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EUROPE FIRST

EMMANUEL MACRON TOWARDS REFORMS AND THE FUTURE OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

ABSTRACT

The research objective of the article is to identify French interests towards EU systemic reform, which constitutes a specific ‘lever’ of France’s European policy. The first part of the analysis presents President E. Macron’s key EU reform proposals and France’s European policy priorities including the concept of European sovereignty as a method of building a ‘Europe of power’. The second part analyzes to what extent the Franco-German duo is driving change in the European political and institutional order. The results showed that the two states derive multifaceted and different benefits from their mutual cooperation, influencing European and global politics more broadly. The article tries to explain, based on the theory of liberal intergovernmentalism, how France uses the EU to promote its own national interests.

Keywords: France, Macron, interests, reform, European Union, European Sovereignty, French-German cooperation

France has its own outlook, its own history, its own view of international affairs, but it builds much more useful and stronger actions when it does so through Europe¹.

E. Macron

Le Grand Continent, 16 November 2020

INTRODUCTION

Emmanuel Macron is not the first French president to suggest European reforms but never before has a French president been so ambitious in his proposals. The ambitious reform program aimed at further intensifying European integration and presented by President Macron in September 2017 at the Sorbonne, resulted in France regaining (after a period of stagnation towards the end of F. Holland's term of office) the initiative in the EU and becoming the main driving force in discussions on EU institutional change. The French proposals strongly emphasized further integration within the euro area, although other areas were also covered, albeit as a compilation of various French initiatives put forward over the last two decades. Emmanuel Macron, while still Minister for the Economy in 2015, called for the creation of a European budget and a euro area parliament, indicating France's willingness to go beyond mere economic governance and create a deeper political union². The French paradigm of economic government involved the strengthening of central institutions (within the euro area), and the consolidation of the Eurogroup for the coordination of macroeconomic policy³.

The research objective of this study is to analyze the aspirations, commitment and objectives of France's European policy by examining its motives and influence on the process of systemic EU reform. President Macron, with his assumption of office as President of the Fifth French Republic, promoted a vision of a sovereign and autonomous EU as a major player on the international arena ('Make Europe Great Again'⁴) capable of meeting the challenges of globalisation and as a panacea for the rise of nationalism, embodied on the Seine by Marine Le Pen⁵. The rhetoric of polarization into good Europeans (liberal democrats) and bad nationalists (illiberal populists), instead of the previous division into right- and left-wing parties, was also part of a desire

¹ "La doctrine Macron: une conversation avec le Président français," *Le Grand Continent*, 16 November 2020, at <https://legrandcontinent.eu/fr/2020/11/16/macron>, 16 April 2024.

² M. Otero-Iglesias, "Still Waiting for Paris: Germany's Reluctant Hegemony in Pursuing Political Union in the Euro Area," *Journal of European Integration*, vol. 39, no. 3 (2017), p. 361.

³ Cf. J. Schild, "EMU's Asymmetries and Asymmetries in German and French Influence on EMU Governance Reforms," *Journal of European Integration*, vol. 42, no. 3 (2020), p. 452.

⁴ L. Bouza García, Á. Oleart, "Make Europe Great Again: The Politicising Pro-European Narrative of Emmanuel Macron in France," in T. Haapala, Á. Oleart (eds), *Tracing the Politicisation of the EU: The Future of Europe Debates Before and After the 2019 Elections*, London 2022, pp. 271-293.

⁵ J. Roch, A. Oleart, "How 'European Sovereignty' Became Mainstream: The Geopoliticisation of the EU's 'Sovereign Turn' by Pro-EU Executive Actors," *Journal of European Integration*, vol. 46, no. 4 (2024), p. 9.

to increase his own legitimacy in the domestic arena and attenuate the growth of the French electorate's support for Eurosceptic parties⁶. Macron unequivocally positioned himself as the leader of 'progressive forces' that defend democracy and EU values, conditioning the disbursement of EU funds on respect for the rule of law.

Subsequently, the following research questions should be asked: (1) What are the priorities of President Emmanuel Macron for the future of the EU?; (2) What is the role of the Franco-German tandem in reforming the EU and what binds Franco-German bilateralism?; (3) What is Germany's ambition and willingness to reform the euro area and follow French demands?; (4) What does the idea of 'European sovereignty' and EU strategic autonomy mean and serve, according to Macron?

As a result of the research, the author formulates two research hypotheses. The first assumes that the aim of France's activism for treaty reform is to politically and economically merge the EU, so that France can reap the political and economic benefits. According to Macron, in today's world, Europe is not weakening, but is a condition for French sovereignty and should be reformed. The study shows that President Macron has called for the strengthening of the EU on the grounds that this is required to protect the international liberal order and what he calls 'European civilization', and French European policy has been built based on three key ideas: the protection of security ('European sovereignty' and 'Europe of power', French: *l'Europe puissance*), the social, economic and welfare protection of the EU ('A Europe that protects its citizens', French: *L'Europe qui protège*) and the protection of European values (democracy and the rule of law).

The second research hypothesis is that France, without German support, is unable to reform the EU or push through its own ideas, and that both states derive multi-dimensional and different benefits from mutual cooperation. Brexit has created an opportunity for Macron to promote himself as the leader of Europe. On the other hand, in European politics, Macron lacked a partner with whom he could pursue his ambitious plans. Germany's unclear position was a problem for France in its attempt at institutional reconstruction of the EU, which was only overcome during Scholtz's tenure. The article analyzes Germany's role in the implementation of Macron's integration concepts, because according to the French president – despite many differences – Franco-German cooperation is a prerequisite for the success of any initiative in the EU. The research analysis shows that, despite their different visions (Jacobin centralism vs. federalism), France and Germany need each other more than ever, as a condition for a strong EU that is in the interests of both states.

The topic of this study is of exceptional research importance, as the study provides a better understanding of France's European and foreign policy, while shedding light on the implications of French aspirations to play a main role in strengthening the EU. According to Macron, France should play a main role in strengthening the EU, for doing

⁶ Cf. D. Hodson, U. Puetter, "The European Union in Disequilibrium: New Intergovernmentalism, Postfunctionalism and Integration Theory in the Post-Maastricht Period," *Journal of European Public Policy*, vol. 26, no. 8 (2019), p. 1158, 1160.

so promotes French interests. Moreover, France is working to strengthen the EU not only because it is in its interests, but also because through the EU France is pursuing its vision of greatness (*'la grandeur'*) in the world as an economic, industrial, military and diplomatic power. This reveals Macron's Gaullist heritage and his opinion that *the European project (...) is very deeply a French project*⁷. In this context, a useful paradigm for the theoretical explanation of the process of articulating France's national preferences to the European level is Andrew Moravcsik's theory of 'liberal intergovernmentalism', which combines the assumptions of realism and liberalism. Referring to the example of France, Moravcsik observes that the European policy of the Fifth Republic, as early as the time of General Charles de Gaulle, was motivated mainly by political-economic interests rather than by a geopolitical *grand vision* or by other political-military considerations⁸. Moravcsik sees the main source of integration as *the interests of states and their relative power*, which each actor transfers to the supranational level⁹. Moravcsik argues that the motivations of national governments to cooperate stem from: (1) the desire to strengthen their control over the outcomes of national policies, as supranational coordination allows them to achieve goals they could not otherwise achieve; (2) the inclusion of international institutions, as part of a 'two-level game' strategy to strengthen their own position¹⁰. Following on from Moravcsik's insights, the theory of 'intergovernmental liberalism' has proved useful in identifying the origins of E. Macron's preferences and proposals for the future of the European Union.

Research on French European policy focuses on highlighting France's role in the implementation of the EU's ambitious internal reforms and the country's growing influence on European politics¹¹, although it abstracts from the evolution of the integration policy paradigm. Other authors have examined the assumptions of Macron's idea of 'European sovereignty' and the concept of Europe as a 'balancing power'¹², and the prospects for reform of the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy¹³. Analyses of the role of the Franco-German tandem as a key cooperation format for strengthening

⁷ Cf. E. Staunton, "France Is Back': Macron's European Policy to Rescue 'European Civilisation' and the Liberal International Order," *Third World Quarterly*, vol. 43, no. 1 (2022), p. 23.

⁸ Cf. A. Moravcsik, "Charles de Gaulle and Europe: The New Revisionism," *Journal of Cold War Studies*, vol. 14, no. 1 (2012), p. 53.

⁹ Cf. H.V. Milner, A. Moravcsik (eds), *Power, Interdependence, and Nonstate Actors in World Politics*, Princeton–Oxford 2009, p. 247; A. Moravcsik, "Negotiating the Single European Act: National Interests and Conventional Statecraft in the European Community," *International Organization*, vol. 45, no. 1 (1991), p. 56.

¹⁰ Cf. A. Moravcsik, "Preferences and Power in the European Community: A Liberal Intergovernmentalist Approach," *Journal of Common Market Studies*, vol. 31, no. 4 (1993), p. 485.

¹¹ E. Staunton, "France Is Back': Macron's European Policy..."; L. Bouza Garcia, A. Oleart, "Make Europe Great Again..."; S.I. Bora, Ch. Lequesne, "French Presidents and the Discursive Use of European Sovereignty: More Than a Metaphor," *Journal of European Integration*, vol. 45, no. 6 (2023).

¹² S.I. Bora, Ch. Lequesne, "French Presidents..."; J. Roch, A. Oleart, "How 'European Sovereignty' Became Mainstream...".

¹³ J.J. Węc, "Perspektywy reformy Wspólnej Polityki Bezpieczeństwa i Obrony Unii Europejskiej do 2025 roku. Autonomia Strategiczna UE?," *Politeja*, vol. 3, no. 78 (2022), pp. 211-239.

European integration were also valuable¹⁴. This study adds to and extends the research by exploring how France competently embeds national interests into the integration process and European structure. The study answers the research questions and draws the general conclusion that the European Union constitutes for France a 'trampoline', and a 'multiplier' of its 'national interests'.

From a methodological point of view, the source of the analysis includes the documents, reports, speeches, declarations of and interviews with the President of the Fifth French Republic, Emmanuel Macron, from September 2017 to May 2024. In attempting to answer the research questions, this article examines case studies and performs a comparative analysis based on a careful review and interpretation of official statements, announcements and keynote speeches by senior French government officials and diplomats at the Quai d'Orsay and presidential advisors at the Élysée Palace, supplemented by research into the available scientific literature in the field of study. Furthermore, the research work presented here is the result of several years of empirical research, with a particular focus on qualitative methods of analysis and inductive reasoning in the field of French integration projects. The author's direct participation in diplomatic processes referring to the subject of the study, including, among others, as the Polish ambassador to France (2017-2022), was an important addition to understand mechanisms of the French European policy. In this respect, the research was based on individual, unstructured interviews with President E. Macron's advisors on European affairs at the time [Clément Beaune, Alexandre Adam], as well as in the diplomatic corps, which provided knowledge clarifying French intentions and priorities, as well as the possibility of a comprehensive assessment of them. In addition, source material was collected through participant observation of some of President E. Macron's keynote speeches, among others, at the Sorbonne University (26 September 2017), which allowed a better understanding of the context of his European agenda.

FRANCE'S EUROPEAN POLICY PRIORITIES, GRAND AMBITIONS AND PRESIDENT MACRON'S ACTION PLAN TO BUILD A 'STRONG EUROPE'

In a memorable keynote speech at the Sorbonne on 26 September 2017, President E. Macron presented a package of French proposals on the future of the EU. The speech was a result of putting the future of the EU and France's place in the EU at the center of Macron's political agenda during the election campaign. The speech, given just after the German

¹⁴ U. Krotz, J. Schild, "Back to the Future? Franco-German Bilateralism in Europe's Post-Brexit Union," *Journal of European Public Policy*, vol. 25, no. 8 (2018), pp. 1174-1193; H. Degner, D. Leuffen, "Brake and Broker: Franco-German Leadership for Saving EMU," *Journal of European Public Policy*, vol. 28, no. 6 (2021), pp. 894-901; Ph. Giurlando, "Emmanuel Macron's Challenge: Ensuring Proximate Parity with Germany," *Modern & Contemporary France*, vol. 29, no. 1 (2021), pp. 57-74; D. Howarth, J. Schild, "Nein to 'Transfer Union': The German Brake on the Construction of a European Union Fiscal Capacity," *Journal of European Integration*, vol. 43, no. 2 (2021), pp. 209-226; J. Roch, A. Oleart, "How 'European Sovereignty' Became Mainstream..."

Bundestag elections, was intended to trigger a discussion on the shape of the German coalition agreement on European affairs and to embed the discussion on the future of the EU in a Europe-wide debate. The French President stressed that actions to change how the EU operates must be taken to tackle many problems Europe is facing, such as security threats, immigration and changes in European economies.

EU treaty change proposals. Macron proposed the establishment of a EU reform working group with representatives from all interested member states and the European institutions, with its objective to develop proposals for EU reform, including enhanced cooperation and possible treaty changes. Groups of countries wishing further integration could increase the pace and level of ambition of cooperation in specific areas, without any EU state being excluded from these projects, but also without any member state being able to block them. They would be subject to broad public consultation (proposed democratic conventions) with the results being reported to the European Council.

The European Commission (EC) would be limited to 15 commissioners (the largest Member States would give up their candidates first to set an example for others), while pan-European (transnational) electoral lists would be established for European Parliament (EP) elections, from which half of the MEPs would be elected¹⁵. Macron called for the creation of the position of Minister for the Eurozone for economy and finance; a European innovation agency; a European food safety inspectorate; a European body to control social dumping; a European civil defence force; a European trade prosecutor's office; a European prosecutor for combating crime and terrorism; and a European intelligence academy.

Common foreign, security and defence policy. President Macron expressed his ambition to equip Europe with the capacity to act autonomously on a complementary basis with NATO. *De facto*, he called for creation of a 'security and defence union' based on a common defence doctrine, a common defence budget (2020-2025 horizon) and a European response force operating on the basis of a common strategic culture. Building the EU's strategic autonomy requires the smooth implementation of PESCO (Permanent Structured Cooperation) and the European Defence Fund, strengthening the interoperability of the armed forces (without undermining the Alliance as a security guarantor for the Euro-Atlantic area).

Reforming EMU and strengthening the euro area. Strengthening the euro area was a priority for President Macron as, in his view, the economic governance architecture has gaps, and the available instruments were insufficient to ensure that the euro area was adequately protected against another crisis. In order to reduce the level of unemployment and make the EU an economic power capable of competing with the United States or China, France expected, in the short term, the coordination of economic policies, including the completion of the banking union, and in the longer term, the creation of a euro area budget (initially a small one, which would grow to 2% to 3% of euro area GDP within a few years) with the task of macroeconomic stabilization and the

¹⁵ "Initiative pour l'Europe – Discours d'Emmanuel Macron pour une Europe souveraine, unie, démocratique," *Élysée*, 26 September 2017, at <https://www.elysee.fr/emmanuel-macron/2017/09/26/initiative-pour-l-europe-discours-d-emmanuel-macron-pour-une-europe-souveraine-unie-democratique>, 13 January 2024.

financing of joint ventures. France saw its own revenues as the source of such a budget (the authorities on the Seine counted on progress on harmonizing the corporate tax base at European level, i.e. a common base for the *Corporate Income Tax* across the EU, as well as a tax on the digital sector and an environmental tax). Eurozone reform – as acknowledged by former President Macron's advisor C. Beaune – including the completion of the banking union and the establishment of the eurozone budget – was a priority and at the same time the most difficult part of France's European agenda¹⁶. Macron also proposed social convergence by establishing and working out parameters for an EU-wide minimum wage with consideration of states' specificities.

'Multi-speed' Europe. Giving expression to his centralist tendencies, Macron pushed the idea of a division within the EU into so-called four 'concentric circles', which in practice was an evolution of the concept of a 'two-speed' Europe. In Macron's view, two objectives must be coordinated: preserving the unity of the EU and an appropriate level of ambition, so EU reform should be based on the formula of so-called '*circles of integration*', for it is necessary to get out of the 'zone of ambiguity', within which each leader boasts to his public about a different part of the conclusion, proving that it was he who 'won and someone else who lost'¹⁷. This creates a cacophony that makes citizens feel that Europe has become bureaucratic and lacking in vision¹⁸. Therefore, integration should continue with groups of states ready for closer cooperation in areas such as, inter alia, economic and monetary union, foreign policy, migration policy (including the Schengen area), climate policy and digital policy (taxation of the digital sector).

In May 2018, President E. Macron, during a debate on the future of the EU in the EP, once again set out an ambitious and pro-European vision for its development, and in his speech the 'European sovereignty' expression in relation to external and internal security, economic and trade, climate and energy, digital and social policies was a recurrent theme. These attributes of European sovereignty should be reflected in the future EU budget¹⁹.

President Macron continued his efforts to consolidate support for his vision of the European project through informal discussions of the future of the EU with countries sharing the French demands. Visits to Spain and Portugal in July 2018 resulted in joint declarations with Madrid on euro area reform and migration²⁰. Further visits

¹⁶ Opinion of C. Beaune, then Advisor on European Affairs to President E. Macron, expressed in October 2017, during a meeting in the diplomatic corps on the occasion of the Estonian Presidency of the Council of the EU.

¹⁷ "Conférence de presse du président de la République, Emmanuel Macron, lors du Conseil européen de Bruxelles," *Élysée*, 20 October 2017, at <https://www.elysee.fr/emmanuel-macron/2017/10/20/conference-de-presse-du-president-de-la-republique-emmanuel-macron-lors-du-conseil-europeen-de-bruxelles>, 16 February 2024.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ "Discours du Président de la République au Parlement européen à Strasbourg," *Élysée*, 17 April 2018, at <https://www.elysee.fr/emmanuel-macron/2018/04/17/discours-du-president-de-la-republique-au-parlement-europeen-a-strasbourg>, 18 February 2024.

²⁰ "Pedro Sánchez and Emmanuel Macron Sign Two Joint Declarations on Migration, and on the Economic and Monetary Union," *La Moclóa*, 26 July 2018, at <https://www.lamoncloa.gob.es/lang/en/presidente/news/Paginas/2018/20180726sanchez-macron.aspx>, 16 March 2024.

to Denmark, Finland and Luxembourg in August/September 2018 were used to promote the presidential agenda and confirmed France's increased focus on constructing bilateral ties, which were to subsequently become the basis for the narrower circles of European integration.

In a speech to the French ambassadors on 27 August 2018, President Macron said that the European battle was just beginning, would be long, difficult and would be at the heart of France's action, while it was necessary to accept that a Europe of *different circles* of integration was a fact²¹. President Macron again came out in favor of supporting EU reform (including reducing the number of commissioners and reforming the euro area, which requires a revision of the treaties²²). According to Macron, *a strong Europe is a Europe of a consolidated and reformed euro area*²³, which obliges the completion of the Banking Union, the acceleration of work on the Capital Markets Union, fiscal convergence and the establishment of a European tax on digital giants (the so-called GAFA: Google, Amazon, Facebook, Apple).

The French president continued his ambitious offensive and expressed new proposals on 4 March 2019, when his proclamation entitled "European Renaissance" was published in Europe's biggest dailies in all EU languages²⁴. Macron called for a European conference to discuss political change in Europe, including the revision of the treaties, deepening the narrative of the dispute between forces acting 'in favour of Europe' (progressives) and Eurosceptic demagogues²⁵. The European continent faces a serious threat when the EU project is undermined and attacked from within (nationalists and populists) and from outside: the United States (the unpredictable policies of then US President D. Trump) and China (economic expansion). Among the main demands was the one for a defence and security treaty, which would define, in agreement with NATO, the obligations of the Europeans including an increase in military spending, the implementation of a mutual defence clause, or the establishment of a European Security Council with the Great Britain's participation (according to C. Beaune, however, the idea of a Security and Defence Treaty had a deeper purpose, i.e. to maintain Britain's commitment for European security cooperation)²⁶.

²¹ "Discours du Président de la République à la conférence des Ambassadeurs," *Élysée*, 27 August 2018, at <https://www.elysee.fr/emmanuel-macron/2018/08/27/discours-du-president-de-la-republique-a-la-conference-des-ambassadeurs>, 16 April 2024.

²² Ibid.

²³ "Conférence de presse de M. Emmanuel Macron, Président de la République, sur les négociations concernant le Brexit et sur la construction européenne, à Bruxelles le 18 octobre 2018," *Vie publique*, 18 October 2018, at <https://www.vie-publique.fr/discours/206958-conference-de-presse-de-m-emmanuel-macron-president-de-la-republique>, 26 March 2024.

²⁴ "Pour une Renaissance européenne," *Élysée*, 4 March 2019, at <https://www.elysee.fr/emmanuel-macron/2019/03/04/pour-une-rennaissance-europeenne>, 18 March 2024.

²⁵ The article was published in the *Guardian* in the UK, *Die Welt* in Germany, *El País* in Spain, *Rzeczpospolita* in Poland, and others.

²⁶ Opinion of C. Beaune, then Advisor on European Affairs to President E. Macron, expressed in March 2019 to the diplomatic corps on the occasion of the Romanian Presidency of the Council of the EU. Despite Brexit, France sought to maintain the UK's commitment to European defence cooperation.

During his first foreign visit following the election of Ursula von der Leyen as EC President (23 July 2019) in Paris, President Macron highlighted France's priorities for the future of the European integration process:

- Strong ambitions in terms of climate, including climate neutrality in 2050, setting a minimum price on CO₂ emissions and introducing a carbon tax at the EU's external borders.
- A Europe of 'social solidarity' expressed through the social convergence agenda (strengthening and harmonizing social rights across the EU, including the minimum wage).
- A Europe that protects and can regulate migration and ensure the protection of its borders, but which also has real ambitions in terms of defence.
- A Europe of values that defends the rule of law, freedom of the press and all the values that underpin the EU.
- A Europe that must face the challenges of the future (artificial intelligence, digitalization).

It is in France's interest to continue the reforms and strengthen the EU, because by reforming Europe, France is trying to reform its own country and challenge the problems it cannot resolve as a single state.

EUROPEAN SOVEREIGNTY AS A METHOD OF BUILDING A 'EUROPE OF POWER'

According to the French President, *Europe represents a good level of defence of sovereignty* (E. Macron Revolution 2016), and the need to build strategic autonomy for the EU ties in with the vision of building a strong Europe, both in economic and military terms (the idea of European military, economic and technological sovereignty)²⁷. President Macron and the French government do not identify the traditional meaning of the word sovereignty (understood as supreme authority over a territory) in terms of a further transfer of competences to the EU level, but as a synonym for strategic autonomy ('European sovereignty' has come to be used interchangeably and has replaced the term 'strategic autonomy'), i.e. the ability to act against other global powers²⁸. Macron's European sovereigntism is meant to address global economic challenges and global economic rivalries, but also includes geopolitical components such as Russia and China, which are increasingly influential in setting political 'rules of the game'²⁹. Europe must

²⁷ "Emmanuel Macron in His Own Words," *The Economist*, 7 November 2019, at <https://www.economist.com/europe/2019/11/07/emmanuel-macron-in-his-own-words-english>, 16 December 2024; "Conférence sur la sécurité de Munich: faire revivre l'Europe comme une puissance politique stratégique," *Élysée*, 15 February 2020, at <https://www.elysee.fr/emmanuel-macron/2020/02/15/conference-sur-la-securite-de-munich-faire-revivre-leurope-comme-une-puissance-politique-strategique>, 3 March 2024.

²⁸ Cf. S.I. Bora, Ch. Lequesne, "French Presidents...", p. 928, 938.

²⁹ J. Roch, A. Oleart, "How 'European Sovereignty' Became...", p. 12.

be prepared to guarantee its security and act alone in the neighborhood to a greater extent. This concerns the development of military capabilities, but also independence in other areas. *Our standards must not be under American control, our infrastructure dependent on Chinese capital and our internet networks under Russian pressure*³⁰. To achieve this, it is necessary to create a common 'strategic culture' to define European interests collectively. Europe must be a 'balancing force' that avoids global bipolarity. The EU must undertake political and military reforms so that countries such as China and the United States see it as a 'power with strategic autonomy'. Indeed, Europe's common sovereignty does not diminish national sovereignty, but creates the opportunity for each member state to remain independent in a world where rivalry of powers is visible in all areas. According to the French authorities, there is a strong interdependence between 'strong nations' and a 'strong Europe': *without strong nations, the European project will be fragile, and without a strong Europe, our nations will be too weak*³¹. There is a need to move away from a 'Europe of fear' to a 'sovereign Europe' based on security autonomy³². It also implies the need to maintain 'economic sovereignty', which relates to broader geostrategic interests including security, research, know-how and future technologies. The need for 'European sovereignty' therefore combines security, technology, the economy, digital cooperation, energy, the environment and values³³.

The term 'European sovereignty' refers to an enhancement of the EU's capacity to act (not the distribution of political power within the EU) and brings together geopolitical (security), economic (reindustrialization and industrial development) and ecological (low-carbon emissions and climate protection) objectives³⁴:

- **Strategic economic autonomy of the EU.** France advocates a stronger coordination of the economic policies of the Member States; in particular, technological autonomy (sovereignty) must be restored. Europe must build its own solutions so as not to become dependent on US-Chinese technology (electromobility, semiconductor manufacturing and computer sector, space industry, pharmaceuticals, hydrogen technologies, digitization and the data innovation sector)³⁵. France promotes Eu-

³⁰ "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," *Élysée*, 7 February 2020, at <https://www.elysee.fr/emmanuel-macron/2020/02/07/discours-du-president-emmanuel-macron-sur-la-strategie-de-defense-et-de-dissuasion-devant-les-stagiaires-de-la-27eme-promotion-de-lecole-de-guerre>, 15 February 2024.

³¹ F. d'Alañon, J.-Ch. Ploquin, "Jean-Yves Le Drian: 'La France refuse un monde bipolaire,'" *La Croix*, 16 June 2020, at <https://www.la-croix.com/France/Politique/Jean-Yves-Le-Drian-France-refuse-monde-bipolaire-2020-06-16-1201100115>, 16 March 2024.

³² "Entretien de M. Jean-Yves Le Drian, ministre de l'Europe et des affaires étrangères, dans «Le Figaro» du 15 octobre 2019, sur les défis et priorités de la politique étrangère de la France," *Vie publique*, 15 October 2019, at <https://www.vie-publique.fr/discours/271248-entretien-jean-yves-le-drian-15102019-politique-etrangere>, 19 March 2024.

³³ Cf. E. Staunton, "France Is Back: Macron's European Policy...", pp. 24-25.

³⁴ S.I. Bora, Ch. Lequesne, "French Presidents and the Discursive Use...", p. 928.

³⁵ Cf. S. Meunier, J. Mickus, "Sizing Up the Competition: Explaining Reform of European Union Competition Policy in the Covid-19 Era," *Journal of European Integration*, vol. 42, no. 8 (2020), p. 1086.

ropean values and approaches, i.e. the need to strengthen the EU's defence mechanisms against unfair trade practices, especially in terms of subsidizing industry and advancing EU-PRC, EU-US agreements), which will position it as one of the leaders of the world economy against rival economic powers.

- **A Europe of power, security and defence.** The EU should be one of the global actors, because Europe is a political project, not just a standalone market³⁶. The EU must abandon its 'obsession' with the free market and become a *realpolitik*, strategic player having one voice, first in its own neighbourhood and then worldwide. Otherwise, according to Macron, Europe risks becoming a bystander victim in a new order dominated by the US-China duopoly³⁷. A sovereign Europe is one that will be able to make its own military, technological and cultural choices in relation to China or the US. The strengthening of political integration through the communitarization of sovereignty in strategic and military terms is to restore, according to Macron, the geopolitical importance and stature of the EU, with the construction of strategic autonomy in terms of defence having to be based on credible armed forces and the cooperation of the European arms industry.
- **Europe being strong, defending its values, interests and identity.** A Europe based on pluralist democracy and the rule of law is to be a 'balancing force' to avoid bipolarity in the global dimension. In the face of competing powers, Europe needs to move away from a form of innocence and naivety in order to assert its own strength in the multilateral international order³⁸.

While sovereignty is a core value protected by states, this does not preclude – as intergovernmental liberalism assumes – the possibility for states to self-limit some of their sovereign rights in favour of supranational institutions, as long as this is offset by other benefits. In this sense, *intergovernmental liberalism shares basic theoretical and methodological assumptions with rational choice institutionalism*³⁹.

'European sovereignty' has become a means of engaging in inter-state rivalry and protecting itself from globalization⁴⁰. Globalization is a central dimension that contributes to justifying and legitimizing the notion of 'European sovereignty' in Macron's eyes⁴¹. European sovereignty is also 'industrial sovereignty', which is just as important – if not more so – as defence. Reiterated by President Macron during his speech on Europe on 25 April 2024 at the Sorbonne University: *If we want to be sovereign, we need to build a new model of growth and production because there can be no power without a solid economic base*, encompassing the development of a *low-carbon industry* and a *European defence industry*. Calling for the adoption of a new EU strategic

³⁶ "La doctrine Macron...".

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ F. d'Alañon, J.-Ch. Ploquin, "Jean-Yves Le Drian...".

³⁹ A. Moravcsik, F. Schimmelfennig, "Liberal Intergovernmentalism," in A. Wiener, T. Diez, *European Integration Theory*, Oxford 2009, p. 84.

⁴⁰ Cf. S.I. Bora, Ch. Lequesne, "French Presidents and the Discursive Use...", pp. 939-940.

⁴¹ J. Roch, A. Oleart, "How 'European Sovereignty' Became...", pp. 16-17.

programme for 2024-2029, Macron concluded: *We proposed building a more united, more sovereign, more democratic Europe. More united, so as to carry weight in the face of other powers..., more sovereign, so as not to allow others to dictate its destiny, its values and its way of life... the concept of sovereignty, which just seven years ago may have seemed very French, has gradually become European*⁴².

These objectives form the core of political cooperation understood as the ability to defend or promote one's place and interests and values in the world, and its format is a 'multi-speed Europe'. Maintaining a uniform institutional framework (EC, Council, EP, CJEU, ECB) is supposed to prevent the EU from disintegrating, but it is also important to introduce more flexible rules for working in different formats (groups of countries) around specific matters (e.g. organizing meetings of the 'euro area parliament' or varying the composition of the Council depending on the issues discussed)⁴³. Such solutions require treaty changes, and in order to increase the efficiency of EU decision-making, it is vital to reduce the number of EC commissioners and to move away from unanimity where it still exists (retaining unanimity only in matters of a constitutional nature such as enlargement, amendment of the treaties and for the budget and its resources)⁴⁴. Macron therefore seeks not only a Europe of *two or three trains moving at two or three speeds*, but an EU of 'many trains' moving in the same direction⁴⁵.

Macron still values French sovereignty but stated that certain issues must be better resolved at the European level, which was in the interests of both France and the EU. This willingness to strengthen European sovereignty includes a variety of issues related to security, the Euro, taxation, migration, climate, social and health issues, agriculture and digital policy. The demands for EU reform were reflected during the French Presidency of the Council of the EU (1 January – 30 June 2022, under the motto 'recovery, strength, belonging', French: *relance, puissance, appartenance*) in the agenda of legislative work on, inter alia, climate issues (decarbonization and carbon neutrality, establishment of a border carbon tax, completion of the taxonomy) and social issues (minimum wage regulations) and the work initiated within the framework of the Conference on the Future of Europe. France also worked actively for a European industrial strategy, digital sovereignty (Digital Services Act, Digital Markets Act), the construction of a technological Europe and an EU innovation ecosystem, and initiated a long-term reflection on the reform of the budget rules of the Stability and Growth Pact (proposal for a flexible approach)⁴⁶. France has also driven the strengthening of

⁴² "Discours sur l'Europe," *Élysée*, 24 April 2024, at <https://www.elysee.fr/emmanuel-macron/2024/04/24/discours-sur-leurope>, 26 April 2024.

⁴³ C. Beaune, "L'Europe, par delà le COVID-19," *Politique étrangère*, vol. 85, no. 3 (2020), pp. 23-24.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

⁴⁵ Cf. A. Brzozowski, "En Belgique, Macron plaide pour une 'Europe à deux ou trois vitesses,'" *Euractiv*, 21 November 2018, at <https://www.euractiv.fr/section/politique/news/in-belgium-macron-pleads-for-two-or-three-speed-europe-treaty-change>, 13 January 2024.

⁴⁶ "Le pacte de stabilité et de croissance est un instrument au service d'une ambition politique," *La France dans l'UE*, 16 June 2023, at <https://ue.delegfrance.org/le-pacte-de-stabilite-et-de>, 22 March 2024;

the EU's autonomy understood as the capacity to defend common European interests – including beyond Europe's borders – through the approval on 21 March 2022 of a 'Strategic Compass' aiming to ensure the ability to work together at EU level within the framework of security and defence, based on an analysis of threats (global, regional, neighborhood conflicts and challenges from non-state actors)⁴⁷.

FRANCE AND GERMANY AS 'CATALYSTS' FOR THE EUROPEAN PROJECT?

Between a 'Europe of solidarity' and an EU of 'budgetary discipline'. From Paris' point of view, cooperation between France and Germany plays the role of 'catalyst' for the European project. Since the 1960s, the strength of Franco-German relations has been in the working relationship at all levels of political and administrative life and results from the fact that the two countries, while often having divergent positions, are able to overcome them in decisive moments⁴⁸. From a German perspective, relations with France are also invariably a priority, even though the government in Berlin is no longer prepared to accept everything that Paris proposes. If proposals are considered, they are subject to tough and extensive negotiations. Berlin is, however, in many cases 'bound' to Paris, albeit more willing and able to seek support from a wider range of member states. There is a certain fiction of balance in the DE-FR relationship, but both states are keen to use it in their own interests. For Germany, it serves to preserve the *status quo* and camouflage the growth of its own power, while for France it serves to change the *status quo*, for fear of an asymmetric strengthening of German power.

Under Chancellor Merkel and two successive French presidents, Sarkozy and Hollande, there were more or less intense periods of cooperation between France and Germany⁴⁹. After his election as president, the vigorous Macron realised that the key to success and EU reform was cooperation with Germany, which represented the best available option to promote French interests in the EU⁵⁰. After the French President and German Chancellor met in Paris on the 55th anniversary of the Elysée Treaty on 19 January 2018, the two leaders reaffirmed their willingness to further strengthen cooperation between the two nations. However, the young president's reformist enthusiasm was quickly tempered by the lack of a clear response from the experienced and restrained Chancellor A. Merkel to the venture proposals from the Sorbonne, dashing

"UE: La France exige plus de 'flexibilité' en faveur de l'investissement," *BFM Business*, 7 December 2023, at https://www.bfmtv.com/economie/ue-la-france-exige-plus-de-flexibilite-en-faveur-de-l-investissement_AD-202312070413.html, 23 March 2024.

⁴⁷ European Union, *A Strategic Compass for Security and Defence*, at https://www.ecas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/strategic_compass_en3_web.pdf, 24 February 2024.

⁴⁸ C. Beaune, "L'Europe, par delà...", pp. 11-12.

⁴⁹ J. Schild, "EMU's Asymmetries and Asymmetries...", pp. 455-456; cf. H. Degner, D. Leuffen, "Brake and Broker...", pp. 895-898.

⁵⁰ Cf. U. Krotz, J. Schild, "Back to the Future?...", p. 1176.

the hopes for reforming the EU together⁵¹. Angela Merkel and her CDU party ultimately rejected Macron's proposals for euro area reform, partly because the solutions were addressed more broadly, i.e. for the EU as a whole and not just for members of the currency community⁵². Germany hindered Macron's ambitions for the euro area budget and the completion of the banking union and promoted the idea of transforming the ESM into a European Monetary Fund, which differed from the French one⁵³. There were differences of opinion on closer integration within the euro area, including the creation of a common euro area budget of 'a few percent' of EU GDP, the establishment of a euro area finance minister or a separate Eurozone parliament, a common EU defence budget and the integration of social policies⁵⁴. Berlin opposed the 'budget without limits' from the very beginning and stuck to its concept of the so-called euro area budget as part of the overall EU budget, clearly indicating where German concessions to France reach their limit⁵⁵. Germany also preferred a more inclusive approach to the future of the EU than the 'European vanguard' concept promoted by Macron. Berlin feared further divisions in Europe and did not want a return to a 'Carolingian Europe'⁵⁶. Leaving Central and Eastern European countries on the margins of integration, or the 'transfer union', i.e. the transfer of money from Germany to economically weaker countries (including France) and the transfer of responsibility for macroeconomic reforms in member states to the EU level, were opposed by Germany⁵⁷.

The Franco-German driving force was virtually stopped when it came to EU policy. While the German government felt obliged to support the French idea of a euro area budget (this was confirmed in a declaration adopted in Meseberg on 19 June 2018 during the 20th *Franco-German Council of Ministers*), this represented a significant concession to France⁵⁸. However, the Franco-German compromise on the euro area budget met

⁵¹ Ł. Jasiński, Ł. Maślanka, "Niepewna przyszłość tandemu. Stosunki francusko-niemieckie w dobie wojny i inflacji," *PISM*, vol. 5, no. 126 (2023), p. 3.

⁵² Ph. Giurlando, "Emmanuel Macron's Challenge...", pp. 69-70.

⁵³ Cf. J. Schild, "Germany and France at Cross Purposes: The Case of Banking Union," *Journal of Economic Policy Reform*, vol. 21, no. 2 (2018), p. 102.

⁵⁴ Ł. Jasiński, Ł. Maślanka, "Niepewna przyszłość tandemu...", pp. 2-3; S. Płóciennik, "Macron musi czekać. O ostrożności Niemiec wobec szybkich reform UE," *Biuletyn PISM*, vol. 67, no. 1640 (2018), pp. 1-2.

⁵⁵ D. Howarth, J. Schild, "Torn between Two Lovers: German Policy on Economic and Monetary Union, the New Hanseatic League and Franco-German Bilateralism," *German Politics*, vol. 31, no. 2 (2022), pp. 334.

⁵⁶ Such a meaning had the speech of Vice Chancellor O. Scholz's at Humboldt University (28.11.2019), in which he proposed converting the French permanent seat on the UN Security Council into a permanent seat for the EU in order to show the French that there are limits that Paris should not overstep by placing excessive expectations on Germany.

⁵⁷ Cf. D. Howarth, J. Schild, "Nein to 'Transfer Union...'," p. 220. Germany saw this as a risk of an unlimited increase in the public debt of the euro area countries and feared that German taxpayers' money from the ring-fenced euro area budget would go to France, Italy or the so-called "South" countries to pay for their public spending.

⁵⁸ D. Howarth, J. Schild, "Torn between Two Lovers...", p. 334.

with strong opposition from a group of northern states described as the 'New Hanseatic League', preventing the idea from being implemented (on 5 March 2018, the governments of the Netherlands, Denmark, Finland, Sweden, the three Baltic states and Ireland issued a joint statement against the idea of a fiscal instrument at European level, and in June 2018, Austria, Belgium, Luxembourg and Malta joined in announcing the twelve states' opposition to Franco-German proposals for a euro area budget)⁵⁹. As a result, the *Meseberg Declaration*, although supposed to be a politically huge step forward, did not translate into the expected results⁶⁰. Also, the Treaty of Aachen, signed on 22 January 2019 (on the anniversary of the Elysée Treaty of 1963), was a document whose signing was completely unnecessarily 'forced' by France on Germany at a time when German politics was highly destabilized by debates within the coalition (nevertheless, the French position was well summarized by A. Adam, who asserted at that the efficacy of the collaboration between Paris and Berlin is derived from the enhancement of their relationship)⁶¹.

In contrast, a major success of Macron's policy was the agreement reached in July 2020 by the European Council, due to the fact that for the first time ever the introduction of a Community debt instrument (loans on the capital markets) was approved, something France had been calling for a long time. Paris was also pleased that the conclusions included a reference to a conditionality mechanism linked to respect for the rule of law. Brexit and Covid-19 created an unprecedented opportunity for the French concept of a more interventionist Europe, politicised and with common commitment aspects⁶². The proposal for a post-pandemic recovery fund was largely based on the Franco-German plan of 18 May 2020 to disburse grants financed by joint debt instruments⁶³, with the Commission adding a further €250 billion in loans to the €500

⁵⁹ J. Schild, "EMU's Asymmetries...", pp. 459-460.

⁶⁰ At the insistence of the Élysée Palace, France and Germany agreed on a joint "Proposal on the Architecture of a Eurozone Budget within the Framework of the European Union" on 16 November 2018. Germany's agreement on the creation of a budget for the euro area was based, inter alia, on the need to engage France in negotiations on EU migration policy.

⁶¹ A new component in the Treaty of Aachen was, inter alia, a declaration of allied assistance in the event of an attack on territory in the form of a so-called security solidarity clause, going beyond Article 5 of the Washington Treaty and Article 42.7 of the TEU. This is intended to serve as a reinforcement and model for other member states ready to strengthen their security and defence policies and weaken the US commitment to NATO. The provision of the Treaty of Aachen implies a readiness to use the French nuclear deterrent force in the event of a threat to German territory, but also the Bundeswehr's commitment to defend French overseas territories.

⁶² Ph. Giurlando, "Emmanuel Macron's Challenge...", p. 70.

⁶³ Following confidential negotiations between the German Chancellery and the French President's office, and between the German and French Finance Ministries at a joint press videoconference, Chancellor Merkel and President Macron on 18 May 2020 agreed on an additional fund of €500 billion. The French Ministry of Finance refrained from using the term "Corona-bonds" and the authorities in Paris agreed that the fund would be linked to the multiannual financial framework and used to complement existing European spending programmes in the EU27 format (and therefore would not be used exclusively for the euro area, as in: P. Becker, "Germany as the European Union's Status Quo Power? Continuity and Change in the Shadow of the Covid-19 Pandemic," *Journal of European Public Policy*, vol. 38, no. 8 (2023), p. 1481.

billion in grants⁶⁴. On 27 May 2020, just nine days after the Franco-German agreement, the Commission presented its proposal for the 'Next Generation EU' recovery fund, together with a renewed proposal for the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF). For years, Germany had opposed the communitarization of European debt, treating Eurobonds as a one-off tool designed only to finance investment and not to pay off old debts. Therefore, the announcement by Macron and Merkel of an agreement on a recovery plan that would use common debt was a major political success for the French president after long months of frustration at the lack of agreement with Germany⁶⁵.

An attempt to rebuild EU leadership and reform. From Berlin's point of view, French ideas (to strengthen the euro area, military cooperation) were seen as a counterweight to the continental shift towards Germany and Central and Eastern Europe. In this context, French proposals for 'concentric circles' were intended to ensure that France was at the center of these configurations.

The election (December 2021) of Olaf Scholz, the candidate preferred by the Elysée Palace, as Chancellor, created new hopes for Germany's openness towards at least some French ideas on EU reform, such as the loosening of the convergence criteria. The pro-European rhetoric of the coalition agreement between the SPD, FDP and Greens was for the most part in line with E. Macron's European ambitions. From the French point of view, the new German government's program contained many positive components, notably the possibility of amending the treaties to reform the EU, also the introduction of a qualified majority in foreign policy matters, as well as the new coalition's favoring of a carbon tax at the EU's borders, supported for years by France but thus far resisted by Chancellor Merkel.

Macron hoped to preserve the pro-EU Franco-German dynamics and advance discussions on strengthening social integration, consolidating strategic industries and joint arms projects. The Franco-German tandem was also expected to promote reform of the treaties⁶⁶.

Increased geopolitical instability in the EU's neighborhood (Russian aggression in Ukraine), the rise of neo-conservative attitudes in Europe that question the achievements of democracy and the prospect of EU enlargement have had a consolidating effect on the Franco-German leadership and the proposal of a precise EU reform project. France and Germany provide leadership if both sides realise the high costs of the *status quo* and believe that the benefits and potential gains of leadership outweigh the costs⁶⁷.

⁶⁴ A. Crespy, L. Schramm, "Breaking the Budgetary Taboo: German Preference Formation in the EU's Response to the Covid-19 Crisis," *German Politics*, vol. 33, no. 1 (2024), p. 61; M. Heermann, D. Leuffen, F. Tigges, "Change to Stay the Same? German European Preference Formation during the COVID-19 Crisis," *German Politics*, vol. 33, no. 2 (2024), p. 7, 12.

⁶⁵ D. Howarth, J. Schild, "Nein to 'Transfer Union...'", p. 219.

⁶⁶ Ł. Jasiński, Ł. Maślanka, "Niepewna przyszłość tandemu...", p. 6.

⁶⁷ L. Schramm, U. Krotz, "Leadership in European Crisis Politics: France, Germany, and the Difficult Quest for Regional Stabilization and Integration," *Journal of European Public Policy*, vol. 31 no. 5 (2024), p. 1155, 1170.

The special bilateral relationship and its role for the stability and political development of the EU often remind decision-makers on both sides that without Franco-German initiatives and compromises the EU risks stagnation or even disintegration⁶⁸. This is expressed in speeches by President Macron on 9 May 2022 at the EP in Strasbourg and Chancellor Scholtz on 29 August 2022 at Charles University in Prague. Macron called once again for a Convention to *revise the European treaties* and create a *European political community*⁶⁹. Chancellor Scholz affirmed the need for institutional reforms that would make the EU more effective (such as the abolition of the Member States' right of veto, or the reduction in the number of the EC's members)⁷⁰. Also, a specific German ambition to play the role of an architect of compromises acceptable to all Member States and to combine deeper integration with EU enlargement could be heard in the German Chancellor's speech⁷¹.

Recognizing EU enlargement as a 'geostrategic imperative' but dependent on the preparation of European institutions and the reform of EU policies and budgets, was reflected in the report released in September 2023 by the Franco-German Working Group on EU Institutional Reforms, entitled "Sailing on High Seas: Reforming and Expanding the EU for the 21st Century" (the so-called "The Group of Twelve Report")⁷². Although it is not the official position of the French and German governments, the report actually reflects the main objectives of EU reform supported by both sides, outlining various paths for treaty change ahead of the next enlargement (such as extending the qualified majority voting system in the Council of the EU, including CFSP and changing the QMV counting, increasing the EU budget from new internal EU resources, giving the Union the right to incur communitized debt). The report also includes a differentiation of integration by choosing different degrees of integration (inner circle, i.e. members of the Eurozone and Schengen; EU; associated states; finally, the European Political Community). The key criterion for belonging to the first three circles of integration is to be the rule of law – failure to meet this criterion would mean limited influence over EU decisions and access to EU funds.

The report reflects well the main interests of France and Germany and, by making agreement on further enlargement of the European Union conditional on agreement to amend the Treaties, the Franco-German proposals have once again become a basis for pan-European discussion.

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 1172.

⁶⁹ "Clôture de la Conférence sur l'avenir de l'Europe," *Élysée*, 9 May 2022, at <https://www.elysee.fr/emmanuel-macron/2022/05/09/cloture-de-la-conference-sur-avenir-de-europe>, 4 April 2024.

⁷⁰ Ł. Jasiński, M. Szczepanik, "Kancelarz Niemiec o przyszłości Europy," *PISM*, no. 114 (2022), pp. 1-2.

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 2.

⁷² *Sailing on High Seas: Reforming and Enlarging the EU for the 21st Century*, Paris–Berlin, 18 September 2023, at https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/20230919_group_of_twelve_report_updated14.12.2023_cle88fb88.pdf, 9 April 2024.

CONCLUSIONS

The analysis of the available source material confirmed both research hypotheses. When France talks about institutional reform, it wants a centralized Europe, and the concept of 'European sovereignty', which has become a cornerstone of Paris' European policy, applies to various areas (including security and defence, monetary integration, industrial policy, energy and climate, migration and digital policy). The European Union is a specific 'lever' of France's European policy, aimed at raising its importance and position in Europe⁷³. As Macron's long-time advisor, former Secretary of State for European Affairs Clément Beaune, said: *national sovereignty is stronger when we engage with Europe*⁷⁴. The study, using the paradigm of the theory of 'intergovernmental liberalism', made it possible to explore French interests in the context of proposals for future EU reform and the role of cooperation with Germany. France's ultimate goal is to merge the EU in terms of politics and economics, so it can benefit politically and economically [hypothesis 1]. The reform of the EU is not only a question of the future structure of its institutions, but above all a 'game' in which France's role and importance in Europe is at stake. Through the EU, France realizes its vision of greatness (*la grandeur*) as a geopolitical, military and economic power. In a sense, it can be said that the 'battle' for reforms in the Union is a 'battle' for the leadership of France in the Union that it desires.

President Macron wants to completely change the European political and institutional order, and this specific 'revolution' is to result in creating a new political center that will give the EU a fresh impetus. For this, he needs strong German support and an efficient Franco-German tandem (as acknowledged by C. Beaune, the European institutions must above all unburden and facilitate the European project, although an avant-garde is necessary to assume its responsibilities, and this is always the Franco-German tandem which guarantees the effectiveness of the European project)⁷⁵. The Franco-German duo is indispensable for any change, although France's desire and necessity to gain Germany's results in a significant reduction of its initial initiatives. Research has also confirmed that Macron has managed to convince Germany, as both countries derive multifaceted and different benefits from their cooperation, influencing European and global politics more broadly [hypothesis 2].

The realization of the concept of EU reform in line with the postulates presented by E. Macron (including the strengthening of the eurozone, the creation of a deeper

⁷³ Cf. T. Młynarski, *Francja wobec głównych problemów reformy instytucjonalnej Unii Europejskiej w XXI w.*, Kraków 2006, p. 227.

⁷⁴ "Entretien de M. Clément Beaune, secrétaire d'Etat auprès du ministre de l'Europe et des affaires étrangères, chargé des affaires européennes, avec France Inter le 2 janvier 2022, sur la polémique concernant le drapeau de l'Union européenne sous l'Arc de triomphe, la question migratoire, la défense, l'énergie nucléaire, le salaire minimum et la construction européenne," *Vie publique*, 2 January 2022, at <https://www.vie-publique.fr/discours/283153-entretien-clement-beaune-02012022-union-europeenne>, 30 April 2024.

⁷⁵ C. Beaune, "L'Europe, par delà...", p. 25.

political union, a 'multi-speed' Europe) could potentially bring a number of benefits (helping to stabilize the French economy, increase France's influence on the shaping of EU policies and regulations, aligning them more closely with its national interests, or deepening integration in areas of French interest). This would aim to help France maintain its position as a leading power in the EU and increase its ability to deal with both national and European challenges. France has failed to convince the other EU countries that it is not using the EU as a tool to promote French interests. For this reason, French initiatives to replace the economic governance architecture have achieved little. President E. Macron's key proposals – the euro area minister, transnational lists – have had to be abandoned, and French diplomacy has failed to gather a broad coalition in favour of the French approach. Macron needs to make significant adjustments if he wants his reforms to succeed. Paris is aware that not all EU member states share his vision, but it does not want to let them slow down the integration process. Hence, further integration is to be initiated among 'differentiated circles', which other countries will be able to join at their own convenience and pace.

In terms of its external dimension, France as a middle power, seeks to play a main role in European and world politics through the EU. President Macron believes that in a post-liberal world that threatens multilateralism, 'European sovereignty' is the answer, understood as the EU's ability to shape relations with other international actors and protect its interests. Speaking of 'European sovereignty', Paris seeks to increase the scope of the EU's subjectivity in international politics and transform it into a 'geopolitical player', which implies the need for the EU to create 'military sovereignty' – i.e. the establishment of a system to effectively defend EU territory independently of NATO. The French concept of a 'Europe of defence' is a kind of 'European neo-Gaullism' (Europe's power in external relations and protectionism within, meaning European, mainly French, defence industry interests)⁷⁶. However, as J. Węc rightly points out, the EU's strategic autonomy should not be understood as a desire to strengthen the Union's international position vis-à-vis NATO, as sought by France and Germany, but only as a way for the EU to make an important contribution to strengthening the Euro-Atlantic security system⁷⁷.

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⁷⁶ Cf. S.I. Bora, L. Schramm, "Toward a More 'Sovereign' Europe? Domestic, Bilateral, and European Factors to Explain France's (Growing) Influence on EU Politics, 2017-2022," *French Politics*, vol. 21 (2023), pp. 16-17.

⁷⁷ J.J. Węc, "Perspektywy reformy Wspólnej Polityki Bezpieczeństwa...", p. 233.

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