
GERMANY'S CDU LUKEWARM ON MACRON'S EU VISION

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Germany's anointed new leader has echoed France in calling for EU reform to combat populism, but with a stronger role for national governments and with little prospect of sharing German wealth.

The German vision was outlined in an article published on Sunday (10 March) by Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer - the new head of German chancellor Angela Merkel's Christian Democratic Union party and her likely successor.

French president Emmanuel Macron was "right" in calling for "urgent ... action" in his latest EU manifesto, published last week, Kramp-Karrenbauer said.

Like him, she also focused on migration, security, climate change, and economic prosperity as a way to soothe voters' "anxiety" and "populist accusations" ahead of the European Parliament (EP) elections in May.

Macron had proposed a slew of new EU institutions in his text - a European Council for Internal Security to manage migration, a European Agency for the Protection of Democracies to stop Russian election meddling, a European Security Council on defence matters, a European Climate Bank to fund green energy projects, and a minimum European wage.

He went further to say leaders should renegotiate the EU treaties to make it happen.

He even suggested a new EU defence treaty with a Nato-style "operational mutual defence clause".

The CDU ideas were less radical, however.

"No version of a European superstate which can live up to the goal of a Europe made up of sovereign member states," Kramp-Karrenbauer said.

"A new Europe cannot be founded without the nation states: they provide democratic legitimacy and identification," she added.

She did not rule out "amendments to the European treaties".

She also agreed with Macron that the Schengen free-travel area ought to involve migrant-sharing and a new EU border control force.

But in place of his European Council for Internal Security, she said: "each member state must

make its own contribution to ... protecting its borders, and taking in migrants".

She made no mention of EU election security, describing Russia as a threat to its "neighbours" rather than the EU as such.

She also called for the creation of a European Security Council on defence that would involve the UK even after Brexit, but she made no mention of a Nato-type treaty and limited her ambition to the joint construction of a new "a common European aircraft carrier".

She also repeated a previous call - rejected by France - to convert its permanent seat on the UN Security Council into an EU one.

"In future, the EU should have a permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council," she said.

Macron's climate bank was relegated to an informal "European Climate Protection Pact" to be agreed by businesses and politicians.

And his ideas on a minimum wage, as well as his previously voiced ideas on deeper economic and monetary union were thrown under the bus.

"The communitarisation of debts, the Europeanisation of social systems, and the minimum wage would be the wrong approach," Kramp-Karrenbauer said.

Taxation

At the same time, her wish-list said "we must close tax loopholes in Europe" that let global tech giants off the hook.

She also described "the taxation of the income of EU officials", which is close to zero, as an "anachronism".

The German leader-in-waiting hinted that she was open to ending consensus-based EU foreign policy decisions in favour of majority votes.

EU voters "feel a lack of clarity when, for instance, the EU requires a seeming eternity before it is able to arrive at a common understanding regarding events in Venezuela", she said, after Italy recently vetoed a joint EU statement on the crisis in the Latin American country.

Like Macron, Kramp-Karrenbauer took aim at nationalist-populist leaders in Central Europe, such as those in Hungary and Poland.

The "European way of life" meant "representative democracy, parliamentarianism, the rule of law, individual freedoms and the social market economy", she said.

Values

"There must be no doubt about the non-negotiable core of values and principles," she said, but "we must respect their [central European states'] approaches and their specific contribution to our common European history and culture," she added.

Kramp-Karrenbauer also echoed the concerns of right-wing EU voters on Islam more stridently than Macron.

There were "Islamic trends that are incompatible with our ideas of an open society", she said.

Europe ought to create institutions that "train our own imams and teachers" in the spirit of "enlightenment and tolerance," she added.

Kaynak/Source: