TranscriptEmmanuel Macron in his own words (English)

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The Economist: We were all struck by the very sombre tone of your recent speech at the ambassadors' conference. You began on an almost existential note about the future of Europe; you spoke of Europe's possible disappearance. Aren't you over-dramatising the situation? Why such a bleak vision of Europe's future?

Emmanuel Macron: I don't believe I'm over-dramatising things, I'm trying to be lucid. But just look at what is happening in the world. Things that were unthinkable five years ago. To be wearing ourselves out over Brexit, to have Europe finding it so difficult to move forward, to have an American ally turning its back on us so quickly on strategic issues; nobody would have believed this possible. How did Europe come into existence? I'm trying to face the facts. Personally, I think Europe is a miracle. This continent has the greatest geographical concentration of cultural and linguistic diversity. Which explains why, for almost two millennia, Europe was rocked by constant civil wars. And over the past 70 years we've achieved a minor geopolitical, historical and civilisational miracle: a political equation free of hegemony which permits peace. And this is due to the fact that Europe experienced one of the most brutal conflicts, the most brutal in its entire history, and, I would say, reached its lowest ebb in the 20th century.

Europe was built on this notion that we would pool the things we had been fighting over: coal and steel. It then structured itself as a community, which is not merely a market, it's a political project. But a series of phenomena have left us on the edge of a precipice. In the first place, Europe has lost track of its history. Europe has forgotten that it is a community, by increasingly thinking of itself as a market, with expansion as its end purpose. This is a fundamental mistake, because it has reduced the political scope of its project, essentially since the 1990s. A market is not a community. A community is stronger: it has notions of solidarity, of convergence, which we've lost, and of political thought.

Moreover, Europe was basically built to be the Americans' junior partner. That was what lay behind the Marshall Plan from the beginning. And this went hand in hand with a benevolent United States, acting as the ultimate guarantor of a system and of a balance of values, based on the preservation of world peace and the domination of Western values. There was a price to pay for that, which was NATO and support to the European Union. But their position has shifted over the past 10 years, and it hasn't only been the Trump administration. You have to understand what is happening deep down in American policy-making. It's the idea put forward by President Obama: "I am a Pacific president".

So the United States were looking elsewhere, which was in fact very astute from their point of view at the time: they were looking at China and the American continent. President Obama then theorised it as a geopolitical strategy of trading blocs, signed treaties and withdrew from the Middle East, saying: "This is no longer my neighbourhood policy". But that then created a problem and a weakness: the 2013-2014 crisis, the failure to intervene in response to the use of chemical weapons in Syria, which was already the first stage in the collapse of the Western bloc. Because at that point, the major regional powers said to themselves: "the West is weak". Things that had already begun implicitly became apparent in recent years.

Which already modified the relationship between Europe and the United States?

EM: The United States remains our major ally, we need them, we are close and we share the same values. I care a lot about this relationship and have invested a great deal in it with President Trump. But we find ourselves for the first time with an American president who doesn't share our idea of the European project, and American policy is diverging from this project. We need to draw conclusions from the consequences. The consequences, we can see them in Syria at the moment: the ultimate guarantor, the umbrella which made Europe stronger, no longer has the same relationship with Europe. Which means that our defence, our security, elements of our sovereignty, must be re-thought through. I didn't wait for Syria to do this. Since I took office I've championed the notion of European military and technological sovereignty.

So, firstly, Europe is gradually losing track of its history; secondly, a change in American strategy is taking place; thirdly, the rebalancing of the world goes hand in hand with the rise—over the last 15 years—of China as a power, which creates the risk of bipolarisation

and clearly marginalises Europe. And add to the risk of a United States/China “G2” the re-emergence of authoritarian powers on the fringes of Europe, which also weakens us very significantly. This re-emergence of authoritarian powers, essentially Turkey and Russia, which are the two main players in our neighbourhood policy, and the consequences of the Arab Spring, creates a kind of turmoil.

All this has led to the exceptional fragility of Europe which, if it can’t think of itself as a global power, will disappear, because it will take a hard knock. Finally, added to all this we have an internal European crisis: an economic, social, moral and political crisis that began ten years ago. Europe hasn’t re-lived civil war through armed conflict, but has lived through selfish nationalism. In Europe there has been a north-south divide on economic issues, and east-west on the migration issue, resulting in the resurgence of populism, all over Europe. These two crises—economic and migration—hit the middle classes particularly hard. By raising taxes, by making budgetary adjustments which hurt the middle classes, which I believe was a historic mistake. That’s incidentally what lies behind the rise in extremism throughout Europe. A Europe that has become much less easy to govern.

Given all the challenges I’ve just listed, we have a Europe in which many countries are governed by coalitions, with fragile majorities or unstable political balances. Look at Germany, Italy, Spain, Belgium, look at the United Kingdom which you know well, look at France. Admittedly, we have strong institutions, a majority until 2022. But we’ve also had a very tough social crisis, which we haven’t yet put behind us, and which has been the French way of responding to this crisis. Not a single European country has been spared. Except those that turned their backs on liberal democracy, and decided to get much tougher. You could say that Hungary and Poland have sheltered themselves from such crises, even though there are warning signs in Budapest.
So, given all these factors, I don’t think I’m being either pessimistic or painting an overly gloomy picture when I say this. I’m just saying that if we don’t wake up, face up to this situation and decide to do something about it, there’s a considerable risk that in the long run we will disappear geopolitically, or at least that we will no longer be in control of our destiny. I believe that very deeply.

But how in practical terms can you meet the challenge you describe? How will you actually overcome all the resistance, the obstacles, and build this European sovereignty?

EM: First of all, things are changing; we need to keep explaining this. There is a deep current of thought that was structured in the period between 1990 and 2000 around the idea of the “end of history”, of a limitless expansion of democracy, of the triumph of the West as a universal value system. That was the accepted truth at the time, until the 2000s, when a series of shocks demonstrated that it wasn’t actually so true.

So I think the first thing to do is to regain military sovereignty. I pushed European defence issues to the forefront as soon as I took office, at the European level, at the Franco-German level. At the Franco-German Council of Ministers on 13 July 2017, we

launched two major projects: the tank and the aircraft of the future. Everyone said: “We’ll never manage that.” It’s very tough, but we’re making progress, it’s possible. We launched the European Intervention Initiative that I announced at the Sorbonne and which is now a reality: on Bastille Day this year, we had the nine other member states in Paris. Since then, Italy has joined us, and Greece would also like to join this initiative. This shows that there is growing awareness of the defence question. Countries like Finland and Estonia have joined this initiative, countries which up until now were, for one, deeply suspicious of NATO, and, for the other, distrustful of Russia, so in a mindset of: “I surrender completely to NATO”. The instability of our American partner and rising tensions have meant that the idea of European defence is gradually taking hold. It’s the aggiornamento for a powerful and strategic Europe. I would add that we will at some stage have to take stock of NATO. To my mind, what we are currently experiencing is the brain death of NATO. We have to be lucid.

“The brain death of NATO?”

EM: Just look at what’s happening. You have partners together in the same part of the world, and you have no coordination whatsoever of strategic decision-making between the United States and its NATO allies. None. You have an uncoordinated aggressive action by another NATO ally, Turkey, in an area where our interests are at stake. There has been no NATO planning, nor any coordination. There hasn’t even been any NATO deconfliction. A meeting is coming up in December. This situation, in my opinion, doesn’t call into question the interoperability of NATO which is efficient between our armies, it works well in commanding operations. But strategically and politically, we need to recognise that we have a problem.

Do you now believe that Article Five doesn’t work either, is that what you suspect?

EM: I don’t know, but what will Article Five mean tomorrow? If the Bashar al-Assad regime decides to retaliate against Turkey, will we commit ourselves under it? It’s a crucial question. We entered the conflict to fight against Daesh [Islamic State]. The paradox is that both the American decision and the Turkish offensive have had the same result: sacrificing our partners who fought against Daesh on the ground, the Syrian Democratic Forces [a militia dominated by Syrian Kurds] That’s the crucial issue. From a strategic and political standpoint, what’s happened is a huge problem for NATO. It makes two things all the more essential on the military and strategic level. Firstly, European defence—Europe must become autonomous in terms of military strategy and capability. And secondly, we need to reopen a strategic dialogue, without being naive and which will take time, with Russia. Because what all this shows is that we need to reappropriate our neighbourhood policy, we cannot let it be managed by third parties who do not share the same interests. So that for me is an important point, it’s a priority issue which is both geopolitical and military. Then there’s the technological issue…

The gap between Europe’s defence, which doesn’t have an Article Five equivalent, and NATO is very hard to bridge though, isn’t it? It’s very hard to guarantee each other’s security with the same credibility that NATO has, even allowing for the

weakening of NATO that you've just spoken of. So how do you get from an idea of collaboration to the guarantee of security, that NATO perhaps can't provide anymore? How do you cross that gap, and project power too if necessary?

EM: First of all, NATO is only as strong as its member states, so it only works if the guarantor of last resort functions as such. I'd argue that we should reassess the reality of what NATO is in the light of the commitment of the United States. Secondly, in my opinion, Europe has the capacity to defend itself. European countries have strong armies, in particular France. We are committed to ensuring the safety of our own soil as well as to many external operations. I think that the interoperability of NATO works well. But we now need to clarify what the strategic goals we want to pursue within NATO are.

Europe may be in a position to do so if it accelerates the development of European defence. We've decided on enhanced cooperation between several member states, which involves pooling, a solidarity clause between member states. A European Defence Fund has been set up. We have the European Intervention Initiative, designed to be complementary to NATO. But you also need to have stress tests on these issues. France knows how to protect itself. After Brexit, it will become the last remaining nuclear power in the European Union. And so it's also essential to think about this in relation to others.

It's an *aggiornamento* for this subject. NATO was designed in response to an enemy: the Warsaw Pact. In 1990 we didn't reassess this geopolitical project in the slightest when our initial enemy vanished. The unarticulated assumption is that the enemy is still Russia. It's also true that when we intervene in Syria against terrorism, it's not actually NATO that intervenes. We use NATO's interoperability mechanisms, but it's an ad hoc coalition. So, the question about the present purpose of NATO is a real question that needs to be asked. Particularly by the United States. In the eyes of President Trump, and I completely respect that, NATO is seen as a commercial project. He sees it as a project in which the United States acts as a sort of geopolitical umbrella, but the trade-off is that there has to be commercial exclusivity, it's an arrangement for buying American products. France didn't sign up for that.

You're right, Europe hasn't demonstrated its credibility yet. I just think that attitudes are changing and that today European defence is complementary to NATO. But I also believe it now needs to become stronger, because it needs to be able to decide and increasingly take responsibility for more of our neighbourhood security policy, that's legitimate.

In my discussions with President Trump when he says, "It's your neighbourhood, not mine"; when he states publicly, "The terrorists, the jihadists that are over there, they're European, they're not American"; when he says, "It's their problem, not mine"—we must hear what he's saying. He's stating a fact. It simply means what was only implicit under NATO until now: I am no longer prepared to pay for and guarantee a security system for them, and so just "wake up". The NATO we've known since the beginning is changing its underlying philosophy. When you have a United States president who says that, we cannot, even if we don't want to hear it, we cannot in all responsibility fail to draw the conclusions, or at least begin to think about them. Will he be prepared to activate

solidarity? If something happens at our borders? It's a real question. When he says such things, which are perfectly legitimate from the standpoint of a United States president, it means that perhaps some alliances, or the strength of these ties, are being reconsidered. I think that many of our partners have realised this and things are starting to move on this issue.

As I was saying, I also see the issue of technology as essential: artificial intelligence, data, digital technology and 5G, all forms of technology which are both civilian and military.

But on the question of 5G, Europe is divided…

EM: Because Europe has simply failed to have any degree of thinking or coordination on the issue. In other words, sovereign decisions and choices were de facto delegated to telecoms operators. I would put it as bluntly as that. I discussed it the other day at the European Round Table with the German Chancellor, and it was as if I'd used a swear word when I said: "Can you guarantee that the development of 5G on the most technologically sensitive cores will be totally European?" Nobody can. In my opinion some elements must only be European.

Exactly, these are divisions…

EM: They're not divisions!

Opinions diverge on the attitude to be taken towards Huawei, for example.

EM: I don't want to stigmatise any manufacturer in particular, it wouldn't be effective. And those on the other side of the Atlantic who have occasionally stigmatised them ended up making deals. I'm just saying that we have two European manufacturers: Ericsson and Nokia. We have a number of key issues. The day that everyone is connected to 5G with critical information, will you be able to protect and secure your system? The day you have all your cyber-connections on a single system, will you be able to ring-fence it? That's the only thing that matters to me. On the other issues I'm business-neutral. But this is a sovereign matter. This is what sovereignty is all about.

For years we delegated the thinking on these issues to the telecoms operators. But they're not in charge of the sovereignty of security systems. Their duty is to provide their shareholders with profits, I can't blame them for that. In a way we've completely abandoned what used to be the "grammar" of sovereignty, which are issues in the general interest that cannot be managed by business. Business can be your partner, but it's the role of the state to manage these things. So we put our foot in it, and I think there's a change starting to take place on this issue. But it isn't about mistrust or being commercially aggressive towards anyone.

I've always said to our partners, whether it's the Americans or the Chinese: "I respect you because you're sovereign". And so I believe Europe will only be respected if it reconsiders its own sovereignty. You have to grasp the sensitivity of what we're talking about. On the issue of 5G, we refer mostly to relationships with Chinese manufacturers; on the subject

of data we mostly talk about relationships with US platforms. But today we've created conditions in Europe where it's business that has decided these things. The result is that if we just allow this to continue, in ten years' time, no one will be able to guarantee the technological soundness of your cyber-systems, no one will be able to guarantee who processes the data and how, of citizens or companies.
From what you're saying, it sounds as if you think your European partners are somewhat naive!

EM: I think Europe's agenda was imposed on it for years and years. We were too slow on many issues. We did discuss these issues. But it wasn't really a question we wanted to ask ourselves, because we lived in a trade-maximising world with secure alliances. The dominant ideology had a flavour of the end of history. So there will be no more great wars, tragedy has left the stage, all is wonderful. The overriding agenda is economic, no longer strategic or political. In short, the underlying idea is that if we're all linked by business, all will be fine, we won't hurt each other. In a way, that the indefinite opening of world trade is an element of making peace.

Except that, within a few years, it became clear that the world was breaking up again, that tragedy had come back on stage, that the alliances we believed to be unbreakable could be upended, that people could decide to turn their backs, that we could have diverging interests. And that at a time of globalisation, the ultimate guarantor of world trade could become protectionist. Major players in world trade could have an agenda that was more an agenda of political sovereignty, or of adjusting the domestic to the international, than of trade.

We have to be clear-sighted. I'm trying to understand the world as it is, I'm not lecturing anyone. I may be wrong. Can we blame anyone for not having seen this five or ten years ago? The United States also has its weaknesses. Take 5G: huge country, the biggest technology market. They no longer have their own genuine 5G players. They are dependent on the technology of others, the Europeans or Chinese. So it's not easy for anyone. But what I mean by this is that it seems to me that Europe was driven by a logic whose primacy was economic, with an underlying belief that was, basically, that the market economy suits everyone well. And that's not true, or not any more. We have to draw conclusions: it's the return of a strategic agenda of sovereignty.

If we don't act, in five years' time I won't be able to tell my fellow citizens: "Your data is protected. You want your data to be protected in France? You have this system that ensures your information is private, I can guarantee it". If I tell them: "I can't guarantee it, I'm not the one who decides what shapes your life, from your relationship with your girlfriend, to managing your children's daily lives and your accounts, etc…" and if we just let things happen, everything that makes up your life will be managed, used, monitored by people who have nothing to do with the state. If you want proof of this, look at Google's attitude to the European directives on copyright policy, a subject that affects you.

But in defence and technology, you described a Europe that's failed to work together, a Europe that's too fragmented. Do you believe that Europe can act together, within the present constitution of the European Union? Does it require a big centralisation of power, of money?

EM: These are subjects which Europe hadn't previously taken on board. European defence was relaunched in the summer of 2017. It was something that hadn't been put on the table since the mid-1950s, despite various efforts that began in 1999. We've only thought about technology in Europe in terms of the single market, ie, how to remove barriers, roaming, etc. We haven't thought it through at all in terms of suppliers and the strategic aspect. Europe is divided on some issues, and it moves too slowly, notably on issues of economic stimulus, budgetary solidarity. It's more the issue of integrating the euro zone, banking union, which aren't moving fast enough, and which are a subject of division in Europe. Europe is also divided on the migration issue. Basically, Europe has been too slow to manage the two major crises it has experienced over the past ten years and to find joint solutions, on that you are right.

On the sovereignty agenda I've referred to, these are fairly new questions, and so we can move fast. On defence, Europe has moved quite quickly. Much more so than on other issues, because it's basically a new environment. We need to share this geopolitical awareness and make sure that everyone is on board. On many of these subjects, the European Commission has competence: digital, single market, and now defence under enhanced cooperation. This incidentally is the French portfolio in the next Commission. That's why it's so important for us, but these are subjects in which the Commission has a major role to play.

As to the question of whether we change constitution, personally I don't see the topic as closed, I've said that several times. But the question of whether we share the same agenda, in other words of pooling more in order to move towards a system that is somehow looser, softer, less and less strategic, I'm not in favour of that. I'm in favour of making things more effective, deciding more quickly, more clearly, changing the dogma and ideology that drive us collectively today. And to have a more sovereign, more ambitious project for Europe's future, which is more democratic, and which on both digital and climate issues goes much faster and is more powerful. But that depends on getting the major European players behind this agenda. Having said that, I think at some point of course Europe will need to be reformed, of course we'll need a Commission with fewer members, of course we'll need to have qualified majority voting on a range of issues.

When we interviewed you in July 2017, you already seemed quite frustrated by Europe's slow pace and especially by the Franco-German relationship and the Germans' ability to work alongside you, and keep pace with you. Who will you build this Europe with, if it's not the Germans?

EM: I've always said we must have the Germans alongside us, and that the British must be a partner on European defence. We're keeping the bilateral treaties we upheld at Sandhurst. I believe that the UK has an essential role to play. Actually, the UK will be faced with the same question because the UK will be even more affected than us if the nature of NATO changes. So I see the bilateral relationship as essential from a military perspective. What is true is that the UK, even prior to Brexit, was opting for a much more aggressive strategy. From a technological and many other standpoints, they decided to abandon sovereignty for a Singapore-type model, I would call it. Personally, I'm not so sure that's sustainable. I discussed this with Theresa May, and then with Boris Johnson, because I think it was the middle classes who reacted and voted for Brexit. I think the elites stand to gain from that type of model. I don't believe that the middle classes do. I think the British middle classes need a better-functioning European model, in which they are better protected.
And with the Germans?

EM: And with the Germans you have to…

They don't share your strategic vision!

EM: I'm in no position to lecture the Germans. They handled the turn of the millennium far better than we did. Why is there an issue with Germany? Germany isn't at the same stage of its economic and political cycle as we are, so we need to rephase. Firstly, they handled the first decade of this century very successfully. They introduced reforms at the right time, they succeeded in opening up, in having a very competitive economy. They are the big winners of the euro zone, including of its dysfunctions. Today, it's just that the German system needs to acknowledge that this situation is not sustainable. But as I said: persuading them, encouraging them to go in that direction, are the only means I have to bring them round to my position. I carry out my reforms, I'm not asking for their support or anything. But I tell them, even for you, this system is not sustainable. So at some point, they will be forced to readjust. Experience has shown that they sometimes take longer, but once they have made up their minds, they are better organised than many.

They don't show very much sign of wanting to make that effort. I mean they push you back all the time.

EM: That's not so true. On defence, they are with us, which was taboo. They are with us strategically, including on ambitious projects, including on arms exports, that's a real asset. They've also supported the mechanisms for integrating the euro zone. Now we have a problem of scale, and it's true that the taboo is the question of budget stimulus. That's true for the whole of Europe. We set our ratios in an environment which was a very different environment in terms of rates and liquidity.

I would widen the focus. We're in a geopolitical situation where no one can really describe China's budgetary state. We assume that they're going for it, they're investing massively. The United States has increased its deficit in order to invest in strategic issues and boost the middle-income brackets. As Europe is alone in consolidating, what is

Europe's situation today? I've said this to other bosses in rather brutal terms, but it is a macroeconomic and financial reality. Europe is one of the continents with the highest levels of savings. A large part of those savings is used to buy American Treasury bonds. So with our savings, we're paying for America's future, and what's more we're exposing ourselves to vulnerability. It's absurd.

Given this context, we need to rethink our macroeconomic deal. We need more expansion, more investment. Europe can't be the only zone not to do so. I think that's also why the debate about the 3% of national budgets and the 1% for the European budget, belongs in the past century. This sort of debate won't enable us to develop this policy. This sort of debate won't allow us to prepare the future. When I look at our level of investment in artificial intelligence, compared with China or the United States, we're just not in the same league.

Could we come back to your diplomatic activity? We've seen a great deal of activity on the Iranian dossier, but also Ukraine. You put forward the idea of France as a balancing power, that's to say a power that can talk to others, have an open dialogue with all. Isn't there an element of contradiction between that ambition and the ambition to create a militarily powerful Europe?

EM: I don't believe so in the slightest. Quite the contrary. Europe in any case has to think of itself as a balancing power. But I think that it's France's role, as a permanent member of the Security Council, a nuclear power, founding member of the European Union, a country which is present through its overseas territories on every continent and which remains very present because of the French-speaking world. We have unparalleled reach. Basically, only the UK, via the Commonwealth, can claim a similar reach, although it's decided to follow a different path. But our traditions and our diplomatic history are different: we're less aligned with American diplomacy, which in this world gives us more room for manoeuvre.

When I say balancing power, that also raises the question of our allies. But to put it very simply, we have the right not to be outright enemies with our friends' enemies. In almost childish terms, that's what it means. That we can speak to people and therefore build balances to stop the whole world from catching fire.

I don't think it's in the least incompatible. Because it's first of all what enables us to be effective and have leverage in the European neighbourhood. It's also what allows us to enact the fact that, for me, the point of military power is not necessarily for it to be used. It's used in the fight against terrorism, in Africa, and as a partner in the international coalition. However, it essentially serves our diplomacy. I think it's very important to keep both levers, and therefore to seek to play this role of balancing power as well as to maintain military credibility. These days, if you don't have military credibility, in a world where authoritarian powers are on the rise again, it won't work.

And actually this is why what just happened in Syria is dramatic. We've enacted a military retreat. It's the opposite of what we obtained from the Americans on 13 April 2018, during the strikes against the Syrian chemical-weapons programme, which enhanced our credit in the region, including from a diplomatic standpoint. With Operation Hamilton, we carried out surgical strikes on chemical-weapons bases in Syria. We showed that the red line was being enforced. Which was not done in 2013-2014. So it's a combination of both, I think it's very complimentary.

You have spoken about the essential value of humanism as being the essence of what Europe brought to the world. And this evening you've spoken to us about a world that is more and more dominated by realpolitik, that the idea that Western values had permanently triumphed was false. Yet many of your European partners find it very difficult to act in a realpolitik way because it requires them to look the other way, to talk to Mr Putin for instance, or to deal with China despite what's happening to the Uighurs in Xinjiang. How do you reconcile that question of humanity and humanism and the requirements of realpolitik in a hostile and dangerous world?

EM: First of all, there's a factor which we may have underestimated, which is the principle of the sovereignty of the people. And I think that the spread of values, of the humanism that we hold high, and the universalisation of these values in which I believe, only work to the extent that you are able to convince the people. We've sometimes made mistakes by wanting to impose our values, by changing regimes, without popular support. It's what happened in Iraq or in Libya. It's perhaps what was envisaged at one point in Syria but failed. It's an element of the Western approach, I would say in generic terms, that was a mistake at the beginning of this century, undoubtedly fatal, and sprang from the union of two forces: the right to intervene with neo-conservatism. And these two forces intertwined and produced dramatic results. Because the sovereignty of the people is in my opinion an unsurpassable factor. It's what made us what we are, and it must be respected everywhere.

The great difficulty is that we are witnessing a sort of backlash, the return of other competing values. Non-democratic models, which are challenging European humanism like never before. I've often said that our model was built in the 18th century with the European Enlightenment, the market economy, individual freedom, democratic rule and the progress of the middle classes. The Chinese model is a model that brings together a market economy and an expanding middle class, but without freedom. Some people say it works, so there's some kind of living proof. I don't know whether it's sustainable, I don't think so. But I think that this non-sustainability is at some point demonstrated by the people in terms of the tension it creates.

The question now is whether our model is sustainable, because I see people everywhere in our countries who are willing to go back on some of these parameters. People who say: "Well, I'm having second thoughts about the market economy, maybe in fact we should withdraw from the world and move towards protectionism or isolationism."

Others who say: “Well, I'm willing to give up certain freedoms to move towards a more authoritarian regime if it protects me more, and allows for growth and greater wealth.” This crisis is right here among us, advocated by a number of parties in our democracies. It’s emerging in Europe, and should lead us to question ourselves. And so I think it would be wrong simply to say: “I want humanism and I’m going to impose it on others.” The question is how to pursue a strategic agenda while at the same time fostering an agenda for development, an economically open agenda, a political, cultural agenda, through which you can consolidate this humanism.

That’s my firm belief for Africa and it's what I'm pushing for in African policy: a massive reinvestment in education, health, work, with Africans, a deep empowerment. It’s also the reason why I want to work with new partners. I was for example the first to host the Sudanese prime minister, from the transitional government, we’ve provided a great deal of help to Prime Minister Abiy in Ethiopia, because they embody this model, in countries we thought had turned their backs on this model. Basically, I think that European humanism, in order to win, needs to become sovereign once again and to rediscover a form of realpolitik.

We now need to think about this, to equip ourselves with the “grammar” of today, which is a grammar of power and sovereignty. This is also what justifies my cultural and copyright policy, for example. I want to defend European authors and European creativity, because this is how humanism spreads. Today the biggest threat to humanism is authoritarian regimes, but also political religious ideology. The rise of radical political Islam is undoubtedly the foremost enemy of European humanist values, which are based on the free and rational individual, equality between women and men, and emancipation. The model of subjugation and domination today is that of radical political Islam. How do you fight this? You can say, when they resort to terrorism, I’ll fight them. The other way is by fostering democracy, by demonstrating that other models, including cultural, economic and social models, can emerge.

On the subject of authoritarian regimes, you have called for a rapprochement with Russia, evoking in a way Obama's reset policy, which in the end was not a great success. What gives you reason to think that this time it will be different?

EM: I look at Russia and I ask myself what strategic choices it has. We’re talking about a country that is the size of a continent, with a vast land mass. With a declining and ageing population. A country whose GDP is the same size as Spain’s. Which is rearming at the double, more than any other European country. Which was legitimately the subject of sanctions over the Ukrainian crisis. And in my view this model is not sustainable. Russia is engaged in over-militarisation, in conflict multiplication, but has its own internal issues: demography, economy, etc. So what are its strategic options?

One option is: rebuild a superpower by itself. That will be extremely difficult, even if our own errors have given it some leverage. We showed ourselves to be weak in 2013-2014, and Ukraine happened. Today Russia is optimising its game in Syria because of our own errors. We’re giving it some breathing space, so it can still play that way. But all that is

very tough, for the reasons I mentioned, along with a political and ideological model based on identity-based conservatism that prevents Russia from having a migration policy. Because the Russian population is composed of and surrounded by Muslim populations that worry it a lot. Given the size of the territory, it could have had a tremendous growth lever, namely a migration policy. But no, it's an Orthodox conservative political project, so that won't work. I don't believe much in this stand-alone option.

A second path that Russia could have taken is the Eurasian model. Only it has a dominant country, namely China, and I don't think that this model would ever be balanced. We've seen this in recent years. I look at the table plans that are laid out for meetings for the new Silk Road, and the Russian president is seated further and further away from President Xi Jinping. He can see things are changing, and I'm not sure he likes it. But the Russian president is a child of St Petersburg. He was born there; his elder brother died in the great famine and is buried in St Petersburg. I don't believe for one second that his strategy is to be China's vassal.

And so what other options does he have left? Re-establishing a policy of balance with Europe. Being respected. He's hard-wired to think: "Europe was the vassal of the United States, the European Union is a kind of Trojan Horse for NATO, NATO was about expansion right up to my borders." For him, the 1990 deal wasn't respected; there was no "safe zone". They tried to go as far as Ukraine, and he wanted to put a stop to it, but through traumatic dealings with us. His conservatism led him to develop an anti-European project, but I don't see how, in the long term, his project can be anything other than a partnership project with Europe.

But you're basing your analysis on logic, not on his behaviour?

EM: Yes I am. His behaviour in recent years has been that of a man who was trained by the [security] services with a state that is more disorganised than we realise. It's a huge country with the logic of power at its centre. And a kind of obsidional fever, that's to say the feeling of being besieged from everywhere. He experienced terrorism before we did. He strengthened the structure of the state at the time of the Chechen wars, and then he said: "it's coming at us from the West".

My idea is not in the least naive. I didn't by the way talk about a "reset", I said it might take ten years. If we want to build peace in Europe, to rebuild European strategic autonomy, we need to reconsider our position with Russia. That the United States is really tough with Russia, it's their administrative, political and historic superego. But there's a sea between the two of them. It's our neighbourhood, we have the right to autonomy, not just to follow American sanctions, to rethink the strategic relationship with Russia, without being the slightest bit naive and remaining just as tough on the Minsk process and on what's going on in Ukraine. It's clear that we need to rethink the strategic relationship. We have plenty of reasons to get angry with each other. There are frozen conflicts, energy issues, technology issues, cyber, defence, etc. What I've proposed

is an exercise that consists of stating how we see the world, the risks we share, the common interests we could have, and how we rebuild what I've called an architecture of trust and security.

What does that mean in practical terms?

EM: It means, for example, that we're aligned on the terrorist issue, but we don't work enough on it together. How do we achieve that? We get our [intelligence] services to work together, we share a vision of the threat, we intervene perhaps in a more coordinated way against Islamist terrorism throughout our neighbourhood. We show that it's in our best interests to collaborate on cyber, which is where we're waging total war against one another. How it's in our interests to deconflict on many issues. How it's in our interests to resolve frozen conflicts, with perhaps a broader agenda than just the Ukrainian issue, so we look at all the frozen conflicts in the region and explain our position. What guarantee does he need? Is it in essence an EU and a NATO guarantee of no further advances on a given territory? That's what it means. It means: what are their main fears? What are ours? How do we approach them together? Which issues can we work on together? Which issues can we decide no longer to attack each other on, if I can put it that way? On which issues can we decide to reconcile? Already, sharing, we have more discussions. And I think it's very productive.

And when you speak to your counterparts in Poland and the Baltic States about this vision, what do they say?

EM: It depends on the country. In Poland, there's some concern. But I'm starting to talk to them. Obviously I've talked about it first with Germany, but I do have partners who are moving on this. Finland has moved significantly, they're in the European Intervention Initiative. I went to Finland, I was the first French President in more than 15 years to go there. President Niinistö and I spoke together, we made some progress. I've discussed it with Denmark, I've discussed it with the Baltic States—Estonia and Latvia. Things are moving forward. I'm not saying that everyone is on the same line. I had a very long discussion on this subject with Viktor Orban. He's quite close to our views and has a key intellectual and political role within the Visegrad group, which is important. That's also the way we may be able to convince the Poles a little more.

So, I think things are changing. I can't blame the Poles. They have a history, they have a relationship with Russia, and they wanted the American umbrella as soon as the wall fell. Things won't happen overnight. But once again, I am opening a track that I don't think will yield results in 18 or 24 months. But I have to start all these projects at the same time, in a coherent way, with some things that should have an immediate effect and others that may have an effect in five or ten years' time. If I don't take this path, it will never open up. And I think that would be a huge mistake for us. Having a strategic vision of Europe means thinking about its neighbourhood and its partnerships. Which is something we haven't yet done. During the debate over enlargement, it was clear that we are thinking about our neighbourhood above all in terms of access to the European Union, which is absurd.

Speaking of which, your policy towards North Macedonia and Albania has sparked a lot of criticism from your partners. How do you explain your position?

EM: But I've told them they're not being consistent…

But you yourself said that you wanted a strategic Europe with regard to its neighbourhood!

EM: But should we be the only ones to say: "the strategy is to integrate our neighbourhood"? That's a weird political purpose. In fact I'd urge you to examine the consistency of an approach that amounts to saying: "the heart of our foreign policy is enlargement". That would mean Europe thinks of its influence only in terms of access, notably to the single market. That's antagonistic to the idea of a powerful Europe. It's Europe as a market.

I've tried to be consistent, I've told them: "We have a problem. We can't make it work with 27 of us; 28 today, 27 tomorrow. Do you think it will work better if there are 30 or 32 of us?" And they tell me: "If we start talks now, it will be in ten or 15 years." That's not being honest with our citizens or with those countries. I've said to them: "Look at banking union". The crisis in 2008 with these big decisions; end of banking union in 2028. It's taking us 20 years to reform. So even if we open these negotiations now, we still won't have reformed our union if we carry on at today's pace.

So for me we need: one, a consistency test. If we want a powerful Europe, it has to move faster and be more integrated. That's not compatible with the opening of an enlargement process right now. Two, those who tell you that we must enlarge are the same who say we must keep the budget at 1%. That's the metaphor I used about toast the other day. Some want the piece of toast to keep getting bigger and bigger, but when it comes to spreading on more butter, they refuse. In the end Europe becomes a market, but there is no longer any solidarity, and no policy for the future. If we spend the same amount of money on something that's bigger, there's no longer any convergence policy, there's no longer any political project in the long run, and there's no longer any capacity to invest in relation to the outside world. So then they tell you: it's the only way to prevent Russia, Turkey and China from being the kingmakers in these countries. But these influences persist, and are increasing, in countries that are already in negotiations, or sometimes even already members.

At the very least if we said: "We'll make an effort, we'll invest, we'll tell our businesses to go full speed ahead, we'll spend on development, on culture, education", that would make sense. Opening a purely bureaucratic process is absurd.

I should add that most of them were in favour of opening up to North Macedonia, but nearly half of them were against opening up to Albania. Fatal error.

Do you think they're hiding behind France?

EM: I don't just think that, I know it. Ask them tomorrow whether they want to open the door to Albania. Half of them will say no. They want to open up to North Macedonia, it's small, it's changed its name and that's a real historic achievement. It doesn't frighten anyone. The reality is that if we don't open up to Albania, we'll inflict a terrible trauma on the region. There are Albanian-speaking communities everywhere. If you humiliate Albania, you will destabilise the region in a lasting way.

So my conviction is that, one, we need to reform our membership procedures, they're no longer fit for purpose. They're not strategic. They're not political, too bureaucratic and not reversible, whereas you have to be able at some point to consider the question of reversibility. Two, if you're concerned about this region, the first question is neither Macedonia, nor Albania, it's Bosnia-Herzegovina. The time-bomb that's ticking right next to Croatia, and which faces the problem of returning jihadists, is Bosnia-Herzegovina. The third issue is that we need to reform our membership procedures before we open negotiations. If we achieve this reform in the coming months, I'd be ready to open negotiations. If they've also made the few extra remaining efforts. But I don't want any further new members until we've reformed the European Union itself. In my opinion that's an honest, and indispensable, prerequisite.

One last question: it seems to me a corollary of what you are saying about Syria and Turkey that, in the long run, Turkey doesn't belong in NATO. Is that your view?

EM: I couldn't say. It's not in our interest to push them out but perhaps to reconsider what NATO is. I applied exactly the same reasoning to the Council of Europe and Russia. I was roundly criticised for that, but I believe it's a stronger message because the Council of Europe involves obligations. Keeping Russia in the Council of Europe was about giving greater protection to Russian citizens. In any case, I think the question that needs to be asked is: "What does it mean to belong to NATO?" I think that, in the current context, it's more in our interest to try to keep Turkey within the framework, and in a responsible mindset, but that also means that given the way NATO operates today, NATO's ultimate guarantee must be clear with regards to Turkey. And today, what's caused this friction? What we have seen, why I spoke about "brain death", is that NATO as a system doesn't regulate its members. So as soon as you have a member who feels they have a right to head off on their own, granted by the United States of America, they do it. And that's what happened.

Thank you very much
EM: Thank you