

OVERVIEW

A EUROPE FOR TODAY AND TOMORROW

**SQOVEREIGNTY
SOLIDARITY
SHARED IDENTITY**

Summary of the report submitted to Clément Beaune, Minister of State for European Affairs, by the Reflection and Proposals Committee for the French Presidency of the Council of the European Union, chaired by Thierry Chopin.

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The members of the committee of reflection and proposals for the PFUE took part in this mission in a personal capacity and their contributions and opinions are not binding for the institutions which employ them.

The committee's work took place fully independently.

The analyses and proposals made in the report are not binding on the government.

Introduction

The French Presidency of the Council of the European Union (hereinafter referred to as the “PFUE”) began on 1 January 2022. As part of preparations for this event, the Minister of State for European Affairs, Clément Beaune, wanted to start a Reflection and Proposals Committee for the PFUE in order to set out broad guidelines for the upcoming presidency.

The outcome of the committee’s work (independent, gender balanced and comprising academics and experts of varied backgrounds and nationalities) was published in a report submitted to the Minister of State on 30 November 2021. The information below aims to present this report by summarizing its main themes for reflection and proposals.

The committee met regularly between March and October 2021. Each meeting was based around the presentation of a thematic note drawn up by two or three committee members and a discussion with all group members. Furthermore, over 50 figures from outside the committee were called on as part of this mission.

Four main ideas can be identified among the committee’s many reflections. Firstly, the need to respond to uncertainties and concerns, whether they be economic and social (fear of individual loss of status), geopolitical (fear of collective decline) or regarding identity (who are we?). Next, the importance of increased solidarity between Member States of the European Union, as we saw in the context of the recent health crisis. Similarly, the committee focused on dealing with European issues based on a multi-scale approach which is not limited to a Europe of institutions or States but which also deals with more local, or conversely, more international levels. Finally, it also emerged that a renewal of the French method seemed desirable, with the idea of showing more humility without, however, rejecting ambitious progress. The French vision, the essence of which is not necessarily being challenged, is nonetheless viewed quite warily by European partners, which suspect France of perceiving the EU as a way to push its model onto them. Efforts could thus be made in terms of education and terminology to address this issue.

In order to provide an insight which, while moving beyond traditional institutional frameworks, could be useful for preparing the PFUE, the committee members chose a three-pronged model for their discussions, drawn up in the French authorities’ programme around the concepts of “Recovery”, “Strength” and “A Sense of Belonging”. But beyond that, this agenda was broadened to include analysis of the perceptions and expectations of this French Presidency in other Member States; and to examine how to more firmly establish a European dimension within France, whose public opinion is one of the most critical of the European Union.

Furthermore, it is important to remember that the PFUE only lasts 6 months, and so like the following reflections, it must be seen within the broader perspective of the debate on the future of Europe.

1. Europe in the face of crisis (“Recovery”)

The committee’s first topic of discussion was the economic prospects of the eurozone and European Union. It examined business and structural aspects as well as the political response to the crisis caused by the pandemic. In that regard, the recovery of the European economy should be supported, it must be made more dynamic and crisis-resilient, and a European responsible capitalism model should be encouraged.

That is why the recovery cannot be seen from just an economic viewpoint. Under the Action Plan launched in March 2021 to implement the European Pillar of Social Rights, and following the Porto Social Summit in May 2021, the committee highlighted several important social issues like EU homelessness, youth and health policy.

A successful economic recovery

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The European response to the pandemic was quicker, stronger and more effective than its response to the financial crisis. The actions of the European Central Bank (ECB) helped ensure continued financing of the economy throughout the eurozone in the face of market destabilization and the increased financing needs during the pandemic. In particular, the decision to issue a shared debt and the terms of the recovery plan under which the Commission borrowed €750 billion on behalf of the EU were welcome departures.

But we must not drop our guard: there must be a sustained recovery in 2022 in order to set out on the path to pre-crisis growth levels. This goal could be achieved by increasing public investments with strong multiplier effects, e.g. in education, health, R&D, digitization of the economy and green infrastructure. Further, the European instrument for temporary Support to mitigate Unemployment Risks in an Emergency (SURE) could be expanded or the unused portion of loans available under the Recovery plan for Europe could be used to facilitate the transformation of the economy following the pandemic by supporting mobility and vocational training as well as youth integration.

From that point of view, the crisis provides the opportunity to rethink fiscal union and to better finance the EU. Reform of the Stability and Growth Pact will determine the applicable budgetary rules when they are reactivated. France could propose exempting from the calculations of public deficit any net public investments which are in line with the objectives of the Recovery plan for Europe, while setting realistic future debt reduction goals for each

country so as not to break the momentum of the recovery. Finally, now may be the right time to reopen the debate on the EU's own resources in order to provide it with the means of repaying this new shared debt, which would also consolidate its credibility as a borrower.

It is also important to ensure that the European Union can meet the challenge of digital financing. With regard to this increasingly important issue, the French Presidency could complete the package of regulatory measures on digital finance, which is essential in order to enable fair competition and regulate the emerging risks associated with the digital economy. It could propose environmental regulations or a carbon tax on cryptoasset transactions, of which the environmental impact is worrying.

In order to propose better alternatives, the PFUE could also provide political support for the development of the digital euro and set out its guiding principles. A digital euro would aim to provide Europeans with extra means of payment which are free, modern and safe, enabling digital payments all over the eurozone. The PFUE could also promote the development of instant European payments to create a standard capable of being implemented globally.

The strengthening of banking union could aim to facilitate the transition towards a green and digital economy by putting in place a supervisory and regulatory framework setting out the appropriate incentives for banks and aiming to strengthen the EU's role as a global leader in sustainable financing.

The spirit of the committee's economic proposals is to create a European responsible capitalism model by firmly committing to extra-financial standards. To do so, a European responsible capitalism and sustainable finance doctrine must be founded by promoting a European "raison d'être" in addition to a corporate name. Such an approach is inspired by French innovations in the area introduced by the PACTE law in order to help each company set out its philosophy and principles in advance and then to structure its set of standards accordingly.

In a French and European context, the main thing is to refocus the debate in the short and medium term on the quality of the recovery. In order to ensure the very long-term sustainability of debt, economic-impact assessment tools should be used in order to maximize the social, environmental and economic value of the recovery. This means creating follow-up governance of the innovative recovery plan, keeping records of its impact according to State non-financial accounting procedures and attributing this impact monetary value in order to supplement national accounts.

At international level, the PFUE can seek to contribute to the global economic recovery, including by supporting the vaccine and health response to

the pandemic. To reduce imported inflation, it could also be useful to start international discussions to support supply and undo bottlenecks.

The social aspect of the recovery. An essential focus on young people

The committee first chose to concentrate on one of the aspects of social Europe: the fight against poverty, and more specifically homelessness.

While social Europe is still struggling to materialize in the eyes of its citizens, in a European Union in which social protection remains a State prerogative, addressing cases of extreme poverty would allow it to become embodied. The PFUE can provide an effective framework to support European efforts.

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Although on the face of it, the issue of homelessness does not fall within the remit of the European Union (competence in social matters is shared among Member States, while the principle of subsidiarity determines the assignment of the various areas within it, and yet local/national authorities seem more suited to take action than the European Union on this issue), several facets of this problem would benefit from EU action. From a fully European perspective, the issue is embodied through the spread and the complicated management of specific populations. There are now very many non-European migrants and asylum seekers among the homeless population. The issue of European coordination is thus absolutely essential. With regard to the Roma, better understanding and regulation of intra-European migration is necessary. Finally, shuttle migration, often from Eastern to Western Europe, requires enhanced cooperation. Furthermore, the European Parliament asked the EU to take action against homelessness in a November 2020 resolution.

Against this backdrop, it is important to set out a European homelessness strategy. As part of the plan of action drawn up to implement the European Pillar of Social Rights, it would be useful to set an objective to reduce the number of homeless persons in Europe, or even a goal to eradicate homelessness.

To that end, an initial step requires drawing up an assessed review of policies. This assessment will be one of the tasks of the European Platform on Combatting Homelessness launched by the Portuguese Presidency. It will first require improving the data by performing counts in major cities.

Then minimum European standards must be created for the services. Just as there are (albeit variously applied) standards in terms of asylum, it would be wise to draw up and enforce minimum standards for homelessness services, particularly regarding shelters, as their quality varies hugely within the European Union.

The European funds could also finance aid for EU nationals who do not have access to social assistance in their European destination country. Similarly, they could finance the creation of social residences and specialized accommodation.

Finally, homeless people are faced with an entirely practical problem in terms of managing their rights: they are often required to repeat the same information, and yet it is impossible for them to easily store the information. One solution could be to create “digital safes” to reduce red tape and improve support for these populations.

In addition to these points on homelessness, the committee has also dealt with the themes of young people and health.

With regard to the issue of the specific attention which the recovery must bring to young people, there should be focus on the vulnerability of workers aged 15 to 29 in the face of the consequences of the health crisis and in a context of pre-existing fragility linked to the consequences of the financial crisis. In addition to the quantitative aspect (reducing youth unemployment), there is a qualitative aspect (regarding the working environment and conditions) in that young people are more affected by part-time work and teleworking, a form of work which is set to become established at least in part after the crisis. These issues must not be neglected or overshadowed by the important issue of a European minimum wage.

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The French Presidency could also open the debate on governing teleworking via a European legislative initiative. Young people were particularly affected by teleworking during the pandemic and all evidence indicates that this form of work will at least partially become established. In this regard, European regulations appear particularly disappointing: the only European standard referring to it up to now is the 2002 framework agreement.

Finally, in the interests of clarity and support for worker mobility, it would be useful for the PFUE to set about creating an individual European training account. This proposal would be part of the new European Skills Agenda advocated by the Commission following the pandemic. The principle would be for each European to receive training credits based on the number of hours worked. These credits would be visible on an individual training account for the duration of their professional career and could be converted into money for self-training or for free hours in a training course.

As regards health, the committee, taking into account both the divergence between national health systems and the limited competences of the EU in this area, analysed the risks linked to the current situation and set out several proposals within the context of the health crisis, characterized by strong support from public opinion for further developing a European health policy.

Within this context, the first priority is to support the newly-created Health Emergency Preparedness and Response Authority (HERA) and to support the strengthening of existing entities (The European Medicines Agency and the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control) as regards cross-border crisis management.

In the longer term, the French Presidency could launch projects such as that on antibiotic resistance or a shared policy in terms of innovation and research in the health sector, drawing on favourable public opinion.

2. Europe in the world (“Strength”)

The committee’s second theme for reflection was based around the issue of strength, as in strengthening the European Union’s ability to act at regional and global level to protect its interests without abandoning its principle of openness. The concept of “European sovereignty” was the focus of the initial reflections followed by more specific concerns about its implementation in more defined areas (technological sovereignty and the relationship with China).

European sovereignty and the European Union’s ability to act: protecting our openness

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It should first be noted that the European Union is not prepared to act within a world of rivalries between a leading rising power (China), an established power which rejects multi-polarity (the United States) and second-tier powers (Russia, Turkey, Iran, etc.) which are asserting themselves. In this context, Europeans must create the strategic and geopolitical contexts that are right for them, rather than aligning themselves with an American ally with differing interests, and must embark on the path of controlled strategic competition.

It is therefore important to convince France’s partners that what is strategic in Europe is first to embrace/protect our openness (internally: democracy; externally: trade, cooperation, development assistance) and build a centre of power while remaining the world’s largest democratic space (to protect our values while ensuring we do not impose them elsewhere and to uphold our interests).

However, we must take some precautions as regards terminology and methodology. It would seem more desirable to further France’s European ambitions less through stylistic effects and more through cooperative humility, preliminary consultations and public debates with concrete results. The interviews conducted by the committee showed that of the PFUE’s three priority areas, it was “Strength” which generated the most interest and approval from European partners (almost double that of “Recovery” and “Sense of Belonging”). This shows that there is strong

geopolitical demand within the EU in the context of a change of model which would benefit France, but which must nonetheless provide reassurances, including on the complementary nature of relations with NATO (which France is often accused of seeking to undermine). To this end, it is possible to work towards common defence policy decisions and to encourage the interoperability of European forces.

Furthermore, “strategic independence” already exists in the broader sense, but should be examined in more detail. Its fields are: following up on COP21, the E3 agreement on Iran, the European Defence Fund reserved for Europeans, projects to regulate the digital sector, the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism, work on quantum R&D and the international role of the Euro.

Another aspect of European strength is its European Neighbourhood Policy, which should be reformed in light of the rise of second-tier powers (Turkey, Iran, Russia, Israel) and third-tier powers (Algeria, Egypt) which are direct players in new geopolitical configurations.

The concept of a European Neighbourhood Policy has been firmly established in the mind map of European institutions. As such, the EU brings together exclusively bilateral policies, due to the lack of regional cooperation among the relevant countries. Action plans draw up political and economic reform programmes comprising short- or medium-term priorities of between three and five years. This approach, however, has many limitations and mixed results. Only feedback on the limitations of influence and the concrete restrictions of the European approach would enable a more realistic approach to be built, first in a smaller format (5+5) based on bilateral political dialogue in this format, conducted with full equality. In this regard, the term “partnership” or “contract” would seem preferable to “neighbourhood”.

Between the country of origin and destination, “contractual mobility” should be organized: a mobility pack is signed with States and the implementation is negotiated with local authorities. Since the desire to learn is one of the main motivating factors of mobility, formats inspired by the success of Erasmus could be considered, such as proposing a Euro-African student mobility programme.

Implementing European “strength” by responding to the challenges of technological sovereignty and the relationship with China

In a world with scarce resources and trade dependent on domestic interests, there is a need in Europe to reinvest in technology. The EU and its Member States’ resilience to shocks depends on this. But for Europe to become a technological power capable of maintaining its interests in today’s world, it must provide itself with the means to do so (including in

terms of public procurement and investments) and encourage the development of necessary ecosystems by including the private sector (e.g. as regards venture capital, which is underdeveloped in the EU). In exchange, this requires overcoming national industrial policies to define a European strategy.

The PFUE must promote this project both internally (to explain that French independence will not be undermined) and at European level (to show that this is not a question of promoting purely French interests).

In the short term, certain hot topics have a strong technological component: contributing to the fight against the pandemic and vaccination on a global scale (necessary to lift production constraints which could hinder the global recovery), responding urgently to the energy crisis and shortages in technological components (which impact the daily lives of European citizens and companies and can also slow the recovery), responding to aggressive strategies from State and quasi-State actors (cyber-attacks, acquisition and transfer of European technologies), regulating major technology companies (need for increased cooperation between the authorities responsible for competition, financial stability, taxation, security and data protection; defining the scope of activities which should be located in European subsidiaries).

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In the medium- to long-term, the goal should be to bring the European Union back to the digital technology frontier and make it a digital actor (e.g. by advancing the European Digital Identity project and multi-country projects announced by the Commission), to push the border of green technologies, to increase European ambitions as regards defence and security technology, to strengthen public and private European financing of innovation, and to identify and remedy European technological dependencies.

Existing policies should also be adapted to these new challenges. Re-examining the competition policy set out by the Commission can play an important role, including in response to the challenges of GAFAs and the practices of hidden subsidies to third countries and technology acquisitions which are incompatible with fair competition, or by indicating openness to forming consortia so as to create first-rate European technological capabilities in fields where Europe is non-existent or lagging behind (which would be pro-competition). As regards industrial policy, it would be important to continuously monitor the resilience and technological dependencies of European value chains at global level, with a view to attracting industry's attention to existing vulnerabilities and to encourage it to resolve this problem. A European share acquisition tool could be considered to go beyond the European Investment Bank's current powers, e.g. in the form of a joint venture from national shareholding agencies. Finally, as regards trade

policy, safeguard clauses could be included in trade agreements signed by the EU so that technological commitments are met.

As regards the relationship with China more specifically, technology transfers from Europe to China (via joint ventures) or directly within Europe (via business acquisitions) are continuing, even though in many areas China has now surpassed Europe in terms of technology. As it is accustomed to doing, China is taking advantage of the EU's lack of unity to seek bilateral agreements with individual Member States.

On this issue, the French Presidency should, in the short term, help create integrated European screening of foreign investments on the grounds of public security in strategic sectors, moving beyond the current coordination permitted under Regulation 2019/452. Furthermore, Chinese businesses should be encouraged to find a European industrial partner enabling them to set up in Europe with European production capacities. Finally, the PFUE should support the Commission's proposal to regulate foreign subsidies which distort competition by carefully monitoring the tool's effectiveness and possible ways to bypass it.

3. Europe and Europeans ("Sense of Belonging")

Both the success of the recovery and the credibility of European strength are directly linked to the ability of Member States to stand together. Such solidarity, however, is only politically tenable if the people of Europe shift from a self-interested stance to a broader stance, which requires a sense of belonging to the European space. It is for this reason that thirdly, the committee has examined the issue of belonging, and beyond its nature, of what it can be comprised.

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Sense of belonging or active identification?

The importance of narrative, cultural and civic dimensions

In the past, European integration was achieved by overcoming secular conflicts by focusing on an economic project. The current situation requires a more political and cultural stage: it is important to build a "overarching narrative" which today seems necessary.

This common narrative must take into account the need for solidarity, which was highlighted by the COVID-19 crisis. Brexit and the East/West divides regarding the rule of law showed both the reversibility and the fragility of European integration. Above all it is with solidarity that a sense of European belonging can be developed, without excluding outlying territories.

When envisaging a European sense of belonging, work should first focus on multilingualism. Extensive, early and continuous language learning should be promoted using the pioneering model of the European schools of Berlin and Luxembourg, which are decidedly more ambitious than the

“European classes” of France. In these European schools from grade one to twelve, students are divided into groups in which 50% are native speakers of a partner language and 50% are native speakers of the language of the country. Along the same lines, teachers’ mobility should be facilitated through by recognizing European educational paths.

As Europe is often conceived as a hostile space, an avatar of globalization to which adherence means betraying one’s roots in some way, it is important to bring Europe to the heart of territories. In this regard, we could create a Europa Cafés network in “outlying” territories, modelled after the 1,000 cafés initiative to revitalize rural regions, launched by the Groupe d’Économie Solidaire SOS with support from the French government.

In addition to this specific example, a great deal needs to be done so that European mobility does not become a privilege reserved only for the wealthiest people. One idea would be to design a “Grand Tour” of Europe open to young people and modelled after the initiation journey for young people during the Age of Enlightenment. Its cost will be based on income so as not to exclude those from lower-income households. Also the Erasmus Programme is rightly considered to be one of Europe’s greatest successes, and it is important to ensure that it benefits as many people as possible. A first idea would be to communicate on the inspiring educational paths that can serve as role models for students who are not necessarily drawn to this type of educational opportunity.

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European identity cannot overlook the delimitation of the space in which one identifies themselves or a set of shared political values around which consensus is possible.

The delimitation of European borders should be given serious consideration. External borders are established so as to identify an “inside” and an “outside” so that a sense of belonging can be created in the form of solidarity particularly when it comes to security. It perhaps comes down to this basic question: if a Member State were threatened, would the others be willing to sacrifice their own people to provide assistance? Clarifying relations with Turkey (for which the accession process is theoretically still under way) and Russia seems to be a major challenge. The delimitation of European Union borders relates to the very nature of the European project: is it a matter of a market extendible at will or a political union? It does not truly seem possible to create a sense of belonging unless the latter is true.

Determining a specific political space requires a consensus on what the basis of this specificity is. In this regard, a first challenge concerns questions related to the rule of law, something which cannot be ignored when it comes to a sense of belonging according to the people interviewed by the Committee. Thirty years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, a new East/West divide seems to have emerged regarding the Union’s political values.

People are challenging European political values all across the European Union, in different and specific ways depending on the Member State they come from. However, the ability to resist this widespread phenomenon varies according to several divides, including the one between the East and the West. It is essential that a political strategy be added to the decisive battle being waged by the Court of Justice, which should absolutely be supported

Moreover, a democratic community of citizens presupposes a sense of belonging to a political community as a space of choice. Although Europeans are regularly called upon to express themselves within the framework of national political competition, for the most part, they still do not have a genuine possibility of political alternation at the supranational level. In this context, a clearly, more legitimate and more responsible political debate should be created to resolve the European “executive branch deficit” and strengthen the Union’s democratic legitimacy.

To do so, three paths should be developed: supporting the *Spitzenkandidaten* system for electing the President of the Commission, reforming the electoral system for the European Parliament by introducing a number of transnational deputies and governing the European Union via a European term-of-office agreement between the European Parliament, Commission and European Council.

Who are we? What is the European way of life?

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Beyond the important theoretical debate on values, it should not be forgotten that a sense of belonging is also based on adherence to tangible actions that could be based on strong support among European peoples and corresponding to common collective preferences.

A first series of this type of action could concern the energy transition. Climate change must be a political priority for Europeans. In March and April 2021, amid the third COVID-19 wave, Europeans considered climate change to be the most serious problem the world must address (18%), slightly ahead of the spread of infectious diseases (17%).

A second series of actions could be based on protecting biodiversity. Protecting the oceans – and to be more comprehensive, the hydrosphere (therefore all components of the water cycle, from oceans to seas and rivers) – is not simply a major environmental challenge but also a crucial diplomatic issue. In this context, the French Presidency could focus on several existing European initiatives, including flagship projects aiming at the protection and regeneration of emblematic European ecosystems. Several places may be envisaged including the Danube (which would present the advantage of connecting “Western Europe” and “Eastern Europe” to bridge this divide) or the Mediterranean Sea (focusing on the major problem of pollution).

A third series of actions could focus on agriculture and food security. In just a few years, Europe has become self-sufficient for a majority of basic products and has joined the group of agro-exporting entities. In this regard, the agricultural sector could be a driving force of innovation, industrialization and development of renewables in Europe. The consequences of Brexit should be monitored in this field.

When it comes to European identity and border management, a last issue seems crucial: the future of the Schengen Area and the management of migration issues. The COVID-19 public health crisis exacerbated the situation by upsetting the paradigm on which the entire construction of the Schengen Area was designed. According to which, movement is the rule and control the exception. As a result, movement between States is the rule and access to a territory can only be refused if a person or group of people pose a threat to law and order. With the public health crisis, the opposite happened. Crossing borders was generally prohibited, only certain categories of people were authorized to do so. Basically, Schengen is not doing well and measures should be taken to improve the way it functions.

For this to happen, legislative amendments could be made, particularly regarding the issue of controls introduced to address terrorist threats which should be better regulated in terms of duration and proportionality, and regarding the Dublin Regulation, whose limits could be seen in the crisis of 2015. The philosophy should be changed by defining a fairer system of distribution taking into account individual situations and not solely focusing on the European Union entry State.

Moreover, there should be more rigorous evaluation of the enforcement of rules in order to ensure that mutual trust is well placed. There should be greater transparency vis-à-vis the European Parliament, as well as a more proactive role of the Commission in the monitoring of Member States' action. Generally, more political steering of the Schengen Area is necessary.

4. France and Germany: a crucial condition but not sufficient for taking action. France and Italy's potential resources

France and Germany's alignment of views seems to be an absolutely essential condition for France's ambitions of its Presidency of the Council of the European Union to be realized. But it is important not to limit France's sources of support to the French-German partnership alone: France's relationship with Italy, currently less established, should also be developed.

Essential joint strategies in French-German cooperation

The campaign for the Federal German elections of September 2021 was conducted under unusually tense circumstances, against a backdrop of attacks against certain candidates, claims of foreign powers' influence and unexpected public health and climate issues.

The German campaign therefore exacerbated parties' divisions on the principle of the European Reconstruction Fund and on the possibility of making the capacity for joint debt permanent, after it was introduced during the COVID-19 crisis. For Angela Merkel, implementing this joint instrument was a one-off solution for dealing with the economic consequences of the crisis, without the intention of it being used beyond the period envisaged by the Member States.

During the campaign, the SPD candidate and future winner, Olaf Scholz – the Chancellor's former Minister of Finance and negotiator of the European recovery fund – stressed the structural nature of this new instrument, which he believed initiated a broader discussion on the European fiscal and budgetary capacity. Conversely, during the campaign certain members of the German right equated the Reconstruction Fund with the capacity for joint debt, raising the fear shared by many Germans that European debt would eventually be pooled. Ahead of the French Presidency of the Council of the European Union, it continues to be important to make a distinction between investment issues and the capacity for joint debt to hopefully move past Germany's polarizing internal debate.

Themes to which German policymakers were fundamentally opposed in the past, may now be discussed, particularly regarding the future of the Euro Area, its geopolitical impact at global level and its operational implications such as the expansion of the capital market or the banking Union. This evolving debate, accelerated by the COVID-19 crisis, could also prompt the new German Government to rethink strategic relations with certain foreign powers such as China. Although German industrial interests continue to prevail, the election campaign sparked changes in certain actors' discourse in Germany, for example regarding 5G. From a geopolitical point of view, the presence of the Greens in the Government could also make it possible to develop a strategic European approach when it comes to external action for the climate.

However, two issues could be sticking points for the liberals of the FDP who are also part of the current government coalition: the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism and making the capacity for joint debt a permanent instrument at European Union level. With regard to these two points, an argument based on the notions of investment and competitiveness could avoid the initial oppositions – noting that for the Greens, investments made in the ecological transition reduce the risk of future debt, which could lead

the other parties to accept the idea of a deduction of these investments in structural deficits accounts. A refocusing of the German economy on the internal market would therefore require significant investments in infrastructures (digital technology, research and education) of other Member States, in order to eliminate excessive divergences which in the medium term are disadvantageous for German companies.

Lastly, the global geopolitical context, marked by the crisis of Australian submarines and the withdrawal of Americans from Afghanistan, could generate fresh discussions in Germany on European defence and arms capability. Beyond bilateral projects that could be completed over the short term, such as the Future Combat Air System (FCAS), the current context may be a window of opportunity for France to involve its German partner in enhanced defence cooperation projects, which would help resolve the sticking points on specific issues noted in the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) at 27.

The relationship with Germany thus has potential but problems must be handled methodically and in advance.

*France and Italy: between asymmetry and proximity,
a fundamental pillar of geopolitical Europe*

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Although it will be crucial for the French Presidency to take the German political context into consideration, it would be harmful to reduce European cooperation to the Franco-German couple alone. It would thus be advisable to focus on another special bilateral European relationship to France: the French-Italian partnership. Unlike France and Germany's relationship, the French-Italian partnership is less structured. Rather than focusing on existing tangible projects, the following developments pose a new approach building on the Quirinal Treaty recently signed between the two countries.

With amazing continuity, the French-Italian dimension seems to have made its mark in European history. Today the two States have been shaped by similar political models and have comparable economic dimensions. They have experienced similar social crises, trajectories and feeling of decline.

This proximity which seems so evident actually points to a paradox. Is it possible to truly affirm that European integration could have a French-Italian dimension similar to France and Germany's relationship in today's context? In the last five years, the relationship between the two countries has been extremely volatile. Mutual distrust and a profound lack of understanding have resulted in dramatic breaks, with the culmination being undoubtedly the recall of the French ambassador in Rome to Paris on 7 February 2019, a first in the recent history of EU founding countries. Since this diplomatic incident, President Emmanuel Macron and his counterpart, Sergio

Mattarella, have stepped up rapprochement efforts, notably with a series of bilateral meetings (in Chambord in May 2019, in Naples in February 2020, for the 35th French-Italian Summit). This series of meetings was conducted in a format of a summit of the two States and structured by the adoption of a bilateral treaty called the Quirinal Treaty. The choice of the Quirinal Palace in Rome, the residence of the President of the Italian Republic since 1948, is an explicit reference to the Élysée Treaty, signed in Paris in 1963, at a crucial moment of France and Germany's rapprochement.

Through its institutions, networks and socialization processes, the French-Germany relationship continues to play a driving role. When it comes to the French-Italian situation, the difficulty establishing points of convergence by defining stable frameworks for negotiating the divergence has produced a paradoxically asymmetric and deeply unstable relationship. The fact that the relationship is not clearly defined may explain the frustration vis-à-vis France noted in the Italian political debate and measured by the opinion polls.

Although France and Italy's relationship is profoundly characterized by asymmetry, it has not benefitted from a continuous institutionalization process based on tangible elements through which spaces and initiatives to achieve socialization and compromise could be developed. This is at the core of the paradox of proximity and the two pitfalls it has generated. First, proximity can accentuate differences, by creating particularly divergent geopolitical representations based on common elements. Second, more basically speaking, proximity creates the impression of immediacy and facility: the relationship is neglected, and whatever is done spontaneously seems sufficient.

France and Italy's relationship is still in need of a common appropriate infrastructure to correct this asymmetry and the basic misunderstandings that render it dysfunctional and intensify the counterproductive divergence processes. The Quirinal Treaty must be understood as an element triggering a new momentum. This rapprochement is not superficial, it should not be envisaged in the discourse of Latin or cultural proximity. The scope of the European political project will depend on the solidity of its pillars, of which the French-Italian axis is absolutely key.

5. The French Presidency of the European Union: an opportunity for Europe to become better rooted in France

To conclude, the Committee completed its discussions on a more national issue, that of the reception of the European project in France. It first focused on relations that the French people have with the European Union then made proposals on the best way to encourage French people's re-ownership of Europe.

French people's relationship with the European Union: between distrust and ambivalence

French people are divided between distrust and ambivalence when it comes to the European Union. Today, although 57% of French people surveyed stated that they have remained attached to the European Union (which illustrates the fact that there is not widespread Europhobia in the country), 49% expressed distrust of the European Union (+ 6 percentage points compared with the European average), constituting one of the highest levels of Euroscepticism in the European Union.

Moreover, distrust vis-à-vis the European Union grew by nearly 30 points between 2007 and 2019. Although during the COVID-19 pandemic there seemed to be a slight improvement at European level, as Europeans' trust in the European Union and its image improved reaching their highest levels since 2009, this was not the case in France. French people's distrust of the European Union remained very high (49% do not trust the European Union compared with 39% who do) while European averages are 43% and 49% respectively according to the Eurobarometer.

However, this distrust is not a monolithic block. It is possible to identify an initial characteristic feature of French people's ambivalent attitude towards Europe: support for the European Union is greater on a more diffuse level (while 57% of French people are attached to Europe, 65% think that it is not "effective" against 49% for total public opinion in Member States).

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Four groups of attitudes towards the European Union according to position and intensity can be identified. French people can be categorized as follows: 37% belong to the first group (quite positive Europeans), 43% of the second group (quite negative Europeans), 5% to the third group (the most positive Europeans) and 15% to the last group (the most negative Europeans). In the rest of Europe, there are twice as many with the most positive attitudes, and two times fewer with the most negative views.

Generally, misconceptions on how the European Union functions are a major driver of French citizens' distrust of Europe (France ranks last among the 27, and almost everyone agrees on this: positive, ambivalent and negative).

How can French people's re-ownership of Europe be encouraged?

A first issue concerns the mobility and education about European issues. There are a number of social and territorial inequalities and divides regarding European issues and mobility. Consequently, there should be a strong focus on educational issues and particularly those of European and international mobility. With this in mind, the issue of acquisition of knowledge, and hence that of education, are crucial, not to use Europhilia for political

ends but simply to raise awareness about everything France has undertaken since 1950 in this reconciliation project.

European mobility remains unrealistic for certain categories of the population because, despite the undeniable success of the Erasmus programme, the opportunity that it represents essentially is reserved for the population that is the most open to globalization. Only 33% of people aged 17 to 23 have been encouraged by their families to study abroad and are concentrated in Paris and in urban areas. These obstacles to mobility are material but also psychological: the very idea of leaving is more difficult to imagine if there is a feeling of loyalty to one's region, interpreted in such a way that European mobility is perceived as a betrayal of one's origins. Young people in France tend to be divided into "Anywheres" and "Somewheres", to use the distinction made in an essay by the British journalist and author, David Goodhart.

The European project is too absent from school courses for this feeling to be offset. In this regard, a real European dimension is lacking in History, Geography and Civic Education courses. A European vision of secondary education should be added to the initiatives already mentioned in the President's Sorbonne speech on higher education.

In addition to Europeanizing curricula (currently concentrated at the local/national level first and global level, second), there should be more teaching of European foreign languages and a greater opening of European political mobility programmes to social classes.

Moreover, if French people are to re-own Europe, better information must be provided on European issues. There is a significant lack of knowledge about European action which can be attributed, paradoxically, to a surplus of information. The problem is not so much that information does not exist but rather that it is limited to institutional issues that are not very attractive and communicated through channels that are not very accessible. Given this fact, it is important to change from institutional communication to strictly political information on European issues, with the French Presidency being an excellent place to start. However, in addition to a short-term impact, a momentum must be launched which goes beyond the period of the Presidency highlighting the existing and little known channels of information.

To go beyond mere institutional information, it is important to use TV and radio channels and networks to a greater extent, which are more familiar to the general public and less demanding in terms of effort. The means for providing information which require a proactive approach are not very effective because French people want information to come to them and not the other way around. It is also a good way to project a Europe that many have considered to be too ethereal and without faces.

It is also important to begin with citizens' perception. It is therefore necessary to speak in the name of the European Union and not a European institution in particular and stress the role that citizens can play. The information communicated must not be purely technical: European issues must be re-connected to symbolic and emotional dimensions. Since there is no real European political space, local and national powers and media must take on that role.

Another issue is making the European Union's local achievements more visible. The actions of proximity undertaken by the European Union remain too confidential or limited to numbers without a connection to tangible actions. From localism of regional media to the fact that the European Union's role is becoming invisible, limited to a footnote, there are many obstacles, but which are not impossible to overcome.

Lastly, the debate on France's relationship with Europe also has an institutional dimension. The President's constitutional prerogative regarding external action generates a lack of connection which can negatively impact France's legislative power and European issues. This is especially disputable as European issues pertain to national policy as well as external action. Without upsetting the constitutional equilibrium, the executive branch would gain more transparency and effectiveness if it would communicate more with the Parliament and by involving it in Council affairs. An annual report on France's European policy could be communicated to the Parliament and negotiations in the Council could make use of parliamentary mandates.

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The extent of Parliament's involvement in the European legislative process is below the European average because of the French political culture. The Parliament, often discovering directives to be transposed at the end of the process and lacking information, has trouble fulfilling its European role. Yet, France's legislative branch is proactive on these issues, as can be seen in the example of the Senate's strong involvement in monitoring the principle of subsidiarity at European level. This shows that there is a parliamentary demand for involvement.

Lastly, to establish a more direct connection to European issues for French people, the President could deliver an annual speech before Congress on the state of European policy. The timing of this speech could be aligned with the speech on the state of the Union given by the President of the European Commission in order to shine more light on this important event in European political life.

Conclusion

To conclude, the Committee's work has aimed to be as comprehensive as possible within the limit of the competencies of its members. It is important to recall that this Committee is only one of the multiple sources which should inspire policymakers. It is therefore important to conclude this report with a call for humility when it comes to French action in European matters: the challenge is to be ambitious without succumbing to the temptation of considering Europe as a "bigger France". In this regard, many issues covered by the Committee's work can only be envisaged over the long term and consequently, must be coordinated with future presidencies.

France will not hold the Presidency of the Council of the European Union again until 2035. The French authorities should therefore take advantage of the few months of their Presidency in 2022 to initiate long-term projects. Their results would enable Europe to become a sovereign power and its citizens to find their place in a societal model uniting Europeans around common collective preferences. To make this happen, France should build a new positive narrative with its European partners. As the founding fathers foresaw in the 1950s, tangible achievements remain the condition for the advent of de facto solidarity among Member States. But this solidarity, so dear to Jacques Delors, will remain incomplete as long as it cannot be supplemented by a common identification with the Union.

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Although they have different national histories and traditions, European Union countries share common values, principles and interests that differentiates them from other countries and regions in the world, including China, Russia or even the United States. If the European Union shows that it can implement its decisions and policies in line with its principles, it will better convince French and European people of its utility and its legitimacy in dealing with and overcoming the world's current challenges. These challenges require a stronger and more inclusive union of Europeans if they want to make their model "competitive" in the global competition of models of political, economic, social and environmental models. It is the condition for giving back to Europeans their self-confidence, pride, ambition and sense of freedom.