

## Member States' Momentum to Make Europe a Stronger Global Actor?

No. 57 August 2018

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In numerous communications of the past years, the European Union (EU) has underlined that European integration has been guaranteeing peace among its member states ever since the launch of the European Coal and Steel Community. However, despite this continuing achievement and its recognition by awarding the Nobel Peace Prize to the EU in 2012, one cannot ignore that already just outside this Union of currently 28 states, turmoil, conflict and war continue to be harsh realities of today's times. In light of these realities, Jean-Claude Juncker defined making Europe a stronger global actor as one of his ten working priorities as President of the European Commission. Considering Europe mainly as a "soft power" in security and defence issues, Juncker highlighted that "even the strongest soft powers cannot make do in the long run without at least some integrated defence capacities".<sup>1</sup>

By doing so, Juncker prepared the way for what could be labelled a realist turn in the way the Union conceives foreign policy and international relations. Such an interpretation seems justified with regard to a stronger focus on security and stability in recently elaborated strategic guiding documents such as the – second – review of the European Neighbourhood Policy in late 2015 or the EU Global Strategy of mid-2016. With realism coming more to the fore and supplementing the conception of the EU as a normative power,<sup>2</sup> the European Union's approach becomes more similar to the ways states – including a considerable number of member states – traditionally approach foreign policy.

In addition, recent ambiguities in transatlantic relations, linked mainly to the "America first" approach of the Trump administration in Washington D.C.,<sup>3</sup> and uncertainties in Europe's cumulated foreign policy, security and defence capacities, linked to the potential implications of the United Kingdom leaving the Union,<sup>4</sup> have again highlighted that foreign policy remains dominated by states. On the EU level, this fact has constantly been acknowledged by adhering to consensual decision making in the Union's Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). Hence, despite all well-intentioned and coordinated input from the Commission and the High Representative, any substantial impulse to revamp Europe's actorness on the international stage depends not only on the willingness in member states' capitals but also on initiatives from governments. Whereas these have often been lukewarm in the past, member states have in recent months taken concrete steps forward to increase capacities in security and defence, manifested by for example the activation of the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) mechanism of the Treaty on European Union in December 2017. Combined with French President Emmanuel Macron's "Initiative Europe" with his central idea of a "Europe qui protège" ("Europe that protects"), first outlined in a speech held at Sorbonne University in September 2017 and substantiated ever since, Europe might be shifting gears in order to truly become a stronger global actor.

Much will depend on the next months prior to the elections to the European Parliament. Macron is determined to deliver on his European ambitions and appears convinced of his analysis that in today's world, Europeans can only act sovereignly, if they act together – and not if they stick to a formal understanding of state sovereignty. This idea of what could be called factual sovereignty, reappears in numerous speeches and initiatives of the French President and – despite being counter-intuitive to the tradition of “grandeur” in French foreign policy – is well compatible with the traditional French understanding of Europe as a power multiplier. It therefore comes unsurprisingly, that Macron actually made more references to Europe than to France when addressing French ambassadors at their annual meeting in Paris on 27 August 2018.<sup>5</sup>

One of the central deductions of Macron's reasoning concerns the international order by and large: With post World War II multilateralism currently being in crisis and particularly the United States (US) “turning it's back on this common history”, it is up to Europe and up to France, to uphold and promote non-hegemonic multilateral cooperation as a pacifying framework to respond to the challenges of today and tomorrow. As hitherto existing alliances seem weakened, the construction of new alliances should be sought and even “alliances of circumstance” should be accepted, a terminology strongly mirroring the former US vocabulary of “coalitions of the willing”.

Within Europe, this multilateral paradigm translates into Macron's ambition to build up “strategic autonomy” for Europe, implying not only to think along traditional lines and alliances, but to actively and constructively engage with all Europeans, including Russia. Despite continuing differences, divisions and disputes, particularly when it comes to the European Union's eastern flank and neighbourhood, coinciding with parts of what Russia considers its “near abroad”, Macron underlines the need of a “strategic partnership”

with Russia. Whereas the EU Global Strategy pleads for “principled pragmatism”, the way Macron intends to ensure Europe's “strategic autonomy” by actively engaging with Russia<sup>6</sup> – thereby recalling the Gaullist approach of dealing and perceiving Russia during the Cold War<sup>7</sup> – can be understood as strategic pragmatism. This goes hand in hand with the aforementioned steps to enhance European capacities in security and defence.

As a single voice and ambition, the initiatives of the French President would surely not become the game changer to boost Europe's international actorness. However, Macron's visions are resonated by other governments in Europe. This is particularly true for Germany that first lagged behind in providing a timely response to Macron's “Initiative Europe” due to the unexpectedly long process to build a coalition after parliamentary elections in September 2017. With the formation of a proper government taking up to March 2018, German Chancellor Angela Merkel has only recently been able to substantially affirm Germany's willingness to join France in advancing the European reform debate. Despite different priorities and schedules, both governments have increasingly acted in concert again, culminating inter alia in the bilateral Meseberg Declaration, elaborated in June 2018.<sup>8</sup> In addition, German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas appears to have closely followed up on Macron's analysis, deductions and even wording: In a speech delivered at the German Conference of Ambassadors on 27 August 2018, Maas calls for the construction of a “sovereign and strong Europe” and underlines, with reference to the United States, the “importance of international organisations”.<sup>9</sup>

If not coordinated, it is a noteworthy coincidence that Maas addresses ambassadors in Berlin the same day Macron holds his speech in Paris, highlighting the connectivity of debates across Europe. However, these debates will have to be substantiated to

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pass from words to deeds. Although the Commission's and High Representative's ambition to build a stronger Europe will be an invaluable asset in this endeavour, it can only be delivered by member states themselves and their ability to bridge divides that continue to exist in Europe.

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*Endnotes:*

1. Jean-Claude Juncker, *A New Start for Europe: My Agenda for Jobs, Growth, Fairness and Democratic Change*, Strasbourg 2014, [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/juncker-political-guidelines-speech\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/juncker-political-guidelines-speech_en.pdf) (accessed 30 August 2018).
2. Ian Manners, "Normative Power Europe: A Contradiction in Terms?", *Journal of Common Market Studies* 40, no. 2 (2002): 235-258.
3. Andreas Marchetti, "Trump Time: Europe must grow up", *politglott plus*, 10 November 2016, <http://politglott.eu/?p=264&lang=en> (accessed 30 August 2018).
4. Peter Round, Bastian Giegerich and Christian Mölling, *European strategic autonomy and Brexit* (London: IISS and DGAP, 2018), <https://www.iiss.org/-/media/images/comment/military-balance-blog/2018/june/european-strategic-autonomy-and-brex-it-iiss-dgap.ashx> (accessed 30 August 2018).
5. See for the following: *Présidence de la République, Discours du Président de la République à la conférence des Ambassadeurs*, Paris, 27 August 2018, <http://www.elysee.fr/declarations/article/discours-du-president-de-la-republique-a-la-conference-des-ambassadeurs/> (accessed 30 August 2018).
6. Along similar lines, Macron also proposes such a partnership with Turkey.
7. Maurice Vaïsse, *La grandeur: Politique étrangère du général de Gaulle 1958-1969* (Paris: Fayard, 1998), 264.
8. The Federal Government, *Meseberg Declaration: Renewing Europe's promises of security and prosperity*, Berlin, 19 June 2018, <https://www.bundesregierung.de/Content/EN/Pressemitteilungen/BPA/2018/2018-06-19-meseberg-declaration.html> (accessed 31 August 2018).
9. Federal Foreign Office, *Speech by Foreign Minister Heiko Maas at the opening of the 16th Ambassadors Conference at the Federal Foreign Office*, Berlin, 27 August 2018, <https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/en/newsroom/news/maas-freeland-ambassadors-conference/2130332> (accessed 31 August 2018).

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