

Germany: Christian Democrats' response to Macron's appeal to the citizens of Europe

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The CDU leader, Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer, published an article on 10 March entitled *Getting Europe right* discussing the concept of European policy. In her article she responded to the appeal to the citizens of Europe announced by the French president on 5 March. In parallel to the publication in the *Welt am Sonntag*, the English, French, Italian, Spanish and Polish translations of this article were uploaded to the CDU's website.

The preferred model of European integration presented in the article is based on the principle of subsidiarity. She expressed her sceptical opinion about centralist and bureaucratic solutions and the vision of a European superstate. Furthermore, she identified the role of the national states as a source of identification and democratic legitimisation, and she recognised the intergovernmental method as a pillar in the decision-making process equal to the community method.

As regards the economy, Kramp-Karrenbauer emphasised the soundness of the conservative approach to stabilising the eurozone, and disapproved of the communitarisation of debts, the Europeanisation of social systems, and the minimum wage. She pointed to the need to create a common internal market for banks. She also recognised the need to develop a strategy for supporting the convergence of living standards in the member states through coordinated action on the national and European level. She backed funding of common research and development of technologies using an EU innovation budget. In her opinion, sticking to the rules of fair competition in the EU should be accompanied by ensuring the capability for European companies to remain competitive with regard to external monopolies benefiting from the protectionist approach of their countries of origin. Furthermore, she appealed for tax evasion to be countered and backed the introduction of the digital taxation model based on the OECD model. She came up with a proposal of a European pact for climate, taking into account the social consequences of the economic transformation this entails.

As regards migration and asylum policy, completing the Schengen system through ensuring effective protection of the EU's external borders, with Frontex playing the key role as an operational border police force, should be a priority. The common approach within the EU to deal with migration challenges should include conducting proceedings on the EU's borders, the development and accessibility of registers and databases, and additional contributions by member states as regards accepting refugees, development aid and the protection of external borders. The strategic partnership 'with and for Africa' is to play a key role in

dealing with the causes of migration.

In the area of foreign and security policy, a common seat in the UN Security Council is expected to contribute to improving the EU's capability to act in the future. In parallel to this, a European Security Council, whose members would include the United Kingdom, would also be established. She mentioned the combat aircraft project initiated with France as an example of European co-operation aimed at improving defence capabilities, and suggested that a European aircraft carrier could be launched as a future symbolic enterprise.

Commentary

- The response to Emmanuel Macron in the form of an article published by the leader of Germany's largest political party offers Germany a convenient change in the platform of discussion with France. While avoiding a confrontation of views between the leaders of the two countries, the German government may still continue to promote the joint leadership of the European integration process. The disagreement, especially as regards economic issues, has been turned into a discussion between political groupings on the national and European levels. This has also increased the degree of freedom in putting forward solutions that are disadvantageous to France (offering Africa access to the EU's agricultural market, moving the seat of the European Parliament from Strasbourg, and the communitarisation of the seat in the UN Security Council).
- The CDU's rapid reaction to Emmanuel Macron's appeal has enabled the Christian Democrats to take the initiative in the German debate on the election to the European Parliament. The proposals presented by the leader of the key political force will serve as the point of reference for the stances to be taken by the other political parties before the CDU and the CSU adopt a common election agenda on 25 March. Furthermore, stimulating internal discussion about the future of the EU may offer counterbalance to the social issues – which are the domain of the SPD – that have recently been at the forefront of the German domestic debate.
- The presented proposals are also intended at strengthening the position of Kramp-Karrenbauer, who came up with such an extensive programme for developing the European project for the first time since becoming leader of the CDU in December 2018. Compliance with the traditional political approach of European Christian Democracy allows her to take the position of a continuator of the policy beneficial for Germany and for the party she leads, and to back her ambitions to lead the government.
- In ideological terms, the main axis of the dispute has been drawn between the Christian Democrat concept of integration based on the subsidiarity principle and the centralist approach of the French president. However, emphasising the equal significance of the intergovernmental method is in line with Emmanuel Macron's preferences. The two countries are in particular interested in the possibility of influencing the European Commission's decisions as regards competition rules.
- The fact that the issue of the Economic and Monetary Union has been raised only to a small extent – as in Macron's appeal – lifts the focus from the difference of opinions between France and Germany as regards eurozone reform. Highlighting these

disagreements would not serve the German Christian Democrats well ahead of the election to the European Parliament because the Eurosceptic AfD and the liberal FDP would capitalise on this. Furthermore, Paris and Berlin prefer discussing proposals in the bilateral format before moving onto talks within a broader framework.

- The proposals concerning foreign and security policy are the most advanced. Unlike in the French-German Meseberg Declaration of June 2018, Kramp-Karrenbauer has suggested setting up a European (and not an EU) Security Council. While Emmanuel Macron proposed setting up an assembly for preparing decisions, the article published by Kramp-Karrenbauer suggests establishing a body whose decision-making competences will go beyond the treaty order currently in force. The article outlines how France and Germany agree in their desire to emancipate Europe from the United States, while still noticing the significance of the transatlantic partnership for European security.
- Emphasising the indisputability of the values and principles in relations with Central and Eastern European countries should be viewed above all in the context of the escalating controversies over Fidesz's membership in the European People's Party, which adversely is affecting the election campaign of the CDU and its sister party the CSU (from which Manfred Weber, the candidate for President of the European Commission, hails). Backing a broad legitimising base for 'a new Europe' and a more compromising approach than that of Macron towards the link between engagement in a common migration and asylum policy and membership in the Schengen Area reflect a desire to soften the East-West divide inside the EU.