

Macron's Sorbonne Speech II

A French Negotiating Tool Dedicated to Influence Europe?

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On April 25, President Emmanuel Macron delivered his second Sorbonne speech, following on from the one he gave on September 26, 2017. Longer, richer in concrete proposals, and deploying maximum ambition for the European Union, commentators hesitate to qualify his target: is it his party's potential voters for the upcoming European elections, the European Parliament, or is it above all his European partners? We would argue here that, while the speech obviously has electoral repercussions, particularly given its high content of proposals, it is above all a speech designed to challenge the Member States, as was already the case in 2017. His proposals include the following:

- (1) **European defense and internal security:** strategic concept for European defense, European military academy, European Defense Council, Internal Security Council to make progress on managing organized crime and migration, etc.
- (2) **Economy and innovation:** European breakthrough innovation agency, inclusion of European preference for defense and space in the treaties, addition of the goal of full employment to the mandate of the European Central Bank, etc.
- (3) **Institutions and culture:** use of Arte as a European audiovisual platform, European digital majority at 15, inclusion of the voluntary termination of pregnancy in the European Charter of Fundamental Rights, etc.

Although derided by many Europeans as unrealistic, the speech will remain an instrument of negotiation between advocates of a European federal leap and supporters of the status quo, which he considers very dangerous. If we stick to the 2017 speech, almost two-thirds of his proposals have been implemented, are in the process of being implemented, or were taken up in the 2024 speech. Nearly 40% have been implemented. Even if he can't take all the credit for past implementations, Macron can hope to influence the European debate with his new or repackaged proposals, especially in defense, internal security, and culture. He should, however, be careful about his image and credibility: in Brussels, France's budgetary policies and Renaissance's polling disavowal in the European elections make Macron relatively inaudible. Nevertheless, he is probably counting on external events such as the election of Donald Trump to give him more negotiating power. Finally, should he fail to make headway, he probably believes that this speech will give him the opportunity to regain a leading role in Europe after 2027, should history prove him right. If it does not, one shall anyways remember that speech as a powerful political legacy.

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1 Back to the Sorbonne

On April 25, 2024, French President Emmanuel Macron delivered his second Sorbonne speech¹, almost seven years after his first². This speech serves both to take stock of his European action over the past seven years and to outline an agenda that he himself has announced as valid for the next ten years.

His speech was structured in three parts: one on Europe-power, endowed with institutions in the fields of defense and internal security; one on prosperous Europe, with the implementation of a new European growth model; one on humanist Europe, which, according to him, is the core of our identity and differentiates us from our American and Chinese rivals. The speech, announced back in 2017, is delivered in an electoral context, but also serves as a program for the presidential party, given the exceptional quantity of proposals.

The tone is pessimistic, with the main message being the potential bankruptcy of the European Union, faced with a Cornelian choice: make a genuine federal leap with more resources and common debts to create a European defense and economy, as Emmanuel Macron proposes in his speech, or maintain what he sees as a dangerous status quo, leading to the disintegration of a Europe with little sovereignty, torn between China and the United States.

Within this framework, this Adhoc first summarizes the main proposals of the speech (Section 2), before commenting on it by comparing it in particular with the 2017 speech (Section 3) and concluding (Section 4). The table of proposals from the 2017 and 2024 Sorbonne speeches can be found in the Appendix.

2 Speech content

2.1 A Europe of defense and internal security

So, in order to shape Europe's power, French President Emmanuel Macron first recommends drawing up a **strategic concept** designed to unite the 27 around a common European defense project. It's not hard to imagine that the Weimar format, bringing together the French, Germans and Poles, could serve as a platform for negotiating this strategic concept, the aim of which will in reality be - and this is probably the most difficult part - to define the "vital interests" of the European Union that will enable a course to be set for European defense. It should be noted that, unlike his predecessors, Macron accepts that this Europe of defense should take the form of a "European pillar of NATO". This strategic concept should be complemented by a **military academy** to train high-level officers uniformly across Europe, and a **Defense Council**, bringing together the 27 to facilitate decision-making and coordination on European defense issues. In addition, further progress has been made on the operationalization of the deployment of the 5,000-strong **Rapid Reaction Force** already envisaged. Emmanuel Macron is also calling for a new European cybersecurity and cyberdefense capability.

As far as the scope of European defense policies is concerned, Macron believes that the European Political Community could be a relevant level for joint work on these issues, although the institutions introduced earlier would not include all EPC states. Within this framework, it could, for example, be

¹ Elysée Palace, [Speech on Europe](#), 24.04.2024.

² Elysée, [Initiative pour l'Europe](#), 26.09.2017.

possible to develop **Arctic, Indo-Pacific, Latin American or African strategies** - the Middle East having, unsurprisingly, been excluded from the scope.

Lastly, he believes that European defense cannot be achieved without the adoption of an **ambitious new budget**, as proposed by Mrs. Kallas, of EUR 100 bn, in order to secure orders for the European defense industrial and technological base and enable a level of scaling up to face geopolitical threats as Europeans, whether they come from the East or the South.

With regard to the Union's internal security, Macron believes that we need to go further on immigration coordination. While he welcomes the Asylum and Migration Pact as a step forward, particularly in terms of monitoring migrants, he asserts that much more needs to be done to make non-European transit countries more accountable, and to facilitate the return of irregular immigrants with **new visa policies and conditional trade preferences**. Within the Union, the fight against migrant smuggling and organized crime must be stepped up. In this respect, an **Internal Security Council**, bringing together the public authorities of the 27 countries on a regular basis, should be set up to facilitate European decision-making and coordination on these issues.

2.2 A new European growth model

With regard to economic policies, Macron stresses - as he did in 2017 - the need to continue deepening the single market, which he sees as one of the European Union's greatest strengths. He sees the next stage of integration as involving businesses and citizens more closely in the process.

On a completely different note, Macron insists on the need to implement ambitious new European industrial policies. Rather than allowing companies to be attracted out of the region, notably to the USA thanks to the IRA, we need to promote "**made in Europe**" in strategic sectors, by investing massively in AI, space, quantum, biotechnologies and new energies (hydrogen, modular reactors and nuclear fusion). This will also involve **simplifying the IPCEIs (Important Projects of Common European Interest) to give** manufacturers greater visibility of orders over a 5 to 10-year horizon, which should facilitate their investments. In addition, Macron believes that it is essential to enshrine **European preference for defense and space in the treaties** - a "Buy European" initiative that should be combined with derogations from European competition law in these sectors to facilitate consolidation and achieve critical mass in the face of the United States and China. He also puts the idea of a "Europe of the atom" back on the table to facilitate the transition, insisting on the need for technological neutrality in the standard for decarbonized electricity. With regard to agriculture, he argues for better protection of European farmers against unfair practices, as he already did in 2017. Finally, he supports the need to better defend industrial and intellectual property, as well as to filter extra-European investments in sensitive sectors (submarine cables, telecoms, satellites).

On the subject of innovation, Macron takes up his idea of an **agency for disruptive innovation**, this time extending it to new strategic technologies where he focused on digital in 2017: quantum, new materials, semiconductors, low-energy batteries, and healthcare. In the latter field, he is even promoting the idea of a **European research and investment plan for the treatment of cancers, Alzheimer's disease, neurodegenerative, rare and orphan diseases**.

With regard to Europe's capacity to finance these investments, Macron refers to a "**common investment shock**" based on borrowing and available (ESM, CBAM) or theoretical (possible European financial transaction tax) funds. He indicates that changing the mandate of the European Central Bank to

include a full-employment objective could prove useful. Likewise, he gives a new ambition to the **Capital Markets Union**, evoking the idea of a 12-month timetable to achieve concrete progress. Lastly, he denounces the risk aversion inherent in the Basel III and Solvency II rules, and calls for their revision, to enable financial establishments to steer Europeans' savings towards riskier products.

2.3 A humanist Europe

Finally, in the third part, which contains a totally new set of proposals compared to what he was able to put forward in 2017, Macron focuses on the cultural battle at work in Europe.

With regard to the European institutions, Macron insists on the need to **reinforce the conditionality of the European budget to respect for the rule of law**. He advocates greater democratic citizen participation in Europe, through frequent consultation of citizens' panels, the introduction of European citizens' initiatives and even European referendums. Finally, although he mentions the issue only briefly, he is in favor of a revision of the Treaties on the basis of the Franco-German agreement on the transition to qualified majority voting in the fields of foreign policy and taxation.

With regard to youth and education - the focus of much attention in the 2017 speech - Macron reiterates the need to increase the number of joint European diplomas and sets a target of 15% of apprentices in European mobility by 2030.

Finally, and this is the most innovative aspect of the speech compared to the previous one, Macron develops a whole series of proposals in the field of culture: **European alliances of museums and libraries, use of Arte as a European audiovisual platform, European Culture Pass, Europe of digital majority at age 15, and finally, inclusion of Voluntary Interruption of Pregnancy in the European Charter of Fundamental Rights**.

He concludes by mentioning the issue of solidarity, with the promotion of a new European program, and biodiversity, with the emphasis on its protection.

3 Speech analysis and comparison with 2017

3.1 A speech full of proposals

The speech contains a total of 46 proposals, of which 27 - the most important - are specific. This is a similar proportion to 2017, when there were just over 40, for a similar number of precise measures (23). It is therefore true that this speech is particularly rich in proposals, while remaining in line with the French President's standards when it comes to Europe.

3.2 A speech that follows the structure of the 2017 Sorbonne speech with a few noticeable differences

Second continuity with the 2017 speech, the 2024 speech evokes the themes more or less in the same order (defense and security, economy, institutions, youth and culture) even if it sometimes focuses on different themes (industrial and technological policies, culture) than previously (ecological and digital transition). These changes reflect the times, and also reflect European successes: the current implementation of the Green Deal "evacuates" the need to add a section devoted to transition policies, as in 2017.

3.3 A maximalist discourse like the first, but more political than institutional in orientation

The quantity and variety of proposals in the 2024 speech give it a "maximalist" character, as was already the case in 2017. The aim seems to be to be exhaustive or quasi-exhaustive - he himself mentions the fact that he is leaving many institutional issues such as treaty reform or enlargement in abeyance - when it comes to European policies. What's more, the mix of specific proposals and declarations of intent illustrates, as he stated verbatim in his 2017 speech, that the aim here is above all to give a vision, without necessarily thinking about the tools that will enable it to be implemented.

Nevertheless, it is also characterized by a greater emphasis than in 2017 on political cooperation between Member States, with concrete proposals such as the European Defense or Internal Security Councils,

3.4 A speech that reiterates many of the unimplemented proposals of the first speech

The 2024 speech includes 10 proposals taken from 2017, including the idea of a common defense doctrine (strategic concept), the European Agency for Breakthrough Innovation, and transnational lists for the European elections. Macron is not compromising on the course he set in 2017. He is merely seeking to update it by focusing on the issues he considers essential (industrial policies, culture).

Nevertheless, in his 2017 speech, 16 of the 44 measures announced simply disappeared and were never implemented. Conversely, this makes a total of 28 proposals implemented, in the process of being implemented or repeated in one way or another in the 2024 speech (64%). 41% have been implemented or are in the process of being implemented. Even if we can't give all the credit to the French President, we can still concede Macron a certain influence on the direction the European Union took after his 2017 speech.

3.5 A speech that could pave the way for new developments in Europe

So, if we follow the logic of the first speech, it's a safe bet that some measures from the second will be taken up. We believe that the most feasible of the most emblematic measures are concentrated in the fields of defense (European Military Academy, Rapid Reaction Force, and European Defense Council), internal security (European Internal Security Council) and culture (Alliance of museums and libraries, use of Arte as a European audiovisual platform).

Emblematic measures in the relatively near future, but more difficult to achieve given European disagreements, are to be found in many areas: defense (strategic concept, European cybersecurity and cyberdefense capability), youth and education (fully joint European diplomas), and institutions (strengthening budget conditionality).

There are also numerous feasible but longer-term emblematic measures in defense (European "Iron Dome"), internal security (conditionality of visa and aid policies for migrant transit countries), innovation (European DARPA, medical innovation investment plan), industrial policies (revision of IPCEI, Capital Markets Union), institutions (European Citizens' Initiative, citizens' referendum), and culture (European Culture Pass, inclusion of abortion in the constitution).

Legitimately, we can also judge that certain emblematic measures have at this stage very little chance of becoming reality in the European Union. These include the Europeanization of France's nuclear deterrent, the establishment of European regional military and diplomatic strategies, the inclusion in the European treaties of European preference in the fields of defense and space, the change in the ECB's mandate, the joint public investment shock, the revision of the Basel III and Solvency II standards to encourage risk-taking by the financial sector, and finally the European digital majority set at 15 years.

In the end, the proportion of measures we consider feasible is fairly close to the proportion of 2017 measures that have been implemented, are in the process of being implemented or have been included in the 2024 speech (74% vs. 64%).

4 Conclusion: A Sorbonne Speech as a negotiating tool and a witness to history

Although derided by many Europeans as unrealistic, and because Macron is suffering from a growing lack of credibility due in part to France's budgetary policies and a polling disavowal, this speech will nonetheless remain an instrument of negotiation between supporters of a European federal leap and supporters of the status quo. What's more, if we stick to the 2017 speech, almost two-thirds of the proposals - not necessarily all invented for this speech or even of French inspiration - have been implemented, are in the process of being implemented, or were taken up in the 2024 speech. Even if he can't take all the credit for past implementations, Macron can hope to influence the European debate with his new or repackaged proposals, especially in defense, internal security, and culture. In his view, what is at stake is not the credibility of his proposals, but the acceleration of the debate on European integration in areas he considers crucial for our times.

He should, however, be concerned about his image and what his partners think if he really wants to make an impact before the end of his mandate. If the French government swings to the other side of the political spectrum in 2027, and even if it doesn't, the likelihood of seeing this European vision fulfilled once he's gone will drop considerably. Nevertheless, he is probably counting on external events (Donald Trump's election in November 2024 and the subsequent trade war, intensification of the conflict in Ukraine) to give him room for maneuver between now and 2027 and influence the program negotiations of the next Parliament and Commission term. To do this, he needs to ensure that his Renaissance party achieves a respectable score in the European elections on June 9.

Finally, even if this is not the case and the presidential coalition is defeated in a few weeks' time, Macron also opens another door with this speech: who else - he may think - but him to take over the reins of the Commission in 2029 if Europe is indeed on the brink of collapse? Macron likes to use the Hegelian expression "the ruse of history" to describe certain unexpected events that impose themselves by force of circumstance, such as his own election in 2017, which he believes followed the inevitable weakening of the governing parties in France. Similarly, if Europe is too weak in the face of geopolitical and economic storms, a European consensus could - he hopes perhaps - in a few years' time emerge in its favor. Whether or not this is a fantasy is not the point: Macron is preparing himself, come what may, to respond to history should it ever come calling. If it does not, one shall anyways remember that speech as a powerful political legacy.

5 Appendix: Table of proposals from the 2017 and 2024 speeches

The table below includes all the identified measures from the first and second Sorbonne speeches on Europe. 9 categories of measures have been designed, with only one counting measures for only one speech, “culture” for the second one. In bold characters, precise measures are identified, while vague ones are in normal characters. Colors are used for both speeches with a different purpose:

- the colors for the first speech help identify the measures that have rather been implemented, the ones that are in progress, the ones that have been repackaged in the second speech, and the ones that have not been implemented and not repackaged. This allows to keep track of the implementation rate of the measures of the first speech to better fathom its influence on European policies since 2017. Of course, all these measures have not been invented by the French, but their common implementation illustrates the – at least partial – validity of Macron’s vision for Europe.
- The colors for the second speech help identify the measures that we have arbitrarily classified as very doable, doable, less doable, and rather not doable. When comparing with the first speech, it seems that the “implementability” of the second speech reaches a rather similar rate (74% of rather implementable measures for the second speech vs. 64% for the first speech). Hence, Macron’s vision might also bear some fruits in Europe in the coming years.

	Sorbonne Speech I	Discours de la Sorbonne II
Summary	23 precise measurements out of 44 (in bold)	27 precise measurements out of 46 (in bold)
	17 measurements (rather) implemented	11 measures likely to be implementable in the short term (by 2027)
	1 measure in progress	8 More difficult measures, but probably implementable in the short term
	10 measures repackaged in Sorbonne II	15 more difficult but probably in the longer-term implementable measures
	16 measures not implemented or taken up	12 measures that are rather unfeasible within a 5-10-year timeframe at this stage
Defense	European intervention initiative to create a common strategic culture	Military Academy (second part of the European intervention initiative)
	Joint Intervention Force	5000-strong rapid reaction force
	Strengthening cybersecurity and creating a common area of security and justice	European Defense Council
	Europe's capacity for autonomous action, as a complement to NATO	Strategic concept of defense policies
		European cybersecurity and cyberdefense capability

	<p>Common defense doctrine</p> <p>Common foreign policy for the Mediterranean and Africa</p> <p>Common defense budget</p>	<p>European Iron Dome</p> <p>In-depth European political community</p> <p>France's Europeanized nuclear deterrent</p> <p>Arctic military and diplomatic strategies, Indo-Pacific, Latin American and African strategies</p> <p>EUR 100 bn European loan for defense industries</p>
<p>Internal security</p>	<p>European Intelligence Academy</p> <p>Combating the financing of terrorism</p> <p>Combating terrorist propaganda on the Internet</p> <p>New European asylum policy</p> <p>More official development assistance</p> <p>Strengthening European border police</p> <p>European Public Prosecutor's Office against organized crime and terrorism</p> <p>European Civil Protection Force</p> <p>Training and integration program for refugees</p>	<p>Internal Security Council to make progress in the fight against organized crime and migration</p> <p>Fighting migrant smuggling</p> <p>Visa policy and conditional trade preferences for migrant transit countries</p>
<p>Innovation</p>	<p>European Agency for Disruptive Innovation</p>	<p>Creation of a European DARPA: quantum, materials of tomorrow, electronic chips, low-energy batteries, healthcare</p> <p>European research and investment plan for treatments for cancer, Alzheimer's, neurodegenerative, rare and orphan diseases</p>

		<p>Annual R&D expenditure target of 3% of GDP</p> <p>Talent retention in Europe</p>
<p>Single market and industrial policy</p>	<p>European energy market</p> <p>Digital Single Market</p> <p>Carbon tax at borders</p> <p>Further simplification of the single market</p> <p>Protecting farmers against unforeseen events and completing the transition without over-administration</p> <p>Carbon price floor</p> <p>Territorial ecological transition contract</p> <p>European industrial program to support clean vehicles</p> <p>European investigation and control force to combat fraud, guarantee food safety and ensure compliance with quality standards throughout Europe.</p> <p>Deployment of infrastructures linked to the common ecological transition</p>	<p>Better screening of non-European investments in sensitive sectors: submarine cables, telecoms, satellites, etc.</p> <p>Better reciprocal trade instruments</p> <p>No more single market</p> <p>Regulatory relief for businesses</p> <p>Simplification of PIIEC, giving manufacturers greater visibility over 5 or 10 years</p> <p>Protecting farmers against unfair practices with uniform implementation at European level</p> <p>Better protection of industrial and intellectual property</p> <p>European preference for defense and space activities enshrined in the Treaties</p> <p>Massive investments in AI, space, quantum, biotechnologies and new energies (hydrogen, modular reactors and nuclear fusion).</p> <p>Building a new Europe of the atom to regain competitiveness</p>
<p>Fiscal, budgetary and monetary policies</p>	<p>Participation in drafting the tax on multinationals</p> <p>Ambitious space policy</p> <p>Acceleration of corporate tax harmonization through conditionality of European cohesion funds</p>	<p>Participation in the development of the OECD billionaire tax</p> <p>Capital Markets Union, with an acceleration plan for the next 12 months</p> <p>Joint public investment shock, €750 to €1,000 billion a year more</p>

	<p>Eurozone budget</p>	<p>Change monetary policy by adding a full-employment objective</p> <p>Revision of Basel and Solvency to accept more risk in the financial system</p>
<p>Solidarity</p>	<p>Convergence of social models: European minimum wage and European social rights base</p> <p>Copyright protection</p> <p>Solidarity fund against excessive social security contributions for posted workers</p>	<p>European Solidarity Program</p> <p>Better protection of biodiversity</p>
<p>Youth and education</p>	<p>Creation of European universities</p> <p>Mutual recognition of secondary education diplomas: the Sorbonne process</p> <p>Proficiency in two European foreign languages by 2024 for all students</p> <p>Target of 50% of under-25s benefiting from Erasmus</p>	<p>Fully joint European diplomas</p> <p>Target of 15% of apprentices on European mobility schemes by 2030</p>
<p>European institutions</p>	<p>European Democratic Convention</p> <p>New treaty with Germany</p> <p>Reintegration of the United Kingdom into a new European institution</p> <p>Transnational lists in European elections</p> <p>Reduction in the number of European Commissioners to 15</p> <p>Franco-German agreement on AI investment and market integration</p>	<p>Reinforcement of budgetary conditionality with observation and sanction procedures</p> <p>Franco-German agreement on foreign policy and taxation to be extended to the rest of the EU</p> <p>Citizen participation, citizens' panels, European Citizens' Initiative, European referendums</p>

<p>Culture</p>		<p>European museum alliances, library alliances to facilitate partnerships</p> <p>Arte European reference platform</p> <p>Defending the model of copyright protection</p> <p>Europe's high-speed trains</p> <p>European Culture Pass</p> <p>Inclusion of the voluntary termination of pregnancy in the European Charter of Fundamental Rights</p> <p>European digital majority at 15</p>
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Source: own design.



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