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And he shall be called Emmanuel

Could President Macron be the saviour of Franco-German relations?

The election of Emmanuel Macron is good news not only for France, but also for Germany and German-French cooperation. This is because Macron is a convinced European who wants to take further steps towards integration, particularly when it comes to the Eurozone and defence policy. It is no secret that he expects a great deal from any co-operation with Berlin. But his clear commitment does not mean France will now partner with Germany to become the driving force behind the EU. Macron was elected not due to, but rather *despite* his positions on European policy.

The decisiveness of Sunday's result, with Macron winning a healthy 65 percent of votes against far-right Marine Le Pen, is deceptive. It obscures the fact that the presidential election was polarised to a degree almost unprecedented in recent French history. It would be mere self-delusion to interpret this victory as a vote for Europe, for liberalism, and for an enlightened cosmopolitanism. Emmanuel Macron has become president because a majority of French voters decided against the alternative – Marine Le Pen and her nationalist coalition with Nicolas Dupont-Aignan.

The effect could be seen even in the first round of voting, with many opting for a tactical vote in favour of Macron, against the serious weaknesses of candidates from traditional parties and the real prospect of extremist movements on the right and left. Only 40 percent of those that voted for him in the first round say they support his manifesto, and only nine percent believe he will keep his promises.

A vote for Macron; not for the EU

The outcome should not be seen as a vote for the European Union, as Emmanuel Macron did little to counter anti-EU sentiment during the election campaign. In Berlin, Brussels, and London he expressed adulation for the EU, whereas within France he focused mainly on the labour market, education policy, and support for enterprise.

Consequently, his voters considered European issues to be less crucial than unemployment and purchasing power. The more anti-European voices dominated, the more restrained Macron's pro-European discourse became. In France itself he presented himself as a candidate who wanted "another Europe" and stated, "I will not keep Europe as it is now". Does this mean that in 2017 a candidate needs signal his distance from Europe in order to become the president of France?

Criticism of the current course of European politics is, of course, not always tantamount to Euroscepticism. Macron has been addressing issues such as the EU directive on the posting of workers. In France the directive has become a symbol for wage dumping from Eastern Europe. Marine Le Pen is calling for it to be abolished, and President Hollande already wanted to combat its abuse. Emmanuel Macron wants to amend it, but in no way challenge the free movement of citizens within the EU. Nevertheless it is clear that anti-Europe sentiment has characterised the election campaign, with all the candidates criticising the EU to various degrees. In France, citizens show increasing dissatisfaction with the EU: today, over 25 percent feel EU membership poses more disadvantages than advantages; the corresponding figure in Germany is 14 percent. Many are mistrustful of globalisation and want guarantees of protection in social issues and domestic security.

This mood will continue to shape political discussions in France, and could limit the new president's influence on European policy. On a day-to-day basis, Macron will need to co-operate with partners who do not always share his enthusiasm for Europe. It is not yet clear whether his 'En Marche!' movement will receive a majority in Parliament in June and, if not, which coalitions will be possible for him. Whatever the outcome, the new president will need to compromise. In a country where even the traditional parties are divided on Europe, this is no small matter. Take the example of EU co-operation on asylum policy: during the election campaign, candidate Macron praised the government's policy in response to the refugee crisis. However, a quota system for housing refugees across the continent has met with such strong resistance among voters that a change of course will be difficult for Macron to pull off. As a result, Macron's preferred option is to establish EU asylum centres in countries outside the Union.

Not so fast

It is not only in European policy where Macron's hands are tied. He will also find it hard to carry out structural reforms. For one thing, any changes he seeks to make will rely on his ability to gain majority support in the National Assembly. The new president has announced his

mandate to reform part of the labour law by decree. He must first obtain authority from parliament, which even after this has the power to nullify the adopted regulations. Outside of parliament, too, Macron will face strong opposition. The unions – above all the confrontational CGT (General Confederation of Labour) – have already announced protests for the summer, which they intend to use to block the labour reforms. Many on the left are resistant to Macron: in their eyes the incarnation of neoliberalism. The rallying cry of "Neither Macron nor Le Pen" by supporters of leftist Jean-Luc Mélenchon typifies this attitude. Groups within Mélenchon's movement, "La France insoumise", threaten to mobilise against Macron. Criticism of globalisation also comes from the far-right: time and time again in the election campaign Le Pen attacked Macron as a representative of "globalisation unleashed". The National Front will make its voice heard both in the National Assembly and outside the corridors of power. And French people of all political stripes are reluctant to give in to German calls for reform.

German politicians like to imagine Emmanuel Macron at the head of a grand coalition, but given institutional and political constraints in France, this hardly seems likely. Germany should also prepare for the possibility of inconvenient demands from Paris. Macron has pledged to create a common budget and establish the post of Minister of Economy and Finance for the Eurozone, to finance future investments and provide emergency financial assistance. Such plans garner little enthusiasm in Germany, since they require financial transfers that the federal government has thus far rejected. Regardless, the two countries will need to talk. Just as Germany needs a strong France, the new French president needs the support of Germany to carry out his reforms. Only then can the EU benefit from a strong Franco-German partnership.



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