



Country Issue: France



The Relaunch of Europe

Mapping Member States' Reform Interests

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Institut für Europäische Politik (Institute for European Politics, IEP) is one of the leading foreign and European policy research centres in the Federal Republic of Germany dedicated to the study of European integration.

Further information on the project can be found here:

www.relaunch-europe.eu

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THE RELAUNCH OF EUROPE

MAPPING MEMBER STATES' REFORM INTERESTS

The Relaunch of Europe. Mapping Member States' Reform Interests (RelaunchEU) is a project conducted by the Institut für Europäische Politik (IEP) on behalf of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) that surveys the implementation prospects for twelve concrete reform proposals. It covers the policy areas of Social Union, Economic and Monetary Union and Defence Union as well as asylum and migration policy and the EU's institutional set-up. Furthermore, it analyses the support for flexible integration and the positioning towards the five scenarios presented in the European Commission's »White Paper on the Future of Europe« of spring 2017. It covers the positions of national governments and of relevant progressive political parties, which received a minimum share of 5 % of the votes in the previous European or national elections.¹

The study follows two main objectives: (1) It demonstrates the scope of action for prompt reforms of the EU in the selected policy areas while also taking into account which member states would, under certain conditions, be willing to implement the specific proposals. (2) It empirically determines which member states could belong to an avant-garde group willing to deepen integration.

Researchers from think tanks and research institutions in the member states of the EU-27 compiled information to determine the position of governments and progressive political parties towards the twelve reform proposals. This qualitative analysis reflects the country experts' views and is based on documents such as coalition agreements, government or party programmes, position papers, press releases, interviews, op-ed pieces, and official documents. It presents a snapshot of the discussions within the governments and parties. In order to keep the country issues short, internal debates and deviating opinions cannot be covered in detail. Positions are subject to change, especially following elections and the formation of new governments. The snapshot was taken at the end of September 2017. More recent developments could not be included. Notable exceptions are the country issues of Austria and Germany, which were updated following the latest coalition negotiations.

The study's results are published in English on the website www.relaunch-europe.eu. It presents maps for every actor and reform proposal, 27 country issues and an analytical paper. The paper compares the positions of all actors in all member states of the EU-27 on the twelve concrete reform proposals and presents five flagship-projects, which bear the chance for a relaunch of Europe.

¹ If a party fulfills this criterion, but is not a relevant actor in the national public debate anymore, it was deleted from the sample based on the judgement of the projects' country expert.

FRANCE

In summer 2017, presidential and parliamentary elections took place. Since then, *La République en Marche!* (REM) is in government. Among the other progressive parties, the formerly governing socialist party *Parti Socialiste* (PS) considerably lost

influence in parliament and the social-liberal *Parti Radical de Gauche* (PRG) plays only a minor role. Nonetheless, three members of PS are ministers for interior, foreign affairs, and defence as well as two PRG members fill further ministerial offices.

Support of the French Government, the PS and PRG for Deepening EU Integration



Legend

- support for
- support under conditions
- against
- neutral

- GOV** National Government
- PS** Parti Socialiste
- PRG** Parti Radical de Gauche

- 1 – Scenario 1: »Carrying on«
- 2 – Scenario 2: »Nothing but the single market«
- 3 – Scenario 3: »Those who want more do more«
- 4 – Scenario 4: »Doing less more efficiently«
- 5 – Scenario 5: »Doing much more together«

SOCIAL UNION

The French government, PS and PRG all share the idea of increasing the **upward convergence of national social security schemes**. Whereas the government and PS suggest establishing a European Pillar of Social Rights, PRG demands further harmonisation of social protection systems in Europe. The government wants to define European minimum standards specifically for national social security schemes concerning health, unemployment insurance, and workers' rights to on-the-job training, but rejects a Europe-wide harmonisation of social standards in general. Nevertheless, all three actors want to add a **European coordination of national minimum wages** to the European Pillar of Social Rights. The aim of this proposal is to reduce inequalities among European citizens by fostering social convergence and to fight unfair competition as well as social dumping. This is especially related to the controversial French debate concerning the Posted Workers Directive (96/71/EC), which has triggered an increased competition of salaries in France. The French government suggests a Europe-wide minimum wage level which takes into account different levels of economic development in the member states, but does not pursue full harmonisation like PRG. In 2016, PS outlined a model for a European minimum wage amounting to at least 50 to 60 % of the national median income, allowing member states to opt for higher levels. Albeit the European minimum wage is primarily conceived for euro zone countries, other member states are free to participate as well. More generally, PS proposes to discuss wages as a central element in the country recommendations of the European Semester to foster wage convergence across Europe. Other than the European Pillar of Social Rights as proposed by the Commission in 2017, little is said about establishing a **new balance between social rights and internal market freedoms**. Identifying social inequalities within the EU as the main future challenge, both PS and PRG highlight that European integration is not solely based on the single market, but should also create an area of solidarity and social progress. In particular, the French government in line with the German one, and PS want to reform the Posted Workers Directive to render the free movement of services compatible with the protection of workers' rights and fair competition across the EU.

EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND MONETARY UNION

The government and PS highlight the importance of **fighting tax fraud and tax evasion on a European level**, which would also imply fiscal transparency in the EU. For this purpose, the current French government signed the »Multilateral Convention to Implement Tax Treaty Related Measures to Prevent Base Erosion and Profit Shifting« in the framework of OECD and negotiated to close tax loopholes in June 2017. To prevent distortion of competition, the government also wants to fight arrangements which offer extreme taxation privileges to selected multinationals

in some EU member states. PS proposes to oblige multinationals to publicly declare profits and taxes in the EU on a country-by-country basis, to create a European public prosecutor's office to fight tax fraud, and to introduce sanctions on tax havens. Whereas PS is in favour of full fiscal harmonisation through a Europe-wide minimum corporate tax rate, PRG supports the Commissions' proposal of a common consolidated corporate tax base (CCCTB) which would entail further integration, but would stop short of full fiscal harmonisation. The CCCTB would be mandatory for large groups and companies and could be implemented by the means of enhanced cooperation. The French and the German government envisage to elaborate a common position on the CCCTB by the end of 2017 and to implement bilateral measures to foster European convergence. Furthermore, the government supports the establishment of a European CCCTB by 2020. The French government, PS and PRG also support the creation of a **fiscal capacity for the euro zone**. According to the French government and PS, a euro zone budget should cushion asymmetric shocks through financial assistance to countries in crisis and foster social convergence through investments. The fiscal capacity is closely linked to the President's proposals for a European finance minister and a euro zone parliament. For the French government, funding should be ensured through proportionate contributions by euro zone countries. Spending from the budget should be allocated to member states based on their compliance with European fiscal and social rules. According to the PS, revenues from corporate taxes with a Europe-wide minimum rate should contribute to fund the new budget, while PRG does not provide further details. On the **mutualisation of public debts**, the French government and PS differ in their opinion, while PRG has not adopted any position on the subject. The government rejects any mutualisation of existing public debts as this would promote irresponsible economic behaviour, but has not given a clear statement on such a measure for future borrowing at the financial markets, yet. PS is in favour of mutualising euro zone countries' public debts above a threshold of 60 % of the national Gross Domestic Product, if approved by the newly established euro zone parliament and the Eurogroup.

EUROPEAN DEFENCE UNION

The French government and the PS explicitly endorse the **extension of EU military planning capabilities** and the establishment of EU headquarters for military missions and operations. For the government, the headquarters would serve to coordinate European with NATO operations, whereas PS wants to prioritise EU military operations over those conducted by NATO. While the government does not support establishing a supranational **EU army**, which would be incompatible with the French government's and PS's strong emphasis on national military autonomy, PS and PRG have not yet adopted a position on the subject of supranational armed forces. Deeply rooted in French defence culture, maintaining national strategic autonomy regarding military decisions and actions

is underlined by both the government and PS. In the latest conclusions of the Franco-German Defence and Security Council, the French and the German government are also very cautious in this respect and do not define a clear position, even though both actors consider European collective defence as a long-term vision. Instead, they decided the common development of military capacities such as European fighter jets, tanks and artillery. The French government prefers holding a leading role in European defence cooperation and considers EU battle groups to be a suitable means to conduct EU missions. PS suggests deepening logistical and financial cooperation in the area of defence policy with the country's most important partners such as Germany, Italy, and Spain. PRG also supports closer bilateral defence cooperation, in particular with Germany and Spain.

ASYLUM AND MIGRATION

Among the government and progressive parties, there is widespread support for the harmonisation of asylum standards, for a reform of the Dublin system (including a fairer and more effective distribution of asylum seekers in the EU) and for the further integration of the Schengen area's external border controls. While the French government endorses reforms to deepen the Common European Asylum System, which would also aim at preventing «asylum shopping» and human trafficking, asylum procedures should still be managed at national level. PS and PRG in particular promote the issuance of humanitarian visas in order to reduce incentives for using irregular and dangerous migration routes. Even though PS is in favour of strengthening the mandate of the European Asylum and Support Office (EASO), as proposed by the Commission in April 2016, concrete concepts for an EU asylum agency or a **pure quota system for the relocation of asylum seekers** are rarely discussed. Indeed, all actors recognise the importance of EU management in the fields of external borders and sea rescue. The French government in particular prioritises the introduction of the European Travel Information and Authorisation System (ETIAS) and the entry-exit-system (EES) by the end of 2017. With regard to extending competences of the **European Border and Coast Guard Agency (EBCG)**, all actors support the expansion of its tasks (covering surveillance missions and border protection) as well as its size. The French government proposes an increase of the EBCG's human capacity from 1,500 up to 5,000 officers to be mobilised in case of need. Especially PS and PRG welcome the agency's ability to pursue both security and humanitarian issues, but only PRG underlines the need for its democratic accountability towards the European Parliament and the Council of the EU.

POLITY

In general, the French government, PS and PRG support the idea of **increased democratic accountability of the economic governance of the euro zone**. The French government is in favour of establishing a European finance minister

with a proper budget, who would be accountable to a newly-created euro zone parliament. The French President is also willing to further strengthen the EMU by transferring major competences to the EU level and to discuss treaty reforms if necessary and appropriate. While PS also suggests the creation of a new euro zone parliament through treaty reforms, PRG goes even further by proposing a new treaty in order to transform the European Commission into a genuine euro zone government. Such a government should ensure economic and budgetary coherence and be accountable to the European Parliament which would in turn benefit from increased control over the Commission. Concerning the **European Citizens' Initiative (ECI)**, reform proposals have not been discussed on a national level by the three actors recently. Given that the major governing party REM was created in April 2016, lacking ECI reform proposals by the new government were foreseeable and PRG and PS have not given any national opinion on the topic either.

WHITE PAPER PROCESS

The French government and PS support Scenario 3 of the **»White Paper on the Future of Europe«**, «those who want more do more», while PRG has no position. Both Macrons' election manifesto and subsequent speeches reflect REM's intention to transform and innovate European politics together with a coalition of willing states. President Macron is opposed to advancing solely as a collective of 19 (euro zone) or 27 member states and calls for an «avant-garde of desire». The PS does not take a clear stand on the White Paper, but implicitly supports scenario 3 by rejecting the idea of EU progressing only collectively at 27. As regards the future of integration in general, REM, PS and PRG are in favour of the idea of **flexible integration**. Macrons' REM explicitly promotes an inclusive and temporary model of a multi-speed Europe, where member states are free to catch up with the avant-garde countries in relevant policy fields. However, cherry-picking is explicitly excluded and bilateral Franco-German cooperation shall represent the starting point for initiatives both within the EU and the euro zone. According to REM, instruments for implementing flexible integration vary depending on the time frame: In the medium-term, advances may be obtained within the treaties (e. g. Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) in defence matters or a joint proposal for a common consolidated tax base). However, in order to induce profound reforms, the French government is also open towards treaty change in the long term, in particular regarding euro zone reforms. Positions of PS and PRG are mostly based on an inclusive, multi-speed Europe in defence and intelligence matters, e. g. PESCO, to build a defence union based on pooling and sharing as well as common intelligence services. However, the parties' proposals also broadly cover fiscal, social and cultural issues as well.

Legend

Actors Covered by the Study in each EU Member State

- *National Government*: including its members from one or more political parties, the Head of State or Government, relevant executive ministers and administration.
- *Progressive Parties*: They include all parties that are represented either in the Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament (S&D) or that are members of the Party of European Socialists (PES) and have gained a minimum share of 5 % of the votes in the last national or European elections. They also include La République en Marche (REM) in France.

Concrete Reform Options in Different Policy Areas

Social Union

1. *Upward Convergence of National Social Security Schemes* to provide Europe-wide protection against social risks and to ensure a decent standard of living for EU citizens.
2. *European Coordination of National Minimum Wages* to ensure a decent income within the EU to prevent in-work poverty, to promote social convergence and to avoid social dumping across the EU.
3. *New Balance of Social Rights and Internal Market Freedoms* to compensate the current precedence of internal market freedoms over national social rights.

European Economic and Monetary Union

4. *Fighting Tax Fraud and Tax Evasion on a European Level* for a fair allocation of tax burdens among natural and judicial persons.
5. *Fiscal Capacity for the Euro Zone* to provide stabilisation against economic shocks through public expenditure in the euro zone.
6. *Mutualisation of Public Debts* to tackle the problem of a sharp increase in public debts in some member states as a result of the euro zone crisis.

European Defence Union

7. *Extending EU Military Planning Capabilities* also for executive military missions and operations.
8. *EU Army* establishing a permanent multinational military force under European command.

Asylum and Migration

9. *Pure Quota System for the Relocation of Asylum Seekers* which would replace the Dublin system.
10. *More Competences for the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (EBCG)* expanding the current EBCG tasks in terms of »shared responsibility« between the EBCG and national authorities.

Polity

11. *Increase Democratic Accountability of the Economic Governance of the Euro Zone* to make its institutions more responsive to EU citizens.
12. *European Citizens' Initiative (ECI)*: revision of the ECI regulation to make the instrument more citizen-friendly and effective in order to strengthen the participative democracy in the EU.

White Paper Process

13. *The White Paper on the Future of Europe* by the European Commission presents five possible scenarios for the future course of European integration.
14. *Flexible Integration*: limiting the application of certain rules to certain EU member states.
15. *Preferred Reform Instrument*: Treaty reform, reforms inside or outside the Treaties.

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