frontières de l'Union européenne : le début d'un long chemin, *Le Monde*, 16 March 2022, https://www.lemonde.fr/planete/article/2022/03/16/taxe-carbone-aux-frontieres-de-l-union-europeenne-le-debut-d-un-long-chemin_6117820_3244.html.

57 Cf. Cécile Boutelet: Comment l'Allemagne s'est convertie à la politique industrielle, *Le Monde*, 24 January 2021, https://www.lemonde.fr/economie/article/2021/01/24/comment-berlin-s-est-converti-a-la-politique-industrielle_6067439_3234.html.

58 FDP: Industriestrategie 2030: Europa braucht mehr Wettbewerb und Mittelstand, 05 May 2019, <https://www.fdp.de/industriestrategie-2030-europa-braucht-mehr-wettbewerb-und-mittelstand>. Own translation.

59 Cf. French-German Non-paper. The European industrial policy strategy and its Spring-2021 Update, 17 February 2021, https://www.bmwi.de/Redaktion/DE/Downloads/G/german-non-paper-european-industrial-policy.pdf?__blob=publicationFile&v=6.

If Europe does not have telecommunications technology, it cannot guarantee European citizens the secrecy of information and the security of their private data.⁶⁰ Similarly, as a political power, Europe must be able to provide data storage solutions ("cloud"). Otherwise the data of Europeans will be stored in a data space without being subject to European regulation.

However, the idea of investing massively in key sectors with public money is not shared by all European partners, even though the COVID-19 crisis shakes things up a lot. Thus, in one of our interviews, a Belgian diplomat notes that "due to a lack of budgetary or diplomatic capacity, Belgians fear that companies may have to pay the price of not being taken into account in major investment projects. [Smaller countries] don't have the same capacity to invest heavily in certain areas with public funds. The Belgian approach is therefore "bottom-up" with research institutes in particular. France has a more "top-down" vision. The planned economy ("grand plan") and Silicon Valley must be reconciled." And even within the Commission, support on the French approach varies. The publication of the new industrial strategy of the EU on 2021 has to be postponed by one week, while the Danish

Commissioner for Competition and Vice-President of the Commission, Margrethe Vestager, warns against interventionism that deviates from the principle of free competition.⁶¹

While the French vision has already gained ground as evidenced by the initiatives up to 2020, the COVID-19 crisis completely changes the situation in Europe. It sparks a debate about the decline of France and other European countries as industrial powers. In this context, with the "France Relance" plan of one hundred billion euros (40 billion of which come from the European Union within the framework of "Next Generation EU" and the "France 2030" plan of Autumn 2021), Macron seizes the opportunity to implement an industrial policy for this timeframe through unprecedented public subsidies, clearly in line with French State planning. This position has been fully assumed by the President and his movement, as a referee of *En Marche* sums up: "The COVID-19 crisis has vindicated us and has allowed us to move Europe forward in line with our ideology". A French advisor of Renew Europe in the European Parliament finds that "COVID was the best proof, and advocate of Macron's vision".

Table 5 | Emmanuel Macron's key proposals on industry

Proposals	Incorporated	Current discussion
Control mechanism for foreign investments in strategic sectors (2017)	✓	The EU framework for screening of foreign direct investment (FDI) was fully operational as of 11 October 2020
Tax, social and environmental clauses in European trade agreements (mirror clauses) (2017)	ouvert	In October 2021, the Commission published a proposal for a new open, sustainable and robust trade strategy; discussions to be continued in the FPEU
Citizens' vigilance committees for European trade agreements (2017)	✗	
Base price for a tonne of carbon (2017)	✗	
Carbon Tax at the borders (Carbon Adjustment Mechanism) (2017)	(✓)	On 15 March 2022, the Council reached agreement on the MACF regulation; as soon as sufficient progress has been made in the Council, the Council will start negotiations with the European Parliament
Fighting tax optimisation of large Internet groups/ a turnover tax for electronic services definition of a tax corridor for corporate income tax (2017)	(✓)	In July 2019, the GAFA tax came into effect in France; In 2021, agreement between 136 countries for a 15 % global tax, which could enter into force in 2023; to be effective, it must be ratified by the parliaments of the 136 countries concerned
European venture capital fund to support the growth of European digital start-ups (2017)	(✓)	The creation of the "European Tech Champions Initiative" fund (ETCI) was announced in February 2022 and is part of the "Scale Up Europe" initiative launched in March 2021
European Agency for Disruptive Innovation (2017)	(✓)	European Innovation Council, launched by the Commission in March 2021
Industrial programme to support clean vehicles (2017)	✓	Call for research projects for the evaluation of the "support for clean vehicles" device, as part of the France Relance plan; ongoing "Fit for 55" discussions, with the goal of reducing new car emissions by 55 % in 2030 and 100 % in 2035

Table based on multiple research.

⁶⁰ Cf. Interview Le Grand Continent, p. 8.

⁶¹ Cf. Hendrik Kafsack/ Svea Junge: Mit dieser Industriestrategie soll Europa aufholen, faz.net, 21 May 2021, <https://www.faz.net/aktuell/wirtschaft/mit-dieser-industriestrategie-soll-europa-aufholen-17327353.html>.

A Democratic, Cultural and Diverse Europe – a French Pipedream?

For Macron, democracy, values, culture and diversity represent the identity of the European Union and distinguish it from other blocs in a multipolar world. He sends a strong symbolic signal during his first speech in Athens, the cradle of European democracy. He praises the European Parliament that he calls a “European miracle”⁶² where the heart of European democracy beats. According to Macron, Europe has a unique culture that combines freedom, equality and the diversity of ideas, languages and landscapes.⁶³ But discussing what constitutes democracy and European identity sounds “abstract, intellectual and typically French”, as the Swiss writer Joseph de Weck comments.⁶⁴ Indeed, France often resorts to the concept of “cultural exception” (*exception culturelle*),⁶⁵ for example when it comes to negotiating international trade agreements, even though the term has been abandoned in favor of “cultural diversity” (*diversité culturelle*).

For the French President, culture cements Europe by forging its specificity and a sense of belonging, which he believes is the prerequisite for the solidity of the European project. Emmanuel Macron cherishes the Erasmus Programme, which he wants to strengthen and expand, and proposes the creation of European universities, which will materialise over his five-year term. Culture is only rich in its diversity, which is therefore its prerequisite. Multilingualism is key to diversity and Macron is calling for a Europe of translators, in line with France's long-standing and constant struggle for the place of French within the European Union and its institutions. This is the rationale behind Macron's remarks on cultural, academic, industrial and research sovereignty.⁶⁶ His desire for Europe to remain at the forefront of these fields leads him to encourage Europeans to project themselves ten or fifteen years into the future during the Conference on the Future of Europe, by imagining large-scale cultural projects and by reviving big dreams and ambitions.⁶⁷

The debate about European identity and values is only held against the backdrop of facing dangers and enemies of Europe. In his letter to the citizens of Europe in 2019, Macron proposes the creation of a European Agency for the Protection of Democracies that would provide experts to Member States to protect their electoral processes from cyber attacks and manipulation by foreign powers.⁶⁸ In 2020, Macron identifies three other dangers to democracy: “a return of the majority rule”, a “de-hierarchisation of statements” due to social net-

works, and a dropout of the middle classes.⁶⁹ First of all, neo-conservatism is directed against minorities who have gained too much power, claiming for the reversal of certain societal achievements and limitations of their influence. Secondly, social networks equalise speech and lead to a contestation of all forms of authority that structure life in democracy and society, whether they are political, academic or scientific. Finally, with the middle classes increasingly exposed to hardships, many doubt on democracy.

To respond to these threats, in 2019, Macron calls for the organisation of a “Conference for Europe”, following the steps previously taken at the national level with the “Great Debate” (*Grand Débat*), after the Yellow Vest crisis, and the Citizens' Climate Convention.⁷⁰ In concrete terms, he proposes to organise citizen consultations to discuss about which Europe they want for the future. This is materialising with the Conference on the Future of Europe under the French presidency. After lengthy internal discussions on its governance, the Conference should give new impetus to ideas for reforms on Europe, theme by theme. Some analysts, such as Julien Thorel, warn of disappointment if citizens' proposals are not taken into account due to the limited time available. This could reduce the process to pure marketing purposes for Macron, rather than demonstrating a real democratic will.⁷¹ The fate of this exercise, initially planned for two years but condensed into one only, therefore remains open, as some Member States are reluctant to adopt its conclusions and to lose national prerogatives. The issue is back on the table with the new German government, which is visibly more supportive of the initiative and rapidly set up national debates in January 2022. Germany is also willing to launch a new constitutional process following the proposals made by the Conference. This is all what Emmanuel Macron could have wished for, if there was not the German claim for a more federal Europe.

In none of Macron's statements over the last five years, the word “federalism” appears. When asked about this point, after the presentation of the programme of the French Council presidency, Macron states that this would go too far and that this is not what he intends.⁷² He thus reiterates his position as of 2017 at the Sorbonne: “What I am proposing is not federalism”.⁷³ At the same time, he is committed to the establishment of transnational lists, which are a prerequisite for a European “demos” and the declared objective of federalists. Like the word “liberalism”, the word “federalism” in a highly centralised country gives rise to fanciful interpretations.

62 Emmanuel Macron: Speech by Emmanuel Macron, President of the Republic at European Parliament, 17 April 2018, p. 2,

<https://www.elysee.fr/en/emmanuel-macron/2018/04/17/speech-by-emmanuel-macron-president-of-the-republic-at-european-parliament>.

63 Idem.

64 Joseph de Weck: Emmanuel Macron, Der revolutionäre Präsident, July 2021, p. 145.

65 Cf. Claude Esclatine: Exception culturelle française : étatisme ou chance historique ? *Géoeconomie* 2013/2 (No. 65), pp. 183-193, February 2013.

66 Cf. Emmanuel Macron: Discours du Président de la République à l'occasion du lancement de la Conférence sur l'avenir de l'Europe, 09 May 2021, p. 3,

<https://www.elysee.fr/emmanuel-macron/2021/05/09/lancement-de-la-conference-sur-lavenir-de-leurope>.

67 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 4.

68 Cf. Letter to the citizens of Europe, p. 2.

69 Interview Le Grand Continent.

70 Cf. Jeanette Süß: A modern agora, Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom, 06 January 2022, <https://www.freiheit.org/european-union/modern-agera>.

71 Cf. Julien Thorel: Welche Zukunft für die EU mit der Zukunftskonferenz, Podcast LiberTee, Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom, 16 February 2022,

<https://www.freiheit.org/de/europaeische-union/libertee-der-neue-frankreich-podcast-des-europaeischen-dialogprogramms-der-fnf>.

72 Cf. Michaela Wiegand at a panel discussion at the Heinrich Heine House: Emmanuel Macron, un président insaisissable ? Bilan de son quinquennat pour la France, les relations franco-allemandes et pour l'Europe, 18 January 2022,

<https://www.maison-heinrich-heine.org/manifestations-culturelles/2022/janvier/emmanuel-macron-un-president-insaisissable-bilan-de-son-quinquennat-pour-la-fr>.

73 Geoffroy Clavel: Discours de la Sorbonne : Macron ne propose pas une Europe fédérale, Mais c'est tout comme, Huffington Post, 26 September 2017,

https://www.huffingtonpost.fr/2017/09/26/discours-de-la-sorbonne-macron-ne-propose-pas-une-europe-federale-mais-cest-tout-comme_a_23223592/.

Table 6 | Macron's key proposals on democracy and values

Proposals	Incorporated	Current discussion
Citizens' Consultations (2017)/ Democratic Conventions (2017)/ Conference on Europe (2019)	✓	Conference on the Future of Europe with final report on 9 May 2022
Restriction of the European Commission to 15 members (2017)	✗	
Transnational lists (2017)	(✓)	European Parliament adopted a common position, in order to start the trilogue process
European Agency for the Protection of Democracies (2019)	(✓)	No European agency, but the European Democracy Action Plan has similar objectives
Erasmus for cultural professionals (2017)	✗	Although there was a lot of support for the proposal, it did not materialise
European Netflix (2017)	✗	Inclusion of Netflix and Co. in July 2021 in the audiovisual media regulations, which contribute to the financing of creative work
European universities (2017)	✓	41 alliances, involving nearly 300 higher education institutions, for 7 million students; France wants to organise a gathering of universities in June 2022

Table based on multiple research.

As illustrated by Frédéric Petit, a member of the French National Assembly, when people talk about federalism in France, they immediately imagine the United States of America – a centrally federated country with a single decision-making centre in Brussels. He adds that it would be desirable to conceive these concepts more as a federation like the German state counties (*Länder*).

While it seems unlikely that this perspective is widely shared in France, the French conception of a more federal Europe is primarily a matter of financial and fiscal solidarity, rather than a political project, as Germany would like it to be. With the Recovery Plan, Macron has been working towards a more federal approach, according to Sylvain Waserman, a member of the National Assembly. Making the concept of a more democratic and united Europe a reality therefore seems to provide ample material for further discussions.

1.3. How liberal is Macron's European vision?

The general political image in France has very quickly classified Emmanuel Macron as a “liberal” or even an “ultraliberal”. Unlike in other countries such as Germany and the Netherlands, this term has a negative connotation. The image of liberalism in France stems from the rapid and even violent liberalisation of the economy following a political shift in the 1990s, caused by a changeover from the left to the right.

As one parliamentary assistant points out, to call yourself a liberal in France is to refer to yourself as right-wing. In an analysis that goes beyond France, Macron concludes that social liberalism prevailed in Europe in the post-war period, but that it has evolved in favour of liberalising the markets to the detriment of social support systems, particularly for the middle classes. Macron seems to incorporate both a liberal position on societal issues such as minority rights and the rule of law in Europe, as well as a social-liberal economic approach that is rather similar to a French variety of social democracy.⁷⁴

Macron's proposals thus include the recognition of free trade while having clear and fair rules. The French President also wants to further control Internet giants and in particular their taxation at the location where they generate their profit. For Macron, strategic autonomy requires that the State supports priority sectors to create “European champions” or, in the world of start-ups, “unicorns”. Macron wants capital expenditure not to be included as operating expenditure in the future Stability and Growth Pact which he seeks to reform. At the European level, one of Macron's first actions in 2018 was to negotiate a new Posting of Workers Directive against social dumping.⁷⁵ According to members of FDP in Paris, the question is not whether the French President is “liberal or not liberal”. His policy has become more protectionist over time, especially since the COVID-19 crisis, with recent contradictions in his electoral programme, where he favours industrial production in “100 % French” branches,⁷⁶ while wanting to support the internal market of the EU. Perhaps it would be appropriate to say that he is French, first and foremost.

74 Cf. Daniela Kallinich: Between Polarisation and Modernisation. A Closer Look at French President Macron and his “Third Way”, Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom, January 2021, p. 24, <https://shop.freiheit.org/#/Publikation/961>.

75 Cf. Claire Demesmay/ Julie Hamann, Länderbericht Frankreich, 2021, pp. 542-544.

76 Presidential majority (majorité présidentielle): Présentation du projet présidentiel pour la France d'Emmanuel Macron, 17 March 2022, <https://avecvous.fr/projet-presidentiel>.

2 The Macron Method

Emmanuel Macron wants to implement his vision, his proposals and his European project for France and for Europe with his method and in his style. Macron presents himself as a “disruptive” candidate for the French presidential election at the age of 39, without any background in party politics. “Disruptive” characterises a “new world” and has been used over and over again by columnists and authors, sometimes even in the headlines. Did the drive of a young President, as he himself put it at the farewell ceremony for Angela Merkel, help him in his project, or did he rather sometimes stand in his own way? To what extent was he able to implement his method?

2.1. Expose and Debate – at the Risk of Imposing His Style

Openly exposing his ideas, seemingly without restraint, in order to reach citizens by generating a media debate is a hallmark of Macron’s method. By committing to translate his words into action, Macron seeks to recreate trust in the European project. During the electoral campaign, he strives to restore the confidence of disillusioned citizens and launches a campaign of optimism that focuses on the regained influence of a Europe that protects. His willingness to carry out reforms quickly is also presented as a pledge of seriousness towards his European partners. This willingness to move forward and to play with open cards also follows the same objective. Analyst Georgina Wright points out in an interview that historically, “there is a general mistrust towards French ambitions and Emmanuel Macron has the willingness to change that, but it takes time for the other Member States to gain trust”. Even more so, since his style can counteract this approach. The lack of trust remains a major concern for the French President. In a clear reference to the financial crisis of 2008 and its consequences, particularly in Greece, Macron goes as far as to declare that the European nations have lost their way in a “civil war”, because they no longer trust each other.⁷⁷

His *Initiative* for Europe, known as the Sorbonne Speech, becomes the symbol of his desire to express his own and France’s position vis-à-vis his European partners. The Sorbonne Speech does not present completely new ideas – even the political advisors of the presidential majority acknowledge that – but it reaffirms the French position in a more comprehensive and coherent manner. Already in 2007, in front of the European Parliament, Nicolas Sarkozy spoke of a “Europe that protects”⁷⁸ and, in 2015, François Hollande spoke of European sovereignty and a reinforced eurozone.⁷⁹ Nevertheless, the theorisation of European sovereignty and its thematic breakdown offers a new reference and a basis for

discussion. The speech did not receive an official response from his partners, including Germany, at whom it was particularly addressed. A diplomat from another European country retorts that countries other than France do not have the culture of long speeches and prefer a method that involves small steps. The fear is that ideological debates can lead to tension. Trust has not yet been restored by holding long speeches alone. But, according to an adviser of his majority, Emmanuel Macron aims to push European integration out of backdoor diplomacy by generating a public debate on a European scale.

Claiming a paradigm shift and a transformation of Europe, Macron regularly stresses the long-term nature of his aspirations. The most frequently mentioned timeframe is a period of ten years, for example, to create the conditions for more sovereignty or to harmonise fiscal, social and energy policies within the EU. This scale of two presidential five-year terms in France links its European project to a national perspective. He considers that fifteen years or even more are needed for possible institutional transformation processes to unfold as a result of a democratic convention following the Conference on the Future of Europe.

Aware of the time needed for his project and of the time he has at his disposal, the French President starts his “crusade” for Europe, announced during his campaign in 2017, as soon as he is elected. He blames those who hesitated to bring the European project forward in order to avoid offending their electorate, by having paralysed Europe and by having paradoxically played into the hands of populists. Five years later, Macron has to admit that he sometimes had to backtrack on his fiery impulses, since his actions did not always have immediate effects.

According to an advisor to the European Commission, behind his lyric vision, Macron is a pragmatist, who states, attempts and adapts if necessary. Therefore, his pragmatism allowed him to save the Paris Agreement when Donald Trump decided to leave it, and to react after the Christchurch attacks by creating coalitions associating states, cities, NGOs and private companies to circumvent the inertia of State multilateralism. Once again, he pleads for reality to be taken into account, with the will to show that things are moving forward and to get results quickly. It is in this spirit that he proposes that Member States should first agree on precise objectives, before discussing the means and legislative tools needed as purely conceptual discussions would often lead to a deadlock.

However, not all European leaders approve his claims. His strategy of breaking taboos ensured his presidential victory

⁷⁷ Cf. Speech in Athens, p. 4.

⁷⁸ Cf. Euractiv: Nicolas Sarkozy justifie sa politique devant le Parlement européen, 13 November 2007, <https://www.euractiv.fr/section/avenir-de-lue/news/nicolas-sarkozy-justifie-sa-politique-devant-le-parlement-europeen/>.

⁷⁹ Cf. François Hollande: Déclaration de M. François Hollande, Président de la République, sur les défis et priorités de l’Union européenne, 07 October 2015, <https://www.vie-publique.fr/discours/196486-declaration-de-m-francois-hollande-president-de-la-republique-sur-les>.

in France in 2017, but it has also distanced him from European leaders who feel that France often claims to speak for Europe but fails to speak with Europe first. In particular, although German leaders acknowledge that France is one of

the rare countries with a global and ambitious project for the future of Europe, Macron's unilateral moves are perceived as provocative, not only in regard to its diagnosis on NATO, but also with regard to Libya and Russia.⁸⁰

Image 1 | Emmanuel Macron builds Europe

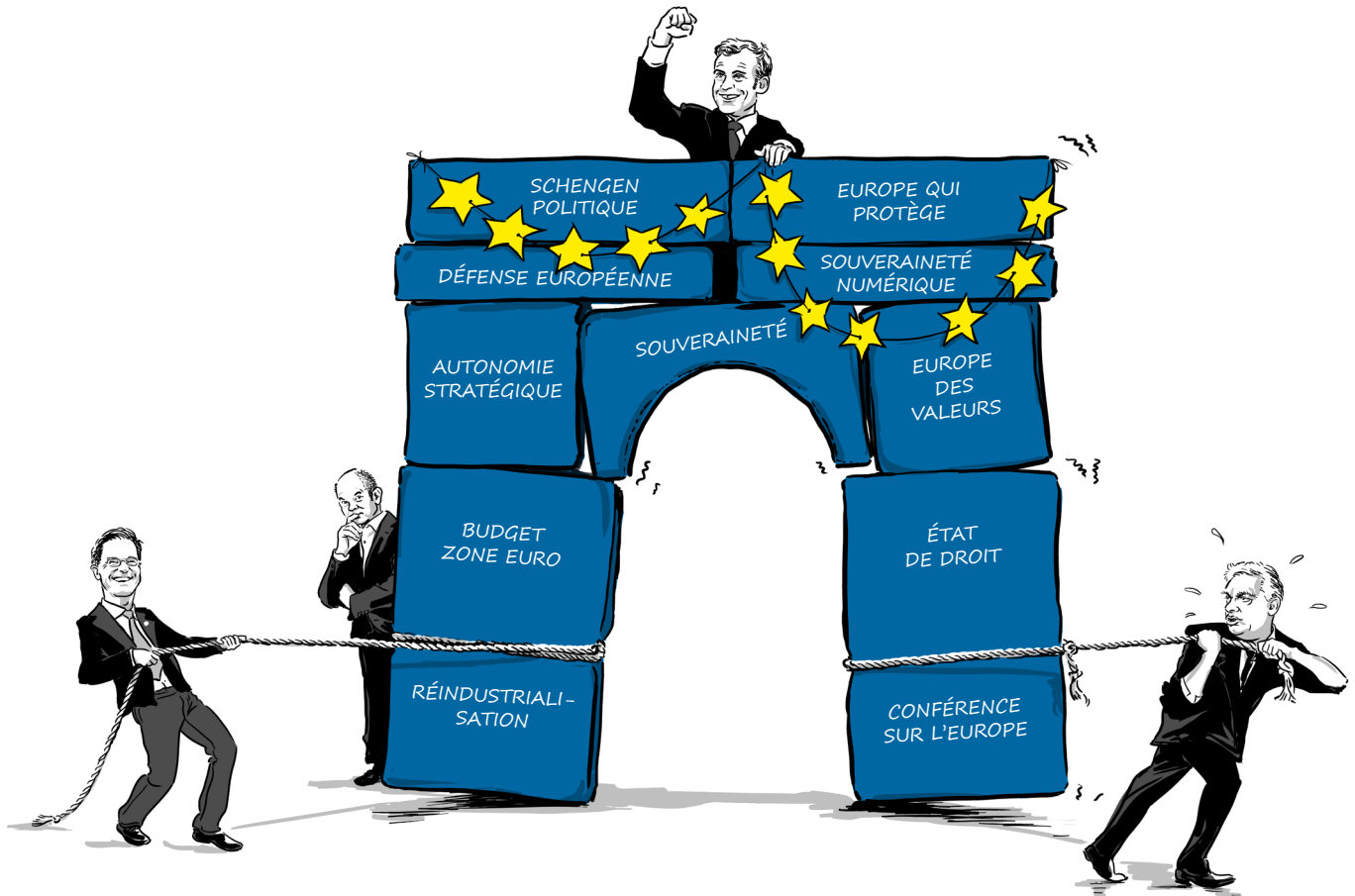


Illustration: © Studio Nippoldt, Berlin.

To make his European project a reality, Emmanuel Macron wants to bring it closer to different players, in order to create a leverage effect: first of all to the French and then, and this is new, to all European citizens. A crucial step for this is his letter for a European renewal addressed to all European citizens in all languages of the Union, written on the eve of the European elections, crossing borders as well as circumventing national governments. It is also a way to campaign for his political movement on a European scale. Nevertheless, he justifies this exceptional step by the urgency of Europe being in danger with the rise of populisms and “illiberal” democracies. During his visits to other European countries, Macron participates in debates with the local youth during citizen conventions, where he promotes and outlines his project in the press.

To intensify the dialogue around his proposals, Macron also has to seek institutional allies. After his election in 2017, just like his Secretary of State for European Affairs, Clément Beaune, he begins a journey that takes him to every European country. This is another first for a French President. More traditionally, as his predecessors, the President presents his vision for Europe to the European Parliament, where compromises that make Europe move forward are negotiated.

If the “Macron Method” involves a detailed exposition of his reasoning and proposals, both in his speeches and in long interviews in the press, it also involves debates during which Macron shows that he is listening. His trips to all European countries symbolise this desire for dialogue and the willingness to take other points of view into consideration.

⁸⁰ In these two cases, refer to the contributions of Wolfram Lacher: *Macron as a Spoiler in Libya* and Susan Stewart: *Macron's Russia Policy: Already a Failure?*, in *France's Foreign and Security Policy under President Macron*, SWP Research Paper 2021/04, 28 May 2021, pp. 15-20 and 31-34, https://www.swp-berlin.org/publications/products/research_papers/2021RP04_PolicyUnderMacron_DASEP.pdf.

A Luxembourg diplomat confirms that European partners perceive France as more inclusive and that the French position is becoming more audible. This will to create debate is also exemplified by Macron's desire to organise citizens' conventions and later the Conference on the Future of Europe.

Throughout his five-year term, Emmanuel Macron has emphasised his European convictions by a figure of speech that echoes the French motto "Liberté Égalité Fraternité". He will thus move from "Souveraineté, goût de l'avenir, démocratie"

(Sovereignty, aspirations for the future, democracy) in 2016, to "Relance, puissance, appartenance" (Recovery, strength, sense of belonging) as a motto for the French Council presidency.

Sovereignty is quoted consistently and often in the first instance, which underlines that this is the most important pillar of his vision for Europe. The following chart reveals the steady concepts of his convictions and the ones he has adopted according to the political context.

Table 7 | Evolution of Macron's concepts about Europe from 2016 to 2022

2016	Peace	Prosperity	Freedom
2016	Sovereignty	Aspirations for the future (goût pour l'avenir)	Democracy
2017	Sovereignty	Democracy	Trust
2017	Sovereignty	Democracy	Culture
2018	Ambition	Sovereignty	Democracy
2019	Freedom	Protection	Progress
2021	Recovery	Strength	Sense of belonging
2022	Democracy	Progress	Peace

Source: own representation.

After laying out his vision for Europe, which he then puts up for debate, it seems that Macron takes a step-by-step approach to achieve clear results. However, this more thoughtful approach sometimes reaches its limits, but Macron constantly tries to meet these challenges strategically.

2.2. Step 1: Have a Clear French Mandate for a European Policy-making

His first step in 2017 is to be elected with a clear mandate on the European project, so that he can approach European partners with a stronger capacity to act than his predecessors. His conviction meets the inertia within the French governing parties of socialists and conservatives, who have been alternating the exercise of power for 30 years and who lost their influence in shaping European policy-making. According to several observers, Macron is the first candidate to campaign on Europe since the 2005 referendum and by making it one of the pillars of his programme. European flags fly together with the French ones during political meetings and Beethoven's Ode to Joy accompanies the French

President in his first speech in front of the Louvre Pyramid in 2017. The dividing line between the camps in favour or against Europe is still very much present though, as the turmoil over the European flag under the Arc de Triomphe to celebrate the start of the French Council presidency on 1 January 2022 revealed. And although the EU played a rather subordinate role in the presidential election campaign, this gesture was at the same time the beginning of an indirect election campaign against the far-right parties in France.

"The fact that Emmanuel Macron won the election on this theme [Europe], has shut the door on the question of France's belonging to the EU for at least 20 years", as columnist Joseph de Weck puts it.⁸¹ But as the final stretch of the 2022 election campaign between Marine Le Pen and Emmanuel Macron demonstrated, this situation seems no longer so clear-cut. Even if Europe did not shape the structure of the debate during the presidential campaign, the broad anchoring of a European political conviction in French society continues to be anything but self-evident given the high approval for Le Pen's far-right positions.

81 Own translation from original citation of Joseph de Weck at a round table of the Heinrich Heine House: Emmanuel Macron, un président insaisissable ? Bilan de son quinquennat pour la France, les relations franco-allemandes et pour l'Europe, 18 January 2022, <https://www.maison-heinrich-heine.org/manifestations-culturelles/2022/janvier/emmanuel-macron-un-president-insaisissable-bilan-de-son-quinquennat-pour-la-lang=fr>.

2.3. Step 2: Build a Network of Multipliers and Ambassadors

Building on his electoral success in 2017, Emmanuel Macron puts ambassadors for his European project in place to increase the impact of his actions. The creation of the En Marche (LREM) movement out of nothing comprises activists who often have no political background spanning a wide spectrum of views, but having Europe as their common denominator.⁸² Moreover, this European conviction is also reflected by the organisational structure: each team at the *Département* level has “Europe Coordinators” in charge of feeding the internal debate, in conjunction with the Europe Unit of the headquarters in Paris. This unit aims to generate ideas by facilitating working groups, where members of Parliament, think tanks, associations and scientists meet. The Simone Veil Pact in favour of women's rights in Europe is a product of this group.

According to MP Sylvain Waserman of the smaller centrist party Mouvement Démocrate (MoDem), Europe is also what ties the parties of the presidential majority. Hence, European engagement secures the backing of François Bayrou, founder of MoDem, who brings consistency and legitimacy through his long-standing commitment to a “pro-European” centre. Emmanuel Macron can therefore count on his coalition partners for additional support. In the same logic, the *Association pour une Renaissance européenne* (Association for a European Renewal) is created in 2021. With reference to Emmanuel Macron's letter to the citizens of Europe, the association seeks to continue to expand this mobilisation work for the 2022 elections.⁸³

A study conducted by the Jacques Delors Institute reveals that French leaders and elites often know little about the European Union.⁸⁴ The political renewal since 2017 has sought to alleviate this situation. En Marche offers a training course on European issues for members of Parliament. In the same vein, the political programmes in the local intermediate elections emphasise the benefits of the European Union for the territories, and lobby for more territorial inclusion with regard to the EU. But this strategy didn't work out as En Marche's anchoring at the local level remained weak.⁸⁵

Conveying the European message via national elected representatives and stimulating interaction between MEPs and national MPs is a challenge. In the European Parliament, Renew Europe therefore puts in place a Liaison Officer between Paris and Brussels to create synergies. MEPs are stepping up their efforts to get in contact with people on the ground, and the proactive discourse of the French President lends them credibility. Nevertheless, the links between the European and national levels remain fragmented, as French

MEP Dominique Riquet notes. The connection largely hinges on the willingness of each part to engage with one another, and is less pronounced on the part of MPs in the French Assembly.

Naturally, this interest in the European Union differs within the various political institutions. Some administrative bodies still basically feel bound by national traditions, even if a collaborator of the European Commission notes that Macron's European commitment has been a real watershed for many officials within the French administration and has contributed to a change in perception even among some more conservative officials. During one of the very first Councils of Ministers (*Conseil des Ministres*), the French government adopts a European working method to speed up and streamline communication between the national executive and the various European institutions in all policy areas.⁸⁶

Besides transmitting his message as widely as possible in society by his various multipliers, Emmanuel Macron puts a few key people in place to ensure the success of his project. In January 2019, the President tasks one of his close advisors, Stéphane Séjourné, with leading the battle for the European elections, and then managing the entry of MEPs in the European Parliament. However, this period of “enthronisation” is not without stumbling blocks.

In July 2020, Emmanuel Macron appoints Clément Beaune as his new Secretary of State for European Affairs. Beaune has been his advisor on European affairs since 2014, when Macron was still Minister of Economy before becoming French President. Beaune worked out Macron's European project in more detail back then (he is the co-author of the Sorbonne Speech). He is the third State Secretary after Nathalie Loiseau, who became an MEP, and Amélie de Montchalin, who took on other ministerial functions. This volatility could have weakened the position of Clément Beaune, if he had not already been Macron's sherpa at European summits. To ensure the success of the French Council presidency, which fell into the delicate period of the presidential election campaign, Emmanuel Macron appoints an expert and a man he can trust. Once in office and in contrast to his predecessors, Beaune makes it a priority to transform his rather technical position into a political one, by increasing his presence in the media and on the ground with about forty trips within France in 2021.

Another battle to wage is the distribution of top jobs in the European institutions. Macron manages to secure several key positions for France. After pushing for the nomination of Ursula von der Leyen, a member of the German CDU, but with a similar political affinity, and liberal Charles Michel from

82 Cf. Bruno Cautrès/ Thierry Pech/ Marc Lazar/ Thomas Vitiello: La République en Marche : Anatomie d'un mouvement, October 2018, https://tnova.fr/site/assets/files/11894/rapport_terra-nova_la-rem-anatomie-d-un-mouvement_081018.pdf?10xv0.

83 Cf. Association pour une Renaissance européenne, <https://renaissanceeuropeenne.eu/>.

84 Cf. Bruno Cautrès/ Thierry Chopin/ Emmanuel Rivière: French-Style Euroscepticism, Jacques Delors Institute, report No. 119/2, November 2021, <https://institutdelors.eu/en/publications/un-euroscepticisme-a-la-francaise/>.

85 Cf. Jeanette Süß: Second Round of French Regional Elections Puts Conservatives and Socialists Into Office, 29 June 2021, Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom, <https://www.freiheit.org/european-union/second-round-french-regional-elections-puts-conservatives-and-socialists-office>.

86 Cf. Compte rendu du Conseil des ministres du 14 juin 2017, La méthode de travail européen, <https://www.gouvernement.fr/conseil-des-ministres/2017-06-14/la-methode-de-travail-europeen>.

Renew Europe, Macron obtains the nomination of Christine Lagarde as Head of the ECB and Thierry Breton as European Commissioner. As the *Le Monde* journalist Sylvie Kauffmann puts it, the French discourse is gaining ground. For instance, while Ursula von der Leyen speaks of a geopolitical commission for her inauguration in 2019, Josep Borrell, the High Representative for Foreign Affairs, wants Europe to learn the language of power.

Emmanuel Macron suggests Thierry Breton as Commissioner, after suffering a setback with the rejection of Sylvie Goulard by the European Parliament, following suspicions of unlawful conflicts of interest. The position negotiated for Breton is tailor-made to act on strategic issues for France: Breton is the former French Minister of Economy, but above all CEO of the telecommunications company, France Telecom (rebranded as Orange), and more recently of Atos, one of the world leaders in digital technology.⁸⁷ Alongside the functioning of the internal market, his position covers the green and digital transition of industry, the technological sovereignty of Europe, the regulation of the two Acts for Digital Market and Services (DMA/DSA), including the battle against disinformation, cyber security, space, and the development of the defence industry. The rationale behind linking these individual policy areas can only be understood as key elements of Macron's conception of European sovereignty – the topic at the very heart of Macron's European vision.

Despite these stakeholders acting as multipliers and leverages, Macron has not managed to turn around French Euro-scepticism after ending his five-year term. According to a survey in January 2022, among a dozen countries, the French are still the least committed to Europe.⁸⁸

2.4. Step 3: Transform France into a Credible European Actor

Like his predecessors, Emmanuel Macron is aware of the fact that France can only increase its influence in the EU, if it demonstrates budgetary discipline to rebuild trust with its European partners.⁸⁹ Until July 2018, there is one social reform after another: labour code, reduction of social contributions, vocational training, apprenticeship, unemployment insurance⁹⁰, the status of the SNCF (French national railways). Five years later, Macron can reap the fruits of his efforts with regard to the overall economic improvement.

The unemployment rate has fallen from 9.5 % in mid-2017 to 7.4 % in 2022, and the number of apprentices has risen from 400 000 in 2016 to 720 000 by the end of 2021, whereas it had only increased by 90 000 young people over the previous 20 years.⁹¹

However, this momentum is undermined by the Yellow Vest crisis in autumn 2018, followed by the COVID-19 crisis. These crises clearly prevent the adoption of the pension reform in early March 2020. From a fiscal and budgetary point of view, Macron has sought to reconcile his commitment to a tax cut for both households and companies over the entire five-year period for a total amount of 55 billion euros and to comply with the Maastricht criteria.⁹² Symbolically, the public deficit falls from 3.6 % in 2016 to 3 % in 2019, which allows the European Commission to repeal the excessive deficit procedure, initiated in 2009.⁹³ This is seen by the government as a success and a guarantee that European discipline is finally respected by France. Concerning the Stability and Growth Pact, however, France is content to maintain the public debt around 98 % of GDP. In spite of cutting taxes, the tax ratio stagnates slightly below 45 % and public spending continues to grow during the first three years of his five-year term.⁹⁴ It seems that Macron has done only the bare minimum to show his goodwill, without really changing the French philosophy. According to economist Philippe Martin, it is important for Macron to show Germany his willingness to respect the budgetary rules. On the other hand, while Macron is convinced that structural reforms are needed, he believes that they cannot be achieved in a context of pure fiscal austerity. This explains the decisions made in the first phase of his five-year term, at least until spring 2020, when the COVID-19 pandemic completely challenges all predictions and forecasts.

2.5. Step 4: Associate European Partners by Common Interests

Following his ambitious national policy, Macron hopes to proceed with his European project by reactivating the Franco-German axis. Immediately after his inauguration, German Chancellor Merkel starts campaigning for elections in September. After that, the coalition negotiations start. They last for six months, during which Macron delivers his Sorbonne Speech in which he directly addresses the Chancellor.⁹⁵

87 Cf. Ouest France: Portrait. Thierry Breton, le candidat multicartes de Macron à la Commission européenne, Ouest France, 24 October 2019, <https://www.ouest-france.fr/europe/ue/portrait-thierry-breton-le-candidat-multicartes-de-macron-la-commission-europeenne-6580491>.

88 Cf. Susi Dennison/ Tara Varma: A certain idea of Europe: How the next French President can lead, ECFR policy brief, 09 March 2022, <https://ecfr.eu/publication/a-certain-idea-of-europe-how-the-next-french-president-can-lead/>.

89 Cf. Emmanuel Macron: Revolution, 2016, p. 229.

90 Cf. Valérie Mazuir: Macron : Six réformes sociales en 18 mois, Les Echos, 30 March 2018, <https://www.lesechos.fr/2018/03/macron-six-reformes-sociales-en-18-mois-987889>.

91 Cf. Dominique Seux: Macron, le bilan économique désormais connu, Les Echos, 27 January 2022, <https://www.lesechos.fr/idees-debats/editions-analyses/macron-le-bilan-economique-desormais-connu-1382639>.

92 Cf. Isabelle Couet: Impôts : Un quinquennat Macron marqué par des baisses soutenues malgré la crise, Les Echos, 09 August 2021, <https://www.lesechos.fr/economie-france/budget-fiscalite/impots-un-quinquennat-macron-marque-par-des-baisses-soutenues-malgre-la-crise-1337594>.

93 Cf. Ministry of Economy, Finance and Recovery (Ministère de l'économie, des finances et de la relance): La Commission européenne recommande que la France sorte de la procédure de déficit excessif, 28 May 2018, <https://www.economie.gouv.fr/fin-procedure-deficit-excessif-ue-pour-france>.

94 Cf. Insee: Indicateurs de richesse nationale : dette publique et privée, 07 December 2021, <https://www.insee.fr/fr/statistiques/3281639?sommaire=3281778>.

95 Emmanuel Macron even showed his speech to Angela Merkel beforehand, cf. Ursula Welter: Michaela Wiegand "Emmanuel Macron. Ein Visionär für Europa," Deutschlandfunk, 07 May 2018, <https://www.deutschlandfunk.de/michaela-wiegand-emmanuel-macron-ein-visionaer-fuer-europa-100.html>.

However, no response follows from the German side. Emmanuel Macron, who wants to commemorate the 55th anniversary of the Elysée Treaty, has to wait until the first half of 2018 to obtain the Meseberg Agreement. Among other significant initiatives, the Agreement announces the Treaty of Aachen, which is signed on the 56th anniversary of the Elysée Treaty – a year later than expected. Emmanuel Macron is considering other alliances in order to gain more influence over Germany and its Chancellor, like his predecessors, Nicolas Sarkozy with the United Kingdom and François Hollande with the southern countries.

Already in 2016, Emmanuel Macron mentions Italy as the third partner in a trio of Germany, Italy and France. This plan is thwarted in June 2018 by the Cinque Stelle-Lega coalition, opposing European institutions and making Emmanuel Macron their scapegoat. Even the Yellow Vest movement receives support from those parts of Italy. At the beginning of 2021, the appointment of Mario Draghi as Prime Minister of Italy allows Macron to establish a real partnership, leading to the negotiation of the Quirinal Treaty in less than a year.

Both out of conviction and in recognition of reality, Macron approaches other European Member States in order to offer each of them a pragmatic partnership. The strategic advantage for France consists of collaborating with multiple coalitions of varying scope in order to exert influence in French key areas. In return for support on one issue, a more accommodating stance can then be taken on another. Macron's first trips take him to Central Europe, where he meets the leaders of Austria, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Bulgaria and Romania. He reforms the directive on posted workers, as he promised during his electoral campaign. He wants to negotiate directly with the Eastern countries, especially since France has always considered this area as part of Germany's sphere of influence since the fall of the Berlin Wall and has therefore neglected it politically. Direct criticism of the Polish and Hungarian leaders on the issue of European values does not make relations any easier, but he has always maintained contact, especially with Poland on defence issues. Moreover, Macron also tries to convince the Baltic countries of his defence policy, even though the COVID-19 crisis delays the meeting until 2021. Due to his efforts, Estonia and later Lithuania declare their participation in the Takuba Task Force in the Sahel.

The relationship with the Netherlands is marked by serious disagreements, especially with regard to the eurozone budget. Within a "liberal Hanseatic league", bringing together the Nordic countries and the Baltic states, countries team up against these plans. The disputes continue in the negotiations on the European Recovery Plan, with Mark Rutte taking over the lead of what is called the "frugal four" group. Once the agreement for the Recovery Plan is reached, in August 2021, Macron proposes to Mark Rutte the setting up of regu-

lar consultations between the French and Dutch Ministers, as is already being practised with Germany, Italy and Spain. In doing so, Macron tries to reduce tensions and to recognise the importance of the "largest of the small countries" which has been the champion of free trade since Brexit.

With the agenda outlined in his Sorbonne Speech, Macron has been developing his thematic coalitions since 2017, hoping to reap the rewards during the French Council presidency. He presents his proposals and sets up his intermediaries in France and in Europe in the European institutions. After the renewal of the European Parliament and the Commission in Autumn 2019, Brexit is the final trigger for Macron to "step up his game", until the unexpected COVID-19 pandemic thwarts his plans. But the crisis is also an opportunity to accelerate many of his visionary ideas even further.

2.6. Take Advantage of Crises

In order to face the pandemic that suddenly hits Europe, the European Council meets on 10 March 2020 to give the Commission a mandate to provide a global European response.⁹⁶ Macron seizes on this rapid reaction to largely add European accents to his first "Statement to the French People" on the COVID-19 crisis.⁹⁷ From the outset, the search for antidotes and vaccines, as well as the support of the economy is to be organised at the European level according to Macron. He already mentions the need for a recovery plan for the post-crisis period. He makes a solemn commitment on behalf of the European leaders to react firmly and quickly in all policy areas. Macron understands that this is a unique opportunity to prove the benefits of a Europe that protects.

The health crisis pushes the European Union towards becoming a Health Union and, above all, to take a historic step by agreeing to mutualise debts within the framework of the Next Generation EU Recovery Plan. After intense negotiations with the "frugal four" countries, including the Netherlands, Austria, Denmark, Sweden and France, together with the countries of the South, France succeeds in imposing its vision over Germany. Germany understands that the risk of dismantling the internal market is too high and will severely affect the German economy. However, the frugal countries recall the exceptional nature of the plan that is not intended to be permanent. Nevertheless, the crisis has proven the relevance of previous French positions, notes an advisor to the European Commission. It is still not the permanent solidarity that Macron calls for in the eurozone management, but a taboo has been broken. This is very probably a future battle for Macron, who stresses that this is a key point for the future consolidation of the euro⁹⁸, provided that the consequences of the COVID-19 crisis subside, without being replaced by a protracted war with Russia.

96 Cf. European Commission: Timeline of EU action during the COVID crisis, https://ec.europa.eu/info/live-work-travel-eu/coronavirus-response/timeline-eu-action_en.

97 Cf. Emmanuel Macron: Déclaration de M. Emmanuel Macron, président de la République, sur la lutte contre l'épidémie de COVID-19, l'engagement des personnels soignants et la protection des personnes vulnérables, 12 March 2020, <https://www.vie-publique.fr/discours/273869-emmanuel-macron-12032020-coronavirus>.

98 Cf. Interview Le Grand Continent, p. 11.

Europe has gained visibility on the public health and economic fronts by addressing the COVID-19 crisis, but even Macron acknowledges that some steps, such as the vaccination campaign, are delayed. He blames the European leaders, who do not believe in the rapid development of vaccines, for their lack of ambition and boldness, and uses the impetus given by this crisis to boost his ideas.⁹⁹

In line with his policy of partnership with Africa, Macron again advocates for a hybrid coalition around the WHO with states, regional powers, laboratories and private foundations, which come up with the COVAX programme to facilitate vaccination in 92 low-income countries.¹⁰⁰ France, along with the United States, China and Japan, is one of the leading donor countries¹⁰¹ and appoints one of Macron's loyal followers as Co-Chair of the organisation's Board of Shareholders. However, the COVAX programme has a mixed track record, as the goal to vaccinate 70 % of the population worldwide by mid-2022 will not be met.¹⁰²

The health crisis also brings Macron to highlight Europe's dependence on certain key products, such as masks and para-

cetamol, and gives substance to his vision of “strategic autonomy” and the need to relocate certain types of products to Europe. The Commission understands what is at stake when Ursula von der Leyen, pressured by Angela Merkel and Emmanuel Macron, tasks Thierry Breton to develop European vaccine production.¹⁰³ As the European Union has been challenging China as the world's leading producer since summer 2021, this new level of autonomy is not only of a symbolic nature.¹⁰⁴

In many areas, the health crisis accelerates the process of integration of Member States and demonstrates the relevance of some of the proposals of the Sorbonne Speech. Moreover, Emmanuel Macron can argue that everything that has been implemented at the European level, as well as the new Commission's attitude, has allowed the European Union to react more rapidly and firmly than it would have done a few years ago. The liberal-centrist Renew Europe group has been pushing for more strategic autonomy, in particular through the influence of French MPs elected in 2019, who, by their very nature, support the plans of the French president.

3 Renewal of a Political Family in Brussels – a New “Liberal” Political Group à la française

Traditionally, France claims a leadership role in European politics.¹⁰⁵ The French presence in the European institutions is diminished before the European elections in 2019 and the reshuffling of the top jobs in Brussels. These elections, two years after Macron's election as French President, present a window of opportunity for him and his political movement to increase French influence in the European institutions. Emmanuel Macron seems to understand the importance of the European Parliament, although the parliamentary level institutionally plays a less important role in France compared to Germany, for example. Indeed, Macron is criticised for sometimes bypassing the parliamentary process, especially when the government uses Article 49.3 of the French Constitution. As pointed out by Sylvain Maréchal, Deputy Secretary General of Renew Europe, Macron wants “to ensure that

there is a Macronian voice in the European Parliament”. As we will see, the French arrival in Brussels is conceived well before the elections and follows several stages.

Three years later, the integration of the French MEPs can be considered as overall successful, even if this process has not been obstacle-free. The pivotal question is the one of the political affiliation of the centrist movement En Marche, as a new strong pillar describing itself as being “neither right nor left.”¹⁰⁶ En Marche joins the liberal-centrist group ALDE (Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe), which changes into Renew Europe, and which already included the German FDP, the Dutch VVD and the liberal party of Luxembourg's Prime Minister Xavier Bettel. Is this a step towards a new European liberalism?

99 Cf. Les Echos: Covid : l'Union européenne a « manqué d'ambition » sur les vaccins, estime Macron, Les Echos, 24 March 2021, <https://www.lesechos.fr/politique-societe/gouvernement/covid-lunion-europeenne-a-manque-dambition-sur-les-vaccins-estime-macron-1301302>.

100 Cf. Interview Le Grand Continent, p. 16.

101 Cf. French Government: Covax, la solidarité vaccinale contre la Covid-19, 02 December 2021, <https://www.gouvernement.fr/actualite/covax-la-solidarite-vaccinale-contre-la-covid-19>.

102 Cf. Pauline Fréour: Covid-19: de grandes disparités dans la couverture vaccinale à l'échelle du globe, Le Figaro, 02 March 2022, <https://www.lefigaro.fr/sciences/covid-19-de-grandes-disparites-dans-la-couverture-vaccinale-a-l-echelle-du-globe-20220302>.

103 Cf. Henry Lauret: Europe : Thierry Breton chargé de bâtir l'« Airbus des vaccins », Le Télégramme, 04 February 2021, <https://www.letelegramme.fr/coronavirus/europe-thierry-breton-charge-de-batir-l-airbus-des-vaccins-04-02-2021-12699689.php>.

104 Cf. Emmanuel Berretta: Production vaccinale : l'Europe veut rattraper et dépasser la Chine, Le Point, 08 June 2021, https://www.lepoint.fr/europe/production-vaccinale-l-europe-veut-rattraper-et-depasser-la-chine-08-06-2021-2429966_2626.php.

105 Cf. Claire Demesmay/ Julie Hamann, Länderbericht Frankreich, 2021.

106 Cf. Jeanette Süß: Neither right nor left – is the system of the 5th Republic outdated? Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom, 25 March 2021, <https://www.freiheit.org/european-union/neither-right-nor-left-system-5th-republic-outdated>.

3.1. French Centrist Parties in the European Parliament before the 2019 European Elections

Before the election of Emmanuel Macron, the French political landscape includes a handful of parties belonging to the “centre”, most of them heirs to the UDF party of former President Giscard d'Estaing. In national and particularly in European elections, these parties either join the Gaullist party of the right or go it alone.¹⁰⁷ Some of them therefore sit in the European People's Party (EPP) group. However, since 2014, the French centrist delegation is part of the liberal ALDE group. With seven MEPs, four from Mouvement Démocrate (MoDem) and three from UDI and related parties, the French form the second largest delegation – on a par with the Netherlands and just behind Spain. ALDE is only the fourth political group back then, with 69 deputies, but representing 22 countries. Germany has three members of the Liberal Democratic Party (FDP) and one member of the Freie Wähler.¹⁰⁸ Taking the floor and coming to decisions is therefore facilitated, as there was a relative balance between the main national delegations.

On the initiative of the EDP (European Democratic Party), MoDem (Mouvement Démocrate) becomes one of the two components of the ALDE Group. MoDem has greater social sensitivity, in particular with regard to environmental issues and free trade, than the other liberal members of the ALDE party such as the FDP and VVD. ALDE as a party bears the same name as the ALDE group in English/ADLE in French in the European Parliament. Until her appointment as a French Minister in May 2017, Marielle de Sarnez, then Vice-President of MoDem, leads the French delegation. Her role consists in finding a common French position and in negotiating with the other national delegations. At the time, MoDem and UDI are in opposition to President Hollande. Their decisions are as much influenced by national political considerations as by European issues. MoDem, unlike UDI, supported Macron and his list for the European Parliament. Two of its most influential members, Marielle de Sarnez and Sylvie Goulard, who is later nominated as the French candidate for a European Commissioner without success, leave the European Parliament as soon as they are elected to become Ministers in France. President Macron thus deprives himself of strong Macronian voices in Brussels and Strasbourg. Some other MEPs, although elected under the UDI label, distance themselves from their original party and are open to Macron's European policy-making. This is the case for Dominique Riquet, the then new President of the French delegation. These MEPs are key for Macron when they welcome him for his first speech in Strasbourg in April 2018, as well as for his two advisors, Clément Beaune and Stéphane Séjourné, when it comes to passing on their expertise on European parliamentarianism.

3.2. The Secret Dream of the Transposition of a French Big Bang to Europe

Europe and France's influence in EU policy-making are so important for Macron and En Marche that all protagonists see entering the European Parliament as a pivotal moment. A parliamentary assistant, who followed the negotiations on the integration of the new MEPs from LREM and the restructuring of the political groups, points out that the major question back then is not about who enters Parliament, but with whom join forces.

Since its first direct election, the EPP and Socialist (S&D) groups have been dominating the European Parliament as a duopoly. Germany is the most important delegation within each of these groups – the CDU/CSU on one side and the SPD on the other. After shaking up the political landscape in France by positioning itself in the centre, the new LREM party seeks to break out of the traditional divide of christian-democratic versus socialist.

Negotiations with European Parties before the European Elections in 2019

Already in 2016, “emissaries” of En Marche travel around Europe to assess different alliance strategies. They quickly reach out to Ciudadanos, which is also a young party like En Marche. Other points of contact are personalities such as Dacian Cioloș, former European Commissioner and Romanian Prime Minister at the time, Robert Biedron of the Polish Wiosna party, and Guy Verhofstadt, President of the ALDE group.¹⁰⁹ The ALDE parties of the northern European countries feel less political affinity with En Marche, but pragmatically wish to join forces to increase their numerical presence. The other liberal-centrists already expect their group to be considerably strengthened with about 20 new French MEPs. Tensions arise from the ambiguity of En Marche's real desire to forge alliances, rather than to create a new party at the European level – En Marche pour l'Europe – independent of other existing parties.¹¹⁰ En Marche holds discussions with the two parties that make up the ALDE group – the ALDE party and EDP. The ALDE party realises that En Marche may have the capacity to create a parliamentary group around it. They invite Astrid Panosyan, co-founder of En Marche and delegate for International Affairs, to speak at their Congress in Madrid in November 2018 to sound out the intentions of the new party. Her announcement that follows is clear: “ALDE is the core with whom En Marche wants to build [our] coalition”.¹¹¹

At the same time, negotiations with EDP stall over the issue of changing the name of the European Democratic Party, a

107 For a detailed explanation of centrist parties in France and their evolution see Daniela Kallinich: Between Polarisation and Modernisation.

A Closer Look at French President Macron and his “Third Way”, Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom, January 2021, <https://shop.freiheit.org/#/Publikation/961>.

108 Cf. Group of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe, European Parliament, <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/elections-2014/fr/political-groups/alliance-of-liberals-and-democrats-for-europe>.

109 Interview with people close to these protagonists.

110 Cf. Cécile Barbière: Macron veut faire émerger « En Marche » au niveau européen, Euractiv, 14 February 2018, <https://www.euractiv.fr/section/elections/news/macron-veut-faire-emerger-en-marche-au-niveau-europeen/>.

111 Astrid Panosyan: Opening speech at ALDE Congress 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=laEYZLDbF3E>.

demand by En Marche, and which its non-French members refuse to accept. Total trust is not established yet between En Marche and its partner MoDem, a major player within EDP.¹¹² The alliance between En Marche, MoDem and Agir in France is recent and MoDem, still trying to consolidate its place in the presidential majority at the national level, continues to sow some doubts among the leaders of En Marche. The youth movement linked to En Marche, the Jeunes avec Macron (JAM) created in 2015 and which at the time are more structured than En Marche itself, actively participate to sound out pro-European parties in all the EU countries.

Establishing Trust as a Newcomer

En Marche's ambition to reshape Brussels' political landscape face three difficulties: the lack of European cleavage among the biggest political groups in the European Parliament, the inertia of the system intrinsic to the functioning of the European Parliament, and a lack of confidence by the existing parties towards the newcomer.

First of all, the EPP and S&D groups do not have the same ideological divides with regard to Europe as those that weaken the French parties in these groups, the Republicans (LR) for the conservatives and the Socialist Party (PS) for the S&D. According to an adviser to an MEP, En Marche officials underestimate the parliamentary record of each of the European parties and the difficulty of transforming the established political families. Organisational features explain a certain degree of parliamentary inertia: the strength of a group depends on the number of its members, which determines the number of positions, the nature of the positions and the importance of the dossiers that the MEPs can deal with, i.e., to be rapporteurs. For instance, MEP Dominique Riquet feels downgraded when changing from EPP to ALDE in 2014. Members of a powerful group such as EPP or S&D thus lose influence and power in Parliament if they join a smaller group.

Finally, potential partners are not sure what political line the newly formed En Marche movement will follow. It takes time and measurable results to build the necessary trust required to forge new alliances, especially given that En Marche commits certain errors, such as publishing a press release announcing the creation of a new European party while negotiations with potential allies. Thereupon, Macron's entourage has to approach the 2019 European elections with more realism.

3.3. The Principle of Reality and the Strategy of a Low Profile

The Challenges of the European Elections: Creating the Electoral List *Renaissance*

The 2019 European elections are the first electoral test for Emmanuel Macron since his election as French President.

Failure is not an option. Oppositions on the right and left of the government (LR and PS) are looking for a defeat to close the "Macron parenthesis", making it an "accident of history". Moreover, the leaders of LREM want to arrive with a large and high-quality delegation to gain influence rapidly and to realise Macron's project. For this purpose, the composition of the list and the programme have to be carefully put together.

The rule of proportional representation oblige the various parties of the presidential majority (LREM, MoDem, Agir, Radical Party) to join a single list. According to the interviewees, there are no real ideological difficulties, since these parties joined Macron in his European project. MoDem claims to have greater sensitivity to democratic principles and the rule of law. Agir joins the negotiations with its own programme, which is overall very much in line with the Renaissance programme. The challenge consists rather in balancing out the different components. The extent of these political nuances allows for a wider electorate and, once elected, for greater compatibility with members of other national delegations within the same group and even beyond.

Selecting candidates is a crucial step in gaining influence in the future group. The Renaissance list has to be carefully prepared to embody a genuine renewal and a break with past habits, in order to assure a quick and effective start once in office. The first rule consists of choosing newcomers. Eligible candidates have to demonstrate a strong European commitment and sign a charter of ethics, showing that they devote themselves totally to their mandate and will not return to national responsibilities as long as they are MEPs. Only two outgoing candidates, Dominique Riquet and Pascal Durand, remain. The former brings his expertise as the Head of the delegation and the latter his experience as a member of another group, the Greens; both share their knowledge of the official and unofficial workings of the European Parliament. It is a risky gamble to promote so many political novices.

Beyond the legal rule of parity, the Renaissance list covers a diversity of ages – with an average of the candidates corresponding to the average age of the French – and a geographical representation that touches 12 of the 13 regions of metropolitan France, without counting the overseas territories. The selection committee reviews approximately 20 new candidates, which correspond to the number of committees in the Parliament. They filter according to the skills of the candidates, ensuring that the list includes experts in each policy area, notably for fishing, which is key during the Brexit period, and international trade, a general weak point of the French. Thus, the French delegation ensures to be present in each of the committees with well-informed MEPs able to come up with concrete proposals. According to the interviewees, this approach is new and far from the reflex of "parachuting" into Brussels to get rid of national political staff.

The Renaissance programme is structured around 79 concrete proposals, a reference to the number of seats reserved for France in the European Parliament, classified into nine

112 According to one of the negotiators on the EDP side.

themes.¹¹³ The first is the ecological transition and the second is social Europe, in line with the presidential project. Firstly, because most of these proposals echo those of the Sorbonne Speech, such as the minimum wage adapted to each country, the European Commercial Prosecutor and European universities. Secondly, because the list is entitled "Renaissance" in reference to Emmanuel Macron's letter "for European renewal" (fr. renaissance). This programme is still the roadmap of the French MEPs of Renew Europe and serves as a reference point, as confirmed by a current parliamentary assistant.

A New Large French Delegation in the European Parliament

The Renaissance list obtains 22.42 % of the votes, just behind the list of the Nationalist Rally, the Rassemblement National, with 23.34 %. This is a disappointment for the presidential majority, as these results give them the same number of seats – 23.¹¹⁴ After the confirmation of these forecasts, En Marche has to address the challenge of successfully integrating into the new parliamentary group and of adapting to the culture of the European Parliament.

Negotiations with the ALDE Group

The negotiations between the parties to join the same parliamentary group begin the day after the European elections. According to our interviewees, the French arrive with great ambitions. In particular, they strive for the presidency of the group. Dominique Riquet, re-elected Member of Parliament, affiliated to the ALDE Party as a member of the Radical Party, maintains contact with Guy Verhofstadt, outgoing President of the ALDE group, and Hans Van Baalen, ALDE Party President. Riquet agreed with Verhofstadt to include the French in the new group. Simultaneously, Stéphane Séjourné, a very close adviser to Emmanuel Macron, in charge of leading En Marche's European campaign, negotiate with the Spanish party Ciudadanos, and the Romanian Dacian Cioloș, who has recently launched his PLUS party. According to the same interlocutors, the demands of En Marche, the lack of trust, the brusqueness felt by some during the previous negotiations, and the unfortunate words of Nathalie Loiseau, Head of the Renaissance list, during a discussion off the record¹¹⁵, prevent the French from forming a new own group around them.

The final option remains to ally with the existing ALDE group, while keeping a level of independence vis-à-vis the two parties, ALDE and EDP. The rallying would concern mainly the

MEPs of En Marche, since those of MoDem already belong to the EDP and those of the Radical movement to the ALDE Party. For the creation of this new group, the negotiating leaders of the French delegation request a name change during discussion with the EDP for membership of their party. On the one hand, this is to end the ambiguity between the terms "ALDE Party" and "ALDE group", and because it is impossible for the French to join a group that calls itself "liberal".¹¹⁶

French officials do not participate in the final meeting to choose the new name, considering that creating a new group is already in itself a significant effort by its partners. Presumably, the French delegation feels that they shall not push their luck even further. This strategy proves successful, as the name of the new group, Renew Europe, once again refers explicitly to Emmanuel Macron's letter. However, the pre-existing wing of the former liberals still wants to refer to the "liberal" group, as one British MEP from the LibDems comments at that time.¹¹⁷

After those moments of friction, having a French person as group leader is completely out of the question. Dacian Cioloș's name stands out because of his European profile as a former Commissioner and with his national stature as a former Prime Minister. As the President of a new party, he is independent of ALDE and EDP. Another argument in his favour is that he is Romanian, and therefore from one of the recent countries joining the EU, whereas all the presidencies of the Commission, the Council, the ECB and the Parliament are held by nationals of the founding Member States. Renew Europe thus marks a difference by sending out a signal of openness.¹¹⁸

The Integration Strategy for New Members

The French delegation then has to face two challenges: learning how to work things out with their new MEPs without previous parliamentary experience, and being accepted as a delegation, numerically dominant, especially after the MEPs of the British LibDems leave in February 2020 after Brexit. The new man in charge is Stéphane Séjourné, a loyal supporter of Emmanuel Macron, who leads the European election campaign, and who becomes Head of the French delegation.

The new MEPs have to rely heavily on the two reappointed MEPs, Dominique Riquet and Pascal Durand. They also have to recruit parliamentary assistants who mainly bring experience from previous legislative periods within the ALDE group or other groups and who know the workings of the European Parliament.

113 En Marche: Élections européennes : Le programme de la liste Renaissance, En Marche, 09 May 2019, <https://en-marche.fr/articles/actualites/programme-renaissance>.

114 Ministry of Interior (Le Ministère de l'Intérieur): Results of the European elections 2019, [https://www.interieur.gouv.fr/Elections/Les-resultats/Europeennes/election_europeennes-2019/\(path\)/europeennes-2019/index.html](https://www.interieur.gouv.fr/Elections/Les-resultats/Europeennes/election_europeennes-2019/(path)/europeennes-2019/index.html).

115 Cf. Maïa De La Baume: Nathalie Loiseau drops bid to lead centrist group in European Parliament, Politico, 13 June 2019, <https://www.politico.eu/article/nathalie-loiseau-centrist-group-european-parliament/>.

116 Cf. Euractiv: EU liberals change name to appeal to new French members, 13 June 2019, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/eu-elections-2019/news/eu-liberals-change-name-to-appease-new-french-members/>.

117 Cf. *ibid*.

118 Nevertheless, before the announcement of his nomination, he was asked to officially clarify his position on abortion rights and LGBT+ rights, as an advisor to a member of the Renaissance delegation reported in an interview.

The new French MEPs are chosen on the basis of their knowledge of European issues. This expertise and anticipation enables them to obtain several positions of responsibility, including chairing two strategic committees for France. The first is the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety (ENVI), a major issue for Emmanuel Macron, also because the Green Party obtains good results in the European elections. They therefore appear as serious challengers on the national political scene. The second is the Subcommittee on Security and Defence (SEDE), a key policy area for France. Pascal Canfin and Nathalie Loiseau, the first two on the list of candidates, become the respective Chairs. The French obtain a third committee, that of Fisheries (PECH), with the departure of the British after Brexit. They also obtain a post of Quaestor with Gilles Boyer, which is key to acting at the very heart of Parliament. As the third group, Renew Europe has two vice-presidencies, one for the Czech ANO MEP Dita Charanzova, Vice-President of the ALDE party, and one for Nicola Beer, Vice-President of the FDP and Head of the German delegation.

When the others agree to change the name of the group, the French delegation suggests keeping the organisation of the ALDE group, inherited from the previous legislative period. According to the parliamentary budgetary rule, the number of advisors belonging to the pro-European central group remains stable for at least six months, even though the number of MEPs increases from 68 to 108 (before Brexit). The new French MEPs “find themselves confronted with 20 years of Nordic liberal culture with their teams in place”, according to one of the advisors of the French delegation. This challenge helps to familiarise with the spirit of parliamentarianism and behaving as a political minority, according to the same source. Conversely, the French delegation promotes the typically French self-image of belonging to a political majority.

The French delegation within Renew Europe is convinced that only results will generate trust. According to a Renew Europe advisor, French MEPs tend to have a reputation for not working very hard, so it is a question of honour to contradict this image. Apparently, the selection strategy based on commitment and expertise on Europe is paying off: they are generally seen as engaged and knowledgeable about their topics. These characteristics do of course also apply to other MEPs within the group, but interviewees frequently point out the change in the French attitude. There is a desire to align opinions by preparing position papers in advance on topics bearing divergence, such as migration or the Recovery Plan, making it possible to come up with clear statements.

The French delegation now represents one-quarter of the group. After its formation, some parties, such as the VVD and the FPD, fear a kind of “hostile takeover” of the group by En Marche, similar to the CDU/CSU who “took over” the EPP. A member of another delegation sees the risk of hegemony as a “bull in a china shop”. In order to avoid monopolising the floor

during meetings between delegations to establish the group's position, the French delegation tries to achieve a balance of views around a single spokesperson. According to several interviewees, the French members are encouraged to debate with their counterparts within Renew Europe, without trying to convince them at all costs. Although there may still be some individual positions expressed by free votes, the MEPs generally follow this approach. The two new co-chairs of the French delegation, Valérie Hayer and Marie-Pierre Vedrenne, have been able to reconcile the different national delegations over diverging topics, in particular those close to the more liberal or social camp within the group, through their Budget (BUDG) and International Trade (INTA) committees.

A French MEP acknowledges that the delegation is still a heavyweight, although it is better accepted overall. This impression is corroborated by another delegation member, who was suspicious at first, but concedes that the French MEPs are now well integrated and that Renew Europe is working increasingly as a group. Finally, thanks to the support of the French delegation, “the [ALDE] group has gone from being an SME to a multinational corporation”, says a former parliamentary assistant.

Compatibility with the Renew Europe Group

When asked about the basis of the group's ideological lines, interviewees refer to societal progressivism, the defence of democracy and the rule of law. Another cornerstone is the conviction that ecological transition and economic growth can be reconciled, particularly through innovation.

Beyond the doctrine, analysts draw a parallel between the ideological principle of overcoming divisions and the inherent functioning of the European Parliament, built on consensus. This may have led to a growing preference among centrist parties for a Europe that advances by compromise. Dominique Riquet states that, in spite of some technical differences, all the Renew Europe delegations are extremely pro-European. Some of them are more federalist than the others. According to a Renew Europe advisor, there is a whole gradation of federalism, with the example of Italian MEP Sandro Gozi, elected on the French Renaissance list and President of the Union of European Federalists.

Nevertheless, one French MEP believes that Renew Europe does not differ significantly in its parliamentary culture from the EPP or S&D. But, unlike the latter, Renew Europe does not yet provide the feeling of belonging to one “big political family” that goes beyond the parliamentary arena. A parliamentary assistant believes that this is due to the lack of structure around a single long-standing party, as in the case of the Parti socialiste for the S&D group. Even if all delegations congratulate one another on their national day, it will take time for this feeling to unfold.

In September 2021, in the context of the preparation of the French presidency of the Council of the European Union, the Renaissance delegation hosts a seminar for Renew Europe in Paris, culminating in a reception at the Elysée Palace with President Macron.¹¹⁹ A first seminar is held in Frankfurt in order to sort out how to work together and to set up a common roadmap. This time, the goal is to foster the feeling of belonging to a mutual political family.

While certain founding principles unite members of the same group, national political cultures or interests are often the cause of divergences. As a result, the issues of disagreement vary from country to country. With the northern countries and Germany, the discussions often relate to budgetary questions and debt, but also more generally to the role of the State and free market rules. The Scandinavian countries, on the other hand, are reluctant to legislate on social affairs. Spain often has differences in its positions on agriculture and Mercosur. International trade is a somewhat general topic of disagreement, as the economic model of each Member State is based on either supply or demand.

The French delegation has been trying to adapt its political concepts. For instance, instead of overly promoting a “Europe that protects”, which could be interpreted as protectionism, it more often advocates an “open strategic autonomy”. Given the role of the Franco-German relationship, the French delegation is attentive to its relations with its German counterpart, in particular the FDP. Indeed, an agreement with the FDP usually triggers an agreement within the group. Internal observers point to the good relations between the two Heads of delegation, Stéphane Séjourné and Nicola Beer, Vice-President of the FDP and of the European Parliament. This behaviour is even more visible now that the FDP is part of the government coalition in Germany.

The Discreet Leadership of Stéphane Séjourné

Stéphane Séjourné is a man of trust for Emmanuel Macron. He was Macron's political advisor when Macron was Minister of Economy and afterwards French President. In January 2019, Macron entrusted Séjourné with directing the campaign for the European elections. Unlike the candidates on the Renaissance list, Stéphane Séjourné did not have an in-depth knowledge of European issues, but he does have a fine command of negotiating skills.

In addition, having spent his youth in Spain and Argentina favours an intercultural openness that helps him to accept other rationales and ways of thinking. A political advisor describes him as “Mr Consensus Builder”. He was able rapidly to learn the codes of Parliament and to assume the role of Head of delegation. A member of another delegation praised

his teamwork and even said that he has no ego. Although he was not destined for a European political role and may have been disappointed at first to move away from Parisian politics¹²⁰, he is considered to be very involved in the European Parliament.

When Dacian Cioloş returns to national politics, the leadership question arises again for Renew Europe. Two candidates are in the running: the Dutch Sophie In't Veld, affiliated with the Dutch D66 party and a member of the European Parliament since 2004, and Stéphane Séjourné. Sophie In't Veld is known for her struggle for freedom and citizens' rights, but is forced to withdraw her candidacy as she senses the lack of support within the group.¹²¹ Strangely enough, as one of the group's political advisors puts it, by meeting with each delegation and MEP, and listening to their wishes, Stéphane Séjourné conducts a German-style campaign. He proposes a certain form of governance and method. In contrast, Sophie In't Veld runs a more personal, French-style campaign, highlighting her own plans without consulting others.

However, Séjourné's election in October 2021 is not unequivocal. As in 2019, there is reluctance to appoint a Frenchman as President of Renew Europe, especially in light of the presidential elections in April 2022 and the French presidency of the Council of the EU, in which some already see him as a key figure.¹²² Some fear an omnipresent French voice that no longer takes into account the pre-existing, more liberal component of the group. With his reputation and his propensity for consensus, Séjourné has finally succeeded in allaying those concerns.

Since his election, he has set himself the priority of creating synergies between the group, Ministers, Heads of State, Commissioners and parties affiliated with Renew Europe, in order to increase Renew's influence outside of Parliament. With this objective in mind and to counter the image of being too French, he is embarking on a tour of Europe with the intention of visiting each country before the end of the legislative period by 2024. He is strengthening the links with the movements that are already part of Renew Europe and identifying the political leaders who share the same values and who could launch parties in countries where the group is not represented enough or not at all. His “obsession” is to achieve what he helped to do in France in 2017: to make the liberal-centrist family the first or second parliamentary group in 2024.

Measuring French Influence: the Kingmakers

2019 is a landmark year, in particular for the organisation of the European Parliament. For the first time since its election

119 Cf. France 24: Macron insiste sur “l'autonomie stratégique” de l'UE face à des eurodéputés, France 24, 06 September 2021, <https://www.france24.com/fr/info-en-continu/20210906-macron-insiste-sur-l-autonomie-strat%C3%A9gique-de-l-ue-face-%C3%A0-des-eurod%C3%A9put%C3%A9s>.

120 Cf. Jeanette Süß: Renew Europe becomes a strong French voice - Stéphane Séjourné takes over as leader of the Liberal Group in the European Parliament, 21 October 2021, Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom, <https://www.freiheit.org/european-union/renew-europe-becomes-strong-french-voice-stephane-sejourne-takes-over-leader-liberal>.

121 Cf. Karl De Meyer: Stéphane Séjourné seul candidat à la présidence de Renew Europe, Les Echos, 12 October 2021, <https://www.lesechos.fr/monde/europe/stephane-sejourne-seul-candidat-a-la-presidence-de-renew-europe-1354351>.

122 Cf. Maia De La Baume: Macron's man in Brussels takes control of the liberals, Politico, 25 October, 2022, <https://www.politico.eu/article/emmanuel-macron-stephane-sejourne-european-parliament-brussels-liberals>.

by direct suffrage in 1979, the two groups, EPP and S&D, lose the absolute majority, as well as the duopoly they established. Valérie Hayer, co-Chair of the Renaissance delegation, reports that there is “a high degree of feverishness” on the part of the two groups, and in particular the EPP, who does not know what line Renew Europe is going to adopt in order to sort out the new power relationship between the groups. The French delegation convinces Renew Europe to oppose the CDU/CSU with their EPP President Manfred Weber as President of the European Commission and thus to reject the system of “Spitzenkandidaten” – a position that is advocated by Emmanuel Macron in the European Council.

Renew Europe prefers to build a three-party majority with EPP and S&D, rather than forming a majority on the right or left with only one of the groups as the political components. This places Renew as being compatible with both the right and left wings of the EP. The idea is to avoid association with

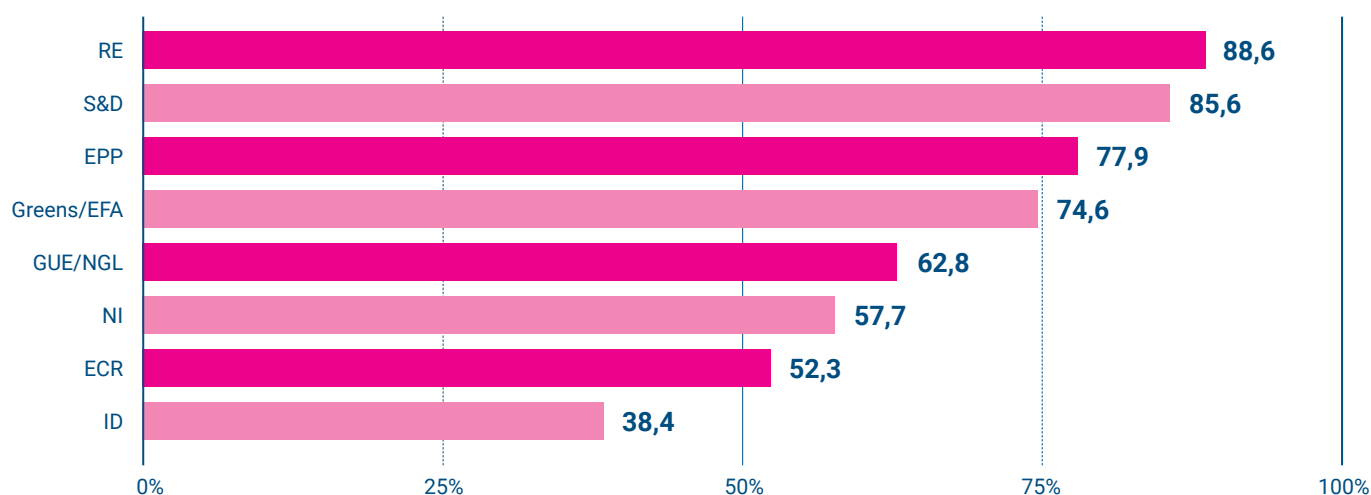
more extreme parties. A parliamentary assistant notes that, while Renew Europe agrees with the Green group or even the Left group on societal issues such as women's rights and the rule of law, there is no common ground on other issues. In 2019, Renew Europe fails to seal the “von der Leyen majority” through an agreement. However, over the course of the legislative period, it has become a key player in legislation.

The group takes advantage of this central position to influence and amend directives. For instance, MEPs believe that their action has led Commission President von der Leyen to place the Green Deal as a top priority. Their aim when forming the group in 2019 was to tip the scales by challenging the prevailing coalition agreement of EPP and S&D. As the following illustration shows, Renew Europe has in fact established itself as the “kingmaker”, being the group that ends up voting with the winning majority the most frequently – a role that was traditionally reserved for EPP.¹²³

On the winning side

The liberal Renew Europe ends up voting with the winning majority the most frequently.

MEP votes with the majority as share of total votes in percentage, by party group.



European Parliament groups: European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR); European People's Party (EPP); Greens-European Free Alliance (Greens/EFA); Identity and Democracy (ID); Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (S&D); Renew Europe (RE); The Left in the European Parliament (GUE/NGL); Independent (NI).

Source: Politico Pro.

By the mid-term elections for the Parliament's Bureau in January 2022, Renew Europe has gained a position¹²⁴ of blocking a purely left- or right-wing majority and forces each of the first two groups to deal with the central group, which has become pivotal. This was the very objective of Stéphane Séjourné. European Commission officials acknowledge that, in their relations with Parliament, Renew Europe has become a key player.

The Midterm Agreement: Presence of French Priorities

Signing the midterm agreement among the top three groups symbolises a change in mindset. The alignment of Commission President Ursula von der Leyen's priorities with those of President Macron prompts the EPP to work with Renew. The agreement aims to acquire stability and to accelerate the implementation of the Commission's

¹²³ Cf. Laurens Cerulus/Cornelius Hirsch: 5 takeaways on Parliament's power dynamics, Politico, 19 January 2022, <https://www.politico.eu/article/european-parliament-report-card-2022-5-takeaways-power-dynamics/>.

¹²⁴ Cf. European Parliament: Parliament's new Vice-Presidents and Quaestors, 19 January 2022, <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20220114IPR21013/parliament-s-new-vice-presidents-and-quaestors>.

programme, delayed due to the COVID-19 crisis. The S&D group, which has less control over the EPP as it is no longer its only possible ally, also has an interest in this agreement in order to guarantee essential social and societal principles. Both groups have observed and worked with Renew Europe and now consider it a reliable partner.

This agreement was nevertheless the subject of negotiations and a power struggle. The candidacy of the Maltese Vice-President Roberta Metsola to replace David Sassoli triggers a double objection: firstly, from the S&D group which break the agreement of alternating presidencies during the legislative period, because it finds itself without any major post. The presidencies of the Commission, the Council and

the ECB are currently held either by the EPP or by Renew Europe. Secondly, Renew Europe objects, because Metsola's position on abortion clashes with the liberal convictions in favour of women's rights. For the French centrists, this is an even more sensitive issue, as they bring the Simone Veil Pact on women's rights to the agenda. Therefore, Stéphane Séjourné requires Roberta Metsola to support this Pact, to speak up for women's rights and to include it in the midterm agreement.

The agreement takes up the most important topics for Renew Europe. It sets out a trajectory up to the next elections in 2024 and seeks to capitalise on the projects achieved or launched during the French presidency of the Council of the European Union.

4 The FPEU: Taking Stock of Increased French Influence on EU Policy-making

France takes over the presidency of the Council of the European Union (FPEU) in the first half of 2022, in parallel to the French presidential elections in April. This concomitance is ostensibly the culmination of Macron's presidential project that has been implemented throughout his five years in office, hence giving rise to the analysis of "advances, failures and adjustments", as *Le Monde* journalist Sylvie Kauffmann puts it.¹²⁵

This timetable is set under the presidency of François Hollande at a European Council meeting in July 2016, following Brexit. Neither his government nor that of Emmanuel Macron try to change the order of the presidencies to avoid this simultaneity. The maintenance of the timetable is therefore the result of both the desire to preside until the very end¹²⁶, and to reap the concrete results from proactive European policy-making for electoral purposes. Moreover, the majority of events, especially those most significant to France, take place in the first quarter, before the presidential elections in April.

To prevent criticism of a shortened or even futile FPEU, France seems to have prepared this presidency in detail. It actually started with the appointment of Clément Beaune as Secretary of State for European Affairs at the end of July 2020. The FPEU is under Beaune's auspices. When he arrives at the Quai d'Orsay, Emmanuel Macron's advisor for European affairs has long since built up his network within the European institutions and capitals. But he also takes care of maintaining close ties with all the chancelleries in

the Member States. He therefore reorganises his cabinet to divide the 27 countries among several advisors, in charge of thematic dossiers related to each geographical area. At the same time, France's Permanent Representation to the European Union in Brussels, headed by Philippe L glise-Costa, is considerably strengthened, as well as the General Secretariat for European Affairs (SGAE), headed by Sandrine Gaudin, who is also the Prime Minister's European adviser.¹²⁷

Given the electoral deadline, France is also suspected of having given preference to French positions and interests. France must therefore make it a priority to convince others that the reforms it defends serve primarily the European interest. The question is ultimately whether France truly believes in the European project and institutions, and can modify its own ambition, build consensus and shape its ideas in such a way that other countries will follow.¹²⁸

The French government also seems to be aware of this challenge and, during this long period of preparation, increases the number of consultations with citizens: Cl ment Beaune recalls that he undertook 48 trips within the EU over the past year. This confirms that he stands by his commitment to visit each Member State of the EU, just like Emmanuel Macron.¹²⁹ The French President's European convictions, the national stakes in this pre-election period in a country that is still marked by Euroscepticism, and the concern for consensus have resulted in a programme that is "very Macron, very French and very European", according to analyst Georgina Wright.¹³⁰

125 Cf. Sylvie Kauffmann: Emmanuel Macron, disrupteur strat gique ? Ambitions et r alit , *Revue D fense Nationale* 841, June 2021.

126 Cf. Erwan Bruckert: R formes : comment Macron compte "pr sider jusqu'au dernier quart d'heure", *L'Express*, 19 August 2021, https://www.lexpress.fr/actualite/politique/reformes-comment-macron-compte-presider-jusqu-au-dernier-quart-d-heure_2156618.html.

127 This is customary for a successful presidency, but easier to achieve for large Member States like France and Germany.

128 Cf. Gilles Gressani/Thierry Chopin: The French Presidency of the Council of the European Union seen from Europe, *Group for Political Studies*, 24 January 2022, <https://geopolitique.eu/en/2022/01/24/the-french-presidency-of-the-council-of-the-european-union-seen-from-europe/>.

129 See Cl ment Beaune on Twitter, 13 December 2021, <https://twitter.com/cbeaune/status/1470310370288050180>.

130 Interview in January 2022 at the Institut Montaigne.

With regard to its form, the FPEU contains an ambitious, even dizzying programme with approximately 60 proposals, 250 texts and more than 2 000 meetings at a time. It aims to conclude agreements negotiated by its predecessors, to lead the 26 other Member States towards a common position and to launch its own initiatives. All ministers are pushed to hold informal meetings with their counterparts and the relevant commissioner to explore the benefits of European coordination on some of their dossiers. However, the French activism is tempered by the fact that this is the midterm period for the Commission and the European Parliament. Given the usual 24-month delay between a Commission's proposal and its adoption after the trilogue it is natural that many projects are ongoing.

In terms of substance, given that France plays an important part in the European Commission's main priorities, some of which echo the 2017 Sorbonne Speech, it is not surprising to see several of these proposals popping up during the presidency. Moreover, Macron does not hesitate to emphasise this, by peppering his presentation of the French presidency with references to his Sorbonne Speech where he laid the groundwork for his European vision.

Indeed, the political files France believes it might be able to conclude, or at least make significant progress on, are all among the proposals made in the Sorbonne Speech: the Strategic Compass, the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM), the regulations on the market and on digital services (DMA/DSA), the directive on adapted minimum wages, the Conference on the Future of Europe. The same is true for the Schengen reform, a new partnership with Africa, new budgetary rules, i.e., the Stability and Growth Pact – a new growth model that includes the ecological transition, investment policies and new financing capacities.

By simultaneously addressing the relationship with Africa on the one hand, and the Western Balkans on the other, France tries to take into account concerns of other Member States. Both are included in a stability and prosperity component of the neighbourhood policy to ensure Europe's security and sovereignty. Developing the relationship with Africa, traditionally relevant for France, is already detailed in the Sorbonne Speech. The relationship with the Western Balkans is just touched upon, considering that further enlargements can only take place once democratic improvements are made. However, the fact of setting the African Summit for mid-February, while the one on the Western Balkans only takes place in June, reveals some sort of policy priorities of the French presidency. Emmanuel Macron is not abandoning his convictions that led him to postpone negotiations for North Macedonia and Albania's accession back in 2018. The Western Balkans Summit is deliberately being held after the conclusions of the Conference on the Future of Europe in May.¹³¹ Macron reiterates his wish to revamp the European

Union before enlarging it. The second concession towards its European partners is a more explicit and positive reference to NATO. In 2017, he advocates for an autonomous defence action capability for Europe, as a complement to NATO. In 2022, after reaffirming the usefulness and effectiveness of the transatlantic alliance, he specifies that a European endeavour to build a new security order shall be established and then shared with their allies within the NATO framework.

Any Council presidency by a Member State is also intended to strengthen the pro-European attachment of its population and to outline the benefits of belonging to the bloc. In the pre-electoral period, in a country where Euroscepticism is mainly fuelled by disappointment, the French authorities have reaped relative success with disseminating the presidency. According to a survey conducted at the very beginning of this period, 86 % of the French say they know about the FPEU but they are not able to give details and still need further explanations.¹³²

In the same spirit, about twenty meetings of the presidency are spread out in a dozen cities covering every French region. As far as possible, the topics are directly linked to local activities, such as the "One Ocean Summit" in Brest and a Summit on Space in Toulouse. This approach makes it possible to highlight the contributions of the European Union in the local and regional media. There are numerous consultations with MPs, representatives of intermediary bodies and associations that are in favour of Europe, to compile their suggestions for this presidency. For example, the proposal to deploy a European civic service is officially attributed to the Young Europeans (*Jeunes Européens*).

Should Europe just be a projection screen for France according to Macron? The answer might emerge from a comparison of the two speeches the French President gives to present the programme of the FPEU, one at the Elysée Palace to mainly French journalists and the other at the European Parliament. In the first speech, Macron highlights on six occasions France's success in European policy-making and how important further achievements as united Europeans are. None of these French achievements are mentioned in the second speech. The idea behind is to pay tribute to the achievements of the French government and at the same time to reassure the French that they will continue to influence European policy-making. With the same logic, France insists that French shall be used as much as possible in documents and exchanges during its presidency, much to the regret of its partners.

With such a programme, France takes two main risks. On the one hand, by embracing too many issues and promising too much, it runs the risk of creating disappointment, contrary to what a senior European official believes is a rule for a successful presidency: "under-promise and over-achieve".¹³⁰

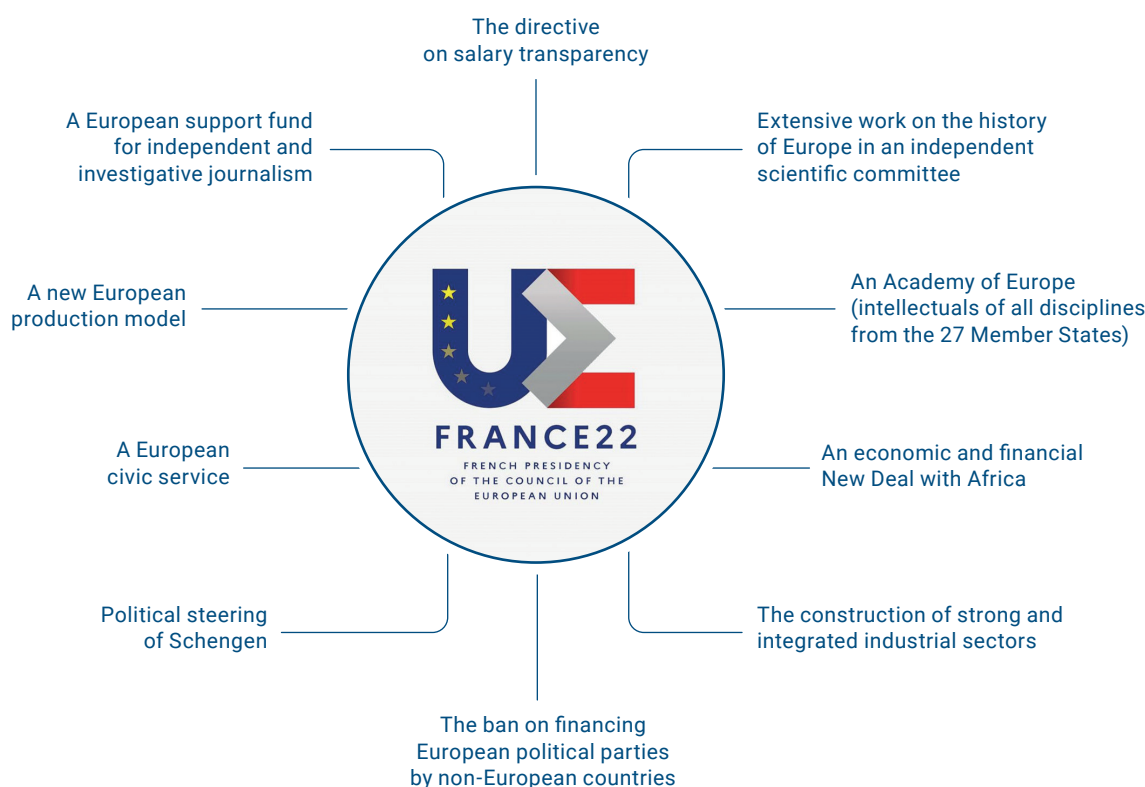
¹³¹ Cf. Presentation of the FPEU, 19 January 2022, p. 5.

¹³² Cf. Theo Moy: Les Français déplorent de ne pas être informés de ce qui se passe au niveau européen, interview by Emmanuel Rivière, La Croix, 21 January 2022, <https://www.la-croix.com/Debats/Francais-deplorent-pas-etre-informes-passe-niveau-europeen-2022-01-21-1201196097>.

On the other hand, this kind of agenda leaves little room for manoeuvre in the event of a crisis. In fact, the presidency is overshadowed by the war in Ukraine that breaks out in February 2022. The presidency is maintaining its programme, but the summit planned for early March on the new growth model has to give way to Europe's energy independence and

the strengthening of its common defence policy. These events are proving Macron right about the need for more autonomy and the capacity to act. Over the last five years, despite much projects still being in their infancy, the European Union has become aware of the challenges that lie ahead.

Image 2 | Extract from some innovative proposals of the FPEU



Source: own representation.

5 An Outlook on European Policy-making

Since the collapse of the financial markets in 2008, European policy-making has been significantly marked by a decade of one crisis after another (migration, Brexit, health). The European Union has been able to respond as best it can, but has remained in reaction mode facing these multiple challenges, rather than developing a proactive and strategic policy agenda. With his Sorbonne Speech, Emmanuel Macron sought to shake up this inertia by formulating an ambitious and long-term vision for the EU. However, he came up against heads of state and government who were tired of discussing reforms.

This lack of enthusiasm, especially on the part of Germany under Angela Merkel, has left France with the role of leadership in Europe, which culminated in the French Council presidency. However, this leadership is meeting resistance on multiple fronts and is regularly generating irritation among its European partners, even if it seems to be supported by the majority of European people, as shown by the ECFR think tank's poll.¹³⁵ Freshly re-elected, Emmanuel Macron will certainly perpetuate this leadership, but real progress in European politics will only materialise with a more com-

133 Cf. Maïa de la Baume: France plots an EU presidency en français, s'il vous plaît, Politico, 07 June 2021, <https://www.politico.eu/article/in-2022-make-french-language-great-again-eu-presidency/>.

134 Gilles Gressani/Thierry Chopin: La PFUE vue d'ailleurs, Groupe d'études politiques, 24 January 2022, <https://geopolitique.eu/2022/01/24/la-pfue-vue-dailleurs/>.

135 Cf. Susi Dennison/ Tara Varma: A certain idea of Europe: How the next French President can lead, ECFR policy brief, 09 March 2022, <https://ecfr.eu/publication/a-certain-idea-of-europe-how-the-next-french-president-can-lead/>.

prehensive and consensual approach between all or at least several European partners. The recent prompt reactions and mechanisms put in place since the Russian invasion of Ukraine, such as the triggering of the European Peace Facility, the severe sanctions against Russia and the joint gas purchases, seem to be moving in this direction. The European Union is demonstrating a mobilised and concerted multilevel governance to achieve much more coherence in speaking with one voice. Once again, this is only a reaction to an unprecedented crisis that threatens the very existence of the European peace project itself.

This strong and unanimous reaction should not overshadow the other issues requiring a European response, such as the greening of the economy, the more sustainable and fairer management of migration flows, digital technology, the rule of law and a more effective and strengthened European democracy. Through the French the Council presidency and its motto "Recovery, Strength, a Sense of Belonging", France has been able to put the key future policy areas on the table. Despite the various partnerships forged by France in recent years, the Franco-German axis still remains essential when it comes to finding answers for all the 27 countries together, or at least some of them, in the form of enhanced cooperation. Many see the coalition agreement of the new German government as a response to the Sorbonne Speech. This is the case of MP Christophe Arend, for example, a member of the Board of the Franco-German Parliamentary Assembly. He perceives the better compatibility between his political movement LREM and the new coalition, which is striving to be "a coalition of progress": "The word 'progress' is central to la République en Marche, since we claim to be progressive".¹³⁶

Indeed, the agenda of the new coalition seems highly compatible, especially committing to a more assertive foreign affairs and defence policy, based on values, the fight for equal opportunities and progressive societal values, the modernisation of the country (digital and infrastructure), renewable energy, innovation and new technologies. In this context, the French President's announcement of the establishment of 100 % French industrial fields and thus pursuing an approach of industrial relocation, still raises the question of whether France really wants to make common cause in Europe. The reindustrialisation of France and Europe and the promise of a new growth model are key questions for the future. Moreover, the confidence of European partners in the feasibility of reforms in France has not been fully restored. Despite some apprehension, the relationship with Germany seems

to be back on track, in light of visits by the most important German Ministers to their French counterparts, particularly the meeting between Christian Lindner and Bruno Le Maire. This relationship of trust needs to be confirmed once the new French government is in place.

However, the Ukrainian crisis has overshadowed the French presidency's original plan to hold a summit on the European growth model and it remains to be seen how Paris, Berlin and others can strike the right balance between a stronger and more innovative Europe, without falling into the trap of protectionism and the "sweet poison of public subsidies".¹³⁷

With Germany's historic turnaround to invest massively in its military and to reach the 2 % target of defence expenditure within its budget, Germany has passed an important milestone in approaching the French discourse of sovereignty. It was a painful decision for all three coalition parties, all of which had to abandon some of their fundamental principles. This decision primarily entails re-equipping rather than rearming German military forces, as Germany is only catching up on its delay. It will be up to the German government to define more concretely for what purpose the new means will be deployed and to take full ownership of its choices. Germany should therefore show its willingness to go further, in order to realise the vision of a common European strategic culture. Engaging in a thorough dialogue with Germany, especially when it comes to redefining its relationship with NATO, is a first task for the re-elected President and his government. The Madrid Summit in June 2022 will be the first opportunity to do so.

The war in Ukraine is finally a catalyst for France and for Europe on the issue raised by the French presidency of the Council of the European Union. While Europe does not traditionally play a pivotal role in French presidential campaigns, the divide between candidates who are either Eurosceptic or Europhile resurfaced in the last round of the campaign. Emmanuel Macron's mission was to prove the benefits of the European Union to the French people. He did not accomplish this mission. Embedding the European debate more systematically into the French one¹³⁸ should therefore be a priority for the future French President. Together with Germany, which has made up for the missed opportunity to organise its own national conventions within the framework of the Conference on the Future of Europe, France should seize this opportunity and not miss the chance of launching a new process of institutional reforms in order to make Europe more efficient, democratic and resilient.

135 Christophe Arend at an event held by the Friedrich Naumann Foundation and Ifri: Quel agenda libéral de la coalition « feu tricolore » ? Regards franco-allemands, 17 January 2022, <https://www.ifri.org/fr/debats/lagenda-liberal-de-coalition-feu-tricolore-regards-franco-allemands>.

137 MP Sandra Weeser (FDP) at a joint event of DGAP and the Friedrich Naumann Foundation: Fünf Jahre Macron. Bilanz einer Amtszeit vor der französischen Präsidentschaftswahl, 23 March 2022, <https://dgap.org/de/veranstaltungen/fuenf-jahre-macron-bilanz-einer-amtszeit-vor-der-franzoesischen>.

138 This is particularly true of the recommendations made by several think tanks during the preparation of the French presidency of the Council of the EU, cf. Reflection and Proposals Committee for the French Presidency of the Council of the European Union, chaired by Thierry Chopin: A Europe for today and tomorrow, Jacques Delors Institute, March 2022.

Interviews Conducted

- Philippe Martin, Professor at the Department of Economics at Sciences Po, interview on 17 January 2022
- Policy Advisor, Renew Europe, interview on 17 January 2022
- Sylvain Waserman, MP, Assemblée Nationale (MoDem), interview on 18 January 2022
- Advisor, Embassy of Luxembourg, interview on 18 January 2022
- Former advisor to En Marche, interview on 18 January 2022
- Frédéric Petit, MP, Assemblée Nationale (MoDem), interview on 19 January 2022
- Advisor, Embassy of Belgium, interview on 20 January 2022
- Joseph de Weck, Director Europe, Greenmantle and writer, interview on 20 January 2022
- Julien Hoez, Assistant to the Director, European Liberal Forum, interview on 25 January 2022
- Advisor, Renew Europe, interview on 25 January 2022
- Parliamentary Assistant to a French MEP, Renew Europe, interview on 26 January 2022
- Sectoral Advisor, Renew Europe, interview on 26 January 2022
- Sylvain Maréchal, Deputy Secretary General, Renew Europe, interview on 27 January 2022
- Parliamentary Assistant to a French MEP, Renew Europe, interview on 27 January 2022
- Former advisor to the French State Secretary of European Affairs, interview on 29 January 2022
- Dominique Riquet, MEP (MR/Renew Europe), interview on 31 January 2022
- Non-French MEP, interview on 01 February 2022
- Responsible for Studies (chargé d'études), MoDem, interview on 02 February 2022
- Advisor, European Commission in France, interview on 03 February 2022
- Valérie Hayer, MEP (En Marche/Renew Europe), interview on 14 February 2022
- Jacob Ross, Andrea Baumgartner, France/Franco-German Relations Programme, DGAP, interview on 23 February 2022
- Advisor to the French State Secretary of European Affairs, interview on 18 March 2022

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