

What's left of French influence in Brussels?

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As France struggles to break its political deadlock, confusion also reigns over its ability to continue to assert its European vision in order to influence policies in Brussels.

A quick analysis shows that the foundations of French influence in Europe have not yet disappeared:

- The European Commission's European Agenda 2024-2029 includes a good number of proposals and intentions similar to those set out by Emmanuel Macron in his Sorbonne II speech on April 25, in terms of defense, security, the single market and AI.
- Emmanuel Macron should also continue to be active at the European Council, perhaps even more so than ever before, since foreign policy will be one of the few areas in which he can continue to fully exercise his power. Nevertheless, the next prime minister may also seek to be active there, while his government may contravene the positions historically held by Macron governments.
- At the Commission, Thierry Breton should be able to help ensure that a French vision prevails in the Commission's work, by continuing his fight against the power of the major digital platforms and in favor of European industry.
- In the Parliament, French MEPs have retained key positions in committees - notably the ECON Committee, chaired by Aurore Lalucq - and parliamentary groups - with the re-election of Valérie Hays as head of the Renew group, and the election of François-Xavier Bellamy as vice-president of the EPP. It's a safe bet, then, that they will be influencing European legislation over the next five years.

French influence is likely to remain strong in Brussels for years to come. Nevertheless, should President Macron be forced to resign, things could quickly change, although it's unclear what turn events might take.

Contents

1	Introduction.....	3
2	French influence clearly visible in the 2024 - 2029 European agenda.....	3
2.1	Similarities between Von der Leyen's and Macron's visions.....	3
2.2	However, some French proposals not included in the 2024-2029 guidelines	4
3	A French President likely to use his remaining wriggle room at the European Council	4
4	A French commissioner likely to have a major influence on the Commission's future work	4
5	French influence in the European Parliament finally saved	5
6	Conclusion: French influence in Europe preserved but fragile	5

1 Introduction

France is still unable to emerge from its political crisis. While a government is expected to be formed in the next few weeks, there is nothing to suggest that a stable, lasting situation will emerge. Against this backdrop, it's important to question France's ability to maintain an influence it has steadily consolidated since - notably - Emmanuel Macron came to power in 2017, having put Europe at the heart of his agenda.¹

Indeed, France's chaotic political situation casts considerable doubt on its ability to influence European policies, and to play a key role in shaping future texts in the Parliament, the Commission, but above all the European Council and the Council of the European Union. Is France thus capable of continuing to play its leading role in Europe, as it has largely done since 2017?

This *cepAdhoc* Network takes on the task of analyzing France's influence on the European agenda (Section 2), at the European and EU Councils (Section 3), at the Commission (Section 4), at the Parliament (Section 5), before concluding (Section 6).

2 French influence clearly visible in the 2024 - 2029 European agenda

2.1 Similarities between Von der Leyen's and Macron's visions

When we consider the statements made on July 18, 2024 by Commission President Ursula von der Leyen² regarding the political guidelines for the coming term of office, it is clear that there are many similarities with Emmanuel Macron's Sorbonne II speech on April 25³.

As far as defense issues are concerned, the idea of a European Defense Council, bringing together the 27 Ministers of Defense, with a probable Commissioner in charge of defense issues, is entirely in line with the vision developed by the French President. Similarly, the President of the Commission and the French President agree on the establishment of a European cyberdefense capability, or a European Iron Dome. **The same applies to security issues**, where the Commission President shares the French President's desire to establish partnerships with third countries, particularly in North Africa, to curb illegal immigration and organized crime.

When it comes to the single market, the two presidents agree on speeding up its completion, and reducing regulatory disparities, while reducing the administrative burden for businesses. Similarly, **on the subject of AI**, the Commission President's vision of setting up "AI factories" is very much in line with that of the French President, who also wants to make the European Union a nerve center for digital technologies. Finally, **on the question of nuclear energy**, Ursula von der Leyen is now adopting a totally French stance, promoting a European return to nuclear power, not least to bring down energy prices.

¹ Elysée, [Initiative pour l'Europe](#), 26.09.2024.

² European Commission, [Statement to the plenary session of the European Parliament by Ursula von der Leyen, candidate for a second term 2024-2029](#), 18.07.2024.

³ Elysée Palace, [Speech on Europe](#), 25.04.2024.

2.2 However, some French proposals not included in the 2024-2029 guidelines

On the other hand, some French proposals do not appear in the guidelines proposed by the President of the European Commission for the coming term of office.

Typically, the idea of a **European agency for disruptive innovation**, already proposed in her 2017 Sorbonne speech, appears nowhere in Ursula von der Leyen's proposals. Nor is there any plan to make Europe a herald of innovation in the healthcare sector. Furthermore, there is no mention of the French proposals to **modify the ECB's mandate** to include, in particular, the achievement of full European employment as an objective, beyond the stability of inflation below 2%. The plan for 1,000 billion in additional investment is also not mentioned in the Commission's 2024-2029 guidelines. As far as control of the digital space is concerned, the Commission does not yet seem ready to take the next step by legislating again with a **Digital Services Act 2** to better protect against potential damage caused by AI-generated content, notably deepfakes. Last but not least, no French proposals relating to **culture** - in particular, the European culture pass - have been put forward.

But on the essentials, Ursula von der Leyen and Emmanuel Macron see eye to eye. Before his national political marginalization on June 9, President Macron is likely to have had time to influence decision-makers in Brussels on policies for the next five years.

3 A French President likely to use his remaining wriggle room at the European Council

Insofar as, once he has appointed a Prime Minister, President Macron will have largely lost his ability to lead a national policy, not least because the Prime Minister will be bound by his own agenda, defined by the coalition that will support him - or be content not to censure him - he should therefore fall back on his last prerogatives, namely defense and foreign affairs.⁴ Like François Mitterrand and Jacques Chirac before him in periods of cohabitation, it's a safe bet that President Macron will try to influence European policies as much as possible by continuing to launch new initiatives, with repercussions, starting with the decisions of the European Council. This was the case on Ukraine⁵ and in many other areas. In a situation of de facto cohabitation, President Macron will probably be more present in Europe than ever.

However, this European effort could be overshadowed by a Prime Minister and his government who also want to be in the European spotlight. At the European Council, the Prime Minister might want to take a seat. At the Council of the European Union, the government might want to defend French positions that differ from those hitherto defended by President Macron and his successive governments.

4 A French commissioner likely to have a major influence on the Commission's future work

It's long been known that France's candidate for the post of Commissioner is none other than Thierry Breton, the former Commissioner, who already had an important portfolio, since he was in charge of the internal market, where he worked hard to implement the Digital Services Act and the Digital

⁴ Vie publique, [What is the reserved domain of the President of the Republic?](#) 03.03.2024.

⁵ Elysée, [European Council of March 21 and 22, 2024](#), 22.03.2024.

Markets Act, while trying to appear as a defender of European industries against a free-trade that he, in good French, now considers largely deleterious.⁶ For a time, he even sought to challenge Ursula von der Leyen's leadership of the Commission by questioning her legitimacy within the European People's Party.⁷ He also takes care to regularly call the major American digital platforms to order with warning letters⁸, and probes⁹.

If he makes it through the parliamentary hearings, he should act as a watchdog for a very French vision of Europe in the next Commission, especially if the French government's voice is no longer audible.

5 French influence in the European Parliament finally saved

At the European Parliament, the French won 1 committee chairmanship, 1 sub-committee chairmanship and 6 vice-chairmanships.¹⁰ Among them, Aurore Lalucq (S&D) was elected chair of the important Committee on Economic and Monetary Affairs (ECON), Mounir Satouri (Greens) chair of the Subcommittee on Human Rights (DROI), Manon Aubry (La Gauche) 1^{ère} vice-chair of the Committee on International Trade (INTA), and Christophe Gomart (EPP) 1^{er} vice-chair of the Subcommittee on Security and Defense (SEDE). In addition, Valérie Hayer¹¹ has won the presidency of the Renew group, the pivotal group within the Parliament's coalition, while François Xavier Bellamy has won the vice-presidency of the EPP group¹², at the heart of the same coalition.

Even if these MEPs lack political direction at the moment, given the confusion of national governments, they will be able to influence European texts to defend a certain vision of French interests in Brussels.

6 Conclusion: French influence in Europe preserved but fragile

What emerges from this brief analysis is that, contrary to what many observers might have feared, French influence in Brussels appears to remain. As President Macron seeks to form a new government that will minimize the damage inflicted by the policies he has pursued over the past seven years, it is a safe bet that the next government will not significantly change this situation. One never knows, however, how certain individuals might behave at a time when the President appears weaker than ever. It's a safe bet that crises could arise in Brussels within the French executive. But, apart from dissolution in the summer of 2025, which could lead to a RN victory, there are few realistic scenarios in which Macron's vision is really challenged in Europe in the medium term. On the other hand, if President Macron were forced to resign by the street (51% of French people are in favor of his resignation at this stage)¹³ or by a political impasse, the situation would change fundamentally, without it being possible at this stage to imagine how.

⁶ Atlantico, Thierry Breton, [the French commissioner in Brussels whose record looks like the sum of his enemies](#), 02.04.2024.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Euractiv, [Thierry Breton warns social network X to comply with EU regulations](#), 14.08.2024.

⁹ Euractiv, [DMA: European Commission opens non-compliance investigations against Alphabet, Apple and Meta](#), 25.03.2024.

¹⁰ Toute l'Europe, [European Parliament: who are the French MEPs who chair and vice-chair parliamentary committees?](#) 24.07.2024

¹¹ Renew Europe, [Valérie Hayer re-elected President of Renew Europe](#), 25.06.2024.

¹² Toute l'Europe, [Manfred Weber re-elected president of the EPP group in the European Parliament, François-Xavier Bellamy appointed vice-president](#), 19.06.2024.

¹³ Le Monde, [Enquête électorale : 51% des sondés favorables à la démission du président de la République, un symptôme de la radicalité ambiante](#), 31.08.2024.



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