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UDC 327::911.3(44)

327(100)

Review scientific article

Received: 18.11.2024.

Accepted: 28.3.2025.

doi: 10.5937/napredak6-54842

France and Geopolitics: A Complicated Story Threatened by EU and NATO Memberships

Abstract: The author of this paper addresses French geopolitics, or today's position of France in the context of its membership in the European Union and the NATO. The starting assumption is that the membership in these two organizations limits the French position and opportunities for reviving French geopolitics which formerly put forward national interests and the sovereignty of the state. Having in mind that the EU and the NATO are a threat to France's true geopolitics, in the first part of the paper the author justifies his thesis, first in the context of France's position in the EU and the NATO, and the in relation to the ideology of positivist liberal internationalism. In the second part, the author analyzes the introduction of geopolitics in the French educational system and recognizes advantages and disadvantages in the system itself. Finally, the author offers a solution to the foundation of the French geopolitical thought which should be based on glorious history and a patriotic elite.

Keywords: France, geopolitics, education, positivism, history, European Union, NATO

Introduction

French geopolitics is becoming less visible and less centred on French interests and specific views of the world since the EU construction took a federalist turn after the Maastricht treaty and the emergence of a political elite (transcending political parties) around Emmanuel Macron, that put first the EU

against French interests; and French return into NATO. Added to this, the study of geopolitics in French curricula will less likely be a first emancipatory step against US-EU geopolitics and ideologies, but will support them as programs of geopolitics are ill-conceived and biased. After analysing the negative impact that NATO and the EU have on French geopolitics, this paper will investigate the

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evolution of mentalities and how the liberal turn makes it harder to think about the very idea of an autonomous French geopolitics. The paper will finally conclude by looking how the specificity of French history and geography can provide a solution to French challenges.

It is necessary to understand the meaning of geopolitics in the context of revival or birth of independent French geopolitical thought. Geopolitics is key to understanding international relations; it points to “how to rule” and how, in a certain context, to create foreign policy strategies aimed at preserving national integrity and state sovereignty. Therefore, struggling to develop French geopolitics implies a road towards a more sovereign and independent position of France, which is challenging in current circumstances, since France is a member of the NATO and the EU as supranational institutions which demand transferring part of sovereignty to the supranational level. The paper starts from the above-stated attitude and, through a critical review of the ideology of positivist liberal internationalism, tries to show the uniformity of the Euro-Atlantic perspective which prevents the establishment of French geopolitics.

EU and NATO as threats for “real French” geopolitics

Currently, French geopolitics and geopolitical thinking is under the threat of a dual mechanism: the security architecture in which France is part of: NATO and the EU; and the current dominating mindset, that constrain and uniformises political thinking.

What security context to choose: French security architecture or Americanized EU and NATO architectures?

Since the end of the Second World War, General de Gaulle had repeatedly defined the type of European union he intended to promote. To him, any EU project should be based on the principles of respect for national sovereignty of States, and complete independence (politically, economically and culturally) from the United States, through the establishment of what he called „European Europe”. For him, France in particular, and Europe more generally, should be completely autonomous in all aspects and should promote and act according to its own vision of the world and of world issues. This means rejecting both the tutelage (or vassalisation to take the words of Zbigniew Brzezinski in *The Grand Chess Board*) of the United States and federal integration, which depoliticizes States’ relations

The Élysée Treaty subsequently signed between France and Germany should have paved the way for a political partnership within a renewed European framework. But General de Gaulle was dealt a blow when, at the time of ratification, the Bundestag drafted and voted on a preamble which, in line with joint pressure from the Americans, Jean Monnet and his Action Committee for the United States of Europe, „reframed” the treaty in terms of a close link with NATO and reduced it to a single agreement on regular consultations. Germany’s refusal to revalue the Mark in the wake of the crisis that had just shaken France convinced (de Gaulle) that it had returned to a policy of power. That understanding proved to be a good analysis when one looks at Berlin’s power play within the

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EU, especially since Ursula van der Leyen has been appointed and the German attempts through the EU to attack French nuclear energy sector under the disguise of the “green energy” argument (this attack is even acknowledged by the EU Parliament!).^[2]

The continuing confrontation between Atlanticists and supranationalists on the one hand and

supporters of an inter-state „European Europe” on the other was therefore inevitable, and continues to be. De Gaulle was aware of the geopolitical permanency of the long term, which transcended immediate political circumstances. It is in this context that we need to understand his expression „Europe from the Atlantic to the Urals”, which looked to the

[2] https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/E-9-2023-002175_EN.html (Accessed on 21 October 2024).

future after communism and rejected this ideology by marking its temporal limit. However, the advocates of the integration of the smaller Europe had only built this European identity within the borders between the two blocs, a short-sighted concept that would prove fatal in their dismay at the fall of the Berlin Wall and that of Soviet communism.

History is always full of surprises when it comes to the apparent logic of its sequencing. For example, General de Gaulle was adamantly opposed to Britain joining the Community on the grounds that it would be the United States' „Trojan horse” in Europe. Yet this same Britain defended the Gaullists' equal aversion to supranationality. In the same way, the Fouchet project proposed by the French was hastily rejected by their partners even though, according to its inspirers, it could have inaugurated a genuine European political union; these same partners being very attached to the accession of Great Britain, which was developing a conception of European organisation that was far removed from their own.

This question of what the European security context and framework should be came back to life starting from 2019 and Emmanuel Macron's words: “l'OTAN est en mort cérébrale”^[3] By this, the French president meant that NATO was no longer pertinent and lost its reason of existence. That was a right analysis. Instead, France supported the concept of “EU strategic compass” (a concept waiting to be clearly defined). These two concepts are, however, as problematic and dangerous for French geopolitics as is NATO. The idea in itself is a way forward

for Europe's true independence from the US as it means that European security should be guaranteed by European and not by actors outside the region (such analysis is similar to Chinese and Russian foreign policy discourses and objectives related to regional conflict resolutions, Grandpierron & Pomès, 2024). The issue with Emmanuel Macron's words is that by Europe he means the European Union. If he really meant Europe as a whole, then the new security architecture would be very much what De Gaulle had in mind and would include Russia, thus resuscitating the historical alliance between France and Russia, that very same alliance that was established against German domination attempts at the end of the 19th century (Cohrs, 2022). Only such security framework could guarantee stability in Europe and exclude outside powers (the US) from using Europe as “battleground” to contain what they perceive as threats to their world hegemony, to keep paraphrasing Brzezinski. In addition, such understanding, because it would include Russia and Serbia, two doors opened towards the future: the BRICS, would connect Europe to where world economy is shifting to. However, such understanding is not Emmanuel Macron's. By Europe, he means the European Union, and it is very different. Instead of an autonomous Europe in which States would maintain their own strategic agendas based on their interests, an EU developing a real foreign policy and security architecture would mean the end of States' national sovereignty. A latest expression of this, is the French President's declaration to use French nuclear weapons to protect the Baltic countries

[3] <https://www.lefigaro.fr/international/le-president-francais-emmanuel-macron-juge-l-otan-en-etat-de-mort-cerebrale-20191107> (Accessed on 22 October 2024).

against Russia. Engaging in the path of an EU as a unified security actor leads to the consequence that all EU members to view the world the same way: having the same understanding of threats and opportunities. This is simply not possible, unless it is argued and belied that that cultures and national histories and political philosophies are all the same.

Then came the Russian special military operation in Ukraine and all the emotional European and North American policies, called “sanctions” (a misleading word deprived from its true legal meaning), which brought Europe and France back to their status of US vassals. The word “sanction” is problematic, because, in its semantics refers to the idea of a judged thing, a judgement rendered by an impartial court and sanctions a social behaviour considered as unacceptable. The objective is therefore twofold, when used by a State: to punish an actor deemed to be deviant but also to limit the room for manoeuvre of a rival power wanting to change the rules of the international system. However, the use of the term ‘sanction’, in an indeterminate way to encompass all measures taken against a state, hides under a legal terminology, often improper, a will to impose its values and perpetuate the international order (Koskeniemi, 2004; Anghie, 2004; Chimni, 2017).

The use of the term ‘sanctions’ in political discourse requires a distinction to be made between sanctions adopted in a multilateral institutional framework (United Nations, etc.) and countermeasures decided by states. In both cases, they are coercive measures aimed at influencing the behaviour of a state deemed to be in violation of international rules. However, the term ‘sanctions’ should be reserved for coercive measures adopted by an organ of

an international organisation in accordance with its constitutive treaty. Far from defending a vision of a universally accepted international order, ‘sanctions’ participate in the imposition of an interpretation of the international order (Sur, 2018). International law is in fact mostly understood as the capacity of international law to regulate international relations, *i.e.* to constrain the behaviour of states. That goes without saying that most of the so-called sanctions taken by European countries are hurting their own vital interest (especially energetic).

Geopolitical thinking prevented by the spread of positivist liberal internationalism ideologies

France and, more generally, European countries are also the prisoner of a specific mindset that prevents them from developing their own geopolitics. This mindset is a sort of evolution of the mindset that dominated American and European politics in the years 1860-1914 and lead inexorably to the suicide of European civilization during the First World War. Political mindsets and communication took a clear racial turn to form a sort of “civilisational nationalism” that opposed Western powers (Britain, France, the US) against those judged underdeveloped (Colonial sphere, China) and those judged immoral and decadent (German and Austro-Hungary Empires). Political scientist Max Weber explained that, in this period, the elites of the “most advanced” powers also became obsessed with measuring global hierarchy, the “rise and fall” of nations and empires, and all form of progress. Thinking about progress became linked to social Darwinism to form a “civilizational Darwinism” thinking. The combination

of “civilizational nationalism” and of “civilizational Darwinism” made political elites canter their discourses (implicitly or explicitly) on the idea that what nations and states were engaged in was essentially a struggle for the survival of the “fittest” civilization (Cohrs, 2022).

There are similarities between these elements and what we can observe in the US and Europe at the occasion for the 2024 elections, mostly European elections, French Parliamentary elections and upcoming US Presidential election. These elections are showing that political discourses are getting more and more ideologized. It is not the exact same ideology as in the years 1860-1914, but an evolved version of it that is based on the idea that the “West” has the best political systems and values as it “won the Cold War”. This ideology is combined by a new cult in science (positivism namely) to form a sort of “positivist liberal internationalism” that argues that development and peace in the world can only be guaranteed by the spread of Western political regimes and values against countries seen as rivals and threats (China, Russia, Iran, etc.).

Positivism grew out of a movement to establish a solid foundation for social science enquiry. Since Waltz and his 1959 book *Man, the State and War*, political science has enthusiastically taken the turn towards technicality and positivism. At last, political science was to become the equal of the hard sciences: analytical protocol, transformation of thought into quasi-mathematical thinking organised around dependent and independent variables. Finally, political science would be able to identify the general rules governing the behaviour of men and political phenomena: the causes of wars, electoral motivations, and so on. The perverse effect,

which underlies what has been studied over these two days, is that history has become a data-set. As soon as facts can be fitted into preconceived boxes, used to justify two opposing events, we arrive at preconceived thinking, automatic thinking, thinking transformed into an equation.

Positivism applied to political science research method contributed to put aside factors of human behaviour that were long identified by Thucydides (Hanink, 2019). As such, cultures, philosophies, perceptions and emotions were considered as not scientific and not worth of being a subject of research. When emotions were taken into account in analyses of international relations, they often tend to be studied from a utilitarian, or at least rationalist, point of view. Hans Morgenthau is to some extent responsible for this, no doubt in spite of himself, by including fear in the highly rationalist model of nuclear deterrence (Morgenthau, 1946).

This approach evacuates all subjectivity, social ties and emotions in social relations. Positivism makes us imagine the worst-case scenario: this is especially true in hardcore realism and liberalism. For many positivist security scholars, international actors are driven by external forces that push them in a particular direction. Future threats are deduced from past trends, as if the social world advances in a linear fashion. Finally, alarmism assumes rational, self-interested and strategic actors struggling for power and resources. In this competitive universe, there is no room for real cooperation, social ties, or anything that we can liken to an international society with “constitutional structures” or the development of a new regional order. This alarmism is rational insofar as the threatening actions are not attributed to actors driven by passion or revenge, but to cold

self-interest or historical forces. A current argument in West-European and North American literatures is what they call the “China threat” or the “Russian threat” (Lindemann, 2023). These countries are often presented as homogeneous actors that “rise” and appear to be intent on imposing its will on the world in a near future through a long-standing strategic plan.

Positivism denies any place for heterogeneity, creativity, and social connections between actors. First, with regard to the subject, positivist approaches have a mainly homogenizing and aggregative approach to subjects that denies individuality. While some categorization and typification are necessary for any science to “know” certain aspects of social reality, nomological positivism tends to reify these categories and, for example, personify aggregations with given interests and emotions, such as the desire of “China” to dominate. This unification can make actors appear particularly powerful and dangerous. If actors are perceived as unified, such as “Russia”, “China”, “North Korea” or “Iran”, it becomes easier to attribute a coherent will to them. It is often forgotten that foreign policy actions are more often the result of compromise than coordinated policy.

The positivist logic also leads to understand concepts only in their Euro-Atlantic understanding. As such, a “democracy” can only be a political construction matching with the Euro-Atlantic understanding. Any other model is not a “true” democracy, cannot be qualified as such and is in fact a manipulatory attempt by corrupted elites to pretend to be a democracy. The conclusion is, wrongly, to assume cultures, histories, civilizations are all equal.

In his book *Le Naufrage des Civilisations*, Amin Maalouf explains that globalisation, facilitated and supported by technological development, is forcing the different components of humanity closer together to such an extent that these different components are tending to become increasingly uniform. Yet there is a paradox: people adhere to doctrines and ideologies that glorify particularism. People are coming together more and more every day, and the clash of identities is becoming increasingly violent. But it cannot be said that we have not been warned. Zamyatin, Huxley and Orwell did. All three wanted to warn their contemporaries of the tyrannies to come and the totalitarian use that could be made of technological tools to wipe out all freedom and human dignity. In *Nous autres*, Zamyatin describes a world in which every aspect has been meticulously planned, timed and transcribed into mathematical formulae represented by the Table of Hours (personal hours, hours devoted to a particular activity, etc).

Are we heading for a world where Big Brother sees and hears everything? A world where language is so controlled and perverted that we can only express opinions that conform to official thinking? This is already happening in the European Union (right from its construction, Laughland, 1998) and the United States: suppression of media (Russian media – but Israelian remain allowed thus showing a biased vision, *CNews* etc.) and opinions that do not conform to the delirium-filled vision of COVID-19 and war in Ukraine. All these measures seriously undermine democracy. Indeed, the fundamental pillar on which democracy rests is transparency. Mearsheimer shows this very well in his latest book, *The Great Delusion* (2018). Transparency means

that everyone has access to the information they need to make decisions. War puts an end to this, under the guise of protecting the secrecy of operations (it would be a shame for the enemy to know about military plans). Information is policed, controlled and reconstructed. Under the guise of trying to intercept conversations between terrorists, we take advantage of the opportunity to listen in on the calls of economic competitors, identify political opponents, and so on.

During the Cold War, Henry Kissinger distinguished between two types of foreign policy. Western foreign policies were structured around the use of rational, objective data, resulting in diplomatic cables that were easy to interpret and from which everyone could make a cost/benefit calculation; and on the other hand, Eastern foreign policies were built around opaque, internal, irrational and emotional factors. In conclusion, there was nothing new in the West, and when reference was made to irrational desires, these had to be translated into scientific, neutral and credible language. Now, it is the other way around: “Eastern” diplomacy is rational, engages with Realpolitik. The latest example is the key Chinese influence in the Saudi-Iranian rapprochement, while Western diplomacy becomes inaudible because it becomes too emotional: it is out of question to negotiate with Putin because Putin is made in public and official discourses the embodiment of Evil.

That was not always the case. During the Cold War, France was able to remain influential in the world because it had an autonomous foreign policy constructed around French interests. As such, France remained a respected actor and paved the way to major turning points, one of which was Gen-

eral De Gaulle’s visit to the USSR at the peak of the Cold War and recognition of the People’s Republic of China as the true China, years before Nixon and Kissinger.

Positivist liberal internationalism is based on the interpretation that the West “won” the Cold War. As such not only the West got prestige, but also the certitude that the Western model was the ultimate stage of human development. This is what Fukuyama wrote about (2020). This neo-Kantian position assumes that individual states with democratic political regimes constitute an ideal that the rest of the world will follow as it offers the best future for a peaceful world order: the more democracies there are, the more peaceful the world will be; the fewer democracies there are, the less peaceful the world will be (Russett, 1994). These ideas are now part of European and North American countries’ foreign policies and are known under the concepts of humanitarian interventions and responsibility to protect (Orford, 2013), and are strongly criticised by other countries, such as the BRICS (Sahakyan & Gärtner, 2022; Maalouf, 2023) and more generally by what the West calls with contempt: the Third World, constituting the basis of the “revolt against the West” (Buzan, 1977; Wight, 1977; Badie, 2013).

Such thinking brings back to life the colonial belief that the West was once again the centre of civilization. Liberal ideology makes it hard for liberal leaders to accept any contestation or power sharing, whether at home or on the international scene. Right from the beginning liberal thinkers wrote about the necessity to avoid losing power, especially to the people. How to keep power between people of good company is the whole point of Publius’s reflection in *The Federalist*. At the time, it was a question

of optimizing the political and electoral system, and from that point on, political thought developed, especially thanks to critical approaches. Gramsci (2001), Foucault (1995) and Steven Lukes (1974) all emphasised the power of ideology in shaping the masses. The state then becomes a safeguard in the service of the ruling class: it has to protect it against itself by introducing a few reforms from time to time designed to show the dominated classes that the capitalist system is indeed their only means of improving their conditions.

Resorting to positivism combined with international liberalism leads to the negation of history and of the particularism of nations, cultures and civilisations. They lead to uniformity and thus to the rejection of differences. The conclusion of this is that Europe is slowly losing its independence by adopting ways of thinking, views of the world that contradict with its long-lasting history. This is reflected in the current French high school curriculum, especially in the programs of history and of geopolitics.

Geopolitics in education programs in France:
a good idea wasted by the a liberal
mondialist "French" elite

Geopolitics made a comeback since 2019 in the high school syllabuses. Geopolitics, as part of the "history-geography, geopolitics, political science" collection of disciplines, is one of the three most popular specialty options for the baccalaureate exam. This resurgence in the teaching of geopolitics is certainly to be welcomed, but it does have a number of weaknesses and cognitive biases.

What place does the study of geopolitics have in France?

The enthusiasm for the discipline of geopolitics is in itself quite unique and French. It is also very French to make geopolitics a quasi-university discipline (it lacks a dedicated section on the Conseil National des Universités to become a university discipline in its own right). Indeed, no other teaching model gives geopolitics as much prominence as the French system.

The French attraction to geopolitics is undoubtedly historically linked to the influence and place of geography in French universities. For a long time, geographers vigorously opposed the emancipation of geopolitics from geography. During the 20th century, geographers sought to establish a scientific, 'serious' geography. This led to preference being given to physical geography because of its technical nature: it has its own complex vocabulary, its own methodology - everything needed to make it a science in a very positivist intellectual context. By setting aside the human and political aspects of geography, geographers at the beginning of the 20th century tried to forget the importance that Emmanuel de Martonne had for Clemenceau in the redrawing of borders in Europe from 1919 onwards. Emmanuel de Martonne also did his utmost to have his importance forgotten.

Today, the situation is very different. One might even say that we have gone from one extreme (rejection of geopolitics) to another (overabundance of geopolitics): the term 'geopolitics' is used indiscriminately by journalists and essayists. This renewed interest can perhaps be explained by the international political aspects of the history and

geography syllabuses in France. A more profound reason for this French attraction to geopolitics could be concern about France's loss of strategic initiative since the end of the Cold War, its return to NATO and recent developments in the European Union. The attraction for geopolitics would then be a manifestation of a kind of unconscious nostalgia for the time of France's rediscovered greatness during the presidency of General de Gaulle; a time when France acquired civil and military nuclear power, when Paris dealt with Washington as well as Moscow and recognised Mao's China as the 'real' China, well before the Americans and Nixon's trip to Beijing in 1972.

Indeed, teaching and practising geopolitics means first and foremost seeing oneself on the international stage, with one's own interests, and thinking about opportunities and threats independently. Other European countries have chosen to be strategically dependent on the United States (Central and Eastern Europe) and in so doing have accepted to see the world in the same way as their protector.

Geopolitics in curriculum: a biased and disorganized initiative

Since 2019, geopolitics has been taught as part of the reform of the Bac and the introduction of specialties. Geopolitics is not taught separately, but has been combined with other subjects to form the specialty of 'history-geography, geopolitics and political science'. While it is clear that the aim at lycée is mainly to provide an introduction, to 'rough out' the disciplines, the programme that has been put together raises a number of questions.

The definition of geopolitics given in the Ministry of Education's official guidelines is restrictive, as it „considers rivalries and power issues between territories in their historical depth, as well as the representations that accompany them”. But geopolitics is more than that. The syllabus appears to be more a juxtaposition of empirical situations than a programme for developing thought. This is evidenced by the absence of a chapter on concepts, thinkers and the methodology of geopolitical analysis. Without concepts, it is difficult to put things into perspective or to make comparisons.

Surprisingly, France is not really studied, except through the question of heritage. In *Elective Affinities*, Goethe states that it is wrong, from the point of view of pedagogical quality, to teach children about distant species before they are familiar with the flora and fauna of their own country. In fact, the programme focuses on the United States, India and China. It is also regrettable that the non-Western countries studied, such as China and India, are studied through a cognitive bias. Their foreign policies are analysed through the model of assertion on the international stage used by the European powers in the 19th century and by the United States after 1945, without taking into account their own systems of thought, histories and cultures. These cognitive biases create the trap of believing that non-Western countries are driven by the same appetite for world domination as Western countries, which is certainly a possibility, but not the most likely one.

Finally, certain themes, such as borders, are not well thought out. The theme of borders is based around an approach reduced to a simple internal/external or them/us dichotomy, thus implicitly allowing us to conceive of borders as a source of

danger and conflict, which they can be, but not always. It is also regrettable that borders are studied without making any reference to what they serve to distinguish: the State.

Embracing glorious history and the need for a patriotic elite as geopolitical solution to seize opportunities and navigate challenges

For the past two centuries, France has been plagued by the fear of decline. How could it be otherwise when France remembers that it was the hegemonic power in Europe at the time of Louis XIV and Napoleon I, that French was the language of diplomacy until the Treaty of Versailles, that it set the tone throughout the 18th century in terms of civilisation, good taste and refinement, that it was considered, at the time of the Revolution, as the birthplace of the modern ideas of human rights and national sovereignty; that it was seen as the 'great nation' in the 19th century, despite its demographic decline; that it was capable of the greatest sacrifices during the First World War to triumph over German imperialism?

Sweden, Spain and Austria were also dominant powers in their time, but they all agreed to fall into line once their decline became apparent. Not so France. France may be one of the countries most worried about its future, but the fear of decline has encouraged it not to give up its position. The desire to stave off decline can be explained by the French's habit of seeing their country as a power that must play a major role in the world. It expresses both the nostalgia of a nation capable of

influencing the destiny of the world and the need for renewal in order to maintain its position. This desire to remain influent in the world is fuelled by the imperative of greatness as solution to regain geopolitical influence.

After each of its failures, France has managed to adapt to regain its room for manoeuvre and overcome the new perils that threatened it. From 1958 onwards, France's image once again became that of an independent country, free of its debts and respected in international bodies. On his return to power, General de Gaulle asserted greater sovereignty over the US, notably by opposing the stationing of American medium-range rockets on French soil. In February 1960, France's first atomic bomb exploded in the Sahara. In 1966, France withdrew from NATO's integrated command and closed the American bases on French territory. The policy of greatness enabled France to become once again a nation that was listened to around the world, particularly by the Arab world and the Third World, a champion of independence, criticism of imperialism, openness towards the East and China, cooperation and development. National interests now take precedence over the constraints imposed by the bipolarisation of the world and the ideological confrontation between the two blocs. Its language is one of the five most widely spoken in the world, although it is losing ground in international organisations and the Americanisation of culture has led to a real retreat from French, including in Africa. Its diplomatic network is the third largest in the world, behind those of China and the United States. Its army is the only one in Europe able to project itself into the world. It has military bases in Africa, the Middle East and

the Indo-Pacific. On the economic front, it has a number of flagship companies, particularly in the aerospace (Airbus), arms (Dassault, Safran, Thalès), oil (Total) and luxury (LVMH) sectors. Its realisation that it is no longer just a middle power explains its determination to make Europe a power multiplier, even if successive enlargements have diluted its influence in an EU of 27.

In fact, nothing condemns France to oblivion, apart from a lack of will and/or failure to defend the French state, the French culture against the attacks of globalization through the US and the EU policies. This is the problem: France has for leaders the politicians who do not believe in the French way, nor do they appreciate nor respect the French culture and language. In this respect, Emmanuel Macron's presidency is a complete shame: declarations abroad that "there is no French culture"^[4], degrading the function of the President by all ill-suited pictures^[5], denigrating French history during the 2024 Olympics opening ceremony^[6], selling pioneered French start-ups judged "vital" for the French defence industry to the US^[7], promoting the EU interests instead of French interests, and the political institutions are no longer respected nor trusted following the 2024 Parliamentary elections.

That is the major challenge: how is it possible to be heard abroad if the country is not seen first and foremost as a solid state at home? France appears to be a country of conflict, with a lack of social dialogue, trade unions that are generally unrepresentative, repeated strikes and a culture of protest. The „Gilets jaunes” movement of 2018-2019 was followed by demonstrations and strikes over pensions in the winter of 2022-2023, and then riots in the suburbs in June and July 2023. While the State monopolises 58% of the wealth it produces, the public service is deteriorating, as shown by the situation of hospitals during the COVID-19 crisis and the steady decline in the standard of education, as measured by the PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) ranking. In economic terms, France's weight has declined sharply over the last half-century.

More alarming than France's fall in the ranking of world powers based on GDP is the deterioration in its position in terms of GDP per capita. Now in twenty-sixth place, its GDP per capita, which was equivalent to that of Germany until 1989, is now almost 15% lower, raising fears of France's long-term impoverishment. Having failed to make the structural reforms that are essential for its economy, like its major neighbours, France is seeing its competitiveness falter and its trade deficit explode (156 billion

[4] <https://www.lefigaro.fr/vox/politique/2017/02/06/31001-20170206ARTFIG00209-emmanuel-macron-et-le-reniement-de-la-culture-francaise.php> (Accessed on 25 October 2024).

[5] <https://www.leparisien.fr/politique/photo-polemique-de-macron-aux-antilles-ce-geste-n-etait-pas-contre-le-president-01-10-2018-7908261.php> (Accessed on 26 October 2024).

[6] <https://www.lefigaro.fr/sports/jeux-olympiques/polemique-sur-la-ceremonie-d-ouverture-des-jo-patrick-bouche-ron-parle-de-cene-subliminale-20240730#:~:text=La%20s%C3%A9quence%20a%20choqu%C3%A9%20l,en%20%C3%A9motions%20et%20universellement%20salu%C3%A9s%C2%BB>. (Accessed on 29 October 2024).

[7] <https://www.lejdd.fr/economie/economie-bercy-donne-son-aval-au-rachat-de-131-entreprises-sensibles-par-letranger-en-2022-135583> (Accessed on 30 October 2024).

by 2022), whereas it was in surplus until 2003. The country is de-industrialising, investing less and innovating less. Public debt has soared from 20% to 112% of GDP since 1980. Despite a significant fall in the last three years, mass unemployment is still high (7.3% at the end of 2023), particularly among young people, and the middle classes are becoming increasingly impoverished.

Ultimately, France is finding it difficult to reconcile its universal international ambitions with its limited financial and human resources. The magic of words has its limits. And without economic power, proclamations of independence and a position free from subservience have little effect. Still deeply scarred by the traumas and setbacks of the last century, France is aware of its decline, without coming to terms with it, but without taking the measures that would enable it to halt it. While relative decline is normal when it results from the rise of large emerging countries, absolute decline is serious when it results from the loss of traditional assets such as industry, technology, culture and demography.

The solution implemented by the current leadership is to dissolve France in the EU integration progress and in NATO, under the argument that in contemporary times, solutions cannot be found alone. That is indeed true, but finding solutions in a multilateral architecture does not mean siding with those having anti-French agenda! History is full of lessons to learn and to madidate. It can

only be hoped that when a new leadership arrives, it will be the one proud of being French, willing to put forward the specificity of French culture and history, and to accept where the future lies: the “Orient”. In other words, France needs more than ever a patriotic elite that stops believing in positivist liberal internationalism to accept that the Orient is the new source of inspiration, and no longer the US.

France is blessed with a territory that makes it connected to every continent. As such, an ambitious geopolitical project would consist in using the over-seas territories to engage France in the new globalization and make France connected to the BRICS and South America, leaving being a declining Europe and a US caught in its internal contradictions. Over-seas territories are seen by the current elite as a liability. That is very degrading for these territories that are among the most patriotic and give provide for the most part of French military. Instead, such territories should be massively invested in and used to connect France to every regional economic initiative, such as the Chinese Belt and Road, the Indonesian Masterplan for Acceleration and Expansion of Indonesia’s Economic Development (MP3EI), Singapore Enterprise 2030 project, or even the project Kuwait Vision 2035.

In other words, the solution lies in coming back to the real definition of geopolitics: a politics of power based on the specificity of a country, of its population and of its history.

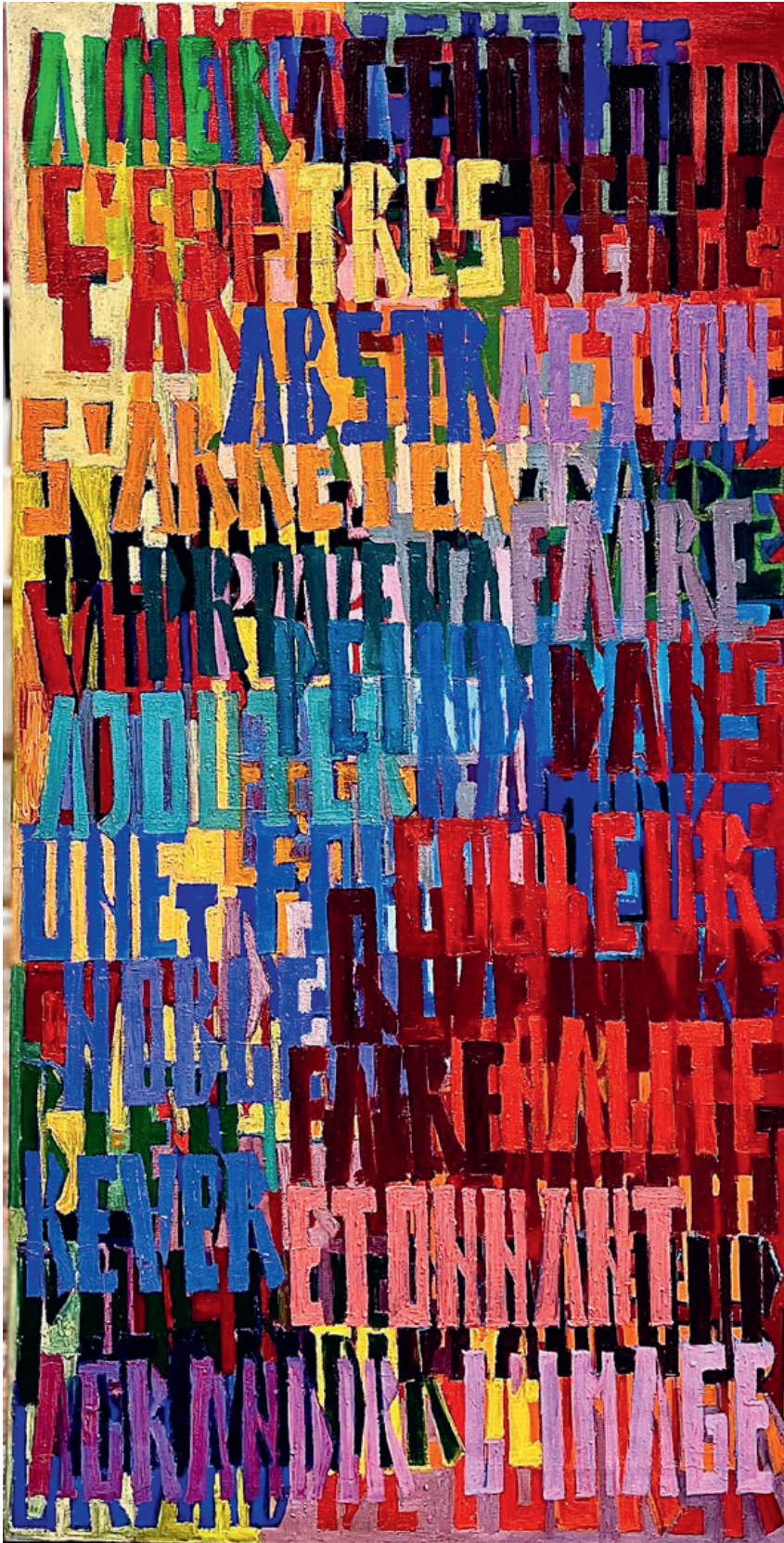
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Étonnant, 2008, the work of Serbian painter Mira Maoduš, who lived and created in France for almost half a century. Apart from Serbia, her works have been exhibited in Paris, Tokyo, Milan, Trebinje, and numerous other European cities.

Photo: Mira Maoduš