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**Research Report**

## France's foreign and security policy under president Macron: The consequences for Franco-German cooperation

SWP Research Paper, No. 4/2021

**Provided in Cooperation with:**

Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (SWP), German Institute for International and Security Affairs, Berlin

*Suggested Citation:* Kempin, Ronja (Ed.) (2021) : France's foreign and security policy under president Macron: The consequences for Franco-German cooperation, SWP Research Paper, No. 4/2021, Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (SWP), Berlin, <https://doi.org/10.18449/2021RP04>

This Version is available at:

<https://hdl.handle.net/10419/253235>

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SWP Research Paper

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*Ronja Kempin (ed.)*

# France's Foreign and Security Policy under President Macron

The Consequences for Franco-German Cooperation



Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik  
German Institute for  
International and Security Affairs

SWP Research Paper 4  
May 2021, Berlin

- French President Emmanuel Macron has announced his goal of revitalising Franco-German relations and founding a “new partnership” between Paris and Berlin. However, in foreign and security policy, and in certain areas of his Europe policy, this aspiration has rarely been fulfilled.
- The main reasons are structural changes in international relations, which the French and German sides have reacted to differently. Paris is looking for new ways of preserving its autonomy in defence policy and of filling the strategic vacuum that has been created by the waning US interest in Europe and its periphery. Berlin emphasises the development of NATO and the EU as fundamental organisations for German foreign policy.
- Reconciling bilateral interests is also complicated by national solo efforts, indifference, and inadequate exchange of experience.
- The first precondition for intensifying bilateral cooperation is for Paris and Berlin to conduct a comprehensive review of the international conflict situation in their existing cooperation formats as regards foreign and security policy. The two governments need to discuss openly to what extent their national interests are concerned, and then determine concrete measures.
- Second, they must refrain from national solo efforts and be sensitive to the other’s pressure points in foreign, security and Europe policy. The Franco-German Parliamentary Assembly needs to urge the executive of both countries to fulfil the Élysée Treaty and the Aachen Treaty.
- The findings presented here will be complemented by case studies on Libya, the Common Security and Defence Policy, the Economic and Monetary Union, Russia, NATO, and Turkey.

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*Ronja Kempin (ed.)*

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SWP Research Paper 4  
May 2021, Berlin

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ISSN (Print) 2747-5123  
ISSN (Online) 1863-1053  
doi: 10.18449/2021RP04

*Translation by Tom Genrich*

(Updated English version of  
SWP-Studie 4/2021)

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## **France's Foreign and Security Policy under President Macron. The Consequences for Franco-German Cooperation**

French President Emmanuel Macron has announced that he wants to revitalise Franco-German relations and forge a “new partnership” between Paris and Berlin. In 2019 the two countries committed themselves in the Aachen Treaty to deepening cooperation in foreign, security and EU policy. However, four years after Macron's inauguration and two years after the conclusion of the Aachen Treaty, it is evident that this aspiration has rarely been realised in foreign and security policy and in certain areas of EU policy. On both sides of the Rhine, the German government's reticence is primarily held to be responsible for this. Too often, it is claimed, the government has not responded to proposals by the French president. Conversely, Berlin laments Macron's various solo efforts in foreign, security and EU policy, and his occasionally disruptive political style.

However, this collective research paper finds the main cause of the almost total lack of progress in furthering Franco-German cooperation to be the countries' differing interpretation and weighting of structural changes in international relations. The paper explores six case studies in which Germany was annoyed by its partner's policy under President Macron: France's attitude in Libya; France's reshaped policy on Russia; its confrontational relations with Turkey; its criticism of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO); its questioning of Franco-German proposals for developing the European Union's (EU) Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP); and its overt disparagement of Germany's policy within the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU). The findings of this research are as follows:

Since 2017 President Macron has imposed changes in the basic assumptions underpinning France's security and defence policy. These changed assumptions recognise that the US is withdrawing from Europe at a time when the French government's ability to act is limited. According to one of these assumptions, France can only remain effective within and via European political decision-making: Europe – which, for Macron, does not necessarily mean the EU – must be



enabled to decide its own fate independently. Otherwise, it will become a mere “bargaining chip” for the two superpowers USA and China.

In 2019 this changed view of international relations and of his own room for manoeuvre led the French president to reshape France’s relationship with Russia. Macron declared that NATO was politically “brain dead” since it was, in his opinion, not equipped to address key aspects of European security. Since quick and decisive action is impossible within the circle of 27 EU member states, Macron prioritised flexible goal-orientated formats over the expansion of the CSDP as long ago as September 2017. In particular, the heavy strain on its armed forces has forced France to join partnerships that are operationally orientated.

While Paris places great value on the structural changes in international relations and is under great pressure to adapt, Berlin’s primary aim is to develop NATO and the EU as fundamental organisations of its foreign and security policy. It is therefore becoming increasingly difficult to reconcile Germany’s and France’s interests.

Emmanuel Macron’s Turkey policy shows that he responds to geopolitical changes but also strives to re-establish the significance and rank of his country. The US withdrawal from Europe and the Middle East, and indifference among European states, has created a geostrategic vacuum. Macron has pointed out that regional powers know how to turn this vacuum to their advantage. Accordingly, France has energetically countered Turkey’s foreign policy since the summer of 2020. Simultaneously, however, Paris has defended its claim vis-à-vis Ankara to pre-eminence in the Middle East and (North) Africa.

Whenever French presidents have a marked sense of mission, it goes hand in hand with solo efforts in foreign and European policy. In those phases, France also strongly imposes its national interest. President Macron’s Libya policy, for example, is decisively influenced by his country’s special relations with the United Arab Emirates (UAE), with which Paris cooperates extensively on armaments. However, as the example of the EMU emphasises, even a mission-conscious president is subject to path dependence in certain areas. France’s economic model severely limits Macron’s ability to develop the EMU further. Since the global Covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated this issue, tensions are set to continue between Berlin and Paris concerning the expansion of the EMU.

Finally, the French president has tended not to incorporate Berlin’s recent experiences – for example, in dealing with Russia or Turkey – into his policy-making. This is not conducive to a new Franco-German partnership. France’s Russia policy since 2019 resembles Germany’s before 2014. Simultaneously, Macron has repeatedly been confronted with German political decisions that show little interest in key French political dossiers, such as Libya. Berlin should be asking itself whether it could have prevented or contained the civil war that broke out in Libya in 2019 by putting greater pressure on France.

There are two preconditions for intensifying bilateral cooperation in foreign, security and Europe policy:

- 1) Both at meetings of the Franco-German Defence and Security Council (DFVSR) and in the committees created to implement the Aachen Treaty, Paris and Berlin should conduct a complete review of the international conflict situation. They should openly discuss to what extent both are concerned with and interested in specific conflicts. In preparation, the two sides could use foreign and security policy information provided by the EU’s Single Intelligence Analysis Capacity (SIAC). Any jointly devised agenda should state clearly how France and Germany intend to contribute to solving crises and conflicts. The DFVSR could thus pave the way to a European Security Council.
- 2) This will require courage and an agreement on how to better gauge national solo efforts and indifference to the pressure points in the other’s foreign, security and Europe policy. The Franco-German Parliamentary Assembly has set itself the task of monitoring the application of the provisions contained in the Élysée and Aachen Treaties. Accordingly, it could publicly call on the executives of both countries to fulfil the agreements.

Ronja Kempin

# Introduction: France's Foreign and Security Policy under President Macron – Dissonances in Franco-German Cooperation

When Emmanuel Macron moved into the Élysée Palace on 14 May 2017, a new era in Franco-German relations seemed conceivable. During his presidential campaign, Macron had already reached out to the German government: the European Union (EU), he said, could only be rejuvenated by intensified cooperation between Paris and Berlin.<sup>1</sup> Two days after the elections to the 19<sup>th</sup> German Bundestag in a keynote address on Europe given at the Sorbonne, he made “first of all [...] the proposal to Germany for a new partnership” and emphasised:

“We will not agree on everything, or straightaway, but we will discuss everything. To those who say that is an impossible task, I reply: you may be used to giving up; I am not. To those who say it is too difficult, I say: think of Robert Schuman five years after a war, from which the blood was barely dry.”<sup>2</sup>

## Bilateral Cooperation in Times of Crisis

Recently the French president openly courted Berlin in February 2020. At the Munich Security Conference, he warned of the lack of bilateral cooperation: “We need more commonalities at the heart of Europe. A heart that works much more towards integration

than today.”<sup>3</sup> It was clear at the time on both sides of the Rhine that Berlin and Paris had so far failed to forge a “new partnership”. German media and politicians of all parties blamed the mediocre level of Franco-German cooperation on Chancellor Angela Merkel and her government. Merkel has been criticised since autumn 2018 for not responding to the proposals and appeals contained in Macron's Sorbonne speech on Europe. The French president himself has been publicly fuelling this criticism since summer 2019: for instance in calling on Germany and France to give clear answers to Europe's current problems, or in lamenting that Franco-German relations could be characterised as a “history of waiting for answers”.<sup>4</sup> That the relationship between Paris and Berlin is rather difficult at the moment can be read between the lines in Macron's warnings that the failure of relations between the two countries would be a “historic mistake”.<sup>5</sup>

There have certainly been joint successes, above all the “Franco-German initiative for European recovery from the coronavirus crisis”;<sup>6</sup> efforts to steer a common course on key issues for the future – climate,

1 En marche!, “Présentation du programme – Discours d'Emmanuel Macron”, Pavillon Gabriel, Paris, 2 March 2017, <https://en-marche.fr/articles/discours/emmanuel-macron-presentation-du-programme-discours> (accessed 7 December 2020).

2 Élysée Palace, “Speech on New Initiative for Europe”. <https://www.elysee.fr/en/emmanuel-macron/2017/09/26/president-macron-gives-speech-on-new-initiative-for-europe> (accessed 5 May 2021).

3 Cornelia Schiemenz, “Macron bei MSC [Munich Security Conference]: ‘Ich bin nicht frustriert, ich bin vielleicht ungeduldig’”, *ZDF Nachrichten*, 15 February 2020, <https://www.zdf.de/nachrichten/politik/macron-msc-muenchener-sicherheitskonferenz-100.html> (accessed 18 May 2020).

4 “‘Ich bin ungeduldig’. Macron will endlich Antworten von Deutschen”, *ntv*, 15 February 2020, <https://www.n-tv.de/politik/Macron-will-endlich-Antworten-von-Deutschen-article-21579247.html> (accessed 7 December 2020).

5 Schiemenz, “Macron bei MSC” (see note 3).

6 German Government, “‘Eine außergewöhnliche, einmalige Kraftanstrengung’, Fragen und Antworten zur deutsch-französischen Initiative”, 27 May 2020, <https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-de/aktuelles/wiederaufbauprogramm-europa-1755280> (accessed 7 December 2020).

environment and digitalisation;<sup>7</sup> or the conclusion of the EU-China investment agreement. However, all too often, these are followed by sharp exchanges. In November 2020, for instance, German Defence Minister Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer and the French president vocally disagreed on the necessity of “strategic autonomy” for the EU.<sup>8</sup>

## France’s Solo Efforts

Tensions between Berlin and Paris, however, have not only been exacerbated by a lack of German responsiveness. Under President Macron, France has taken several foreign and security policy decisions that have surprised or annoyed Berlin: at times, Germany felt that it had not been informed; at others, no compromise could be found because France’s actions ran counter to German policy; yet others suggest that Paris seems to have chosen a deliberately disruptive path. In chronological order, this applies to:

- *Libya*: In July 2017 President Macron met with the renegade General Haftar, thus making him socially acceptable on the international stage. Instead of convincing Haftar to work out a compromise with the internationally recognised unity government in Tripoli, France’s attitude ultimately encouraged him to attack Tripoli in April 2019, launching a new civil war.
- *EU Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP)*: In July 2017 Berlin and Paris made a breakthrough in establishing a Permanent Structured Cooperation. In September of the same year, President Macron

seemed to distance himself from this consensus by proposing a European Intervention Initiative. Since November 2018 this project has been pursued outside the EU framework. Two years later, the Franco-German dispute over Europe’s strategic autonomy was rekindled.

- *Economic and Monetary Union (EMU)/Eurozone*: Since summer 2019, Macron has ratcheted up his criticism of Germany’s stance on the eurozone. He has repeatedly called for EU financial regulations to be discarded. For him, the debt ceiling of 3 percent of GDP is a debate that “belongs in the past century”. He described Germany’s role in the eurozone as follows: “They [the Germans] are the big winners of the eurozone, including of its dysfunctions.” The “German system” had to recognise, he claimed, that the situation was “not sustainable”.<sup>9</sup>
- *Russia*: In August 2019, President Macron called on his country’s ambassadors to rethink France’s relations with Russia, describing the prevailing distance to Moscow as a strategic error. In a changing international environment, he said, Europe could not afford conflict-laden relations with Russia. Instead, he wanted the EU to be open towards its neighbouring country as a strategic alternative to China.<sup>10</sup>
- *NATO*: The French government’s reshaped Russia policy was (and is) the more important because of Emmanuel Macron’s declaration in November 2019 that NATO was “brain dead”.<sup>11</sup> He criticised the US and Turkey, both fellow NATO members, for acting in Syria without prior accord with their partners,

7 Claire Stam and Philipp Grüll, “Deutscher Botschafter in Paris: Wir erleben einen ‘Moment Franco-Allemand’”, *Euractiv.de*, 7 December 2020, <https://www.euractiv.de/section/eu-aussenpolitik/interview/deutscher-botschafter-in-paris-wir-erleben-einen-moment-franco-allemand/> (accessed 7 December 2020).

8 In a newspaper article, the German defence minister called for “[i]llusions of European strategic autonomy [to] come to an end.” The French president countered: “I profoundly disagree, for instance, with the opinion piece signed by the German minister of defence in *Politico*. I think it is a misinterpretation of history.” For an analysis of the controversy, see Markus Kaim and Ronja Kempin, *Strategische Autonomie Europas: Das deutsch-französische Missverständnis*, Kurz gesagt (Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, 30 November 2020), <https://www.swp-berlin.org/publikation/strategische-autonomie-europas-das-deutsch-franzoesische-missverstaendnis/> (accessed 7 December 2020).

9 “Emmanuel Macron in His Own Words (English). The French President’s Interview with *The Economist*”, *The Economist*, 7 November 2019, <https://www.economist.com/europe/2019/11/07/emmanuel-macron-in-his-own-words-english> (accessed 19 May 2020).

10 Élysée Palace, “Discours du Président de la République Emmanuel Macron à la conférence des ambassadeurs et des ambassadrices de 2019”, Paris, 27 August 2019, <https://www.elysee.fr/emmanuel-macron/2019/08/27/discours-du-president-de-la-republique-a-la-conference-des-ambassadeurs-1> (accessed 19 May 2020); Liana Fix, “Europas Chefunruhestifter”, *ipg-journal* [Internationale Politik und Gesellschaft], 30 January 2020, <https://www.ipg-journal.de/regionen/europa/artikel/detail/europas-chefunruhestifter-4034/> (accessed 19 May 2020).

11 The interview was published on 7 November 2019 under the title “Emmanuel Macron in His Own Words (English). The French President’s Interview with *The Economist*” (see note 9).

even though the latter's (national) interests were at stake. Days earlier Macron had already snubbed his NATO partners with a letter to Russian President Vladimir Putin, offering to examine the Russian proposal of a moratorium on stationing nuclear short and medium-range missiles – a moratorium which NATO had already categorised as not credible. The context was the expiry of the treaty banning land-based medium range missiles (INF Treaty) in August 2019. Russia, Macron claimed, now had to be included in deliberations on Europe's new security architecture.<sup>12</sup>

- *Turkey*: In summer 2020, France took sides in the Eastern Mediterranean by conducting joint military manoeuvres with Cyprus and Greece. Macron demanded that his EU partners deal “clearly and decisively with the government of President Erdoğan, whose actions today are unacceptable”.<sup>13</sup> He added that he would be voting against the planned customs union between the EU and Turkey.<sup>14</sup>

## Issues and Structure of the Research Paper

How can France's foreign, security and Europe policy under President Macron be explained? Why does it markedly differ from German political decisions on key issues – even though the two countries are politically more closely linked than any other pair of states in international relations?<sup>15</sup>

<sup>12</sup> In late November 2019 Emmanuel Macron emphasised after a meeting with NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg: “However, we believed that it [the Russian offer of a moratorium] should not be dismissed outright as a basis for discussions.” See Michaela Wiegel, “Macron steht zu Brief an Russland”, *FAZ.net*, 28 November 2019, <https://www.faz.net/aktuell/politik/ausland/gegen-linie-der-nato-macron-steht-zu-brief-an-russland-16508507.html> (accessed 19 May 2020).

<sup>13</sup> “‘La Turquie n’est plus un partenaire en Méditerranée orientale’, dit Macron”, *Reuters*, 10 September 2020, <https://fr.reuters.com/article/france-turquie-macron-idFRKBN2611JJ> (accessed 23 September 2020).

<sup>14</sup> “La France veut proposer de supprimer l’union douanière entre l’UE [Union européenne] et la Turquie”, *Europe 1*, 9 November 2020, <https://www.europe1.fr/politique/diplomatie-macron-veut-supprimer-lunion-douaniere-entre-lunion-europeenne-et-la-turquie-4004339> (accessed 23 November 2020).

<sup>15</sup> In 2017 President Macron appointed numerous experts on Germany to his first cabinet. Prime Minister Édouard Philippe (2017–2020) obtained his Abitur at the Franco-

This research paper argues that Berlin and Paris have different perceptions and evaluations of the structural changes in international relations. The fundamental question it asks is therefore: *what structural changes in international relations does France perceive, and how does it evaluate them?*

To provide an answer, the case studies proceed in three analytical steps. First, they outline the important differences between Berlin and Paris in the respective policy areas. Second, they explore the structural changes, investigating whether, and to what extent, they can explain Macron's foreign, security and European policy. Counterfactually, they verify whether other motives might explain France's policies. Finally, the authors gauge the consequences on Franco-German cooperation that arise from their respective analyses.

This research paper deliberately forgoes studying the institutional aspect of Franco-German relations. It will not establish which committee knew at which point in time what the other government's political intentions were. Its authors believe that since Berlin and Paris have been unable to reconcile their interests on fundamental issues in European and international policy in recent years, Germany and France have not sufficiently discussed the altered structures in the international environment. This research paper aims to provide an impetus for this by providing a comprehensive analysis and evaluation of France's foreign, security and European policy under President Macron.

German secondary school in Bonn in 1988, where his father was headmaster for several years. Macron's Minister of Finance and the Economy Bruno Le Maire had been secretary of state for Europe at the foreign ministry and chargé d'affaires for Franco-German cooperation (2008-2009) during Nicolas Sarkozy's presidency, and Germany consultant for the conservative presidential candidate François Fillon (2016–2017). Philippe Étienne was French ambassador to Germany when Emmanuel Macron appointed him as his diplomatic consultant. He is now France's ambassador to Washington. Étienne's predecessor in Berlin, Maurice Gourdault-Montagne, was promoted by Macron to general secretary of the French foreign ministry (2017–2019).

Claudia Major

# France's Security and Defence Policy under President Macron – Pragmatic, Ambitious, Disruptive

The current French security and defence policy is characterised by certain core assumptions and objectives, which affect all case studies explored in this study.

France's security and defence policy has traditionally been challenging for Germany in terms of both content and form. France has a different interpretation of national interest, cooperation formats, and the use of military force. It is also more outspoken about its views and preferences than Berlin. Since President Macron took office in 2017 these differences have intensified, as have, as a consequence, misunderstandings and misgivings on both sides. Today, the bilateral relationship is tense in key security policy areas – ranging from NATO to European defence, industrial cooperation and country-specific dossiers. Both partners certainly seem to be aware that cooperation is necessary. Yet, structural differences complicate their cooperation and slow down progress in implementing common goals.

## Core Assumptions of French Security Policy under Macron

In recent years several core assumptions underpinning France's security and defence policy have changed. This shift had begun before Macron's presidency, but has since been driven forwards and codified in official writings, for instance in the 2017 *Revue stratégique*,<sup>1</sup> its 2021 update,<sup>2</sup> and articles and

speeches by government officials. Macron has further developed his world view in interviews and speeches.<sup>3</sup>

presentation/evenements/actualisation-strategique-2021 (accessed 9 March 2021).

<sup>3</sup> See especially French Embassy in Berlin, "Initiative für Europa – Die Rede von Staatspräsident Macron im Wortlaut", Sorbonne University, Paris, 26 September 2017, [https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/macron\\_sorbonne\\_europe\\_integral\\_cle4e8d46.pdf](https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/macron_sorbonne_europe_integral_cle4e8d46.pdf) (accessed 5 November 2020); President's Office, "Discours du Président de la République à la conférence des ambassadeurs", Paris, 27 August 2019, <https://www.elysee.fr/emmanuel-macron/2019/08/27/discours-du-president-de-la-republique-a-la-conference-des-ambassadeurs-1> (accessed 5 November 2020); "Transcript: Emmanuel Macron in His Own Words (French)", *The Economist*, 7 November 2019, <https://www.economist.com/europe/2019/11/07/emmanuel-macron-in-his-own-words-french> (accessed 5 November 2020); "The Macron Doctrine: A Conversation with the French President", *Le Grand Continent* (Paris), 16 November 2020, <https://geopolitique.eu/en/macron-grand-continent> (accessed 5 November 2020); the speech by Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian in Prague in 2019: "Intervention de Jean-Yves Le Drian, ministre de l'Europe et des Affaires étrangères, au colloque 'Au-delà de 1989: Espoirs et désillusions après les révolutions'", Prague, 6 December 2019, <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/fr/dossiers-pays/republique-tcheque/evenements/article/intervention-de-jean-yves-le-drian-ministre-de-l-europe-et-des-affaires> (accessed 5 November 2020); and in Bratislava in 2020: French Europe and Foreign Affairs Ministry, "'GLOBSEC 2020 Bratislava Forum' – Speech by Jean-Yves Le Drian", Bratislava, 8 October 2020, <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/our-ministers/jean-yves-le-drian/speeches/article/speech-by-jean-yves-le-drian-in-bratislava-globsec-2020-bratislava-forum-08-oct> (accessed 5 November 2020); and Philippe Etienne, *A View from the Élysée: France's Role in the World* (London: Chatham House – The Royal Institute of International Affairs, September 2018), <https://chathamhouse.soutron.net/Portal/DownloadImageFile.ashx?objectId=1707> (accessed 5 November 2020); Clément Beaune, "Covid-19: À bas la mondialisation, Vive l'Europe? Un monde

<sup>1</sup> French Defence Ministry, *Revue stratégique de défense et de sécurité nationale 2017* (Paris, 4 December 2017), <https://www.defense.gouv.fr/content/download/514684/8664656/file/2017-RS-def1018.pdf> (accessed 5 November 2020).

<sup>2</sup> French Defence Ministry, *Actualisation stratégique 2021*, 10 February 2021, <https://www.defense.gouv.fr/dgris/>

This has led to an approach which is coherent from the French perspective in theory, but it seems not always adhered to in practice. Simultaneously, several of France's partners (including Germany) find it hard to overcome cherished preconceptions of French politics. This leads to misinterpretations and complicates cooperation.

### **For Paris, Brexit and Trump's election victory in 2016 were not accidents but the results of a structural transformation.**

From the French perspective, the framework and conditions for European and global security and defence policy have fundamentally changed: the liberal world order that prevailed after the end of the Cold War, and which was marked by multilateral institutions, alliances, and free trade, is increasingly being challenged, even inside European democracies.<sup>4</sup> From this vantage point, events such as Donald Trump's 2016 election victory or Brexit were not exceptions or accidents, but rather examples and consequences of structural transformation processes, to which France and Europe must respond. France considers its own ability to act as limited, especially when it comes to shaping an international order that is increasingly characterised by Sino-US rivalry, systemic conflicts, and a changed US leadership. Paris considers that only the European level can offer the framework for a meaningful capacity to act. This is why French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian called on European countries to "to rediscover the thread of our European ambitions, overcoming the narcissism of our small differences".<sup>5</sup> For Paris, this is an extremely urgent matter; accordingly, Le Drian warned that "we face a very clear choice: we must

emerge from the withdrawal in which we have lived for too long, or be swept out of our own History."<sup>6</sup>

Despite these urgent warnings, it appears to France as though its European partners do not want to acknowledge their own strategic weakness in an increasingly power-based world — or at least hesitate to draw the necessary consequences. For France, the answer is European sovereignty. It describes an overarching and coherent vision for Europe as an actor who defends its objectives in the political, technological, the economic, digital and military realms in a more outspoken way actively shapes its environment, and acts with more self-confidence.<sup>7</sup> Paris is convinced "that our world interests will be best defended and our values better promoted by a more united and sovereign Europe".<sup>8</sup>

### **European Sovereignty as Key Concept**

European autonomy and sovereignty are not new ideas; they were already part of previous French official documents. However, President Macron and government officials, especially Foreign Minister Le Drian and Defence Minister Florence Parly, have expressed them more vocally and have steadily spelled them out in more detail.<sup>9</sup> According to Macron, autonomy means "that we choose our own rules for ourselves."<sup>10</sup> By contrast, European sovereignty would be a notably higher level of capacity to act. It would assume the existence of "a fully established European political power" and require Europe to actually be an autonomous actor. In autumn 2020, Macron admitted that Europe was still a long way from that status and that the term "sovereignty" was therefore "excessive".<sup>11</sup>

6 Ibid.

7 See, e.g., "Emmanuel Macron in His Own Words" (see note 3); "The Macron Doctrine" (see note 3).

8 Etienne, *A View from the Élysée* (see note 3).

9 French President's Office, "Discours du Président Emmanuel Macron sur la stratégie de défense et de dissuasion devant les stagiaires de la 27ème promotion de l'École de guerre", Paris, 7 February 2020, <https://www.elysee.fr/front/pdf/elysee-module-15162-fr.pdf> (accessed 5 November 2020); "Emmanuel Macron in His Own Words" (see note 3).

10 "The Macron Doctrine" (see note 3).

11 "It is a term that is a bit excessive, I admit, because if there were European sovereignty, there would be a fully established European political power in place. We are not there yet. [...] If we wanted European sovereignty, we would undoubtedly need European leaders fully elected by the

de villes", *Politique Étrangère* (online) 3 (2020): 8–29, [https://www.ifri.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/leurope\\_par\\_dela\\_le\\_covid19.pdf](https://www.ifri.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/leurope_par_dela_le_covid19.pdf); "Déclaration de Mme Florence Parly, ministre des armées, sur la France et l'OTAN", Paris, 18 October 2018, <https://www.vie-publique.fr/discours/206937-declaration-de-mme-florence-parly-ministre-des-armees-sur-la-france-et> (accessed 5 November 2020).

4 "Emmanuel Macron in His Own Words" (see note 3); "The Macron Doctrine" (see note 3).

5 French Europe and Foreign Affairs Ministry, "'GLOBSEC 2020 Bratislava Forum' — Speech by Jean-Yves Le Drian" (see note 3).

A rather new French concern is that Europe in the context of Sino-US rivalry is increasingly outclassed and reduced to a mere bargaining chip (“Europe is on the menu but not at the table”). France is certainly worried about the prospect of the US reducing its security commitments in Europe. What it fears even more, however, is that Europe could become the plaything of conflicting interests without being able to pursue its own political interests and shape its own environment. Macron thus stressed the necessity of “conceiving the terms of European sovereignty and strategic autonomy, so that we can have our own say and not become the vassal of this or that power and no longer have a say”.<sup>12</sup>

One leitmotif is thus that Europe’s fate should be decided in Europe by Europeans. One example for this approach is the French position with regard to the negotiations on potential formats to follow the Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty. For Paris, Europe should play a bigger role in such talks, rather than leaving them to the US and Russia, because, after all, it is Europe which is within reach of these weapons.

Yet, Paris discerns little interest among its European partners in pursuing such ideas beyond the rhetorical level, nor at the proposed speed. France therefore concludes that, where necessary, it may have to act alone or in a deliberately disruptive way so as to inspire action among other Europeans.<sup>13</sup>

A look at France’s current security and defence policy reveals a number of characteristic elements:

*The relativisation of the EU as a normative priority:* The European Union remains a key element, but particularly as regards defence, France has traditionally focussed more on Europe than on the EU. Brexit has consolidated this tendency. This is obvious, for instance, in the 2017 *Revue stratégique* – a sort of white paper lite – that President Macron quickly launched after taking office.<sup>14</sup> It distinguishes between “European cooperation” and “EU cooperation”. This is not meant as a critique of the EU per se, but as a quest to find the best framework for an effective capacity to act. A larger understanding of Europe, going beyond the EU, is meant to help in this endeavour. Yet, this perspective is particularly challenging for Germany.

European people. This sovereignty is therefore, if I may say so, transitive”: “The Macron Doctrine” (see note 3).

<sup>12</sup> “The Macron Doctrine” (see note 3).

<sup>13</sup> See Ronja Kempin’s contribution on the CSDP, pp. 21ff.

<sup>14</sup> French Defence Ministry, *Revue stratégique* (see note 1).

This is closely linked to a *pragmatic and flexible approach* to institutions, formats, partners, and possibilities for influence, up to and including unilateral approaches. There is no automatic preference for the EU; rather, formats and partners are defined in terms of the problem to be solved: the mission defines the format.<sup>15</sup> On a case-by-case basis, these can be the EU, a coalition of the willing, or NATO. The best example of this result-orientated approach is the European Intervention Initiative, founded in 2017, which Paris deliberately located outside EU institutions.<sup>16</sup> This, however, runs the risk of weakening the EU in order to strengthen France’s and Europe’s capacity to act.

Unlike Germany, France does not believe in the inherent utility of institutions, but rather in using them flexibly in situations for which they are best suited.<sup>17</sup> Thus, the European Commission can be well suited to screening Chinese investments, but might be less able to steer defence cooperation. From the French perspective, the E3 format (France, Germany, the UK) is an important instrument in security policy. Flexible mini-lateralism is a leitmotif. Paris views this as supporting – not competing with – institutions such as the EU and NATO, and as a means for Europe to develop autonomous abilities – both for European goals and to support France when it takes on tasks for Europe, such as fighting terrorism in Africa.<sup>18</sup> This

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.; Christian Mölling and Claudia Major, *Pragmatisch und europäisch: Frankreich setzt neue Ziele in der Verteidigungspolitik* (Berlin: Deutsche Gesellschaft für Auswärtige Politik [DGAP], October 2017), <https://dgap.org/de/forschung/publikationen/pragmatisch-und-europaeisch> (accessed 5 November 2020).

<sup>16</sup> Maike Kahlert and Claudia Major, *Frankreichs Europäische Interventionsinitiative (EI2): Fakten, Kritik und Perspektiven*, Forschungsgruppe Sicherheitspolitik, Arbeitspapier no. 01 (Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, June 2019), [https://www.swp-berlin.org/fileadmin/contents/products/arbeitspapiere/Major\\_Kahlert\\_Arbeitspapier\\_01072019.pdf](https://www.swp-berlin.org/fileadmin/contents/products/arbeitspapiere/Major_Kahlert_Arbeitspapier_01072019.pdf) (accessed 5 November 2020); Claudia Major and Christian Mölling, *France Moves from EU Defense to European Defense* (Brussels: Carnegie Europe, December 2017), <https://carnegie-europe.eu/strategieurope/74944> (accessed 5 November 2020).

<sup>17</sup> See the contributions by Ronja Kempin on the CSDP, pp. 21ff, and by Claudia Major on France’s NATO policy, pp. 35ff.

<sup>18</sup> Alice Pannier, “Between Autonomy and Cooperation: The Role of Allies in France’s New Defense Strategy”, *War on the Rocks* (online), 2 November 2017, <https://warontherocks.com/2017/11/between-autonomy-and-cooperation-the-role-of-allies-in-frances-new-defense-strategy/> (accessed 5 November 2020).

flexibility includes unilateral approaches for whenever France considers its European partners' reactions too slow or non-existent, yet believes that a response is required.<sup>19</sup>

*Overcoming dichotomies:* With this flexibility in mind, France wants to overcome traditional dichotomies and perhaps construed opposites so as to better pursue its objectives. Instead of getting caught up in debates, such as “for or against Russia”, Paris considers this black-and-white thinking to be obsolete. Consequently, it can back Belarus's efforts to establish a democracy and yet also attempt to launch a dialogue with Moscow. This mirrors Macron's approach of overcoming the traditional dividing lines of French party politics. Yet, because of insufficient or no prior coordination, this behaviour regularly irritates his European partners, thereby undermining the potential success of such initiatives.

*Cautious acceptance of the necessity of cooperation:* Even though France insists on its right to act alone if absolutely necessary, it also recognises that its own capabilities are increasingly limited, that some objectives require cooperation, and that this can create dependencies.<sup>20</sup> This concerns operations and military capabilities but also industrial cooperation. However, accepting the limits of its national ability to act remains controversial in France, and cooperating with partners is often difficult in practice.<sup>21</sup> Depending on the range of topics, the balance between a national and a cooperative approach is then adjusted accordingly.

*Focus on practice and operations:* In the past, debates about how to forge a European strategic culture mainly focused on doing so by developing joint European or bilateral strategy papers. France has now shifted that focus onto practical joint operational experiences as a catalyst for European defence. For Paris, European sovereignty and strategic culture result from joint operations in the field, rather than

from drafting a white book or building new institutions.

## Structural Differences Complicate Franco-German Cooperation

These altered core assumptions irritate the German government since they run counter to several of its own assumptions. This is the case, for instance, with flexibility in formats and the focus on operations. The characteristics of France's political system, which are well-known but have stood out starkly during Macron's mandate, further complicate bilateral cooperation. In other words, not only the contents but also the processes of French political decision-making strain cooperation with partners. The most important bilateral differences remain strategic culture, the role of industry, and administrative traditions.<sup>22</sup>

Under Macron, a prominent factor is the large amount of power that the French constitution traditionally accords the president in shaping foreign, security and defence policy, and as the chief of the armed forces. Macron has interpreted these constitutional provisions in a traditional way, in the sense of a clear and powerful presidential “*domaine réservé*”. Accordingly, the ministries' main duty is to implement the president's decisions.<sup>23</sup> Macron has been defending French interests more explicitly and is readier for conflict than his predecessors, especially vis-à-vis Germany.<sup>24</sup> The French system tends to adapt to the president's decisions, rather than steer them. There is neither a systemic counterweight nor a controlling body for the president's comprehensive power.

2020); Claudia Major and Christian Mölling, *France Moves from EU Defense to European Defense* (Brussels: Carnegie Europe, December 2017), <https://carnegieeurope.eu/strategieurope/74944> (accessed 5 November 2020).

19 See the contribution by Ronja Kempin on France's Turkey policy, pp. 42ff.

20 French Defence Ministry, *Revue stratégique* (see note 1).

21 See, e.g., Claudia Major and Christian Mölling, “Europas Kampfflugzeug der Zukunft schmiert ab”, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (online), 30 September 2020, <https://www.faz.net/aktuell/politik/fcas-das-kampfflugzeug-der-zukunft-schmiert-ab-16978609.html> (accessed 5 November 2020).

22 See, e.g., Alexandre Escorcica and Sebastian Groth, “More Romance Wouldn't Hurt – A Look into the Engine Room of German-French Relations”, *Berlin Policy Journal*, 9 January 2019, <https://berlinpolicyjournal.com/more-romance-wouldnt-hurt/> (accessed 5 November 2020); Christian Mölling and Jean-Pierre Maulny, *Consent, Dissent, Misunderstandings: The Problem Landscape of Franco-German Defense Industrial Cooperation*, Analysis (Berlin: DGAP, 14 January 2020), <https://dgap.org/en/research/publications/consent-dissent-misunderstandings> (accessed 5 November 2020).

23 See the contributions by Wolfram Lacher on Macron's Libya policy, pp. 15ff., and Susan Stewart on Macron's Russia policy, pp. 31ff.

24 See the contribution by Paweł Tokarski on Macron's eurozone policy, pp. 26ff.



**Macron takes decisions quickly and largely independently – even, where necessary, in opposition to his partners.**

This makes cooperation with partners such as Germany more difficult on several levels. In Germany, for example, individual ministries have more competencies than their French counterparts. The power of heads of states or government in other European NATO or EU countries pales in comparison to the far-reaching decision-making competencies of the French president. The German chancellor cannot take decisions unilaterally and have them implemented to the same extent. This also means that it is not enough for Macron to convince Chancellor Merkel to share his objectives – rather, other political actors in Germany, especially the Bundestag, also have to be won over for cooperation to work properly. Under Macron, the well-known differences between the French presidential system and the German parliamentary one – the one centralising, the other federal – have clashed particularly strongly. Macron can decide quickly and largely independently, and does so whenever he deems it necessary, even if that means openly opposing European partners, for instance regarding Libya or Russia.

This is another characteristic feature of Macron's presidency. Paris feels that the current international challenges make timely action critically important, yet other Europeans are slow to respond. Macron claims the right to behave disruptively if necessary, for instance in his harsh criticism of NATO, which he described as "brain dead" in 2019.<sup>25</sup> This corresponds to his approach of *rupture* with traditional ways of behaviour, which he had successfully promoted during his 2017 presidential campaign.

Still, such behaviour estranges Macron's European partners, including Germany. This is especially the case when he acts with no or only belated coordination, or without sufficient proposals for implementation, as was the case when he announced his Russia initiative.<sup>26</sup> This reinforces the impression, which is especially prevalent in Central and Eastern Europe, that France pretends to speak *for* Europe but forgot to speak *with* Europe first, and does so without man-

date.<sup>27</sup> Concerns over French approaches potentially contradicting European positions grow accordingly. An example is Macron's favourable reply to Putin's proposal of an INF moratorium in late 2019, which the other NATO allies had rejected.<sup>28</sup>

From a German perspective, the overall picture that emerges of Berlin's close partner France is therefore ambivalent. On the one hand, it is one of the few European countries to have developed an impressive and comprehensive concept for Europe's future foreign, security and defence policy.

On the other hand, Paris regularly irritates Germany and other European countries with its high demands, unilateral approaches and proposals that are perceived as provocative, sometimes overwhelming, thus making joint approaches more difficult.

<sup>25</sup> See Claudia Major's contribution on France's NATO policy, pp. 35ff.

<sup>26</sup> See Susan Stewart's contribution on Macron's Russia policy, pp. 31ff.

<sup>27</sup> Gustav Gressel, Kadri Liik, Jeremy Shapiro and Tara Varma, *Emmanuel Macron's Very Big Idea on Russia*, ECFR Commentary (European Council on Foreign Relations, 25 September 2019), [https://ecfr.eu/article/commentary\\_emmanuel\\_macrons\\_very\\_big\\_idea\\_on\\_russia/](https://ecfr.eu/article/commentary_emmanuel_macrons_very_big_idea_on_russia/) (accessed 11 December 2020); Romain Le Quiniou, *Mission Unaccomplished: France's Monsieur Macron Visits the Baltics*, London: Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security Studies, 9 October 2020 (RUSI Commentary), <https://rusi.org/commentary/mission-unaccomplished-france-monsieur-macron-visits-baltics> (accessed 11 December 2020).

<sup>28</sup> Lorenz Hemicker and Michaela Wiegel, "Macron kommt Russland bei Atomraketen entgegen", *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (online), 27 November 2019, <https://www.faz.net/aktuell/politik/ausland/macron-will-putins-angebot-fuer-raketen-moratorium-pruefen-16506811.html> (accessed 11 December 2020).

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## Macron as a Spoiler in Libya

Two aspects have marked Emmanuel Macron's Libya policy thus far: short-lived unilateral initiatives that have complicated the work of United Nations (UN) mediators; and cooperation with the United Arab Emirates (UAE) in the ultimately failed attempt to facilitate militia leader Khalifa Haftar's ascension by force. In a situation where the USA failed to assert its leadership, France ensured that Europe did not take a more robust stance towards Haftar's foreign backers. This policy contributed to an unprecedented escalation of the conflict, and paved the way for Russia to intervene with Emirati support. In turn, Turkey moved to counter Haftar and the UAE.<sup>1</sup> The upshot of Macron's Libya policy is that the UAE, Russia and Turkey have massively expanded their interventions while Europe has almost entirely lost its influence in the conflict. Since Haftar's defeat in Tripoli, France has taken a lower profile in Libya, but the consequences of its policies remain. Foreign meddlers have retained their presence and influence even after the ceasefire of October 2020 and the formation of a Government of National Unity (GNU) in March 2021.

In Berlin, France's Libya policy caused much headshaking. Yet Germany shied away from confronting France over Libya because, from Berlin's perspective, the Libya file was not a priority in Franco-German relations. Similarly, at the European level, Macron and his Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian did not have to work very hard to convince others to prevent a tougher stance on Haftar and his foreign backers. French diplomacy succeeded in diluting the original objective of the Berlin process, namely curbing foreign intervention.<sup>2</sup> France's destabilising policy and Germany's passivity complemented each other fatally.

The formation of the GNU has allowed both states to rally behind the UN-led process once more. But just as the GNU papers over deep domestic rifts without overcoming them, conflicting foreign interests are likely to gradually pull its constituent parties in opposing directions.<sup>3</sup>

### Divergences

German and French positions on Libya began to diverge after the creation of the Government of National Accord (GNA) in late 2015 under UN auspices. Germany initially supported the GNA, but remained neutral when Haftar launched his offensive against Tripoli in April 2019.

France, by contrast, from early 2016 onwards provided military support to Haftar, the GNA's greatest adversary. French support allowed Haftar to make territorial gains in Benghazi. It also signalled that Haftar remained France's preferred partner despite his opposition to the GNA. This helped him consolidate his authority over the east of the country. France thus substantially contributed to the GNA's failure to reunite the politically divided country.<sup>4</sup> In 2017, Macron was the first European head of state to receive Haftar, thereby making him acceptable on the international stage. French special forces later supported the expansion of his forces in southern Libya, which immediately preceded the assault on Tripoli and was explicitly hailed by Foreign Minister Le Drian.<sup>5</sup> This undoubtedly emboldened Haftar to launch his attack on Tripoli. Given their cooperation with him, the French intelligence services must have been well

1 See Ronja Kempin's contribution on France's Turkey policy, pp. 42ff.

2 Wolfram Lacher, *International Schemes, Libyan Realities. Attempts at Appeasing Khalifa Haftar Risk Further Escalating Libya's Civil War*, SWP Comments 2019/C45 (Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, November 2019).

3 Wolfram Lacher, *Libya's Flawed Unity Government. A Semblance of Compromise Obscures Old and New Rifts*, SWP Comments 29/2021 (Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, April 2021).

4 Nathalie Guibert, "La France mène des opérations secrètes en Libye", *Le Monde*, 23 February 2016.

5 Isabelle Lasserre, "Paris cherche à rapprocher les frères ennemis libyens", *Le Figaro*, 20 March 2019.

informed about the preparations for the Tripoli offensive. French diplomats nevertheless claimed that they had always advised him against an offensive in western Libya and had been taken by surprise by it.<sup>6</sup>

Once the offensive had begun, French diplomats thwarted the EU from condemning Haftar, downplayed the humanitarian consequences of the war, and portrayed the warlord's opponents as terrorists and criminals.<sup>7</sup> The ambiguous US position played into France's hands. American diplomats and military officers had impressed on Haftar that Tripoli was a "red line". But it later emerged that, just before the assault, Haftar had received the green light from US National Security Advisor John Bolton.<sup>8</sup>

In addition to the obvious divergences in policy between Germany and France, there are three underlying differences on Libya. First, Libya's place on the list of foreign policy priorities varies strongly between Berlin and Paris. In France, Libya policy has for years attracted the personal attention of both President Macron and Foreign Minister Le Drian. By contrast, the German government displayed little interest in the Libyan conflict until the Berlin Conference of January 2020, and this high-level attention has proved fleeting.

Second, Germany's Libya policy is anchored in multilateralism, whereas Macron has primarily acted unilaterally or in alliance with the UAE and Egypt in Libya. Admittedly, the German commitment to multilateralism in Libya is less than persuasive, since Germany's support for the UN masks the fact that Berlin does not have a Libya policy of its own. The UN arms embargo, which Germany likes to emphasise, is not taken seriously either by the members of the Security

Council or the intervening states. Yet one of the main factors contributing to the failure of the UN efforts was precisely France's unilateralism. This was evident at the two Paris summits between Macron, Haftar and the GNA's then-Prime Minister Fayez al-Sarraj. In both cases, Macron surprised the UN as well as his European partners with an improvised initiative. In 2017 and 2018 Macron's solo efforts were the primary reason for Franco-Italian friction over European Libya policy, since Italy felt sidelined.<sup>9</sup>

Third, like his predecessors, Macron is willing to become militarily involved in Libya whereas Germany practises military reticence. Already during François Hollande's *quinquennat*, the then-Defence Minister Le Drian began supporting Haftar with special forces. Under Macron, the French foreign intelligence service carried out reconnaissance for Haftar's offensives. Simultaneously, the French government cooperated with individual GNA commanders. In early 2019, French special forces supported the expansion of Haftar's forces in southern Libya. The discovery of French weapons during the attack on Tripoli in June 2019 also suggests that French forces were at least temporarily embedded in Haftar's troops.<sup>10</sup> However, France's political backing was far more important for Haftar's war, since it allowed him the necessary international leeway.

## Interests

Macron's Libya policy was as destructive as it was unsuccessful. To explain this puzzle, analysts have often credited the French government with trying to fight terrorism and stabilise southern Libya so as reduce threats to allied countries such as Chad and Niger, and the French military operating there.<sup>11</sup> However, this is not fully convincing. Other calcula-

6 Isabelle Lasserre, "Jean-Yves Le Drian: 'La France est en Libye pour combattre le terrorisme'", *Le Figaro*, 2 May 2019; Ulf Laessing, "How Libya's Haftar Blindsided World Powers with Advance on Tripoli", *Reuters*, 10 April 2019.

7 Author's conversations with French diplomats, Berlin and Brussels, April–May 2019; Gabriela Baczynska and Francesco Guarascio, "France Blocks EU Call to Stop Haftar's Offensive in Libya", *Reuters*, 11 April 2019; Lasserre, "Jean-Yves Le Drian" (see note 6); Frédéric Bobin and Marc Semo, "Libye: La France critiquée pour son rôle ambigu dans la crise actuelle", *Le Monde*, 12 April 2019; Ulf Laessing and John Irish, "Libya Offensive Stalls, but Haftar Digs in Given Foreign Sympathies", *Reuters*, 15 April 2019.

8 Author's conversations with US diplomats, Tunis and Berlin, March 2019; David D. Kirkpatrick, "The White House Blessed a War in Libya, but Russia Won It", *New York Times*, 14 April 2020.

9 Frédéric Bobin and Marc Semo, "Libye: La France organise un nouveau sommet de 'sortie de crise'", *Le Monde*, 28 May 2018.

10 Eric Schmitt and Declan Walsh, "U. S. Missiles Found in Libyan Rebel Camp Were First Sold to France", *New York Times*, 9 July 2019.

11 *Stopping the War for Tripoli*, Briefing no. 69 (Brussels : International Crisis Group, 23 May 2019); Andrew Lebovich and Tarek Megerisi, *France's Strongman Strategy in the Sahel*, European Council on Foreign Relations, 8 March 2019, [https://ecfr.eu/article/commentary\\_frances\\_strongman\\_strategy\\_in\\_the\\_sahel/](https://ecfr.eu/article/commentary_frances_strongman_strategy_in_the_sahel/).

tions underpinning France's actions had little to do with stabilising Libya.

### France's close alliance with the UAE is likely to have been decisive in Macron's support for Haftar.

Insofar as fighting terrorism is a motive in France's Libya policy, it was shaped by Le Drian's cooperation with Haftar during the Hollande presidency; under Macron, it has featured mainly as a path dependence. After the devastating terrorist attacks in France in 2015, counterterrorism became a much more prominent theme in French foreign policy, particularly in Syria, Iraq, Mali and Libya. In some cases, it was doubtful whether there was in fact a direct link between the jihadi groups in situ and the threat in France, or whether the French approach was appropriate for containing these groups. In the words of one French diplomat, visibly supporting supposed counterterrorists like Haftar aimed not least at covering the government's back against potential criticism by rightwing populist forces in France.<sup>12</sup>

In fact, it could hardly be lost on the French government that Haftar, with his brutal methods, was combating not only jihadis but a much broader range of adversaries, thus creating fertile ground for further radicalisation; that he was using the fight against terrorism as a cover for his own autocratic ambitions; and that he strongly promoted radical Salafists in his own ranks.<sup>13</sup> Even after the start of the battle for Tripoli, Foreign Minister Le Drian continued to insist that French cooperation with Haftar had only ever been about combating terror, so as to protect France.<sup>14</sup> But this official line was never plausible.

The decisive factor in Macron's continued support for Haftar even after the so-called "Islamic State" had lost all its territory in Libya in 2017 was no doubt France's close alliance with the UAE and Egypt. This had developed out of their intensive military cooperation and the existence of a French navy base in the UAE, and was cemented from 2014 to 2017 by lucra-

tive French arms deals with both countries.<sup>15</sup> Emirati slogans of "religious tolerance" and hostility to political Islam also had their sympathizers in the Elysée Palace and the Quai d'Orsay, who conveniently ignored that Haftar boosted Salafi elements and that his wars boosted radicalisation.<sup>16</sup> French diplomats cooperated very closely with the UAE on Libya – first in their attempt to bring Haftar to power through negotiations, and from April 2019 onwards in preventing any Western pressure on the warlord and his foreign backers so that he could continue his war in Tripoli unhindered.<sup>17</sup> To ensure a Haftar victory, France's Emirati allies even hired Russian mercenaries, thus creating a permanent Russian presence in Libya.<sup>18</sup> After Turkey's intervention foiled this scheme, Macron relentlessly denounced Turkey's role, but did not once mention the UAE.<sup>19</sup>

If Macron and Le Drian really had stabilisation at heart when backing Haftar, then French policy was based on serious miscalculations. Haftar's expansion in the south did nothing to improve the security situation; in fact, it provoked new local conflicts that remain unresolved to date. Meanwhile, Haftar has continued to rely on Sudanese and Chadian merce-

<sup>15</sup> French Defence Ministry, *Rapport au Parlement sur les exportations d'armement de la France 2019*, Paris, Juni 2019; Eva Thiébaud, "Une entente indigne entre la France et les Émirats arabes unis", *Orient XXI* (online), 10 September 2020, <https://orientxxi.info/magazine/une-entente-indigne-entre-la-france-et-les-emirats-arabes-unis,4117>.

<sup>16</sup> Author's conversations with European diplomats, 2019–2020; see also Arianna Poletti and Thomas Hamamdjian, "France-Émirats: Les noces guerrières d'Emmanuel Macron et MBZ [Mohammed Bin Zayed]", *Jeune Afrique*, 18 August 2020; Cinzia Bianco, "La France devrait élargir sa stratégie au Moyen-Orient", *La Croix*, 15 October 2020.

<sup>17</sup> Author's conversations with European and US diplomats, June–December 2019; Baczynska and Guarascio, "France Blocks EU Call to Stop Haftar's Offensive in Libya" (see note 7); Laessing and Irish, "Libya Offensive Stalls, but Haftar Digs in Given Foreign Sympathies" (see note 7).

<sup>18</sup> Alex Emmons and Matthew Cole, "Arms Sale to UAE Goes Forward Even as U.S. Probes Ties between UAE and Russian Mercenaries", *The Intercept* (online), 2 December 2020, <https://theintercept.com/2020/12/02/uae-arms-sale-wagner-group/>.

<sup>19</sup> "Libye: Macron accuse Erdogan de violation 'gravissime' des engagements de Berlin", *Reuters*, 29 January 2020; "Emmanuel Macron dénonce un 'jeu dangereux' de la Turquie en Libye", *France24*, 22 June 2020; "Libye: Macron condamne la 'responsabilité historique et criminelle' de la Turquie", *Le Figaro*, 29 June 2020.

<sup>12</sup> Author's conversation with French diplomat, Paris, July 2019.

<sup>13</sup> Wolfram Lacher, *A Most Irregular Army: The Rise of Khalifa Haftar's Libyan Arab Armed Forces*, Research Division Middle East and Africa Working Paper Nr. 02 (Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, November 2020), [https://www.swp-berlin.org/fileadmin/contents/products/arbeitspapiere/2020WP02\\_FG06\\_lac.pdf](https://www.swp-berlin.org/fileadmin/contents/products/arbeitspapiere/2020WP02_FG06_lac.pdf).

<sup>14</sup> Lasserre, "Jean-Yves Le Drian" (see note 6).

naries in southern and central Libya, allowing such groups to recruit and arm themselves.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, it was predictable *before* the war in Tripoli that Haftar's attempt to seize power by force would cause massive destabilisation.<sup>21</sup> Besides, victory on the part of the ageing militia leader would have raised the question whether his highly personalised power structure could survive his death. Such concerns over stabilisation appear not to have featured prominently in Macron's Libya policy because it was strongly influenced by the UAE, for which these concerns do not matter. But this policy was diametrically opposed to the European interest in containing the conflict.

## Consequences

The first obvious victim of Franco-German divergences over Libya was the UN's leading role in conflict resolution. While Germany largely limited itself to supporting the UN process, Macron undermined it with his unilateral initiatives of 2017 and 2018. Berlin certainly saw this as disruptive. But high-ranking officials showed little interest in the Libya file, and were therefore not inclined to engage Macron on the issue. Haftar's attack on Tripoli, which France at least tacitly tolerated, then nullified all of the efforts by UN Special Representative Ghassan Salamé. Salamé had long been preparing a National Conference that was meant to pave the path for conflict resolution and was planned for April 2019 – but never took place because of Haftar's offensive.

During the Berlin process in autumn 2019, France led the camp of those who shifted the focus from enforcing the arms embargo to asking the GNA to make concessions as preconditions for a ceasefire.<sup>22</sup> At the time, Haftar's foreign backers believed themselves to have the military advantage and were in no hurry to end the war. The Berlin Conference thus failed in its objective of stopping foreign interference in Libya. Turkey, the UAE and Russia significantly expanded their interventions after the conference, while Europeans further lost influence – perhaps irreversibly

so.<sup>23</sup> European diplomats try to credit the Berlin process with ending the war and facilitating the formation of the Government of National Unity (GNU). In reality, it was the Turkish intervention – in defiance of the Berlin process – that in spring 2020 pushed Haftar's forces out of Tripoli and western Libya, thereby ending his offensive and establishing a balance of power along the new frontline in the centre of the country. The ceasefire agreement signed in October 2020 merely formalised the new status quo. This equilibrium also formed the basis of a rapprochement between Turkey and Egypt which was key for promoting progress in the UN-led talks that led to the GNU's formation. Meanwhile, foreign meddlers have retained their influence: Turkey has cemented its formal military presence;<sup>24</sup> Russian mercenaries have built fortifications and are securing key bases for Haftar in central and southern Libya;<sup>25</sup> the UAE pay at least some of the mercenaries in Haftar's service;<sup>26</sup> and Egypt holds sway over political actors in the GNU and the parliament. The conflicting parties of the last war continue to distrust each other, and are therefore unlikely to work towards the withdrawal of their foreign backers.

France's partisanship in Libya has also had wider regional implications. France's involvement in the dispute between Turkey and Greece in the Eastern Mediterranean was directly linked to its opposition to Turkey in Libya.<sup>27</sup> In November 2019, Turkey had tied the conflict in Libya to the dispute over maritime borders in the Mediterranean by concluding a maritime agreement with the GNA. France and the UAE used the occasion to win over Greece and Cyprus as

**20** UN Security Council, *Final Report of the Panel of Experts on the Sudan*, S/2020/36, 14 January 2020.

**21** Wolfram Lacher, *Libya's Conflicts Enter a Dangerous New Phase*, SWP Comment 8/2019 (Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, February 2019).

**22** Author's conversations with European and UN diplomats, August 2019 – January 2020.

**23** Frederic Wehrey, *'This War Is Out of Our Hands'. The Internationalization of Libya's Post-2011 Conflicts from Proxies to Boots on the Ground*, Washington, D.C.: New America, 2020.

**24** "Turkey Says Its Troops Will Stay in Libya As Long As Military Deal Active, Government Requests It", *Reuters*, 11 February 2021.

**25** Nick Paton Walsh and Sarah El Sirgany, "Foreign fighters were meant to leave Libya this week. A huge trench being dug by Russian-backed mercenaries indicates they plan to stay", *CNN* (online), 22 January 2021, <https://edition.cnn.com/2021/01/22/africa/libya-trench-russia-intl/index.html>.

**26** Emmons and Cole, "Arms Sale to UAE Goes Forward" (see note 18); UN Security Council, *Final Report of the Panel of Experts on the Sudan*, S/2021/40, 13 January 2021.

**27** See the contribution by Ronja Kempin on France's Turkey policy, pp. 42ff.

new allies for Haftar.<sup>28</sup> Macron repeatedly attacked Turkey for intervening in Libya, castigating it as a troublemaker and wrongly describing the Syrian mercenaries it deployed in Libya as “Jihadis” and “terrorists”.<sup>29</sup> The French government has been far less vocal on Russian involvement, while remaining entirely silent on the actions of its Emirati allies that had brought both Turkey and Russia to Libya. The intention to single out Turkey apparently also contributed to the incident that occurred between a Turkish and a French battleship off Libya in June 2020, and strained relations within NATO for months.<sup>30</sup> France’s and Turkey’s Libya policies fuelled tensions within NATO, thereby playing into Russia’s hands. Finally, France’s support for Haftar indirectly backfired in the form of an incursion by Libya-based Chadian rebels into Chad in April 2021, during which France’s most important ally in the Sahel, President Idriss Deby, was killed. The rebel group, *Front pour l’alternance et la concorde au Tchad* (FACT), had since June 2017 been based in areas under Haftar’s control, and in early 2021 received training from Russian mercenaries at Haftar’s Brak al-Shate airbase in southern

Libya.<sup>31</sup> The episode neatly sums up the counterproductive nature of France’s Libya policy under Macron.

## Conclusions

The two defining characteristics of France’s Libya policy during the Macron presidency reveal both a stylistic feature of Macron’s diplomacy, and a new structural aspect of French foreign policy in Europe’s southern neighbourhood. More often than his predecessor, Macron has drawn attention to himself on the international stage with impulsive, unilateral and often unsuccessful initiatives – and not only in Libya.<sup>32</sup> His support for Haftar, however, came about because of the ever closer French alliance with the UAE, which is based on common interests, especially in the military sector and the arms industry. The result was a unilateral policy that served the interests of authoritarian Middle Eastern regimes, but contradicted the European interest in stabilising the southern neighbourhood. Although this policy irritated the German government, it encountered little open criticism.

With the conclusion of a ceasefire and the establishment of the GNU, the French and German governments have been keen to display their newfound unity in supporting the UN-led process.<sup>33</sup> German officials’ eagerness to attribute progress in Libya to the Berlin process conceals a stark reality of persistent foreign meddling. Meanwhile, France’s policy shift should not be seen as a reconversion to multilateralism. With Haftar’s defeat in Tripoli, the previous policy simply became unviable – at least for now. There is no sign that the spectacular failure of Macron’s Libya policy has prompted any meaningful

28 Joint Declaration Adopted by the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Cyprus, Egypt, France, Greece and the United Arab Emirates, Athens: Hellenic Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 11 May 2020, <https://www.mfa.gr/en/current-affairs/statements-speeches/joint-declaration-adopted-by-the-ministers-of-foreign-affairs-of-cyprus-egypt-france-greece-and-the-united-arab-emirates-11052020.html>; Paul Iddon, “UAE Dispatches Fighter Jets to Support Its Allies against Turkey”, *Forbes* (online), 26 August 2020, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/pauliddon/2020/08/26/uae-sends-fighter-jets-to-support-allies-against-turkey/>.

29 Press conference by Chancellor Merkel and President Macron, Meseberg Castle, 29 June 2020; Elisabeth Tsurkov, “The Syrian Mercenaries Fighting Foreign Wars for Russia and Turkey”, *The New York Review* (online), 16 October 2020, <https://www.nybooks.com/daily/2020/10/16/the-syrian-mercenaries-fighting-foreign-wars-for-russia-and-turkey/>; “De la Libye au Haut-Karabakh: Macron et le mythe du mercenaire djihadiste syrien”, *Syrie Factuel* (online), 12 October 2020, <https://medium.com/@syriefactuel/de-la-libye-au-haut-karabakh-macron-et-le-mythe-du-mercenaire-djihadiste-syrien-cc621ef76707>.

30 Nicolas Gros-Verheyde, “Retour sur l’incident naval turco-français. Volonté de provoquer ou d’assurer le respect de la loi?” *Bruxelles 2* (Blog), 9 July 2020, <https://www.bruxelles2.eu/2020/07/retour-sur-lincident-naval-turco-francais-une-certaine-volonte-de-provoquer/>.

31 Frédéric Bobin, “Le Sud libyen, troublante base arrière des rebelles tchadiens”, *Le Monde*, 22 April 2021; Declan Walsh, “Where Did Chad Rebels Prepare for Their Own War? In Libya”, *New York Times*, 22 April 2021.

32 Christophe Ayad, “Macron: Les limites d’une diplomatie à usage interne”, *Le Monde*, 10 November 2020; Bruno Tertrais, “The Making of Macron’s Worldview”, *World Politics Review* (online), 19 January 2021, <https://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/articles/29362/how-france-s-jean-pierre-chevenement-shaped-the-macron-agenda>.

33 Auswärtiges Amt, “Außenminister Maas, Di Maio und Le Drian in Libyen: Gemeinsam für dauerhaften Frieden”, 25 March 2021, <https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/de/aussenpolitik/laender/libyen-node/maas-libyen-berliner-prozess/2450348>.

introspection. Libya has hardly featured in French foreign policy debates; occasional criticisms in the media have not amounted to public controversy.<sup>34</sup> Paul Soler, who in Macron's Élysée was key in devising France's policy of support to Haftar, was in March 2021 appointed France's special envoy to Libya.<sup>35</sup> German complacency regarding the semblance of progress in Libya could encourage yet more French adventurism.

**34** Cyril Bensimon and Frédéric Bobin, "En Libye, les ratés du pari français sur Haftar", *Le Monde*, 4 May 2021.

**35** Pascal Airault, "En Libye, la France cherche à contrer l'influence turque", *L'Opinion*, 13 April 2021.

Ronja Kempin

# The CSDP: An Instrument, but not a Pillar, of France's Security and Defence Policy

There have been radical changes in both the EU and its geopolitical neighbourhood over the last decade. EU member states and the European Commission have pursued various initiatives since November 2016, aiming for a higher degree of strategic autonomy for the EU in security and defence issues. For example, they activated the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) and institutionalised, in the Coordinated Annual Review on Defence (CARD), a systematic exchange between member states on their defence planning. The European Defence Fund is intended to provide financial support for procuring military (core) capabilities.<sup>1</sup> To give the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) a uniform strategic direction, Brussels and its member states have been working on a Strategic Compass since the summer of 2020.<sup>2</sup>

France and Germany have contributed significantly to these developments. Their different strategic cultures and relationships with NATO were rarely obstacles for Berlin or Paris in pushing ahead with the CSDP.<sup>3</sup> Under President Emmanuel Macron, bilateral

cooperation in this format began well too. On 13 July 2017 the Franco-German Defence and Security Council (DFVSR)<sup>4</sup> headed by Macron and Chancellor Merkel agreed to give the CSDP further impetus. The two parties concurred that the EU needed to become “a truly global actor in security and defence”. The intention was to boost this process through the procurement of ambitious military capabilities and through PESCO. As Germany and France wrote, the latter offers “EU member states the political framework for improving their solidarity and cooperation as well as their respective military instruments and defence capabilities through coordinated initiatives and specific projects; this will help to fulfil the EU's objectives”.<sup>5</sup>

According to Article 46 of the Lisbon Treaty, PESCO is open to all member states. Initially, there was controversy over the membership criteria to be fulfilled since the text of the treaty is vague on this point. In July 2017 the DFVSR therefore drew up a catalogue of binding commitments; shortly afterwards, it was adopted by the EU member states and has since been the basis for participating in PESCO.<sup>6</sup>

1 See Rosa Beckmann and Ronja Kempin, *EU Defence Policy Needs Strategy. Time for Political Examination of the CSDP's Reform Objectives*, SWP Comment 34/2017 (Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, September 2017), <https://www.swp-berlin.org/en/publication/eu-defence-policy-needs-strategy/> (accessed 12 January 2021).

2 German Bundestag, *Antwort der Bundesregierung auf die Kleine Anfrage der Abgeordneten Armin-Paulus Hampel, Dr. Roland Hartwig, Petr Bystron, weiterer Abgeordneter und der Fraktion der AfD. Zum geplanten Strategischen Kompass der Europäischen Union*, Drucksache 19/22209 (Berlin, 24 September 2020), p. 1f, <https://dip21.bundestag.de/dip21/btd/19/227/1922795.pdf> (accessed 12 January 2021).

3 Examples are the concepts of EU battle groups and an autonomous operative headquarters. The Franco-German Brigade, put into service in 1989, is considered groundbreaking for the integration of armed forces in Europe; Airbus (formerly EADS) is equally pioneering in arms cooperation.

4 The DFVSR was set up in 1988 under a supplementary protocol of the Élysée Treaty. The Council is led by France's head of state and Germany's head of government. It also includes both countries' foreign and defence ministers as well as the inspector general of the German army and the French chief of general staff.

5 Franco-German Council of Ministers/Franco-German Defence and Security Council, *Schlussfolgerungen* (Paris, 13 July 2017), <https://www.bundesregierung.de/resource/blob/997532/751584/3b34110c1fb367f5a69011ab14880e5c/2017-07-13-abschlusserklaerung-d-f-ministerrat-data.pdf?download=1> (accessed 9 November 2020).

6 The countries participating in PESCO – 25 of the EU's 27 members – agreed on 20 binding commitments. These include regularly raising their defence budgets and increasing spending on defence goods to 20 percent in the medium term. Two percent of defence budgets must be invested



## Inclusive versus Ambitious: The Franco-German Compromise Is Crumbling

It quickly became evident, however, that the Franco-German agreement was built on sand. Two months after the summit, Macron presented the European Intervention Initiative (EI2) in his speech on Europe at the Sorbonne. Its objective, he stated, was the development of a common strategic culture. While he acknowledged that “progress of historic levels” had been achieved in the CSDP, he also demanded: “we must go further”.<sup>7</sup> Without a common strategic culture, he claimed, Europe could not become autonomous in defence.

The contours of the Intervention Initiative were initially blurred. When it became clear that the EI2 was to be located outside EU structures, Berlin tried to prevent the project in that form, arguing that the initiative undermined the CSDP and therefore had to be transferred into the EU framework.<sup>8</sup> Paris conversely denounced Germany for wanting an inclusive PESCO that preferably integrated all member states. France repeatedly referred to the wording of the Lisbon Treaty, which specifies that PESCO is open to all member states “whose military capabilities fulfill higher criteria, and which have made more binding commitments to one another in this area with a view to the most demanding missions”. On 11 December 2017, however, the broader interpretation promoted by Germany was accepted. Twenty-five of the then 28 EU members declared that they intended to partici-

in research. To lastingly develop their defence capabilities, member states need to participate in the arms cooperation programmes of the European Defence Agency (EDA). The joint use of existing capabilities is to be improved; the interoperability of EU battle groups is to be increased. Member states must be in a position to provide, within one month, military units plus equipment for multinational deployments lasting up to three months. PESCO members are expected to annually document their progress in implementing the 20 commitments using National Implementation Plans (NIP). See German Defence Ministry, “PESCO”, <https://www.bmvg.de/de/themen/europaeische-sicherheit-und-verteidigung/pesco> (accessed 22 March 2021).

<sup>7</sup> French Embassy, “Rede von Staatspräsident Macron an der Sorbonne – Initiative für Europa. Paris, den 26. September 2017”, *Frankreich-Info*, (2017), 4f., [https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/macron\\_sorbonne\\_europe\\_integral\\_cle4e8d46.pdf](https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/macron_sorbonne_europe_integral_cle4e8d46.pdf) (accessed 9 November 2020).

<sup>8</sup> Sophia Besch and Jana Puglierin, “Alle Mann an Deck!” *Internationale Politik*, (March and April 2019): 46–51.

pate in PESCO.<sup>9</sup> France responded by becoming only moderately involved in the format. On 6 March 2018 the Council adopted 17 PESCO projects; France joined in only eight of them.<sup>10</sup>

The dispute between Berlin and Paris over which model best drives European defence policy was only defused several months later. In June 2018, at the meeting of the Franco-German Council of Ministers at Meseberg Castle, the two parties emphasised “how important it is to further develop a common strategic culture through the European Intervention Initiative, which will be linked as closely as possible with the Permanent Structured Cooperation”.<sup>11</sup> Six days later, the Letter of Intent for the EI2 was signed.<sup>12</sup> France consequently increased its commitment to PESCO.

<sup>9</sup> “Council Decision (CFSP) 2017/2315 of 11 December 2017 establishing permanent structured cooperation (PESCO) and determining the list of participating Member States”, *Official Journal of the European Union*, (14 December 2017) L 331/77, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32017D2315&from=EN> (accessed 13 January 2021).

<sup>10</sup> The list of PESCO projects was expanded on 19 November 2018 and 12 November 2019. Currently member states are implementing 47 projects. France is participating in 30 of them and leading 10. All PESCO projects can be found here: European Council, *Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO)’s Projects – Overview*, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/41333/pesco-projects-12-nov-2019.pdf> (accessed 3 December 2020).

<sup>11</sup> German Government, “Erklärung von Meseberg. Das Versprechen Europas für Sicherheit und Wohlstand erneuern”, Pressemitteilung 214, 19 June 2018, <https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-de/aktuelles/erklaerung-von-meseberg-1140536> (accessed 10 November 2020).

<sup>12</sup> The document’s signatories were Belgium, Denmark, Estonia, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, and the United Kingdom. Daniel Brössler, “Deutschland und Frankreich wollen künftig gemeinsam auf Krisen reagieren”, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 25 June 2018, <https://www.sueddeutsche.de/politik/europa-deutschland-und-frankreich-wollen-kuenftig-gemeinsam-auf-krisen-reagieren-1.4029025> (accessed 10 November 2020). The German government had pushed through a definition of the EI2 as a “flexible, non-binding forum” of states that were “willing and able” to deploy their forces when necessary to defend Europe’s security interests. The Letter of Intent further states: “EI2 does not entail the creation of a new rapid reaction force.”

## Points of Friction when Implementing the CSDP Reform Agenda

Germany and France have tended to pursue different objectives in the remaining key CSDP dossiers as well. This includes the implementation of the CSDP reform agenda, which EU foreign ministers agreed on in 2016. Paris was long opposed to the participation of third countries in PESCO and in armament projects that the European Defence Fund financially supported. In particular, France was concerned that the US would influence the development of the CSDP by becoming involved in PESCO and EDF projects. It feared that Washington could oppose French efforts to reduce the defence dependence of EU member states on the US. Berlin, by contrast, was open to the involvement of the United Kingdom and the US. The Trump administration's criticism that PESCO and EDF were protectionist measures that duplicated corresponding NATO structures resonated somewhat in Germany.<sup>13</sup> A compromise was not reached until October 2018, under the German presidency of the EU Council, whereby independent rules of cooperation are drawn up for each PESCO project.<sup>14</sup>

### Berlin responded with great reticence to Macron's call to upgrade the mutual assistance clause contained in the Lisbon Treaty.

The Franco-German dispute over reforming Article 42(7) of the Lisbon Treaty was at least temporarily defused in late May 2020. This article contains a mutual assistance clause for EU member states that applies in an armed attack.<sup>15</sup> The disagreement arose

<sup>13</sup> Nicole Koenig, *Time to Go beyond the Meta-debate on Strategic Autonomy in Defence*, Policy Brief (Berlin: Hertie School, Jacques Delors Center, 4 December 2020), 2, [https://hertie-school-f4e6.kxcdn.com/fileadmin/2\\_Research/1\\_About\\_our\\_research/2\\_Research\\_centres/6\\_Jacques\\_Delors\\_Centre/Publications/20201203\\_defence\\_Koenig.pdf](https://hertie-school-f4e6.kxcdn.com/fileadmin/2_Research/1_About_our_research/2_Research_centres/6_Jacques_Delors_Centre/Publications/20201203_defence_Koenig.pdf) (accessed 12 December 2020).

<sup>14</sup> German Defence Ministry, *PESCO-Drittstaatenbeteiligung* (Berlin, 5 November 2020), <https://www.bmvg.de/de/aktuelles/pesco-drittstaatenbeteiligung-4181694> (accessed 12 January 2021).

<sup>15</sup> The wording of Art. 42 para 7 is vague: "If a Member State is the victim of armed aggression on its territory, the other Member States shall have towards it an obligation of aid and assistance by all the means in their power, in accordance with Article 51 of the United Nations Charter.

following President Macron's proposal in August 2018 of "Measures to strengthen European solidarity in security matters". In a speech, he elaborated:

"We must indeed give real meaning to Article 42 paragraph 7 of the Treaty on European Union, which France invoked for the first time after the 2015 terror attacks. France is willing to enter into a concrete debate among European countries on the nature of mutual solidarity and defence relations, which our commitments contractually bring with them. Europe can no longer leave its security up to the United States alone. Today it is up to us to take on our responsibility and our security, and thus guarantee Europe's sovereignty."<sup>16</sup>

Berlin responded with extreme reticence to Macron's call for a substantial upgrade of the mutual assistance clause. It was concerned that his proposal might divide the EU even further. The Central and Eastern European member states, which have close ties to the US, are especially worried about the prospect of further estranging Washington by developing a separate EU defence policy.<sup>17</sup> As a compromise, the German government proposed launching a discussion and consultation process with all member states during its EU Council presidency and drawing up a Strategic Compass. Berlin and Paris finally agreed to go ahead with both processes: reforming Article 42 and drawing up the Strategic Compass.<sup>18</sup>

This shall not prejudice the specific character of the security and defence policy of certain Member States."

<sup>16</sup> French Embassy, "Rede von Staatspräsident Emmanuel Macron zum Auftakt der Konferenz der Botschafter und Botschafterinnen, Auszüge, Paris, den 27. August 2018", Berlin, 27 August 2018, 2, [https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/180827\\_auszuge\\_rede\\_pr\\_botschafterkonferenz\\_cle8d8a61.pdf](https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/180827_auszuge_rede_pr_botschafterkonferenz_cle8d8a61.pdf) (accessed 12 December 2020).

<sup>17</sup> Sophia Besch, *Defence without Direction*, CER Bulletin (Brussels: Centre for European Reform [CER], #129, December 2019/January 2020), [https://www.cer.eu/sites/default/files/bulletin\\_129\\_article3\\_SB.pdf](https://www.cer.eu/sites/default/files/bulletin_129_article3_SB.pdf) (accessed 12 December 2020).

<sup>18</sup> "At the Heart of Our European Union", Defence Ministers Florence Parly, Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer, Margarita Robles Fernández and Lorenzo Guerini Jointly Signed a Letter for the Attention of Their Counterparts from the Other 23 Member States of the European Union as Well as the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Josep Borrell", <https://www.bmvg.de/resource/blob/261184/4f63d2a54ee7f96476156796f00874ed/20200528-download-brief-pesco-englisch-data.pdf> (accessed 12 December 2020).

Paris continues to support reshaping the mutual assistance clause, such that it could also be applied after a cyber or conventional attack on countries like Finland and Sweden, which are members of the EU but not of NATO. During the French presidency of the EU Council, Paris therefore intends to have a political declaration signed in which EU states set out what they would do in the event of Article 42(7) being invoked. More Franco-German tensions can thus be expected on this issue.

## Two Conceptions of the CSDP

The list of points of tension between Germany and France could be extended at will. Under debate, for example, is whether the European Defence Agency's Capability Development Plan (CDP) should become binding for member states. Furthermore, there is disagreement over whether EU crisis management should be further developed by national civilian or military interventions, or the upgrading of third countries. Essentially, all disputes between Berlin and Paris have the same origin: the two sides give different weight to the CSDP and its development.

The German government has been investing much capital in multilateral institutions, which it considers to be the pillars of the international order, and thus as irreplaceable. Berlin is accordingly reticent about more flexible, more pragmatic, or ad hoc formats. From the German point of view, these carry the risk of weakening or fragmenting existing multilateral institutions. Moreover, Berlin views the CSDP as a key issue for the future, able to strengthen cohesion between EU member states. Designing the CSDP to be as "inclusive" as possible is therefore important. For Berlin, "confidence-building interim measures" are thus the best means of enabling the EU to defend itself externally.<sup>19</sup> Since the German government sees the CSDP primarily as a political undertaking, specific deployment scenarios are rather hazy in the German debate. At most it has a vague focus on crisis management in the European neighbourhood.

<sup>19</sup> Ursula von der Leyen, "Die Armee der Europäer nimmt bereits Gestalt an", *Handelsblatt*, 10 January 2019, <https://www.handelsblatt.com/meinung/gastbeitraege/gastkommentar-von-ursula-von-der-leyen-die-armee-der-europaeer-nimmt-bereits-gestalt-an/23846102.html?ticket=ST-10624377-ubz7h0kdvthOswsdVfDa-ap5> (accessed 10 November 2020).

Paris, by contrast, always considers the CSDP to be only one framework for action of its security and defence policy, which rests on three pillars. France used transatlantic relations and NATO — the first pillar — in its war on international terrorism in Africa as well as in Syria and Iraq. Paris consolidated its partnership with the US without having to commit too firmly to NATO's collective defence. The CSDP — the second pillar and, for France, tied to the Berlin-Paris axis — is useful for pushing ahead French efforts to make the EU more independent from the US in security and defence policy, but also in obtaining further support for French deployments in Africa. Finally, France compensated for the disinclination of EU states to become actively involved in operations and invest in strategic core capabilities by its close security relations with the UK — the third pillar. The UK's defence technology industry helped preserve Europe's base of defence technology and industry, which is so decisive in the French perspective.<sup>20</sup>

## A Changed Environment: France Cornered

Four political and geopolitical caesuras, however, have led France to gradually adapt its strategy in recent years. The first was Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 in violation of international law, and its subsequent interference in internal EU affairs using disinformation campaigns. As a consequence, a majority of European NATO members prioritised collective defence over international crisis management at a time when France needed support for its war on international terrorism. Since the 2015 terror attacks in Paris — the second caesura — this war has been the key task of the French armed forces. The resulting deployments in the Middle East, the Sahel and at home, however, have taken their toll: the armed forces are overstretched. Core capabilities are available less and less frequently since the investments required to procure or modernise them have fallen victim to high operational costs. The 2016 Brexit referendum — the third seismic shock — burdened France's special relationship with the UK

<sup>20</sup> Alice Pannier, *France's Defense Partnerships and the Dilemmas of Brexit*, Policy Brief no. 022 (Washington, D.C.: German Marshall Fund of the United States, May 2018), <https://www.gmfus.org/file/25794/download> (accessed 11 November 2020).

with uncertainty and increased distress in Paris.<sup>21</sup> While Berlin felt no pressure to modify its approach towards developing the CSDP, Paris was forced to find new allies and new money for continuing its military operations with modern capabilities.<sup>22</sup> France responded to the need to exercise new approaches in security cooperation with its *Revue stratégique de défense et de sécurité nationale*, published in October 2017.<sup>23</sup> The document affords special importance to minilateral formats. It was also a reaction to the 2016 election of Donald Trump as US president – the fourth caesura in very few years. The change in the White House worsened transatlantic relations; America's security guarantees no longer looked reliable. The conviction took root in Paris that Europe would have to be in a position to defend itself. Accordingly, the *Revue stratégique* made clear that France supported all CSDP initiatives that strengthened the ability of member states to intervene militarily.

### The CSDP still has a different value in Germany and France.

Regardless, Berlin and Paris still differ in how they deal with the CSDP. This concerns not only the tasks each ascribes to the format but also the value each sees in it. Germany spends much political capital on gradually developing the CSDP in existing structures. Given the US orientation towards the Indo-Pacific, France believes it necessary to change the EU's defence policy quickly and comprehensively so as to have a plan B vis-à-vis NATO and the US.<sup>24</sup>

### An Obstacle: The Pressure to Compromise

The consequence of these Franco-German differences is that, again and again, compromises have to be laboriously found; meanwhile pioneering political initiatives have failed to materialise. As a result, Berlin and Paris have had hardly any influence on the progress of PESCO since they formally ended their dispute over its objective and design in summer 2018. Yet it was clear only a few months later that the vast majority of PESCO projects do not contribute to meeting the CSDP's level of ambition, as defined by member states in 2016. PESCO projects sit at the bottom of the performance spectrum and mainly consist of undertakings that the member states were willing to develop at the national level. Gaps in strategic core capabilities such as reconnaissance or air transport that have existed for years have not been closed by member states.<sup>25</sup> Similarly, France's EI2 has thus far lagged behind expectations.<sup>26</sup>

And the next dispute between Berlin and Paris is already looming. The two countries have not developed any joint conception of the nature, intensity or extent of military deployments that will have to be agreed upon by member states to meet the CSDP's military ambitions. While France is likely to call for a considerable level of ambition in drawing up the Strategic Compass that befits a geopolitical power, Germany will probably advocate a less ambitious target, in line with the current CSDP.<sup>27</sup> We can expect a bilateral compromise that will once again reinforce the impression that the EU is incapable of producing tangible results in security and defence policy. France will then feel vindicated in its desire to deepen defence cooperation outside the EU.

21 Paul Taylor, *Crunch Time. France and the Future of European Defence. Report* (Brussels: Friends of Europe, April 2017),

[https://www.friendsofeurope.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/FSR\\_v9\\_18042017\\_Final.pdf](https://www.friendsofeurope.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/FSR_v9_18042017_Final.pdf) (accessed 13 November 2020).

22 See the contribution by Claudia Major on France's security and defence policy, pp. 10ff.

23 French Government, *Revue stratégique de défense et de sécurité nationale. 2017* (Paris, October 2017), 62, <https://www.defense.gouv.fr/content/download/514684/8664656/file/2017-RS-def1018.pdf> (accessed 12 November 2020).

24 Barbara Kunz, "Germany and European Strategic Autonomy: Two Constants at Play", in *European Strategic Autonomy in Security and Defence. Now the Going Gets Tough, It's Time to Get Going*, ed. Dick Zandee, Bob Deen, Kimberley Kruijver and Adája Stoetman (Clingendael Report (The Hague: Clingendael, December 2020), Annex 2, 58–62, [https://www.clingendael.org/sites/default/files/2020-12/Report\\_European\\_Strategic\\_Autonomy\\_December\\_2020.pdf](https://www.clingendael.org/sites/default/files/2020-12/Report_European_Strategic_Autonomy_December_2020.pdf) (accessed 12 January 2021).

25 Alice Billon-Galland and Yvonne-Stefania Efstathiou, *Are PESCO Projects Fit for Purpose?* European Defence Policy Brief (European Leadership Network and IISS, February 2019), <https://www.europeanleadershipnetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Final-PESCO-policy-brief-ELN-IISS-20-Feb-2019-ilovepdf-compressed.pdf> (accessed 12 December 2020).

26 Maike Kahlert and Claudia Major, *Frankreichs Europäische Interventionsinitiative (EI2): Fakten, Kritik und Perspektiven – Eine Zwischenbilanz*, Forschungsgruppe Sicherheitspolitik, Arbeitspapier no. 01 (Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, June 2019), [https://www.swp-berlin.org/fileadmin/contents/products/arbeitspapiere/Major\\_Kahlert\\_Arbeitspapier\\_01072019.pdf](https://www.swp-berlin.org/fileadmin/contents/products/arbeitspapiere/Major_Kahlert_Arbeitspapier_01072019.pdf) (accessed 21 December 2020).

27 *European Strategic Autonomy in Security and Defence*, ed. Zandee, Deen, Kruijver and Stoetman (see note 24), 50.

Paweł Tokarski

# Continuation Rather than Revolution: Five Aspects of Macron's Attitude vis-à-vis the Eurozone

Monetary integration and the single currency of the euro are of particular political and economic interest to France. The French attitude towards the eurozone is markedly different from the German one. Berlin and Paris are aiming for differing degrees of fiscal integration and are drifting apart on the issue of whether greater economic interventionism is acceptable at the supranational level. Moreover, they gauge the role of the European Central Bank (ECB) and monetary policy differently. The topic of risk-sharing among the eurozone member states has also repeatedly triggered tensions between the two countries. Finally, the Franco-German tandem has failed to agree on whether further closer economic integration should be advanced within the EU-19 or the EU-27.

The eurozone vision of French President Macron is marked by pragmatism and path dependence. It is guided by historical experiences with currency integration, the specific challenges of the French economic model, Macron's constant efforts to show "leadership", the aim of greater involvement of monetary policy in economic policy, and the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.

## France, Germany and the Historical Aspect of Monetary Integration

President Macron's attitude towards monetary integration is part of a French political tradition going back many decades. In the late 1960s, the then French vice-president of the European Commission, Raymond Barre, suggested establishing an alternative to the dollar-dominated Bretton Woods system. Since then, French governments have called for closer coordination of currency policy in Europe and the creation of a common currency. Their actions were more based on practical considerations than on fun-

damental reflections on European integration. First, exchange rate instabilities were having negative effects on the EU's Common Agricultural Policy.<sup>1</sup> Second, speculators' attacks on the French currency were making it vulnerable and volatile. To stabilise the exchange rate, France was forced to keep interest rates high. However, this had a negative impact on economic growth, public debt, and the job creation. Third, France considered monetary integration an instrument to influence monetary policy in Europe, which before the creation of the euro, was dominated by the German Bundesbank.<sup>2</sup> Paris also recognised that the creation of a common currency could be a means of containing Germany's economic and political power in Europe.<sup>3</sup>

Germany, by contrast, was suspicious of the idea of a single currency from the beginning. It pursued the objective of implanting the model of the stable Deutsche Mark and independent Bundesbank into the European Monetary Union. It also insisted on sufficient convergence of the participating economies. Such convergence, however, has still not been attained today. Economic and social divergences have increased due to the incomplete construction of the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU), the absence of ambitious structural reforms at the national level, and a series of external shocks. These divergences generate political tensions within the eurozone —

1 Valerie Caton, *France and the Politics of European Economic and Monetary Union* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 3–14.

2 Christian Bordes and Eric Girardin, "The Achievements of the ERM [Exchange Rate Mechanism] and the Preconditions for Monetary Union: A French Perspective", in *Economic Convergence and Monetary Union in Europe*, ed. Ray Barrell (London: Sage, 1992), 98–120 (115–119).

3 Michel R. Gueldry, *France and European Integration. Toward a Transnational Polity?* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2001), 124.

including between Paris and Berlin — and push any lasting stabilisation of the monetary union even further into the future. Because of their differing priorities, Germany and France find it difficult to reach agreement on the future integration of the currency union. Paris has not had the same experiences as Berlin in terms of inflation perception and the influence of supranational institutions on economic policy-making; it also has a different relationship with monetary policy. Both are aware, however, that monetary integration is irreversible.

## Challenges to the French Economic Model

One important factor that explains Franco-German political differences in the eurozone is the countries' differing economic models. In almost all respects, the French model has taken resolutely different directions to the German model, no matter whether this concerns the role of the state in the economy, economic thinking, the structures of the economy, or the efficiency of labour market institutions.<sup>4</sup> For several decades, the French economic model has been faced with a multitude of challenges, namely low international competitiveness, bureaucratic burdens, high taxes, growing public debt, and structural unemployment.

The state's enormous involvement in the economy is also a problem. At 55.9 percent of its gross domestic product (GDP), France's public spending in 2018 was proportionately the highest among the member states of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).<sup>5</sup> The country's oversized public sector is one of the main reasons for its chronic budget deficits, conflicts with the European Commission over spending plans, and criticism from Germany. Due to

the pandemic, France's public debt will probably grow from 98 percent of GDP in 2019 to about 120 percent in 2022.<sup>6</sup> It also has the highest private sector debt in relative terms in the eurozone (150 percent of GDP in the second quarter of 2020).<sup>7</sup> France's tax revenues in relation to GDP are the second-highest among OECD countries after Denmark, at 45.4 percent of GDP in 2019. This figure is both substantially higher than the OECD average of 33.8 percent and markedly higher than Germany's (38.8 percent).<sup>8</sup> The French government therefore has little room for further taxation of the economy — not that the public would approve further tax raises.

Since his inauguration in May 2017, President Macron has initiated and seen through a large number of structural reforms — in many instances against popular resistance. However, none of these reforms has managed to overcome the difficulties of the French economic model. The lack of substantive results is particularly flagrant in public finances. Even though the ECB has significantly lowered its borrowing costs, the prospects for future developments in France's public debt are still concerning.<sup>9</sup> These challenges and the resulting economic and social problems are having a negative impact on France's political position in Europe and the equilibrium in its relations with Germany. Due to its limited political leeway for a real structural transformation domestically, Paris is interlinking the eurozone reform with the expectation of being able to design its fiscal policy more flexibly, and is pushing for more economic interventionism in the EU and the eurozone. These expectations run counter to Germany's traditional attitude of valuing the binding nature of fiscal rules

4 Markus K. Brunnermeier, Harold James and Jean-Pierre Landau, *The Euro and the Battle of Ideas* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2016); Guillaume Cléaud et al., *Cruising at Different Speeds: Similarities and Divergences between the German and the French Economies*, European Economy. Discussion Paper 103 (Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, July 2019); Pawel Tokarski, *Divergence and Diversity in the Euro Area. The Case of Germany, France and Italy*, SWP Research Paper 2019/RP 06 (Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, May 2019).

5 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), *General Government Spending*, <https://data.oecd.org/gga/general-government-spending.htm> (accessed 7 December 2020).

6 European Commission, *European Economic Forecast. Autumn 2020*, Institutional Paper 136 (Luxembourg, November 2020), 97.

7 Banque de France, *Debt Ratios by Institutional Sectors – International Comparisons, 2020Q2*, 19 November 2020, <https://www.banque-france.fr/en/statistics/loans/debt-and-securities/debt-ratios-intitutional-sectors-international-comparisons> (accessed 14 February 2021).

8 OECD, *Tax Revenue*, <https://data.oecd.org/tax/tax-revenue.htm> (accessed 7 December 2020).

9 “Covid-19: La France a ‘versé beaucoup de fonds publics’, mais ‘il va falloir revenir aux réalités’, alerte le président de la commission sur l’avenir des finances publiques”, *france-info*, 5 December 2020, [https://www.francetvinfo.fr/economie/deficit/covid-19-la-france-a-verse-beaucoup-de-fonds-publics-mais-il-va-falloir-revenir-aux-realites-alerte-le-president-de-la-commission-sur-l-avenir-des-finances-publicques\\_4208055.html](https://www.francetvinfo.fr/economie/deficit/covid-19-la-france-a-verse-beaucoup-de-fonds-publics-mais-il-va-falloir-revenir-aux-realites-alerte-le-president-de-la-commission-sur-l-avenir-des-finances-publicques_4208055.html) (accessed 14 February 2021).

within the monetary union and stressing the necessity of national structural reforms.

### Macron, Berlin and the Euro: Looking to Lead

In Macron's proposals for reviving the European Union, the eurozone has a leading role.<sup>10</sup> Like his predecessors in the Élysée Palace, President Macron also aims for closer fiscal integration and more risk-sharing within the EU-19. The elementary building blocks of a eurozone reform as presented in his book *Révolution* are the creation of a common stabilisation and investment budget and the appointment of a eurozone finance minister.<sup>11</sup> These ideas reflect the conception of a "gouvernement économique", which has long been promoted by France. This would go hand-in-hand with more economic interventionism at the EU level without member states having to cede control over their own economic policy. It would also mean reducing the ECB's independence in setting and implementing its monetary policy.<sup>12</sup>

Macron incorporated these elements into his 2017 Sorbonne speech, which linked pragmatism with an attempt to make Germany react to the demands emanating from Paris.<sup>13</sup> He stressed the importance of structural reform in France, and emphasised the responsibility of member states for their debts, which corresponded to Berlin's expectations; he also refrained from his usual criticism of Germany's trade surplus.<sup>14</sup> However, he did refer to the "red lines" that Berlin regularly warns of, and which have become the catchphrase for Germany's reluctance to share risks within the currency union.<sup>15</sup>

The emphasis on domestic structural reforms was also an attempt to restore the credibility of French economic policy in the eyes of Berlin, as well as an argument meant to facilitate German concessions on deeper integration in the eurozone.<sup>16</sup> One year later President Macron and Chancellor Merkel adopted the Franco-German Meseberg declaration, which was intended to revitalise eurozone reform and was an interim goal in Macron's efforts not only to reduce the political imbalance between Berlin and Paris but to regain the leadership role in its tandem with Germany.<sup>17</sup>

### France and the European Central Bank

As mentioned above, the desire to both increase France's influence and reduce the Bundesbank's influence over monetary policy in Europe was a decisive factor in French support for the project of monetary integration. Before the euro was born, monetary policy in Europe had been dominated by the Bundesbank. At the time, the other central banks, including the Banque de France, followed the monetary policy decisions of the German Central Bank. Naturally, the Bundesbank acted first and foremost in the interests of the German economy. The French franc was chronically weak, and French politicians were regularly forced to ask Germany for readjustments within the European currency system.

Resistance to an independent central bank is thus deeply rooted in French politics. Since the start of the economic downturn in 2001, the ECB's monetary policy has regularly faced criticism in France.<sup>18</sup> It has been one of the most important political objectives of the various French governments to gain significant influence over the ECB's monetary policy and to have a French president of this institution — this has been

<sup>10</sup> See the contribution by Claudia Major on France's security and defence policy, pp. 10ff.

<sup>11</sup> Emmanuel Macron, *Révolution. C'est notre combat pour la France* (Paris: XO Éditions, 2016), 235–36.

<sup>12</sup> Clement Fontan and Sabine Saurugger, "Between a Rock and a Hard Place: Preference Formation in France during the Eurozone Crisis", *Political Studies Review* 18, no. 4 (2020): 507–24 (508); David J. Howarth, "Making and Breaking the Rules: French Policy on EU 'gouvernement économique'", *Journal of European Public Policy* 14, no. 7 (2007): 1061–78.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Michaela Wiegel, *Emmanuel Macron: Ein Visionär für Europa – eine Herausforderung für Deutschland* (Berlin et al.: Europa Verlag, 2018), 200.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Macron, *Révolution. C'est notre combat pour la France* (see note 11), 236–37.

<sup>17</sup> Federal Press Office of the German Government (BPA), "Erklärung von Meseberg. Das Versprechen Europas für Sicherheit und Wohlstand erneuern", Pressemitteilung 214, 19 June 2018, <https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-de/aktuelles/erklarung-von-meseberg-1140536> (accessed 4 December 2020).

<sup>18</sup> Howarth, "Making and Breaking the Rules" (see note 12), 1073–74.

accomplished with Jean-Claude Trichet (2003–2011) and currently with Christine Lagarde.<sup>19</sup>

The ECB has had a key role in stabilising the eurozone since the euro crisis began in 2010 by counteracting the increase in public debt. Due to the crisis, the weight of the ECB within the EU's institutional fabric has substantially increased, but it has also been more strongly politicised.<sup>20</sup> The appointment of Christine Lagarde as the new ECB president in 2019 was one of the greatest successes of Macron's EU policy. In view of the ECB's key role in the economic governance of the eurozone, a French ECB director can help Paris to push the currency integration project closer to the French vision. Lagarde has announced and initiated a review of the ECB's monetary strategy. As part of this, she is likely to substantially influence the future orientation of its monetary policy.

### Covid-19: A Stress Test for the Eurozone and the Franco-German Tandem

Both in Paris and in Berlin, decision-makers were quick to understand that the Covid-19 pandemic was not just a serious threat to individual economies and the eurozone, but above all an enormous political challenge. France suggested developing new financial assistance instruments in the eurozone. It brought together an informal coalition of nine countries, including Italy and Spain, which advocated the joint issuing of bonds in the EU-19 (corona bonds) to combat the repercussions of the pandemic. The group's demands were supported by Christine Lagarde.<sup>21</sup> In addition to the enormous fiscal incentives set by individual members and the aid package adopted by the Eurogroup, on 18 May 2020 France and Germany proposed the creation of a special financial instrument. In this decision, France took Germany's concerns into account and agreed to simultaneously

commit "to solid economic policy and an ambitious reform agenda".<sup>22</sup>

Following the Franco-German accord, an agreement was concluded between all EU member states to establish a Recovery and Resilience Facility, largely stocked by contributions, which is to have a volume of up to 672.5 billion euros. This was without doubt a success for Macron, even though the instrument remains within the EU budget. In contrast to Germany, France preferred to pursue further fiscal integration within a smaller group of states, such as the EU-19.

### The French job market will not return to pre-crisis levels in the election year 2022 either.

The French job market has been hit hard by the pandemic. It is unlikely that even the funds from the Recovery and Resilience Facility will make much difference initially. According to optimistic prognoses, France might see a strong upturn in GDP growth (5.3 percent)<sup>23</sup> in 2021. However, at the end of 2020, the job market situation still remained challenging, as more than one in every five labour market participants experienced shortages in the job offer.<sup>24</sup> The labour market will most likely not return to pre-Covid levels in the election year 2022 either.<sup>25</sup> Moreover, public debt will develop differently in France and Germany. France will have one of the highest public debts in the EU-19 relative to GDP, at around 117.8 percent of GDP in 2021. In Germany it will be 71.7 percent of GDP.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>19</sup> There is an informal agreement between France, Germany and Italy – respected to this day – that the three countries should be permanently represented on the ECB executive board.

<sup>20</sup> Paweł Tokarski, *Die Europäische Zentralbank als politischer Akteur in der Eurokrise. Mandat, Stellung und Handeln der EZB in einer unvollständigen Währungsunion*, SWP-Studie 14/2016 (Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, July 2016).

<sup>21</sup> Daniel Dombey, Guy Chazan and Jim Brunsten, "Nine Eurozone Countries Issue Call for 'Coronabonds'", *Financial Times*, 25 March 2020.

<sup>22</sup> BPA, "Deutsch-französische Initiative zur wirtschaftlichen Erholung Europas nach der Coronakrise", Pressemitteilung 173, 18 May 2020, <https://www.bundeskanzlerin.de/bkin-de/aktuelles/deutsch-franzoesische-initiative-zur-wirtschaftlichen-erholung-europas-nach-der-coronakrise-1753760> (accessed 22 February 2021).

<sup>23</sup> Economic Intelligence Unit, *France, Forecast Summary*, 1 April 2021.

<sup>24</sup> Institut national de la statistique et des études économiques (INSEE), *Au quatrième trimestre 2020, le taux de chômage se replie à nouveau, à 8,0 %*, <https://www.insee.fr/fr/statistiques/5044459> (accessed 5 March 2020).

<sup>25</sup> Economic Intelligence Unit, *France, Forecast Summary*, 1 April 2021.

<sup>26</sup> European Commission, *European Economic Forecast. Autumn 2020* (see note 6), 87, 97.



## Prospect: Paris and Berlin in the Post-Covid-19 Eurozone

Emmanuel Macron's vision of the eurozone does not fundamentally differ from traditional French perspectives or approaches. The most significant Franco-German differences on this issue will therefore remain. Despite Macron's attempts to project himself as a eurozone reformer, his speech at the Sorbonne barely concealed France's aversion to giving supranational institutions more control over economic policy in the eurozone. At least Emmanuel Macron shows more resolve than his predecessors concerning the programme of economic reforms in France that will be decisive for the stability of the eurozone. The president thus intends to restore France's position as an equal in its relations with Germany and re-establish its political influence in the EU.<sup>27</sup>

The pandemic has introduced a new dynamic into economic integration in the EU, and forced Paris and Berlin to cooperate more effectively in this domain. As a result, an unprecedented support mechanism, the Recovery and Resilience Facility, has been created under the umbrella of the EU budget. The fact that Germany supported the idea shows a certain paradigm shift in its political decision-making. However, the unequal consequences of the health crisis and the different speeds of recovery will deepen economic divergence not only within the EU-19, but also between Germany and France.

In particular, the inevitable significant increase in public debt is likely to greatly influence the direction that further integration takes within the eurozone. It should therefore be expected that Paris will take an active role in the anticipated debate over the possibility of further risk-sharing in public finance and over reforming the EU's fiscal rules. Although the fiscal rules of the eurozone moved further and further away from economic reality, Germany is likely to prefer postponing this debate as long as possible. Given the elections in Germany (2021) and France (2022), and member states' differing interests, it will be very difficult to make progress in this area. In the context of structural challenges to the French economy and the current crisis due to the Covid-19 pandemic, it is important for France to keep up its fiscal support for the economy. It will therefore be decisive for the ECB to continue its expansive monetary policy, so as to keep public borrowing costs low

in the eurozone. In the medium term, it is politically the "least expensive" option both for Paris and for Berlin that the ECB retain its comprehensive commitment to stabilising the eurozone.

<sup>27</sup> See the Introduction by Ronja Kempin, pp. 7ff.

Susan Stewart

## Macron's Russia Policy: Already a Failure?\*

Emmanuel Macron made headlines with his statement about NATO being brain dead.<sup>1</sup> Just as important in the German context is his approach to Russia: in August 2019 the French president announced that he wanted to enter into a dialogue with Russia about European security.<sup>2</sup> He subsequently initiated bilateral steps to improve relations between Paris and Moscow. The most visible was the reintroduction of the 2+2 format, meaning regular meetings between the two countries' foreign and defence ministers. Thirteen working groups were created for more specific topics, such as Libya or cybersecurity, and started work in September 2020.

Macron has affirmed this approach in speeches in several formats, even where it explicitly ran counter to advice from foreign-affairs experts.<sup>3</sup> He has been seconded, at least rhetorically, by Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian, who, in a speech in Prague in late 2019, linked the new French approach to NATO's Cold War policy.<sup>4</sup> He emphasised that history had

proved the necessity of keeping up a dialogue with Russia to guarantee Europe's security. Macron's invitation to Vladimir Putin to visit him at his summer residence in Brégançon just before the G7 summit in August 2019 demonstrates his determination to enter into such a dialogue with the Russian president. It also signals that the French president would welcome Russia's return to the G7 – or rather G8 – format in the medium term, and that he was prepared to relay Putin's messages into the summit talks if applicable.<sup>5</sup>

However, Macron's approach to Russia should not be seen in isolation from his statement that NATO was "brain dead". Rather it is embedded in a broader view of the international situation, which has led Macron to conclude that cooperation with Moscow is imperative. Both in his interview with *The Economist* magazine in November 2019 and in his programmatic speech to French ambassadors in August 2019, he expanded on why it was necessary to convince Russia of the advantages of closer cooperation: it would likely weaken the cooperation between Russia and China; and its success would give Europe increased weight on the international scene, making it less reliant on a good transatlantic relationship and US security guarantees.

The French president's proposed (and in part already realised) project vis-à-vis the Russian Federation therefore contains both rhetorical and practical components, and is part of a larger whole that reflects his view of the international situation. This chapter will present the differences between Paris and Berlin as regards their Russia policies, account for the French

\* I would like to thank Céline Marangé for her comments on an earlier version of this text.

1 "Emmanuel Macron in His Own Words. The French President's Interview with *The Economist*", *The Economist*, 7 November 2019, <https://www.economist.com/europe/2019/11/07/emmanuel-macron-in-his-own-words-english> (accessed 21 February 2021).

2 Élysée Palace, "Discours du Président de la République Emmanuel Macron à la conférence des ambassadeurs et des ambassadrices de 2019", 27 August 2019, <https://www.elysee.fr/emmanuel-macron/2019/08/27/discours-du-president-de-la-republique-a-la-conference-des-ambassadeurs-1> (accessed 21 February 2021).

3 Ibid. In this speech Macron explicitly admitted the existence of a "deep state" ("un État profond"). He was referring, inter alia, to the many diplomats who did not support his Russia initiative.

4 French Embassy in Vientiane, "Discours de M. Jean-Yves Le Drian à Prague, au colloque 'Au-delà de 1989: Espoirs et désillusions après les révolutions'", 6 December 2019, <https://la.ambafrance.org/Discours-de-M-Jean-Yves-Le-Drian-ministre-de-l-Europe-et-des-affaires> (accessed 21 February

2021). See also the contribution by Claudia Major on France's security and defence policy, pp. 10ff.

5 However, Macron was unequivocal that Russia's return to the G8 format was not possible until the Ukraine conflict had been resolved. See "Macron juge 'pertinent' que la Russie puisse rejoindre le G8... 'à terme'", *Radio France Internationale* (RFI), 22 August 2019, <https://www.rfi.fr/fr/europe/20190821-emmanuel-macron-russie-ukraine-g7-g8> (accessed 21 February 2021).

approach, and explain the impact of already initiated steps on the Franco-German relationship.

## Shifting Roles in Russia Policy

From the German perspective, the main problem with Emmanuel Macron's Russia policy is that it is seen as a solo effort. The French president adopted the approach described above without prior consultation with Berlin or other member states of the European Union (EU). This annoyed German decision-makers considerably, in particular because Berlin often takes the lead within the EU on Russia.

The two countries' policies on Russia also differ in content. While the French approach has some similarities to Germany's previous Russia policy, and certainly harmonises with the views of numerous political and economic actors in Germany, it is at odds with the spirit of Berlin's current dealings with Russia. The latter are mainly characterised by open criticism of specific Russian actions as well as resolute support of existing EU sanctions against Russia. France has not questioned the sanctions, but French rhetoric concerning Russia has become markedly gentler during Macron's presidency.

### **France draws conclusions about what Russia's "logical" interests might be. Germany is guided by Russian behaviour.**

However, the decisive fact is that the French president's approach is based on his own deductions about what Russia's "logical" interests might be, not on Russian behaviour.<sup>6</sup> After several disappointments in dealing with Russian actors (over the annexation of the Crimea, the war in the Donbas, the "Lisa Case", the poisoning of Alexei Navalny), key politicians in Germany have come to the conclusion that Russian logic is difficult to reconstruct and that assumptions should instead be made on the basis of Russian actions. This results in a mix of instruments and approaches which differs from the one chosen by the French side.

<sup>6</sup> "Emmanuel Macron in His Own Words" (see note 1). Macron's reply to the question "But you're basing your analysis on logic, not on his [Putin's] behaviour?" was "Yes, I am."

Germany's Russia policy also contains cooperative and regime-supporting elements in its Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline project, which it has upheld. By contrast, in 2014 France cancelled the sale of two Mistral helicopters to Russia although it was already contractually arranged.<sup>7</sup> This occurred under the then-President François Hollande and is thus not part of Macron's Russia policy. Nevertheless, the issue of joint major projects with Russia is significant for Macron as well; he has repeatedly voiced his reservations about Nord Stream 2. It is a plausible assumption that he found Germany's attitude in this affair problematic because German criticism of Russia is hard to reconcile with a continuation of the Nord Stream 2 project.<sup>8</sup>

Macron's view of global developments does not always meet with agreement in Berlin either. First, the idea that actors inside the EU could convince the Russian leadership to give up its close relationship with China in favour of intensive cooperation with the EU or Europe is controversial in Germany. Many Russia experts questioned this assertion; several political actors also found it unconvincing.<sup>9</sup> They claimed that the EU could not offer Russia anything sufficiently attractive to induce it to downgrade its relationship with China. Arguments put forward by

<sup>7</sup> Sebastien Roblin, "How France Almost Sold Russia Two Powerful Aircraft Carriers", *The National Interest*, 1 September 2019, <https://nationalinterest.org/blog/buzz/how-france-almost-sold-russia-two-powerful-aircraft-carriers-77241> (accessed 21 February 2021). In August 2015 the ships were both sold to Egypt instead.

<sup>8</sup> Markus Becker and Peter Müller, "Streit über Nord Stream 2: Was hinter Macrons Kurswechsel steckt", *Der Spiegel*, 7 February 2019, <https://www.spiegel.de/wirtschaft/soziales/nord-stream-2-frankreich-rueckt-von-pipeline-ab-und-von-angela-merkel-a-1252185.html>; "Nordstream – L'Europe ne devrait pas accroître sa dépendance au gaz russe – Macron" (Reuters), *Les Échos*, 28 August 2020, <https://investir.lesechos.fr/marches/actualites/nordstream-l-europe-ne-devrait-pas-accroitre-sa-dependance-au-gaz-russe-macron-1924512.php>; see also Thomas Hanke, "'Sanktionen genügen nicht mehr': Frankreich fordert Ende von Nord Stream 2", *Handelsblatt*, 1 February 2021, <https://www.handelsblatt.com/politik/international/gaspipeline-sanktionen-genuegen-nicht-mehr-frankreich-fordert-ende-von-nord-stream-2/26871894.html?ticket=ST-2611793-ZoSxLu32VBHEdUiVL2zG-ap5> (all accessed on 21 February 2021).

<sup>9</sup> See, e.g., Liana Fix, "Europas Chefunruhestifter", *ipg-journal* [Internationale Politik und Gesellschaft], 30 January 2020, <https://www.ipg-journal.de/regionen/europa/artikel/europas-chefunruhestifter-4034/> (accessed 21 February 2021).

members of the EU delegation in Moscow, however, resembled Macron's.<sup>10</sup> Berlin only partly shares this view, inter alia because there is hardly any leverage for influencing Russia's foreign policy in the desired direction.

Second, the French objective seems to be a greater decoupling of Europe from the US, which does not chime with German policy. The logic behind Macron's proposals appears to be that the EU should try to work towards a strong Europe so as to gain more autonomy vis-à-vis China and the US.<sup>11</sup> This would make substantial rapprochement with Russia indispensable. More intensive security cooperation with Russia would clearly generate more distance between the EU and the US – at least in the foreseeable future. This perspective and thinking runs counter to the prevalent stance in Berlin on transatlantic relations, especially following Joe Biden's victory in the US presidential elections.

Interestingly Macron's Russia policy is relatively close to Berlin's course of action before 2014. This means that roles have shifted within the EU where Russia is concerned. France now fulfils Germany's former role, while Germany has moved somewhat closer to the Russia critics in the eastern EU, namely Poland and the Baltic states. This demonstrates how far and how substantially the German course has changed in recent years. Germany's approach nevertheless remains in the middle of the EU spectrum, even though relations with Russia have noticeably worsened since the poisoning of opposition politician Alexei Navalny.<sup>12</sup>

### The French Approach vis-à-vis Russia: Primarily Geopolitical

The French president's Russia policy is merely one building block in a larger whole. According to Emmanuel Macron's vision of the world – as he explained it, for example, in his interview with *The Economist* magazine in the autumn of 2019 – it is vital to integrate Russia more strongly into a Euro-

pean discourse and to cooperate more intensively with Moscow. To this end, the Russian leadership's interest in cooperation will need to be refocused from China onto Europe. Otherwise Russia and China will form a bloc, and the EU will likely be forced to seek a closer alliance with the US to compensate. In other words, it is a very geopolitical perspective that has induced the French president to work towards cooperation with Russia. Perhaps his initiatives also seem questionable to some in Berlin because many German actors find it difficult or virtually impossible to acquire a taste for geopolitics.

Macron's approach enables him to project himself as a European and, if successful, to take on a leading role in Europe's foreign policy. It also corresponds to the preferences of important political and economic circles within France. Even though the French foreign-affairs establishment is divided on Russia, part of it backs Macron's proposal, including a number of renowned and emeritus ambassadors and ministers.<sup>13</sup> They include Pierre Vimont, a high-ranking diplomat and currently the French president's envoy for security architecture and for building trust with Russia. Furthermore, several influential French businesspeople from the energy and arms sectors are interested in good relations with Russia, primarily for financial reasons.<sup>14</sup>

Finally, the French president expects his Russia approach to have a positive impact on several foreign-policy challenges, especially in the Middle East and Africa. Since Russia has a key role in Syria, Macron's logic dictates that it would be easier to persuade the Russian leadership to undertake or abandon certain actions if bilateral Franco-Russian relations, as well as overall EU-Russia relations, were better. But Macron seems to have hoped for positive spillover effects for Libya and the Sahel as well.<sup>15</sup> Relations with Russia

<sup>13</sup> See, e.g., Eugénie Bastié and Guillaume Perrault, "Hubert Védrine: 'Il est temps de revenir à une politique plus réaliste avec la Russie'", *Le Figaro*, 16 August 2019, <https://www.lefigaro.fr/vox/monde/hubert-vedrine-il-est-temps-de-revenir-a-une-politique-plus-realiste-avec-la-russie-20190816> (accessed 21 February 2021).

<sup>14</sup> See, e.g., Nabil Wakim, "La France pourrait soutenir un gigantesque projet gazier dans l'Arctique russe", *Le Monde*, 2 September 2020, [https://www.lemonde.fr/economie/article/2020/09/02/la-france-pourrait-soutenir-un-gigantesque-projet-gazier-dans-l-arctique-russe\\_6050731\\_3234.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/economie/article/2020/09/02/la-france-pourrait-soutenir-un-gigantesque-projet-gazier-dans-l-arctique-russe_6050731_3234.html) (accessed 21 February 2021).

<sup>15</sup> See the contribution by Wolfram Lacher on Macron's Libya policy, pp. 15ff.

<sup>10</sup> Michael Peel, "EU Envoy Urges Bloc to Engage More with Russia over 5G and Data", *Financial Times*, 13 September 2019, <https://www.ft.com/content/725aa5b6-d5f7-11e9-8367-807ebd53ab77> (accessed 21 February 2021).

<sup>11</sup> See the contribution by Ronja Kempin on the CSDP, pp. 21ff.

<sup>12</sup> See Alexander Chernyshev et al., "Das Nawalny-Komplott", *Der Spiegel*, 28 August 2020.

are therefore relevant for key French foreign-policy concerns in areas to the south of the EU.

## Consequences for Franco-German Relations: Still Undecided

Thus far, differences in the French and German approaches to Russia have not had any serious consequences for Franco-German relations. There are at least two reasons for this. One, the French approach has so far mostly manifested itself in rhetoric. The few concrete actions (2+2 dialogue, Putin being invited to Brégançon) have had no tangible results. Two, recent developments in and concerning Russia have put the brake on Macron's approach, at least temporarily. After Alexei Navalny was poisoned, the next scheduled dialogue in the 2+2 format was postponed, and Macron's envisaged visit to Moscow was called into question.<sup>16</sup> However, this is only a temporary phenomenon, and does not mean the French approach has been fundamentally modified.

When Macron originally outlined his proposals, experts in Germany were concerned that his rapprochement with Russia could have a negative impact on the Normandy Format.<sup>17</sup> Their thinking was that such a rapprochement (or even merely the potential for a rapprochement) would influence both Russian calculations within the Format and the previously unified stance of France and Germany. However, the Normandy summit in Paris in December 2019 showed that these fears were unfounded. The unity of the two EU members does not currently seem to be at risk; nevertheless, negotiations in the Normandy Format could be negatively affected since relations with Russia have worsened further due to the Navalny case.

Like Germany, France has been trying to conduct a dialogue about Russia with the EU's eastern members. Emmanuel Macron's trip to Lithuania in late September 2020, however, sent signals in two direc-

tions. On the one hand, the French president had harsh words for the Russian leadership's treatment of Navalny, and he took time to meet with the Belarusian opposition politician Svetlana Tikhonovskaya. On the other hand, the meeting had a relatively low profile, and Macron's other rhetoric in Vilnius was dedicated to the assertion that dialogue with Moscow had to be continued.<sup>18</sup> Overall, the impression is that no departure from the current French stance towards Russia is envisaged. Macron's visit to Lithuania shows his intention of continuing to cultivate good relations with governments in Eastern Europe. However, his trip to Warsaw in February 2020, for instance, brought about neither a tangible improvement in Franco-Polish relations, nor a rapprochement between the two countries concerning Russia.

**Following Biden's election victory, Berlin will rely more than Paris on the US as a partner. This could make Franco-German relations more difficult.**

Since the French approach to Russia is embedded in a broader international context, the question arises whether and to what extent Germany and France will move closer to each other in related areas of foreign policy. There are currently no significant signs of such a rapprochement. Following the Biden victory in the US elections, assessments in the two countries could diverge about what potential this holds for transatlantic relations. Germany is likely to rely more on the US as a partner in the short to medium term – France will presumably be more reticent. Such a development could further complicate Franco-German cooperation, both in the EU and regarding Russia. Finally, it is unclear which path Germany's foreign policy will take after the parliamentary elections of September 2021, or what challenges the country may have to face, especially in terms of relations with Russia. It therefore remains an open question how the German and French approaches to Russia might develop in the medium term, and whether they will tend to converge or diverge.

<sup>16</sup> "Affaire Navalny: La France reporte une réunion ministérielle franco-russe" (Agence France-Presse, AFP), *Le Figaro*, 8 September 2020, <https://www.lefigaro.fr/flash-actu/affaire-navalny-la-france-reporte-une-reunion-ministerielle-franco-russe-20200908> (accessed 21 February 2020). At the time of completion of this analysis (February 2021), neither the talks nor the visit had taken place.

<sup>17</sup> The Normandy Format consists of France, Germany, Ukraine and Russia, and was created in June 2014 to work out a resolution for the conflict in the Donbas.

<sup>18</sup> Élysée Palace, "Déplacement du Président Emmanuel Macron en République de Lituanie", 29 September 2020, <https://www.elysee.fr/emmanuel-macron/2020/09/29/deplacement-du-president-emmanuel-macron-en-republique-de-lituanie> (accessed 21 February 2021).

Claudia Major

# A Committed but Challenging Ally: France's NATO Policy

France's NATO policy clearly demonstrates the characteristics of its current security and defence approach: the leitmotifs of European sovereignty, disruptive approaches, high expectations, and the willingness to go it alone if deemed necessary. The policy that Paris is currently pursuing in the Alliance reflects – apart from a few exceptions – traditional French approaches.

## Franco-German Differences

For France, NATO is one format among many for pursuing its defence policy objectives.<sup>1</sup> The relationship between Paris and the Alliance has been complicated for decades, as is evident from the fact that France left NATO's integrated military structures in 1966 and only returned in 2009. France sees its role in the Alliance under the slogan “*amie, alliée, mais pas alignée*” (friend, ally, but not aligned), and defines NATO primarily as a military defence alliance. Paris has thus far made, and very strictly defended, the distinction, unique in Europe, between NATO as an (appreciated) *military* defence organisation and the Alliance as a *political* union. From the French perspective, NATO is an instrument that should exclusively be used where it has added value, namely in the collective defence of Europe, and in securing the interoperability of allies.

By contrast, Germany emphasises both elements: the political and the military. It views NATO as a central pillar of the transatlantic order and the most important framework for organising and guaranteeing Euroatlantic defence.<sup>2</sup> According to the 2016

White Paper on Security Policy and the Future of the Bundeswehr, Germany's security is best served by a strong NATO and a Europe capable to act: “Strengthening the cohesion and capacity to act of NATO and the EU is for paramount importance for Germany.” Alliance solidarity is therefore “a fundamental principle of German governance.”<sup>3</sup> Accordingly, NATO is the decisive benchmark for German defence policy, for planning, equipment, training and exercises. Given the US's key role within the Alliance, Germany considers NATO to be the ultimate military life insurance and the central political forum for transatlantic cooperation.

In contrast to Germany, France sees its bilateral defence cooperation with the US as largely independent of NATO. In general, Paris considers its transatlantic relations to be much more comprehensive. Accordingly, NATO is only one of several formats for this – albeit an important one – but neither unique nor privileged. It is even perceived as rather cumbersome and bureaucratic. For Paris, constructive cooperation with Washington can therefore perfectly take place outside the Alliance (for example, in operations in the Sahel and in the coalition against the “Islamic State” (IS)), even if the Franco-American relationship within NATO can be rather tense at the same time. Unlike Germany and many Central and Eastern European countries, France views NATO and the US's pledges certainly as key elements for safeguarding Europe's security and stability, but not as the ultimate guarantee. Instead, Paris tends to emphasise its independence, in particular because it disposes of its own nuclear weapons to guarantee its national sovereignty, and thus feels less dependent on US security assurances.

<sup>1</sup> See the contribution by Ronja Kempin on the CSDP, pp. 21ff.

<sup>2</sup> Claudia Major, *Die Rolle der NATO für Europas Verteidigung. Stand und Optionen zur Weiterentwicklung aus deutscher Perspektive*, SWP-Studie 25/2019 (Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, November 2019).

<sup>3</sup> German Government, *Weißbuch zur Sicherheitspolitik und zur Zukunft der Bundeswehr* (Berlin, June 2016), 49 <https://www.bundeswehr.de/resource/blob/4800140/fe103a80d8576b2cd7a135a5a8a86dde/download-white-paper-2016-data.pdf>.

Also in practical terms, NATO's significance within French defence policy is limited. This is evident in France's most recent operations, in both the geographical location (Africa, Middle East) and the institutional framework (coalition of the willing, EU, cooperation with local armed forces).

In recent years, the amount of French participation in NATO operations has declined. This is in part due to the fact that the Alliance has generally reduced its deployments, but also because Paris needed its forces in other theatres, for example inside France — since 2015 for the anti-terror operation “Sentinelle” — and for operations such as “Barkhane” in the Sahel or “Chammal” in Syria and Iraq. Nonetheless, France substantially contributes to NATO's deterrence and defence measures, for example as part of the enhanced Forward Presence (eFP) in the Baltic states.

### Macron's Approach to NATO: A Military but also a Political Alliance

Under President Macron, a novelty emerged in France's NATO policy: Paris now emphasises the political dimension of the Alliance. Otherwise, France's NATO policy largely relies on continuity.

#### Continuity in the Core Assumptions

Four factors explain the traditional French position. Firstly, Paris doubts that US pledges for European security are reliable and robust in the long term. This was especially true during Donald Trump's presidency, which confirmed such concerns — for instance with the uncoordinated US withdrawal from Syria in the autumn of 2019, rhetorical diatribes against the European Union (“a foe”),<sup>4</sup> and Washington's withdrawal from the global international order. However, French concerns are also motivated by structural tendencies — such as the increasing US focus on its systemic competition with China — and broader power shifts at the global level. Trump's replacement with Joe Biden is therefore unlikely to change France's perceptions. Paris will hold onto its well-known concerns about Washington's role and continue to deem

4 “‘I Think the European Union Is a Foe’, Trump Says ahead of Putin Meeting in Helsinki”, *CBS Newsweek* (online), 15 July 2018, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/donald-trump-interview-cbs-news-european-union-is-a-foe-ahead-of-putin-meeting-in-helsinki-jeff-glor/> (accessed 18 December 2020).

it necessary to build up European defence and sovereignty. Yet, this should not be misunderstood as distrust of Washington. To France it seems reasonable that the US will devote itself to what it considers its greatest challenges — such as China — and expect Europe to increase its capacity to act in security and defence issue in its own environment. Rather, from the French perspective, the challenge for Europeans consists in accompanying this US change of focus in a cooperative and constructive way.

Secondly, France detects a weakening of NATO, due to the fact that some allies increasingly pursue their own interests and carry bilateral conflicts into the Alliance. For instance, Hungary is blocking NATO's relationship with Ukraine. Turkey was or still is involved in various theatres (Syria, Libya, Iraq, Greece, Cyprus, Nagorno-Karabakh) where it partly acts against NATO decisions and interests, for example by violating the arms embargo for Libya. Ankara is blocking not only NATO's relations with the EU, but also its bilateral partnerships with Egypt, Armenia, Jordan, Israel, Iraq and Austria. For Paris this demonstrates that coordination and consultation among allies do not work properly and that NATO is unable to deliver on its coordinating role. France would even go a step further and posit that the behaviour of individual NATO allies is directly harming the interests of others, including France. For example, Turkey is combating Kurdish YPG militias, which were trained and equipped by France and the US, and which fought the IS with them. Paris believes that — due to Ankara's conduct — it has been weakened in the conflict with IS and that its domestic security has deteriorated, because the risk of attacks in France increased. This eventually also undermines NATO's credibility as a defence alliance, within which allies are supposed to pledge mutual assistance in times of crisis.

Thirdly, Paris has criticised NATO for being too strongly focused on Russia; from the French perspective, terrorism is also a key threat to Europe.<sup>5</sup> In France, 2015 is seen as a key year for security policy, with the attack on the *Charlie Hebdo* editorial office in January, and the series of attacks in Paris on 13 November. By contrast, 2014 — the year in which Russia

5 See also Philippe Etienne, *A View from the Élysée: France's Role in the World* (London: Chatham House — The Royal Institute of International Affairs, September 2018), <https://chathamhouse.soutron.net/Portal/DownloadImageFile.ashx?objectId=1707> (accessed 18 December 2020).

annexed Crimea — has less impact than it does in Germany. Paris certainly views Russia as a challenge. France's deterrence doctrine is based on ambivalence and does not explicitly name adversaries. Still, one can deduce from the positions it takes that French nuclear weapons are intended to deter Russia among other threats. What Paris wants is for NATO to perceive existing threats in a balanced and comprehensive manner, and avoid a one-sided perspective.

Finally, Paris's fourth concern is that the strong focus on NATO and the US of some Allies (especially in Central and Eastern Europe) could undermine French efforts to strengthen European sovereignty. Moreover, if Europeans spend their growing defence budgets on US equipment rather than European equipment, Europe is — from a French perspective — wasting an opportunity for building greater autonomy.

Nevertheless, Paris vocally emphasises that NATO is of fundamental importance as the “foundation” of collective defence in an “unstable unbalanced world”.<sup>6</sup> France values the Alliance as a forum that guarantees the interoperability among allies (from which other formats and operations also benefit) and that raises awareness of security problems, for instance on NATO's southern flank with a view to terrorism. From the French perspective, European defence and NATO mutually strengthen each other, since NATO and transatlantic relations ultimately benefit from improved European capabilities.<sup>7</sup> It is

<sup>6</sup> See the speech by Defence Minister Florence Parly at the NATO Resource Conference in October 2018: “Alors, face à ce monde instable, déséquilibré, face à des menaces plus mouvantes, plus pernicieuses, plus difficiles à combattre et à appréhender, nous avons un besoin toujours aussi puissant d'une défense collective forte. Et le socle de cette défense collective est et demeure l'OTAN.” Vie Publique, “Déclaration de Mme Florence Parly, ministre des armées, sur la France et l'OTAN”, Paris, 16 October 2018, <https://www.vie-publique.fr/discours/206937-declaration-de-mme-florence-parly-ministre-des-armees-sur-la-france-et> (accessed 18 December 2020).

<sup>7</sup> See *ibid.*; see also the speech by Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian in Bratislava in October 2020: “There cannot be European defence without NATO, just as there cannot be a credible and sustainable NATO without lasting European defence commitments. [...] Everything we have done to strengthen our ability to defend our defence and security interests is not done against one party or another. And even less so, of course, against the transatlantic relationship. It is done for ourselves.” Ministère de l'Europe et des Affaires Étrangères, “‘GLOBSEC 2020 Bratislava Forum’ — Rede von Jean-Yves Le Drian”, Bratislava, 8 October 2020, <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/de/die-minister/jean-yves-le-drian/rede/article/globsec-2020-bratislava-forum-rede-von-jean-yves-le-drian-08-10-20> (accessed 30 November 2020).

therefore not a question of “the EU replacing NATO, but of us complementing NATO and making a greater contribution to its [i.e. Europe's] own defence”, as the former foreign minister Hubert Védrine put it, who represented France in the 2020 reflection process on NATO's future.<sup>8</sup> In other words, for France, NATO is neither the key political security organisation nor the framework for European sovereignty.

## A Surprising Upgrade for NATO's Political Role

However, despite all the continuity under President Macron, one change is emerging: he has surprisingly upgraded NATO's political role. This sets him apart from the traditional minimalist vision of his predecessors, who viewed the Alliance as a military but not a political organisation.

In the military realm, France is making an effort to contribute visibly. National commitments still have priority, but, after some initial hesitations, Paris is substantially contributing to the deterrence and defence measures against Russia that the allies decided following Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014. This includes participating in the Baltic Air Policing and NATO's enhanced Forward Presence in the Baltic states: 300 French soldiers who are stationed on a rotational basis in Estonia and Lithuania.<sup>9</sup> Here, France provides military capabilities, such as its Leclerc battle tanks, which are needed for collective defence in Europe, but otherwise rarely required in French security planning. France considers this a European commitment, and argues that its other operations (for instance, in the Sahel); its military capabilities; its defence spending (which meets NATO's two-percent spending goal); and its initiatives, such as the European Intervention Initiative, also con-

<sup>8</sup> Martina Meister, “Wir müssen auch Joe Biden mit Sanktionen drohen”, *Welt* (online), 15 November 2020, [https://amp.welt.de/politik/ausland/article220158758/EU-als-Weltmacht-Wir-muessen-auch-Joe-Biden-mit-Sanktionen-drohen.html?\\_\\_twitter\\_impression=true](https://amp.welt.de/politik/ausland/article220158758/EU-als-Weltmacht-Wir-muessen-auch-Joe-Biden-mit-Sanktionen-drohen.html?__twitter_impression=true) (accessed 18 December 2020).

<sup>9</sup> French Defence Ministry, “Actualités: Mission Lynx”, Paris, 22 September 2020, <https://www.defense.gouv.fr/actualites/operations/mission-lynx> (accessed 18 December 2020).



tribute to European defence and should therefore be appreciated as part of NATO burden-sharing.<sup>10</sup>

**Macron’s assessment that NATO was “brain dead” was officially deplored – informally, however, most allies agreed with his analysis.**

More remarkable is the political upgrade of NATO, which Macron paradoxically conveyed by harshly criticising the Alliance in an interview with *The Economist* magazine in late 2019.<sup>11</sup> While he acknowledged that NATO was functioning militarily, he complained that it was blocked politically, because of Turkey, the US and a lack of unity among Europeans. This is a change from France’s traditional stance, which primarily views NATO as a military alliance. Macron formulated his criticism disruptively – by diagnosing “brain death” – thus annoying not only his fellow allies, but also his own administration. His aim was to draw attention to what he considered fundamental deficiencies in NATO, which, he believed, would otherwise be swept under the carpet.<sup>12</sup>

The official reaction of the other allies was one of unanimous rejection; many demonstratively declared their allegiance to NATO, and harshly reprimanded the French president.<sup>13</sup> Informally, however, almost

all of them agreed with Macron’s analysis. Their disapproval was primarily directed at the form and timing of his statement: Paris issued its fundamental critique shortly before NATO’s 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary summit in December 2019. Many allies feared that public quarrels would spoil the festivities and lastingly damage NATO – and thus also European defence.

German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas subsequently proposed setting up an expert commission. He was picking up on a suggestion that had initially come from Paris, but that had little chance of success in the foreseeable future due to France’s critical attitude within the Alliance.<sup>14</sup> Now the idea bore fruit. The subsequently appointed expert group was to develop recommendations on how NATO could again become a place of political debate. This initiative eventually prevented public disputes at the London meeting of heads of state and government in December 2019, since sensitive topics could be devolved to the expert group and the tensions were thus channelled. The meeting’s final declaration tasked the NATO Secretary-General with making proposals for strengthening the Alliance’s political dimension.<sup>15</sup>

Subsequently, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg launched a process; within which Thomas de Maizière and Wess Mitchell led the practical work. The result, in December 2020, was a final report containing 130 recommendations that many allies praised.<sup>16</sup> Ultimately this report is also a success for staunch transatlanticist allies such as Germany and Poland, for example in that it will lead to the revision of NATO’s 2010 Strategic Concept, which many members had previously called for in vain. Without the

**10** See speech by Defence Minister Parly: “Mais je le dis aussi, une OTAN forte, c’est une Europe forte. La France y prend part pleinement. Elle est une puissance nucléaire. Elle agit dans le cadre de l’OTAN au titre des mesures d’assurance. Elle emploie, aussi, en dehors de l’OTAN, des milliers de militaires, au quotidien, pour combattre le terrorisme à sa source, arrêter les trafics, assurer la protection de tous.” Vie Publique, “Déclaration de Mme Florence Parly, ministre des armées, sur la France et l’OTAN” (see note 6).

**11** “Emmanuel Macron Warns Europe: NATO Is Becoming Brain-dead”, *The Economist* (online), 7 November 2019, <https://www.economist.com/europe/2019/11/07/emmanuel-macron-warns-europe-nato-is-becoming-brain-dead> (accessed 24 February 2021).

**12** E.g. Rym Momtaz, “Inside Macron’s Diplomacy: Tension, Turf Wars and Burnout”, *Politico* (online), 28 October 2020, <https://www.politico.eu/article/emmanuel-macron-diplomacy-tension-turf-wars-burnouts/> (accessed 18 December 2020).

**13** E.g. Heiko Maas, “Wir wollen und brauchen die NATO”, *Der Spiegel* (online), 10 November 2019, <https://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/heiko-maas-sicherheit-fuer-europagastbeitrag-des-bundesaussenministers-a-1295735.html> (accessed 18 December 2020); Angelique Chrisafis, “Macron Criticised by US and Germany over NATO ‘Brain Death’ Claims”, *The Guardian*, 7 November 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/nov/07/macron-warns-of-nato-brain-death-as-us-turns-its-back-on-allies> (accessed 18 December 2020).

**14** “Heiko Maas will Expertenkommission zur NATO einsetzen”, *Zeit online*, 19 November 2019, <https://www.zeit.de/politik/ausland/2019-11/militaerbuendnis-heiko-maas-nato-kommission> (accessed 18 December 2020).

**15** “London Declaration. Issued by the Heads of State and Government Participating in the Meeting of the North Atlantic Council in London 3–4 December 2019”, Press release, (4 December 2019) 115, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official\\_texts\\_171584.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_171584.htm) (accessed 18 December 2020).

**16** International Staff, Private Office of the Secretary General, *Report by the Group on NATO 2030*, PO(2020)0375, 25 November 2020, [https://www.nato.int/nato\\_static\\_fl2014/assets/pdf/2020/12/pdf/201201-Reflection-Group-Final-Report-Uni.pdf](https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2020/12/pdf/201201-Reflection-Group-Final-Report-Uni.pdf) (accessed 9 March 2021).

shock of Macron's criticism, this would hardly have happened. France is largely satisfied with the result, and claims responsibility for the content and success. The report emphasises the importance of political cohesion and a community of shared values, nuclear deterrence, EU-NATO cooperation, and the threat of terrorism. In a declaration, Macron praised the report shortly after its publication. He also urged that NATO and EU developments – such as the Strategic Compass process launched under the German EU Council presidency in late 2020 – be coordinated, and that the path to European sovereignty be continued.<sup>17</sup>

## NATO's Turkey Problem

With regard to Turkey, France also sees itself in the role of an admonisher who dares to address problems – disruptively if necessary – so as to motivate partners to act.<sup>18</sup> While for a long time certain allies preferred to see the difficulties between Paris and Ankara as purely bilateral, now all agree that the Alliance itself has a Turkey problem. The only divergences left are about how to deal with it. While some (including Spain, the UK and NATO institutions) warn that the Alliance could lose Turkey, others rely on subtle pressure (e.g. the US) or indeed a confrontational approach (Greece, as well as France).

There are several reasons, of both bilateral and international nature, for the tensions between Paris and Ankara.<sup>19</sup> Bilaterally, France believes that Turkey targets it with an organised, state-supported campaign that uses disinformation, the instrumentalisation of Muslim minorities, personal insults against President Macron, and the boycott of French products.<sup>20</sup> At the international level, Paris is critical of

many aspects of Turkish policy: its conduct in Syria; its illegal military support for the internationally recognised unity government in Libya; the maritime agreement that Ankara has concluded with Tripoli; its natural gas explorations in the eastern Mediterranean that violated Greek and Cypriot maritime sovereignty; and its support for Azerbaijan against Armenia in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in the autumn of 2020. From the French perspective, these are power claims and legal breaches that Europe should reject. In view of Turkey's ambitions in the geopolitically important Mediterranean Paris believes that Europe needs to defend its interests more assertively.

In June 2020 tensions between Paris and Ankara almost escalated into a military confrontation. As part of NATO operation "Sea Guardian", the crew of the French frigate "Le Coubert" wanted to inspect the cargo ship "Çirkin", which it suspected of unauthorised arms deliveries to Libya.<sup>21</sup> The cargo ship was escorted by Turkish military vessels, which prevented the inspection and used their targeting system on the French frigate, which was flying the NATO flag. The "Le Coubert" ultimately turned away.

France subsequently suspended its participation in "Sea Guardian" and demanded that the Alliance investigate the event. Paris was frustrated by the reluctance of other allies and NATO's military structure to hold Turkey responsible. From the French perspective, this is a fundamental Turkey-NATO problem

politik/macron-gehoert-in-psychiatrische-behandlung-frank-reich-ruft-nach-erdogan-beleidigung-botschafter-zurueck/26306146.html (accessed 30 November 2020); Maurice Szafran, "Islamisme: Pourquoi Macron ne cédera pas face à Erdogan", *Challenges* (online), 25 October 2020, [https://www.challenges.fr/monde/islamisme-pourquoi-macron-ne-cedera-pas-face-a-erdogan\\_734299](https://www.challenges.fr/monde/islamisme-pourquoi-macron-ne-cedera-pas-face-a-erdogan_734299) (accessed 18 December 2020); Marie Jégo, "Pourquoi le président turc, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, attaque violemment Emmanuel Macron", *Le Monde* (online), 26 October 2020, [https://www.lemonde.fr/international/article/2020/10/26/entre-emmanuel-macron-et-recep-tayyip-erdogan-les-relations-n-ont-jamais-ete-aussi-delitees\\_6057354\\_3210.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/international/article/2020/10/26/entre-emmanuel-macron-et-recep-tayyip-erdogan-les-relations-n-ont-jamais-ete-aussi-delitees_6057354_3210.html) (accessed 18 December 2020).

<sup>21</sup> "France-Turquie: 'Une réflexion est nécessaire sur ce qui est en train de se passer au sein de l'OTAN', prévient Florence Parly", *Public Senat*, 18 June 2020, <https://www.publicsenat.fr/article/parlementaire/france-turquie-une-reflexion-est-necessaire-sur-ce-qui-est-en-train-de-se> (accessed 18 December 2020); Thomas Gutschker and Michaela Wiegel, "Kurz vor dem Feuerbefehl", *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (online), 3 July 2020, <https://www.faz.net/aktuell/politik/ausland/tuerkei-frankreich-und-nato-konflikt-im-mittelmeer-16843219.html> (accessed 18 December 2020).

<sup>17</sup> Élysée Palace, "Entretien téléphonique du Président de la République avec le Secrétaire Général de l'OTAN, M. Jens Stoltenberg", Paris, 2 December 2020, <https://www.elysee.fr/emmanuel-macron/2020/12/02/entretien-telephonique-du-president-de-la-republique-avec-le-secretaire-general-de-lotan-m-jens-stoltenberg> (accessed 18 December 2020).

<sup>18</sup> See the contribution by Ronja Kempin on France's Turkey policy, pp. 42ff.

<sup>19</sup> Ariane Bonzon, "Pourquoi la Turquie et la France s'affrontent-elles en Méditerranée?", *Le Grand Continent* (online), 19 October 2020, <https://legrandcontinent.eu/fr/2020/10/19/pourquoi-la-turquie-et-la-france-saffrontent-elles-en-mediterranee/> (accessed 18 December 2020).

<sup>20</sup> Susanne Güsten and Albrecht Meier, "Frankreich ruft nach Erdogan-Beleidigung Botschafter zurück", *Tagesspiegel* (online), 26 October 2020, <https://www.tagesspiegel.de/>

that concerns all other allies as well, and not at all a bilateral matter between Paris and Ankara. Thus, France points out that it is not the only ally to reject Ankara's demand that the Kurdish YPG militias — France's former allies in the fight against IS — be categorised as terrorists. NATO states from Central and Eastern Europe in turn criticised Turkey for blocking the Alliance's updated defence plans for its eastern flank. And there is unanimous condemnation within the Alliance of the fact that Ankara is procuring Russian S400 air defence systems, thus undermining NATO's integrated air defence.<sup>22</sup>

In parallel, France's perception has been reinforced that other Europeans do not want to recognise, or tackle, pressing security challenges — be it the changed US role or Turkey's power ambitions — or else they prefer other tactics and instruments than France. Paris therefore feels obliged to act alone and in various formats wherever necessary to motivate its European partners to take action and defend European objectives.

### Consequences for the Franco-German Relationship

The form and content of its NATO policy mean that France's relationship with other allies is often challenging. Informally most of them agree with the French criticisms and value the country's military commitment. Yet, there are substantial differences on how to deal with Russia, the role of the US, and the future of European defence. Most of the Central and Eastern European allies reject the objective of European sovereignty since they consider it a threat to transatlantic relations.<sup>23</sup> Many NATO states also feel it is counterproductive for France to take positions in the way that it does, to openly defend unpopular views, and sometimes to launch initiatives without coordination. This has led to a hardening of positions and has given France the reputation of being a difficult ally.

France's initiatives within NATO suffer from this reputation since they are at times viewed critically simply because of their (French) origin. French ideas would have better prospects of being implemented if Paris sought prior support from other allies. Recently, this is what France has attempted to do, especially with Italy and Spain, and to some extent Germany, but the overall atmosphere is only likely to change in the long term.

This pattern can also be observed in many other dossiers concerning the Alliance or the wider framework of France's NATO policy. This includes Macron's accommodating reply to the Russian proposal in the autumn of 2019 for a moratorium for intermediate range nuclear weapons in Europe after the end of the INF Treaty. From the perspective of the other allies, who did not want to respond to Moscow's offer perceived as not credible, Paris's behaviour undermined the NATO consensus and courted Russia. For Paris however, simply not reacting will not advance the post-INF debate: Europe has to formulate its own position instead of relying on negotiations between Moscow and Washington. Besides, Paris considers dialogue with the nuclear power Russia necessary for European security.

This pattern repeats in the context of President Macron's offer in February 2020 to conduct a strategic dialogue on the role that France's nuclear weapons play in European security.<sup>24</sup> Many allies reacted with great restraint and caution because they feared that it compromised the extended US nuclear deterrence for Europe. Yet, Paris sought to express, via this offer, its commitment to the continent's security, believing it imperative to think about Europe's future defence and sovereignty together.

Germany finds this French way of doing things — assertive, at times disruptive, unafraid of unilateral efforts and conflicts — difficult. Even though Berlin shares many of Paris's assessments, for instance on Turkey's controversial role, it is annoyed by the methods Paris chooses. Yet, the current situation should be expected to continue, unless and until there is a political change in one of the two coun-

<sup>22</sup> Günter Seufert, "Die Türkei provoziert ihre NATO-Partner", *Cicero* (online), 22 October 2020, <https://www.cicero.de/aussenpolitik/test-russisches-raketenabwehrsystem-tuerkei-provokation-nato> (accessed 30 November 2020).

<sup>23</sup> E.g. Mariusz Błaszczak, "Europe's Alliance with the US Is the Foundation of Its Security", *Politico* (online), 25 November 2020, <https://www.politico.eu/article/us-poland-europe-alliance-foundation-security/> (accessed 18 December 2020).

<sup>24</sup> Élysée Palace, "Discours du Président Emmanuel Macron sur la stratégie de défense et de dissuasion devant les stagiaires de la 27<sup>ème</sup> promotion de l'École de guerre", Paris, 7 February 2020, <https://www.elysee.fr/front/pdf/elysee-module-15162-fr.pdf> (accessed 18 December 2020).

tries.<sup>25</sup> Any other modification of the French approach would require a frank assessment that Paris could at best accept pro forma, but that it would reject in content.

Yet, both, Germany and France clearly emphasise the necessity and willingness to cooperate. For Paris, Germany – beyond NATO – remains the desired partner, although that is in part because the UK and to a lesser extent Italy are less available due to their domestic political situations. From the French perspective, after Brexit, Germany and France have an even bigger responsibility for Europe and especially the EU. This adds weight to the imperative to overcome the recognised conflicts in their bilateral relationship to further Europe's progress. In other words, the expectations placed on the bilateral relationship are increasing, while the structural and political differences between the two countries have not diminished.

In fact, in France the impression is growing that bilateral cooperation with Germany – from NATO to industry – is difficult.<sup>26</sup> Berlin agrees with the content of many French analyses, but disapproves of their at times unilateral implementation and finds them less pressing. Seen from Paris, Franco-German cooperation often only works reasonably well. There appears to be no alternative to investing in it, but it is frequently perceived as complicated, tiring and often not very promising.

For Germany, France is certainly a difficult and demanding partner. However, it is in Berlin's interest to support President Macron, who invested very much

in bilateral cooperation. This is important not least with a view to the 2022 presidential elections, which Marine Le Pen from the extreme right-wing Rassemblement National is likely to contest. It is not about giving carte blanche to French demands. It is crucial, however, for Germany to formulate its priorities more clearly and raise awareness of the fact that the foreign-policy problems France has with Germany have domestic political consequences in France – which in turn rebound on Germany and Europe.

<sup>25</sup> Should there be a change of government in France in 2022 in favour of Marine Le Pen's extreme rightwing Rassemblement National, the principles underpinning France's security policy would presumably change fundamentally.

<sup>26</sup> Dominic Vogel, *Future Combat Air System: Too Big To Fail*, SWP Comment 2/2021 (Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, January 2021); Claudia Major and Christian Mölling, "Europas Kampfflugzeug der Zukunft schmiert ab", *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (online), 30 September 2020, <https://www.faz.net/aktuell/politik/fcas-das-kampfflugzeug-der-zukunft-schmiert-ab-16978609.html> (accessed 18 December 2020); Claudia Major and Christian Mölling, "La crise dans la coopération industrielle franco-allemande pourrait devenir une crise de l'intégration européenne", *Le Monde*, 17 November 2020, [https://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2020/11/17/la-crise-dans-la-cooperation-industrielle-franco-allemande-pourrait-devenir-une-crise-de-l-integration-europeenne\\_6060006\\_3232.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2020/11/17/la-crise-dans-la-cooperation-industrielle-franco-allemande-pourrait-devenir-une-crise-de-l-integration-europeenne_6060006_3232.html) (accessed 18 May 2021).

Ronja Kempin

# France and Turkey: Estrangement and Strategic Rivalry

In the summer of 2020, the differences between Germany's and France's policy concerning Turkey became plain. On 10 September 2020, Turkey signed what French President Emmanuel Macron called "unacceptable agreements with the Libyan unity government which deny the legitimate rights of Greece"; Turkish drillships had also engaged in "unacceptable" resource explorations off Cyprus, leading Macron to publicly conclude "that Turkey [is] no longer a partner in the region".<sup>1</sup> France insisted that Turkey's foreign policy, which it perceived as increasingly aggressive, must be curbed by imposing sanctions and drawing "red lines"; rather than taking Greece's side in the natural gas dispute, Germany relied on solving tensions with Ankara through dialogue.<sup>2</sup>

Under President Emmanuel Macron, two recent structural changes dominate Franco-Turkish relations: Turkey's influence on the Muslim diaspora in France, and the new order in the eastern Mediterranean. France is trying to gain the advantage vis-à-vis Turkey in the region.

## Turkey's Influence on the Diaspora

France's relations with Turkey have been strained since January 2001, when the National Assembly in Paris recognised the Armenian genocide; moreover, growing numbers of leading French politicians rejected the possibility of Turkey gaining full membership of

the EU soon thereafter.<sup>3</sup> Since then, Ankara has massively expanded its network of institutions, associations, and media in France. Secular Turkish associations, which are traditionally strong in France, have almost completely been replaced by organisations representing and driving the nationalist and religious agenda of Turkey's ruling party, the AKP, in schools, mosques and clubs.

In February 2020 President Macron had already declared that France would curb any external influence on religious Muslims on its territory.<sup>4</sup> He announced on 2 October 2020 that his government was drafting a law to counteract "France's problem": "Islamist separatism".<sup>5</sup> The bill's "five acts" also con-

3 See National Assembly, Eleventh Legislature, "Session Ordinaire de 2000 – 2001, janvier 2001, Proposition de Loi relative à la reconnaissance du génocide arménien de 1915", *Assemblée Nationale*, Paris, 18 January 2001, <http://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/11/ta/ta0611.asp>; "Pour ou contre l'adhésion de la Turquie à l'Union européenne", *Le Monde*, 8 November 2002, [https://www.lemonde.fr/europe/article/2002/11/08/pour-ou-contre-l-adhesion-de-la-turquie-a-l-union-europeenne\\_297386\\_3214.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/europe/article/2002/11/08/pour-ou-contre-l-adhesion-de-la-turquie-a-l-union-europeenne_297386_3214.html) (accessed 23 September 2020).

4 Élysée Palace, *Transcription du propos liminaire du Président de la République lors du point-presse à Mulhouse*, Mulhouse, 18 February 2020, <https://www.elysee.fr/front/pdf/elysee-module-15216-fr.pdf> (accessed 29 September 2020).

5 President Macron defines "Islamist separatism" as a "conscious, theoretically founded, political-religious project that takes shape by repeated divergence from the values of the French Republic, frequently leads to the emergence of a counter-society, and expresses itself in children dropping out of school, and the development of sports, culture and community practices that serve as a cover for the transmission of principles that do not correspond to the laws of the French Republic", see Élysée Palace, "Discours du Président de la République sur le thème de la lutte contre les séparatismes", Les Mureaux, 2 October 2020, <https://www.elysee.fr/emmanuel-macron/2020/10/02/la-republique-en-actes-discours-du-president-de-la-republique-sur-le-theme-de-la-lutte-contre-les-separatismes> (accessed 18 February 2021).

1 "La Turquie n'est plus un partenaire en Méditerranée orientale, dit Macron", *Reuters*, 10 September 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/france-turquie-macron-idFRKBN2611J> (accessed 23 September 2020).

2 German Foreign Office, "Rede von Außenminister Heiko Maas anlässlich der Konferenz der Botschafterinnen und Botschafter der Französischen Republik", Paris, 31 August 2020, <https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/de/newsroom/maas-boko-paris/2379972> (accessed 23 September 2020).

cern Turkey. The Law on Strengthening the Values of the French Republic is intended to give the government renewed control over France's schools. Furthermore, the "Enseignement de langue et de culture d'origine étrangère (Elco)" will be cancelled. In 1977 France had concluded bilateral agreements with nine countries, including Turkey, which allowed those countries to send trained teachers to France to instruct pupils in their language and culture of origin. Eighty thousand children participate, 14,000 of them in Turkish. The French state school supervisors have no control over teaching content. After efforts by the French authorities to gain more insight into and influence over Elco failed due to Ankara's resistance,<sup>6</sup> Elco will now be terminated, as will the system of "imams détachés". The latter enabled imams and preachers to come to France who had been trained in their countries of origin and selected by their governments. Half of the 300 imams deployed to France come from Turkey.<sup>7</sup>

Finally, the Law on Strengthening the Values of the French Republic is to contain a passage enabling France to check the funds that Muslim institutions receive from abroad.<sup>8</sup>

## Geopolitical Rivalry

In its foreign policy, the Macron government tries to contain Turkey's influence and create a pre-eminent position for France, especially in the Mediterranean. A new order has been taking shape there following the US withdrawal.

## Conflict in the Eastern Mediterranean

France, as President Macron emphasised in summer 2020, sees itself as a Mediterranean power. In fact, as the only coastal state with a permanent seat on the United Nations (UN) Security Council, and with allegedly the most powerful armed forces in the Mediter-

anean basin, it claims a leading role in the region. Its soft power in the region was derived, Macron stated, from France's historical links with the political elites of the countries bordering the Mediterranean, as well as an extensive network of diplomatic, cultural and educational institutions in those states.

The eastern Mediterranean plays an important role in France's security and defence policy. As a part of the war on international terrorism, French fighter planes stationed in Jordan have attacked "Islamic State" (IS) positions in Syria and Iraq. The French government supports regional actors that it believes to be useful in the war on Islamist terror. In Syria it backs the Kurdish People's Protection Units (Yekîneyên Parastina Gel, YPG). Turkey, however, categorises the YPG as a terrorist organisation and inflicted heavy casualties on it in October 2019, an event that Paris rated a "serious attack on [its] security interests".<sup>9</sup>

The most decisive factor for France's behaviour in the Mediterranean basin, however, is the newly emerging order in the eastern Mediterranean. The US withdrawal from the region has now created an opportunity for Paris to pursue its own interests. France considers Turkey to be its greatest adversary in this. In recent years, Ankara has invested heavily in expanding its armed forces and shipyards.<sup>10</sup> In its maritime doctrine entitled "Blue Homeland", Turkey claims to protect maritime interests in the Mediterranean, the Aegean and the Black Sea. Ankara calls the eastern Mediterranean the "Turkish Sea".<sup>11</sup>

France has been working on closer ties with Greece and Cyprus. Since 2017 the French navy has conducted many joint manoeuvres with the naval forces of these two countries and other regional partners. In April 2017 Paris also concluded an agreement with Cyprus to intensify "collaboration between the two countries in energy security and maritime security, early warning and crisis management, and the fight against terrorism and piracy".<sup>12</sup> In May 2019 Paris and Nicosia

9 Smolar, "La France contre la Turquie" (see note 7).

10 Günter Seufert, "Die Türkei auf dem Weg zur Seemacht", *Le Monde Diplomatique*, 9 May 2019, <https://monde-diplomatique.de/artikel/!5586515> (accessed 5 October 2020).

11 Iyad Dakka, "Will either Macron or Erdogan Back down in the Eastern Mediterranean?" *World Politics Review*, 9 September 2020, <https://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/articles/29040/will-macron-or-erdogan-back-down-in-the-eastern-mediterranean-gas-crisis> (accessed 2 October 2020).

12 "Chypre et la France concluent un accord de coopération en matière de défense", *France24.com*, 6 August 2020, <https://www.fr24news.com/fr/a/2020/08/chypre-et-la-france->

6 President Macron had referred to this in February 2020 in his speech in Mulhouse, see Élysée Palace, *Transcription du propos liminaire du Président de la République* (see note 4).

7 Piotr Smolar, "La France contre la Turquie, aux racines de l'affrontement", *Le Monde*, 10 July 2020, [https://www.lemonde.fr/international/article/2020/07/10/la-france-contre-la-turquie-aux-racines-de-l-affrontement\\_6045775\\_3210.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/international/article/2020/07/10/la-france-contre-la-turquie-aux-racines-de-l-affrontement_6045775_3210.html) (accessed 29 September 2020).

8 Élysée Palace, "Discours du Président de la République sur le thème de la lutte contre les séparatismes" (see note 5).

had already agreed that French naval vessels were allowed to put into harbour at the Cypriot naval base at Mari. In January 2020 the French government reached an agreement with Athens on joint sea, air and land operations.<sup>13</sup>

**France sees itself as a Mediterranean power. It wants to shape the new order emerging in the region to its advantage.**

France even managed to become a member of the “East Mediterranean Gas Forum”. In January 2020 it had sought to join this recently created regional organisation, which comprises Egypt, Israel, Greece, Cyprus, Jordan and the Palestinian National Authority. The objectives of the Gas Forum are both to cover the energy needs of its members and to export the region’s gas to the EU at competitive prices. The French energy company Total and its Italian counterpart ENI have jointly obtained permits to exploit gas fields in Cypriot, Greek and Lebanese coastal waters. As a full member since March 2021, Paris now has more influence over the extraction, marketing and transport of the gas. The Gas Forum is consolidating the formation of rival camps in the eastern Mediterranean: Turkey has been denied membership.<sup>14</sup>

France’s influence in the region is paying off – at least in the arms trade. In September 2020 the Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis announced that the Greek air force would buy 18 Rafale combat aircraft from France (six new and 12 used).<sup>15</sup>

concluent-un-accord-de-cooperation-en-matiere-de-defense.html (accessed 2 October 2020).

**13** Marina Rafenberg, “Face aux tensions persistantes avec la Turquie, la Grèce muscle sa défense militaire”, *Le Monde*, 16 September 2020, [https://www.lemonde.fr/international/article/2020/09/16/face-aux-tensions-persistantes-avec-ankara-athenes-muscle-sa-defense\\_6052433\\_3210.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/international/article/2020/09/16/face-aux-tensions-persistantes-avec-ankara-athenes-muscle-sa-defense_6052433_3210.html) (accessed 5 October 2020).

**14** Karol Wasilewski and Lukasz Maślanka, *The Franco-Turkish Tensions* (Warsaw: The Polish Institute of International Affairs, 10 July 2020), [https://www.pism.pl/publications/The\\_FrancoTurkish\\_Tensions](https://www.pism.pl/publications/The_FrancoTurkish_Tensions) (accessed 28 September 2020); Dakka, “Will either Macron or Erdogan Back down?” (see note 11).

**15** From 1974 to 2000 Greece bought 95 Mirage fighter jets, the predecessor of the Rafale, from the French manufacturer Dassault Aviation; see on this point Piotr Smolar and Isabelle Chaperon, “La Grèce, premier pays européen à acheter le Rafale”, *Le Monde*, 13 September 2020, <https://www.>

France’s efforts to gain strategic supremacy in the (eastern) Mediterranean have led to a striking divergence of interests with Germany. While Paris sees Turkey as a strategic rival, Berlin considers Ankara a problematic but unavoidable partner and, not least, one of the most important customers for German armaments.

## Growing Competition in Africa

Paris views Turkey’s increasing influence in Africa with concern and mistrust as well. This is particularly true in Libya, where the French government had backed General Haftar for a long time,<sup>16</sup> hoping that his eventual victory over the internationally recognised unity government would stabilise the country. Paris shares the reservations of Egypt and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), who consider the government in Tripoli to be strongly influenced by the Muslim Brotherhood. Consequently, France accuses Turkey of using the Muslim Brotherhood as a foreign-policy instrument. Turkey’s open military intervention in support of the unity government reversed the course of the Libyan civil war in the first six months. With Turkey’s backing, the government in Tripoli has succeeded in driving Haftar’s forces, equipped by France, Egypt, Russia and the UAE, out of western Libya. Turkey has already used this power shift to establish an air force presence in Libya and conclude a trade agreement with the government. This laid the foundations for new Turkish investment and an intensification of trade. Moreover, Ankara has obtained permission to carry out building projects that had been agreed upon in the Gaddafi era.<sup>17</sup>

Paris is also aware that Turkey concluded a strategic partnership with Algeria in January 2020. In Niger, which supplies France with a third of the uranium it needs for its nuclear power plants, Turkey

[lemonde.fr/economie/article/2020/09/13/la-grece-premier-pays-europeen-a-acheter-le-rafale\\_6052036\\_3234.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/economie/article/2020/09/13/la-grece-premier-pays-europeen-a-acheter-le-rafale_6052036_3234.html) (accessed 5 October 2020).

**16** See the contribution by Wolfram Lacher on Macron’s Libya policy, pp. 15ff.

**17** Michaël Tanchum, “Turkey Advances in Africa against Franco-Emirati-Egyptian Entente”, *The Turkey Analyst* (online), 25 August 2020, <http://www.turkeyanalyst.org/publications/turkey-analyst-articles/item/646-turkey-advances-in-africa-against-franco-emirati-egyptian-entente.html> (accessed 5 October 2020).

has become involved in the mining industry and is training Nigerien soldiers.<sup>18</sup>

## Conclusions

Throughout 2020 France's relations with Turkey worsened steadily. The mutual insults between Presidents Emmanuel Macron and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan grew increasingly harsh. Under President Macron, France is reacting to two structural changes. Domestically, the government in Paris is moving against Islamism. The measures ordered by Macron are also directed against Turkey's growing influence over the Muslim population of France. His announcement of the Law to Strengthen the Values of the French Republic is breaking new ground: no predecessor has ever stipulated such tough rules for a minority.

Simultaneously, Macron seems to be adopting the rhetoric and methods of his predecessor Nicolas Sarkozy for the presidential elections in 2022. To weaken the extreme right-wing party Rassemblement National (formerly Front National), Sarkozy had preached a clampdown on Islamism. If Macron continues down this path, there is little room for relations with Turkey to ease. This would also impact Germany and the EU: since the Turkish President Erdoğan called for a boycott of French products in the autumn of 2020, Macron has been threatening to veto the envisaged customs union between the EU and Turkey.<sup>19</sup>

In foreign policy, France and Turkey are wrestling for hegemony in the Mediterranean. Both want to turn the US withdrawal to their advantage. President Macron is acting in the tradition of his predecessors by claiming pre-eminence in the region for France. To impose this position, and stop the expansion of Turkey's influence, France is likely to collaborate even more closely with Egypt and the UAE in the future.

The geopolitical rivalry between France and Turkey will also continue to affect NATO and the EU, and seriously disturb internal relationships in both orga-

nisations. The multiple layers of the bilateral conflict are likely to make it almost impossible for France's and Turkey's partner in the EU and NATO – first and foremost Germany – to reconcile interests. Berlin needs to prepare for a difficult balancing act in foreign and security policy. To succeed, it should finally seek to establish a dialogue with France concerning Turkey. The objective should be to strengthen those positions on which there is agreement, for instance on maintaining and monitoring the UN arms embargo against Libya.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Michaël Darmon, "La France veut proposer de supprimer l'union douanière entre l'UE et la Turquie", *Europe 1*, 9 November 2020, <https://www.europe1.fr/politique/diplomatie-macron-veut-supprimer-lunion-douaniere-entre-lunion-europeenne-et-la-turquie-4004339> (accessed 23 November 2020).



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# Conclusions

In the past, Germany and France have repeatedly managed to reinforce their bilateral cooperation and strengthen the European Union. In January 2019 the two countries agreed in the Aachen Treaty “to raise their bilateral relations to a new level”.<sup>1</sup> On 18 May 2020, via video conference, President Emmanuel Macron and Chancellor Angela Merkel drew up a proposal for Europe’s economic recovery after the Covid-19 pandemic. A keystone of their initiative was establishing a Recovery Fund, which was integrated by the European Commission into its recovery plan on 27 May. It was agreed by the remaining EU member states on 21 July 2020.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, Germany and France played a significant role in the EU and China reaching a new investment agreement in late December 2020, after seven years of negotiations. Berlin and Paris had orchestrated it so that the EU-China agreement was concluded during the German Council presidency, and it will be ratified in 2022 during the French Council presidency.<sup>3</sup>

However, the results are not as positive for foreign and security policy, or parts of EU policy. As this

research paper has shown, the French president’s offer of a “new partnership” with Germany could neither be realised within NATO, nor in relations with Russia or Turkey, nor in Libya. Commitments under Article 1 of the Aachen Treaty have also not been fully met so far. The Article states that the two countries wish to “champion an effective and strong Common Foreign and Security Policy” and “strengthen and deepen” the Economic and Monetary Union.<sup>4</sup> The main reason for these shortcomings is that Germany and France have responded differently to structural changes in international politics.

The case studies have demonstrated that since Emmanuel Macron’s inauguration in the spring of 2017, he has changed the basic assumptions of French security and defence policy. In 2013 France’s Defence White Paper had already predicted certain developments in international relations: the US withdrawal from Europe; China’s growing power; an increase in regional conflicts; the widening importance of artificial intelligence; the question of dominance in cyberspace; and the persistence of international terrorism, which would also affect Europe.

Drawn up under Macron’s leadership and published in October 2017, the *Defence and National Security Strategic Review (Revue stratégique de défense et de sécurité nationale)* acknowledges that these changes have occurred much more quickly and comprehensively than was assumed in 2013. It is therefore all the more pressing, the Review states, to respond to them. For Macron it is obvious that the US under President Donald Trump refused to show solidarity with its European partners at a time when France’s own ability to act was increasingly limited.<sup>5</sup> According to the Review, France can only remain effective in and via Europe, meaning that Europe must be enabled to take control of its own destiny; otherwise, Europe will become a

1 Vertrag zwischen der Bundesrepublik Deutschland und der Französischen Republik über die deutsch-französische Zusammenarbeit und Integration (Aachen, 22 January 2019), 2, <https://www.bundesregierung.de/resource/blob/997532/1570126/c720a7f2e1a0128050baaa6a16b760f7/2019-01-19-vertrag-von-aachen-data.pdf?download=1> (accessed 10 January 2021).

2 German Government, “‘Eine außergewöhnliche, einmalige Kraftanstrengung’, Fragen und Antworten zur deutsch-französischen Initiative”, 27 May 2020, <https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-de/aktuelles/wiederaufbauprogramm-europa-1755280> (accessed 10 January 2021); Peter Becker, *Nach dem EU-Gipfel: Historische Integrationsschritte unter Zeitdruck*, Kurz gesagt (Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, 23 July 2020), <https://www.swp-berlin.org/publikation/nachdem-eu-gipfel-historische-integrationsschritte-unter-zeitdruck/> (accessed 10 January 2021).

3 Hans von der Burchard, “Merkel Pushes EU-China Investment Deal over the Finish Line Despite Criticism”, *Politico.eu*, 29 December 2020, <https://www.politico.eu/article/eu-china-investment-deal-angela-merkel-pushes-finish-line-despite-criticism/> (accessed 10 January 2021).’

4 Vertrag über die deutsch-französische Zusammenarbeit und Integration (see note 1), Article 1, p. 4.

5 See the contribution by Claudia Major on France’s security and defence policy, pp. 10ff.

mere bargaining chip between the super powers America and China.

In 2019 this analysis of international relations and France's room for manoeuvre led the French president to call on his ambassadors to rethink the Franco-Russian relationship.<sup>6</sup> Shortly afterwards, he stated that NATO was "brain dead" – it was not competent to comment on key topics of European security. Moreover, it did not prevent the Alliance members USA and Turkey from pursuing a Syria policy that undermined the security of their partners.<sup>7</sup>

The fact that France was going to be more dependent on its partners in security and defence policy than before was already evident in the aftermath of the Paris terror attacks of 2015. The fight against international terrorism, both at home and in Africa and the Middle East, had a grave personal and financial impact on the French armed forces. In 2017 the *Defence and National Security Strategic Review* came to the conclusion that France should in future act more pragmatically and flexibly and make minilateral formats its leitmotif in security and defence policy. Under Macron's predecessor, Paris had already been convinced that most of its European partners were uninterested in reacting to the new challenges in security policy and did not deem it urgent to face them.

Under President Macron, France has relativised the significance of the European Union as a reference framework for its security and defence policy. Instead, it increasingly relies on "Europe" as the framework in which, and via which, it can assert its influence in this policy area. This demonstrates Paris's new pragmatism. Macron accords the structural changes in international relations great significance and feels strong pressure to adapt. Germany's foreign, security and EU policy, by contrast, largely sticks to the status quo. Berlin's aim remains to further develop NATO and the CSDP as fundamental organisations of German security policy. It is also making efforts to structure its relations with the super powers America and China and the regional powers Russia and Turkey, by attempting to reconcile interests within the EU and NATO. Thus, it is increasingly difficult to square French and German interests in foreign and security policy.

<sup>6</sup> See the contribution by Susan Stewart on Macron's Russia policy, pp. 31ff.

<sup>7</sup> See the contribution by Claudia Major on France's NATO policy, pp. 35ff.

The findings of this paper close a substantial gap in the current literature on the CFSP. While the motives underpinning Emmanuel Macron's European policy have already been explored,<sup>8</sup> there was no similar analysis of his foreign or security policy. This research paper has identified six additional factors that have repeatedly led to friction between Berlin and Paris on decisive foreign, security and Europe policy issues.

The *first* factor has already been discussed: unlike Berlin, Paris feels a distinct pressure to act in many policy areas. This difference explains the deterioration of the Franco-German relationship under Macron even as regards issues where the two partners' conceptual differences are widely known. This is the case, for example, for NATO and the question of how to shape transatlantic security relations, but also for economic and euro policy.<sup>9</sup>

Due to its dwindling military capabilities, France is less and less able to meet its own expectations of solving crises and conflicts in the world. Consequently,

<sup>8</sup> Joachim Schild, for example, has shown that Macron has shaped his Europe policy in response to growing EU scepticism in his country. In the first round of the 2017 presidential elections, 40 percent of votes went either to Marine Le Pen and her extreme rightwing party, Front National (known as Rassemblement National since 1 June 2018), or to the radical left candidate from La France Insoumise ("France Unbowed"), Jean-Luc Mélenchon. Both had declared their intention to take France out of the EU. Emmanuel Macron shares his fellow citizens' scepticism as to the EU's ability to fulfil its most important promises, namely peace, prosperity and freedom, while they share his description of "the Union as a construct that is petrified in bureaucratic routines, complex procedures, and excessively detailed interventions contrary to the principle of subsidiarity, without relation to reality and without a political vision. Accordingly, the traditional aspiration of France's European policy runs through his manifesto, namely to revive the Union via a new value-based *political* project that treats Europe as more than just a market." Unlike Le Pen and Mélenchon, however, Macron does not promote a souverainist withdrawal into the nation-state. Instead, he advocates shared sovereignty within the EU. In 2016 Macron had already explained that "sovereignty means being able to act effectively, which, for key policy areas, is no longer possible at the level of the nation-state". See on this point Joachim Schild, "Französische Europa-politik unter Emmanuel Macron. Ambitionen, Strategien, Erfolgsbedingungen", *Integration* 40, no. 3 (2017): 177–92 (182), and Emmanuel Macron, *Révolution. C'est notre combat pour la France* (Paris: XO Éditions, 2016), 222ff.

<sup>9</sup> See the contribution by Paweł Tokarski on Macron's euro-zone policy, pp. 26ff.

Paris is dependent on partners who share its interests and incline towards a joint operational approach. Efforts primarily intended to be integrating and inclusive (e.g. PESCO) are subordinated to this key concern, or complemented by formats that France considers beneficial (e.g. EII2).<sup>10</sup> Within the Economic and Monetary Union, France is one of the countries that have been hardest hit by the Covid-19 pandemic. The massive rise in unemployment is a particular weight on Macron's shoulders. The Franco-German proposal to establish a Recovery and Resilience Facility has not given him the reprieve that would be required for the French economy and labour market to reach pre-crisis levels before the 2022 presidential elections.

Macron will thus remain an inconvenient partner for Germany in security and defence policy as well as in economic and euro policy. Any joint (compromise) solutions will at best be temporary.

Second, almost all the individual contributions to this paper conclude that the differences in the French and German strategic cultures and political systems are key. The greater the French president's expectation to exert influence on international relations and to fulfil France's claim to weight and rank, the less Paris and Berlin are able to agree and promote a bilateral reconciliation of interests. Both in his presidential campaign and at the start of his presidency, Emmanuel Macron repeatedly made it very clear that he strives to improve France's international image and position.

In 2016 he had already advocated "remaking" the European Union in his book *Révolution*,<sup>11</sup> a blueprint for his election manifesto. Macron recognised that a precondition for his ambitious plans for reform – which culminated in his "Initiative for Europe"<sup>12</sup> in September 2017 – was to dismantle Germany's mistrust of France. Shortly after his election to the French presidency, he announced to international journalists that France could only be the "engine" driving Europe if it moved its economy and society forward. Since France's "credibility, our efficiency our strength" were at stake, he said, he would be tackling indispensable

<sup>10</sup> See Ronja Kempin's contribution on the CSDP, pp. 21ff.

<sup>11</sup> Macron, *Révolution* (see note 8), the chapter on Europe (pp. 221ff.) is entitled "Refonder l'Europe".

<sup>12</sup> French Embassy in Berlin, "Initiative für Europa – Die Rede von Staatspräsident Macron im Wortlaut", Universität Sorbonne, Paris, 26 September 2017, <https://de.ambafrance.org/Initiative-fur-Europa-Die-Rede-von-Staatspraesident-Macron-im-Wortlaut> (accessed 18 May 2020).

reforms that Berlin, among others, had long been waiting for.<sup>13</sup>

With a view to French security and defence policy, Macron emphasised in February 2017 in an interview with a specialist review that France's strategic environment was complex and unstable, while its armed forces faced enormous shortages. He said:

"Whether it concerns maintaining deployability, renewing equipment, or training, it is our responsibility to quickly make the investments that will enable our armed forces to assert themselves. I will therefore keep a close eye on the implementation of the defence budget, and, immediately after the elections, I will launch a strategic review [*revue stratégique*] to enable us to set priorities for new armament programmes, equipment maintenance and staff costs within a very short time period, no more than a few months."<sup>14</sup>

In the *Defence and National Security Strategic Review*, Macron commits himself to a strong France that is "master of its fate" and "[can] respond to the great crises of the day, promote its values and assert its interests."<sup>15</sup>

Regarding France's Turkey policy in particular, this research paper has elaborated the practical impact of the president's efforts to re-establish his country's weight and rank.<sup>16</sup> Following the US withdrawal from Europe and the Middle East, and due to the apparent lack of interest by other European countries in the challenges posed by this region, a geostrategic vacuum has been created. The US withdrawal from Europe and the Middle East, and the apparent lack of interest by other European countries in the region's challenges has created a geostrategic vacuum. Macron is convinced that the regional power Turkey knows how to turn this power vacuum to its advantage. He has

<sup>13</sup> Christian Wernicke, "Der Anfang einer Renaissance", *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 22 June 2017, 2.

<sup>14</sup> Joseph Henrotin, "Présidentielle 2017 – Défense: Les réponses d'Emmanuel Macron", 17 April 2017, <https://www.areion24.news/2017/04/17/presidentielle-2017-defense-reponses-demmanuel-macron/> (accessed 14 December 2020).

<sup>15</sup> "Préface du Président de la République", in French Defence Ministry, *Revue stratégique de défense et de sécurité nationale 2017* (Paris, October 2017), 5–7 (6), [https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/2017-rs-def1018\\_cle0b6ef5-1.pdf](https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/2017-rs-def1018_cle0b6ef5-1.pdf) (accessed 1 March 2021).

<sup>16</sup> See the contribution by Ronja Kempin on France's Turkey policy, pp. 42ff.

therefore resolutely opposed Turkey's foreign policy since summer 2020. However, Paris is simultaneously defending its own pre-eminent position vis-à-vis Ankara in the Middle East and (North) Africa.

*Third:* French presidents with a marked sense of mission – including Emmanuel Macron – have tended to engage in solo efforts in foreign and European policy and to emphatically implement the national interest. In the past, Paris has criticised Germany for its unilateral decision to abandon nuclear power and continue with the Nord Stream 2 project; now it is President Macron who can be accused of unilateral approaches. Berlin was in the dark both about his intention to receive, in July 2017, the Libyan General Haftar and thus make him socially acceptable on the international scene, and about his reshaping of France's Russia policy. France's new Russia policy can be derived from reasoned geostrategic reflections in August 2019.

However, this reshaping of France's policy on Russia also shows – and this is the *fourth* factor – that Franco-German relations are suffering from the fact that there is no critical thought about the other's policy approaches, especially where these have not been successful. Macron's stance on Russia is very close to Germany's policy before 2014 – which is now generally considered to have been a failure, even if no full replacement has yet been worked out. France's policy concerning Turkey has developed similarly: since summer 2020 it has worsened, among other reasons because of Turkish attempts to influence French domestic policy. There is no sign in the most recent draft of the Law to Strengthen the Values of the French Republic that any thought was given to the experiences which Berlin has made with Turkey's efforts to influence the German diaspora (regardless of the differences in the French and German education systems).

*Fifth,* Emmanuel Macron's occasionally disruptive political style has not helped to put bilateral relations on a footing of unreserved trust. Yet from the perspective of the French president, this approach seems appropriate. It serves him primarily to confront his European partners – first and foremost Germany – with European and international challenges.

*Sixth,* it is hardly conducive to improving bilateral relations that Germany has long been largely indifferent to Libya, even though that country is of paramount importance to France. If Germany had been responsive to France's interests early enough, the internationalisation of the conflict might possibly

have been avoided. In late 2020 Turkey responded with similar levels of aggression to the attempt by a German patrol ship to check a Turkish vessel suspected of smuggling arms to Libya as it had vis-à-vis France in summer 2020. Indifference is particularly serious when it benefits third parties: France's close cooperation on armaments with the United Arab Emirates is increasingly influencing its Turkey and Libya policies. Thus, Paris now represents UAE interests in Libya more closely than EU interests.<sup>17</sup>

From these findings, this research paper derives two recommendations for future Franco-German cooperation in foreign, security and European policy:

1) In individual dossiers, Germany and France still frequently fail to consider international politics and its conflict areas as well as the two countries' overriding interests *comprehensively*. Following the Aachen Treaty, Berlin and Paris have introduced many new formats. These include the meetings of the secretaries of states and of the Europe departments at the French and German foreign ministries. And yet it is the case, particularly with the meetings of the secretaries of state and the Franco-German Security Council (DFVSR), that their agendas are closely aligned with the participants' personal interests.

To avoid limiting the bilateral exchange in these high-ranking meetings to single issues, Berlin and Paris should base any foreign and security policy discussions on information from the EU's Single Intelligence Analysis Capacity (SIAC). The SIAC is a part of the crisis management structures of the European External Action Service (EEAS). It assesses material prepared by national intelligence agencies and complements it with data from freely available sources. SIAC's reports on international security consider both civilian and military aspects, and are made available to EU member states.

Such an approach would offer a comprehensive overview of the international crisis situation. For each conflict, Germany and France should discuss the extent to which they are concerned and their mutual interests, and draw up a joint agenda on that basis. The objective of the agenda can be to formulate common positions as much as to reconcile bilateral interests. Moreover, it can list concrete measures for a joint resolution of crises and

<sup>17</sup> See the contribution by Wolfram Lacher on Macron's Libya policy, pp. 15ff.

conflicts. As such, the DFVSR could be a first milestone on the road to a European Security Council. Paris and Berlin endorse establishing such a Council. They should therefore commit other European partners to the Franco-German agenda regularly and early. Regular issue-specific formats could complement the activities of the DFVSR at the operational level that draw up “lessons learned” and “best practices”, for instance when dealing with Russia or for international crisis management.

- 2) In January 2019 Berlin and Paris agreed the following in the Aachen Treaty: “The two countries will deepen their cooperation in foreign policy, defence, external and internal security, and development, and will simultaneously work towards strengthening Europe’s ability to act autonomously.” They further committed to “setting out common positions for all important decisions that touch on shared interests and acting jointly whenever possible”.<sup>18</sup> Neither in the 1963 Élysée Treaty nor in the Aachen Treaty are there any indications of how violations of these commitments should be evaluated.

If misconduct is not penalised, national solo efforts on significant international and European policy issues will continue to weaken the Franco-German relationship; indifference to pressure points in the other’s foreign, security and European policy will have the same effect. It would be game-changing if the Franco-German Parliamentary Assembly, which has existed since March 2019, became active and exhorted the executives of both countries to comply with their contractual obligations – after all, the Franco-German Parliamentary Agreement puts the Assembly in charge of monitoring how the stipulations of the Élysée and Aachen Treaties are applied.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>18</sup> *Vertrag über die deutsch-französische Zusammenarbeit und Integration* (see note 1), Article 3, p. 5.

<sup>19</sup> German Bundestag and French National Assembly, *Deutsch-Französisches Parlamentsabkommen* (Paris, 25 March 2019), Article 6, p. 2, [https://www.bundestag.de/resource/blob/644916/6da7d188b3e235709e82d716689f9c9c/abkommen\\_deutsch-data.pdf](https://www.bundestag.de/resource/blob/644916/6da7d188b3e235709e82d716689f9c9c/abkommen_deutsch-data.pdf) (accessed 11 January 2021).

# Appendix

## Abbreviations

AFP	Agence France-Presse
AKP	Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (Justice and Development Party; Turkey)
BPA	Press and Information Office of the Federal Government
CARD	Coordinated Annual Review on Defence
CDP	Capability Development Plan
CER	Centre for European Reform
CFSP	Common Foreign and Security Policy
CSDP	Common Security and Defence Policy
DFVSR	Franco-German Defence and Security Council
DGAP	German Council on Foreign Relations (Berlin)
ECB	European Central Bank
ECFR	European Council on Foreign Relations
EDA	European Defence Agency
EDF	European Defence Fund
EEAS	European External Action Service
eFP	Enhanced Forward Presence
EI2	European Intervention Initiative
Elco	Enseignement de langue et de culture d'origine étrangère
EMU	Economic and Monetary Union
ERM	Exchange Rate Mechanism
EU	European Union
G7	Group of Seven (the seven leading Western industrialised nations)
G8	Group of Eight (the seven leading Western industrialised nations + Russia)
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
IISS	The International Institute for Strategic Studies (London)
INF	Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces
INSEE	Institut National de la Statistique et des Études Économiques
IPG	Internationale Politik und Gesellschaft
IS	"Islamic State"
MSC	Munich Security Conference
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NIP	National Implementation Plans
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OTAN	Organisation du Traité de l'Atlantique Nord
PESCO	Permanent Structured Cooperation
RFI	Radio France Internationale
RUSI	Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security Studies (London)

SIAC	Single Intelligence Analysis Capacity
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UE	Union européenne
UN	United Nations
YPG	Yekîneyên Parastina Gel (Kurdish People's Protection Units)

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