

Recovery, Strength, Belonging

Key Priorities of the French Presidency of the Council of the EU

By Alexander Conway



On 1 January 2022, France will assume the rotating Presidency of the Council of the European Union, which it will hold for six months until 31 June 2022. This marks the beginning of a new trio with France, the Czech Republic, and Sweden and will set the political agenda for the EU for the next 18 months.

This will be France's thirteenth Presidency of the Council of the EU - its first held in 1959. France will hold the Presidency as the European Union continues to manage the ongoing impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, tensions over migration on the EU-Belarusian border, and the climate change crisis. Apart from addressing the legislative agenda foreseen for 2022, the French Presidency will also preside over the conclusion of the Conference on the Future of Europe. A major emphasis of the Presidency will be on addressing citizens' disillusionment with democracy through strengthening Europe's economic and industrial competitiveness and tackling socio-economic inequality. The political activities of the Presidency will also be complemented by over 380

citizens' events and ministerial meetings on culture and identity throughout France.

Ongoing COVID-19 infection waves across Europe may impede the French Presidency's from holding of important ministerial meetings and summits, particularly if restrictive measures are reintroduced across Europe. The delays to the running of the Conference on the Future of Europe, including the postponement of a Citizens' Panel in Dublin Castle from December 2021 to February 2022, may also push the Conference timeline beyond the initial provisional end date of March 2022 and limit its relevance for the French Presidential elections in April 2022.

In a press conference held on Thursday 9 December 2021 at the Elysée Palace in Paris to outline the priorities of the French Presidency of the Council of the EU, President Macron stated that France had "inherited the timing of the Presidency – notably because of Brexit", as a consequence of which

the date of subsequent Presidencies, was brought forward by six months.¹ The French Presidency priorities will be situated in the broader framework of the Trio of Presidencies (France, the Czech Republic and Sweden) based on strategic threats such as migration management, challenges to rule of law and reinforcing industrial and digital sovereignty the next 18 months.²

Presidency Motto and Logo

The French Presidency motto, “*Recovery, Strength, Belonging*” (*relance, puissance et appartenance*), encapsulates France’s ambitions for their six-month term. This refers to the EU’s health and economic Recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic; asserting Europe’s Strength in response to geopolitical challenges and cultivating a sense of *Belonging* within an EU based on rule of law and shared values.

As outlined by French Secretary of State for European Affairs, Clément Beaune,³ the logo of the Presidency represents an EU oriented towards progress, based on the initials of the European Union in French (UE) the French tricolour and the 12 stars of the EU and an arrowhead which indicates France’s determination to move forward together as a Union. The Presidency

motto and logo together underscore France’s belief that the best response to the health crisis, to tensions in the international political order and to climate change is a unified European one.⁴

France’s EU Presidency Priorities

The priorities of the French Presidency of the Council of the EU can be seen as a continuation of the President Macron’s 2017 “Sorbonne speech”⁵ which has framed France’s vision of a Europe better equipped to defend its values and interests in a competitive global environment. This shared vision can be seen in the Fit for 55 package of climate neutrality by 2050, an emphasis on the regulation of digital markets and the platform/gig economy, legislation on a European minimum wage, and the introduction of more robust international trade policy enforcement instruments.

Within this overarching ambition President Macron identified three broad priorities, namely: a more sovereign Europe, a new economic growth model for Europe, and a more social and humane Europe.

Building a More Sovereign Europe / Une Europe plus souveraine

A more sovereign Europe for France is based on



¹ Georgina Wright on Twitter: "Ok, I can't help myself. Macron says "We inherited the timing of the presidency - notably because of Brexit". He's right: remember, UK was supposed to hold the presidency in 2017. It didn't, so all the successive presidencies moved forward by 6 months." / Twitter

² [programme-du-trio.pdf \(europa.eu\)](#)

³ [Discours du Président de la République à la conférence de presse du 9 décembre 2021 - Présidence française du Conseil de l'Union européenne 2022 \(europa.eu\)](#)

⁴ [Emblème et devise - Présidence française du Conseil de l'Union européenne 2022 \(europa.eu\)](#)

⁵ [President Macron gives speech on new initiative for Europe | Élysée \(elysee.fr\)](#)

three interlinked issues: **migration management**, **improving common European defence capacities** and **stabilising Europe's neighbourhood**.

Migration Management

A key priority for the French Presidency is the reform of the Schengen Area of free movement of people and the improvement of control of Europe's borders. To achieve this, President Macron has called for a revision of the Schengen Area's governance to be modelled on the example of the Eurozone where relevant national ministers meet regularly to ensure "a coherent policy" for the EU's external borders and for internal movement within Schengen. This would be supported by the conclusion of the discussions on the new Migration and Asylum Pact, and the establishment of an intergovernmental emergency border support mechanism. This would provide for the rapid deployment of Frontex and national law enforcement officials and equipment to Member States whose external borders are under pressure. The French Presidency also plans to develop closer relations and foster greater cooperation with countries of origin and transit countries for migrants to mitigate the primary causes of migration.⁶

Defence and Strategic Autonomy

The defence aspect of European strategic autonomy involves the development of a coherent common European defence policy and is a key strategic priority for the French Presidency. This will be further elaborated with the development of common threat assessment criteria as part of the Strategic Compass to be adopted in a March 2022 summit. President Macron expects that the Strategic Compass will allow European defence to enter a more "operational phase" and the final component of strategic autonomy is reinforcing European defence industries.⁷ Furthermore, issues such as greater

European defence cooperation in the cyber, maritime and space domains will be addressed ahead of a NATO summit in June 2022.

European Neighbourhood

The final element of a more sovereign autonomous Europe focuses on ensuring the stability of the EU's immediate neighbourhood, specifically Africa and the Western Balkans. The French Presidency has highlighted the relationship with Africa as a key priority, with an EU-African Union Summit scheduled for February 2022. It envisages three axes of engagement: economic, development and security.

- The economic proposal is to establish a "New Deal" to help finance the €300bn needed for African economic development in the context of the economic impacts of COVID-19 and demographic growth.
- On development, France wants to support the greater EU engagement in education initiatives in Africa, particularly for girls and for teacher training; to facilitate technology transfers and production capacities in vaccines and primary healthcare; and to finance energy transitions and climate mitigation measures.
- France's security ambition is to further engage fellow EU countries into French-led operations in the Sahel region and develop a true Europe-Africa security partnership to address terrorism.

President Macron has also scheduled a summit for June 2022 to address Europe's particular responsibility for the Western Balkans and has two objectives for the region.

- To clarify the effective nature of the integration of the region, which is crucial for the future security

⁶ [Discours du Président de la République à la conférence de presse du 9 décembre 2021 - Présidence française du Conseil de l'Union européenne 2022 \(europa.eu\)](#)

⁷ [Discours du Président de la République à la conférence de presse du 9 décembre 2021 - Présidence française du Conseil de l'Union européenne 2022 \(europa.eu\)](#)

of the EU according to the French Presidency,

- To prevent “interference and manipulation” by foreign powers who seek to destabilise the EU via the region.

Developing a New Economic Growth Model (Un nouveau modèle de croissance économique)

France plans to use its Presidency as an opportunity to “**imagine a new European model**” which combines competitiveness with regulation and solidarity.

This new model would involve a re-evaluation of the **EU’s common budgetary rules** which limit annual deficits to 3% of Member States’ GDP and overall national debt levels to 60% of GDP, according to the Maastricht convergence criteria⁸ and the Stability and Growth Pact.⁹ This reform would permit Member States to finance strategic investments in critical industries to facilitate the climate and digital transitions. These topics are to be discussed at an extraordinary European Council on 10-11 March 2022 in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and effective suspension of EU budget rules.

At a macroeconomic level, the French Presidency plans to focus on tackling mass unemployment and creating the “right jobs” to address the socio-economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. Central to this will be prioritising the conclusion of the European minimum wage directive,¹⁰ which does not define an average wage, but sets a Union-wide minimum, and the pay transparency directive.¹¹ The French Presidency also plans to channel targeted strategic investment into critical technologies and industries, in order to create European-scale industrial champions.

Climate Transition

⁸ [EUR-Lex - xy0026 - EN - EUR-Lex \(europa.eu\)](#)

⁹ [EUR-Lex - I25021 - EN - EUR-Lex \(europa.eu\)](#)

¹⁰ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52020PC0682>

¹¹ [EUR-Lex - 52021PC0093 - EN - EUR-Lex \(europa.eu\)](#)

¹² <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52021PC0564>

Another French Presidency focus will be the reconciliation of economic growth with Europe’s **climate ambitions**, namely a 55% reductions of greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 and climate neutrality by 2050. France aims to conclude the “Fit for 55” legislative package under its six-month term and will devote considerable attention to the implementation of the carbon border adjustment mechanism (CBAM)¹² which aims to support the green transition while preserving European firms’ competitiveness against foreign competitors.

This is complemented by France’s support for the inclusion of “mirror clauses” in EU trade deals to incorporate equivalent EU environmental and social standards with trading partners at EU and WTO levels. In addition, France will champion the adoption of a new instrument similar to the CBAM to combat deforestation and biodiversity loss by banning the importation of soy, beef, palm oil, wood, cocoa, and coffee products to the EU, if they are found to have contributed to deforestation.

Digital Transition

Ushering in the **digital transition** and fostering European digital champions and digital sovereignty is a key ambition of the French Presidency. France is keen to further the expansion of the European Single Market into digital services and begin implementing a commonly agreed-upon taxation of digital multinationals. Central to the French Presidency’s digital agenda will be the conclusion and implementation of the Digital Services Act (DSA), which establishes a liability regime for large online platforms for the content published on their platforms, and the Digital Markets Act (DMA) which tackles monopolisation and ensures fair competition online.

A More Humane/Social Europe (Une Europe plus humaine/sociale)

A core ambition for President Macron during France's Presidency is to develop a more "humane" Europe which better protects the most vulnerable in society and works constructively with European social partners.

Furthermore, an emphasis on values and the rule on the law is not only reflected in the Presidency priorities, but also in the Conference on the Future of Europe which will be co-chaired by France and is due to be concluded on Europe Day, 9 May 2022. France has underlined the non-negotiable status of the rule of law in the EU and supports the establishment of a European support fund for independent investigative journalism, the extension of EU crimes to include hate speech and the development of new instruments to defend democracy and the rule of law.

To counter the revisionist view of European history in certain Member States, France plans to establish a "Europe Academy" which would bring together 100 intellectuals across the EU.¹³ In the context of the European Year of Youth 2022, France will also spearhead the development of a six-month European civic service initiative open to all Europeans under 25 years old, building on the success of Erasmus+ and the European Commission's proposed Alma programme.

Conclusion

The French Presidency of the Council of the EU could prove momentous for the European Union, coming as the Union begins to imagine a post-COVID future and tackle pressing questions about how it protects its interests, promotes its values, and asserts its place in the world. France's ambitious agenda is set against the background of internal and external challenges to the Union's cohesion and increasing geopolitical fragmentation and competition. The impact of the French presidential and legislative elections on

the Presidency remains to be seen, but a changed Franco-German dynamic with a new government in Berlin may alter the effectiveness of French policy proposals.

France is Ireland's closest EU neighbour, and the two share a deep commitment to the values of the EU and the benefits of EU membership. Their status as the only two EU countries on the UN Security Council in 2022 also affords them the opportunity to shape the international agenda at the United Nations. Common concerns about the future resilience and relevance of the Union will likely shape the French Presidency and may drive the agenda for the subsequent presidencies in the Trio.

¹³ [Les priorités de la présidence française du Conseil de l'Union européenne 2022 - Présidence française du Conseil de l'Union européenne 2022 \(europa.eu\)](https://europa.eu/press-room/en/infographic-les-priorites-de-la-presidence-francaise-du-conseil-de-lunion-europeenne-2022)

Current French Political Landscape

France is a founding member of the EU and is a unitary bicameral semi-presidential republic.

France's previous presidential election, held between 23 April 2017 – 7 May 2017, was won by Emmanuel Macron representing *En Marche!* with 66.1% of the vote in the second round against Marine Le Pen of the *Front national* (now *Rassemblement nationale*). Legislative elections were held between 11-18 June 2017 and resulted in a parliamentary majority for President Macron's *La République En Marche!* (LREM), allied with the centrist *MoDem*, which won 350 of the 577 seats in the *Assemblée Nationale*.

The present government is led by Prime Minister Jean Castex, the third government under President Macron following the resignation of Édouard Philippe. Following several defections, LREM and MoDem have 325 combined seats, retaining their majority in the chamber, although LREM have lost their individual overall majority.

President Macron is predicted to win his presidential re-election campaign in April 2022, although the margin is expected to be less than that in 2017 according to recent polls. The other main contenders are Valérie Pécresse of the centre-right *Les Républicains* and Marine Le Pen of the far-right *Rassemblement nationale*. Media reports suggest that Anne Hidalgo of the *Parti Socialiste* and the independent far-right *Éric Zemmour* have an outside chance of reaching the second round. Legislative elections for the *Assemblée Nationale* are scheduled for 2022 following the presidential elections. Both elections will take place while France co-chairs the Conference on the Future of Europe.

Key Actors in the French Presidency



President, Emmanuel Macron



Prime Minister, Jean Castex



Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs,
Jean-Yves Le Drian



Secretary of State for European Affairs,
Clément Beaune



Minister of the Economy, Finance and the Recovery,
Bruno Le Maire



Minister of State for the Digital Transition and
Electronic Communication, Cédric O



Minister of the Interior, Gérald Darmanin



Minister of Culture, Roselyne Bachelot



Minister for the Ecological Transition,
Barbara Pompili



Florence Parly,
Minister for the Armed Forces



Alexandre Adam,
Europe Advisor to President Macron

Provisional Council Meeting Agenda for the French Presidency 2022

- 17 January – AGRIFISH & Eurogroup
- 18 January – ECOFIN
- 24 January – FAC
- 25 January – GAC
- 17-18 February – European Union–African Union Summit
- 21 February – AGRIFISH & FAC
- 22 February – GAC
- 24 February – COMPET
- 10-11 March – Informal European Council summit
- 14 March – Eurogroup & EPSCO
- 15 March – ECOFIN
- 17 March – ENVI
- 21 March – FAC & FAC (Defence)
- 22 March – GAC
- 23 March – Tripartite Social Summit
- 24-25 March – European Council
- 29 March – EPSCO (Health)
- 4 April – Eurogroup
- 4-5 April – EYCS Council
- 5 April – ECOFIN
- 7 April – AGRIFISH
- 11 April – FAC
- 12 April – GAC
- 16-17 May – FAC & special summit on defence union FAC (Defence)
- 20 May – FAC (Development)
- 23 May – Eurogroup
- 24 May – ECOFIN
- 30 May – GAC
- 2 June – TTE (Transport)
- 3 June – FAC (Trade) & TTE (Telecommunications)
- 9 June – COMP & JHA
- 10 June - COMP
- 13 June – AGRIFISH
- 16 June – Eurogroup
- 16-17 June – EPSCO
- 17 June - ECOFIN
- 20 June - FAC
- 21 June - GAC
- 23-24 June – European Council (Balkans)
- 27 June – TTE (Energy)
- 28 June - ENVI

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