Opinion | 26 March 2019

Dominique Moisi: The Ambition Europe Needs

Whereas the Europe of the 1950s was desperate to ensure peace and freedom, underpinned by liberal democratic systems and values, the Europe of 2019 is electing nationalist and populist parties that are actively undermining that effort. This is not a status quo anyone – especially not Germany – should be defending, writes **Dominique Moisi**

Source: Flikr

French President Emmanuel Macron recently launched his platform for the upcoming European Parliament elections. Official reactions to his approach – outlined in a commentary published simultaneously in every European Union country – were mostly positive, with even the Euroskeptic prime minister of Hungary, Viktor Orbán and Liviu Dragnea of Romania, endorsing his agenda (for tactical reasons). But, in the chorus of approval, one notable voice was missing: Germany.

Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer (known as AKK) – the Christian Democratic Union's new leader and Angela Merkel's likely successor as Germany's chancellor – believes that Macron's vision is overly ambitious and insufficiently pragmatic. Her response to his platform implicitly challenged France's

commitment to a more centralized Europe.

First, she advocated for the EU to have a permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council – a privilege that, in Europe, only France and the United Kingdom currently enjoy. Second, she emphasized the need to "abolish anachronisms," including by having the European Parliament meet only in Brussels, rather that continuing to hold monthly sessions in Strasbourg.

But, if any anachronism is doing harm to Europe, it is Germany's commitment to the status quo. Beyond some ideas for what France could sacrifice for Europe, AKK's proposals brought nothing new to the table – certainly no ideas about what Germany could offer in return. As a German friend who played an important political role in his country in the 1990s put it to me: "There are too many ideas on the French side, and too few on the German one."

Whatever marriage of reason might have existed between France and Germany previously, it has given way to estrangement. This is a clash not just of personalities or even political imperatives, but of nostalgias: France craves the grandeur of the Charles de Gaulle era, while Germany recalls fondly the comfortable stability of the Bonn Republic.

In September 1989 – just before the fall of the Berlin Wall, when European communism had already begun to unravel – I attended a conference in Frankfurt, where I told an audience of German bankers that, within a few years, Europe, and Germany, would be reunited. Their disapproval was palpable. Even if reunification were possible – not likely, in their eyes, since the Soviet Union would never agree – why would anyone want to take risks with history, changing a policy that was working so well, at least for West Germany?

While Germany laments its loss of comfortable stability, France finds its nostalgia for grandeur being fulfilled. France cannot recapture its former glory alone. But, as a leader of the EU, it can. The key is for Europe to remain ambitious – an imperative that Germany's obsession with the status quo continues to impede.

The question, of course, is which country is backing an approach that better serves Europe as a whole. The answer is unambiguous: France.

At a time when the United States is embracing isolationism, Europe can no longer count on its most important international partner. Meanwhile, (re)emerging players, especially China and Russia, are working hard to build up their power and influence.

In her response to Macron, AKK seems to recognize the challenges this implies. She asks, for example, "do we want our future to be determined by the strategic decisions of China or the United States, or do we want to play an active role in shaping the rules of future global coexistence?"

What AKK fails to recognize is that an ambitious Europe has a much better chance of competing in this environment than a stagnant one. In this sense, Germany, once the star pupil in the European class, is acting like its laziest and most stubborn member.

For nearly 30 years, Europeans have been seeking a new narrative, one that is less about resisting the negative than about embodying the positive. Europe's leaders sought it in integration. By the time the EU succeeded the European Economic Community in 1993, the goal of Europe had

become to create Europeans, united by values, interests, and even to some extent, identity.

The Erasmus Programme, created in 1987, was supposed to advance this goal. At a dinner I attended in the mid-1990s, German Chancellor Helmut Kohl was enthusiastic about the plan. He believed that exchanges by young people – the sharing of ideas and cultures, along with pizza and beer – would create a generation of Europeans. They would create European families, with European children. War among them would be inconceivable.

Nearly three decades later, Europe may not be back to square one, but it is certainly regressing. Whereas the Europe of the 1950s was desperate to ensure peace and freedom, underpinned by liberal democratic systems and values, the Europe of 2019 is electing nationalist and populist parties that are actively undermining that effort. This is not a status quo anyone should be defending.

This article was published on Project Syndicate on 22 March 2019

Author

Amrita Naik Nimbalkar
Junior Economist, Global Macro
amrita.naik.nimbalkar@ing.com

Mateusz Sutowicz
Senior Economist, Poland
mateusz.sutowicz@ing.pl

Alissa Lefebre
Economist
alissa.lefebre@ing.com

Deepali Bhargava
Regional Head of Research, Asia-Pacific
Deepali.Bhargava@ing.com

Ruben Dewitte
Economist
+32495364780
ruben.dewitte@ing.com

Kinga Havasi
Economic research trainee
kinga.havasi@ing.com

Marten van Garderen
Consumer Economist, Netherlands
marten.van.garderen@ing.com

David Havrlant
Chief Economist, Czech Republic
420 770 321 486
david.havrlant@ing.com

Sander Burgers
Senior Economist, Dutch Housing
sander.burgers@ing.com

Lynn Song
Chief Economist, Greater China
lynn.song@asia.ing.com

Michiel Tukker
Senior European Rates Strategist
michiel.tukker@ing.com

Michal Rubaszek
Senior Economist, Poland
michal.rubaszek@ing.pl

This is a test author

Stefan Posea
Economist, Romania
tiberiu-stefan.posea@ing.com

Marine Leleux
Sector Strategist, Financials
marine.leleux2@ing.com

Jesse Norcross
Senior Sector Strategist, Real Estate
jesse.norcross@ing.com

Teise Stellema
Research Assistant, Energy Transition
teise.stellema@ing.com

Diederik Stadig
Sector Economist, TMT & Healthcare
diederik.stadig@ing.com

Diogo Gouveia
Sector Economist
diogo.duarte.vieira.de.gouveia@ing.com

Marine Leleux
Sector Strategist, Financials
marine.leleux2@ing.com

Ewa Manthey
Commodities Strategist
ewa.manthey@ing.com

ING Analysts

James Wilson
EM Sovereign Strategist
James.wilson@ing.com

Sophie Smith
Digital Editor
sophie.smith@ing.com

Frantisek Taborsky
EMEA FX & FI Strategist
frantisek.taborsky@ing.com

Adam Antoniak
Senior Economist, Poland
adam.antoniak@ing.pl

Min Joo Kang
Senior Economist, South Korea and Japan
min.joo.kang@asia.ing.com

Coco Zhang
ESG Research
coco.zhang@ing.com

Jan Frederik Slijkerman
Senior Sector Strategist, TMT
jan.frederik.slijkerman@ing.com

Katinka Jongkind
Senior Economist, Services and Leisure
Katinka.Jongkind@ing.com

Marina Le Blanc
Sector Strategist, Financials
Marina.Le.Blanc@ing.com

Samuel Abettan

Junior Economist
samuel.abettan@ing.com

Franziska Biehl
Senior Economist, Germany
Franziska.Marie.Biehl@ing.de

Rebecca Byrne
Senior Editor and Supervisory Analyst
rebecca.byrne@ing.com

Mirjam Bani
Sector Economist, Commercial Real Estate & Public Sector (Netherlands)
mirjam.bani@ing.com

Timothy Rahill
Credit Strategist
timothy.rahill@ing.com

Leszek Kasek
Senior Economist, Poland
leszek.kasek@ing.pl

Oleksiy Soroka, CFA
Senior High Yield Credit Strategist
oleksiy.soroka@ing.com

Antoine Bouvet
Head of European Rates Strategy
antoine.bouvet@ing.com

Jeroen van den Broek
Global Head of Sector Research
jeroen.van.den.broek@ing.com

Edse Dantuma
Senior Sector Economist, Industry and Healthcare
edse.dantuma@ing.com

Francesco Pesole
FX Strategist
francesco.pesole@ing.com

Rico Luman
Senior Sector Economist, Transport and Logistics
Rico.Luman@ing.com

Jurjen Witteveen

Sector Economist
jurjen.witteveen@ing.com

Dmitry Dolgin
Chief Economist, CIS
dmitry.dolgin@ing.de

Nicholas Mapa
Senior Economist, Philippines
nicholas.antonio.mapa@asia.ing.com

Egor Fedorov
Senior Credit Analyst
egor.fedorov@ing.com

Sebastian Franke
Consumer Economist
sebastian.franke@ing.de

Gerben Hieminga
Senior Sector Economist, Energy
gerben.hieminga@ing.com

Nadège Tillier
Head of Corporates Sector Strategy
nadege.tillier@ing.com

Charlotte de Montpellier
Senior Economist, France and Switzerland
charlotte.de.montpellier@ing.com

Laura Straeter
Behavioural Scientist
+31(0)611172684
laura.Straeter@ing.com

Valentin Tataru
Chief Economist, Romania
valentin.tataru@ing.com

James Smith
Developed Markets Economist, UK
james.smith@ing.com

Suvi Platerink Kosonen
Senior Sector Strategist, Financials
suvi.platerink-kosonen@ing.com

Thijs Geijer
Senior Sector Economist, Food & Agri
thijs.geijer@ing.com

Maurice van Sante
Senior Economist Construction & Team Lead Sectors
maurice.van.sante@ing.com

Marcel Klok
Senior Economist, Netherlands
marcel.klok@ing.com

Piotr Poplawski
Senior Economist, Poland
piotr.poplawski@ing.pl

Paolo Pizzoli
Senior Economist, Italy, Greece
paolo.pizzoli@ing.com

Marieke Blom
Chief Economist and Global Head of Research
marieke.blom@ing.com

Raoul Leering
Senior Macro Economist
raoul.leering@ing.com

Maarten Leen
Head of Global IFRS9 ME Scenarios
maarten.leen@ing.com

Maureen Schuller
Head of Financials Sector Strategy
Maureen.Schuller@ing.com

Warren Patterson
Head of Commodities Strategy
Warren.Patterson@asia.ing.com

Rafal Benecki
Chief Economist, Poland
rafal.benecki@ing.pl

Philippe Ledent
Senior Economist, Belgium, Luxembourg
philippe.ledent@ing.com

Peter Virovacz
Senior Economist, Hungary
peter.virovacz@ing.com

Inga Fechner
Senior Economist, Germany, Global Trade
inga.fechner@ing.de

Dimitry Fleming
Senior Data Analyst, Netherlands
Dimitry.Fleming@ing.com

Ciprian Dascalu
Chief Economist, Romania
+40 31 406 8990
ciprian.dascalu@ing.com

Muhammet Mercan
Chief Economist, Turkey
muhammet.mercan@ingbank.com.tr

Iris Pang
Chief Economist, Greater China
iris.pang@asia.ing.com

Sophie Freeman
Writer, Group Research
+44 20 7767 6209
Sophie.Freeman@uk.ing.com

Padhraic Garvey, CFA
Regional Head of Research, Americas
padhraic.garvey@ing.com

James Knightley
Chief International Economist, US
james.knightley@ing.com

Tim Condon
Asia Chief Economist
+65 6232-6020

Martin van Vliet
Senior Interest Rate Strategist
+31 20 563 8801
martin.van.vliet@ing.com

Karol Pogorzelski

Senior Economist, Poland
Karol.Pogorzelski@ing.pl

Carsten Brzeski
Global Head of Macro
carsten.brzeski@ing.de

Viraj Patel
Foreign Exchange Strategist
+44 20 7767 6405
viraj.patel@ing.com

Owen Thomas
Global Head of Editorial Content
+44 (0) 207 767 5331
owen.thomas@ing.com

Bert Colijn
Chief Economist, Netherlands
bert.colijn@ing.com

Peter Vanden Houte
Chief Economist, Belgium, Luxembourg, Eurozone
peter.vandenhoute@ing.com

Benjamin Schroeder
Senior Rates Strategist
benjamin.schroder@ing.com

Chris Turner
Global Head of Markets and Regional Head of Research for UK & CEE
chris.turner@ing.com

Gustavo Rangel
Chief Economist, LATAM
+1 646 424 6464
gustavo.rangel@ing.com

Carlo Cocuzzo
Economist, Digital Finance
+44 20 7767 5306
carlo.cocuzzo@ing.com