

## **Rencontres d'Estoril**

### **France and European sovereignty**

It's a pleasure for me to participate in these meetings in Estoril. These places and moments for discussion and reflection are all the more invaluable at a time when we're wondering about the future and our present is being turned upside down by many radical changes, not least the COVID-19 pandemic.

It's also a pleasure to be taking part in these discussions under the patronage of de Gaulle, a historical figure but one who has never been as topical as in these times of increasing geopolitical disruption, when the notions of independence, power and sovereignty – obsessions de Gaulle held so dear – are taking on their whole meaning again, but with a very different hue from the one they had in the past.

Indeed, at a time when there is an increasing number of crises and challenges, whatever the views of de Gaulle, who had announced that he wanted to “tear up” the 1957 Treaty of Rome if he returned to power (in the end he maintained and supported it), the sovereignty and independence of France – and that of the other Member States – today depend on Europe; a sovereign, democratic, united Europe, in the words of President Macron. Today more than ever, the essential challenge for Europe is to assert itself more effectively, through its values and interests, to determine its future, otherwise it will see its destiny decided by others. That's what this European sovereignty means.

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Indeed, what we're witnessing today is a world which has changed and is characterized by a growing brutalization of international life, against the backdrop of a challenging of multilateral regulatory frameworks and an increase in power politics.

We're seeing destabilization become an instrument of power in its own right. And in Ukraine, Syria, Libya – and Nagorno-Karabakh today – we see these harmful trends making crises which originated locally international, and fanning their flames.

We're seeing a weakening of multilateralism, which is today suffering from a triple chronic disease:

- the temptation of unilateral withdrawal
- an approach of systematic obstruction, which affects the international community's ability to act
- attempts to exploit situations for the benefit of private interests.

This is a very basic observation, but it's true that for a long time we didn't want to face up to this reality. For too long, we believed that thanks to a sort of European exception, we could escape the perils of this new global context.

Yet Europe today risks being marginalized and transformed into a theatre of influence. We, Europeans, are now at a crossroads and faced with a very clear choice: to be wiped out of our own history or assert ourselves, assert our European sovereignty. In other words, we've got to assert our ability to make the choices which have a lasting impact on the future of our societies and determine the place we occupy on the international stage. Assert our ability to work out a third way, a European way, by which Europe accepts responsibility for its role through its values and interests, i.e. it gives itself the tools to

determine its future. Otherwise, Europe will see its destiny decided by others. That's what this European sovereignty means.

And I'd like to clarify two points straightaway:

- firstly, we mustn't build this European sovereignty as a substitute for our national sovereignties, but in addition to it. It is not designed to replace them – on the contrary: it emanates from them - otherwise it would have no legitimacy – and builds on them. European sovereignty, far from weakening national sovereignties, works with them, strengthens them. It is now even one of the conditions of our shared independence – in a world where none of us could carry weight alone up against the new powers. In other words, European sovereignty is dependent on the strength of nations.
- the second point is that asserting this European sovereignty has nothing to do with sovereignism, protectionism or autarky. The goal isn't to shut ourselves away. Exchanges provide an opportunity for Europe and openness is part of its DNA. Solidarity today is part, even a condition of collective effectiveness. It's also one of the great contradictions of today's world: these unilateral trends are occurring in a world characterized by interdependence on a huge scale and challenges which can be met effectively only by working collectively: terrorism, the fight against global warming and the erosion of biodiversity, and the challenge posed by the digital revolution.

This assertion of European sovereignty, this third way – to avoid pointless alternatives and being subjected to certain State or private actors' agendas of influence – is valid for every sphere.

I'm thinking in particular of the recovery plan agreed on in principle in July. In this recovery plan we made a virtual quantum leap, by resorting for the first time to collective borrowing in support of our economies, which will enable us to invest in the ecological and energy transition and the digital transformation. This will benefit our citizens, our businesses and employment, in sectors that are of paramount importance for the European Union's security and sovereignty.

At industrial level, by relocating onto our European soil the production of certain strategic assets. This also applies to Europe's coordination of the screening of foreign investments in the most sensitive fields.

It applies to access to our internal market, with measures to combat distortions of competition, whether they come from companies subsidized by third States or firms that don't comply with the rules we set ourselves for reducing CO<sub>2</sub> emissions.

It applies to foreign trade, to enforce the reciprocity principle and total compatibility with the demands of the Paris Agreement.

It also applies to legal protection of our businesses, with cross-European work to respond more effectively to extraterritorial measures by some of our partners.

It also applies to the digital transformation, so that we are no longer reliant on the technology of others and standards we haven't decided on. The digital sector has today become an area essential to our sovereignty, and together we must devise a form of European digital sovereignty that is both effective and in line with our values – in order not only to strengthen security in cyberspace but

also to win the battle of innovation, by identifying critical areas like artificial intelligence and 5G.

Finally, it applies to the field of external relations, where Europe must emerge from the background, assert itself more and accept that it is already a power. Today it no longer has the choice. For a long time it was turned in on itself and its internal worries alone; today it must agree to have an external agenda if it wants to go on carrying weight. The time when economic Europe was enough is really over.

Specifically, this means stepping up our fight to defend multilateralism and to open up a third way enabling the international community not to be the playing field or the passive theatre for the battle being waged between the United States and China.

It also means strengthening Defence Europe, which, through Permanent Structured Cooperation, the European Defence Fund and the European Intervention Initiative in particular, has made significant progress.

It also means our getting more involved in handling crises that profoundly impact our security. I'm thinking of the eastern Mediterranean, the Sahel, Libya and more generally the African continent, where, beyond the crises, we must build a more balanced relationship.

Finally, it means asserting the power of our model in this competition of values, which today is one of the major dimensions of international competition. A humanist model based on a certain idea of humanity and its dignity, based on the protection of basic rights, the rule of law, the fight against discrimination, and support for the most vulnerable. A model whereby diverse national histories and cultures coexist.

That's something new for Europe, but it's the condition for not staying on the sidelines, for devising this third way with our partners all over the world, for showing it's possible to change the course of events that are presented as inexorable: global warming, migration tragedies, inequalities and health – whose importance the pandemic has emphasized more than ever.

Thank you./.