

Macron the European halfway : constancy and circumstances?

Yves Bertoncini, Consultant in European affairs, he teaches at the Corps des Mines and at ESCP Business School

Thierry Chopin, professor at the Catholic University of Lille, he also teaches at the College of Europe in Bruges

A translated version of the policy paper published by Le Grand Continent on 27 September 2022 under the title : "[Cinq ans après, que reste-t-il du discours de la Sorbonne?](#)"

The fifth anniversary of Emmanuel Macron's speech at the Sorbonne on September 26, 2017¹ is a good moment for a stocktaking exercise that is all the more necessary after the recent successes achieved by the French Presidency of the Council of the European Union (FPEU) and while the war in Ukraine profoundly alters the geopolitical context in which the second five-year term of the President of the Republic opens². The strategy he outlined at the Sorbonne, centered on strengthening European sovereignty and identity, has been implemented on the basis of a series of normative, financial and diplomatic initiatives, such as the emblematic "Next Generation EU" recovery plan, which was not included as such in his speech and was adopted to deal with the pandemic crisis. This is a sign that circumstances, which Emmanuel Macron has been able to seize upon, have also played a significant role over the past five years, and that it is important that the consistency he has shown up to now be able to adjust to the "new era"³ evoked by Olaf Scholz after Russia's aggression in Ukraine.

At the Sorbonne and afterwards, Emmanuel Macron first posed as the "architect" of European construction, on the basis of a clear and ambitious vision, before turning into a stubborn and sometimes impatient "mason" and then donning his "fireman's helmet" to manage successive crises. It is on these three political registers distinguished by Jacques Delors that it is appropriate to put into perspective the merits and limits of the thinking and action of the President of the Republic⁴, indicating why and how European sovereignty and identity have been able to progress since 2017, and then whether and under what conditions they could still do so by 2027.

1. A European sovereignty and identity that have asserted themselves: from speech to action

The Sorbonne speech focused, first of all, on strengthening European sovereignty, for which Emmanuel Macron wanted to find the "keys" in terms of security and defense, control of borders and migration challenges, foreign policy and development, ecological and energy

¹ Emmanuel Macron, "Initiative for Europe. Pour une Europe souveraine, unie, démocratique," speech delivered at La Sorbonne, September 26, 2017 <https://www.elysee.fr/front/pdf/elysee-module-795-fr.pdf>

² The present contribution extends and updates the one sketched mid-five-year in Yves Bertoncini and Thierry Chopin, "Macron l'Européen: de l'hymne à la joie à l'embarras des choix" Le Débat, 2020/1 n°208, 2019.

³ On Olaf Scholz's European vision, see the full version of her speech delivered at Charles University in Prague on August 29, 2022, translated and commented on the Grand Continent website: <https://legrandcontinent.eu/fr/2022/08/29/discours-de-prague-comprendre-le-tournant-de-scholz-sur-lunion/>

⁴ In this perspective, see also Shahin Vallée, "Why Macron's European Policy Keeps Failing", Foreign Policy, August 2022.

transition, digital issues, and finally economic, industrial and monetary issues. His speech also has the merit of calling for the reinforcement of what is destined to constitute the basis of this sovereignty, namely European identity: it is indeed because they will be more aware that they are alike - even if they are "united in diversity" - that Europeans will see the value of acting together in a world in which they are less and less the center and which is becoming more and more adverse. It is on this double register that a positive and contrasted assessment can be made five years later.

1.1 European sovereignty reinforced by the health crisis and the war in Ukraine

The political narrative on "European sovereignty", developed on various occasions since the Sorbonne speech, has strong justifications⁵: first of all, international challenges call into question the collective capacity of Europeans to respond to global geopolitical transformations and to face up to the challenges of power (this is the case, for example, for the organization of their collective security, but also for the regulation of migratory flows); this project also makes sense from the point of view of the management of the new global geo-economic power relations, as much in the environmental and energy fields as in the digital, technological, commercial and also fiscal fields

The justifications for the "European sovereignty" agenda, strategically supported at the highest level of government by the President of the Republic, have been reinforced by the health crisis. The most fundamental event of the year 2020 at the EU level was the adoption of the European Recovery Plan⁶, while the health crisis also reinforced the "geopolitical awakening of Europe"⁷, by provoking an awareness that it is facing geopolitical competition for health and technology, particularly with China but also with the United States. The pandemic crisis has also shown that Europeans were ill-equipped and that it is necessary for the European Union, in a world of scarce resources and trade conditioned by domestic interests, to reinvest in technology⁸ in order to improve the resilience of the EU and its members to shocks.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine also elicited historic responses from the EU that mark a "European turning point": delivery of lethal weapons to the Ukrainians via the "Peace Facility"; broad reception of Ukrainian refugees in the EU; unprecedented economic and political sanctions against Russia; decision to increase German military spending in a sustainable manner... It is worth highlighting here the role played by the French authorities in the first half of 2022, which was an opportunity to advance the European debate and agenda and to affirm the EU as the strategic actor that it is not yet sufficiently, especially in the field of security. Power" issues were placed at the heart of the agenda of the EUFP, with the idea of strengthening the "capacity to act" (a term preferred and used in Germany - "Handlungsfähigkeit") at regional and global levels to protect its interests.

⁵ See Thierry Chopin and Jean-François Jamet, "Comment répondre aux attentes des Européens?", *Commentaire*, n°155, Autumn 2016, pp. 503-512; and Thierry Chopin, "Défendre l'Europe pour défendre la vraie souveraineté", Institut Jacques-Delors-Fondation Robert Schuman, April 2017.

⁶ See Clément Beaune, "L'Europe, par-delà le Covid-19," *Politique étrangère*, IFRI, Fall 2020, pp. 9-29.

⁷ See Luuk van Middelaar, *Le réveil géopolitique de l'Europe*, Editions du Collège de France, 2022; and by the same author *Pandemonium. Europe's Covid Crisis*, Columbia University Press, 2022

⁸ See Jean-François Jamet, "L'Europe au défi de la souveraineté technologique", *La Revue des juristes de Sciences Po*, n°22, March 2022, p. 60-64.

The evaluation of France's European policy during Emmanuel Macron's first five-year term therefore highlights a positive record if one relates the results obtained in this area to the program set out in the Sorbonne speech (September 2017) and to the priorities set for the EUFP.

In the area of security and defense, the European Defense Fund created under the presidency of François Hollande came into action, while EU-financed arms deliveries were decided during the EUFP. The latter brought to fruition the "Strategic Compass" project launched under the German Presidency, while the "European Strategic Initiative" initiated by Emmanuel Macron also contributed to the emergence of a "common strategic culture". Moreover, in the context of the war in Ukraine, the Versailles Declaration⁹ set the objective of strengthening European military capabilities, even if it doesn't sufficiently specify the objectives¹⁰ (is it a matter of increasing the national capabilities of member states? Or to strengthen the EU's shared capabilities?) Political framing work is still needed to promote strategic, industrial and political convergence between EU member states so that the "European turn" underway can lead to concrete operational progress¹¹.

Useful but lesser progress has been made on other key regalian issues identified at the Sorbonne. For example, during the press conference he gave in December 2021, just before the beginning of the EUFP, the President of the Republic emphasized the issues related to border control and migration challenges by affirming his desire to "re-found" the Schengen area, to create an emergency support mechanism in case of crisis and to advance the European "asylum-migration" package around different axes (working with countries of origin and transit ; protecting the EU's external borders, harmonizing asylum rules, etc.). However, it seems that fewer results have been obtained on these subjects, which testifies to the great difficulty in forging agreements at the European level, but also sometimes in defining clear positions at the national level on these politically very thorny and divisive issues. All in all, it is perhaps Emmanuel Macron's decision to reinstate border controls at the French borders after the attack on a church in Nice that will remain the most striking, even though it reflects the exercise of national sovereignty rather than European sovereignty...

More tangible results have been obtained on other key and concrete issues identified in 2017, in response to the major challenges facing Europeans. Deepening European sovereignty in technological matters with, in particular, the adoption of legislation on digital markets and services - DMA and DSA - allowing for better regulation of digital giants, even if the European tax on "GAFAMs" promoted by France was finally transformed into a minimum taxation of all multinationals under the auspices of the OECD. The fight against climate change on issues that strongly echo the collective preferences of Europeans has also made significant progresses: implementation of the European Green Pact, insertion of environmental clauses in EU trade agreements, launch of a "carbon adjustment mechanism" at the EU borders (CIBAM), albeit in a targeted and more modest way than planned.

⁹ On March 10 and 11, 2022, the Heads of State and Government of the EU member states met in Versailles and adopted a declaration on the Russian aggression against Ukraine, as well as on the strengthening of defense capabilities, the reduction of energy dependence and the construction of a more solid economic base - <https://presidence-francaise.consilium.europa.eu/media/x0wf4oy3/20220311-versailles-declaration-fr.pdf>

¹⁰ See Samuel H. Faure, "Une politique du "gentle reminder" : le bilan de Versailles en 10 points", Le Grand Continent, March 2022 - <https://legrandcontinent.eu/fr/2022/03/14/une-politique-du-gentle-reminder-le-bilan-de-versailles-en-10-points/>

¹¹ See Yves Bertoincini, "European defence: the need for convergence criteria, including for France!", Blog post, March 10, 2022 - <http://yvesbertoincini.eu/en/developpement/european-defense-the-need-for-convergence-criteria-including-for-france/>

In terms of economic, industrial and monetary sovereignty, the "budget for the euro zone" proposed at the Sorbonne is still in limbo, while an uncertain debate will begin on the possible revision of the Stability and Growth Pact, which has proven to be very flexible. But the pandemic crisis has led to the launch of a major European loan of 750 billion euros to finance the "Next generation EU" recovery plan, under the impetus of Emmanuel Macron and Angela Merkel, but also of their southern partners Italy and Spain. This agreement on the principle of a common debt has fundamental implications in terms of solidarity, but also in terms of sovereignty, since the constitution of a loan is historically a national political prerogative: It was certainly not the first time that Europeans borrowed together, but it was the first time that they did so on such a scale, not only to lend but also to subsidize... The bulk of the hundreds of billions of euros collected in this way still needs to be committed effectively, while agreeing on the terms and conditions of repayment of such a loan, with the creation of new own resources promised for this purpose by the French President yet to be confirmed. The pandemic crisis has led to the acceleration of the establishment of "industrial alliances" and "important projects of common European interest" that are exempt from EU competition rules: they are intended to boost continental production in sectors considered strategic, such as electric batteries and hydrogen, semiconductors and circular plastics, critical raw materials, etc. As well as the hardening of Washington and Beijing, the pandemic crisis has also helped to strengthen the EU's trade policy, which has not been afraid to resist the Trump administration and has now acquired tools to better counter the impact of foreign subsidies and to respond to the instrumentalization of trade for political purposes (following the Chinese sanctions against Lithuania), developments that are also in line with those proposed by Emmanuel Macron at the Sorbonne.

1.2 A stronger sense of belonging, for what common identity?

At the Sorbonne, in Athens and afterwards, Emmanuel Macron had the great merit of invoking the common identity of Europeans and the ways and means of consolidating it; the issues relating to "belonging" have even been one of the three elements of the "triptych" structuring the agenda of the EUPF.

In this respect, it can be noted that very useful operational progress has been made between 2017 and 2022, not only in higher education with the creation of the first European Universities, but also with the desire to strengthen the European dimension in secondary education, the learning of foreign languages and the democratization of mobility. Progress has also been made in social matters, with the adoption of a directive on minimum wages in the EU and increased regulation of posted workers, so as to consolidate the "European social model".

This progress has been consolidated by the unitary reactions felt and forged by Europeans in the face of Brexit, the pandemic threat and the war in Ukraine. The dynamics following the British referendum have indeed illustrated the need to identify an inside and an outside¹², and the way in which the identification of an outside can help to strengthen internal cohesion. The fact that the 27 national governments had to negotiate with what became a third country had

¹² See on this point the works of Michel Foucher, *L'obsession des frontières*, Perrin, 2007; and of the same author, *Le retour des frontières*, Editions du CNRS, 2nd edition, 2020.

the effect of uniting them further¹³. More recently, the return of war to the borders of the EU since the Russian invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, has not only aroused strong emotions in European public opinion, but also a unity of the 27 member states leading to strong solidarity as well as unprecedented political, humanitarian and military support for Ukraine on the part of the EU¹⁴. It remains to be seen, of course, whether this unanimity will be maintained as the sanctions against Russia produce effects on the economies of the 27, particularly in terms of rising energy prices.

European identity also refers to the existence of a feeling of belonging to a civic political community, which implies reflection and proposals in this area.

In this perspective, the fight led by the President of the Republic in favor of the rule of law since the Sorbonne speech seems logical and welcome: it has notably led to the implementation of a conditionality mechanism for the payment of European funds, which should produce its first effects. It is nevertheless desirable that the terms of this debate be clarified, as the confusion between the political values of the rule of law and societal values around the divide between progressives and conservatives is harmful.

On the civic register, it is possible to highlight the organization in 2018 of the "Citizens' Consultations for Europe" proposed by the Sorbonne speech, while regretting their very weak political and operational impact. Emmanuel Macron's proposal to organize a "Conference on the Future of Europe" in 2021 and 2022 has given rise to an exercise in participatory democracy that is much broader from an institutional and geographical point of view: however, its outlets remain vague at this stage, however, and could prove disappointing in light of the expectations created¹⁵.

Moreover, while the President defends a certain number of proposals that go in the direction of democratization of the EU (for example, the creation of transnational lists for European elections), "at the same time", its reservations about the procedure of "Spitzenkandidaten" (head of list candidates proposed by the European parties) for the choice of the President of the European Commission are a source of persistent ambiguity on the French position in this matter, since it is a real key to the process of democratization of European political life.

It is therefore rather because of the geopolitical context created by the pandemic crisis and the war in Ukraine that the EU has been able to make some progress in terms of identity, including at the time of the EUFP: it is because Europeans have felt themselves to be such in the face of Russian aggression that they have been able to act better together. Such progress was, however, largely counterbalanced by the French position, both traditional and erratic, on the question of the geopolitical limits of European construction, which has become fundamental once again under the effect of the war in Ukraine, as well as with regard to the two most fundamental diplomatic issues for European construction, namely the nature of relations with the United States and with Russia.

¹³ See Thierry Chopin and Christian Lequesne, "Disintegration Reversed: Brexit and the Cohesiveness of the EU27," *Journal of Contemporary European Studies*, 29 (3), 2021, pp. 419-431.

¹⁴ The most recent opinion surveys show a rise in confidence in the EU, with strong support for its response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine and its energy policies, although France is an exception (see §-3.3.). See Standard Eurobarometer 97, September 2022 - <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2693>

¹⁵ See the website of the Conference on the Future of Europe for an inventory of the proposals made and the follow-up given - <https://futureeu.europa.eu/?locale=fr>

The Sorbonne speech was intended to be unifying, but it emphasized on the deepening of European construction by calling for the creation of "refounding groups" that could have been joined by countries wishing to embody a European vanguard, but which never met... The European outlook is quite different five years later: while Emmanuel Macron focused his Sorbonne speech on Africa, the war in Ukraine revived the issue of EU enlargement, with Ukraine's application for membership filed at the outset of the conflict by President Zelensky, followed by Georgia and Moldova, while the EU granted Ukraine and Moldova candidate status in record time at the June 23-24, 2022 European Council. Given the length of the accession processes, these exceptional historical circumstances led Emmanuel Macron to launch the "European Political Community" (EPC)¹⁶ project in the European Parliament on May 9, 2022, in order to allow *"democratic European nations adhering to our set of values to find a new space for political cooperation, security, cooperation in energy, transport, investment, infrastructure, movement of people and in particular of our youth"*.

The European political community can only function if it does not become a purgatory for the candidate countries that feel that their entry into the EU will never happen¹⁷. Thus, Emmanuel Macron's insistence in his May 9 speech to the European Parliament that accession will take "decades" is a blunder. So is his statement that Britain could be part of the European political community, even though it has decided to leave the EU, which so many other neighboring countries are eager to join. In this case, the project gives the impression that the objective of enlargement is being totally neglected, even though the President has changed his tune by stating more clearly that the EPC is not an alternative to membership.

The format of the first meeting of the European Political Community, held in Prague on October 6, 2022, could be enlarged to 44 heads of state and government representing the 27 member states, the Balkan and Eastern European candidates for EU membership, states that share the rules of the European market (Iceland, Norway, Switzerland), but also Great Britain and Turkey. If the EU moves in this direction, the European Political Community will risk being a simple forum for exchange and dialogue with the EU, certainly useful in the current context, but not much more, and thus miss its objective of geopolitical stabilization of the eastern margins of the continent.

The European Political Community should not be dissociated from the future enlargement of the EU. The member states of the EU Union that refuse this reality will necessarily find themselves marginalized. Germany seems to have understood this, as evidenced by the very clear words of Chancellor Scholz in his Prague speech supporting the idea of the European Political Community: *"I am in favor of the enlargement of the European Union to include the Western Balkan states, Ukraine, Moldavia and eventually Georgia"*. For its part, by launching the EPC project, France seemed to want to disprove its reputation for being cautious about enlargement, particularly towards the east of the continent¹⁸. Opting for an EPC disconnected from the prospect of membership would be a surprising step backwards, damaging both for

¹⁶ See Thierry Chopin, Lukas Macek, Sébastien Maillard, "The European political community. A new anchoring to the European Union", Jacques Delors Institute, May 2022 <https://institutdelors.eu/en/publications/la-communaute-politique-europeenne/>; see also, from another perspective, Franz C. Mayer, Jean Pisani-Ferry, Daniela Schwarzer and Shahin Vallée, "Une feuille de route pour la Communauté politique européenne", Le Grand Continent, September 2022 - <https://legrandcontinent.eu/fr/2022/09/22/une-feuille-de-route-pour-la-communaute-politique-europeenne/>

¹⁷ See Thierry Chopin and Christian Lequesne, "The European Union in a continent at war", Foreign Policy, IFRI, Autumn 2022.

¹⁸ On this issue see Joseph de Wech, "Europe Needs Macron to Overcome his Fetishisms," Internationale Politik Quarterly, September 2022 <https://ip-quarterly.com/en/europe-needs-macron-overcome-his-fetishisms>

Europe and for French influence within it. From this point of view, there remains a real difficulty among the French political-administrative elites to consider that the geopolitization of the EU is compatible with the original project of European construction¹⁹ and to explain it in a satisfactory way to a skeptical public opinion²⁰. Since the end of the Cold War, the French preference for a small "Carolingian" Europe has become a strategic disadvantage for France in the eyes of the 27, while geopolitics at the margins of the continent increasingly guides the process of European construction.

It is on the geopolitical and identity-related register of the relations established with the United States and Russia that the limits of the European strategy deployed since the Sorbonne speech appear the most flagrant. To put it succinctly, the war in Ukraine has powerfully reactivated the Euro-Atlantic community, both militarily and politically: as at the time of the launch of European construction, the countries of the continent are more than ever united around the project of warding off threats from Moscow by taking advantage of Washington's protection. In this context, although Emmanuel Macron cannot be blamed for wanting to distinguish himself from the America embodied by Donald Trump, his comments about "NATO being brain-dead²¹" and his recurrent calls for "strategic autonomy" vis-à-vis the United States appear to be profoundly out of step with the mindset of his European partners. Similarly, Emmanuel Macron had good reasons to reach out to Vladimir Putin by receiving him in Versailles at the beginning of his first five years in office; on the other hand, continuing this dialogue in a too uncoordinated manner, despite the reservations of the Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs²², by receiving him at the Fort of Brégançon, could only have strongly tense up a number of EU capitals and peoples, who were more than comforted in their positions by the Russian invasion of the Ukraine. No doubt the most Atlanticist Europeans will have a greater say in the coming years than a French President suspected of reverting to a "Gaullist" position ill-suited to the new times...

2. The mason at the foot of the wall: a second European five-year term fraught with challenges

The cursory assessment of Emmanuel Macron's European action in the summer of 2022 shows significant progress in relation to the objectives set out at the Sorbonne: it allows us to emphasize that he is halfway to the goal, if not halfway through, but also that he still has time to make new advances while adapting his course to an evolving and volatile geopolitical context²³. The "refoundation" of Europe can certainly still wait, but new deepening of European construction could occur by 2027, if the President of the Republic maintains his ambitions in community matters while making substantial adjustments in the discursive

¹⁹ See Christian Lequesne, *La France dans la nouvelle Europe. Assumer le changement d'échelle*, Presses de Sciences Po, 2008.

²⁰ See Bruno Cautrès, Thierry Chopin, Emmanuel Rivière, "Un euroscepticisme à la française. Entre défiance et ambivalence", Report n°119/2, Sciences Po - CEVIPOF, Institut Jacques Delors, Kantar Public, December 2021 https://institutdelors.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Dec21_R119.2_EuroscepticismeFrancais_Cautres_Chopin_Riviere_FR_VDef.pdf

²¹ Interview with Emmanuel Macron published by The Economist on November 7, 2019.

²² On this topic see for example Clément Beaune, "L'Europe, par-delà le Covid-19", op. cit.

²³ On the need to fully adapt France's European strategy to the new geopolitical context, see Michel Duclos, "Diplomatie - Emmanuel Macron et Olaf Scholz sont dans un bateau...", Institut Montaigne, September 2022 <https://www.institutmontaigne.org/analyses/diplomatie-emmanuel-macron-et-olaf-scholz-sont-dans-un-bateau>

register and in political matters. These new advances will also depend on the extent of the external and internal political resources available to France at the European level, which may prove to be more limited than in 2017.

2.1 The need to change the discursive and political register "In the beginning was the word...", and afterwards?

The question of method is fundamental in European affairs. A change of discursive register must allow France's European ambitions to be advanced in a renewed manner: less style and more humility, more upstream consultation, more public debate with concrete results. It is a question of doing "more Robert Schuman, less Victor Hugo"²⁴. It is also necessary to remove the ambiguities of the traditional French discourse on Europe: neither questioning the national independence of France, nor promoting only French interests in Europe. From this stems a double requirement: to educate internally about the project that is being carried out, particularly in terms of "European sovereignty", in order to explain that this will not lead to a dissolution of French national independence; to double this first dimension with an education on a European scale to show that it is not a question of promoting purely French interests; we must remove the ambiguity (at the heart of the logic of projection characteristic of the relationship between France and the French and Europe) which could lead some of our partners to believe that the project of "strategic autonomy" is in fact aimed at breaking European external dependence on certain powers (the United States, China) in order to make a new transfer of dependence, internal this time, and in particular on France. Emmanuel Macron's second European five-year term thus provides an opportunity to renew the "French discourse" on Europe, which for several decades has been caught up in a logic of "projection" (the famous "Archimedean lever" dear to General de Gaulle), producing a fundamental ambiguity and negative effects both at the European level and in France²⁵.

Changing the discursive register should also lead Emmanuel Macron to better control his words and to avoid counterproductive verbal departures. For example, Emmanuel Macron began his first five-year term by criticizing the Polish Prime Minister of the time for her position on posted workers - which is perfectly legitimate - while adding that the "Polish people deserve better" - what right did he have to say that? He ended this same five-year term by calling the current Polish Prime Minister "anti-Semitic", which is factually unproven and diplomatically more than counterproductive... Beyond his great program speeches, it is likely that Europeans will remember Emmanuel Macron's first five years in office for his diagnosis of "NATO as brain-dead" and his call "not to humiliate Russia", two remarks that shocked and angered many key players in the European political game and that will remain for a long time in the minds of the wounded... Some of General de Gaulle's more or less calculated remarks have also passed into posterity, but he was a national sovereignist, working in a very different

²⁴ Une Europe pour aujourd'hui et pour demain. Souveraineté, solidarités, identité commune, Report submitted to Clément Beaune, Secretary of State for European Affairs, by the committee of reflection and proposals for the French presidency of the Council of the European Union chaired by Thierry Chopin, La documentation française, 2022 - <https://www.vie-publique.fr/sites/default/files/rapport/pdf/284512.pdf>

²⁵ On this central issue, see Yves Bertoncini and Thierry Chopin, "La " FrancEurope " 70 ans après la déclaration Schuman : projet commun ou projection nationale ?", Le Grand Continent, May 2020 - <https://legrandcontinent.eu/fr/2020/05/08/franceurope-declaration-schuman-chopin-bertoncini/>

geopolitical context, and who did not display a reaffirmed will to make the EEC progress by involving all its member states.

Looking back at these two emblematic presidential statements, assumed and never regretted, on NATO and Russia also leads to highlighting the obvious limits of a discursive register that is both intellectual and technical, which seems to neglect and underestimate the emotional and memorial dimension of the issues at stake. Proclaiming the (brain) death of NATO when it is indispensable for the protection of Europeans and worrying about appeasing Russia at a time when its soldiers are massacring and raping in Ukraine is in this respect extremely damaging: the European peoples and their leaders perceive and shape the future of our continent from their hearts, their souls and their guts, much more than on the basis of a single cold and rational analysis: the "neo-cortex" is not everything in politics, and even less so at the European level, it is necessary to address more the "reptilian" brain (where the survival instinct sits) and the "limbic" brain (where the memory sits) in order to lead the crowds...

2.2 The "Gaullo-macronism" challenge of going it alone

Emmanuel Macron faces a second major political challenge, if he really wants to give substance to the European sovereignty he defends by 2027, as General de Gaulle once did national sovereignty. This European sovereignty will indeed and by its very nature be built through the sharing of the exercise of national sovereignty, and therefore through significant changes that are not necessarily compatible with maintaining the Gaullist heritage as it is.

Is the presidential desire to position France as a "balancing power" and to exercise diplomatic leadership in all directions compatible with the emergence of the common foreign and security policy that Emmanuel Macron called for at the Sorbonne? Shouldn't Europe become this "balancing power," based on initiatives that are certainly inspired by France, but whose formulation and conduct are shared? In this context, while it might have seemed useful to maintain a channel of discussion with Vladimir Putin, before and after his invasion of Ukraine, was it not counterproductive to do so with such intensity and publicity²⁶, at the risk of antagonizing both the other EU leaders and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenski, to the point that it took a presidential visit to Kiev for the latter to announce that he was agreeing to "turn the page"? Legitimately shocked by Australia's denunciation of the contract to supply French submarines to the benefit of British and American suppliers (in the framework of the "Aukus"), could the French authorities obtain anything other than official and formal support from their European partners without realizing that this was a purely national industrial and diplomatic move, within the framework of an "Indo-Pacific" strategy that was just being Europeanized? Did they sufficiently realize that, faced with the rise in Chinese power perceived by Australia and all the countries in the region, only the United States could be considered a sufficiently powerful counterweight, and not France? Has everything been done to Europeanize our military presence in Mali and to avoid the withdrawal of a "Barkhane force" all the more easily denounced (wrongly) as neo-colonial because it was launched and led by our country alone? What were the tangible results of the diplomatic trips and initiatives that Emmanuel Macron undertook in Lebanon, without their coordination with the EU's actions being very visible? Wasn't it counterproductive to organize in La Celle Saint Cloud a summit on Libya from which our Italian and European neighbors felt excluded, something that

²⁶ See for example *Un Président, l'Europe et la guerre*, Documentary (110 min - June 2022) - Directed by Guy Lagache <https://www.francetelevisions.fr/et-vous/notre-tele/a-ne-pas-manquer/un-president-leurope-et-la-guerre-12479>

the new Italian leaders are keeping in mind? As numerous analyses of the war in Ukraine remind us, Emmanuel Macron's commendable diplomatic activism is often based on an acute understanding of the issues at stake: does his permanent staging, which sometimes reminds us of General de Gaulle's, not however hinder an intimate and continuous articulation with the European actors concerned, without which the emergence of a "European sovereignty" in diplomatic matters will remain very difficult?

One need only analyzes the scope of the objectives set by the Declaration adopted by the Heads of State and Government meeting in Versailles in March 2022²⁷ to illustrate the difficulty of bringing about genuine European sovereignty in military, energy and economic matters in order to strengthen our "strategic autonomy" vis-à-vis Russia and the rest of the world.

How can we bring about a true "Europe of defence" in a country whose President is struggling to distance himself here and there from the United States, at a time when the latter is more than ever perceived as the effective and ultimate protector of our continent? How can we advance the "Europe of armaments", notably through the "future combat aircraft system" project, without despairing of Dassault, which is still reluctant to share its know-how with German manufacturers, and which would like to produce a new national heir to the glorious Mirage and Rafale alone?

In the area of energy, how can we promote European unity and sovereignty by making the nuclear industry such a political and financial priority? While France is perfectly free to do so for its own sake and for its own good, its European crusade on this issue is met with a number of reservations in Europe, since the energy mixes of our neighbors tend to give priority to renewable energies. Is the French campaign to include nuclear power in the investments recognized as green by the European "taxonomy" not a Pyrrhic victory comparable to the one obtained by General de Gaulle when he managed to remove France from the controls of the European Atomic Energy Community (Euratom) founded by the other Treaty of Rome?

In economic matters, it is permissible to plead for Europe's food and even "protein" sovereignty, but this is at the risk of appearing above all to be the zealous defender of French farmers and their unions, whose fears had prompted General de Gaulle to provoke the "empty chair crisis" in order to ward off the supposed risks of a switch to majority voting in the management of the Common Agricultural Policy. How can we bring most Europeans on board economically and politically while continuing to support national farmers to such an extent in the face of the greening attempts proposed by the European Commission, but also against the free trade agreement projects concluded between the EU and Mercosur or New Zealand?

In a word, how can one be credible and effective in the promotion of European sovereignty while maintaining the flagships of Gaullist sovereignty such as the armaments produced by Dassault, the nuclear power plants run by EDF and the agricultural world co-managed with the FNSEA? By stating in his memoirs that the construction of Europe could be the "Archimedean lever of France", General De Gaulle displayed clear national objectives consistent with his position with regard to Europe: if this projection of French interests is both natural and perceptible in Emmanuel Macron's more Europhile speeches, will he have the political will and means to cut the few national Gordian knots that strengthen his credibility with his EU partners and promote the advent of true European sovereignty?²⁸

²⁷ See the "Versailles Declaration" of 10 and 11 March 2022, op. cit.

²⁸ On this central issue, see Yves Bertoncini and Thierry Chopin, "La " FrancEurope " 70 ans après la déclaration Schuman : projet commun ou projection nationale ? op.cit.

2.3 Limited political resources to go further?

Achieving the ambitious objectives set at the Sorbonne presupposes that Emmanuel Macron has sufficient political resources to convince other European actors to move forward, which is far from guaranteed.

On the institutional front, he will no longer be able to benefit from the catalytic role of the recent rotating Council Presidency and will have to continue to rely on the liberal-democratic political family, which is only the third force in the European Council, the Commission and the European Parliament, but can play a pivotal role given its central position. He will not be helped by the accession to power in Italy of a coalition composed of the far right and the right wing, which will not only close the Draghi parenthesis, but will strengthen the European influence of these political forces, which are also in power in Hungary, Poland and Sweden. His greatest challenge, however, will be to exercise leadership in a Union that is even more fragmented than it was at the beginning of his first term. The pandemic crisis has increased the political and budgetary divide between the presumably virtuous countries of the North and the reputedly spendthrift countries of the South, towards which France has slowly slipped. Above all, the war in Ukraine has strengthened the influence of Central and Eastern European and Nordic countries, both because they are in the front line and because they believe they were right about Russia, unlike France and Germany. It is not unimportant that the former Danish Prime Minister and ex-NATO Secretary General Anders-Fogh Rasmussen is among the most vocal critics of Emmanuel Macron's position on Putin and Ukraine²⁹. It was therefore all the more salutary that Emmanuel Macron recently used the podium of the United Nations General Assembly to specify and clarify his strategy in this area in the eyes of Europeans and the world³⁰ - it remains to be hoped that he will have convinced them.

While the Sorbonne speech was primarily addressed to "Merkelian" Germany, in the aftermath of its federal elections in September 2017, it is now a matter of rallying European countries that are much less close to France, and that will no longer really put up with Franco-German leadership. It is also a matter of working alongside a Germany governed by a more or less coherent coalition, largely focused on domestic challenges, while the new international situation in terms of energy, trade and diplomacy forces particularly heavy and time-consuming adjustments. This new situation could be all the more penalizing at a time when Germany is more than ever at the center of our continent's future, which it can undoubtedly analyze and shape even better than France, given its history, its geography, its traditional Atlanticism and its economic weight³¹.

In this context, it will be all the more delicate to advance French ambitions in European matters as our national credibility has hardly increased since 2017. Emblematic example: while Emmanuel Macron began his first five-year term by announcing that the French budget would be balanced in 2022, he launched his second term by announcing that France would be back under the 3% deficit in 2027, which very few would bet on in Brussels and elsewhere... While

²⁹ See Anders-Fogh Rasmussen, "Emmanuel Macron has harmed Ukraine and weakened it" Interview with Slim Allagui, Le Point, September 2022: https://www.lepoint.fr/monde/anders-fogh-rasmussen-emmanuel-macron-a-nui-a-l-ukraine-et-l-a-affaiblie-23-09-2022-2491015_24.php

³⁰ See the speech of the President of the Republic before the UN General Assembly, September 20, 2022 <https://www.elysee.fr/emmanuel-macron/2022/09/20/discours-du-president-de-la-republique-devant-lassemblee-generale-de-lorganisation-des-nations-unies>

³¹ On Germany's central position in Europe, see Michel Duclos, "Diplomatie - Emmanuel Macron et Olaf Scholz sont dans un bateau...", op.cit.

France has improved its economic and social situation somewhat between 2017 and 2022, it remains stuck in the bottom third or even the bottom quarter of the European ranking in terms of public finances, foreign trade, growth and even unemployment, while approaching the European average in terms of GDP/capita³². Similarly, while France has been able to secure the launch of a number of very welcome European industrial initiatives³³, it will not be able to drag its partners indefinitely into a crusade aimed at their "reindustrialization" or "relocation", since the "deindustrialization" from which France suffers does not fully concern them and has primarily national roots³⁴. The same is true of French reticence with regard to European trade policy, which is now intended to be more "sustainable" and "firm" while remaining "open"³⁵, and whose evolution alone will not be able to limit a national trade deficit that has exceeded 100 billion euros annually during 2022, in an EU with an overall trade surplus, like most of its member states. Finally, what can be said of the doubts that have arisen as to France's ability to honor its promises to deliver arms to Ukraine, even though it will remain perceived as the European leader in this area as long as the massive investments announced by Germany have not produced their effects? These hexagonal weaknesses will continue to maintain the doubts of its European partners regarding France and the powers of its President to improve its situation after a five-year term marked by a largely endogenous "yellow vest crisis," while he can now only rely on a relative majority in the National Assembly.

For it is also according to the extent of the political resources available to him domestically that Emmanuel Macron will be able to effectively project his ambitions at the European level. In this respect, he has two advantages: the great institutional freedom that his presidential prerogatives give him in European and foreign policy matters, while his counterparts in the European Council are often subject to very strict parliamentary control, and the political freedom linked to the fact that he cannot seek re-election in 2027. In the register of handicaps, the President of the Republic may continue to suffer from his allegedly defiant relations with the Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs, which he went so far as to publicly accuse in the summer of 2020 by pointing out the resistance of the "deep state" to his strategy of openness towards Putin... Similarly, the appointment of 5 Secretaries of State or Ministers of European Affairs in 5 years is an obstacle to a thorough debate and education on Europe in France. This situation is all the more regrettable given that Emmanuel Macron will have to submit a number of European decisions to the formal agreement of the National Assembly, in particular in order to transpose directives of legislative scope, to approve "mixed" trade agreements concluded by the EU, to validate the French financial contribution to the community budget or to ratify the Treaties of deepening and accession, all of which are all the more sensitive in these times of relative majority and in the run-up to the European elections in May 2024. Beyond the National Assembly, the French President is faced with a national political landscape that evokes the one that led to the parliamentary rejection of the "European Defence Community" project in 1954, on the basis of a coalition between right-wing sovereigntists (the Gaullists of the time), communists and disoriented socialists... The most recent Eurobarometer survey available directly echoes this uncomfortable situation, by

³² For comparative data on the economic and social situations of EU member states, see the EU's statistical agency - <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/fr/>

³³ On these issues and changes, see Yves Bertoncini, "Relocaliser en France avec l'Europe", Fondapol, 2020

³⁴ On these issues, see Nicolas Dufourcq, La désindustrialisation de la France, 1995-2015, Odile Jacob, 2022

³⁵ See European Commission "An open, sustainable and assertive trade policy", 2021 https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/qanda_21_645

ranking French public opinion as the most eurosceptic of the 27: Europhobia, i.e., the desire to leave the EU, is certainly no longer popular in France, including thanks to Emmanuel Macron's resounding victory over Marine Le Pen in 2017 and his re-election in 2022; but confidence in the EU is particularly low there³⁶, in a country where Eurosceptic and radical parties on the left and right have taken advantage of the President's central positioning and can all the more shape debates on European construction.

Conclusion: from text to context

The first five years of Emmanuel Macron's presidency, which began with the Ode to Joy and the Sorbonne speech, have allowed him to set out and clarify his ambitious vision of European integration, but also to achieve a number of notable successes in terms of legislation and diplomacy. Several of these advances are largely due to the pandemic and war context that marked the second part of the five-year term (first and foremost the "Next Generation EU" recovery plan and the European delivery of arms to Ukraine), but also to the skill with which the French President was able to advance the implementation of his initial agenda.

To make further progress over the next five years, it is therefore necessary to distinguish between what is the result of the President's intellectual and political foresight and constancy and what is the result of unexpected circumstances that are globally favorable to the promotion of European sovereignty and identity mentioned at the Sorbonne. This distinction is all the more essential given that the geopolitical context in which the second five-year term opens is very different from that of 2017: it is no longer a question today of dealing with the Brexit or accommodating Donald Trump, but with the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the Chinese stiffening and the risks of stagflation or recession. It is therefore more to the tune of the "Ode to fear" that the construction of Europe is called upon to evolve, appealing to instincts and reflexes that great program speeches will struggle to mobilize

It would therefore be salutary if the President of the Republic and the French authorities were able to analyze with acuity the factors that have enabled France to advance its ambitions over the past few years, the limits and obstacles it has encountered, as well as the impact of the tectonic changes brought about by the Russian-Ukrainian war. The more they show humility and resipiscence the more the French authorities will be able to take their full part in this analysis, without succumbing to the illusion that the EU agenda can only be a more or less faithful echo of the diagnoses and proposals that they have constantly formulated. No one is a prophet in his own continent: it would be better to abandon the costume of the great overhanging architect and wear the costume of the devoted mason in order to build the sovereign and united Europe that the Sorbonne speech lyrically calls for.

If the current geopolitical context seems to resonate with the French vision of European construction, the latter cannot by nature be a "France in bigger": it is on this ridge line that the host of the Elysée Palace should go on walking, just like all those who want to work in favor of a stronger, more united and more democratic Union that we need more than ever to face the great challenges of our time.

³⁶ According to the Eurobarometer published in July 2022, French public opinion is last in terms of confidence in the European Union, with only 34% confidence, compared to a European average of 49% (17 of the 27 EU countries score higher than or equal to this average); it is second to last (after Greece) when it comes to the image of the EU, which is positive for only 50% of the French (compared to 65% for Europeans as a whole) see <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2693>