

The French Presidency of the Council of the European Union seen from Europe

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Foreword

THIERRY CHOPIN • PRESIDENT
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PROPOSAL COMMITTEE FOR THE
FRENCH PRESIDENCY OF THE
COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN
UNION

The French Presidency of the Council of the European Union (PFUE) began on 1 January 2022. In preparation for this event, the Secretary of State for European Affairs, Clément Beaune, sought to establish a reflection and proposal committee in order to develop a number of main directives for this presidency.

The results of the work of this committee (independent, gender-balanced, and made up of academics and experts from a variety of fields and nationalities) were presented in a report delivered to the Secretary of State on 30 November 2021 and which is now published by *La Documentation française*.

In order to provide a perspective which, while going beyond traditional institutional frameworks, can be useful in the preparation of the PFUE, committee members chose to base their reflections on the three-part agenda established by the French authorities around the notions of “Recovery”, “Power”, and “Belonging”. Beyond that, this agenda was expanded in order to analyze the perception and the expectations that other member states may have of this French presidency.

To address a subject which is as broad as the PFUE’s priorities viewed from a European perspective, more than thirty high-level figures from more than twenty member states of scientific, political, and institutional backgrounds were consulted.

The objective of the exercise was not so much to produce an exhaustive overview, a detailed mapping of power relations, or opinion trends from a representative sample, but to suggest a series of criteria that would reveal potential points of agreement or disagreement, expectations, or freely voiced suggestions.

This broad consultation informed the committee’s work by contributing to reflection on the key points of the PFUE, its strategy or expectations, as well as any misgivings that it may cause within the European Union. At the moment of our report’s publication, the work is presented here.

The French Presidency of the Council of the European Union seen from Europe

GILLES GRESSANI • PRESIDENT
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GÉOPOLITIQUES

1. “Under-promise and over-achieve” : the importance of the method

To address a subject which is as broad as the French presidency of the Council of the European Union (PFUE) priorities viewed from a European perspective, more than thirty high-level figures from more than twenty member states of scientific (directors of research centers, think tanks, universities, or prominent professors), political, and institutional (former European commissioners, ministers, or parliamentarians) backgrounds were consulted.¹

The objective of the exercise was not so much to produce an exhaustive overview, a detailed mapping of power relations, or opinion trends from a representative sample, but rather to suggest a series of criteria that would reveal potential points of agreement or disagreement, expectations, or freely voiced suggestions by the individuals who participated in this exercise, and who occupy a central role in their respective fields, expressing themselves without involving their institutions. This wide-ranging consultation process has fed into the Committee's work, contributing to the reflection on the key points of the PFUE, on its strategy or on the expectations it raises in Europe.

Of course, the method used has several biases that should be immediately pointed out. The respondents are all fairly supportive of European integration, and most of them probably view the French presidency positively, hoping that it will be a success. As one contributor, a specialist in qualitative survey methods, remarked, « hope for progress is, of course, a characteristic of our group. » Furthermore, despite the repeated reminders of the Committee's «total freedom of proposal », a certain effect of self-censorship on some responses cannot be ruled out, thereby adding nuance or deflecting the intensity of criticism.

To use a metaphor from the history of geography, the aim here is not to produce a map, but a portolan: through these consultations and contributions, it will undoubtedly be possible to identify certain important guidelines for navigating around a few cardinal points, but it should not be claimed, on the basis of this instrument alone, that it has the geometric accuracy to cross continents. Seven of the 34 people interviewed questioned the relevance of the role played by the rotating presidency. In their criticisms, we find a recurring argument, which is perfectly summarized by the contribution of a former senior European official: « In my opinion, rotating presidencies are relics of another era in which we did not have a presidency of the European Council... It is a form of folklore that should probably be preserved in the same way that village festivals are preserved without expecting them to change village life. » This position is

1 — This study was conducted by Gilles Gressani from May to June 2021. It was presented on July 2 at a Committee meeting. The first two parts of this chapter are largely based on that presentation.

sometimes accompanied by confidence in a French-led initiative: « I am very confident in French leadership in Europe after Brexit, because of the internationalization of European debates, not so much on the pertinence of the Council presidency following the Treaty of Lisbon. »

This tension between a strong discourse, a recognized capacity for proposals, and an institutional opportunity that provides limited means of action can produce a major political contradiction and will certainly be exploited by forces at odds with the French project that could highlight the disconnect between words and actions, between ambitions and achievements. According to a former minister, this disconnect is linked to a «problem of political cognition of the EU, notably a discrepancy between the expectations created and the instruments to respond to them, and a zero-sum construction of many of its policies (notably its budget).» It is in this respect that another senior European official recommends that France review the scope of the French presidency's expectations with a catchphrase: «Under-promise and over-achieve...». In Europe we often do the opposite. A presidency is an important occasion, but we must not create unrealistic expectations. A presidency does not have much leeway.

1.1. For an attentive and pragmatic presidency

We find this call for temperance and modesty on several occasions, with a divide which is roughly centered on a North-East/South-West axis. For instance, according to one Dutch personality, « the best EU presidencies are the most modest ». She also adds: « There is another reason why France should be as small and humble as possible: Brexit. Since Brexit, Germany and France are seen as more dominant than before. In smaller countries as well as in Eastern Europe, this can easily cause resentment.» But can we really say that the last German presidency was a modest one? The impression one draws from this series of consultations is that «modesty» is associated more with the ability to listen or integration than with the content of what is said. The German presidency managed to be ambitious while at the same time avoiding the impression that it was in a position of political leadership, but rather that it was an engineer of consensus. Hence the interest in creating opportunities during the French presidency and beyond to bring scientific, political, and intellectual personalities of different nationalities to the table.

In this sense, several analysts have stressed the need to position the French presidency in a broader sequence, within the framework of parallel initiatives, fully assuming the geopolitical dimension of the context (we will look at this in greater detail in the section of this analysis devoted to the dimension of power): «the French presidency coincides with the conclusions of two key projects for the Union's identity: the Conference on the Future of Europe and reflection on the strategic compass. These projects should provide guidance on the future shape and direction of the EU, as well as the scope and ambition of its security and defense policy. » However, the connection between these timeframes does not seem to be obvious, as another interviewee pointed out: « Since the Conference on the Future of Europe will be concluded during the presidential election period, it runs the risk of going completely unnoticed in France (as well as in the rest of the Union). »

1.2. A unique context: the french presidency of the council of the eu and the french presidential election

The French electoral calendar is seen by most contributors as a « critical obstacle to action », in two dimensions. First, because «the national election

campaign will be the main focus of Mr. Macron»; second, because «the outcome of the German elections and the French presidential campaign could have a considerable impact on his performance.» One Dutch figure stressed the need for a change in discourse that could pre-empt the «political turbulence» anticipated by most of the contributions: «France would be wise to listen to others, while refraining from taking unilateral action, to focus on its own problems and to avoid making grand declarations.» Most analysts predict that «the French presidency will be very strongly linked to French domestic politics,» while being critical of the possibilities of a continental impact. « I don't know to what extent it will have an impact in other capitals or in Brussels.»

A number of contributions also emphasize the concrete, temporal dimension and the limitations caused by the French electoral calendar: «The 2022 presidential election will significantly limit the active phase » of the French presidency of the Council of the EU, according to a senior European official, echoing an idea expressed by most contributors. Another senior European official mentions a «truncated French presidency ». This idea presents a political risk in the context of the special moment that Europe is currently going through. In particular, from the German perspective, the overlap between the French presidency and the election campaign raises two serious concerns. One is the risk of «making promises that will not be kept, along with losing control of the process». The other being the «risk of an overly ambitious rhetoric that could have repercussions on the domestic situations of member states».

Most of the contributions, which regard the rotating presidency as a meaningful institutional event, stress the historic nature of the period that coincides with the French presidency. One Polish analyst feels that «this is not a time to 'waste' a presidency, as the French presidency comes at a (potentially) historic moment for the Union.»

Should we try to decouple the presidential campaign from the French presidency of the Council of the EU, or should we instead play on the continuity between the two events? Both options seem difficult to reconcile: should France's European discourse be politicized during the French presidency in order to lead to progress or the cementing of a new consensus, the terms of which would be at least partly defined in Paris, or should we try to embody the role of the «honest broker » suggested by some Dutch and German contributions? Several people interviewed have no doubt about the option that will be chosen: «France will lead an energetic presidency of the Council of the European Union. Not only is President Macron the leader with the most ambitious European agenda, but the Conference on the Future of Europe will come to an end during the presidency and (most importantly) the French presidential election will also take place. The stage is therefore nicely set for high stakes, and the political incentives are strong.»

1.3. A critical moment for reconfiguring the terms of the european debate? opportunities and risks of a new consensus initiated by Paris

The French presidency will take place at a « critical moment,» as one Greek figure put it. In Greek, critical means decisive, conducive to judgment. Several elements could contribute to defining this « window of opportunity », as another Eastern European political scientist puts it. One analyst lists these elements as follows: «The political context that the EU faces in early 2022 will be interesting. Germany will have its first post-Merkel chancellor, the novelty of

the Biden presidency will have worn off, and France will itself be heading for a presidential election.»

One might add: the possible stabilization of the political cycle initiated by Mario Draghi and of the Franco-Italian relationship around the Quirinal Treaty. Other contributions add two more elements: « Major international meetings have been held before the French presidency (e.g. COP 26 in November 2021) and will be held shortly after (e.g. the 9th BTWC to be held in August 2022)». According to one Polish figure, «the ‘strong’ presidency [of France], at a time when Europe should be concentrating on post-Brexit and post-pandemic considerations,» should serve to formalize a «paradigm shift within the EU that is [now] obvious.»

But will we witness what some of the most pro-integration individuals have defined as a « European moment »? According to one German figure, who happens to be critical of several aspects, « the French presidency will play a key role, especially because France is a founding member of the EU, a large and powerful country, albeit one that is politically shaken.»

In fact, at least ten or so contributions mention four major, global issues that could determine the legitimacy of European integration: inequality, the environment, digital technology, and geopolitics.

Several contributors highlight obstacles, but also see a window of opportunity in the development of a «new consensus»² during the French presidency. As one former senior European official points out, this new dimension may lead to a new consolidation of the terms of reference of the European debate around three axes: «the regulation of global capitalism on its own scale, particularly in terms of corporate taxation and very large portfolios; geopolitical weight in neighborhood stability extending as far as the Sahel, and in the US-China rivalry; effective leadership in global warming and in the preservation of resource diversity.» According to another political scientist following the same analytical framework, it is useful, « especially in the framework of the EU-27 », to first face the «themes where consensus is easier to find », namely the « new digital sovereignty and green growth challenges ».

But as an Eastern European political scientist states, «beyond the elements strictly linked to the end of the debate, France must succeed in providing effective, empathetic, pragmatic and tempered leadership within the EU-27 », by being able to « refute the caricature that threatens it: it will be necessary to give priority to the quality of projects over quantity, to prioritize realism and pragmatism over theological or ideological considerations, and above all, to pay as much attention to method as to substance.» More concretely, according to another Eastern European political scientist, within the timeframe of the French presidency, «important decisions will have to be made at the European level concerning, among other things, the return of budgetary rules.» Several contributions share this view and expect the French presidency to bring about an important breakthrough on budgetary rules. According to an economist engaged

2 — Ramona Bloj, Gilles Gressani, Mathéo Malik, «The Macron Doctrine: A conversation with the French President,» *Le Grand Continent*, November 16, 2020, <https://legrandcontinent.eu/fr/2020/11/16/macron/>.

in the German debate, this is « the only subject on which France, if it so wishes, can move the European debate ». According to an Italian political scientist, this reflection, as soon as the French presidency begins, should include «the revision of the Stability and Growth Pact and the creation of a single (and not common) EU foreign and security policy » so that the EU can, in the medium term, « acquire a (limited) fiscal and security sovereignty. The EU should also have its own (limited) budget supported by own resources and should develop its own (limited) defense and security capability.»

A core belief seems to be emerging: it seems that most of the contributions supportive of French leadership expect this moment to contribute to redefining the main terms of the European political and institutional debate of the post-Covid era, a kind of realistic aggiornamento « of the four major European speeches of the Macron presidency's first year » in order to «reaffirm France's ambition for a Europe that must think of itself as a political subject both internally and internationally. » To borrow a wonderful turn of phrase, it is a matter of doing «more Robert Schuman, less Victor Hugo», by exchanging « the image of a visionary dreamer for that of a pragmatic reformer ». A contribution from Northern Europe places this demand at the member state level, which «must find a consensus on how to make the EU more resilient (health security, economic resilience and strengthening free movement).»

However, alongside these positive elements, which emphasize France's role as a driving force for proposals, it is possible to detect a countermovement that leads to highlighting a concern. The proactive role of France and of the President of the Republic is recognized by all contributors, but it can be the subject of criticism and cause roadblocks. There is a risk that France, through its dominant position, could generate «resentment», as one Dutch figure expressed, by fueling, as an East European political scientist put it: « skepticism about Emmanuel Macron's ability to move from European activism to a principle of concrete achievements ».

The composition of the list of experts involved and the nature of the exercise undoubtedly led to an under-representation of this view which, not surprisingly, emerges particularly in the Baltic countries, in Scandinavia, and in the Netherlands. One influential analyst, for example, sees « controversial attitudes towards several recent French proposals in other member states.» In essence, she explains that «the delicate question is knowing to what extent France can modify its own ambition, build consensus, and shape its ideas in such a way that other countries will follow. » A similar idea is repeated several times. Another specialist from Northern Europe emphasizes the need to connect French interests with European interests: « France has asserted itself as the main member state pursuing major reforms of the EU, so it is well positioned to play a leading role during its presidency of the Council. It should use the presidency to convince others that the reforms serve a European interest first and foremost, especially in the context of the upcoming French presidential election.» An analyst from the Baltic states is more explicit in her criticism: « What worries me is a situation where France is too forceful with its strategic autonomy objectives and its 'do what it takes' attitude, and it ends up alienating the member states that have a different vision from its own. » The question, indirectly raised by other contributions, is whether France truly believes « in the project and in European institutions »: the French presidency is thus becoming a litmus test to « lead France to position itself more clearly in the EU, by believing more in the project and the institutions. But always with the ability to think big, and to think broadly, by focusing on issues that are big enough to engage citizens and

to attract partners at the global level.»

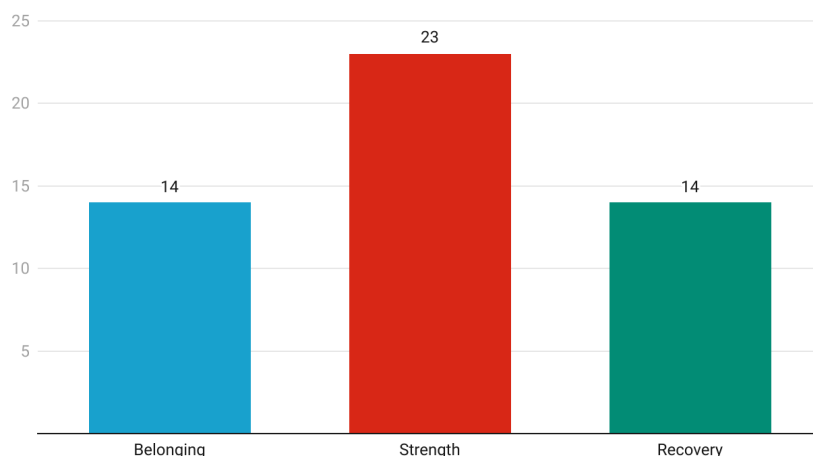
2. The pillars of a european consensus

Among the various testimonies collected, it is possible to imagine several sources of consensus, notably around the development of European power and the feeling of belonging based on democracy, solidarity, and culture.

2.1. The geopolitical demand: a strong convergence on questions of strength

As can be seen in the figure below, which offers a quantitative synthesis of the implicit understanding of the term «positive advances» that structured the questioning of the various interviews and contributions, power is the axis of the French presidency's three-part motto that receives the most interest and support. Indeed, 23/34 contributions attribute an implicit meaning to «positive advances» based on the notion of « Power » (connotations: strategic autonomy, sovereignty, geopolitics), which is almost twice as much as « Recovery » and « Belonging » (14/34 each).

Figure 1 – Perception of the notion of progress



14 contributors link progress to the implementation of a policy related to EU membership.

Source: Gilles Gressani, Synthesis of 33 semi-structured interviews conducted in June 2021.

This support for the more geopolitical aspect of the French presidency is broad, heterogeneous, and goes beyond centers of interest, regional identification, or the contributors' field of specialization. We believe we can recognize a real influence of the French discourse around the notion of « Europe as a power »³ as well as a real evolution of the «geopolitical demand » based on the shared observation of a paradigm shift: « we have entered an era of pure realism », as stated by a member of the academic community working in a field that is entirely tangential to geopolitics.

Is this proof that, at least on certain subjects, the hegemony over the terms of the discourse is worth pursuing and that a certain anti-intellectualism can also become a source of obstruction in periods of profound transformation? An influential figure in the Brussels think tank space expresses this very clearly: « My expectation of the French presidency is geopolitical in nature: France being one of the member states with a robust foreign

3 — Gilles Gressani, Sébastien Lumet, «L'Europe puissance,» a conversation with Clément Beaune, Le Grand Continent, March 12, 2020, <https://legrandcontinent.eu/fr/2020/12/03/conversation-avec-clement-beaune/>.

policy, I hope that this presidency will move the European Union forward on issues and initiatives, but also on the attitude towards the diplomacy of 27 that will reinforce its status as a geopolitical actor... I particularly hope that France will launch a debate on decision-making in the Council concerning foreign policy, in order to find an alternative to the current state of things.

This discursive shift is worth studying, as it may be a turning point for the Europeanization of the French presidency's continental strategy. Indeed, even those most critical of the possibilities of imposing a particularly proactive agenda on the French presidency see in the geopolitical advances, and more generally in the power component, an extremely promising perspective: « After years of improvising in crisis situations, we should now develop a method and a process. France is well placed to do this. Provided that it eases the fears of some partners that it wants to weaken NATO or push for protectionism. It is important to develop a positive agenda: how to strengthen our capacity for action and how not to be too dependent. »

According to one contribution, the strength component can help shape « a positive agenda » including « a stronger commitment to EU military operations and a concrete articulation of strategic autonomy. The European Defense Fund will also be in full operation, so bold decisions on key strategic defense capabilities will have to be taken. A more serious approach to the protection of global commons such as maritime, air, space and cyberspace will also be an essential sign of progress. In this regard, it will be possible to see in early 2022 whether the concept of coordinated maritime presence can be replicated in the Indo-Pacific region. The launch of a European space defense strategy would be good news, as would the development of the EU's readiness for mutual assistance and solidarity. » On this point, an interviewee from Eastern Europe believes that « the action plan on space and defense industries » can become a central point for coordinating synergies between the components of an ecosystem that is essential for European strategic autonomy. More concretely, for another analyst, the French presidency should engage « in the area of defense, in pursuing the functioning and clarification of the mutual assistance (Article 42.7 TEU) and solidarity (222 TFEU) clauses, which are elements of the compass' resilience toolbox, and which could be an area where progress is being made, as France has so far been the only Member State to activate Article 42.7. »

Several figures from Northern Europe stress the importance of the cultural dimension in building a common defense: « France can be expected to seek to strengthen the EU as a global player. This will require continued efforts to create a common strategic culture,» while emphasizing elements related to the Brussels effect, by « improving the EU's ability to shape and strengthen global norms, whether in the field of trade, climate, or (more difficult for the EU) security.» This view is shared by a Polish figure: « The EU must learn to walk. A comprehensive approach covering politics, economics, and security is needed in order to become an effective international actor. The Union must clearly define its objectives and the values it is prepared to defend.»

The definition of these values is, of course, somewhat open and debated - it has a closely related aspect to the membership and internal geopolitics of the Union with, for example, the case of Viktor Orbán's political action. According to one official, «the French presidency could strengthen the values-based approach in the EU's geopolitical ambitions. It could relaunch the EU's partnership with the southern neighborhood and the Sahel region and would strengthen Europe's approach as a whole for a system of development cooperation based on shared competences with EU member states' organizations.» Contributions from the most involved individuals highlight the necessary re-articulation of power with human rights: « From my perspective, coming from the human rights community, positive progress would be shown by the EU's ability to promote and

protect human rights, both within and outside its borders.»

Beyond the internal debate, can the French presidency provide the framework for advancing ideas for reforming multilateralism? Several analysts are positive: «As the only EU member with a permanent seat on the UN Security Council, France has the diplomatic clout to advance the Commission's agenda to engage in multilateral reform. An academic who is not a specialist in geopolitical issues offers an interesting reading of this new multilateralism from the perspective of Eastern European history: « What our leaders, helped by us, should do is identify how to replicate the successful strategy that led the communist world to bankruptcy and some reforms in the 1980s – a major change from the current situation where Russia and China are successfully abusing the institutions of globalization to weaken the West.»

Of course, adherence to abstract advances in the geopolitical field remains challenged by several concrete issues; the two main and most delicate ones seem to be represented by the Atlantic relationship and by NATO. According to a political scientist from Eastern Europe, « the French vision of 'strategic autonomy' gained supporters under Trump, but with Biden the majority of Europeans seem to believe that the interlude is over.» Faced with this hurdle, according to one German interviewee, concrete solutions must be formulated, with an emphasis on the need to strengthen the Common Security and Defense Policy « in a complementary way to NATO (based on inter-operability, and a single set of forces) and with the possibility of working towards majority decisions within the framework of the CFSP «. Not surprisingly, the role of NATO is also a central concern for contributors from countries to the north or east of France (Luxembourg, Finland, Latvia, Romania), along with the United States, depending on how geopolitical relations with Russia and China are structured. In this sense, we can see a convergence between the positions of the Austrian and German personalities interviewed.

In fact, the issues of European sovereignty, geopolitics, or the place of the Union in the world have made considerable strides since 2017 – lengthy episodes (the experience of the Trump presidency) as well as shocks (the most recent being the withdrawal from Kabul) have contributed to creating a context that helps validate the French diagnosis. In this context, where do the roadblocks come from? There is a problem in certain countries that can be summed up by the sentence: « It's true, the French diagnosis is correct, but it's not the doctor.» Consequently, we can identify three paths for moving forward. If the diagnosis is now increasingly shared, the doctor's role must also be shared: by agreeing to highlight France's ability to listen to other proposals, the bilateral work accomplished, as well as listening to the bilateral initiatives of others, by combining the symbolic with concrete and visible measures. A more in-depth diagnosis should also be made, by moving forward with a strategic analysis on a continental scale. The importance of a homologous perspective of the heterogeneous crises that concern us is therefore a crucial element that should be confronted with the question of belonging. In this sense, the debate on strategic autonomy, as it stands, continues to present a structural limit: it is difficult to conceive of a strategic autonomy that is not accompanied by the construction of a space for autonomous debate.

2.2. The question of belonging: democracy, solidarity, and culture

According to several people interviewed, particularly those from countries to the east of France, the aspect of belonging must be considered as the main priority of the French presidency: « Indeed, if the feeling of belonging to a 'European project' is not reinforced, public support for the other two ambitions will not be forthcoming.» The crisis of confidence in EU institutions - which should be understood in tandem with the crisis of national political institutions - «can be attributed in part to the failures (or inconsistencies) of EU vaccine rollout, as well as widespread 'pandemic fatigue' and its significant economic

and social effects. But much of this also has to do with the (extreme) inadequacy of communication about what the EU is doing (and what it can indeed be blamed for). The next twelve months will be crucial if we are to reverse this loss of trust.» The French presidency can address this issue by connecting the aspect more closely related to the communication of the means of European recovery and the construction of a common strategic culture.

The most optimistic among all those interviewed believe that France could take full advantage of the French presidency to focus on the aspect of «belonging», by carrying out actions structured around a new « role of culture », « capable of pulling European debates out of their deadly boredom » by implementing a new communication mechanism, following the framework described by Italian essayist Giuliano da Empoli, which is also referred to in the Committee's work in the third part of the report:

« After having played a decisive role in launching the European Recovery Plan, I believe that France will be, in the six months of its presidency, in an ideal position to deliver the Cultural Recovery Plan that the European project needs to win the hearts and minds of the Union's citizens. » Among the areas he proposes: « 1) a network of European cafés; 2) a project modeled on Franklin Roosevelt's Writer's Project, which would allow writers, as well as artists, musicians, directors and visual artists, to create a great collective self-portrait of today's Europe; 3) the creation of a 'meme factory'».⁴

In most of the contributions that deal specifically with belonging, an intersection of several perspectives can be identified: communication, culture, values, lifestyles, and geopolitical representations. A question arises: is there a concept that can integrate these different dimensions? One person interviewed highlighted the notion of solidarity, which would make it possible to concretely imagine the connection between investments «in European infrastructures», the efforts to combat youth unemployment, the Green Deal, and digitalization, by evoking both the economic and social dimensions, collective security, and belonging.

Several contributions focus on a divisive issue: the matter of belonging in the European project is being called into question and becoming politicized. According to a political scientist from Central Europe, the French presidency must manage to «raise the problem of the 'illiberal' drift within the EU by avoiding posturing and an East/West split on values.» Indeed, «for a decade, the EU has been 'lax' on political liberalism, judicial independence, and the media. Will it mobilize societal liberalism?» As one NGO director argues, «the French presidency could encourage greater EU coordination (and a stronger voice) to counter the actions of authoritarian governments on digital policy in various international forums.» According to a Dutch figure, it is necessary to «start with the EU itself. I don't expect the Slovenian presidency to undertake any initiatives in this area, but the king will be naked in the EU if we are not able to clean our own house by stopping people like Viktor Orbán.»

Those supporting more integration all defended the idea of membership as a source of community democratization:

«if we are aiming for the democratization of Europe, as in any democracy, the EU (or Europe) should as a necessary - though insufficient - condition guarantee the equality of all European citizens before the law, as well as in the areas that Pierre Rosanvallon called the « sacrament of the citizen »: voting, access to social welfare and taxation » - « Without

4 — Giuliano da Empoli, «Seven Ideas for a Cultural Recovery Plan for the Union», Paris-Brussels, Geopolitical Studies Group, July 2020, <https://geopolitique.eu/2020/07/06/sept-idees-pour-un-plan-de-relance-culturel-de-lunion/>.

this, Ms. Von der Leyen is not consulting real European citizens, but - in fact - Portuguese, French, Slovaks, Irish, etc ».

We can add a medium-long term dimension: « The European electoral law (at the heart of institutional reforms justifying the launch of the Conference on the Future of Europe) is currently being debated and will be voted on in the autumn, before being ratified by the 27 (last time, it was not): there is still no majority for transnational lists and the public debate on this matter is absent.»

Today we can observe a strong level of support for questions concerning the principle of European integration, which is out of sync with the answers to questions concerning everyday life and projection into the near future. The French presidency can be the moment to more intensely engage in the need to reflect on the sources of legitimacy of the European project, identifying elements that should be dealt with at the European level and which are not. One of the long-term legacies of the French presidency could be its ability to shape a cycle in which crucial political matters (digital, social, ecological, geopolitical) emerge in the post-Covid era «beyond national forums in order to establish a consensus and a common narrative that would bridge the gap between adherence to principle and expectations of the institutions. »

List of the members of the Committee of reflection and proposals for the French presidency of the Council of the European Union⁵

- **Thierry CHOPIN**, Professor of political science at the Catholic University of Lille (ESPOL), special advisor to the Jacques Delors Institute, President of the Committee of Reflection and Proposals for the French presidency
- **Salomé BERLIOUX**, Director General of the association Chemins d’avenir
- **Julien DAMON**, Associate professor at HEC and Sciences Po, scientific advisor at the French École nationale supérieure of social security
- **Michel FOUCHER**, Geographer and former diplomat, Chair of applied geopolitics, Fondation de la Maison des sciences de l’homme
- **Gilles GRESSANI**, President of Groupe d’études géopolitiques and director of Le Grand Continent
- **Isabell HOFFMANN**, Director of the Future of Europe program at the Bertelsmann Foundation, Berlin, founder of the EUpinions project
- **Jean-François JAMET**, Advisor to the Executive Board of the European Central Bank, Frankfurt
- **Dominique SCHNAPPER**, Sociologist, director of studies at EHESS, former member of the Constitutional Council
- **Daniela SCHWARZER**, Executive Director for Europe and Eurasia of the Open Society Foundation, professor at the Freie Universität, Berlin
- **Thomas SERRIER**, Professor at the University of Lille, Contemporary German History, CNRS - Institut de Recherches Historiques du Septentrion
- **Natacha VALLA**, Economist, dean of the School of Management and Innovation at Sciences Po
- **Tara VARMA**, Director of the European Council on Foreign Relations office in Paris

⁵ — The members of the Committee of Reflection and Proposals for the French presidency participated in this mission in a personal capacity and their contributions and statements do not represent the institutions for which they work.

List of hearings and contributions

Sébastien ABIS, Director General of Club Le Demeter
Karim AMELLAL, Ambassador for the Mediterranean
Alberto ALEMANNI, Professor of law, chair of European Union law, HEC
Yves BERTONCINI, President of the European Movement - France
Luiza BIALASIEWICZ, Political geographer, professor of European governance, University of Amsterdam
Ramona BLOJ, Head of Studies, Robert Schuman Foundation, member of the Groupe d'études géopolitiques
Luis BOUZA GARCIA, Professor of Political Science at the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid.
Jim CLOOS, Former Deputy Director General for General and Institutional Policy, General Secretariat of the Council of the European Union
Giuliano DA EMPOLI, President of the Volta think tank.
Caroline DE GRUYTER, European correspondent for the Dutch newspaper NRC Handelsblad
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Klaus SCHARIOTH, Dean of the Mercator Fellowship on International Affairs, former German ambassador to the United States
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