

AFTER MACRON: WHAT WILL SURVIVE BEYOND 2027

Can ‘Macronism’ survive its founder?

From supposed centrism to the centralisation of power: an anatomy of institutional continuity

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ABSTRACT

President Emmanuel Macron will not be able to stand for re-election in the 2027 presidential elections. This has raised a question in the public debate: who will succeed him? This is not the only question. This study argues that ‘Macronism’ has never constituted centrism in the doctrinal sense of the term: none of the four criteria of historical centrism (representative democracy, parliamentary compromise, European integration, and a balance between economic freedom and social protection) is met by the practices observed since 2017. It was a centralisation of power – that is, a position enabling governance – rather than a transmissible doctrine. Whilst the so-called ‘centrist’ bloc is disintegrating electorally, the concentration of power is shifting towards the institutions: appointments to supervisory bodies for terms running until 2032 and 2034, laws enacted and emergency measures now enshrined in positive law, and European arbitration proceedings initiated beyond the national timetable. Finally, the study examines what the Constitution actually permits in the event of a conflict, the possibility of a return in 2032 and that of a presidency of the European Council, concluding that the relevant timeframe is not the five-year term that is coming to an end but the decade that is beginning.

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Emmanuel Macron will not be able to stand for re-election in 2027. Article 6 of the Constitution limits the presidency to two consecutive terms, and this is the first time under the Fifth Republic that a Head of State has actually been bound by this provision.

Despite stepping down as President of the Republic, his political influence will not disappear at the end of his term. It will endure through the institutions, the laws enacted since he took office, his appointments, his European networks and, more discreetly, through established patterns of government.

The question, therefore, is this: **does 'Macronism' constitute a political movement capable of outliving its founder, or was it a presidential construct designed to permanently shift the centre of gravity of power?**

To answer this, we must first define the concept correctly, as the word 'centrism', which is used to describe it, is perhaps the most misleading term in the French political lexicon.

I. IS MACRONISM A FORM OF CENTRISM?

What 'centrism' has historically denoted

In French political history, centrism refers to a distinct political family: a commitment to representative democracy, a culture of parliamentary compromise, European integration, and the pursuit of a balance between economic freedom and social protection. It is a tradition (that of the MRP, the Radicals and the UDF) with its own points of reference, local structures and internal disagreements.

Three points of analysis help to gauge the gap between this tradition and the practice observed since 2017.

According to public perception, the French themselves no longer classify this party as centrist. In the Ipsos-BVA/CESI electoral survey conducted for CEVIPOF, the Jean-Jaurès Foundation, **Le Monde** and the Institut Montaigne in September 2026 amongst 13,060 people, the Renaissance party was classified as follows: 51 per cent of respondents classified it as 'on the right', compared with 21 per cent as 'in the centre' and 18 per cent as 'on the left'.¹ The self-declared centre is no longer perceived as central.

In a doctrinal sense, political science directly challenges the idea of a centre that is 'moderate' by nature. The historian Pierre Serna coined the term 'extreme centre': the centre is not the neutral midpoint of a line, but a political family in its own right, which can be just as inflexible in its convictions as the poles it claims to transcend.² The objection boils down to one question: who would claim that Emmanuel Macron is 'moderately' pro-European? Political scientist Pierre Martin proposes a three-pole framework: democratic-eco-socialist, conservative-identitarian, liberal-globalist, within which Macronism unambiguously falls into the third category. This is not a space for compromise between two camps, but rather a third project in its own right, with its own non-negotiable commitments.

Finally, **in terms of grassroots organisation**, Macronism has never built what usually ensures the survival of a political movement: local elected representatives, regional

¹ *French Election Survey 2026*, Wave 3, fieldwork carried out from 3 to 9 September 2026, 13,060 people registered on the electoral roll. <https://www.sciencespo.fr/cevipof/fr/etudes-enquetes/l-enquete-electorale-francaise-2026-2027-election-presidentielle/>

² Pierre Serna, **The Extreme Centre or the French Poison, 1789–2019**, Champ Vallon, 2019.

federations, or a written doctrine. Political scientist Roland Cayrol observes that Renaissance's lack of local roots dates back to its very foundation: everything had been staked on the national level. The March 2026 local elections served as a reminder of this: in towns and cities with more than 100,000 inhabitants, not a single town hall is currently clearly controlled by the Renaissance party.

II. THE TEST OF THE FOUR CRITERIA

This assessment deserves more than a general evaluation. Let us examine, one by one, how the party's exercise of power measures up against the criteria of historical centrism.

Representative democracy

Respect for national representation presupposes that Parliament decides, or at the very least deliberates, on matters of national importance.

For example, in matters of defence, Article 35 of the Constitution requires the Government to inform Parliament of any deployment of the armed forces abroad and to seek its authorisation for deployments lasting longer than four months. Yet major strategic shifts – such as support for the conflict in Ukraine, changes to the doctrine of nuclear deterrence, and commitments made to our European partners – were announced by the Head of State in speeches, prior to any parliamentary debate and, indeed, even after such a debate had taken place.

On matters of civil society, no public consultation has been organised. The law on assisted dying, which concerns the definition of the role of healthcare professionals and the legal and moral value of human life, was not put to a referendum, even though Article 11 of the Constitution allows any bill concerning reforms relating to the nation's social policy to be put to the people (the Constitutional Council also rejected the request to hold a referendum on the subject, submitted by senators). The same applies to the pension reform, which was rejected by a large majority of the public and adopted without a vote in the National Assembly. More broadly speaking, no referendum has been held since 2005 – that is, for more than twenty years.

The culture of parliamentary compromise

On this subject, the figures are very revealing. Article 49(3), which allows a bill to be passed without a vote by MPs, has been used 23 times in twenty months by Élisabeth Borne's government alone. This is an unprecedented rate under the Fifth Republic, including under Michel Rocard, who used it 28 times in three years.³ The invocation of Article 49.3 for the pension reform in March 2023 was the hundredth in the history of the Fifth Republic.

The use of decrees under Article 38 followed the same pattern. The reform of the Labour Code was carried out by executive orders from 2017 onwards, even though the government held an absolute majority in the National Assembly and there was no need for efficiency to justify it. This is the most telling factor: bypassing parliamentary debate was not a matter of necessity but of a deliberate choice. As for the fast-track procedure, designed as an exception for urgent legislation, it has been systematised to the point of becoming the standard procedure for legislative debate. Added to this are blocked votes and bills examined late at night, away from public scrutiny.

³ Data from the National Assembly. Analysis: Institut La Boétie, 49.3: *French-style authoritarian liberalism*, June 2025. <https://institutlaboetie.fr/note-49-3-autoritaire/>

The philosopher Grégoire Chamayou has proposed a concept to describe this situation: ‘**authoritarian** liberalism’, characterised by a growing disconnect between liberal reforms and democratic procedures. French practice since 2017 is a textbook example of this.

The balance between economic freedom and social protection

The third pillar of centrism requires a trade-off. Yet the trajectory is clear: the abolition of the solidarity tax on wealth and its replacement with a tax on property wealth, the introduction of a single flat-rate levy of 30 per cent on capital income, the ‘labour decrees’, two successive reforms of unemployment insurance tightening the conditions for benefits, and the raising of the statutory retirement age to 64. Each of these measures eases the burden on capital or reduces social protection. None of them moves in the opposite direction.

The reform of the ISF into the IFI deserves particular attention. By replacing a tax levied on total wealth with a tax levied solely on property assets, it has exempted income from movable capital (i.e. financial portfolios) whilst maintaining taxation on property owners. The trade-off is clear: it favours financial investment at the expense of property ownership.

In the service of whose interests?

A serious political analysis focuses in particular on the interests that a leader’s actions objectively serve. Two well-documented cases shed particular light on this issue.

Industrial divestments. As Minister for the Economy in 2014, Emmanuel Macron approved the sale of Alstom’s energy division (including the turbines used in French nuclear power stations) to the American group General Electric for 12.3 billion euros. In 2017–2018, MP Olivier Marleix chaired the parliamentary committee of inquiry into this transaction and the divestments of flagship industrial assets.⁴ In it, he criticised the state’s failings in dealing with foreign investment and highlighted what he called “striking parallels between the beneficiaries of these sales and the 2017 campaign’s financial backers”. He referred the matter to the National Financial Prosecutor’s Office in 2019, and the investigation was dismissed.⁵

The outsourcing of public expertise. The Senate committee of inquiry, chaired by Arnaud Bazin and with Éliane Assassi as rapporteur, described the influence of consultancy firms on public policy as ‘widespread’.⁶ It found that the State spent €41.05 million on consultancy services during the health crisis alone, including €12.3 million on McKinsey, and that eighteen successive contracts were awarded to McKinsey and Accenture totalling over €16 million for three areas: the vaccine information system, the vaccination campaign and the health pass. The report notes that McKinsey had contractually insisted on remaining ‘behind the scenes’; its deliverables were to be presented solely under the ministry’s letterhead, with no mention of its name. The National Financial Prosecutor’s Office has opened two judicial

⁴ National Assembly, Committee of Inquiry tasked with examining the State’s decisions on industrial policy in relation to corporate mergers, notably in the cases of Alstom, Alcatel and STX, report of April 2018. <https://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/dyn/15/comptes-rendus/cepolind>

⁵ Olivier Marleix, **French Dissolution: The End of Macronism**, Robert Laffont, November 2025.

⁶ Senate, *A sprawling phenomenon: the growing influence of consultancy firms on public policy*, Report No. 578, 16 March 2022. <https://www.senat.fr/rap/r21-578-1/r21-578-1.html>

investigations, relating in particular to the financing of the 2017 and 2022 presidential campaigns.

These elements reveal a consistent pattern: that of an exercise of power geared towards opening up markets, the outsourcing of public expertise and supranational integration, rather than towards preserving the state's sovereign capacities.

The decisive distinction

None of the four criteria of historical centrism are met. We must therefore distinguish between two concepts that the word 'centre' constantly conflates: centrism as a doctrine, which presupposes specific, transferable principles independent of individuals; and centrality as a position of power, which consists of occupying the space from which one can govern.

III. WHAT WILL NOT SURVIVE: THE CENTRAL BLOC AS AN ELECTORAL FORCE

A study by the Jean-Jaurès Foundation published on 29 May 2026, authored by Antoine Bristielle, establishes that Macronism no longer constitutes a homogeneous bloc but a coalition in the process of disintegrating. Of the voters who voted for Emmanuel Macron in the second round of 2022, only 35 per cent remain loyal to the central bloc, 27 per cent say they are tempted by the right, 23 per cent by the left, and 15 per cent say they are disillusioned.

This fragmentation is reflected in voting intentions, and care must be taken not to confuse two distinct measures.

Among former Emmanuel Macron voters alone, preferences are split between Édouard Philippe (40 per cent), Gabriel Attal (17 per cent), Raphaël Glucksmann (15 per cent) and Bruno Retailleau (10 per cent), with 11 per cent of this electorate now stating they intend to vote for Marine Le Pen.

When considered in relation to the electorate as a whole, these candidates' support is far more modest: according to the scenarios tested in September 2026, no single candidate from this political camp exceeds 17.5 per cent in the first round, whilst Marine Le Pen stands at between 33 per cent and 35 per cent in all scenarios.

The rivalry between the successors completes the picture. Édouard Philippe, a declared candidate since September 2024, has announced a programme of radical change. Gabriel Attal, a candidate since May 2026, has publicly described the pension reform championed by Édouard Philippe as 'brutal' and 'ineffective'. Neither can present himself as the successor to a legacy that they are both striving to distance themselves from. The proposals put forward to prevent a fragmented vote (organised withdrawal of candidates, an agreement between political groups, or a primary for the centrist bloc championed by François Bayrou) all presuppose an agreement between competing ambitions.

In conclusion, if 'Macronism' had been a doctrine, it would have produced an heir. Instead, it is producing rivals.

Nevertheless, a centralised concentration of power does not necessarily disappear with the electoral failure of those who claim to represent it.

IV. WHAT WILL SURVIVE: INSTITUTIONAL CONTINUITY

Public policy does not depend solely on those who decide it. It also depends on those who implement it.

Administrative continuity is a fundamental characteristic of the French state. It only becomes a political issue when it is deliberately organised in the run-up to an election.

The Fifth Republic grants the President considerable power of appointment. Since the beginning of 2026, this prerogative has been exercised at a remarkable pace:

- **Constitutional Council:** Richard Ferrand, former secretary-general of En Marche (the former name of the Renaissance party) and former President of the National Assembly, took over as President in March 2025. His confirmation was decided by a single vote (58 votes against, out of the 59 required to block the appointment) thanks to the abstention of the National Rally. His term of office runs **until 2034**. He will therefore preside over the institution that proclaims the results of the 2027 and 2032 elections.
- **Court of Auditors:** Amélie de Montchalin, then Minister for Public Action and Accounts, was appointed First President by decree on 11 February 2026.⁷ This is the first time under the Fifth Republic that a budget minister has moved directly from the Ministry of Finance to head the institution responsible for auditing public accounts. The Club des juristes noted that this appointment “raises sensitive questions about the institution’s independence”.⁸ From June 2026, the Court was due to present its report on public finances resulting from the actions of its new President whilst she was a minister.
- **Council of State:** Marc Guillaume, Secretary of State from 2015 to 2020 and Prefect of Paris and the Île-de-France region from 2020 to 2026, became Vice-President of the Council of State in May 2026: the highest administrative court, which advises the government on legislation and adjudicates on the actions of the administration, for a term that may run until 2036.⁹
- **Banque de France:** Emmanuel Moulin, Secretary-General of the Élysée, has been tipped for the governorship, for a term running until 2032.
- **Regulatory bodies, operators, diplomacy:** the Energy Regulatory Commission, RTE and the National Family Allowances Fund have been entrusted to former female aides to the President; a wave of appointments to major embassies (Washington, London, New York, Brussels) began in May 2026.
- **Prefectural corps and senior civil service:** prefects are appointed by decree of the Council of Ministers and hold posts ‘at the Government’s discretion’, which may be revoked at will. They hold administrative policing powers across the territory, authority over the internal security forces and jurisdiction at first instance in the application of emergency measures. The reform of the senior civil service, which came into force in 2022 (abolition of the ENA in favour of the INSP, and the merger of administrative

⁷ Decree of 11 February 2026 appointing the first female President of the Court of Auditors. <https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/jorf/id/JORFTEXT000053459190>; press release from the Court of Auditors: <https://www.ccomptes.fr/fr/communiqués-presse/prise-de-fonctions-damelie-de-montchalin-la-premiere-presidence-de-la-cour-des>

⁸ ‘Amélie de Montchalin at the Court of Auditors: a surprising appointment’, Club des juristes, February 2026. <https://www.leclubdesjuristes.com/opinion/amelie-de-montchalin-a-la-cour-des-comptes-une-nomination-qui-surprend-14295/>

⁹ ‘Marc Guillaume appointed Vice-President of the Council of State’, Décideurs Magazine, May 2026. <https://www.decideurs-juridiques.com/nominations-juridiques/64406-marc-guillaume-est-nomme-vice-president-du-conseil-d-etat.html>

bodies into a single body of state administrators), has increased the fluidity – and therefore the discretion – of appointments to senior management posts.

One point is worth highlighting, as it comes from the Élysée itself: when questioned about these appointments, the Presidency justified them on the grounds of a desire to ‘**secure the institutions**’.¹⁰ The phrasing is telling. Secure them against what, and for whose benefit? It implicitly acknowledges that these appointments pursue an objective that goes beyond the sole competence of the individuals appointed.

Of course, each appointment complies with constitutional procedures, including parliamentary scrutiny where required, and several coincide with normal turnover dates. Yet appointing someone does not guarantee their loyalty: institutions retain their autonomy, their holders are subject to the law, and history is full of appointments that have backfired on those who made them.

Nevertheless, it would be just as naïve to argue that these decisions have no effect. The Constitutional Council rules on the constitutionality of laws and declares the results of elections. The Court of Auditors oversees public funds. The Council of State may suspend or annul acts of the executive. The Bank of France influences financial stability. Prefects enforce police measures. **These are the bodies responsible for overseeing and implementing state power.** And their terms of office, by their very nature, extend beyond that of the president who appointed them.

The question is therefore not whether Emmanuel Macron will ‘control’ these institutions after 2027; that is not the argument being made here. The question is **under what institutional conditions his successor will have to govern**, and whether we are not witnessing a network of influence operating within the oversight bodies themselves.

V. WHAT WILL ALSO SURVIVE: THE LAWS ALREADY ON THE BOOKS

Public policy survives first and foremost through the legislation that has been adopted. Here are a few illustrative examples.

The legacy of the health crisis. The state of public health emergency, established by the Act of 23 March 2020, enshrined an entirely new system of exceptional measures in the Public Health Code. Articles L.3131-12 et seq. confer on the Prime Minister, by decree, the power to restrict freedom of movement, freedom of enterprise and freedom of assembly, amongst other things. This framework was to be implemented on the basis of criteria of gravity and proportionality. These conditions were clearly not met in many of the measures taken during the crisis, and yet the courts did not question their legality in the light of these criteria. The decisions were prepared behind closed doors by the Defence Council, then ratified by Parliament thanks to the presidential majority, through fast-track procedures and blocked votes. The Scientific Council and the Analysis, Research and Expertise Committee – some of whose members had conflicts of interest with the pharmaceutical industry – sidelined the High Authority for Health and Santé publique France. The crucial point is that **not all the provisions introduced at that time were repealed when the state of emergency ended.** Part of the framework remained in the code, available for reactivation. This is characteristic of emergency legislation: although designed to be temporary, it becomes entrenched.

¹⁰ “Marc Guillaume appointed Vice-President of the Council of State”, *Décideurs Magazine*, May 2026. <https://www.decideurs-juridiques.com/nominations-juridiques/64406-marc-guillaume-est-nomme-vice-president-du-conseil-d-etat.html>

The final stages. Despite three successive rejections by the Senate, the bill was finally passed on 15 July 2026 by the National Assembly, which had the final say at the request of Prime Minister Sébastien Lecornu, by 291 votes to 241. Yaël Braun-Pivet had publicly set the target of passing the bill ‘before the end of the five-year term’. The President praised the fulfilment of her ‘commitment’ regarding a bill that he was determined to see passed before the end of his term of office. No referendum was envisaged on a subject that nevertheless touches upon society’s conception of the human person.

Military emergency powers. The Act updating the 2024–2030 military programme, adopted on 1 July 2026, approved by the Constitutional Council on 6 August and promulgated on 16 August, establishes a ‘state of national security alert’, which the Senate itself describes as ‘an intermediate mechanism between ordinary law and the various emergency regimes’.

It is important here not to confuse two distinct regimes, stemming from two different pieces of legislation, the overlap of which is precisely the problem.

The first stems from Article 47 of the Military Programming Act No. 2023-703 of 1 August 2023, which has become Article L. 2212-1 of the Defence Code. It concerns the requisitioning of persons and property. Its novelty lies in the trigger condition it has introduced: a ‘threat of such a nature as to justify the implementation of the State’s international defence commitments’. It is this regime that is based on a **threat that is merely foreseeable** (no longer current or imminent) and which can therefore be invoked in advance, at the sole discretion of the executive, without the need for a decree by the Council of Ministers. Furthermore, the criterion of ‘international commitments’ is undefined in law: these commitments are numerous and evolving, and their implementation is subject to the discretionary assessment of the Head of State, which deprives the mechanism of any effective judicial safeguard.

The second stems from Article 21 of the 2026 Update Act, which creates a new Title IV bis in the Defence Code, comprising Articles L. 2143-1 et seq. This, in turn, requires a ‘serious and present’ threat, but in three scenarios of considerable scope: any threat to national security (an extremely broad formulation); a threat justifying the implementation of international defence commitments (which **reproduces almost verbatim the wording of Article 47 of 2023**); and, finally, the deployment at short notice, on national territory, **of the French armed forces or allied forces** – a concept which the text does not define and which may refer to NATO forces as well as forces under European command. Its effects are far-reaching: derogation from regulatory standards in six areas (security of activities of vital importance, town planning and the environment, working hours, supplies, transport and electronic communications); the subjection of contracts to the exceptional regime governing defence procurement; and, above all, pursuant to Article L. 2143-5, exemption from **all** consultation obligations, including those relating to the Council of State. It is triggered by a decree of the Council of Ministers, without prior notification to Parliament, whose authorisation is required only after a period of more than two months, with no limit on the number of extensions.

The key point is this: **these two regimes are based, in part, on the same activation mechanism, and may therefore be triggered simultaneously on the basis of a single and identical threat**, thereby combining their legal effects. To this must be added the state of emergency arising from the Act of 3 April 1955, the state of alert and general mobilisation (Articles L. 2141-1 et seq. of the Defence Code). France thus has **five exceptional regimes that can potentially be applied concurrently, two of which can be activated on the basis of the same circumstances**. The Council of State has, moreover, recognised that this new

regime was justified because the previous ones were either too restrictive (general mobilisation, state of alert) or unsuitable for a rapid response (state of emergency). In doing so, it supplements the arsenal of exceptional measures to the point of making it a virtually continuous mechanism.

Digital identification. The law prohibiting minors under the age of fifteen from accessing social media, adopted on 21 July 2026, was struck down by the Constitutional Council on 14 August 2026. On 14 September, the government notified Brussels of a revised version, whilst the European Commission is pressing ahead with a ‘digital majority’ across the Union. Any scheme of this nature requires age verification, and therefore identification mechanisms covering all users, not just minors. Having been struck down at national level, the scheme is immediately taken to the European level, where, of course, the French Constitutional Council no longer has jurisdiction.

None of the candidates in the 2027 presidential election appears willing to challenge these measures at this stage.

VI. A CUMULATIVE EROSION OF THE RULE OF LAW

We are witnessing an erosion brought about by the accumulation of legal and regulatory measures, the cumulative effect of which alters the balance of powers.

Government by the Defence Council

From March 2020, Emmanuel Macron governed by convening the Defence and National Security Council every week in an unprecedented format known as the ‘Health Defence Council’. This body has three characteristics that distinguish it from the Council of Ministers: its composition is determined by the President alone; its deliberations are subject to national defence secrecy; and it is not subject to any obligation to report to Parliament.

The objection is not partisan. Jean-Luc Mélenchon denounced a country “run by a secret committee”. Xavier Bertrand raised the same question before the Senate’s committee of inquiry in September 2020: ‘Is the High Defence Council what is currently replacing the Council of Ministers?’ The legal scholar Thibault Desmoulins, writing in **Jus Politicum**, articulated the constitutional issue: can the Defence Council become the standard forum for public decision-making?¹¹

It would be incorrect to claim that ‘all documents’ relating to the crisis were classified as defence secrets, and judicial investigations were able to be carried out. The Court of Justice of the Republic carried out searches as early as October 2020. It is, however, true that the deliberations of the Health Defence Council – that is, the forum where decisions were taken – were subject to national defence secrecy, even though **Article R.1122-1 of the Defence Code does not confer any health-related powers on this body**. The problem is therefore not the legality of defence secrecy, which protects legitimate interests, but its **extension to matters that do not fall within its scope** and the resulting effect: a major public decision, affecting the freedoms of the entire population, removed from parliamentary debate, public scrutiny and ordinary judicial review.

¹¹ Thibault Desmoulins, “The Defence Council: notes on a central yet little-known institution in times of health crisis”, *Jus Politicum*, 13 November 2020. <https://blog.juspoliticum.com/2020/11/13/le-conseil-de-defense-notes-sur-une-institution-centrale-et-meconnue-en-temps-de-crise-sanitaire-par-thibault-desmoulins/>

A practice that is becoming entrenched

This precedent has not remained an isolated case: the public health state of emergency and its successive extensions, repeated recourse to Article 49.3 and executive orders, fast-track procedures that have become the norm, and now a state of emergency that can be triggered by the mere threat of a crisis.

This is where constitutional checks and balances should come into their own. However, a system in which constitutional review becomes a last resort rather than a theoretical safeguard still functions, albeit under constant strain.

This is not a declared state of emergency, but rather **a routine state of exception**. These instruments will not lapse in May 2027.

VII. THE THIRD THEATRE: EUROPE

Since 2017, Emmanuel Macron has made European politics a central focus of his agenda. Yet Europe has a distinctive feature: **whilst national governments change, its institutions, negotiations and networks are built on the long term**. A president who leaves the Élysée Palace loses his direct power whilst retaining the ability to exert influence through his network, his experience of the European Council, the people he has helped to appoint, and the continuity of policy areas.

Current events illustrate this perfectly. According to a Reuters report dated 15 September 2026, France is said to be backing the candidacy of the Dutchman Klaas Knot for the presidency of the European Central Bank, on condition that the post of chief economist goes to a French candidate. According to the agency's sources, this arrangement enjoys the personal support of Emmanuel Macron. Christine Lagarde's term of office ends in late October 2027, after the French presidential election: part of the monetary balance for the coming decade is therefore being negotiated today, under the current presidency.

The precedent set by Mario Draghi is instructive: several years after stepping down from office, his analyses continue to shape the European agenda. His 2024 report on competitiveness has become an essential reference.

One can therefore envisage a 'Macronism without Macron as president': no longer a dominant party, but a capacity for influence built on networks, appointments and policy areas that extend beyond the French electoral calendar.

Defence, the last reserved domain, and its gradual co-opting

Here, we must establish a principle enshrined in the Treaties themselves. Article 4(2) of the Treaty on European Union stipulates that the Union shall respect the essential functions of the State, in particular those aimed at ensuring its territorial integrity, maintaining public order and safeguarding national security, and it expressly adds that **national security remains the sole responsibility of each Member State**. Furthermore, the common security and defence policy is governed by an intergovernmental procedure requiring unanimity in the Council, precisely because the Member States have never intended to bring this area under Community jurisdiction.

This is not a procedural subtlety. I have had the opportunity elsewhere to elaborate on the analysis applied by the Constitutional Council to transfers of powers: it first examines the link between the matter in question and state power (the more consubstantial this link is with sovereignty, the more likely a transfer – even a limited one – is to undermine the essential conditions for the exercise of sovereignty), then the scope of the transfer, and

finally whether it is definitive or revocable.¹² Yet no area is more intrinsically linked to sovereignty than defence: it is, alongside currency and justice, the attribute by which a state defines itself as a state. A transfer, even a partial one, therefore in principle requires a constitutional amendment.

It is against this backdrop that we must interpret the State of the Union address delivered by Ursula von der Leyen to the European Parliament in Strasbourg on 16 September 2026.¹³ In her address, the President of the Commission asserts that Europe ‘is better equipped than ever to defend itself’, on the grounds that **‘we have thoroughly rethought the security of its Member States’**. She welcomes an increase of more than 80 per cent in European defence spending over five years, announces initiatives for November focusing in particular on defence and space, and concludes with the following statement: **‘in a world as fragile as glass, the only sovereignty that counts is that which Europe offers to Europeans’**.

This final sentence asserts that the national sovereignty of Member States is no longer a sovereignty ‘that counts’, and that the only legitimate sovereignty is that which an institution not elected by direct universal suffrage ‘offers’ to the peoples of Europe. The choice of verb is telling: sovereignty that is received from a higher authority is not sovereignty at all; it is a revocable delegation of power. The very essence of sovereignty lies precisely in deriving one’s power from no one.

We must be precise about the scope of this statement, as it has no normative value. A political declaration does not transfer any powers, and the initiatives announced will have to be negotiated with the Member States and, in the case of defence, adopted unanimously. Nothing has been legally accomplished.

This is where one must understand the subtlety of the mechanism at work. Transfers of competence in this area do not take place, as they ought to, through a formal treaty subject to ratification (a process that would require a national debate and, where necessary, a constitutional amendment). Instead, they occur through the accumulation of technical instruments: joint funding, industrial programmes, support funds, joint procurement contracts, and interoperability standards. Each is presented as voluntary cooperation. Taken together, they create a structural dependency which, in the long run, renders decision-making autonomy largely theoretical. A state that no longer controls the funding, production or standards of its armaments retains the formal sovereignty to decide, but loses the material means to decide otherwise.

This is the same logic observed at the domestic level: what cannot be achieved through the main channel – at European level through the Treaty, and at national level through a parliamentary vote or the Constitutional Council – is achieved through indirect means. And it is the same shift as that observed in relation to digital identification: censored in Paris, the scheme re-emerges in Brussels, where French constitutional review no longer applies.

¹² On the analysis of transfers of powers and the three criteria — qualitative, quantitative and formal — adopted by the Constitutional Council, as well as on the distinction between the transfer of sovereignty (absolutely prohibited) and the transfer of powers (subject to constitutional revision), see Virginie de Araújo-Recchia, *From the 2024–2030 Military Programming Act to its update*, 2026.

¹³ President von der Leyen’s 2026 State of the Union Address, Strasbourg, 16 September 2026, full text published by the European Commission: https://france.representation.ec.europa.eu/informations-et-evenements/informations/discours-sur-letat-de-lunion-2026-de-la-presidente-von-der-leyen-2026-09-16_fr

A hypothesis worth considering: the presidency of the European Council

There remains one question that the French debate almost never addresses, even though the current situation calls for it.

First, we must clear up a confusion, as what is incorrectly termed the ‘presidency of Europe’ actually encompasses two distinct roles. The presidency of the European Commission, held by Ursula von der Leyen until 2029, involves nomination by the European Council followed by election by the European Parliament: this route is now closed.

The presidency of the European Council follows an entirely different process. António Costa took office on 1 December 2024 for a term of two and a half years, renewable once. His first term therefore ends **in late May 2027, a few weeks after the French presidential term expires**.

The method of appointment deserves particular attention. Article 15(5) of the Treaty on European Union provides that the President of the European Council is elected by the European Council **by a qualified majority**. There is no universal suffrage, no vote by the European Parliament, nor any requirement for the candidate to have the support of their national government. The precedent set by Donald Tusk, who was re-elected in 2017 despite his own Polish government voting against him, establishes that a candidate can assume this office against the advice of their home country. In other words: a former French president would need neither the support of French voters nor the consent of their successor at the Élysée.

Nevertheless, several obstacles exist and must be mentioned. The four successive holders of the post (Herman Van Rompuy, Donald Tusk, Charles Michel and António Costa) were all former heads of government from smaller states: the role was conceived as one of arbitration and consensus-building, and Member States are traditionally reluctant to see it go to one of the most powerful among them. The balance between European political families also plays a role: the Commission is chaired by a member of the European People’s Party, the European Council by a socialist, whilst the Renew group – to which the French presidential camp is affiliated – emerged weakened from the 2024 elections. Finally, France cannot lay claim to all the posts simultaneously: if it secures the post of Chief Economist at the European Central Bank, it will have used up a substantial portion of its bargaining capital.

The point here is to note that the possibility is legally open, that the timetable is favourable, and that the post would constitute the natural culmination of everything described in this section: a network built up over ten years of European Councils, and personal relationships with leaders.

If this scenario were to materialise, it would provide the most complete illustration of the argument put forward here. A former French president holding the office that sets the Union’s direction, appointed by his peers by a qualified majority, without any French voter having had a say: this is precisely what the survival of a centralised power structure beyond the mandate that established it means.

The most sensitive issue: nuclear doctrine

On 2 March 2026, speaking from the Île Longue base, Emmanuel Macron announced a major shift in French doctrine, which he termed ‘advanced deterrence’.¹⁴ In practical terms, this involves the possibility of temporarily deploying French strategic air forces on the territory of allied states (‘an archipelago of force’), the participation of European allies in deterrence exercises, and the establishment, alongside Germany, of a ‘high-level nuclear steering group’. Nine states have accepted this framework.

To be precise, the President has expressly ruled out any ‘sharing of the final decision’ and any ‘sharing of the definition of vital interests’: legally, the nuclear launch authority remains solely in the hands of the French Head of State. We shall therefore not speak of a ‘pooling’ of nuclear weapons.

However, the constitutional issue remains unresolved. A doctrine of deterrence concerns the very existence of the nation. The decision to amend it was taken by the President alone, announced in a speech, without a parliamentary vote, without prior debate, and without a public consultation. Yet deploying strategic assets on the territory of third countries alters the conditions under which France might find itself drawn into a conflict. This decision, which affects future generations, is left to the sole discretion of a president.

The same observation applies to support for the conflict in Ukraine: arms deliveries, multi-year financial commitments and bilateral security agreements do not formally fall under the procedure set out in Article 35, and are therefore largely exempt from a parliamentary vote, even though they involve considerable sums of money and the country’s strategic position.

VIII. THE SCENARIO OF WAR: WHAT WOULD THE CONSTITUTION ACTUALLY ALLOW?

Could a president nearing the end of their term remain in power by virtue of a conflict?

Nothing in French law allows for the cancellation of a presidential election or the extension of a term of office beyond its expiry, even in times of war.

Article 16 grants the President exceptional powers when the institutions, the nation’s independence or the integrity of the territory are threatened ‘in a serious and immediate manner’ and the normal functioning of public authorities is disrupted (both conditions must be met). It has been invoked only once, from 23 April to 29 September 1961.¹⁵ However, as the constitutional expert Jean-Philippe Derosier points out, Article 16 allows for the adoption of necessary measures ‘in accordance with the Constitution’, and the duration of the presidential term is set by the Constitution itself. Exceptional powers cannot therefore be used to extend the term of office of the person exercising them. Since 2008, the Constitutional Council may be referred to after thirty days of application to verify that the conditions are still met.

¹⁴ Speech by the President of the Republic at Île Longue, 2 March 2026, full text: <https://legrandcontinent.eu/fr/2026/03/02/nucleaire-macron-ile-longue/>; summary: <https://www.touteleurope.eu/l-ue-dans-le-monde/dissuasion-nucleaire-quelle-doctrine-francaise/>

¹⁵ Constitutional Council, ‘What does it provide for in the event of war?’ <https://www.conseil-constitutionnel.fr/la-constitution/que-prevoit-elle-en-cas-de-guerre>

Article 7 provides that the Constitutional Council may extend the electoral deadlines, though the election must take place no later than thirty-five days after its decision. A postponement is therefore possible, but strictly limited: a few weeks, not several months.¹⁶

A state of siege (Article 36), declared by the Council of Ministers in the event of imminent danger resulting from a foreign war, transfers police powers to the military authorities; however, its extension beyond twelve days may only be authorised by Parliament. Here too, it does not permit the postponement of an election.

The only legally viable route to a lasting change would be a **constitutional amendment**, which requires a three-fifths majority vote in Congress or a referendum.

The point of concern lies elsewhere, as the risk stems from intermediate regimes: the 2023 requisition regime, which can be activated in response to a merely foreseeable threat, and the state of national security alert established in August 2026, triggered by decree without prior notification to Parliament and with no limit on the number of extensions; neither of these attracts the public attention that Article 16 would. **A regime that does not declare itself is a regime that is not challenged.**

IX. AND WHAT ABOUT THE RETURN? WHAT EXACTLY DOES THE CONSTITUTION SAY?

According to several media sources, Emmanuel Macron is reported to have suggested that he will ‘no longer be involved in politics’ after 2027, stating that he would ‘probably do something completely different’.

However, Article 6 of the Constitution should be read carefully. The restriction, introduced by the 2008 revision, relates to **consecutive terms**, not to the total number of terms. This has a consequence that is frequently overlooked in public debate: **Emmanuel Macron will be perfectly entitled to stand for election in 2032**, following a term in office by another president. He will then be fifty-four years old, and this prospect alone is enough to give political significance to everything that has gone before.

A second, more speculative hypothesis is worth considering. Put forward in 2022 by Jean-Jacques Urvoas, former Minister of Justice: if the president were to dissolve the National Assembly, lose the general election and resign before the end of his second term, a snap election would be held and Emmanuel Macron, having not served two full consecutive terms, could stand in it. The argument is based on a real precedent: a 2022 ruling by the Council of State had allowed Édouard Fritch, President of French Polynesia, whose first term had lasted only four years, to stand for a third term.

This interpretation is rejected by the majority of legal scholars. Professor Dominique Rousseau considers the Polynesian precedent to be inapplicable. Professor Olivier Beaud points out that the Council of State itself had characterised its decision as **a question of legality, not of constitutionality**. A precedent in administrative law applied to an overseas collectivity cannot govern the interpretation of Article 6.¹⁷ Professor Bertrand Mathieu

¹⁶ Les Surligneurs, ‘Could Emmanuel Macron cancel the elections in the event of war?’, November 2025. <https://lessurligneurs.eu/emmanuel-macron-pourra-t-il-annuler-les-elections-en-cas-de-guerre/>

¹⁷ Olivier Beaud, ‘A question of little or no interest: the possibility of a third presidential term?’, *Jus Politicum*, 14 June 2024. <https://blog.juspoliticum.com/2024/06/14/une-question-sans-interet-ou-presque-la-possibilite-dun-troisieme-mandat-presidentiel-par-olivier-beaud/>

concludes that, in law, the answer is no: only a constitutional amendment would permit a third consecutive term of office.¹⁸

The scenario of a third consecutive term through early resignation is a matter of doctrinal controversy that has been settled in the negative.

CONCLUSION: 2027 – A BREAK WITH THE PAST OR A TURNING POINT?

A change in the presidency alters the holder of executive power. It does not, overnight, change the composition of the Constitutional Council, the leadership of the Council of State or the Court of Auditors, the laws enacted, the emergency provisions enshrined in law, nor the decisions taken within the European institutions.

The evidence gathered here points towards the hypothesis that **‘Macronism’ could disappear as a political identity whilst surviving as a culture of government**. It would no longer be measured by the number of MPs a party holds, but by appointments, legislation in force, European networks and administrative practices.

The more deeply a president’s influence is embedded within the institutions, the more his policies may outlive him; yet the more this influence rests on individuals rather than on a doctrine openly espoused before the electorate, the greater the risk that it will be perceived not as a lasting movement, but as the informal extension of personal power.

The question that the next political cycle will have to address goes far beyond the figure of Emmanuel Macron: **can we truly turn a new page when those who wrote the previous one remain in the positions that shape public decision-making?**

It concerns our very conception of power in a democracy.

¹⁸ Bertrand Mathieu, ‘Resignation, then a third term for Emmanuel Macron? Legally speaking, the answer is no!’, Club des juristes, June 2024. <https://www.leclubdesjuristes.com/politique/une-demission-puis-un-3eme-mandat-pour-emmanuel-macron-en-droit-cest-non-6257/>