



Sigmar Gabriel, Jürgen Habermas, Emmanuel Macron

Rethinking Europe

A discussion between Jürgen Habermas, Sigmar Gabriel and Emmanuel Macron

Published 20 April 2017

Original in **German**

Translation by **Saul Lipetz**

First published in **Blätter für deutsche und internationale Politik 4/2017 (German version); Eurozine (English version)**

Downloaded from eurozine.com (<http://www.eurozine.com/rethinking-europe/>)

© Blätter für deutsche und internationale Politik / Eurozine

Emmanuel Macron has broken from entrenched definitions of right and left in France and based a programme on liberalization and social justice. Sigmar Gabriel, the German Social Democrat foreign minister, has also sought to bring together the conflicting wings of his party. Here, the two discuss the need for positive campaigning on Europe, and why the future of the Union depends on a combination of investment and reform. With an introduction by Jürgen Habermas.

This event, entitled 'Which future for Europe?', was hosted by the Hertie School of Governance in Berlin on 16 March 2017 and moderated by Henrik Enderlein, the Hertie School's Vice-President.

Jürgen Habermas: I have been entrusted with the honour of saying a few introductory words about the subject of our conversation between our distinguished guest Emmanuel Macron and Sigmar Gabriel, our foreign minister who recently rose like the proverbial phoenix from the ashes. Both names are associated with courageous reactions to challenging situations. Emmanuel Macron has dared to cross a red line hitherto untouched since 1789. He has broken apart the entrenched configuration of the two political camps of right and left. Given that it is impossible in a democracy for any



individual to stand *above* the parties, we are curious to see how the political spectrum will be reconfigured if, as expected, he is victorious in the French election.

In Germany we can observe a similar impulse, albeit under different auspices. Here too, Sigmar Gabriel has chosen his friend Martin Schulz for an unorthodox role. Schulz has been welcomed by the public as a largely independent candidate for the chancellorship and is expected to lead his party in a new direction. Although the political, economic and social situations in our two countries are very different, the fundamental mentality of citizens seems to me to reflect a similar feeling of irritation- irritation about the inertia of governments that, despite the palpably increasing pressure of the problems we face continue to muddle along without any prospect of restructuring. We feel that the lack of political will to act is paralysing, particularly given the problems that can only be resolved *collectively*, on a European level.

Emmanuel Macron personifies the antithesis of the passivity of political actors today. He and Sigmar Gabriel, back when both were ministers of the economy, proposed an initiative for enhanced fiscal, economic, social and political cooperation within Europe, even if unfortunately it was unsuccessful. If I recall correctly, they argued for a ministry of finance to be set up for the eurozone and for a joint independent budget, overseen by the European Parliament. They thereby hoped to create scope on a European level for flexible economic and political action, with a view to overcoming an obstacle that has inhibited closer cooperation between the member states in other areas as well. By this I mean the significant differences in rates of growth, in levels of unemployment and in national debt between the economies of the north and south of a common monetary are predicated on convergence even while its economies drift apart. Meanwhile the political cohesion of this monetary union is being worn down by its persistent and still increasing divergences in commercial performance. In the course of the implementation of an austerity regime that was bound to have dramatic and asymmetrical effects on the economies in northern and southern Europe, the divergent experiences and contrasting narratives of the various countries have given rise to aggressive reactions on both sides, and have deeply divided Europe.

Initiatives such as these can fail for all sorts of reasons, including



institutional ones. For instance, it is the governments of member states, which have to justify themselves to their respective electorates, that are least equipped to assert the interests of the community as a whole; and yet, as long as there is no pan-European party system, they are the only bodies that can make any difference at all. What interests me is whether the refusal to accept the consequences of a potential redistributive policy means that any broadening of European competencies is doomed once the reallocation of financial burdens extends beyond national borders. To put it simply: does the reaction of, for example, the German public to the notorious buzzword 'transfer union' mean that appeals to solidarity here are bound to fail? Or are we just kicking the problem of a still-simmering financial crisis down the road, because our political elites lack the courage to tackle the burning issue of Europe's future? [1]

On the concept of solidarity, I would simply say that since the French Revolution and the early socialist movements this expression has been used not as a moral, but as a political concept. Solidarity is not charity. Solidarity – united action supportive of one's allies – means accepting certain disadvantages for the sake of one's long-term self-interest, trusting that one's partners will act similarly in comparable situations. Reciprocal trust, in our case trust that transcends national borders, is indeed a relevant variable – but so is one's long-term self-interest. Despite what many of my colleagues assume, there is no natural or inevitable reason why issues of redistributive fairness should stop at national borders and should not also be discussed within the European community of nations – although these nations have long formed a legal jurisdiction, and nineteen of them have long been subject to the systemic constraints of the same currency union, albeit with asymmetric consequences.

To this day, European unification has remained an elite project because political elites have avoided involving the wider public in an informed debate about alternative scenarios for the future. National populations will only be able to recognize and decide what is in their *own* respective interests *in the long run* when we begin to discuss – far beyond the bounds of academic journals – the far-reaching alternatives between abandoning the euro, or else returning to a currency system allowing for a limited margin of fluctuation, or indeed opting for closer cooperation.

Global crises and the divided West



In the meantime, other problems that are now attracting more public attention anyway show that Europeans should be cooperating more closely. There is the perception of an escalating situation in global and international affairs that has slowly reached the tolerance threshold even of the Council of Europe's governing members, shocking them out of their narrow national mindset. The crises, which must at the very least make us think about closer cooperation, are obvious: Europe's geopolitical situation had already undergone dramatic change since the Syrian civil war, the crisis in Ukraine and the gradual retreat of the USA from the role of a global regulatory power. But now that the global power that is the United States seems to be turning away from the hitherto prevailing internationalist school of thought, Europe's position has become even more unpredictable. With Trump's pressure on the members of NATO to augment their military contribution, questions of external security have become even more relevant.

Moreover, the terrorist threat is not about to go away in the medium term; and the pressure of migration on Europe has become a century-defining problem. Both developments clearly demand closer cooperation from Europeans.

Finally, America's new government threatens not only to divide the West with regard to global trade and economic policy. Nationalist, racist, anti-Islamic and anti-Semitic prejudices – which thanks to the new American government's communication style and ideology have gained political weight – are, together with the authoritarian developments in Russia, Turkey, Egypt and other countries, forming an unexpected challenge to the way the West perceives itself both politically and culturally. Europe suddenly sees itself left to fend for itself, in the role of a defensive custodian of liberal principles supporting the sidelined majority of the American electorate.

So far, the only noticeable reaction to this tremendous pressure has been some tentative attempts to promote a 'multi-speed Europe' in the area of military cooperation. As I see it, this attempt is also destined to fail, unless Germany is willing at the same time to defuse the ticking time bomb of the structural economic disparities in the eurozone. As long as we pretend that this conflict doesn't exist, we will not be able to achieve closer cooperation in any other policy area either. Besides, the vague notion of a 'multi-speed Europe' is aimed at the wrong targets – given that we can expect willingness to cooperate most of all from the member states of the currency union, i.e. the countries that since the outbreak of the banking crisis have been



mutually interdependent and reliant on one another.

By no means do I wish to suggest that it is only Germany that has good reasons to reassess its policies. Another way in which Emmanuel Macron stands out among European politicians is that he calls problems by their name that can only be tackled in France itself. But it is now up to the German government – although it did not choose this role – to take the initiative alongside France, so that together we can turn this situation round. The blessing of being the major beneficiary of the European Union is also a curse – because, from a historical perspective, the failure of the European unification project would be attributed to the indecision of German policy, and with good reason.

Henrik Enderlein: Emmanuel Macron, you heard what Jürgen Habermas said: you are the only politician brave enough to say out loud what France can do at home to move the European debate forward. So what needs to be done?

Emmanuel Macron: Hello to you all. First of all I'd like to thank you for allowing me to speak French, since my German isn't good enough. When I was lucky enough to be invited to the Humboldt University recently, I spoke English – naively hoping above all that at least I would be understood. But that bothered a lot of people in France, especially my opponents in the National Front, who saw this as a great insult to our language. I love the French language, I defend it – but I also think that Europe was created so that we could understand one another. Now you are giving me a double opportunity – to speak my own language and to be understood into the bargain. So I'm grateful for that.

Jürgen Habermas addressed many important issues. I think we are facing a double challenge today, one which we indeed need to tackle at a national level. The first challenge is that Europe has ceased to work as it should. Since the French and the Dutch 'no' to the constitutional treaty ten years ago, there have been no new proposals. And the fact that there is no longer an agenda with European proposals weakens Europe massively, because now all the talk is of division.

And yet the European adventure is driven by a logic of will. There will always be a few member states that suggest something that was hitherto inconceivable, who then succeed in bringing the others along with them.



And this logic of will gradually includes everyone, according to the principle of concentric circles. But since nothing new has been put forward for ten years, apathy sets in, everyone pulls back and we have talk of Grexit and Brexit. If we do nothing, we shall have many other similar debates.

So we have to put forward a European agenda – and we have to stick to it. I think Europeans are mistaken if they think they will appeal to the general public by saying ‘Europe has become so unpopular – let’s not talk about it.’ Or, ‘let’s try not to be too European. Or ‘let’s be European, but first of all sort of nationalist’. But if you’re a timid European, you are already a defeated European – so this option isn’t one I recommend. Because today Europe is the thing that protects us from new dangers.

Let’s advocate a European agenda in our national debates

In response to Jürgen Habermas’s remarks I can perhaps highlight two points. First: Europe has stalled, because nothing new is being proposed, but above all because we are no longer managing to reconcile the ethics of responsibility with social justice – as you expressed it very well. In our country we are engaged in many debates in which social justice is interpreted in the classic sense, as redistribution between a country’s social classes. This is not a debate we are having at European level or in the eurozone.

And yet we have a problem of inequity at European level and especially in the eurozone: because at the moment our revenues are piled up in different areas, because some countries are carrying out reforms but not using them to best advantage, and because the eurozone is dysfunctional. So if we don’t have a real debate about distribution and fairness – and at the same time about responsibility – we won’t make any progress.

The chief risk is of fatally weakening the very governments that are actually pursuing reforms. Because as long as these countries are in the grip of this inequality, the reforms are too slow to yield results that are politically and socially noticeable, and then it’s the reformers who are in the wrong. And that plays into the hands of populists and extremists.

Enderlein: So does France have to reform in order to win back other countries’ trust?



Macron: Yes, and this brings me to my second point. Europe at the same time allows us to protect ourselves from the major risks that Jürgen Habermas mentioned – especially the international risks. I think that the momentum that we need to rediscover – and in any case the revival of the European project – will be achieved through the Franco-German partnership.

Today, the responsibility rests on French shoulders. Why? Because we have lost people's confidence – that happened about fifteen years ago, when France didn't carry out reforms. At the time France had made a commitment to tackling those reforms together with Germany, and negotiated joint exceptions from the Maastricht Treaty in order to do so. In some ways we have been trying to catch up with this history for fifteen years. So France has to restore its credibility in economic and budgetary matters – as a precondition for this discussion. But at the same time France has to spark off a movement towards more investments, towards economic revival and towards greater solidarity. Solidarity, for me, does not stop at the economic level, but on the German side also relates to immigration, security and defence.

For what concerns us today is a lack of trust, caused by the logic of direct responsibility that Europe is currently stuck with. Sigmar Gabriel and I spoke out against this almost two years ago now in a joint article, when we were both ministers of the economy in our countries. [2] So we have to solve the problems of reality and of trust.

Enderlein: So let's talk about whether this indecision will continue, or not. Emmanuel Macron has just said that France is ready to act. Foreign Minister Gabriel, what is Germany ready to do?

Sigmar Gabriel: I think that before we succeed in doing what Professor Habermas has just called for, namely winning majorities for an extension of European competencies, we first need to change a few narratives. Because politics begins with saying what's right. At the moment we like pointing at people who produce fake news – but there are also some bits of fake news that have become established here over the last thirty years, maybe even longer. The first bit of fake news is that Germany is the packhorse of the European Union: We are *the* net contributors! We are the ones who support everyone else! Unfortunately this is a story that has been told for decades, in politics, in the media, in the economy – pretty much irrespective of who happens to be in power at any given time.



Whenever the financial structure of the European Union has been discussed, we have always stuck to the standard cross-party view that we have to reduce our net contribution – the balance of which incidentally comes to about twelve billion euros. So whenever I'm told – correctly – how important the European project is, twelve billion euros isn't a figure that blows me away. In the German federal budget we pay more for far less important things. That's why first of all we must stop this narrative of Germany as the packhorse of the European Union. Ultimately it serves only to pander to people's alleged national interests. The upsurge in nationalistic feeling that we're currently seeing is not the beginning, but the result, of thirty years of false narratives. The root of the problem is purely national narratives in the member states of the European Union, particularly in our country. Whereas the truth is that Germany is the chief profiteer, indeed the net *beneficiary*, of the European Union.

In political terms, there would be no united Germany without Europe – that much is obvious – but also culturally, in terms of peace, and of course more than that, commercially, financially and economically. Yes, we send more tax revenues to Brussels than we get back. But of course, you don't become European export champions, even world champions, without producing enough steel, enough electrical technology, enough chemicals and enough machines that these products are subsequently bought not only in Germany, but in other countries as well.

And only when others are doing well do they have enough money to buy German cars – they're expensive, partly because our wages and social security contributions are so high. And hopefully that will remain the case – we don't want even lower wages or worse social security benefits. Therefore, as Germans, we must have a real – and indeed a purely economic – interest in the rest of Europe doing well. Because only then do we do well.

Germany as net beneficiary of the EU, not net contributor

So, far from being net contributors, we are actually net beneficiaries of the European Union. But what is the best way to break through this false narrative? My suggestion to my own party is this: in the upcoming general election campaign we should, for the first time, make an aggressive case that we are willing to invest *more* in Europe than the agreed one per cent of European GDP. We should even be prepared to take the strain on our own if need be, or together with others, without the same criteria being applied for



all in Europe. Only with the provocative message 'We are willing to pay more!' will you get a debate about why, in Europe, we should actually all have a shared interest in this.

The second false narrative is to say that defence and security policies are somehow the ultimate vote-winner – because this presupposes a common world-view. By this I mean that actually we require, in the first instance, a common foreign policy concept. Not only because improving our security and defence policies will achieve nothing without social and economic progress in the EU, as Jürgen Habermas says, but also because we should not abruptly start forging ahead with defence projects on a purely national level without having a united European view of what our foreign policies should look like – because that could ultimately lead us in the wrong direction. That too is a false narrative, I believe. In Europe, foreign policy always used to be seen as paramount, particularly in defence policy – and I say that not just because I am a foreign minister, but because it should apply as a general rule. So politics starts with not telling people any fake news ourselves – which mostly only happens because people think it works better in an election campaign. We Germans in particular have to understand that a strong, united European Union is in our own interest. Our children and grandchildren will no longer have any voice in the world unless that voice is a European one – and that is why we are prepared to invest more, in our own interest and in the interests of Europe.

So, to conclude, one more point on the topic of solidarity – which is a concept that, as a social democrat, I know something about – solidarity means acting responsibly, both towards oneself and towards the community one belongs to. This responsible action is what it's all about. And I am quite sure that if we pursue this narrative we will also obtain the majorities we need to put it into practice.

Enderlein: Jürgen Habermas made it very clear in his address that it is important not only that more is done for Europe in Germany, but also that more money is spent in other countries – that is, that the prevailing austerity policies are abandoned. But if you spend more money, you have more debts, and sooner or later someone has to pay off those debts. That might be the nation states, which are in crisis – and in that case the stability pact has to be abandoned. It might be Germany – but that doesn't help those countries at a fundamental level. It might be the EU – but then we need to consider how these rising European debts will eventually be settled. So how should



the abandonment of austerity policies be achieved?

Gabriel: Here too I think it is critical to begin with the right narrative. In Germany people always say that at the beginning of the 2000s we implemented all these great reforms and that the only mistake we made was to break the debt criteria of the Maastricht Treaty. The true story is of course that the social reforms were only possible because we were investing at the same time, and *not* reducing our debts. Germany's success is the result of the fact that when we were reforming the country, we did not drive our economic development to the wall, but invested: in education – at the time the SPD–Green coalition developed the first all-day school programme – in renewable energies, in research and development.

So it borders on the irresponsible to justify policies of austerity by pointing to Germany as an example, the argument being that you can get out of the crisis if only you save enough. We did the opposite. We combined social and political reforms, as controversial as they were, with more debts than the EU permitted at the time. This is the only reason we prevented our growth from collapsing and unemployment from rising further. By the way, I would argue that otherwise we would never have got the social reforms through in any case.

And the same goes for Europe. Here too we need to get the right narrative across: if you are making reforms, you need time – or a time-out, even – to reduce deficits. If anything, you need more investment to stabilize growth and employment. Because ultimately, however much we do for Europe, it makes no difference: if the spurious pressure of austerity causes youth unemployment in countries like Italy to stand at forty per cent, why would anyone of that generation be interested in the European Union?

For me Europe always represented something hopeful. But for very many young people, Europe now represents a danger, because they have the impression that no one is helping them to find work and earn a living. That is why I think we need to tell the right story here. Only saving will inhibit reforms more than it helps them. And that is why we need more flexibility for investments at this time, rather than less.

This finally brings me to the question of how this is to be financed: which is of course by changing the debate over tax policy that we are having at the moment. It boggles the mind that the European Union loses 1.5 trillion euros



every year through legal forms of tax avoidance and that we provide securities for Irish banks, but that the state there can refuse to seize fourteen billion euros from Apple that this 'global player' should actually have paid. It is not as if there's no money – the question is only whether we're prepared to let everyone have a fair share in our community. Or should every master baker in Berlin pay higher rates of tax than big corporations? That's the important question.

If you don't fight for Europe, you give up on it

Enderlein: Can this pro-European discourse still be at all convincing in France, Emmanuel Macron? There's currently a heated debate there about national identity and also over the question of taxation, so about solidarity and its limits. And yet the most popular party among 18 to 24 year-olds is the National Front.

Macron: I think this line of argument in favour of Europe absolutely can be convincing, and I make a big effort to make it. Because if you don't fight, you've already lost. And yet so far there hasn't been any austerity in France. Sure enough, lots of people think there was a policy of austerity in France, but that's not true. It was southern Europe that was hit by austerity. To take up what Sigmar has just said, the criticisms in France result from the fact that after the crisis of 2008–10, we, the Hollande government, corrected the mistakes of the past, and the mistrust that it gave rise to, by reforms.

You cannot adequately tackle the problem of social justice within Europe if you do not address the problem of the 'moral hazard', of moral temptation and economic irresponsibility. A lot of trust has been lost as a result. If we want to see a European revival, the real question is: How can countries implement reforms if there is no pressure to do so? And are we investing in the right place by supporting countries that implement the right reforms, or should we take a loss and invest in countries that don't? That is the real debate that we will have – and it's going to be a very spirited one – in Germany even more than in France.

This is why we will only make progress – beyond the flexibility that Sigmar Gabriel has called for, which some countries may be afforded – through the joint capacity to invest, i.e. by means of a budget for the eurozone. This is the only means to reconcile social justice with the problem of the moral hazard, because then there would be a European institution capable of



restoring dynamism and trust in Europe. If the rules no longer permit progress, we need shared institutions to reach the next stage. We therefore need this institution at eurozone level, to create growth and foster solidarity.

Enderlein: Have you also discussed this with Chancellor Merkel?

Macron: I have discussed it with the Chancellor. I have told her that the first stage is obviously the reform in France, but that this reform cannot work if there is not a new European departure in all the matters that we've mentioned here. And therein lies the answer that Germany must deliver - more or less simultaneously.

We can win this debate and convince our fellow citizens that Europe is still the solution. I am impressed that in so many countries - this is true for France, for Italy and for many other countries - the commitment to Europe endures and there is a love for Europe and the European idea, even after so many years of crisis and massive difficulties. In Italy, Spain and Portugal an entire generation - the youngest - has never known anything other than mass unemployment that is directly linked to Europe. And yet, this generation remains attached to the European idea, and is therefore simply in need of a European project that operates at a level worthy of this commitment.

But this can only happen if we explain how we intend to create a future of growth and security. Therefore the European narrative that we must create - and this is exactly the same challenge that I face in this French presidential election - consists in this explanation: Europe is not this ultra-liberal vision of a mere common market, one which, if we take an honest look at our own history, we have very often been led towards by the British and a few others. What it is, is a common market free of barriers, so that we can function as a bloc of twenty-eight nations today and twenty-seven tomorrow, and a cooperative enterprise that is based on shared minimal rules and common standards and therefore highly ambitious.

But more importantly still, this European Union is a Europe that *protects* - in security and immigration - and that to this end must develop a common asylum policy and properly safeguard our European borders. This is a Europe that protects trade. When we were ministers of the economy and industry, [3] we fought to ensure that Europe would safeguard its steel industry against Chinese dumping. Only Europe can do that. Neither France nor



Germany can resist China – but Europe can. So if we get back to our narrative of growth and protection, Europe has a future in our public spheres. But we have to accept this narrative, embrace it and stand by it. And this is something I insist on in the face of the defeatism that is far too widespread today. Initially, after I had launched my movement ‘En Marche!’, people said ‘He’s crazy. It’ll never get anywhere.’ Now people are wondering how we will govern – which is already an indication of how many obstacles we have overcome.

Yet still many people in France, Germany and England say ‘You’re completely naive. You think you can win an election by defending Europe.’ But I’m not naive at all, quite the opposite. I think you can win an election today by defending Europe, as long as you do so honestly. Not a Europe that isn’t working, in other words, but a European project.

We need fierce debates

Earlier Sigmar showed me the SPD archive in the Willy Brandt House. We were quite emotional as we looked at the Élysée Treaty. Where was public opinion in Germany and France when the first European initiatives were launched? I would say that if people at the time had talked as far too many are doing today, we would never have seen the European Coal and Steel Community, or the Treaties of Rome, or the Élysée Treaty.

So we must not be under any illusions: just because our democracies are so strongly dictated by public opinion, or because the media are more prominent, does not mean that our political representatives should simply follow public opinion. Instead, we should explain what ways we can find to achieve success, even if they upset public opinion. Let us resist this contemporary treason of the intellectuals! [4] This manifests itself today in the belief that Europe is finished, that it is no longer a relevant concept for the challenges of our time and that nationalism or brutality are the right answers to our current experiences.

Enderlein: Surely we can also lose this debate about the idea of Europe? That’s what we’ve just seen in Britain.

Macron: This is the danger we face if we do not *lead* this debate. If we don’t front up to this battle and admit defeat, then we will lose. That much is certain. So we must lead this discussion. We need fierce debates. We have



to say things that some people might find unpleasant.

By the way, the best thing is to take the lead in one's own country in this complex debate. To be honest, I am not going to give the Germans lessons and explain to them that they have to invest. Many French people have already done this. We are the kings of teaching the Germans lessons. But what is far more useful is if I explain this to the French people: if we are to rediscover our dignity, our ability to act and to defend the idea of Europe, we first need to pursue reforms at home, so as to initiate something far more powerful in Europe. That's why I also think that what both of you have been doing is very helpful – that is to say, if intellectuals and politicians say with one voice 'We need more investment and more solidarity'. Nor should we fetishize budgetary consolidation, or even potential inflationary risks – which, to be honest, does not seem to me to be the biggest risk currently facing Germany.

Enderlein: Let me ask Sigmar Gabriel this question too: Can we lose this political debate about Europe? Can one even take this risk by going on the offensive?

Gabriel: Emmanuel Macron is right, of course: if you don't even try, you've already lost. And besides, I am a firm believer that this is a debate we can only win. That's what we learned from the French Enlightenment: ultimately those who espouse the enlightened view will triumph. They sometimes suffered setbacks, and sometimes even defeats. But the history of the Enlightenment shows us that they prevail in the end. And why should that not be the case here?

Enderlein: Jürgen Habermas, you said in your introduction that there is no natural law that dictates that questions of distributive fairness need to stop at national borders. Well, we can ask the question: why is Europe, specifically, the correct category here? It could equally be the nation state, or a region, or even the whole world. So why is this Europe so significant?

Habermas: History is full of accidents – all the more reason to trust in paths on which we are already travelling. We have invested half a century – sixty years, to be precise, since the Treaties of Rome were signed – in an extraordinarily demanding project. And now the question is *not* 'why Europe?' but rather: 'Is there any reason to abandon this project that has advanced so far?' – even if its successes are now no longer viewed in the



light that they deserve, because, in the course of a wrongheaded crisis policy, we have reached a state of deep division within Europe.

We are sitting here discussing this question of Europe's future because we have reached a historically critical moment. Having made so many efforts to create a legal jurisdiction in Europe that works and that we all belong to not simply by virtue of our passport, and having made so many efforts to create a common economic area and a common currency, which it would be infinitely more costly to abandon than any alternative - having done all this we need to look at how to keep the things that we've achieved, but above all how to correct the mistakes that have manoeuvred us into a pretty difficult situation. These mistakes are in large part the result of the economic asymmetries between the national economies of the member states, which were made even worse by the rather contrived and technocratic programme that the Council of Europe devised to resolve the problem. Sigmar Gabriel is right: in order to finally engage the general public in the policies that have such a profound impact on their lives, we need the narratives that will correct the preconceptions that have now become ingrained. Unfortunately, given the increasing opposition that we face, we don't have much time.

Emmanuel Macron understandably argued on the basis of the status quo: his position is that the French cannot tell the German government what to do - nor should they want to - and that first of all they should resolve their own national problems. Except, Mr Macron, as I see it this isn't enough in the current situation. Shouldn't you be thinking about what you want to achieve in and for Europe when you next visit Martin Schulz or Angela Merkel as French president? In other words, what can be achieved only by working together.

Let's renew a Franco-German relationship based on trust

Enderlein: Before Emmanuel Macron responds, I'd like to combine that with one final question and take up something that Jürgen Habermas has just said: What would be the first initiative that a President Macron would introduce? What is the most important initiative, as far as Europe is concerned, on the day after the election?

Macron: First of all, I don't want there to be any misunderstanding: I have not abandoned myself to defeatism on this issue, and nor am I in any doubt that we need to create a different narrative. Sigmar and I have picked up on



this idea time and time again. I've written about what I want for Europe and the eurozone. But I say this in a strict order of priorities: if we want to be credible, we first need to carry out the reconstruction that's needed at home. But I don't see that as an unalterable state of affairs.

What I'm trying to explain is that, yes, I am committed to reforms in France and consider them necessary for my country. But it's not enough to stop there. For one thing, that is unsatisfactory for France. I won't solve all France's problems: the future of France lies in a policy focused on Europe and on investment. Second, I won't solve all Europe's problems on my own. And the road map that sets out the path we need to take together - to which, by the way, we have already committed ourselves in the EU - is much more ambitious. So in this respect there is no ambivalence at all. And I was just as clear about this when I spoke to Chancellor Merkel.

But right now, the essential precondition is the restoration of French credibility and a Franco-German relationship based on trust. Because the situation I find myself in is not one of an independent intellectual, but of an accountable politician who is standing for office and who seeks a return to a successful partnership with our German allies. The key, for me, therefore lies in rebuilding a level of trust that currently no longer exists. This may also have something to do with France's habit in the past of sometimes offering lessons, narratives or opinions without delivering the necessary preconditions for them to be put into practice.

I am honest with myself, which is why I want to deal with both projects in the right order. So I want to convince my fellow citizens that we need reforms to become stronger, and I want to convince our European partners that this needs to go hand in hand with far more assertive goals on a European level and in the eurozone - that's to say with a new narrative, a new common story - in order for us to move forward.

It is this common story that I intend to tackle as my very first act. I want to see much more structured Franco-German cooperation on at least three issues: investment, common security at our borders, and defence, especially in the Middle East and in Africa. And I believe that this must indeed be backed up with acts of symbolism.

If we pull off this 'Franco-German New Deal', we will have taken a very important step. It will allow us to set in motion further progress among all



twenty-seven states and at the eurozone level. But even in our two countries, this initiative will lead to our investing in something approximating to a new answer to the big risks we face.

Because what are our peoples afraid of, at the moment? The problems of security and terrorism, the waves of migration and the security at our borders, as well as the problems with investment and low growth. The three answers to these problems that I have described are within our grasp if we decide to operate differently, and if we decide to act together and really trust one another.

Public opinion in both our countries is aware of the global risks, but is not automatically willing to go down the European road. I am sure that if you asked the German public to support a large-scale investment policy for Europe, that wouldn't work. And if I asked people at home about a large-scale policy of common defence of our borders, the French would not be wildly enthusiastic. But was there any great appetite among the French and Germans to pool their coal and steel resources all those decades ago? No. But it still had to be done.

The three actions of solidarity I have described are in areas where partly France and partly Germany are marginally predominant. What I want to do is act swiftly and decisively after the elections to press ahead with these projects together.



Footnotes

1. There have been some commendable and far from discouraging empirical studies conducted on this issue, by Jürgen Gerhards, Holger Lengfeld, Monika Eigenmüller and others; but these can of course lay claim only to a limited prognostic value. The real test lies in practice, with all its risks.
2. Sigmar Gabriel and Emmanuel Macron, 'Why Europe must become a social union', in *Die Welt*, 4 June 2015.
3. Emmanuel Macron held this office between August 2014 and August 2016, Sigmar Gabriel between December 2013 and January 2017 (ed.).
4. In the original 'trahison des clercs', a reference to the book of the same name by Julien Benda (1927/1946). In it he criticizes the tendency of contemporary intellectuals towards nationalism, fascism or communism, which, he argues, represent the abandonment of universalism.