POLICY PAPER

Taking Stock on Future of the EU According to Macron: Perspective from the V4[1]

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- **Macron's success in the 2017 French presidential elections halted the upsurge of Euroscepticism throughout the continent with the clearly pro-EU candidate defeating the nationalist, proponent of French exit from the Eurozone and outspoken protectionist Marine LePen. Macron's positive campaign and optimistic vision of the EU were arguably bedrocks of his success. It was clear already throughout the campaign that Macron would bring an equally energizing and positive agenda for reform at the EU's home front and to Brussels.**

- **It did not take too long for French president to present his ideas on future of the EU's institutional framework and France's role in it. In his speech entitled "Initiative for Europe" delivered on the 26th of September 2017 at the Sorbonne University, Macron outlined his ambition to reinvigorate the Franco-German relationship and attempts for major reform of the EU. This announcement raised relevant questions of what role is there for the rest of the EU member states in general, and small members of the bloc in particular. In this context, the paper looks at Macron's initial call for the EU's institutional and policy reconfiguration and the V4's position regarding the specific policy proposals.**

Introduction

To get a better grasp of Macron's perspectives on the future of the EU, this paper uses discourse analysis as an analytical framework. This approach is useful mainly because it focuses on "understanding how language constitutes and produces the world around us".[2] Discourse mediates socially reproducible meanings, or representations of reality.[3] The reproduction of certain discourses then transforms into set of practices through which it becomes institutionalized over time. Hence, a useful way to assess common perspectives and potential flashpoints of the future relationship between France and the V4 is firstly to analyze and outline the framework and understanding of the future of the EU as perceived by Macron. Macron's political discourse, as any discourse, produces specific interpretations of reality - in this case possibilities of future institutional reforms - and depicts possible scenarios for the EU's future institutional development. This study assesses the possible overlaps between the French vision of the future of the EU's institutional framework and the visions of the V4.

Thus, the main question that this paper seeks to address is: to what extent does Macron's representation of the future of the EU, as outlined in the Sorbonne speech, overlap with that of the V4? The paper discusses the initial reactions of V4 leaders to Macron's speech, assesses what consequences his approach might have on the future of the EU and concludes by asking whether the upcoming European elections will have any effect on Macron's proposed reforms.

Vision of the European Union according to Macron

As it was seen during his presidential campaign, Macron articulated a different, rather positive perception of the European project which was in stark contrast to the rest of the candidates. Firstly, he explicitly supported advances credited to EU integration in the last few decades and argued for the further development and deepening of specific policies. Second, his refusal to run for the presidency as a candidate of neither the left nor the right brought him closer to the 'people' as established political parties were perceived as being too distant from the citizens. The notion of creating Europe for the people and winning back their trust for the European project appears quite frequently in Macron's speeches. He reiterated this idea iat the Sorbonne where he addressed concerns of the regular middle class, who were by no means champions of globalization, and argued for a "revamped social model" of the 21st century.

Before getting into the policy and reform proposals of Macron's initiative, it is useful to briefly mention his understanding of the European project in the first place. Macron conceives the EU as being built around idea(s) and not necessarily around material structures. However prestigious those structures might appear, they are not infused with values. Important is also the notion of perception, since as Macron stated: "Europe will only live through the idea that we have of it". Hence, the EU can be successful only if people conceive the EU as having a positive contribution on their lives. At the Sorbonne, sovereignty was the framework around which the whole speech was constructed. In fact, Macron used sovereignty as a defining principle towards which the EU should strive. Losing sovereignty as a nation-state had become the main concern of Eurosceptic voices lurking in members states, therefore one can read this particular construction of sovereignty as an answer to the populists and nationalists he (still) has to face. Macron infused this term with a

different, rather positive meaning. He treats it as an ideal that member states should aim for, because only a truly sovereign Europe is a strong Europe, according to him. Based upon his speech, sovereign Europe is built around six key principles/policies which the paper addresses in following section. The second part of the paper analyzes Macron's proposal to create additional EU-level agencies/institutions and what consequences this initiative might have for European administrative order. The third part assesses Macron's proposal for the EU ahead of the 2019 European Parliament elections and tries to reconcile this vision with the perspective of the V4.

Security

Since the Sorbonne speech, groundbreaking agreements in defense sector have been achieved with the signature of Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) by 25 EU member states. This defense pact unites countries willing to participate on voluntary basis and offers cooperation in a series of joint projects. In fact, rather than being a policy per se, PESCO is a structured process which should gradually deepen defense cooperation. EU foreign ministries revealed a list of 17 collaborative projects which are supposed to create PESCO's framework, covering areas of common training and exercises, several operational domains and joint and enabling capabilities. [4]

Despite this achievement, Macron expressed that the inability to work together in the field of defense hampers the EU's credibility in the world. He proposed to move beyond the PESCO framework and create a common defense budget, launch a joint intervention force and create a common doctrine for action. All of these proposals should eventually blur boundaries between the member states in defense cooperation and overcome the lack of common strategic culture.

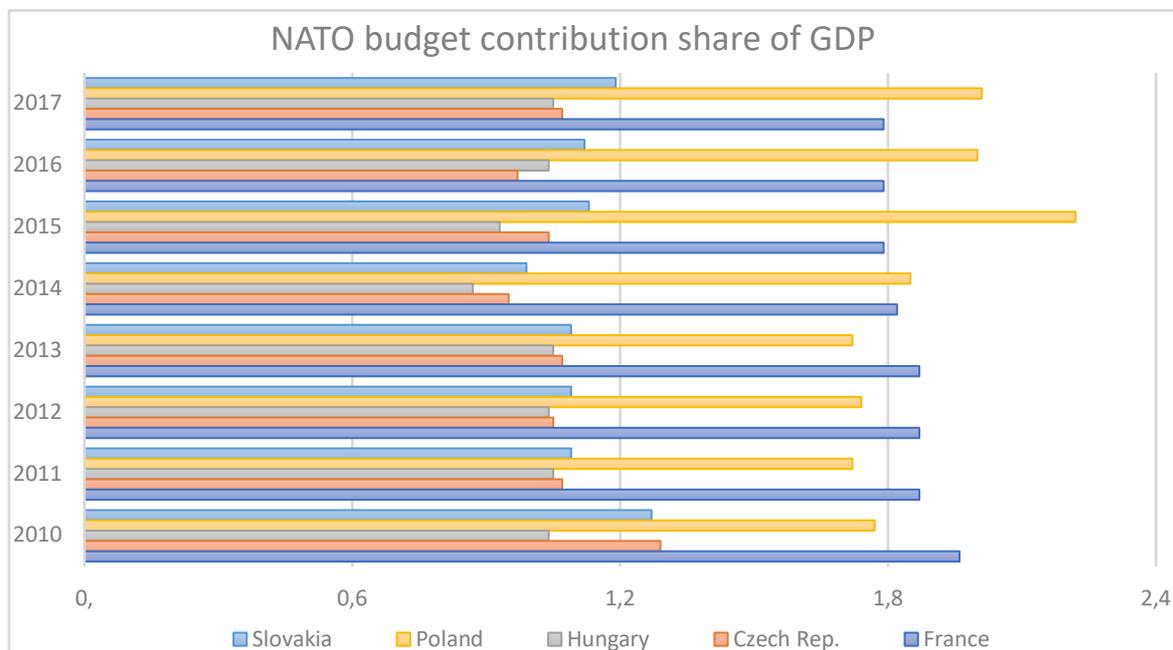Recent crises that swept through the EU (increasing Russian antagonism, migration, Brexit) created a strong impetus to come up with a more demanding plan and start to reconsider talks about launching Joint European Defense Task Forces. From the V4 ranks, Macron could find an ally most probably in Czech Republic and Hungary, countries that explicitly expressed a desire to create an EU Army to counter irregular migration and gain a stronger foothold on security issues on the continent.[5] Poland and Slovakia did not demonstrate a similar enthusiasm for the idea. The official Slovak official line that the EU army basically represents the collective armies of 28 member states, while the Polish perception on the issue is that viable security can only be achieved within the NATO framework. Warsaw's dedication to the trans-Atlantic partnership was noticeable when Poland deployed one of the largest battalions in conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq and also by being the only V4 country meeting its commitment to spend 2% of the GDP on defense in the past few years.

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[4] Since the time of wirting, an extra 17 projects have been added, bringing the total to 34. A second set of another 17 projects was adopted by the Council on 20 November 2018. (see

http://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-6393-2018-INIT/en/pdf)
[5] https://visegradpost.com/en/2016/08/29/hungary-and-czechia-want-a-european-army/

NATO budget contribution share of GDP

Legend: Slovakia, Poland, Hungary, Czech Rep., France (years 2010–2017)

Source: NATO

Controlling borders and preserving our values

Since the unprecedented inflow of refugees arriving to Europe's shores, V4 countries are vehemently claiming that the migration crisis is explicitly linked to question of security. Macron, on the other hand, has tried to ensure that the two issues are addressed separately. There is also a stark difference on how to deal with ongoing migration and handling asylum seekers. For Macron, the protection of European borders is intrinsically linked with the effective management of the migration crisis. Agreeing to common solutions based upon the principle of solidarity, improving the European Asylum Support Office operation and finding ways how to better finance integration programs in member states is for Macron a sine qua non for assuming control over borders and preserving European values.

After voters in Great Britain decided to leave the EU and Britain's government in an attempt to agree a deal on the future co-existence with the Union, debates about the indivisibility of four freedoms have come to the forefront. The President of the Commission, as well as the remaining 27 and including the V4, were strictly against cherry picking as regards basic freedoms. There is now with the migration crisis an attempt to unify asylum procedures in order to loosen the pressure from countries most hit by the influx of refugees, such as Italy and Greece. If certain number of countries decide to unify their asylum procedures, there are then relevant grounds to consider closing the border even for the EU citizens of countries which opted out from such initiative. This could essentially create a small Schengen area within the existing Schengen and hamper free movement.

Foreign Policy

With regards to foreign policy, and closely interconnected with the migration crisis, Macron called for an increased contribution to European development aid which should support and stabilize mainly countries in Mediterranean and Africa. This effort could be financed by establishing a new tax on financial transactions across the

member states.[6] In this respect, the V4 has made certain concessions from the outbreak of the migration crisis in 2015, with the starting point being the mantra repeated by representatives of the V4 countries: in order to solve the problem, we have to look at the source of the problem, meaning stabilize the countries torn by war and in need of economic help. For that reason, the V4 together contributed to the EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa EUR 35mil.[7] However, it is questionable whether this payment is sufficient and could contribute to solving the problem in the long run. This contribution by V4 countries remains low respective to their foreign aid development priorities, as the table below shows. Hence, the question remains as to whether they are ready to chip in to the fund more than this one-off payment in the future if needed, especially if their contribution to official development assistance barely reaches 0.1% of gross national income (GNI).

Official Development Assistance as a share of %GNI
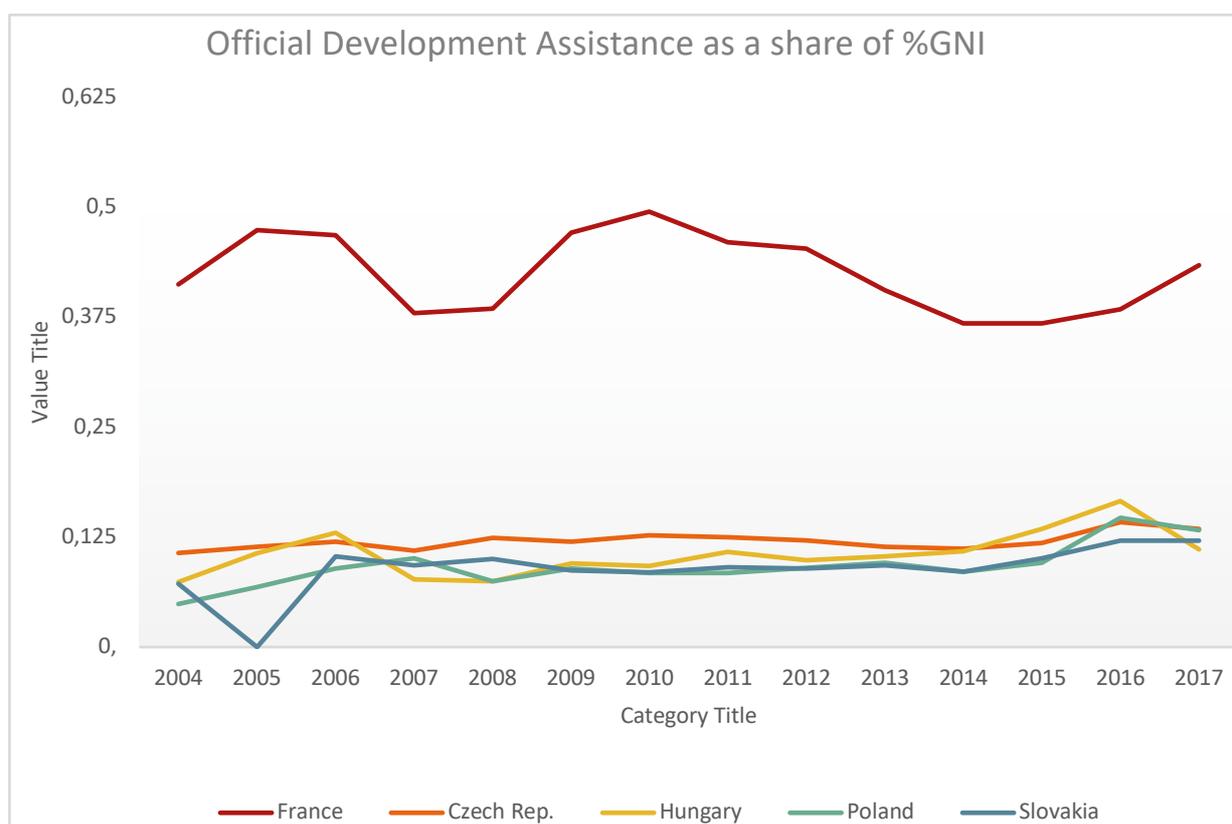
Source: OECD (2018), Net ODA (indicator). doi: 10.1787/33346549-en (Accessed on 12 June 2018)

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[6] Given that the new Commission's Multi Annual Financial Framework proposal did not consider the enactment of a new tax on financial transactions, despite voiced concerns of the European Parliament in this regard, for now, Macron cannot rely on this to be an additional source of finance for development aid.

[7] https://ec.europa.eu/trustfundforafrica/sites/euetfa/files/contributions_website_2.pdf

Ecological and Agricultural Transformation

The future transformation of member states' industries is another concern expressed by Macron. In this field, he proposed to establish a floor price on carbon accompanied by the creation of a European border carbon tax – something his predecessors initially proposed but were unable to push further through the EU institutions. Macron also called for the transformation of Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). One of the oldest EU sectoral policies, created upon French insistence in the late 1950s, has been under constant criticism ever since its inception. At the Sorbonne, Macron broke the long-lasting French taboo by questioning the CAP's effectiveness and contemplated whether this policy really delivers what it should and whether it is well suited to protect farmers from major market turbulences. Only later it became clear that what French president had in mind, was by no means lessening the financial contribution allocated to CAP (which is currently around 38% of total EU budget) but maintaining it at the current level.[8] Macron called for reduction of bureaucratization and asked to give more flexibility to Member states in organizing their regions, sectors and support for industries.

Arguably, France would find pool of allies in its attempt to maintain (or even push for an increase) the CAP budget, particularly after Britain's exit from the EU. Based on an assessment of Member States CAP budget status in 2021-2027 period following Brexit[9], Paris would find like-minded countries across the continent, particularly in V4 countries which will be CAP net beneficiary for the years to come. Additionally, the possible decentralization of CAP policies might mean flexibility in transferring money from Pillar 1 to Pillar 2, which is under national scrutiny and gives better leeway to implement own CAP national plans. However, increasing transfers between the pillars might be of concern for the European Commission, because it is harder to maintain oversight over taxpayer money. Moreover, a recent report[10] from the European Court of Auditors has showed that a hallmark of the EU's rural development system (Pillar 2) is saturated with implementation delays and ambiguous planning, which often fails to deliver tangible results.

Digital Europe

The fifth key to the EU's sovereignty is, according to Macron, keeping pace with the radical transformation of the EU's economies in the digital era. Therefore, the EU should address concerns regarding how to deal with enterprises using digital technology. For this purpose, he reiterated the initiative of taxing value created where it is produced - an idea that has been floating in the Council meetings for a certain amount of time. It seemed that Macron would be able to win over most of the member states, but since the time the EU's Commission proposal entered the pipeline, some of the initial backers, mainly Germany, have showed cold feet. The strongly export-oriented car industry decided to reevaluate consequences it might have, since the proposal is mainly aimed at US -based giant digital corporations.

According to the Commission's impact assessment[11] of the proposal for a Council directive on the common system of digital services tax on revenues resulting from the provision of certain digital services, some member states have already taken certain measures to address the taxation of digital economy in their national legislation. Most of the V4 countries have taken in this regard unilateral measures to address the issue. Hungary implemented an online advertising tax already in 2014, Slovakia adopted and enforced tax on revenues derived by intermediation through websites and online platforms in 2018, while France and Czech Republic implemented similar legislation levying access to online digital content, in 2003 (amended in 2016) and in 2012, respectively. However, all these different measures have diversified the scene of taxation, which

8   http://agriculture.gouv.fr/la-france-lespagne-le-portugal-lirlande-la-finlande-et-la-grece-sunissent-pour-defendre-le-budget-de
9 http://capreform.eu/frances-puzzling-interest-in-increasing-the-cap-budget/

10   https://g8fip1kplyr33r3krz5b97d1-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/ECA-special-report_Rural_Development_under-EMBARGO-until-Tuesday-14-November-2017-at-11H30.pdf1_.pdf
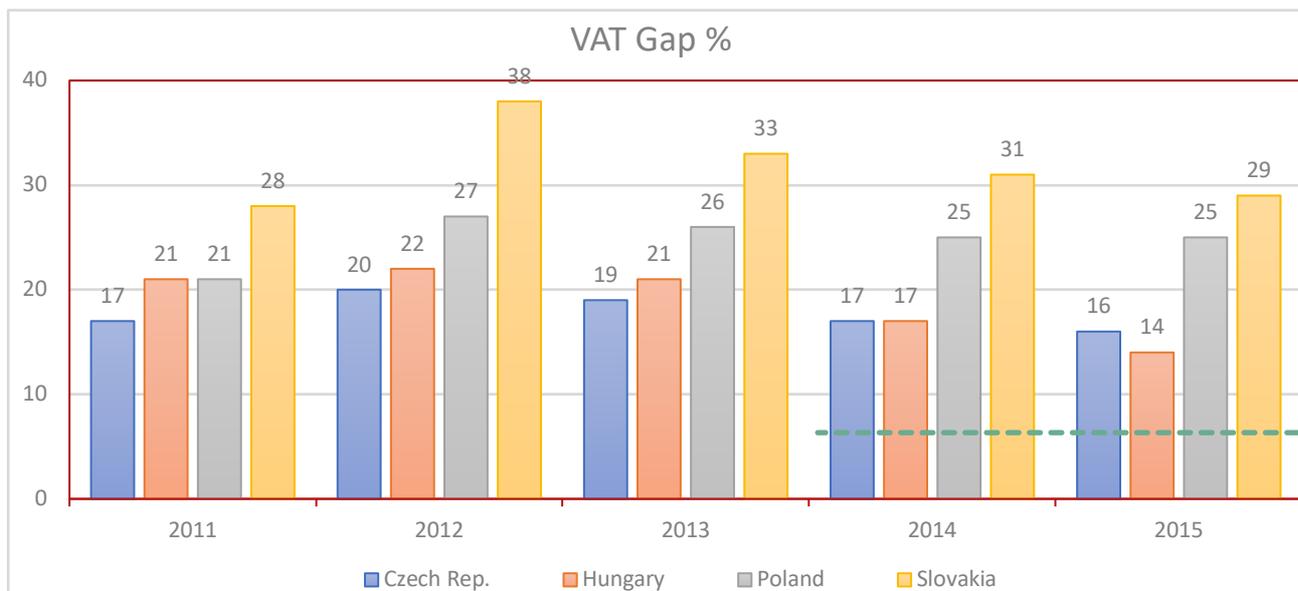11https://ec.europa.eu/taxation_customs/sites/taxation/files/fair_taxation_digital_economy_ia_21032018.pdf

might cause discrepancies in national legislation in an attempt to create common rules for the bloc.

Europe as an industrial and monetary economic power

The economic stability which the single currency has fostered is for Macron the final key to the success of the European project. The core of an integrated Europe could be created only through an economic and monetary union, which would essentially help fight unemployment in the Eurozone. This entails the convergence of national administrations and the coordination of national reforms together with economic policies and the creation of a common budget for the Eurozone. Furthermore, Macron is concerned with disparate taxation levels and different social systems across the Union. To that end, he sees the solution in harmonizing tax bases by creating common corporate tax bases (CCTB). On the issue of social equality, Macron champions the progressive and gradual convergence of the social models of member states.

Debates about creating common rules for tax bases date back to 2001, during the time when the EU launched discussions about a barrier-less Internal Market. Since then, the European Commission's working group was tasked to prepare the draft of the directive which was published in 2011. The report raised huge debates, mainly due to the uncertain impact on member states' budgets. As a result, the proposal was reconsidered and reworked. Published in 2015, the premise of the new proposal rests upon the argument that CCTB should be perceived as a tool fighting tax evasion, tax fraud and base erosion and profit shifting practices, that many member states currently face. Arguably, the Commission's tactic of labelling the proposal as anti-fraud and a tool-fighting tax evasion might find little resistance in member states, as opposition to it would demand explaining to their respective constituents at home, reasons for voting against it. Moreover, a 2017 report[12] published by the Directorate General Taxation and Customs Union shows that reducing the gap between the amount of VAT actually collected and VAT theoretically collectable could, in V4 countries, significantly increase national budget revenues (see Figure 2 below).

Green line represents EU median in 2014 and 2105. Source: DG Taxation and Custom Union.

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[12] https://ec.europa.eu/taxation_customs/sites/taxation/files/study_and_reports_on_the_vat_gap_2017.pdf

Macron's philosophical understanding of the European Union: From Ricoeur to Progressive agencification?

In order to understand the full scope of Macron's ambition in reforming the EU, one should take closer look at the philosophical principles underpinning his view of the world. This is crucial, because the ideological framework influences the articulation and reproduction of the discourse to the public. According to some observers of French politics,[13] Macron's decisions reflect his deeper philosophical understanding of politics, which were influenced by late French philosopher Paul Ricoeur. The hallmark of Ricoeur's philosophy is to "draw strength from the opposition between two conflicting viewpoints",[14] where one tries to compromise between what seem to be irreconcilable standpoints. Macron espoused this idea already the during presidential campaign, when he refused to be confined to the traditional right-left political cleavage, where traditional political parties are usually entangled in wayward ideologies. Instead, he ran as a candidate of En Marche!, a movement he founded just a year before the presidential elections. His embrace of Ricoeurean philosophy was also reflected in the Sorbonne speech, in his future of Europe speech and, in fact, in many other instances where he touched upon his visions for the future of the EU. Macron has confidence in finding compromises between those in favor of deeper integration and those concerned with surrendering national sovereignty half way by promoting communitarian solutions to intergovernmental problems. He is therefore trying, by this, to preserve member states' national sovereignty while at the same time deepening the EU integration process. From the institutional perspective, this means supporting supranational bodies while maintaining national governments' independence in decision making processes, whenever they are better equipped than Brussels to do so.

Following from above, along with concrete steps on how to proceed further in European integration, Macron has proposed also a series of new initiatives. Some of them, such as for instance the creation of a European border police force, or the European Trade Prosecutor, are more ambitious in nature and would require Treaty modifications, something that Macron, and arguably an overwhelming majority of member states, are not in mood to undertake in the current state of affairs. Taking into account the political ambience of distrust and the confrontational tone that taken over the past few meetings of European Council, one can hardly imagine that a vote for overhaul of Treaties would find any meaningful support among the EU member states.[15] Macron has nonetheless not entirely written this option off, and his discourse indicates he is willing to go down this road if necessary. However, there is another tactic that Macron could pursue: the creation of new institutional bodies within the existing Treaty framework. Such changes could take form of new institutions/agencies to be created at supranational level, in order to boost enhanced cooperation in certain policy areas without requiring any Treaty modifications. Some of the Macron's ideas even overlap with Commission's work programme and are already proposed or foreseen by the Commission, but they differ slightly in the anticipated consequences and the period of implementation. At the Sorbonne, Macron proposed the creation of none less than a European Intelligence Academy, a European Asylum Office, a European Agency for disruptive innovation, a European Labor authority countering fraud and guaranteeing food safety and food quality standards, a European Control Authority overseeing implementation of the rules governing posted workers, and to strengthen the recently created European Prosecutor's Office by extending its remit.

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[13]   https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/paul-ricoeur-the-philosopher-behind-emmanuel-macron-1.3094792;
http://www.institutmontaigne.org/en/blog/inside-macrons-mind-tint-paul-ricoeur;
[14]   https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/macron-takes-aim-european-politics/

[15] According to COSAC, 28th Bi-annual Report, Belgian, French and Romanian Parliaments together with Austrian Nationalrat (NEOS and Green Party) and Bundesrat indicated approval for the idea of possible changes to the EU Treaties.

The proposed initiatives raise questions about the role of these new EU-level administrative bodies in a reformed EU, and more importantly whether they are able to live up to Macron's anticipation of creating the EU for ordinary citizens? Looking at the problem from the administration and political science perspective, the Commission's recent enhanced autonomy and gradual consolidation contributed to the creation of EU-level administrative bodies. The proliferation of EU-level agencies complemented and extended the Commission's executive powers. Such agencies consequently create capacity for taking action and execution in sectoral policies and could be perceived as a tool resolving acute problems, devising political responses to momentary challenges or crises, or modified the institutionalized form of already existing and established organizational networks and EU committees.[16] In general, EU-level agencies are tasked with information gathering and administering technical support in order to propose and implement informed policies and decisions. Several of the currently existing EU-level agencies however, are also granted decision-making power, but they are still limited. A recent study shows that the exponential growth of EU-level agencies correlates with the increase of personnel in the Commission services. This trend demonstrates that both EU-level agencies and the Commission acquired increased administrative capacity due to strengthening of supranational executive powers.[17] Parallel to this, there is an ongoing process of creation of agencies at the national level as well. Such agencies emanate from national ministries and are well interconnected with EU-level agencies, thus being usually better informed and technically better off.

The above outlined trend is in academic literature termed 'agencification'. Following Macron's speeches, it seems that the solution he sees in solving current problems in the EU is in the progressive agencification of the European executive. This approach also fits Macron's philosophy outlined above, because similarly to the Riceourean approach which draws strength from two conflicting viewpoints, the process of agencification reconciles two opposite views of the Union. As Egeberg puts it, agencification means a "political compromise between, on the one hand, the functional need for more regulatory capacity at European level and, on the other hand, member states' unwillingness to transfer more power to the Commission"[18]. The consequences of agencification tendencies are still unclear and assessing the magnitude of change of such processes on the EU's administration and national governance is in current stage problematic. Despite that, the one problem that progressive agencification of the European Union executive brings along is the question of democratic deficit. Increasing the executive power of the European Commission and national agencies circumvents democratically elected governments and could further alienate the citizens trust in democratic procedures Although the level of administrative autonomy differs from country to country, there are relevant concerns regarding the functions and influence that agencies can project on national administrations. National agencies tend to be organizationally detached from national ministries, thus also from ministerial steering and political chain of command, which impedes their accountability and oversight over them.

Granting increasing power to a supranational executive body could have the potential to undermine the fragile balance among the EU institutions. In fact, the latent

[16] Curtin, Deirdre. "Holding (Quasi-) Autonomous EU Administrative Actors to Public Account." European Law Journal 13.4 (2007): 523-541. Egeberg, Morten, and Jarle Trondal. "Agencification of the European Union Administration: Connecting the Dots." (2016). Everson, Michelle. "Independent agencies: hierarchy beaters?." European Law Journal 1.2 (1995): 180-204. Krapohl, Sebastian. "Credible commitment in non-independent regulatory agencies: A comparative analysis of the European agencies for pharmaceuticals and foodstuffs." European Law Journal 10.5 (2004): 518-538. Martens, Maria. "Executive power in the making: the establishment of the European Chemicals Agency." The Agency Phenomenon in the European Union 42 (2012).

[17] Egeberg, Morten, et al. "The European parliament administration: organizational structure and behavioral implications." The Palgrave Handbook of the European Administrative System. Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2015. 227-245.

[18] Egeberg, Morten. "EU Administration: Center Formation and Multilevelness." The Palgrave Handbook of the European Administrative System. Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2015. 66-78.

increase of European the Commission's executive powers is worrisome to the European Parliament, which already called for strengthening the parliamentary accountability of the Commission and its respective agencies. On 30 March 2017, in the report on transparency, accountability and integrity in the EU institution, the European Parliament called for the Commission to "draw up a regulation relating to all EU agencies, under which the Parliament will be granted co-decision powers in the appointment or dismissal of directors of such agencies and a direct right to question and hear them"[19].

It is unclear what the position of the V4 and France would be on proliferation of agencies, if concerns about increasing administrative autonomy and decreasing democratic accountability of such agencies were to end up becoming a topic.

Macron's call to create transnational list of candidates in 2019 European Parliamentary elections

Macron's ambition is to also leave mark on the EU's institutional setup. With this in mind, he proposed the creation of a transnational list of candidates in European Parliament elections taking place in 2019, using the quota allocated for British MEPs departing the bloc. Furthermore, he also called for creation of transnational list of candidates, where half of the MEPs in 2024 European Parliamentary elections would be elected through an international list, ensuring the creation of truly pan-European constituency where EU citizens could vote for MEPs regardless of their nationality. The V4 echoed its opposition to the creation of such transnational list stressing that such an attempt would be in violation of the Treaties.[20] Together with the V4, Austria, and other MEPs from Sweden were quick to oppose the idea, arguing that it will rather undermine the European democracy rather than strengthening it. Eventually, the

European Parliament's vote on the issue in February 2018 foiled Macron's and President of the Commission Juncker's push for creation of a pan-European constituency via a transnational list. Nonetheless, Macron said he will continue to defend the idea in the upcoming months and years, since he considers it as the right way ti launch debates on the challenges the EU is facing. On top of that, the European Parliament's Committee on Constitutional Affairs [21] expressed concerns regarding the introduction of cross-border lists in the 2019 European Parliament elections, due to increasing legal uncertainties accompanying the process. The reasons for opposition from the V4 bloc could be interpreted as a fear of increasing the contingent of German MEPs in the European Parliament. Looking at voter turnout from the 2014 European Parliament elections, V4 countries occupy the last 6 places, making their fear of weakening their respective positions legitimate.[22] Moreover, splitting the European Parliament equally between national and pan-European MEPs could theoretically create dividing lines within the Parliament itself, where transnational MEPs might feel a greater legitimacy in deciding on what is best for the EU. Furthermore, the eventual creation of pan-European fractions within the European Parliament would implicitly indicate that the EU slowly transforms into a federation, which is imaginably antithetic to many MS' wishes.

The Election of Commission President and Spitzenkandidaten

The results of the upcoming European Parliament elections are closely intertwined with the future composition of the European Commission. The main question here is that if the process of Spitzenkandidaten would be after last elections in 2014 repeated. The European Council does not share the view of the European Parliament that there should be "automaticity" between the selection of party leader who competes in European election campaign on the one hand,

[19] http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+REPORT+A8-2017-0133+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN#top
[20] http://www.visegradgroup.eu/calendar/2018/v4-statement-on-the
[21] http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=COMPARL&reference=PE-608.038&format=PDF&language=EN&secondRef=01

[22] As the result from previous elections into European Parliament shows, these elections are not very high on the agenda in V4 countries. Political parties invest very little into campaign before the elections and general information about the relevancy of such elections among ordinary citizens remains very low.

and the nomination of the future Commission President by the European Council, on the other. During the informal meeting of the EU-27 in Brussels in February 2018, it became clear that France together with the V4 and Latvia and Portugal opposed the automatic mechanism for selecting the Commission President.

As Macron's En Marche! has yet to compete in European Parliament elections for the first time, his stance here is understandable. The current power balance within the European Parliament gives little chance to compete for the most senior official job in the EU to members of other parties than S&D or the EPP. There is an option to align with one of the major parties, but this would undermine Macron's mantra of positioning himself neither left or right. Moreover, by aligning with the EPP, his En Marche! MEPs would share fraction alliance with Victor Orban's Fidesz, for whose nationalistic policies and autocratic tendencies has Macron less than little understanding. Finding a suitable fraction in European Parliament that shares Macron's vision for the EU's future gives little prospects for optimism. An alignment with S&D would mean joining Social democrats, a group slowly losing ground across Europe. Eventually, Macron aligned with the ALDE group, despite it meaning partnering with the German FDP, which ardently opposes Macron's attempts to reform the Eurozone while embracing a liberal and pro-EU agenda.

Ironically, the V4 agrees with the French refusal of automaticity of the Spitzenkandidaten mechanism, but for a different reason. The main concern that representatives of the Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia and Poland share by repeating the process from 2014 is that the power of the European Council will be curtailed at the expense of the European Parliament, while President Macron's motivation to disagree with the automaticity of the Spitzenkandidaten mechanism is uncertain due to the result of European Parliament elections in 2019. Debates about institutional matters such as the ones currently taking place in the EU are indeed politically motivated and reflect the new power balance across the continent, but at the same time they stimulate the discussion about the source of the democratic legitimacy. The European Parliament, together with Commission President Juncker, support the Spitzenkandidaten mechanism, because in this way European citizens have a say in the future composition of the Commission while simplifying the whole process for ordinary people. On the other hand, President Macron, Chancellor Merkel, the V4 and President of the European Council, Tusk believe that appointment by heads of the governments elected within the national member states elections, through the European Council is equally democratic.

Conclusions

President's Macron's speech on future of the EU is without doubt one of the major attempts from a European politician to reinvigorate the European project. His approach to solving the current problems faced by the EU is differentiated integration, where states willing to deepen their cooperation in certain areas and sectoral policies would be free to do so. The hallmark of this approach is the progressive convergence and harmonization of member states executives and administrations towards a unitary European model. Some have pointed out that this is already taking place by the progressive agencification of the EU and national executive systems. While being in favor of such process, Macron and number of member states, do not forget to assess their space for maneuvering in order to achieve profit maximizing outcomes. The V4 is in this sense no exception. Despite having a different view on number of issues regarding the EU's future, the migration crisis has united the bloc of four Central European countries as no other issue ever before. Their persistent refusal to accept mandatory quota for allocating migrants has demonstrated that the V4 currently represents a force to be reckon with. This does nonetheless not stop V4 countries from participating in number of other initiatives with France. The question is whether the bloc's unity will persist in cases when participation in enhanced cooperation would be conditioned by accepting political compromises on home turf.

The results of the upcoming elections to the European Parliament will be crucial for the fate of Macron's reform initiatives. Rather than counting on the European Parliament, Macron would need to rely on building good

relations within the Council because of two reasons. Firstly, except for Czech ruling party ANO, ALDE unites political parties of marginal importance in domestic constituencies. Second, the MEPs obedience to the preferences of national governments is likely, mainly because they are dependent on national political parties which nominate them in the first place.

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