

**“A Europe that protects Europeans”:
Emmanuel Macron’s realistic vision of
France’s position in the world**

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Executive Summary

The first major domestic challenge facing the newly elected French President, Emmanuel Macron, is to obtain an absolute majority in today’s legislative elections. His promise of a constructive proactivism at the level of the European Union was enthusiastically welcomed in Europe. However, if Emmanuel Macron is to succeed in his mandate and if he is to play a significant role in a European Union facing a serious identity crisis, his main challenge will be to reverse the scepticism of French people, mainly among those who gave him their vote, not by conviction, but to counter the Front National. The President must act while ensuring that the French citizens understand his action at the European level, and the need for a strong Europe so that it can become a real instrument for France’s power projection.

Introduction

In an environment characterized by growing Euroscepticism and rising populism, the election of Emmanuel Macron was welcomed with relief by the European Union (EU). Repeated terrorist attacks, the migration crisis, economic difficulties, Brexit, all have profoundly shaken the idea of a greater Europe across all European countries. The election of a young convinced European is expected to give a new impetus to the European construction. Italian, Spanish, and German leaders have shown great enthusiasm for the election of Emmanuel Macron (Couturier, 2017). Federica Mogherini, the EU high representative for Foreign and Security Policy, has stated that “France elected as President the candidate who had chosen, more than all the others, European pride and identity as his own flag” and they did that even “after months of prophecy on the inevitable rise of the extreme right, on the dissolution of the European Union” (Mogherini, in Couturier, 2017, author’s translation). But the presidential election campaign highlighted the profound disappointment of the French people confronted with the unfulfilled promises of previous rulers. So, will Macron’s European vision be a real asset in the eyes of French citizens and will it allow him to make the EU a real instrument for French power projection?

Realist prism: France cannot stand alone in the world

During the presidential campaign, Emmanuel Macron’s realistic vision of France’s position in the world made him repeatedly assert that France needs Europe and that Europe makes France bigger and stronger. In fact, the “En Marche!” programme contained a developed chapter about the candidate’s conception of Europe, one that « protects the Europeans ». He presented a diagnostic in which Europe’s *acquis* is essential but also he noted that a decade has been lost since 2005. The rejection of the European Constitutional Treaty by referendum was a sign of decline in popular support, it is not increased European integration. He argued that French people feel like they have been excluded from the European project and they do not trust European institutions, which have become major scapegoats for French politicians’ failures. Therefore, the young candidate has presented three very ambitious objectives to “regenerate” the EU. These include; the promotion of debate on Europe and the organisation of a democratic convention by the end of 2017; the strengthening of the EU in the spheres of security, social (rights) services and economics, protection against globalisation, sustainable development and digital fields; and the strengthening of European identity by concrete achievements, mainly for the

youth. In his inaugural speech, Emmanuel Macron reasserted the "immensity" of France's role in correcting "the excesses of the course of the world" and in ensuring the "defence of freedom." To the latter end, France will need a "more efficient, more democratic and more political Europe" for that is the instrument of France's power and sovereignty.

A need for change and a multi-speed Europe

The new President has clearly articulated the need for change, but his programme is too ambitious. Particularly concerning the reform of the Euro and the Eurozone (creation of a Eurozone budget, setting of anti-dumping measures, creation of a Eurozone Minister of Economy and Finance). France will have to demonstrate to its partners that it is willing to make additional efforts since the European Commission's 2018 forecast for the French government deficit reaches 3.2% of the GDP (European Commission, 2017). Although German Chancellor Angela Merkel has shown a degree of political will for treaty reform during their meeting in May, France and Germany have different interests on several issues (Wieder, 2017). One such is the implementation of fiscal and social measures to prevent dumping in the Eurozone. Contrary to the French President, the Chancellor is firmly committed to the principles of free trade (Ibidem).

The agreement of other European partners must be secured because consensus is required for treaty revision. Despite the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty in 2009, since 2008, the EU has been in a stalemate in terms of integration and, for Emmanuel Macron, "the Eurozone has not moved forward by the shame of itself. It is necessary to dare the multi-speed Europe" (Macron in Robert, 2017, author's translation). In other words, the pragmatic "En Marche!" candidate argued that it is necessary to admit that a multi-speed Europe already exists (opt-in, opt-out, permanent structured and enhanced cooperation's, Eurozone) and that it should be used to go forward, mainly to strengthen Eurozone (Ibidem). Further, Emmanuel Macron has expressed a tough opinion concerning Brexit. Last February, he argued that "an exit is an exit" and that he would insist that the process should not bring undue advantages to the United Kingdom (France 24, 2017).

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Rising French scepticism: The real challenge

German chancellor also has congratulated the French President, asserting that French electors "have clearly opted for Europe" (Merkel in Couturier, 2017, author's translation). However, recent opinion polls reveal a more fragile picture of this support. In 2016, the European Union elicited more fear than hope among French people, with only one respondent out of four (25%) identifying the EU as a source of hope (Zulfikarpasic, 2016). This represents 13 points less than in 2013, 25 points less than in 2011 and especially, 36 points less than in 2003 (Ibidem). Still in 2016, 41% of French people thought that the EU was a source of fear, namely for the workers (52%) and for less qualified persons (55%) (Ibidem). Although an opinion poll carried out in March 2017 for the 60-year anniversary of the Rome Treaty showed that favourable opinions were increasing in particular after the

victory of the Brexit in the UK, 52% of respondents still have concerns about the EU and 67% think that the EU is not functioning properly (François, 2017). If Emmanuel Macron is to play a significant role in a European Union facing a serious identity crisis, his main challenge will be to reverse the scepticism of French people. French citizens need to acknowledge the importance of the EU as an instrument for France's influence in the world. Therefore, it is important to underline Europe's positive effects on citizens' daily life and, according to Emmanuel Macron, resist the temptation to use the EU as a scapegoat to justify the country's troubles. But, this tactic has been used too often in the past. It remains to be seen whether the new French executive will be able to resist temptation in the event of a storm.

Conclusion

Although the opinion polls are quite favorable to « La République En Marche! » (renamed after the presidential election), the implementation of its programme, including the “Europe component’ rests largely on the results of the today. Only an absolute majority can endorse the new President’s willingness to “overinvest” in the European scene in the face of a domestic situation that dissatisfies the voters. Emammuel Macron will have to find the right balance in his mandate to show to the French people that his action in Europe is in the interest of France or else the popular discontent will be exacerbated. The President must act while ensuring that the French citizens understand his action at the European level, especially the need to strengthen Europe in its economic, social and security dimensions in order to become a real instrument for France’s power projection.

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