



New Pact for Europe

National Report

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NEW PACT FOR EUROPE – Rebuilding trust through dialogue

Project description

Launched in 2013 by the King Baudouin Foundation and the Bertelsmann Stiftung, and supported by a large transnational consortium including the Open Society Initiative for Europe (OSIFE), the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, the European Policy Centre (EPC), the BMW Foundation Herbert Quandt, and the Open Estonia Foundation, the New Pact for Europe (NPE) project aims to promote a European wide debate and develop proposals on how to reform the European Union in light of the manifold challenges Europe is currently facing.

After a first successful period in 2013-2015, which included more than 80 events in 17 EU countries and the publication of two major reports, which elaborated five strategic options on the future of the EU, the NPE project entered a new phase in 2016-2017. The ultimate aim of this new phase of the NPE project is to work out the details of a wider ‘package deal’ to equip the EU with the tools it needs to meet the internal and external challenges it faces. This proposal will contain solutions generated by connecting the discussions on the key policy challenges, and propose changes in the way the EU and its policies are defined to avoid future fundamental crises.

Building on the analysis and proposals elaborated in the previous phase, the NPE has in this period explored how the EU can better serve the interests of its member states and citizens, through a series of 30 national and transnational debates on key policy challenges (including the migration/refugee crisis, internal and external security, as well as economic and social challenges).

National Reflection Groups have been created and met specifically for this purpose in ten EU countries (Belgium, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Poland, Portugal and Slovakia), followed by transnational exchanges between these groups. This national report is the result of the work and discussions of one of these National Reflection Groups.

The discussions within and between representatives of the ten National Reflection Groups will be discussed by a European Reflection Group of eminent persons, which includes all the national rapporteurs. It will be tasked to produce a final NPE report taking into account the national and transnational debates, scheduled to be published at the end of 2017.

The project also benefits from the overall guidance of an Advisory Group of high-ranking policy-makers, academics, NGO representatives and other stakeholders from all over Europe. It is chaired by Herman Van Rompuy, President Emeritus of the European Council and former Prime Minister of Belgium.

For more information on the NPE project, please see the project website: www.newpactforeurope.eu

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The views expressed in this report reflect the result of the work and discussions of this National Reflection Group, enriched by exchanges with two other National Reflection Groups, but they do not necessarily represent the views of each member of the group or the institutions they are affiliated with.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

EMU	Economic and Monetary Union
EP	European Parliament
EU	European Union
FN	Front National
LR	Les Républicains
MEP	Member of European Parliament
MP	Member of Parliament
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NPE	New Pact for Europe
NRG	National Reflection Group
PS	Parti Socialiste
SGAE	Secrétariat Général aux Affaires Européennes
UK	United Kingdom

FOREWORD

This report is inspired by the discussions of the French National Reflection Group enriched by exchanges with National Reflection Groups from Greece and Poland. It reflects on the ‘state of the Union’ from a national perspective and discusses the main challenges the EU and its members are facing, taking into account both the European and national perspective. Finally, it proposes ideas and recommendations on how the EU and its members should react to these main challenges and sets out how the EU and European integration should develop in the years to come.

This paper is part of a series of ten national reports. These reports and the debates in the member states will provide a solid basis for the discussions in the NPE European Reflection Group. The latter will be asked to take the reflection a step further through in-depth and thorough discussions at the European level. The Advisory Group chaired by Herman Van Rompuy will provide input into this process. All these reflections will lead to a final NPE report that analyses the current ‘state of the Union’ and contains several proposals on how to re-energise the European project. It will be published at the end of 2017.

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Edouard Gaudot, Rapporteur

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

France *had* a leading role but today its position within Europe seems to be weakened. The homeland of Jean Monnet has for a long time been associated with the destiny of “its” founding father; dedicated to the cause of European integration. When designing the next Fifth Republic, Charles de Gaulle became the first post-war French official to visit Germany, planting the seed of reconciliation between former enemies. At the institutional level, Simone Veil, first President of the newly elected European Parliament and Jacques Delors, at the head of the European Commission for ten years, have been the living proofs of French leadership on European integration. Today, France is awaiting a new Simone Veil or Jacques Delors.

According to the French people, French leadership in Europe and a well-balanced Franco-German relationship is the right combination for an efficient Europe. Then, their failure cumulated with the debt crisis, the migration crisis, the lack of transparency in the political sphere, the end of the “perfect combination” created the impression that the EU is a dysfunctional organisation.

Drawing on the discussions held amongst the French National Reflection Group (NRG), this report accounts a set of conclusions on how France sees the future of the European project and on how present challenges might be overcome. These debates, held between the vote in favour of a Brexit and the presidential elections, and during a - still available - state of emergency, highlights mainly the fact that France cannot, now, just wait for its new European leader... However, most of NRG members are glad to see it could be possible again.

- As stated by the candidate – and now President – Emmanuel Macron, **France needs to successfully implement structural reforms to earn or consolidate the trust of its partners, namely Germany.** Then, and then only, will France be able to regain influence on the course of European integration.
- **In the area of migration,** the NRG called for a “common migration policy” that would fundamentally differ from, and thus correct, the Dublin system. The EU cannot afford to uphold its current dysfunctional policy: since the beginning of the crisis, intergovernmentalism in decision-making has hampered the emergence of viable common solutions. For example, the highly questionable “Turkey deal” is now challenged by most NRG members as unacceptable.
- **In the economic field,** there is a broad consensus on the need to acknowledge the dire situation of the European economy: no growth, rising inequalities, loss of global competitiveness, lack of investment, damaging fiscal and economic competition within the EU... The crisis has laid bare the fundamental policy mistakes and structural flaws of the EMU – and revealed a certain inclination for “half-baked” situations. The coordination of the different economic policies remains a huge hurdle to address. In fact, there is no growth potential because there is no growth policy. Hence to mitigate the unsustainably high level of unemployment, especially that of the youth, massive investments are required in sustainable and renewable energy or the digital economy. A consensus has also emerged on the fact that future prosperity hinges on significant investments in education, human capital, training, digital education, professional training, and developing new skills.

- **Regarding security**, the discussion mixed a lot of concerns, from military might to global strategy including the thorny issue of sovereignty. Any talk of Common Defence Policy proves delicate as it directly touches on what member states consider to be their core sovereign role: to protect the national territory (and by extension, the national interest).

INTRODUCTION: A MOST CHALLENGING CONTEXT

Launched in the wake of the Brexit vote in June 2016, the French National Reflection Group (NRG) met in a general context of an intense crisis between the European Union (EU) and its member states as well as a presidential election campaign in a country (23 April/7 May) where many populist political movements driven by anti-European rhetoric were gaining steam.¹

2016 with its load of depressing if not threatening events² weighted heavily on the NRG's statements and the appreciations of the present and, of course, the future of the EU. In this first half of 2017, the shock felt in many European public opinions following the unforeseen election of Donald Trump in the United States (US) was only reinforced by the first decisions of his rather unpredictable administration.³ Hence, his first steps on the international stage stirred only more uncertainties and speculative statements, especially noticeable during the discussions of the French NRG on security issues, as well as during the dialogue with colleagues from countries where NATO is the cornerstone of their national security architecture – such as Poland.⁴

In the discussions, the fate of the transatlantic relationship was adding another layer of uncertainty to an already tense situation. The latter was obviously the result of the on-going social and economic crisis in Greece⁵ and the EU's Southern periphery, the echoes of the terror attacks in France, Belgium, Sweden or Germany, the potential unravelling of the European order following the British referendum, the rise of illiberal governments in Central Europe and in Ankara, the conflicts in the EU's direct neighbourhood, the resurging banking crisis in Italy, and the unresolved pressure of refugee inflows.⁶

For the NRG, the results of the re-run of the Austrian presidential election has eventually soothed a bit the mood, while the prospect of upcoming elections in at least three major member states in 2017 (The Netherlands, France and Germany) added a sense of urgency in the discussions. Since then, the outcome of

¹ Gilles Ivaldi, "The Front National and the politics of Euroscepticism in France", in Birte Wassenberg, Patrick Moreau (eds), *European Integration and new Anti-Europeanism*, 1, Franz Steiner Verlag, pp.131-147, 2016.

² France is under legislative state of emergency since the 16th November 2015 due to succession of terrorist attacks, see "Timeline Attacks in France" available on <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-33288542> and faces complicated migration policy, see "EU migrants' crisis: Clashes as France clears Calais 'Jungle', available at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-35686209>.

³ "Donald Trump Président : les réactions en France", see <http://www.ledauphine.com/france-monde/2016/11/09/presidentielle-americaine-les-premieres-reactions-en-france>.

⁴ "Donald Trump Says NATO is 'obsolete', UN is 'Political Game'", available at https://www.nytimes.com/politics/first-draft/2016/04/02/donald-trump-tells-crowd-hed-be-fine-if-nato-broke-up/?_r=0.

⁵ Stéphane Cossé, « Le sauvetage de la Grèce ; un case study d'économie politique », *Huffington Post*, available at http://www.huffingtonpost.fr/stephane-cosse/le-sauvetage-de-la-grece-un-case-study-deconomie-politique_b_7816230.html.

⁶ Cynthia Fleury, « Il y a une volonté d'inventer en politique et pas seulement une volonté de repli », *Europe 1*, available at <http://www.europe1.fr/emissions/l-invite-d-europe-1-nuit/cynthia-fleury-il-y-a-une-volonte-dinventer-en-politique-et-pas-seulement-une-volonte-de-repli-2940515>.

the Dutch general election on 15 March has been welcomed with relief in the French EU circles⁷, while the threat conveyed by Marine Le Pen's strong showing in the presidential race was finally dispelled with the outcome of the second round on 7 May, as she was clearly defeated (33,9% vs. 66,1% to her opponent, Emmanuel Macron).⁸

Nevertheless, in this pre-electoral context, the NRG discussions widely bemoaned the lack of vision, leadership, common storytelling or solidarity at both European and national levels.⁹ The dominant feeling is that the “community spirit” of the 1950s has vanished. Against this backdrop, the NRG policy proposals for the future of Europe have called for a renewed sense of leadership, vision and European spirit. It has also pointed out the necessity of re-building trust within and among societies, the need for the EU to recapture the support of its citizens, and finally, the need for pro-European forces to get out of their comfort zone or “preach to the choir” tendency.

This report is based on the NRG discussions and completed by a broad reference to the state of the public debate on the EU and Europe in France. It navigates freely – but as sincerely as possible – between the “popular feeling” to the elite’s representation and from the institutional perspective to the political interpretations.

In *Mémoires de Guerre*, General de Gaulle wrote his famous incipit: “Toute ma vie je me suis fait une certaine idée de la France” (*All my life, I have had a certain idea of France*).¹⁰ This sentence has shaped French self-perception and political imagination ever since¹¹. It has been a reference in the deeds and speeches of his successors.¹² But since the 1960s, the European project has been seen as challenging this “certain idea” in many areas.¹³ This report aims at describing and explaining the differences between the ideas of “France” and “Europe”, the discrepancies between the way France sees Europe and the rest of the EU. It tries also to evaluate the impact they have on the French vision of the current state of the Union and the challenges the EU is facing.

It is of course too soon to tell if the election of a staunchly pro-European French president will eventually bridge these differences, but the accession of Emmanuel Macron to the Presidency certainly opens a new window of opportunity to bring ever closer the two ideas of an independent France and a united Europe.

⁷ « Elections législatives néerlandaises 2017 – Paris salue un vote pour une Europe plus forte » available at <http://www.lalibre.be/dernieres-depeches/belga/elections-legislatives-neerlandaises-2017-paris-salue-un-vote-pour-une-europe-plus-forte-58c9f1e0cd70a15c9a2c0a2b>.

⁸ Conseil Constitutionnel, « Proclamation des résultats de l'élection du Président de la République, 10th May 2017, available at <http://www.conseil-constitutionnel.fr/conseil-constitutionnel/francais/actualites/2017/proclamation-des-resultats-de-l-election-du-president-de-la-republique.148978.html>.

⁹ Yves Bertoncini, Jean-Marie Cavada, Thierry Chopin, Anne Macey et Denis Simonneau, « Europe et présidentielle, pour le meilleur ou pour le pire ? », *Les Echos*, available at https://www.lesechos.fr/29/12/2016/LesEchos/22350-034-ECH_europe-et-presidentielle--pour-le-meilleur-ou-pour-le-pire-.htm?texte=denis%27simonneau.

¹⁰ Charles de Gaulle, *Mémoires de guerre et mémoires d'espoir*, EDI8, 2016, 2073 p.

¹¹ Christine Cadot, *L'Europe imaginée, lecture iconoclaste de la construction européenne*, Presses de Sciences Po, 2014, 150 p.

¹² Sudhir Hazareesingh, « L'imaginaire républicain en France, de la Révolution française à Charles de Gaulle », *Revue Historique*, 2011/3 (n° 659), p. 637-654.

¹³ Marie-Thérèse Bitsch, *La construction européenne : enjeux politiques et choix institutionnels*, Peter Lang, 2007, 320 p.

PART 1: THE ‘GRANDE NATION’ LOST IN EUROPE – THE STATE OF THE UNION SEEN FROM FRANCE

The feeling that France is losing its grip on what the EU is becoming is prevalent in the public debate.¹⁴ Many studies and articles, including the excellent publications of the Schuman Foundation or the briefings of VoteWatch¹⁵, point out time and again the “loss of French influence” within the European institutions. It is always challenging to define a beginning for such diffuse trends. One could venture that France’s inability to grasp the nature of the path the EU is taking date back to the negotiations of the Nice Treaty in 2000. Hindered by its “cohabitation” (Jacques Chirac – Lionel Jospin)¹⁶ setting and dominated by a state-centred vision of politics, the French government stubbornly defended its “big country” status and its weight in the Council, to the detriment of its European Parliament (EP) representation, contrary to its German partner, whose experience in federalism led it to better understand what the institutional setting of the EU was about to become.¹⁷

Focussed on the intergovernmental legacy of the Gaullist-Mitterrand era¹⁸, France lost view of the emerging trend that would gradually favour the influence of the EP, the National Assembly¹⁹ and civil society in European affairs – with its positive (citizens’ mobilisation, European Citizens’ Initiative)²⁰ or negative (rise of populist defiance of the EU) dimensions. Worse, the reinforcement of the institutional role of the EP was not picked up by the French political class, who (bar a few exceptional vintages) still sends to the House of the European Citizens a mix of old glories, political exiles, party outcasts²¹, and rabid Europhobes²². Currently, a

¹⁴ Maurice Vaisse, *La puissance ou l'influence ? La France dans le monde depuis 1958*, Fayard, 2009, 660 p.

¹⁵ Observatoire des élections de la Fondation Robert Schuman, available on <http://www.robert-schuman.eu/fr/observatoire-des-elections-en-europe> and VoteWatchEurope available on <http://www.votewatch.eu/>.

¹⁶ In semipresidential systems such as that of France, cohabitation entails that the offices of president and prime minister are held by members of competing political parties. About J Chirac and L Jospin and the case of EU, see Frédéric Rouvillois, *Droit constitutionnel (Tome 2) - La Ve République*, Flammarion, 5^e éd., 437p.

¹⁷ Sylvie Goulard, *Europe ou chambre à part ?*, Flammarion, 2013, 132 p.

¹⁸ Gérard Bossuat, *Faire l'Europe sans défaire la France: 60 ans de politique d'unité européenne des gouvernements et des présidents de la République française (1943-2003)*, Peter Lang, 2005.

¹⁹ About Art. 88-4 of the French Constitution, see “L’Assemblée nationale et les questions européennes”, available at <http://www2.assemblee-nationale.fr/découvrir-l-assemblée/role-et-pouvoirs-de-l-assemblée-nationale/l-assemblée-nationale-et-les-questions-européennes/l-assemblée-nationale-et-les-questions-européennes>.

²⁰ “Démocratie européenne ; avancées et limites”, available at <http://www.ladocumentationfrançaise.fr/dossiers/d000022-le-traité-de-lisbonne-a-l-épreuve-de-la-crise-économique/démocratie-européenne-avancées-et-limites>.

²¹ « A l’ombre des absentéistes du Parlement européen », available at http://www.lepoint.fr/politique/a-l-ombre-des-absenteistes-du-parlement-europeen-11-04-2013-1653486_20.php.

²² « Premiers pas polémiques des eurosceptiques au Parlement européen », available at <http://www.euractiv.fr/section/all/news/premiers-pas-polémiques-des-eurosceptiques-au-parlement-europeen/>; « L’immunité parlementaire de Marine Le Pen levée », available at <http://www.bfmtv.com/politique/l-immunité-parlementaire-de-marine-le-pen-levee-1186960.html>.

third of its MEPs belong to the Front National (FN). As a result, France's weight in the EP is reduced to the margins – and a handful of influential and respected MEPs are hardly enough to compensate for that.²³

As in many Western European countries, the confidence in the EU is undermined by the growing gap between the Brussels-based institutional sphere and a civil society that is increasingly distrustful of its powers.²⁴ But if France's people have grown wary of "Europe" as they gradually realised its growth in size and power, France's elites themselves never really came to terms with what Europe is becoming and the fact that after the 2004 enlargement the balance of power in the EU had shifted for good.²⁵ Weakened by economic competition rules which tend to favour German industry and faltering in a Union that had expanded too much to its liking and made Berlin and Frankfurt its new epicentres²⁶, the French political class in its great majority seemed to no longer understand Europe.

Despite the commitment of some great political figures across the political spectrum and an active chapter of the Mouvement Européen, France was never exactly a haven for pro-European federalists. The Fifth Republic, a synthesis between the heritage of the *monarchie absolue* and the democratic values of the Republic, echoes France's political culture²⁷, which is fundamentally at odds with the spirit and general functioning of the EU. Whilst the Finnish or Danish Prime Ministers cannot hope to talk to their peers in the European Council without a clear mandate voted by their national parliament, whilst the German Federal Government must give the Bundestag an opportunity to state its opinion and take into account these opinions in its conduct of negotiations, the French parliament almost shuns any democratic control over the European policy pursued by the government.²⁸ Furthermore, most French Presidents – direct representatives of national sovereignty – behave before their European counterparts²⁹ with a deep-rooted feeling of superiority stemming from having been directly and personally picked by more than 20 million French citizens. They may also at times look down on the "smaller countries" and their supposedly "smaller" head of government.³⁰ Therefore, when the French President does not have the political means to assert his superiority, the feeling of being considered as a "junior partner" makes of "Europe" a constant source of political frustration.

²³ « Avec un tiers d'eurodéputés FN, la France risque de voir son influence réduite »,

<https://www.euractiv.fr/section/all/news/avec-un-tiers-d-eurodeputes-fn-la-france-risque-de-voir-son-influence-reduite/>.

²⁴ Yves Mény and Yves Surel, 'The Constitutive Ambiguity of Populism', in: Y. Mény and Y. Surel (eds.), *Democracies and the Populist Challenge*. Palgrave, 2002, p. 15 ; René Cuperus, 'Roots of European Populism: The Case of Pim Fortuyn's Populist Revolt in the Netherlands', in: Xavier Casals (ed.), *Political Survival on the Extreme Right. European Movements between the inherited past and the need to adapt to the future*', Institut de Ciències Polítiques I Socials (ICPS), Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, p. 147 – 168, Barcelona, 2005.

²⁵ Elsa Tulmets, "Germany, the Enlargement and Neighbourhood Policies of the European Union. Between Multilateralism and Bilateralism", *Transcontinentales*, 2006-2, p. 121-149.

²⁶ « Qui de Paris ou Francfort profitera du Brexit ? », <http://www.france24.com/fr/20160624-finance-londre-paris-francfort-profit-brexit-bourse-referendum-victoire-out-sortie-ue>.

²⁷ Francis Hamon, Jacques Lelièvre, *L'héritage politique de la Révolution française*, Presses Univ. Septentrion, 1993, spp. 122 "C'est le grand mérite de la Ve République que d'avoir opéré la synthèse entre le principe monarchique, incarné par le Président de la République, et le principe républicain, signifié par son élection".

²⁸ Florence Chaltiel, *La souveraineté de l'Etat dans l'Union européenne, l'exemple français : recherches sur la souveraineté de l'Etat membre*, LGDJ, 2000, 606 p.

²⁹ « L'Europe, domaine réservé du Président en France », <http://www.touteurope.eu/actualite/l-europe-domaine-reserve-du-president-en-france.html>.

³⁰ Pierre-Henri d'Argenson, « L'influence française à Bruxelles : les voies de la reconquête », *Politique étrangère*, vol. hiver, no. 4, 2008, pp. 857-870..

“FOREIGN EUROPE”

The doublespeak Brussels-bashing is in no way a French-only peculiarity³¹. Nevertheless, the former can prosper easily in a country so convinced of its exceptional destiny and long standing independence.³² The institutional setting has also long kept Europe out of the public debate. Following the heated year of 1992 when the Maastricht treaty was ratified by referendum with a very slim majority (51 to 49%)³³, there has been a 13-year gap before the defeat in the referendum on the Treaty Establishing a Constitution for Europe in 2005.³⁴ At the time, the (low) quality and (high) intensity of the debate reflected both the French appetite for this discussion and the lack of training of the pro-European forces. The latter was often too defensive and oblivious to the weight of growing group of electors that would eventually tilt the scale: the disappointed pro-European left-wingers. The scars of this referendum run deep, and the lessons have never been fully drawn. The successive presidencies of Sarkozy³⁵ and Hollande³⁶ considered the European integration process again as an unquestionable “raison d’Etat” instead of building a case for its necessity and desirability.

In a way, thanks to the Eurosceptics, Europe and the EU have both become central issues in the French political debate.³⁷ Rhetorically, however, the EU often takes the form of a “foreign” power whose influence challenges the so-called “French model”, “French cultural exception” or “French genius”... Ironically, whereas the European institutions can be perceived as a French-inspired bureaucratic monster by most Nordics or Brexiteers, they are seen by the French as the Anglo-Saxon Trojan Horse of neoliberal globalisation. In the eyes of the French, “Europe is foreign”.³⁸ The fact that this country has been an essential pillar of European integration and has strongly contributed to give the EU its current shape is at best ignored, and at worst considered as evidence of the duplicity and the lack of patriotism of past governments.

So, after decades of political and economic integration, European affairs are still considered a “foreign” affairs issue – including in the pages of leading newspapers.³⁹ And since the De Gaulle era in France, “Foreign Affairs” are a “domaine réservé” of the French president – sanctioned by the constitutional order and the institutional practice.⁴⁰ Hence, decisions on French positions may be taken at the level of the government, possibly with

³¹ « Les risques du Bruxelles bashing », available at <http://www.lopinion.fr/edition/politique/risques-bruxelles-bashing-96396>.

³² « Présidentielle française, l’Europe sans hésiter », available at <http://www.levif.be/actualite/international/presidentielle-francaise-l-europe-sans-hesiter/article-opinion-656505.html>.

³³ Référendum du 20 septembre 1992, results available at [https://www.interieur.gouv.fr/Elections/Les-resultats/Referendums/elecresult_referendum_1992/\(path\)/referendum_1992/index.html](https://www.interieur.gouv.fr/Elections/Les-resultats/Referendums/elecresult_referendum_1992/(path)/referendum_1992/index.html).

³⁴ Référendum du 29 mai 2005, 54,64% against the adoption of a law ratifying the TECE, results available at [https://www.interieur.gouv.fr/Elections/Les-resultats/Referendums/elecresult_referendum_2005/\(path\)/referendum_2005/index.html](https://www.interieur.gouv.fr/Elections/Les-resultats/Referendums/elecresult_referendum_2005/(path)/referendum_2005/index.html).

³⁵ Bernard Cazeneuve, Home Affairs, « Les courtes vues de Nicolas Sarkozy sur l’Europe et l’immigration », available at http://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2014/05/23/les-courtes-vues-de-nicolas-sarkozy-sur-l-europe-et-l-immigration_4424226_3232.html.

³⁶ « Europe ; quel bilan pour François Hollande ? » available at <http://www.touteurope.eu/actualite/europe-quel-bilan-pour-francois-hollande.html>.

³⁷ « Europe : Merci Trump », available at http://www.libération.fr/planète/2017/05/31/europe-merci-trump_1573688

³⁸ Florence Chaltiel, *Naissance du peuple européen*, Odile Jacob, 2006, spp. 112.

³⁹ « Pour une fusion des Affaires européennes et du SGAE », available at http://www.lexpress.fr/actualite/remaniement-fusionnons-les-affaires-europeennes-et-le-sgae-aupres-du-1er-ministre_1570463.html.

⁴⁰ Bertrand Pauvert, *Droit constitutionnel ; théorie générale*, 2004, Studyrama, spp. 259.

the ‘Secrétariat Général aux Affaires européennes’⁴¹, but most frequently they might just stem out of the cabinet of the President.⁴² Parliamentary control is scarce, complex and politically unrewarding for MPs who would venture there.⁴³ And government information or manoeuvring in Brussels is rarely shared in advance and at times concealed to national representatives or even the government itself – especially when it concerns comitology procedures or *ad hoc* negotiations.⁴⁴

This focus on the deeds and will of the President is nothing but the natural outcome of a nation-state that has for centuries erected itself on the central administration of a Royal and then Republican claim to absolute power.⁴⁵ French political culture has been incapable of dissociating democracy or the rule of law from the existence of a more or less centralised state.⁴⁶ For an overwhelming majority of French citizens, the problem is that Europe and the EU remain abstract entities that lack an embodiment or a symbolic figure they could relate to. This tendency may also explain why the French public opinion increasingly supports a directly elected EU president, from 41% in 2002 to more than 75% in 2013 (sources Eurobarometer).⁴⁷

This connexion to a symbol of power is at the root of a persistent misunderstanding between the French – elite and people altogether – and the rest of the European order. Most surveys show a paradox: on the one hand, there is a relatively high level of mistrust in “Europe”. On the other hand, the French still show a strong support for the Euro, a reinforced European defence or foreign policy, policies which have well-identified “ministerial figures”.⁴⁸ Similarly, the recurring calls for “harmonisation” (of social, tax or economic policies)⁴⁹, which implicitly presumes alignment on French standards and habits, all follow the same pattern. The French

⁴¹ After WWII, is created the ‘Secrétariat général du Comité interministériel pour les questions de coopération économique européenne’ as a Primer Minister’s service. In charge of coordination between all ministries to deal with « Marshall Plan », it naturally came to deal with the EU affairs (excepted CFSP) and became the ‘Secrétariat général des affaires européennes’ (SGAE), with the décret 2005-1283 17th October 2005. Since 9th April 2014, Philippe Léglise-Costa is the General Secretary of European Affairs.

⁴² « Qui sont les membres du cabinet Macron à l’Elysée ? », available at <http://www.ouest-france.fr/elections/presidentielle/qui-sont-les-membres-du-cabinet-de-macron-l-elysee-4990845>.

⁴³ « Faut-il modifier l’Art.88-4 de la Constitution ? », French Senate Report available at <https://www.senat.fr/rap/r97-281/r97-281.html>.

⁴⁴ « La place des actes délégués dans la législation européenne », French Senate Report available at [http://www.senat.fr/rap/r13-322/r13-322_mono.html](https://www.senat.fr/rap/r13-322/r13-322_mono.html).

⁴⁵ Noticed from Alexis de Tocqueville, *De la démocratie en Amérique*, Vol. 1, Librairie de C. Gosselin, 1839, spp. 159 ; to present times, Luc Heuschling, *Etat de droit, Rechstaat, Rule of Law*, Dalloz, 2002, spp. 326.

⁴⁶ See « Jacobinisme » in *Encyclopédie de la culture politique contemporaine*, Hermann, 2008, p. 553.

⁴⁷ Eurobaromètre Standard 86, « L’opinion publique dans l’Union européenne », published by the European Commission, report available at http://ec.europa.eu/france/sites/france/files/st86_natrep_repf.pdf.

⁴⁸ Emmanuel Macron, « One ne peut pas être timidement européen, sinon on a déjà perdu », *Libération*, 23 mars 2017, available at http://www.liberation.fr/elections-presidentielle-legislatives-2017/2017/03/23/emmanuel-macron-on-ne-peut-pas-etre-timidement-europeen-sinon-on-a-deja-perdu_1557953.

⁴⁹ « Impôt sur les sociétés, à qui profiterait l’harmonisation européenne ? » *La Tribune*, available at <http://www.latribune.fr/economie/union-europeenne/impot-sur-les-societes-a-qui-profitera-l-harmonisation-europeenne-697780.html> ; « Harmonisation fiscale : ce qui changerait pour la France », *Les Echos*, available at https://www.lesechos.fr/27/10/2016/LesEchos/22307-018-ECH_harmonisation-fiscale--ce-qui-changerait-pour-la-france.htm ; « Quelle harmonisation européenne en matière de regroupement familial ? » *France Terre d’asile*, available at <http://www.france-terre-asile.org/actualites/actualites-choisies/quel-harmonisation-europeenne-en-matiere-de-regroupement-familial>.

tend to consider that the only way for Europe to become reality is to make it become a “*France en grand*”.⁵⁰ And if it does not develop in this direction, then it might not be worth the shot.

Nevertheless, the gradual economic integration in the EU, especially after a decade of Eurozone membership, has fuelled a new approach to EU affairs in France, that is distinct from the traditional and exclusively diplomatic view. If the *Quai d'Orsay*, the French Foreign Ministry, in line with the tradition of a country with an imperial track record and global ambitions, plays the tune of a “reluctant European”, *Bercy*, the French Ministry for Economy and Finances, clearly offers a more federalist voice within the French institutional setup.⁵¹ This is very well exemplified by the positioning of the “centrist” candidate in the 2017 presidential race, Emmanuel Macron. A former employee of the banking industry and member of the Inspection Générale des Finances, the backbone of France’s upper-level civil service – present from the various finance and economy top administrations to the high management position in the private sector – Macron is a remarkable illustration of this “European integration by the economy” federalism.

On the 2017 line-up, Emmanuel Macron, Benoît Hamon and François Fillon (considering their program not only their public speeches) were the only (serious) contenders who did not want to either exit or weaken the EU. Fillon represented a very intergovernmental Europe, focused on external borders, Eurozone and the establishment of a “Trésor européen” (pooling debts) in his program but never made of Europe a campaign topic. Hamon was the candidate of the Greens and the left wing of the Social Party. He defended a critical approach of the EU and its neoliberal policies. Inspired by the rapprochements at work in the EP (Progressive Caucus intergroup), he pledged to steer the EU away from its (German inspired) ordo-liberal straightjacket and towards more democracy, solidarity and sustainability. In a way, and although he knows the shortcomings of the current setting and policies, Macron mostly offered continuity. Balancing the relative lack of audacity of his EU reform agenda⁵² with a positive and resolute pro-EU message, he managed to gather around his candidacy those for whom it remains first and foremost an ideal. Only at his political rallies would EU flags be waved and Europe applauded. It was thus no surprise to see by his side a totem of the European spirit such as Daniel Cohn-Bendit.⁵³

LONGING FOR A LONG-GONE ‘AGE D’OR’

Over the past decades, nostalgia has become one of the recurring features in the French debate – and it fuels the anger and disenfranchisement that powers the rise of the extreme-right and various populist movements.⁵⁴ When it comes to Europe and the EU, this feeling of nostalgia is pervasive. False of course, but forcefully efficient in an uninformed and polarised debate, the claim that the Euro is destroying France’s industrial jobs was

⁵⁰ « La France en grand » could be qualified as a traditional slogan of Jacques Chirac supporters, see Michel Barnier, « La France ne peut être grande sans une Europe protectrice et souveraine », *Le Monde*, http://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2017/05/04/michel-barnier-la-france-ne-peut-etre-grande-sans-une-europe-protectrice-et-souveraine_5122405_3232.html.

⁵¹ This statement is not new, see : Laurence Badel (et alii eds), *Les administrations nationales et la construction européenne: une approche historique (1919-1975)*, Peter Lang, 2005, spp. 377.

⁵² Imola Streho (et alii eds.), « Réformer l’Europe ? – Economistes, juristes et politistes se penchent sur l’avenir de l’Union européenne », *Revue de l’OFCE*, 2014-3.

⁵³ « L’élection de Macron tranche la question européenne», *Libération*, available at <http://bruxelles.blogs.liberation.fr/2017/05/09/lelection-de-macron-tranche-la-question-europeenne/>.

⁵⁴ Pierre-François Gouiffès, *L’âge d’or des déficits – 40 ans de déficit budgétaire*, La Documentation française, 2013, 240 p.

repeated by Marine Le Pen during the first official TV debate of the presidential debate.⁵⁵ Worryingly, however, the leader of the FN is quite representative of the national mood in this regard. With only few exceptions, the French presidential candidates for 2017 all mirrored a growing feeling in the French society that everything was better “before”. In other words, ‘golden age fantasies’ in a society claiming to be revolutionary...⁵⁶ but only because its structures resist the changes until the very last moment. With the limitation of the particular context of the second round which saw him oppose the far-right candidate, Emmanuel Macron’s victory could be an encouraging signal that the mod could change, especially as the candidate embodied a positive message about the future. But for now, it remains only a theoretical possibility.⁵⁷

As far as Europe is concerned, “before” often refers to “before 2004”⁵⁸, i.e. before the EU enlargement from 15 to 25, 27 and 28 members. Thus, the whole issue of “posted workers”, mainly coming from Eastern Europe, is triggering fierce discussions and a lot of anxious if not xenophobic reflexes including on the left of the political spectrum.⁵⁹ Part of the mobilisation against the Constitutional Treaty in the 2005 referendum stemmed from an opposition to opening the labour market to competition and revolved around the archetype of the Polish plumber or the Slovak nurse, and the fantasy that they would soon be followed by the Romanian dentist and then the Turkish worker, fuelled by the ill-timed announcement of the infamous “Bolkestein Directive”.⁶⁰ In a context of decades-long massive unemployment and culturally entrenched distrust between social partners, the fears of “social dumping” coming from the EU with the blessings of rogue managers to undermine the so-called French Social Model have never receded.⁶¹ In this regard, the first measures of the new Macron government will test his capacity to reassure those who always fear that reforms are detrimental to their situation.

Even in the 1990s, when it was one of its drivers, France was never at ease with globalisation.⁶² The conservative mentality of the French society, that roughly traces back to its (both aristocratic and commoner) rural roots, described by Alexis de Tocqueville or Eugen Weber⁶³, is at odds with a world where no position can be held indefinitely. For many in France, globalisation brings instability, competition and questions the *status quo*. What

⁵⁵ « Europe, chômage, terrorisme : les intox du débat présidentiel à onze candidats », *Le Monde*, available at http://www.lemonde.fr/les-decodeurs/article/2017/04/05/europe-chomage-terrorisme-les-intox-du-debat-presidentiel-a-onze-candidats_5106011_4355770.html.

⁵⁶ French Media Research Group (University of Newcastle), *Journée d'études "Age d'or. Médias et nostalgie*, 12 septembre 2014, CELSA Paris Sorbonne.

⁵⁷ Emmanuel Macron : « Je veux éradiquer la colère dont le Front National se nourrit », *FranceTV Info*, available at http://www.francetvinfo.fr/politique/emmanuel-macron/emmanuel-macron-je-veux-eradiquer-la-colere-dont-le-front-national-se-nourrit_2174909.html.

⁵⁸ Gérard Boismenu (et alii eds.), *L'Europe qui se fait: Regards croisés sur un parcours inachevé*, Presses universitaires de Montréal, 2008, 257 p.

⁵⁹ « Travailleurs détachés : l'Europe est-elle victime de dumping social », *L'Express*, available at http://lexpansion.lexpress.fr/actualite-economique/travailleurs-detaches-l-europe-est-elle-victime-de-dumping-social_1492232.html.

⁶⁰ Dominique Drouin, La République de Jacques Chirac: référendum Constitution européenne 29 mai 2005, Lulu.com, 2007, spp. 5.

⁶¹ « Comment Macron enterre le modèle social français », *Challenges*, available at https://www.challenges.fr/challenges-soir/comment-macron-enterre-le-modele-social-francais_432553.

⁶² Helen Drake, « Jacques Delors et la commission européenne. Un leadership unique ? », *Politique européenne*, vol. 8, no. 4, 2002, pp. 131-145.

⁶³ Jean Vigreux, « Les campagnes françaises et la politique (1830-1914) », *Parlement[s], Revue d'histoire politique*, vol. 5, no. 1, 2006, pp. 54-72.

constitutes an opportunity for some resonates as instability and threat for the majority.⁶⁴ The issue is that in the eyes of the French the EU appears as the Trojan horse of neoliberalism.⁶⁵ The EU is commonly described as one of the main institutional structures responsible for accelerating the grip of globalisation (and the banks) on citizens' daily lives. It is perceived as imposing austerity on everyone for the benefit of a few executives and shareholders in large multinational companies that are increasingly freed from regulation. It is thus pitting societies and social models one against another – in the name of greater profits.

THE SICK MAN⁶⁶ IN A DIVIDED EUROPE

In today's Europe, France is at the crossroad of both "northern" and "southern" anxieties.⁶⁷ These anxieties fed the anti-EU rhetoric that powered almost half of the French electorate in 2017. Still a wealthy country and a net contributor to the EU budget, the French share the worries of those virtuous Nordic member states reluctantly compelled to pay for "profligate irresponsible Southerners"⁶⁸ as the general cliché goes. But the French also feel that it wouldn't take much to join Portugal, Italy, Ireland, Greece, Cyprus, or Spain, that have been coerced into fiscal austerity by the technocrats of the Troïka because of Berlin's intransigence.⁶⁹ The proximity with the southern and Latin member states has always been a constant in the way France pictures itself in the EU. Nicolas Sarkozy's attempt in 2008 to create the "Union pour la Méditerranée" is a good reminder of this tropism⁷⁰ And today, from Hollande to Mélenchon, the rhetoric and expectations of the left count Spain, Greece or Italy as natural allies, who would answer France's call at once irrespective of the colour of their governments.⁷¹

The view of the NRG is that with its self-centred representation of the EU, France is also contributing to the rifts dividing the EU. Since 2011, the Eurozone governance crisis and its dire effects on social and economic welfare in many member states have aggravated the fault-lines. It is not merely a 'virtuous North' against a 'reckless South'. It is also petty bickering between net payers and net receivers or between bigger and smaller

⁶⁴ Jérémie Charbonneau et Nicolas Couderc, « Globalisation et (in)stabilité financières », *Regards croisés sur l'économie*, vol. 3, no. 1, 2008, pp. 235-242.

⁶⁵ Pierre Bourdieu, « L'essence du néo-libéralisme », *Le Monde diplomatique*, available at <https://www.monde-diplomatique.fr/1998/03/BOURDIEU/3609>.

⁶⁶ Etienne Balibar, « Après la fin de l'Europe », *Vacarme*, 1^e février 2016, available at <http://www.vacarme.org/article2834.html>.

⁶⁷ "Le Président de l'Eurogroupe et ses bons vieux clichés sur les Européens du Sud », *Courrier international*, available at <http://www.courrierinternational.com/article/europe-le-president-de-leurogroupe-et-ses-bons-gros-cliches-sur-les-europeens-du-sud>.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ « Pourquoi l'UE n'arrive pas à sortir de sa logique perdante », *La Tribune*, available at <http://www.latribune.fr/economie/union-europeenne/pourquoi-l-union-europeenne-ne-parvient-pas-a-sortir-de-sa-logique-perdante-598461.html>.

⁷⁰ "Le projet d'Union pour la Méditerranée conjugue ambitions et incertitudes », *Le Monde*, available at http://www.lemonde.fr/l-europe-a-l-heure-de-la-presentation-francaise/article/2008/07/11/le-projet-d-union-pour-la-mediterranee-conjugue-ambitions-et-incertitudes_1072518_1058958.html.

⁷¹ "Trump Brexit : les pays du Sud de l'UE se réunissent pour faire bloc », *Challenges* available at https://www.challenges.fr/monde/europe/trump-brexit-les-pays-du-sud-de-l-ue-se-reunissent-pour-faire-bloc_450862; « Syriza Podemos, Mélenchon : où en est la gauche radicale après la crise grecque », *Le Figaro*, available at <http://www.lefigaro.fr/vox/monde/2015/07/17/31002-20150717ARTFIG00157-syriza-podemos-melenchon-o-en-est-la-gauche-radicale-apres-la-crise-grecque.php>.

member states. It is also the antics of mostly Eastern illiberal governments, like Kaczynski's⁷² or Orban's⁷³, that depart from mostly 'Western rule of law abiding members'. It is also the rise all over the EU of extreme-right movements united in the combined loathing of Islam and the EU, worsening the tensions in liberal societies. And finally, it builds on long-term sociological trends such as the growing wedge between more connected and open urban centres that "surf" the globalised waves and disenfranchised forsaken rural areas.

⁷² « Poland's constitutional crisis », *New York Times*, available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/18/opinion/polands-constitutional-crisis.html>.

⁷³ « Le Premier ministre hongrois appelle à un état 'illiberal' provoquant la critique internationale », *Civil Liberties Union for Europe*, available at <http://www.liberties.eu/fr/news/illiberal-etat-hongrie>.

PART 2: RETHINKING LEADERSHIP AND INTEGRATION – THE CHALLENGES OF THE UNION

LEADERSHIP: STILL A FRANCO-GERMAN ISSUE?

When the first cabinet and government of newly elected President Macron were announced, many observers commented abundantly on the visible presence of German speaking and Germany-friendly advisors and ministers – from Bruno Le Maire⁷⁴ in charge of the Economy to Sylvie Goulard⁷⁵ responsible for defence (before her premature resignation following an investigation on her former political party “MoDem”). Attention to the Franco-German relationship has been a compulsory orientation of any French government since the 1963 Elysée Treaty between de Gaulle and Adenauer.⁷⁶ But the days of the famous Mitterrand-Kohl collaboration have since never been matched in quality and intensity.⁷⁷ It seems that as for Europe, the French political class no longer understands Germany.

“La question allemande” (“the German question”) is a recurring feature of the French public debate. It is like an “elephant in the room”.⁷⁸ Coined by Europe’s oldest great powers to underline the difficulty to deal with the centrality of Germany in Europe, it refers to a country seen as dangerous when too weak or too strong. Since the 19th century, the German question is an excellent yardstick to measure the degree of confidence or malaise of France in Europe. For the 1992 referendum on the Treaty of Maastricht, the debate focused less on Europe than on the newly reunited neighbour: the options were to ring Germany with a tight solidarity net (vote ‘yes’) or fear Germany dominating the new European structure (vote ‘no’).⁷⁹

Today, from its open-door migration policy to its reluctance to deal with sovereign debts on a common basis and its insistence on fiscal consolidation, Germany has become more than ever the focal point of European politics in these turbulent times. This resurgence of Germany as an “disconcerting powerful neighbour” in the French political imaginary finds a good illustration in Jean-Luc Mélenchon’s rants against Berlin.⁸⁰ Far from the poised analytical tone of the books he refers to, such as Ulrich Beck, Wolfgang Streeck and

⁷⁴ « Bruno Le Maire nommé Ministre de l’économie... », *Le Monde*, available at http://www.huffingtonpost.fr/2017/05/17/bruno-le-maire-nommé-ministre-de-leconomie-du-gouvernement-dou_a_22093696/.

⁷⁵ « Sylvie Goulard décroche la Défense et va jouer le couple franco-allemand », *Challenges*, available at https://www.challenges.fr/politique/sylvie-goulard-une-centriste-europeenne-convaincue-ministre-des-armees_473946.

⁷⁶ Jean-Manuel Larralde et Stéphane Leclerc, *Les 50 ans du traité de l’Élysée, 1963-2013: le couple franco-allemand dans la construction européenne*, L’Harmattan, 2016, 191 p.

⁷⁷ Marion Gaillard, « François Mitterrand et l’Allemagne, 1981-1995 », *Histoire@Politique*, vol. 4, no. 1, 2008, pp. 16-16.

⁷⁸ Lucien Calvié, *La question allemande. Histoire et actualité*, Éditions du Cygne, coll. « Frontières », 2016, 145 p.

⁷⁹ Ecole Nationale d’Administration, Mise en oeuvre du traité de Maastricht et construction européenne: rapports de séminaires établis par les élèves de la promotion Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, Volume 2, 1994, spp. 590.

⁸⁰ Jean-Luc Mélenchon « Emmanuel Macron va se faire adouber à Berlin », *CNews*, available at <http://cache.itele.fr/politique/video/jean-luc-melenchon-emmanuel-macron-va-se-faire-adouber-a-berlin-173666>.

Guillaume Duval's book on Merkel's policies, Mélenchon has no qualms about turning to the most basic nationalist tendencies, resorting to the most German-phobic culturalist clichés and celebrating the genius of the "Grande Nation".⁸¹ Yet, he is not necessarily the worst in this race to the bottom. The general discussion on Germany and Europe in some parts of the electorate bodes ominously for the French state of mind.

The paradox of this dented relationship is that it works as a self-fulfilling prophecy that can contribute to worsening existing crises. The locking up of the Franco-German engine are aggravating today's crises: the migration and refugee crisis; the rise in populism; Brexit; the euro-area crisis management. Disunited, Paris and Berlin also struggle to formulate a common security and foreign policy. The couple's weakness on the inside becomes the EU's weakness on the outside.⁸² Before it became a sordid game of haggling between a beleaguered EU and President Erdogan's authoritarian Turkey⁸³, the refugee deal was a somewhat suspicious Franco-German agreement. In exchange for its lack of solidarity with Germany on the refugee issue, Paris would leave Berlin to outsource the dirty work to Ankara. France – the so-called home of Human Rights – has been criticised for not doing its part in handling the burden of the refugee and migrant tragedy.⁸⁴ France's rebuttal of the Commission refugee relocation quotas in 2015 mirrored Germany's deafness to the pleas for more solidarity during the early phases of the euro crisis.⁸⁵

The solution to the leadership riddle also lies in the hands of the German political class and public. The elections in September 2017 may or may not change the position of Berlin in the EU.⁸⁶ But as far as the role of Paris in Europe is concerned, the question remains open: is France still a co-pilot with Germany? Or is it a junior-partner alongside other bigger members? Should France seek to lead of alternative coalitions? The problem with Paris is the combination of a temporary weakness, namely its budget situation that prevents its alignment with Germany-bound requirements, and a more structural lack of understanding of Europe within its political and media sphere.

In this context, the surprise exit of the United Kingdom from the EU seems to be bestowing a second breath to the hitherto stalled European Common Defence.⁸⁷ Left as the only member state with military capacities, global strategic culture – and serious sectorial industrial interest – France considers security and defence as a way to somehow re-balance its ailing political leadership in the EU.⁸⁸ Until now, this approach has raised

⁸¹ "Rompre avec le poison allemand est donc une exigence nationale, populaire, sociale et philosophique pour le camp du progrès humain et la lutte contre le productivisme." : Jean-Luc Mélenchon, *Le hareng de Bismarck (le poison allemand)*, Plon, 2015, 150 p.

⁸² "Le couple franco-allemand va être obligé de se raccommoder", *Le Monde*, available at http://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2017/03/25/le-couple-franco-allemand-va-etre-oblige-de-se-raccommader_5100697_3232.html.

⁸³ Dorothée Schmid, « Où va la Turquie d'Erdogan ? », *France culture*, available at <https://www.franceculture.fr/emissions/la-grande-table-2eme-partie/dorothee-schmid-ou-va-la-turquie-derdogan>.

⁸⁴ « L'accord UE-Turquie et ses implications », *Fondation Schuman*, available at <http://www.robert-schuman.eu/fr/questions-d-europe/0396-l-accord-ue-turquie-et-ses-implications-un-partenariat-incontournable-mais-sous-conditions>.

⁸⁵ « Valls opposé aux quotas migratoires dans l'Union européenne », *Le Monde*, available at http://www.lemonde.fr/europe/article/2015/05/16/valls-s-oppose-a-l-instauracion-de-quotas-migratoires-dans-l-union-europeenne_4634750_3214.html.

⁸⁶ « Europe (2) : des élections allemandes sous tension », *La Tribune*, available at <http://www.latribune.fr/economie/union-europeenne/europe-2017-2-des-elections-allemandes-sous-tension-627083.html>.

⁸⁷ « Défense européenne : ce que le Brexit va changer, ou peut changer », *Radio France International*, available at <http://www.rfi.fr/europe/20160628-impact-limite-brexit-defense-europeenne-otan-royaume-uni-allemagne>.

⁸⁸ « Budget de défense : la France le rêve, l'Allemagne le fait », *La Tribune*, available at <http://www.latribune.fr/entreprises-finance/industrie/aeronautique-defense/budget-de-defense-la-france-le-reve-l-allemagne-le-fait-628012.html>.

more questions and drawn more opposition, than it has provided answers and support, but it has found a new echo with the Juncker Commission's insistence on "Europe taking care of its own defence"⁸⁹ through a European Defence Action Plan.

INTEGRATION: NOT JUST AN INSTITUTIONAL TASK

Since the outbreak of the financial crisis in 2008, the EU seems to be confronted with the challenge of ever-looser integration.⁹⁰ When pressed to come forth with elements of convergence, to try and balance out the powerful forces of disintegration, three major concerns have been highlighted by the French NRG.

First and foremost, it is important to speak the "language of truth" as Mahatma Gandhi would say.⁹¹ One must dismiss the usual lack of consistency, and at times honesty, when addressing European issues. It is not solely about the abovementioned tendency to "doublespeak", although this damaging habit has already considerably weakened the legitimacy of the EU and the European project in the mind of French citizens. It is about the worrying lack of consistency and empathy in the backing for Europe and its achievements. There seems to be no room for "Euro-criticism", since dissenting opinions and interpretations are quickly condemned and de-legitimised as anti-European. For example, when the euro was introduced in France, there was a strong popular feeling that prices were going up. Sticking to the low inflation indexes, officials merely dismissed the anxieties as irrelevant instead of addressing them.⁹² Of course, facts matter – but in politics, perceptions matter more.⁹³

The second dominant concern in the eyes of the French relates to the Single Market and its socio-economic imbalances. To foster convergence, it has become urgent to seriously address inequalities and wealth redistribution at European level, both between and within countries.⁹⁴ The single market needs completion and a facilitated access, perhaps through initiatives such as a European Business Code, mooted by EuropaNova in other circles and places.⁹⁵

⁸⁹ European Daily News, 8th June 2017, *Base de données des communiqués de Presse*, available at http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_MEX-17-1573_en.htm.

⁹⁰ Martial Foucault, « Les politiques économiques européennes face à la Grande Récession », *Politique européenne*, vol. 42, no. 4, 2013, pp. 8-21.

⁹¹ Mohandas K. Gandhi, *The Story of my Experiment with Truth*, Beacon Press 1993.

⁹² « Hause des prix : l'euro est-il vraiment coupable ? », *L'Express*, available at http://expansion.lexpress.fr/actualite-economique/hause-des-prix-l-euro-est-il-vraiment-coupable_1362414.html; Institut National de la Statistique et des Etudes Economiques, « Une inflation modérée depuis le passage à l'euro », *INSEE mai 2017*, available at <https://www.insee.fr/fr/statistiques/2854085>.

⁹³ « La vérité importe-t-elle encore en politique », *FranceTV info*, available at http://www.francetvinfo.fr/politique/la-verite-importe-t-elle-encore-en-politique_1925183.html.

⁹⁴ « Tirer le meilleur du marché européen », *France Stratégie*, available at <http://www.strategie.gouv.fr/point-de-vue/tirer-le-meilleur-marche-unique-europeen#sthash.82HhQlh4.dpbs>.

⁹⁵ Elise Bernard et Paul Bayzelon, « Pour un Code européen des affaires », *Questions d'Europe – Fondation Robert Schuman*, 23 janvier 2017, available at <http://www.robert-schuman.eu/fr/doc/questions-d-europe/qe-418-fr.pdf> ; and in March of 2017, European Commission, *White Paper on the future of Europe*, p. 21 « A group of countries works together and agree on a common "Business Law Code" unifying corporate, commercial and related domains of law, helping businesses of all sizes to easily operate across borders» available at https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/white_paper_on_the_future_of_europe_en.pdf.

Finally, mutual ignorance in Europe is also worrying. The cultural and social realities of other countries are often ignored. The public debate does not fulfil the promise engrained in the European integration project to strive for mutual understanding.⁹⁶ As a result, it often trades on cultural and societal clichés. The media play a crucial role in this regard as they widely contribute to shaping public representations. The NRG pointed out the lack of a functional European public sphere.

THE HALF-BAKED ISSUE

The European project is far from completion, especially if one considers Europe as a journey, not a destination. For some, it's a means towards a different organisation of powers, an enlarged democracy and a different scale for solidarity and prosperity required by globalisation. For most, it remains also a strive for peace.⁹⁷ The NRG considers that consolidating the legitimacy of EU action is essential to counter rising euro-scepticism in different members states. Building this legitimacy hinges on the EU's ability to "deliver". This could start with a concrete first step: take stock of what has already been agreed and implement it. For many, the tools and means needed for an "EU that delivers" already exist.⁹⁸

The general feeling in the NRG is, however, that the "job is not finished". Too many policies, or mechanisms, are only designed to cover half of the problem. The EMU is built for fair weather, but not for stormy conditions.⁹⁹ The migration approach, dubbed the "Dublin system", is built to manage regular flows of migrants not a sudden and massive influx of asylum seekers. As a result, in Greece, the situation was already bad enough with the austerity policies. With the refugee crisis, it has grown into a humanitarian crisis that is threatening everybody, migrants and Greeks alike.¹⁰⁰ In the economic and migration fields, the dominant proposal is thus to call for the design of more comprehensive EU policies.

When the discussion delves deeper into the solutions and the way to resolve the current stagnation, an institutional bias re-emerges. Among the pro-EU forces, the argument goes that the current crises cannot be addressed on an intergovernmental basis. Arguably, the increased use of this decision-making process over the past years is the reason why Europe was unable to respond to the crises.¹⁰¹ As a result, the Lisbon treaty should be fully implemented. It is not uncommon, however, to hear an opposite view. The idea is to start afresh at the national level, to encourage national debates on the future of Europe and find a new common denominator. The two approaches are not necessarily incompatible, but they remain quite confrontational: considering nation-states as building blocks or as obstacles is hopping on one leg.

⁹⁶ « La France et l'Europe, une incompréhension et un malaise », *Radio France International*, available at <http://www.rfi.fr/emission/20170430-france-presidentielle-candidats-europe-incomprehension-malaise-immigration>.

⁹⁷ « L'union politique de l'Union est un moyen, pas une fin », *Le Monde*, available at http://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2012/10/02/l-integration-politique-europeenne-est-un-moyen-pas-une-fin_1768680_3232.html.

⁹⁸ Jean-Marc Ferry, Yves Bertoncini, François Cheneval et Thierry Chopin (eds), *Démocratie, la voie européenne*, Presses Paris Sorbonne, 2007, spp. 141.

⁹⁹ Pierre-Charles Pradier, « Solvabilité 2 accroît-elle le risque systémique ? », *Banque et Stratégie*, 2015, ENASS Papers 10

¹⁰⁰ Commission des lois de l'Assemblée nationale, *Rapport d'information sur l'élaboration de l'efficacité des mécanismes européens pour prendre en charge des flux migratoires exceptionnels*, 2016, spp. 44.

¹⁰¹ Philippe Bance, *L'action publique dans la crise: vers un renouveau en France et en Europe?*, Publication Univ Rouen Havre, 2012, 336 p.

FROM INSTITUTIONAL COMMUNICATION TO DIALOGUE BETWEEN PEOPLE

This is yet another illustration of our epistemological tendency to consider the EU construction along the same line as the nation-building of the 19th and 20th centuries. Often, one would like to see applied to Europe what Massimo d’Azeglio famously said about creating the Italians after Italy.¹⁰² The usual claim, however, is that “we have created the EU but we have not created European citizens”.¹⁰³ That is why the narrative issue has become central to the debate about the future of the EU. The resurgence of (dismissive and even xenophobic) national stereotypes echoes a looser European spirit. True to its political culture, the French NRG would calls for extending the means that can help shape a civic identity, building on successful programmes such as Erasmus or concrete regulatory changes such as the end of roaming charges, thereby forgoing the rather elitist initiatives that concern only a small portion of the European population.¹⁰⁴

And here comes the question of the attitude and the communication. While keeping the focus on substance, how can the EU be better communicated and explained at all levels? Can Europe be a flag to fight against populism or is it necessary to keep a low profile? Should pro-Europeans be more offensive? In a public debate poisoned by Eurosceptic rants, there is a need to refresh the narrative and position the Union as a shield in a globalised world.¹⁰⁵ The NRG unanimously called for a more genuine and sincere treatment of the EU in the public discourse breaking away from usual scapegoat approach that often prevails in political speeches, the media or in education.¹⁰⁶ It called for more positive stories, for an evidence-based illustration of the EU’s work in all fields. The election of Emmanuel Macron following an unprecedented pro-European campaign might open a window of opportunity to lead the French wind back in the sails of the EU.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰² Massimo d’Azeglio, *L’Italie de 1847-1865*, Didier et cie, 1867, spp. 400.

¹⁰³ Taking in account the restrictive notion of European citizenship in the French constitutional Law : Florence Chaltiel, “La citoyenneté européenne”, *Les Cahiers du Conseil constitutionnel*, n°23, 2008, available at <http://www.conseil-constitutionnel.fr/conseil-constitutionnel/francais/nouveaux-cahiers-du-conseil/cahier-n-23/la-citoyennete-europeenne.51807.html>.

¹⁰⁴ Confrontations Europe, « Identité et citoyenneté européenne », available at <http://confrontations.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Identite-Citoyennete-RELUCWAM-pour-site.pdf>.

¹⁰⁵ Tonatiuh Sandoval, « L’idée d’Europe dans la politique positive d’Auguste Comte », Philonsorbonne, 3- 2009, p. 51-73.

¹⁰⁶ *La lettre de la Fondation Hippocrène*, 2015, available at

http://fondationhippocrène.eu/app/uploads/2015/06/Lettre_FH2015_Web.pdf.

¹⁰⁷ Guillaume Klossa, « Emmanuel Macron, une opportunité pour réinventer l’Europe », *Libération*, available at http://www.liberation.fr/debats/2017/05/09/manuel-macron-une-opportunité-pour-reinventer-l-europe_1568379.

PART 3: WHAT SHOULD BE DONE? SOME POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

In the field of security, echoing the public debate, the NRG discussions mixed many concerns, from military power to global strategy including the thorny issue of national sovereignty. Debating a Common Defence Policy proves delicate as it directly touches on what member states consider as their sovereign role: the protection of the national territory (and by extension, the national interest).¹⁰⁸ As a result of their respective size, means, geography and strategic culture, France and its partners have different perspectives on the relationship between Europe and national security. Hence, defining a common “nightmare” or vision of the threats is tricky. In today’s world, for example, threats for France would include Russia and instability in some African countries. Greece,¹⁰⁹ whose (cultural and military) ties with Russia¹¹⁰ are old and strong¹¹¹ may not share this perception. As the exchanges with the Greek NRG emphasised, threats concern Turkey and instability in the Middle-East rather than Africa.

Finally, another philosophical yet essential debate emerged on the “post-Westphalian” dimension of the European construction and its (in)adequacy with an enduring Westphalian international order, that sees sovereign states ensure a balance of power.¹¹² It remained an unresolved issue whether it was in the nature and purpose of the EU to become a global powerhouse able to display hard power, play the hardball game and drive the world towards a post-conflict, post-national, global governance system.

Hence without a clear consensus on this fundamental issue, the NRG recommendations followed a rather Westphalian logic:

1. Set up a European defence body, with civil and military staff;
2. Create a European Academy of defence, diplomacy and cyber-defence;
3. Develop strategic forces based on a doctrine, a new “white paper” assessing the various threats and defining a common strategy;

¹⁰⁸ Pascal Verdeau, « Sommet européen : priorité à la sécurité après le Brexit », *France info*, available at http://www.francetvinfo.fr/monde/europe/la-grande-bretagne-et-l-ue/sommet-europeen-priorite-a-la-securite-apres-le-brexit_1828273.html.

¹⁰⁹ Jean-Christophe Ploquin, *La Croix*, « La crise des migrants en Grèce pèse sur l’opinion et nourrit l’extrémisme en Grèce », *La Croix*, available at <http://paris-international.blogs.la-croix.com/la-crise-des-migrants-pese-sur-lopinion-et-nourrit-lextremisme-en-grece/2017/01/16/>.

¹¹⁰ Laurent Marchand, « L’Europe sous influence russe ? », *EuradioNantes*, available at <http://www.euradionantes.eu/news/2017/3/31/l-europe-sous-influence-russe>.

¹¹¹ Dominique de Villepin invité de Véronique Auger, « L’Europe doit-elle craindre un conflit armé avec la Russie ? », *FranceTV info - Avenue de l’Europe*, available at http://www.francetvinfo.fr/monde/europe/manifestations-en-ukraine/video-l-europe-doit-elle-craindre-un-conflit-arme-avec-la-russie-la-reponse-de-dominique-de-villepin_2061657.html.

¹¹² Frédéric Mérand et Julien Weisbein, *Introduction à l’Union européenne: Institutions, politiques et société*, De Boeck Supérieur, 2011, spp 166.

4. Create a European fund allocated to military R&D and connected to civilian purposes;
5. Increase the budget of the European Defence Agency (EDA);
6. Better coordinate European intelligence services and create a common body modelled on the US Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI);
7. Develop Eurocorps;
8. Develop a European military industrial powerhouse;
9. Create a European Cybersecurity Agency.

Fundamental caveats lingered. To date, the legitimacy and the democratic governance of a European military remain unresolved. How would one organise the democratic approval of military action, which involves sending off national soldiers risk their lives abroad on behalf of European security interests? In addition, the financing of a European army was also left open.

In the field of migration, the NRG called for a “common migration policy” that would fundamentally differ from, and thus correct, the Dublin system. The EU cannot afford to uphold its current dysfunctional policy: since the beginning of the crisis, intergovernmentalism in decision-making has hampered the emergence of viable common solutions.¹¹³ The lack of common approach and solidarity led to the “Turkey deal”, which most in the NRG agreed to find “highly questionable” from both a human rights and a geopolitical perspective.

As a result, the NRG recommendations attempt to strike a balance between efficiency and ethics:

1. Strengthen Frontex, which implies the clarification and the review of its mandate, the upwards revision of its budget, an increased control and the development of a practical ethical dimension. Indeed, Frontex is a controversial agency tough to administrate with debateable practices. Frontex fills the gaps of solidarity between the different member states, but it makes it an agency not much concerned by the respect of human rights;
2. Strengthen the external border, which would go with a Community management as well as a European code clarifying the implementation of the Right of asylum;
3. Reform Dublin III and review its criteria with the suppression of the European readmission clause, towards a common management of the refugees’ crisis;
4. Share inspiration through the best practices in terms of asylum and integration of refugees, from language courses to work integration, following the German policy in these matters;
5. Develop external policies that tackle the issue of development and the many causes for refugee flows;

¹¹³ Commission des lois de l’Assemblée nationale, *Rapport d’information sur l’élaboration de l’efficacité des mécanismes européens pour prendre en charge des flux migratoires exceptionnels*, 2016, spp. 48.

6. Foster European coalitions of local authorities and integration initiatives, for asylum seekers and refugees; and link them to the European agencies and the United Nations programmes. Such measure should go together with an adequate financing to be asked from the European Commission, as well as an incentive system for asylum seekers relocation;
7. Establish a compensation system for the population segments most adversely affected by the impacts of globalisation (e.g. de-industrialisation) to help change their negative perception of migrants as “unfair competition” (either for work or welfare benefits). An increase in structural funds might be required;
8. Ask the European Commission to clarify the notion of European solidarity (Art. 80 TFEU) because it is essential to make this definition less technocratic, less accountant-like and more human.

In the economic field, a broad consensus emerged within the NRG to acknowledge the imbalanced and contrasted situation of the European economy: while some countries like Poland seem to know no crisis, there is no growth in the Eurozone; inequalities are rising across and within member states; France and many other Eurozone members suffer from a loss of global competitiveness; the lack of investment is widespread; and fiscal and economic competition within the EU is damaging solidarity and cooperation.

This assessment naturally reflects the view of a country, such as France, that is confronted with many economic difficulties. Beyond this domestic bias, the discussion focussed on the fundamental policy mistakes and structural flaws of the EMU laid bare by the crisis and its mismanagement – yet another illustration of a certain inclination for “half-baked” solutions. The coordination of differing economic policies remains a huge hurdle to address. There is no growth potential because there is no growth policy. Hence to mitigate the unsustainably high levels of unemployment, especially those of the youth¹¹⁴, massive investments are needed, not a mere re-allocation of existing funds, such as the so-called Juncker plan. These investments should focus on the digital economy¹¹⁵ as well as sustainable and renewable energy.¹¹⁶ A consensus also emerged around the idea that future prosperity can only stem from solid investments in education, human capital, training, digital education, professional training, and new skills development. This requires more means. Thus, an increased EU budget is pivotal to succeed.

1. Create a Finance Minister for the Eurozone amongst the portfolios of the European Commission;
2. End austerity programmes, especially Greece’s, and foster economic solidarity within the EU through social convergence and a fiscal harmonisation that would curb tax evasion and tax optimisation;
3. Introduce more fairness through a reform of the Stability and Growth Pact by transforming it into a “European Snake” that would include both social and economic indicators;

¹¹⁴ « Le taux de chômage en Europe », *Toute l’Europe*, available at <http://www.touteurope.eu/actualite/le-taux-de-chomage-en-europe.html>.

¹¹⁵ Commission des Affaires économiques de l’Assemblée nationale, *Rapport d’information sur le développement de l’économie numérique*, 2014, spp. 55.

¹¹⁶ Raphaël H. Boroumand (et alii eds), *20 idées reçues sur l’énergie*, De Boeck, 2015, 188 p.

4. Introduce a European Business Code to improve equal access to the single market;
5. Better coordinate the burden-sharing of public debt and establish Eurobonds at a unique rate;
6. Invest massively in strategic fields such as energy, industry, training, innovation and R&D.

In addition to these specific policies, what course of action is required to foster a new path towards European convergence? Again, let's look at the French presidential debate. Following the election of Emmanuel Macron, France needs to implement structural reforms to earn and consolidate the trust of its partners, namely Germany. Then, and then only, will France regain influence on the course of European integration. Most candidates, however, from the most impatient "Frexiters" to those who would be more lenient and willing to negotiate longer, believed that "Europe" must bend and accept the sovereign expression of the French people, contrary to what happened to Greece with its referendum on the memorandum. Because France considers itself as big, essential and central to the European construction, "Europe" or "Berlin" or "Brussels" (as these three players often collide in this kind of nationalist perspective) will have to accept the fundamental changes mooted by Paris.

The striking effect is that in the French debate, Europe and France are taken as two independent and equal players, two monolithic blocks, considered whole and solid. As if France was an island and all French were not Europeans – whether they feel and accept it or not; and Europe not 27 other sovereign states, with 450 million citizens, as well as decade-long established institutions in Brussels, Strasbourg and Luxembourg. The first effort is to separate the different players and know what to ask from each, rather than resorting to the usual "they must".

Regarding **the European Commission**, the first and probably the most urgent call is for more "prospective". Beyond the traditional technocratic process that makes policy-making hinge on studies and impact assessments (whose methodology is at times questionable), the NRG calls for a real "blueprint for the future" laying out the finalities of European integration. After more than a decade of unambitious management, the Juncker commission has raised to the challenge with the publication of its *White paper for the Future of Europe*. The five scenarios that were put forward for discussion lack the required audacity. As such, they appear as an attempt to force national governments out of their inertia.¹¹⁷ This first step is necessary yet insufficient. The NRG also called for a more "political" approach in the "allocation of resources". The current system is considered as too dependent on statistical aggregates and technocratic processes (despite some occasional national bargaining) that are irrespective of the actual needs and dynamics of the regions and populations concerned. Since the Commission claims to be a political actor, it should act, and be accounted for, accordingly.

Regarding the **French government**, the NRG called for an actual Europeanisation of both the policies implemented and the general discourse. First and foremost, as mentioned above, the absolute necessity is to establish a parliamentary control and audit of what the executive branch is doing at EU level.

¹¹⁷ "Le Président de la Commission présente cinq pistes pas très originales pour sortir de la crise des institutions », *Libération*, available at http://www.liberation.fr/planete/2017/03/01/union-europeenne-le-pale-livre-blanc-de-jean-claude-juncker_1552557.

Accountability and transparency are considered defining standards for a democracy, and in this regard, France's European policy lacks both.¹¹⁸

A more proactive and pro-European involvement in EU matters could make France great again in the European game, leading **its partners** to agree on two necessary changes. The first one would enable the drawing up of transnational lists for European elections. Such a small yet clear step would signal of commitment towards the building of a truly European democracy. The departure of the UK will leave 73 seats in the EP to be re-allocated. Instead of scrapping them or worse, sharing the spoils between the remaining members, this lot should be the first contingent of MEPs elected by a common European constituency based on the general orientations of their political family rather than the outcome of national contexts and battles.¹¹⁹ The second necessary step forward would be the re-introduction in the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) of "own resources", crucial in order to loosen the grip of the Member states on the EU budget and help them move away from their "paying/receiving" mentality.¹²⁰

For the French NRG, **civil society**, including the EP should take full responsibility for educating European citizens and ensure they know both the continent's history and the project's purpose. Economic actors, from business associations to trade unions, could develop a "vision for Europe" beyond their mere support for the single market. NGOs and political associations should exert a stronger and stricter control of EU policies. Given their responsibility in shaping (in-forming) the debate on Europe, the media should also contribute to de-nationalise the debate: the need to resuscitate the spirit of "Press-Europe" is pressing.¹²¹

¹¹⁸ "Transparence européenne : une quête utopique?", *Café Babel*, available at <http://www.cafebabel.fr/bruxelles/article/transparence-europeenne-une-quete-utopique.html>.

¹¹⁹ European Council of Foreign Relations, "Views from the Capitals ; Working with President Macron ? », available at http://www.ecfr.eu/publications/summary/vfc_views_from_the_capitals_reactions_to_macrons_victory#.

¹²⁰ « Les ressources propres sont la seule issue à la schizophrénie du budget de l'UE », *Euractiv*, available at <http://www.euractiv.fr/section/avenir-de-l-ue/interview/les-ressources-propres-sont-la-seule-issue-a-la-schizophrenie-du-budget-de-lue/>.

¹²¹ Alain Bernard, Sylvain Bonnet, Anouar El Anouni, Cédric Denis-Rémis, Cynthia Fleury, Alexandre Heully, Gaëlle Le-Goff, Guillaume Klossa, Lena Morozova-Friha, Sébastien Maillard, Aurélie Motta-Rivey, Denis Simonneau, Cédric Villan, « Mayday ! Il faut sauver le soldat Europe ! », *EuropaNova*, available at <http://www.europanova.eu/mayday-il-faut-sauver-le-soldat-europe/>.

CONCLUSION: MAKING THE CASE FOR ALL EUROPEANS

Before we conclude, a caveat is important: this report has obviously been drafted with a clear political bias in favour of the European idea and its integration. The case for Europe has long been the privilege and monopoly of small (often superior) segments of society, who have had pioneering instincts and strong beliefs in the words and deeds of the European founding fathers. Today, these fervent supporters may have become a liability to the cause. As it happened many times in the history of mankind, the ritual can become the graveyard of a beautiful idea. For example, it is worrying to observe that while celebrating its 60th anniversary, the European idea seems to be struggling to find its marks. Its champions are either overwhelmed, weak or getting old. “Europe” has become a political battlefield where reactionary forces have been gaining momentum in their opposition to the EU. Hence there is a strong need to recruit more troops to defend the European idea.

But too often, the traditional reflex of EU partisans is to focus on the narrative, either refreshing, reinventing, or rewriting it, as if it was enough to just re-make the movie in a more fashionably updated style. Undoubtedly, founding myths are essential to build a sense of community. But this approach may fall short as “Europe” is less about knowledge, teaching or story than it is about experience. It must be lived, felt and seen rather than studied and communicated. The “communication breakdown” pointed out by pro-EU forces is that of an increasingly polarised society, where all powers are deemed suspicious – Europe, national, media, cultural, institutional, economic, etc. alike.

Such institutional bias tends to transform this deep cognitive gap and political drift into a matter of public pedagogy and communication on the various benefits of the public action. Defending the policies instead of arguing politics. This might be a dangerous misreading of the situation. For example, the debate about migration too often focuses on the economic dimension, thereby overlooking the “cultural insecurity” or the “alien” factor. Migration cannot be a mere matter of communication or pedagogy on the benefits of multiculturalism. The issue also runs deep with a sense of identity and its protective reflexes. These feelings must be acknowledged to be overcome.

It remains to be seen if the election of President Macron will completely change the game. So far, the lack of European vision among France’s political, cultural and economic elites is to be deplored. Thus, the way the French relate to the EU and respond to its challenges can astonish and disappoint France’s partners because of its routine and outdated answers. In this regard, NRG discussions often stressed this gap between the unsatisfied expectations of one side and the complacent self-righteousness of the other. Similarly, institutional communication emphasising the European project’s peace and reconciliation arguments will never be as convincing as a direct encounter and experience of the “other” by European citizens. It is not enough to be able to visit the whole of the EU, visa-free and change-free (for the Eurozone). What is necessary is a mutual understanding of citizens from different backgrounds and origins. Europe should not be the narrative but the opportunity for such experience.

In this regard, the transnational exchanges should be more directly focussed on what can be frankly expected from each other at national level. To dispel the dangerous *rapport de force* that antagonistic rhetoric can fuel, it is essential to spur a “community spirit” that would enable European nations to feel more at ease to express what they expect from each other.

This much needed “dialogue” would help to monitor three trends: i) The extent to which national sensitivities prevail on certain issues despite the European credo; ii) The perception of each other’s qualities as regards national and European policies and the necessity to mobilise them in order to play a greater role in the European construction; and iii) The potential ways in which transnational coalitions could emerge, to achieve some common objectives, and bring some palpable changes in the respective institutional spheres.

This leads to one last remark on what could be called a “sociological gap”. The relative sociological homogeneity of the focus groups makes the discussion much easier of course. But it tends to depoliticise a debate that is becoming more and more political. More space must be given to dissenting voices on the European project. This would help understand the logics, the dynamics and the reach of their arguments. The usual framing into “winners and losers” of the EU integration process, globalisation or migration (or all) might facilitate the reading, but it eventually translates into an ambivalent situation where the “winners” gather to discuss how to convince the “losers” that their condition is in fact not that bad.

The danger is of course to produce a discourse that can only reach a limited portion of society, that is often already on board. Making the case for Europe must be making the case for Europeans – including the Eurosceptics.

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