

How to read President Macron's letter to Europeans

President Macron's letter basically kicks off his EU election campaign. The main proposals are those for which progress has been slow since the speech in Sorbonne, which outlined France's European ambitions. But areas, where France's diplomatic capital has declined, don't really seem to be on the top of the agenda



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An update on the Sorbonne speech

This week, President Macron launched his EU election campaign by [writing a letter to EU citizens](#), translated into 22 languages and published in the main newspapers of most EU countries. In parallel, the Elysée palace [published a note](#) on the progress made towards the targets of his speech at the Sorbonne university in September 2017 on an explicit and ambitious European policy program.

The comparison between his letter, the 2017 ambitions and their progress so far, is interesting, to say the least. In the letter, President Macron comes back to several ideas that he has been consistently supporting since his presidential election campaign two years ago, despite the

resistance he's faced in recent years in some European capitals. These are the very points of his initial program for which the least progress have been made.

[Read President Macron's letter to all people of Europe, here on THINK](#)

Not so ambitious on Eurozone reforms

The first thing that strikes us is that the letter doesn't seem so ambitious on Eurozone reforms. Of course, this is a letter to all EU citizens, which means it has to address everyone, not only those who use the euro. But still, when someone shortens a text, the bits that don't make it are just as interesting as those that do.

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Maybe this is a sign that France has understood the hint, that after the progress made in 2018, it would be very difficult to go any further on Eurozone reforms even after the Brexit dilemma is solved. After the EU summit in June 2018 and the decisions on a Eurozone budget, the ongoing banking union progress along with the intention to see corporate tax rate converge in Germany and France, as agreed in Meseberg, this is as far as Germany will go for now on Eurozone reforms - as they are still going ahead on other things.

But a lot more daring on Schengen

However, the letter is more daring on the external front, fustigating Brexiteers, as he writes "Who, told the British people the truth about their post-Brexit future?" and Russia's influence "We should also ban the funding of European political parties by foreign powers". It also calls for "Rethinking Schengen", which is a much stronger tone, than the words used earlier on European migration policy while it is less prominent on EU defence.

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Of course, it is a reply to President Macron's populist adversaries, but again, the status note explains the tone. Apart from reinforcing Frontex - the border control agency- the EU migration policy is still lacking support among member states. If the defence is largely absent from the letter, it could be because several projects from the last speech were initiated on the defence front last year, such as the €15 billion EU Defense Fund - a 10-country EU military intervention initiative, an EU intelligence academy, an EU civilian protection force, etc.

Migration is not the only area where the Sorbonne speech ambitions have frustrated, triggering a renewal of some reform suggestions for which progress has been scarce.

The first reactions to President Macron's letter have been lukewarm. But on the national front, it will be the starting point of a merciless campaign between the same adversaries as in 2017: Mr Macron v Mrs Le Pen

The European conference is a good example: in September 2017, Mr Macron called for a large European debate which the EU Commission organised in 2018, largely online. It is as if Mr Macron is not satisfied by the follow-up, or that the French “National Debate” organised around the “yellow vest” is such a catharsis that he would like it to be repeated at the European level. The EU minimum wage, despite the progress made on the detached workers directive, is back in the letter with the idea of a European “social shield”. On the climate side, the carbon tax which was in the Sorbonne speech is giving place to a European Climate Bank.

Sorbonne 'bis' on innovation

Finally, innovation policy is also back. Where the Sorbonne speech was pleading for a 'European agency for breakthrough innovation' (one on which progress has been fairly limited), the letter is calling for an Innovation Council.

The Alstom-Siemens merger also made its way to the letter, with the President pleading for a reform of the European competition policy that could allow “*European preference in strategic industries and our public procurement, as our American and Chinese competitors, do*” - a pledge that was not explicit two years ago.

In the same vein, the Gafa tax (named after Google, Amazon and Facebook), which was also in the Sorbonne speech also found its way in the letter.

Campaigner Macron is back

It, therefore, seems that this letter is more a catalogue of possible reforms that France has been pushing for in the last two years with mild success. Its omissions are also a careful way of recognising both progress or deadlock.

It is simultaneously both a national electoral program and a declaration of intent for the rest of Europe. The first reactions to the letter have been lukewarm. That said, on the national front, it will be the starting point of a merciless campaign between the same adversaries as in 2017: Mr Macron v Mrs Le Pen.

[Read the progress report](#)