France's Grand Design for Europe and the Elusive Quest for European Sovereignty

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Abstract

In the context of the Liberal International Order crisis amplified by the Trump Administration's *America First* doctrine and a retreat of multilateralism, President Macron was emboldened to carry further his vision for a Sovereign Europe (*Europe-Puissance*) capable of ensuring its own strategic autonomy and acting as an independent actor on the international stage. However, President Macron faces the task of articulating a coherent way of achieving this goal, especially giving Germany's reluctance to accept any changes in the postwar defense *status quo*, and East-Central European anxieties regarding a possible Russian rapprochement pursued by the French president. Early in his presidency, Macron proposed his Grand Design for a concentric and multi-speed Europe with different stages of integration, and different levels of functioning, a plan which was met with a degree of unwillingness from East-Central European capitals.

Keywords: French European Policy, Multi-Speed Europe, President Macron, Sorbonne Speech

France and the European Project, between Embedded Bilateralism and Multilateral Intergovernmentalism

This article aims to discuss France's approaches in attaining a Sovereign Europe, and how through the means of both its embedded bilateralism with Germany and multilateral intergovernmentalism within the European Union, Paris is searching to propose the creation of a concentric multi-speed Europe and a European Defense capable of ensuring its own strategic autonomy. Although President Macron's proposals are gaining much attention and generating debate, these ideas do not represent an innovative approach regarding French European policy, since they have been advocated under one form or another by his predecessors in consistence with France's interests and viewpoints on how the European construction should evolve.

In the gilded *Grand Amphitéâtre* of the Sorbonne, the newly elected French president Emmanuel Macron delivered on September 2017 a speech suggestively, yet unimaginatively named *Initiative pour l'Europe,* where he espoused his vision on the future of the European construction. Giving the choice of his location and the overtone of his arguments emphasizing the common European cosmopolitan culture, he was searching to convey the message that ideas have consequences, as he pointed out that:

> "Europe, too, is an idea. An idea supported for many centuries by pioneers, optimists, and visionaries, and it is always up to us to claim it for our own […] It is our responsibility to bring it to life, make it ever better and stronger, to not stop at the form that historic circumstances have shaped it into. Because this form may change, but the idea remains, and its ambition must be ours" (Macron, 2017).

This was an anticipated speech as pressure mounted on the new president, both internally and externally, to depart from the stagnation of his predecessor and his unimpressive record and show a European direction by rebalancing the Franco-German relationship, in the wake of growing criticism of a sole German leadership in the European Union.

Zbigniew Brzezinski once famously said that "France seeks reincarnation through Europe, [whereas] Germany hopes for redemption through Europe" (Brzezinski, 1997, p. 61). As a rank-obsessed Great Power regarding its proper place and influence in global affairs, France ultimately seeks this reincarnation because "it wants to embody Europe on the world stage, with the tendency of French leaders to speak in the name of Europe and also shape Europe according to French ideas" (Irondelle, 2008, p. 154). Nonetheless, regardless of Paris or Berlin's ambitions, to such extent is the French-German partnership calibrated that any unbalance could create difficulties for the whole Union. As a founding country of the European Communities, France has always had two approaches towards the European construction, one bilateral approach through the French-German partnership and a multilateral approach through intergovernmentalism.

Regarding the subject of the French-German bilateral cooperation and postwar reconciliation, there is a vast historiography from both French and German, and Anglo-American authors, that would be impossible to review here. On this subject, a general and cogent overview is giving in Hélène Miard-Delaroix, Andreas Wirsching, *Ennemis héréditaire? Un dialogue franco-allemand* by retracing the tumultuous historical past between the two nations since 1871 and their reconciliation efforts. On the context in which the Elysée Treaty, the totemic document of the Franco-German reconciliation, came to be signed and its subsequent political consequences, Corine Defrance, Ulrich Pfeil (eds.), *La France, L'Allemagne et le traité d'Elysée* offers insightful and nuanced details drawing from both French and German archival sources.

In respect with the two nations institutional cooperation within the European Union, a thoroughly researched account can be found in Marie-Thérèse Bitsch (ed.) *Le couple France-Allemagne et les institutions européennes. Une postérité pour le Plan Schuman?* from its creation up until the Nice Treaty of 2002, and in Ulrich Krotz, Joachim Schild, *Shaping Europe: France, Germany, and Embedded Bilateralism from the Elysée Treaty to the Twenty-First Century.* As Pierre-Emmanuel Thomann points out in his critical assessment, *Le couple franco-allemand et le projet européen: représentations géopolitiques, unité et rivalités,* the metaphor "couple" exists

only in the French language to describe this special partnership, whereas the Germans prefer to address it simply as "the cooperation" - as in *die Deutsche-Französische Zusammenarbeit,* or "the friendship" - *die Freundschaft*. Far from being an anecdotal detail, it shows the amount of expectation invested by the French public opinion and political decision-makers in this partnership, whereas their German counterparts tend to be more self-restrained. This metaphor can be interpreted also on a more personal level, designating the historical political duos, like in the case of Charles de Gaulle and Konrad Adenauer, Giscard d'Estaing and Helmut Schmidt, or Mitterrand and Helmut Kohl (Thomann, 2015).

A more German-based perspective of this bilateral political partnership and its contribution to the European construction, based on German archival sources, one finds in Ulrich Lappenküper, *Die deutsche-französische Beziehungen 1949-1963* and *Mitterrand und Deutschland, die enträtselte Sphinx*. For the same period, regarding the significant influence the personality of François Mitterrand had on the course of German history, especially during the reunification process with his desire for a firmly Western-anchored reunified Germany, Tilo Schabert, *Weltgeschichte gemacht wird. Frankheit und die deutsche Einheit* provides an illuminating account. The Mitterrand-Kohl period was indeed one of the must eventful and consequential for the future of both nations, since it saw the fall of the Berlin Wall (9th November 1989), the German reunification (3rd October 1990) and afterwards the Maastricht Treaty (1992) that transformed the European Community into the European Union and paved the way for the adoption of the future single currency, the euro in 1999 (Bozo, 2005),

As Frédéric Bozo's seminal *Mitterrand, la guerre froide et l'unification allemande: De Yalta à Maatricht* eloquently and cogently explains, the birth of the euro was part of a grand bargain, between the two partners, where Mitterrand supported the reunification, and didn't interfere in any way in obstructing its course, and in return demanded from Kohl to speed up the process leading to the Maastricht Treaty, thus further deepening the European construction - while demanding from Kohl the abandon of the Deutsche-Mark, and hence

setting the stage for the future adoption of the euro. As archival evidence shows, Mitterrand was wary that a newly reunified Germany would abandon its previous European engagements and would further pursue its *Sonderwerg* especially towards the East, like many times before during its history.

Since he reportedly considered the Deutsche-Mark as "Germany's nuclear option", the French president considered that only a German commitment towards a European Monetary Union (the future Eurozone) would provide proof of Berlin's goodwill for carrying ahead with the European construction, Mitterrand hoping that a single currency would control the economic powerhouse that was to become the reunified Germany (Bozo, 2005). However, after the German reunification, with the *Bonner Republik* transforming itself into a *Berliner Republik* of 80 million citizens and an economic and industrial hegemon, what Stanley Hoffmann used to call "l'équilibre des déséquilibres" (Hoffmann, 1990, p. 504) between the political French partner, and the economic German one, soon transformed into a full-fledged unequal partnership, with Paris lagging behind Berlin. This unbalance would further accentuate after the Great Recession of 2008, with Germany slowly becoming the *de facto* leader of the European Union (Husson, 2019).

The second approach of multilateralism is grounded in the French diplomacy's postwar belief that multilateralism is a multiplier of France's influence on the world stage. In respect with the European construction, before the bilateral approach started by Pierre Mendès-France and Konrad Adenauer, then continued by De Gaulle and Adenauer from 1958, and later formalized by the Elysée Treaty, the reconciliation between the two countries ran through the multilateral framework proposed by the Schuman Declaration of May 1950 - that eventually lead to the Paris (1952) and Rome (1958) Treaties and the subsequent creation of the supranational European Steel and Coal Community and European Economic Communities. It was in this multilateral framework of Six (France, West Germany, Italy, and the Benelux countries) that their respective Christian-Democrat leaders, later to be known as the "the founding fathers" of Europe, envisioned a project to control the German steel industry by pooling together the Ruhr basin resources, in a multilateral

and supranational construction that was to become the European Steel and Carbon Community (Soutou, 2018).

Among the stakes of this construction, there was the desire to avoid a resurgence of nationalism in West Germany, by anchoring it in a multilateral economic framework under the French leadership. Another multilateral arrangement presented at the same time was the so-called Pleven Plan, named after the French Prime-Minister René Pleven, that advocated for the creation of European Defense Community (EDC) designed to reintegrate a remilitarized West Germany in a defense community under American leadership. However, the project of an EDC was torpedoed in a vote at the French National Assembly in 1954 by the Gaullist and Communist opposition (Soutou, 2018).

Throughout the Cold War, both during the Fourth and the Fifth French Republic, political leaders and diplomats saw multilateralism as a multiplier of France's influence in Europe and around the world (Treacher, 2001). After 1958, with the return in power of General Charles de Gaulle, who was a firm believer of the importance of Nation-State, Paris started to favor an intergovernmental approach toward the integration process as opposed to the previous supranational one. The Empty Chairs Crisis of 1965 prompted by De Gaulle's refusal to endorse proposals that would have granted more power to the European Commission eventually led to the Luxemburg Compromise of 1966 that further consolidated the Commission's intergovernmental nature. Later, in 1974, it was President Giscard d'Estaing who came with the idea of regular working reunions by the European heads of government to enhance cooperation and make significant progress towards more integration. Thus, the European Council was born as an indispensable instrument, a functioning compromise between an efficient executive and an intergovernmental institution. (Vaïsse, 2009). Over the decades, the French-German bilateralism transformed itself into an *embedded bilateralism*, meaning that once Paris and Berlin negotiated on a particular issue, the decision on that matter becomes multilateralised or communitarized for the rest of the Union - the other member states usually rallying up behind one country or another during the negotiations. (Lequesne, Schild, 2018).

However, the period that followed the Maastricht Treaty (1992), in the context of the growing unbalance between Paris and Berlin and the financial consequences of the Great Recession of 2008, ushered a series of missed opportunities of coordination between the two indispensable nations, concerning issues like further enlargement, a reform of the Eurozone, and a common defense policy (Stark, 2019). Despite Jacques Chirac and Gerhard Schröeder's similar stand on condemning the US-led military intervention in Iraq, their views on Europe were fraught with disagreement especially regarding the Common Agricultural Policy and the question of vote parity, eventually settled by the Nice Treaty (2002). Later, in the first years of Nicolas Sarkozy's term (2007-2012) the French president tried to establish a Franco-British relationship with Gordon Brown, but the 2008 recession forced him to return for further cooperation with Berlin, in what the media dubbed *Merkozy* (a portmanteau between Merkel and Sarkozy). A similar attempt was made by his Socialist successor François Hollande, this time towards fellow Socialist Italian PM Matteo Renzi, but the Greek crisis forced him as well to return to the French-German mode of function (Husson, 2019).

In this context, the former Economy Minister from Hollande's term, the young and promising Emmanuel Macron won the 2017 election against the far-right Eurosceptic Marine Le Pen, much to Berlin's relief, which feared the surge of an anti-European (and anti-Euro) populism, especially since the German political class itself was confronting with the surge of the Eurosceptic and anti-Euro party, *Alternative für Deutschland* (Stark, 2019). President Macron's election in May 2017 brought the promise of new impetus to move forward the European project from the stagnating former years.

Macron's Sorbonne Speech on the future of Europe

Unlike his predecessors, Sarkozy and Hollande, Macron turned towards Berlin right from the start of his term, as he displayed a strong voluntarism for reforming the European Union. He presented his vision for Europe in five carefully choreographed speeches in highly symbolic places like Athens (September 7th 2017), the Sorbonne (September 26th 2017), at the European

Parliament in Strasbourg (17th April 2018), at Aachen while receiving the Charlemagne Award (10th May 2018) and in Berlin in front of the Bundestag members (November 18th 2018). He also gave in 2020 a long foreign policy interview for *Le Grand Continent* magazine that was entitled by the editorial team as the "Macron Doctrine".

Of all his interventions, the speech he gave at the Sorbonne is the one that encapsulates the best his *Weltanschauung* on the European construction, where he underpins its past intellectual and cosmopolitan heritage and then espouses France's ambitious plans for institutional reform. The French president offered a bold new vision regarding the future of the European Union, speaking of the need to find its sovereignty through six essential keys - by choosing "the route of rebuilding a sovereign united and democratic Europe", to find a better standing in front of the XXI century challenges of globalization, as Europe risks to be sidelined by Atlantic and Asian Great Powers (Macron, 2017).

According to Macron, the first key in achieving sovereignty is the need of a European Army "ensuring Europe's autonomous operating capabilities, in complement to NATO […] by proposing a European intervention initiative aimed at developing a shared strategic culture". Moreover, Macron advocated the need for a "European Intelligence Academy to be created, to strengthen the ties between our countries through training and exchanges", together with a "European Public Prosecutor's Office for organized crime and terrorism, above and beyond the current competences that have just been established". Regarding the fight against climate change, an issue France is actively engaged through the Paris Agreement, the president expressed his intention of establishing "a European civil protection force, pooling our resources for rescue and intervention, thus enabling us to respond to disasters that are less and less natural: from fires to hurricanes, from floods to earthquakes" (Macron, 2017).

The second key needed for reaching European sovereignty was finding a working solution for the complex crisis of border-control and migration that caught Europe off guard in 2015. Macron laid out his intention on seeing in

future years "the adoption of the various texts that are being discussed for the reform of our migration policy. I would like a genuine European asylum office to be created that will speed up and harmonize our procedures" in conjunction with the creation of something "like a European border police force to gradually be put in place, to ensure rigorous management of borders across Europe and the return of those who cannot stay" (Macron, 2017).

Describing the third key needed for the European Union in attaining its sovereignty, Macron seemed to entangle France's interests with those of the EU by searching a common policy towards the Mediterranean and Africa, especially towards the Sahel region, where the French army is actively engaged with some 5100 troops deployed under the anti-insurgent and counter-terrorist Operation Barkhane - with the mission of fighting against Islamist terrorist groups that pose a threat to France or any other European country. Promoting Africa as a future partner for the EU, President Macron admitted that:

> "[i]n recent weeks, a few of us have sought to do so, constantly involving the European Union in the initiatives taken for Libya and for the Sahel. More generally, however, our European policy can no longer view Africa as a threatening neighbor, but as the strategic partner with which we need to confront tomorrow's challenges: youth employment, mobility, combating climate change, and technological revolutions".

Wary that even the most daring ideas need some solid backing anchored in financial realities, the French president suggested that these bold initiatives to be financially sustained by a "European financial transaction tax, in order to finance this policy", an idea flaunted before by his predecessors, both from the political Right and Left with little success (Macron, 2017).

The fourth key necessary in attaining sovereignty is the ecological transition, understood by him as "[t]his total transformation [that] is revolutionizing the way we produce, redistribute and behave" where the European nations are called to become "leaders of a new production model that will not only be a model for the economy, but also a model for society and civilization, enabling

a fresh perspective on inequalities and externalities of a society whose main victims of imbalances are the weakest and most vulnerable".

To achieve these highly ambitious goals, Macron suggested following the four goals of implementing a floor price, developing energy interconnections, drawing a regional transition contract, and adopting a border carbon tax. Moreover, by reforming the Common Agricultural Policy, the sacred cow of French agricultural interest in the EU, Macron proposed pursuing Europe's food sovereignty coupled with "promoting the major European agricultural transition and giving countries more flexibility in organizing their regions and sectors". Furthermore, to assure food safety and avoid double standards in food quality, as it was proved to happen in East-Central European countries, he advocated for "a European investigation and inspection force to tackle fraud, ensure food safety, and ensure compliance with quality standards throughout Europe" (Macron, 2017).

Regarding the fifth key for European sovereignty, Macron got to the issue of digital technology and proposed boosting research and development by creating an agency similar to the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) in the United States, defining a regulatory framework for the Digital Single market and more importantly establishing a digital tax on revenues or as he presented it "a fair tax because it taxes across countries the amount of value which is created in each, and simply recalls a fundamental element of our common and democratic philosophies: that there are common goods to be financed and that all economic actors must play their part", which basically amounted to positioning himself on a confrontational course with the GAFA companies from Silicon Valley.

Finally, the last but not the least key from Macron's ambitious program to reform the European Union is linked with the imperious need of reforming the Eurozone by proposing a fiscal union and a banking union, the creation of a finance ministry for the Eurozone, and transforming the role of the European Stability Mechanism by expanding its attributions to eventually convert itself into a European Monetary Fund (Macron, 2017).

French Views on a Concentric Europe

Despite Macron's new voluntarism on the European stage his visions were echoing traditional French stances regarding institutional changes of the EU, that Paris has been advocating ever since the Maastricht Treaty. For instance, the proposal for a banking and fiscal union was also made by his predecessors Hollande and Sarkozy and can be seen as part of France's decades-long call for a multi-speed Europe and differentiated integration in specific domains. This approach started in the 90s in the aftermath the fall of the Berlin Wall and had to do with the prospect of future enlargement towards the newly communist-free countries of East-Central Europe, and how that should be coordinated with a deepening of the European institutions to achieve a functioning union.

Moreover, the multi-speed Europe discourse evolved into a concentric vision of Europe embraced by the whole French political Establishment from Left to Right. It is true that the notion of a "core Europe" or *Kerneuropa* first appeared in a document written in 1994 by the German Christian Democrats Karl Lamers and Wolfgang Schäuble, in which they advocated for a federalist core Europe that could work as a magnet for new members (Martin, 2018). The French Prime Minister of the time, the center-right Edouard Balladur embraced the idea of a differentiated integration in the form of a concentric Europe, while rejecting the notion of federalism. As diplomat Claude Martin recalls in his memoir:

> "We were more flexible on the French side. We envisioned concentric circles, bringing together countries that were prepared to move to different degrees (not at all, a little, a lot) towards integration. The formulas seemed similar, but they did not necessarily bring together the same countries. The Germans saw an elitist, very northern Europe; we were for a proactive community, careful not to exclude the countries of the South" (Martin, 2018, p. 872).

It is also worth mentioning that after the fall of the Iron Curtain, the Socialist president François Mitterrand inadvertently confessed that Eastern European

countries would have to wait "dozens and dozens of years" before joining the EU (Le Monde, 1991) considering prematurely any sooner accession. More prudently, Balladur welcomed a future enlargement, but proposed a reform for an institutional organization along concentric circles, with different integration levels according to each country's capabilities (Le Monde, 1994). The idea remained popular with French leaders and technocrats, and their belief in such a new institutional architecture would be reenforced with each new enlargement. Nicolas Sarkozy, a former *protégé* of Balladur and one-term president of France, while running for a second term in office in 2014 advocated the same ideas as his mentor by proposing a three-speed Europe characterized among other things by "a large Franco-German economic area" and "the end of the Schengen Area" (Quatremer, 2014). Politicians from the Left were also enthusiasts about this idea, like Laurent Fabius, former Socialist Primer-Minister under Mitterrand, and Minister of Foreign Affairs under Hollande (Fabius, 2004).

However, one the most articulate presentations of a concentric Europe appeared again in 2014 and was presented by the national secretary of the center-right UMP, Vincent Le Biez, in the journal *Le Figaro*. Le Biez spoke about the need of a three circles Europe that would be comprised by a first tier composed by the original five founding members plus Spain, meaning a critical mass formed by the leading economies of the Eurozone that amount to almost 90% of the zone's GDP. This tier should become a full political union with one single representative at the World Bank, the G20 and the IMF, should have a budget of its own and be able to finance big Research and Development projects, hence becoming the economic locomotive of the European construction. A second tier should comprise the rest of Eurozone's economies united under a banking union, with the purpose of reinforcing solidarity and cooperation - this proposition making even more sense at that time in the context of the Greek debt crisis of 2015, when difficulties in rescuing Athens disarraying finances threw a glaring light on the Lisbon Treaty's failures to anticipate such challenges and provide the adequate framework. Hence, the scope of this banking union would be also one of promoting more coordinated economic policies through a Treasury

for the Eurozone that could offer macroeconomic predictions, and act like a European IMF by refinancing troubled economies, like those of Greece or other Mediterranean countries that might face similar financial turbulence.

A third circle would be formed by the rest of the remaining countries and should focus on transversal values like the rule of law and human rights, as there was the prevailing feeling among Western countries that the enlargement took place too early and rapidly, and Eastern countries failed to fully internalize them. This third tier should be like a limbo, an intermediate space, with projects funded by a Bank of Investments where neighboring countries like the United Kingdom, Russia or Turkey could be associated with institutions like the Council of Europe and its Human Rights Court and tackle issues like climate change, human rights, and promote the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (Le Biez, 2014).

In the following year, 2015, the presidential hopeful and then-Minister of Economy, Emmanuel Macron, also began mentioning the need of a two-speed Europe by saying that "one has to accept to make a two-speed Europe" with "a vanguard of the Eurozone with more solidarity and integration, a common budget, a common debt capacity and fiscal convergence" (Prissette, 2015). After his election in 2017, he further elaborated his early proposition in the above-mentioned Sorbonne speech by using the expression "multi-speed Europe", a hint at the concentric three-tier architecture similar to the one Vincent Le Biez proposed in 2014.

The ambitions for a European Defense

Regarding the proposal for a European Army, this was not a new idea - since efforts have been made before in the aftermath of the Second World War, firstly through the already mentioned Pleven Plan proposed by French Prime-Minister Rene Pleven, but largely written by Jean Monnet, to create a European Defense Community, an initiative that failed to pass the parliamentary vote in 1954. Secondly, other defense French initiatives came after the De Gaulle's return in power 1958, with a memorandum addressed to Washington and London for a *directoire* of powers within the Atlantic Alliance that failed

to gain interest, and then with the proposal of the so-called Fouchet Plan addressed to the original Six founding nations of the European Economic Community - to form a political and defense union that would exclude both the UK and the US. Unsurprisingly, the Fouchet Plan was rejected by the Netherlanders and the Belgians that feared a French leadership without an Anglo-American counterweight (Vaïsse, 2009).

After the Maastricht Treaty, another attempt for a Europe of Defense was made by Jacques Chirac and British Prime-Minister Tony Blair, with their 1998 St-Malo Declaration on Joint European Defense and supported by the US as long as it did not duplicate NATO missions. In the context of the Kosovo War, which ended the decade-long disintegration of Yugoslavia, EU's inability to intervene became a painful reminder that it lacked a military presence worthy of its ambitions. Therefore, since the Lisbon Treaty of 2007, the European Union now disposes of a Common Security and Defense Policy deploying both military and civilian mission (Vaïsse, 2009).

What Macron brought new in advocating his proposal was the argument of a coming new Cold War between the United States and China, where the EU will be caught between two rivaling powers and eventually forced to choose. Moreover, the French president was channeling once again De Gaulle's spirit, through a careful, yet sustained rapprochement towards Russia, out of a desire to signal further independence within NATO and perform a "Nixon in reverse" move, meaning decoupling Russia from China (Leonard, 2019). More than anything, one of Macron's most controversial statements was in an interview with *The Economist* in 2019 - when he said that "NATO is brain dead", a statement that drew criticism from the traditionally Atlanticist Eastern European countries. The controversies continued with the question of a strategically autonomous Europe, when in a 2020 interview for *Le Grand Continent* online magazine, Macron criticized an earlier tribune in *Politico* by Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer, the German minister of Defense, where she stated that "Europe needs the US" (Kramp-Karrenbauer, 2020). Macron called this idea a "historical counter sense" (Le Grand Continent, 2020), and in return the German minister of Defense, and at that time considered

Merkel's most likely successor, quickly responded to the French president saying that "[t]he idea of a strategic autonomy of Europe is going too far if it nurtures the illusion that we can guarantee security, stability and prosperity in Europe without NATO and without the United States" (Lawton, 2020).

The message the French president was trying to convey was that not always the United States' interests are similar with those of Europe and that is why the continent should pursue an autonomous strategy and build its own defense capabilities - to protect itself independently from security and terrorist threats, especially those located in the African Sahel region, where France was already involved in Operation Barkhane, a counter-insurgency intervention against terrorist groups (Hanne, 2017).

Despite the controversy on this issue, President Macron's proposal came to fruition with the creation in 2018 of the military project European Intervention Initiative (EI2) composed by the armed forces of 14 member states, twelve from EU countries together with those of Norway and the UK, while remaining open to other non-EU states willing to join (Maulny, 2019). That same year saw the creation of a Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) as part of the Common Security and Defense Policy with a legal base in article 42.2 from the Lisbon Treaty, which stipulated that "[t]he CSDP shall include the progressive framing of a common Union defense policy; this will lead to a common defense, when the European Council, acting unanimously, so decides" and in article 42.6 that mentions a "permanent structured cooperation" (Eur-Lex, 2015).

Unlike the Paris-sponsored EI2, PESCO is more bureaucratic, with a rigid mechanism acting in the legal framework of the Lisbon Treaty, and very inclusive with 25 members EU member states - except the United Kingdom and Denmark. The Berlin-sponsored PESCO envisions promoting mostly projects and cooperation and has broader focus dealing with military training, the harmonization of the military apparatuses, capability development, defense investment and planning (Koening, 2018). It plans to reinforce "EU's strategic autonomy to act alone when necessary and with partners whenever possible, or separably if required" (EASS, 2020).

On the other hand, Macron's EI2 project is more exclusive and open to non-EU countries, like the United Kingdom, a country that is the centerpiece of any functioning European defense structure due to the importance of the British navy, and with which France is bound in military cooperation through the 2010 Lancaster Agreements that continue despite UK's departure from the EU (Abécassis, Howorth, 2020). Unlike PESCO's broader focuses, the EI2 has narrower ones and is mainly seeking to enhance interaction in "strategic foresight and intelligence sharing, scenario development and planning and fostering a common strategic culture" (Koening, 2018).

In European affairs, Macron pursued the embedded bilateralism already established by his predecessors and, together with chancellor Angela Merkel, he further extended the French-German cooperation with the 2018 Meseberg Declaration - the next year, in 2019, with the Aachen (or Aix-la-Chapelle) Treaty. The Meseberg Declaration tried to bring further progress on the Eurozone despite diverging views on monetary policy, although some analysts saw it as insufficient. Continuing with his initial goals, Macron unsuccessfully pleaded for a Eurozone budget with a finance minister responsible in front of a Parliament. At the end of the negotiations, chancellor Merkel agreed to endorse a Eurozone budget from 2021, but of a more restrained dimension, hardly capable to sustain the macroeconomic policies of counter-cyclical support for countries hit by an asymmetrical shock (Lequesne, Schild, 2019). On the other hand, the chancellor imposed her idea of a new credit line for the European Stability Mechanism (ESM) destined to support countries with short-term individual conditional loans when dealing with the asymmetrical shock, in the foreseeable future enshrining these changes in EU law (Keller, 2018).

As for the 2019 Aachen Treaty, the two countries pledged further enhanced cooperation to create a French-German economic area using common rules and a common Economic and Financial Council for the bilateral alignment of their business and financial legislation. On defense and security issues, the new treaty does not bring substantial change, other than declaratory policies, but rather adds new subjects on their common agenda - like mutual support

in case of an armed attack on their respective territories, developing joint strategies to strengthen the European defense union, reinforced cooperation of French and German armed forces in view of a common security culture and joint deployments. Other subjects are related to setting up common defense programs, defining a common approach to armaments exports and making the French-German Defense and Security Council into a political steering body for cooperation on security issues (Kempin, Kunz, 2019).

Conclusions

President Macron's ideas on Europe are not necessarily new, since he is channeling much of De Gaulle's and his other predecessors' views, like those of Mitterrand, Sarkozy, and Hollande, on European defense issues and institutional reform. Nevertheless, he draws significant attention with his voluntarism and engaging willingness, making his personality subject to many analyses regarding the intellectual influences of his political thought and the formative experiences that built his *Weltanschauung* (Tertrais, 2021). There are observers that compare him with Valéry Giscard d'Estaing because of their many ideological and political resemblances (Husson, 2019), while others recognize his ambitions for change, together with an eloquence in conveying his ideas, but point out his fondness for showmanship with a penchant for buzzwords and less for strategy (Momtaz, 2020).

In his 2017 Sorbonne speech, he presented his bold plans for reforming the European Union by transforming it into a sovereign actor on the world stage in the context of the growing rivalry between the US and China, and by making it both strategically autonomous and more institutionally flexible. However, regardless the sources of his political conduct or his intellectual references, Emmanuel Macron is pursuing France's fundamental postwar European policy in seeing Europe as a multiplier of its international influence and projecting its geopolitical goals through those of the European Union.

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