

POLICY PAPER

France and the V4 in a multi-speed Europe: rough times ahead?

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- **“Europe is weakened by bureaucratic proliferation” and the “growing scepticism” about its action is “not unjustified”, said a European leader in 2017. “I am offering you to take a step back and to move away from the tyranny of agenda-setting and the meanderings of technical decision-making”, the leader continued. “At some point, we will need to change the treaties because the EU is far from complete: the question is not whether these changes are necessary, but when and how” they will be enacted.**
- **Readers would be excused to think these statements come straight from the mind of a Central European leader, when in fact they have been made by Emmanuel Macron, the new French President.**



Introduction

Macron's victory was hailed by an overwhelming majority of the European and global press as a victory for the pro-European agenda, and that his presidency could "save European unity", in cooperation with the German Chancellor Angela Merkel¹. Past the relief of Macron's victory against extreme-right Marine Le Pen, a certain unease started to crystallize in Visegrád countries (the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia, hereafter referred to as "V4") regarding the outlines of Macron's plans for the EU and how his ambitions could affect Visegrád priorities and influence in the region². Addressing these potential tensions from early on is an essential part of the desire for a new French leadership that has tended to be critical of the region, a fact symbolized by Macron warning central European countries not to treat the EU "like a supermarket"³ when it comes to respecting key values such as solidarity and rule of law.

Macron and the V4: setting the table and tugging on the tablecloth

In an interview for Spiegel Magazine in March, Macron openly said that "a multispeed Europe has long been a reality" and that "we shouldn't even attempt to push all countries to move forward in unison. That was a major mistake of the past years." He added that further

integration in the Eurozone has been halted "because we feared scaring the British and the Poles. And what did that lead to? Britain voted to leave anyway and Poland is now telling us that Europe is a horrible thing."⁴ The projects put forward by Macron early on in his term, especially the reform of the Eurozone, the terms of which will be put forward by a Franco-German experts team by the end of the summer⁵, clearly outline the fact that integration as seen by Macron passes first and foremost by a reinforcement of the Eurozone. Such a process would mechanically weaken the position of the V4 countries – Slovakia to a lesser extent due to its Eurozone status – and could also significantly enhance political divisions between the four countries. Pressures and discussions about the adoption of the Euro have already started in the Czech Republic and will form part of the debate in the general elections in October 2017; additionally, the Euro issue may also create an extra wedge between the Czech Republic and Slovakia on one side, and Hungary and Poland on the other, given the ongoing tensions about rule of law in the latter two and the unease about these issues in Prague and Bratislava.

Therefore, while at the moment the process of turning Macron's visions into reality has remained at the declaratory level, the table is clearly set for a new era in the relations between France and the Visegrád Four countries in the near future. The meeting between Macron and V4 heads of state

¹ Alison Smale, "Macron and Merkel Meet, Pledging to Save European Unity", *The New York Times*, May 15 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/05/15/world/europe/france-emmanuel-macron-edouard-philippe.html>

² For immediate reactions to Macron's election and its potential impact for Visegrád countries, see for example: Łukasz Jurczyszyn, "PISM Spotlight: Emmanuel Macron is France's Next President", Polish Institute of International Affairs, 7 May 2017, <http://www.pism.pl/publications/spotlight/no-9-2017>; Gabriela Rogowska, "Macron vs. Central Europe", *Visegrádinsight.eu*, 11 May 2017, <http://Visegrádinsight.eu/macron-vs-central-europe/>; and Tony Barber, "Europe's new political divisions", *Financial Times*, 14 May 2017, <https://www.ft.com/content/21138f54-35ab-11e7-bce4-9023f8c0fd2e>.

³ Esther King, "Emmanuel Macron: 'Europe is not a supermarket'", *politico.eu*, 22 June 2017, <http://www.politico.eu/article/emmanuel-macron-europe-is-not-a-supermarket/>

⁴ *Spiegel Online*, "SPIEGEL Interview with Emmanuel Macron: I am offering the French renewal", 17 March 2017, <http://www.spiegel.de/international/europe/emmanuel-macron-interview-on-french-election-campaign-a-1139214.html>

⁵ Thomas Hanke, Jan Hildebrand, "Macron, Merkel Talk European Hard Core", *Handelsblatt Global*, 28 July 2017, <https://global.handelsblatt.com/politics/macron-merkel-talk-european-hard-core-804447>

in Brussels before his first European Council in June 2017 very clearly showed the neat division of the V4 in two camps, a fact symbolized by the harsh reactions from Warsaw and Budapest, in contrast with the tamer language from Prague and Bratislava⁶. The “frank and direct” exchange that took place clearly indicates that there are wide-ranging divisive issues which will require a more structured dialogue between the five countries that will also need to involve the historical – for both sides - German partner.

As a matter of fact, this opens the possibility of a slow but irreversible trend of a strong Franco-German engine dividing, if not conquering, a V4 that will see its fault lines deepen and few common projects on which to base future unity. It may usher a time where even institutional “muscle memory” may not suffice to keep the four countries together. This of course implies that Paris and Berlin see eye-to-eye on the necessity to reform the EU but also on the remedies applied, a question that will be answered with more clarity after the federal elections in September. It also will imply that France will maintain a desire to be engaged with Central European countries and opens possibilities for cooperation beyond the existing levels. The risk would otherwise be to consolidate Euro-skepticism in a region that has been accustomed to a negative presentation of the EU and has openly contested the leadership of “old Europe” on EU affairs.

The precondition: France reforming, Germany compromising

When Macron met the Visegrád leaders, carrying the halo of his momentous victory and huge expectations for his first European Council, there is one message that the

newly-elected president probably left out: if France wants to be in the European driving seat again, the sine qua non-precondition is the enactment of deep reforms of the French economy in order to increase its competitiveness. Angela Merkel and Wolfgang Schäuble, the German Minister of Finance, have both made clear that any German compromises on Eurozone reform would only follow these reforms.

Of course, Macron was elected first and foremost by the French people on this very platform of reforming France, but the scenario of the election, with a second round against Le Pen and record-high levels of abstention should instill caution in the government flashing its reformist credentials all too fast. As Macron knows all too well from when his labor law mobilized the unions in the street for a long period of time in 2015, social unrest in France can affect a government’s ability to act, especially with the wide-ranging labor market reforms that are destined to tackle unemployment and public debt. The President himself is not unaware of this, saying that he does not underestimate the doubts, the anger which undoubtedly will manifest themselves”, also knowing “that the French people firmly decided on this transformation”⁷.

As quick as reforms may be, the visible effects of these reforms on economic indicators will be clear further down the road. This means that the development of this multi-speed Europe, premised around a deep Eurozone reform, should be seen as a political ambition for the future rather than a short-term political reality.

⁶ For a summary of reactions, see : hungarianspectrum.org, “Emmanuel Macron meets the leaders of the Visegrád 4 countries”, 23 June 2017, <http://hungarianspectrum.org/2017/06/23/emmanuel-macron-meets-the-leaders-of-the-Visegrád-4-countries/> and Nicholas Vinocur, Maïa de la Baume, “Macron’s EU charm offensive stops at Eastern Europe”, *politico.eu*, 23 June 2017,

<http://www.politico.eu/article/france-president-emmanuel-macrons-eu-charm-offensive-stops-at-eastern-europe-Visegrád/>.

⁷ Georgi Gotev, “France and Germany to make joint proposal for future future of Europe”, *euractiv.com*, June 23 2017, <http://www.euractiv.com/section/global-europe/news/france-and-germany-to-make-joint-proposal-for-future-of-europe/>

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It is this reality that should dictate the approach of V4 countries to the new French presidency: Macron will not be the strong European leader he wants to be until the reforms are implemented, persuading Germany to accept more risks within the Eurozone and perhaps move towards treaty change, something Merkel grudgingly accepted in June 2017⁸.

It is however clear that Macron's outlook on the exercise of power is resolutely different than his two predecessors', Nicolas Sarkozy and François Hollande. While the two exercised a quasi-daily influence on the conduct of domestic politics, Macron has decided to largely delegate the implementation of his presidential platform to his Prime Minister, Edouard Philippe, in order not to become embroiled in the daily grind in a way that diminished the very stature of the presidency and opened previous presidents to very harsh criticism⁹ and historically low polling records. Macron moving away from this model means he will devote more energy to restoring France's influence within the EU, a self-avowed objective of the government¹⁰, and restoring the balance of power with Germany, a promise that every new president has made but never delivered upon because of the economic imbalances between the two countries. With Macron saving his political capital at home and using his Prime Minister as a lightning rod to channel potential popular discontent, it is therefore clear that he will use his capital in Brussels ensuring that his vision of the necessary reforms for Europe are being implemented and that the relationship with Germany is being mended (on top of attempting to restore France's role on the international scene).

Contrary to Sarkozy and Hollande, Macron was not elected on a conflictual platform with Germany, a positioning that seems to pay its dividends since both Merkel and Schäuble have opened the door to Eurozone reform, and the harmonious relationship between Merkel and Macron shows that the Franco-German relationship can perhaps be more than the "marriage of reason" that it is usually boiled down to. Macron's position, freed from lots of domestic constraints, will therefore allow him to focus on the alliance with Berlin in order to reach the necessary compromises regarding for example the creation of a Eurozone finance minister and parliament, of a Eurozone budget, and further down the road increasing financial support to member states without a deeper control of their economic policy and the mutualization of bank guarantee funds.

These elements, which are at the heart of deepening Eurozone integration, remain long-term prospects for Franco-German cooperation and are not part of the bargain that is currently being struck by the two countries on defense, climate change and the digital union, and fiscal convergence for companies¹¹. This lack of more important progress can also be explained by the upcoming federal elections, but the likely result means that some commentators are already pushing for Germany to open up the Eurozone dossier: "It is about time Berlin get used to the idea that the EU is more than a sporting field that the Germans always leave victorious. The ability to compromise is deeply enshrined in Germany's political identity, and this part of its culture has also served the EU in the past. The next government in Berlin should learn from the current administration's underestimating the readiness of a majority of Germans for greater EU cooperation, and, indeed,

⁸ Georgi Gotev, "Macron, Merkel: EU treaty change is not taboo", *euractiv.com*, June 23 2017, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/future-eu/news/macron-merkel-eu-treaty-change-is-not-taboo/>

⁹ For a more detailed analysis of this issue, see : Martin Quencez, Martin Michelot, "The Rise of the Front National: Taking Stock of Ten Years of French Mainstream Politics", Policy Paper, German Marshall Fund of the United States, 24 February 2017, <http://brussels.gmfus.org/publications/rise-front-national-taking-stock-ten-years-french-mainstream-politics>.

¹⁰ "French influence in Brussels must increase accordingly with our competence, our credibility and our engagement": tweet

by the State Secretary for European Affairs, Nathalie Loiseau, 20 July 2017, <https://twitter.com/NathalieLoiseau/status/887974587782266880>

¹¹ See: *dw.com*, "Franco-German cooperation focuses on EU reforms, defense, enterprise and education", 13 July 2017, <http://www.dw.com/en/franco-german-cooperation-focuses-on-eu-reforms-defense-enterprise-and-education/a-39666836> and <http://www.ouest-france.fr>, "Macron: "Je veux conforter la confiance des Français et des investisseurs" », 13 July 2017, <http://www.ouest-france.fr/politique/emmanuel-macron/exclusif-emmanuel-macron-l-europe-et-la-france-indispensables-l-un-l-autre-5130477> .

integration”¹², says Almut Möller. In a context where Germany feels more comfortable operating in a system where decision-making and influence is split among various national and institutional levels, the decision to focus on the more unilateral Franco-German engine would represent a sea change in German thinking. It can therefore be said that Franco-German cooperation and the advent of a multi-speed Europe requires not only deep economic reforms in France, but also a changed strategic culture and approach to the EU on the side of Berlin. While the elections may be a determining factor of this change (on both sides of the Rhine), it is once again clear that these prospects are long-term, a perspective that should allow for strategic adaptation on the side of V4 countries.

The perception of V4 member states in Macron’s new Europe

The fraught relationship between France and the V4 receives very little attention compared to other partnerships of these countries, and is one that seems to be mostly negatively structured around shocks rather than following an identifiable course. The dominant position of Germany – economic, political and cultural – in the region means that Paris has tended to take a less proactive approach to Central Europe.

France was, contrary to Germany, reluctant regarding quick enlargement of the EU towards the East and fearful of the consequences for its own interests, with Berlin also viewing enlargement as a way to create new political alliances that would lessen political dependence on Paris and create new format of coalitions in EU decision making processes.

From the infamous Chirac claiming the Letter of Eight was “infantile”, that leaders “missed a great opportunity to shut up”¹³, and that “entry into the European Union implies a minimum of understanding for the others”, to Nicolas Sarkozy’s warning that if the V4 heads of state “have to meet regularly before each council, that could raise questions”¹⁴, political tensions have often marked the France-V4 relationship, without even raising the issue of comments in the opposite direction. Economic disappointments have added weight, more recently with the failed bid by Areva to obtain the tender for the construction of a nuclear power plant in Temelin (Czech Republic), which ended in a bitter lawsuit and competition infringement procedure in front of the European Commission in 2014, or the decision by the new Polish government to cancel the previously agreed-upon sale of 50 military helicopters for an approximate cost of €3,1b. This has fed into the perception that France’s only interests in Central Europe are limited to the economic development of national companies rather than providing support for V4 political agendas, such as the Eastern Partnership, enlargement policies, or even transatlantic security.

Macron’s campaign statements towards Central Europe mostly served the purpose of presenting his agenda of a “Europe that protects”. A couple days after the first round, Macron and Marine Le Pen fought a proxy battle on the grounds of the Whirlpool factory near Amiens, Macron’s hometown, whose production lines were under threat of being moved to Lodz, Poland. This defining moment of the campaign saw Macron say that he has “always defended the EU in this campaign while also saying that I want another Europe, a Europe that protects”, that there can no longer exist situations where countries “benefit from social and fiscal differences within the EU and that is simultaneously going against every principle of the Union”¹⁵. He finally committed himself to initiate an infringement procedure

¹² Almut Möller, “Taking the Bull by the Horns”, Berlin Policy Journal, July/August 2017, <http://berlinpolicyjournal.com/taking-the-bull-by-the-horns/>

¹³ Cnn.com, “Chirac lashes out at ‘new Europe’”, 18/2/2003, <http://edition.cnn.com/2003/WORLD/europe/02/18/sprj.irq.chirac/>

¹⁴ Honor Mahony, “Sarkozy warns Visegrad countries not to make a habit of pre-summit meetings”, *euobserver.com*, 4 November 2009, <https://euobserver.com/news/28928>

¹⁵ *Lavoixdunord.fr*, “Macron hausse le ton contre la Pologne, en plein dossier Whirlpool”, 27 April 2017, <http://www.lavoixdunord.fr/154426/article/2017-04-27/macron-hausse-le-ton-contre-la-pologne-en-plein-dossier-whirlpool>

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against Poland at the EU level within three months of his election. By committing his political weight behind social dumping and linking it clearly to rule of law concerns, Macron attempted to move conflictuality from the relationship with Berlin to the relationship with Central Europe, which also boosted his campaign and rendered even more uncontroversial the perspective of a positive relationship with Germany. Central Europe, and Poland and Hungary especially, were therefore tools that Macron used to strengthen his image as protector but also boost his protectionist credentials.

The heart of Macron's protectionist platform consists in a renegotiation of the posted workers directive (bringing the maximum posting time to a year instead of two, closing loopholes such as "mailbox" companies), the coordination of minimum wages and unemployment insurance across the Union, harmonized tax rules and prohibitions on extreme social dumping via his proposed "Buy European Act", which would ensure that public tenders are awarded only to companies that produce at least half their goods within EU territory.

The European Commission voted down the plan in May¹⁶, followed by the Council in June, which however called on "co-legislators to swiftly agree on modern, WTO-compatible trade defense instruments, which will reinforce the ability of the EU to effectively tackle unfair and discriminatory trade practices and market distortions."¹⁷ Of course, such plans can be a cause for concern in Central Europe if they are agreed upon and adopted within the narrower framework of a Eurozone decision-making group,

¹⁶ Hans von der Burchard, "Commission Vice-President : EU 'cannot afford' Macron's Buy European Act", *politico.eu*, 8 May 2017, <http://www.politico.eu/article/commission-vice-president-the-eu-cannot-afford-macrons-buy-european-act/>

which once the UK leaves will account for 85% of the EU's economy.

This will certainly lead to a certain amount of soul-searching in the V4 capitals, but also has the potential to irreversibly damage regional unity. France and Germany seem ready, in the next five years, to present a new model for integration that will force regional leaders to make tough decisions about the future of their country. As Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico said in June, "either we get in the integration express or we'll be stuck in the depot on the second track". Regional differences are starting to show, and undoubtedly represent a turning point for the very nature of the V4's existence.

A multi-speed V4?

The future departure of the UK leaves the V4 countries without a big country protecting certain economic and social interests and preventing the Eurozone from striking such deals as the ones that have been described above. The vacuum created by the British departure from the EU therefore has brought V4 states to think more clearly about where their interests lie.

Slovakia, as a Eurozone member, and the Czech Republic, which sends more than 60% of its exports to the Eurozone, will be bound in the future to consider their strategic orientations. A lot will of course lie on the results of the general elections this October in the Czech Republic: the frontrunner for the position of Prime Minister, Andrej Babiš, has made clear that "we do not want the euro here" as "another thing that Brussels will interfere in" and qualified the currency as a "collapsing business", adding that a multi-speed Europe would mean the end of strong states in Europe¹⁸. The outgoing Prime Minister Bohuslav

¹⁷ European Council, "European Council conclusions, 22-23/06/2017", paragraph 17, <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2017/06/23-euco-conclusions/>

¹⁸ *Novinky.cz*, "Euro tady nechceme. Každý ví, že je to krachující podnik, řekl Babiš", 26 June 2017,

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Sobotka, who systematically rejected any discussion about the introduction of the Euro during his term, has now declared that the new energy between France and Germany in pushing for multi-speed Europe means that Prague should formally set a date for the adoption of the common currency¹⁹. His Social-Democratic party is set to take a heavy loss in the election but the message is now shared by some other center-right and center-left parties, and should structure debates about the EU in the Czech Republic during the term of the next government, given the very real risk that this poses to Czech influence within the EU. A newly-elected Babiš in the beginning of his term would probably use the momentum of his victory to quash any discussion about the euro and would try to set some terms for Czech interests to be defended, but that may not prove sufficient to ensure that the country's competitiveness remains untouched if the Eurozone reforms are carried out. Further integration will therefore be a good test to see whether the bombastic language of some V4 leaders towards the mythical "Brussels" beast stands the test of a potential degradation of the economic situation of their countries.

In the shorter term, it looks like the divisions within the V4 may have real long-term consequences and contribute to crystallize even further the two paths the region seems to be taking. As Tom Nuttall put it in his Charlemagne column for The Economist, "governments like Poland's sabotage their own case when they promulgate lurid horror stories about migrants or, worse, undermine the democratic values to which they signed up as EU members. Moderate governments that may sympathise with their

arguments on the single market will recoil from association with countries in the grip of populism."²⁰ Ivan Krastev, in the *New York Times*, adds that the illiberal turn in Hungary and Poland "has forced many Western Europeans to close their ears to what may be in some instances legitimate Central European grievances" and "for other Europeans to dismiss Central Europe's legitimate fears as objectionable nationalism".²¹

Slovakia and the Czech Republic have, to a certain extent, been harmed by the association with their two regional partners, and even if they have remained outside of Macron's crosshairs, there is certain unease in Bratislava and Prague about what being lumped into a unitary group with Budapest and Warsaw can clearly contribute.

In this context, the direction the Czech Republic takes after the elections will be closely watched in determining whether the idea of a multi-speed Europe has contributed to changing the nature of regional unity against the idea. With Prague set to be a net contributor to the next Multiannual Financial Framework – which will be prepared during the next government's term, the country can, and will, boast of a better position in influencing budgetary – and especially investment – choices in the EU budget. Its positions will provide a first look at the choices it wants the

<https://www.novinky.cz/domaci/441865-euro-tady-nechceme-kazdy-vi-ze-je-to-krachujici-podnik-rekl-babis.html>
¹⁹ *info.cz*, "Už žádné koruny v peněženkách, Sobotka chce euro. Musíme si stanovit termín přijetí, říká", 16 May 2017, <http://www.info.cz/cesko/uz-zadne-koruny-v-penezenkach-sobotka-chce-euro-musime-si-stanovit-termin-prijeti-rika-9635.html>

²⁰ *The Economist*, « Emmanuel Macron is revitalising the European Union – and dividing it », 22 July 2017, <https://www.economist.com/news/europe/21725332-eurocrats-should-temper-their-new-optimism-bit-caution-emmanuel-macron-revitalising>

²¹ Ivan Krastev, "Central Europe's Tough Choice: Macron or Orbán?", *nytimes.com*, 22 June 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/06/22/opinion/macron-merkel-orban-european-union.html>

EU to make: more investment, as desired by Paris, or continuing in a similar vein than the previous budget.

It will therefore be important for V4 countries to explore avenues by which they can integrate the plans for cooperation that France and Germany have set out for the near future, and to do so in a unified fashion. It is equally important, if not even more so, that France and Germany, in its bridging role, involve V4 countries in the development of these plans if they do not wish to see the region further peel off from the European path. When Macron and Merkel jointly announce the development of cooperation on the EU digital market, there is scope to link with the V4 countries that have set the digital agenda as one of their main EU priorities in the near future.

When France and Germany push forward for the development of a stronger EU defense union and already for two-speed EU on certain defense initiatives, via the Permanent Structured Cooperation mechanism, there is an interest for V4 countries to participate, if not to "constructively abstain" from the creation of such mechanisms.

Down the line, the integration of V4 defense industries in European defense supply chains, the decreasing of the capability gap with the United States are factors of the continued prosperity of V4 countries, to the same extent than the opening up of new European markets for its digital champions. Similarly, the smarter management of European borders or the reform of the European asylum system needs to be the result of a deep European cooperation that involves V4 stakeholders, in order to quell the usual regional rhetoric according to which decision that are being made by Paris and Berlin disregard national interests and widen East/West divisions. Eventually, a strong dynamic behind

European integration, and the real threat for V4 countries not to be part of the next steps of the construction of the single market, could play a decisive factor in either assuaging political discourse in the region, or providing the final straw that would break the V4's back.

Conclusion: long-term prospects for cooperation

There is understandable concern in Central and Eastern Europe regarding the potential effects of deeper Eurozone integration on their bargaining power in Brussels, and their ability to influence the decisions that will seemingly increasingly be driven by Berlin and Paris. Besides the above-stated fact that this process will be driven largely by whether France will be able to reform and convince Germany to drop its reluctance for greater risk-sharing in the Eurozone, some consideration should also be given by prospective Eurozone members as to the potential benefits that such plans can provide for the long-term health of their economies.

Protecting the Eurozone from shocks, ensuring the existence of proper decision-making systems to respond to eventual crises, and also cutting down on deficits should, on principle, make the Eurozone more attractive for the "healthy" V4 countries to join, as they would be potentially less exposed to the chain reactions and costs of inefficient bailout plans. There are of course still problems looming in the Eurozone, especially regarding the long-term health of the Italian banking system for example, or the slow recovery of Greece, that make belonging to the Eurozone a less attractive premise. However, it is also possible to think that the V4 would regain a certain amount of political influence and bargaining capital on issues that are of deep importance to its countries if it decided to take the Eurozone leap, which all the countries are ready for according to existing criteria.

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Further down the road, the Eurozone, and the political weight associated with it, can also provide the basis for a diversification and transformation of the V4 countries' economy, and to accompany the natural and necessary movement of increasing the living conditions of its citizens, by raising average wages to improve purchasing power and quell rising dissatisfaction within the population. This could well prove to be a political trump card for Andrej Babis, who, if he can oversee a gradual increase of Czech average wages, could efficiently undercut opposition from the Social-Democrats whose campaign platform is premised on this issue, and consolidate his stronghold on power.

When Emmanuel Macron visits Budapest to meet once again with V4 Prime Ministers (a visit supposed to take place by the end of the year²²), the new French president would be well advised to present a set of issues on which he

foresees increased cooperation between France and the V4. While defense cooperation is politically on the right track, real progress remains to be made on integrating V4 countries in the package announced by Paris and Berlin for the digital union, on ensuring a greater independence from Russia for energy supplies, and especially on the planned harmonization of social and fiscal rules. Once the renegotiation of the posted workers directive agreed upon, France will be largely responsible for setting a positive agenda for cooperation that will incentivize V4 countries to stay away from the punishing rhetoric about an EU that infringes on its interests. Germany will be a key partner in setting the tone right in this process. There is a real impetus for a new era in France-V4 relations, which, even if it started off the wrong foot, could consolidate Macron's credentials as a breath of fresh air for the European Union.

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²² Szabolcs Dull, "Még az idén Budapestre látogat a francia elnök", *index.hu*, 14 July 2017, <http://index.hu/kulfold/2017/07/14/meg-az-iden-budapestre-latogat-a-francia-elnok/>

