
OPINION: WITH EMMANUEL MACRON, THE EU STILL HAS A CHANCE

- 11.05.2018

Deutsche Welle (10 May 2018)

In his acceptance speech for the Charlemagne Prize, French President Emmanuel Macron urged the European Union to make reforms. We cannot lose any more time in implementing them, says DW's Bernd Riegert.

He's only been in office for a year, but he is a worthy recipient of the International Charlemagne Prize of Aachen. In his impressive and passionate speech, French President Emmanuel Macron has shown that he has clear goals for Europe, that he has the will and ability to enact change. At just 40 years old, this politician can certainly inspire and motivate his audience, as was apparent from the response in the town hall in the western German city of Aachen and at the public screening in the squares outside. Macron wins people's approval; they are fired up by his ideas.

When he says that the EU cannot afford to be weak given the challenges it faces on the domestic and foreign policy fronts, it is immediately obvious. The EU has to act in order to renew itself, and it has to act now. This is Macron's core theory. And the EU must not be afraid. In saying this, Macron was also directly appealing to those EU citizens who are wavering and losing heart. Solidarity among people within the bloc must be restored, he said, whether on economic issues or on migration. Nationalism must be warded off, and a multilateral world order must be established. Macron sees himself as the alternative to the president of the United States. He is the European anti-Donald Trump.

Against nationalism

In his speech in Aachen and in his exclusive interview with DW, Macron was not stating these aims for the first time; but he repeated them very forcefully and with great conviction. You believe that he is genuinely committed to the politics of Europe. His appeal to the EU not to allow itself to be divided is sincere and credible. The latest warnings have taken the form of Brexit and a new nationalism in Poland and Hungary, and now in Italy, too. Macron, who won an election with a clear declaration of loyalty to Europe, could be the EU's last chance.

What was particularly notable about this Charlemagne Prize award ceremony was that German Chancellor Angela Merkel agrees with the recipient on almost every point. She promised that Germany and France would renew the EU together.

Macron's proposals are concrete; Merkel's are still vague. She promised this would change at the EU summit to be held at the end of June. Germany and France also agree that the EU ought to play

a greater foreign policy role – especially in the Middle East. The Iran deal must be upheld as best it can. Merkel repeated her statement that Europe could no longer rely on the US as a guarantor for defense and security.

Germany must join in

In his speech, Macron the European once again made it crystal clear that there will be a price to pay for the continuing development of the EU. Germany must relinquish its opposition to a transfer union. France must give up its resistance and be prepared to accept EU treaty changes, i.e. be prepared to take a democratic risk.

This is a courageous approach, but Macron has realized that if nothing is risked, nothing is gained. The French president succeeded in getting the pro-European-minded guests at the Charlemagne Prize ceremony on his side. Now he also has to convince the skeptics in Poland, Hungary, Italy and elsewhere. That will be considerably harder than delivering a brilliant speech.

Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban chose Thursday of all days, the day of the Charlemagne Prize ceremony, to confirm the end of "liberal democracy." This sends shivers down the spine. The great hope of the EU has to try and save the project. What if he doesn't succeed? By the end of the ceremony it was clear to everyone in Aachen: We need more Macrons in Europe.

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