

18 May 2020 - [Seul le prononcé fait foi](#)

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# OPENING REMARKS BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC, MR EMMANUEL MACRON, DURING THE JOINT PRESS CONFERENCE WITH THE CHANCELLOR OF THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF GERMANY, MS ANGELA MERKEL

Thank you very much, Madam Chancellor, my dear Angela Merkel.

Today, and in recent weeks, we have held numerous exchanges and discussions to deepen our common positions and forge this Franco-German agreement in the unprecedented context that Angela Merkel has just set out.

The current crisis is unprecedented and involves, requires, a response which must be collective and, first and foremost, European, if it is to be effective. Because, as we have both said since the beginning of this crisis, the virus knows no border and has affected all our Europe.

Europe, and we must be clear on this, no doubt fell short at the beginning of the crisis, firstly because public health is not a European competence – and the European Union should not be expected to address what is outside its purview.

Also because there were nationalist reflexes, particularly as regards border management, including within the Schengen Area. And in this respect we must learn all this pandemic's lessons. Angela Merkel just reiterated that, and I totally agree with what she just said.

We also need to say that remarkable actions have been taken at European level. I do not want to forget the very tangible gestures of solidarity which have given Europe a human face. That solidarity has saved lives. Germany, Switzerland, Luxembourg and Austria took in almost 200 French patients. Both Germany and France have provided and delivered a lot of equipment to Italy and several other countries. And this solidarity is also part of the European spirit, and it is Europe that worked.

We have also had a very strong economic and monetary response since the crisis began. From mid-March, the European Central Bank made a massive suitable response and helped avoid a short-term financial crisis and greater interest rate spreads between European countries. The European Commission was very quick to lift the rules that could have constrained us fiscally or in terms of competition rules and enabled the Member States to make sectoral responses that were absolutely necessary.

This very important response also came with failings, egotism and delays, as I was saying. I have in mind the issue of borders. On this subject, nothing is taboo, and France, in coordination with Germany, actively pushed for a strict closure of the European Union's external borders.

But within Europe, things were in our eyes different, not because of naivety but because of the need for effectiveness, as we needed to be equal to our history and not give in to demagoguery. We put in place restrictions at all our borders, including with Germany, because it was necessary. We did so in coordination, and in constant liaison with Chancellor Merkel. We did not close the borders to all movement, and in particular, we allowed our 350,000 cross-border workers to continue working. We also allowed through certain food and health products that were essential for our countries. Other European countries simply did not have that reflex and closed all their borders without warning the neighbours, displaying a very sad image of our Europe.

Above and beyond that, essential debates remain to be had: that of financial solidarity in Europe, our European sovereignty, and a stronger Europe. That is the common belief the Chancellor and I are promoting, which has led us today to present this Franco-German initiative. It is the fruit of work that was bilateral, but carried out in liaison with several of our partners; we have carried out this work with Italy, Spain, Portugal, the Netherlands

and several other countries, and with the President of the Council and the President of the Commission.

The Chancellor has set out the main thrusts of this initiative, so I will only come back to them briefly, focusing on coherence. Our initiative has four pillars: health, fiscal stimulus, the ecological transition and economic sovereignty. And I am convinced that this is the essential foundation for rebuilding our lives, our economies and our societies, which requires this strategy.

When it comes to health, what we want to do, together, is to give Europe a very tangible competence and to take action together, with common stocks of masks or tests, shared or coordinated purchasing and production capacities for treatments and vaccines, and shared prevention plans for epidemics with common methods to identify cases. That Health Europe has never existed. It needs to become our priority.

On fiscal matters and solidarity instruments, the Chancellor just briefly highlighted the importance of this recovery fund of €500 billion, which will supplement our financial horizons and therefore our European budget. But on the basis of existing treaties, what we are proposing together for the first time, Germany and France, to the 27 Member States, is firstly to decide together to take out common debt on the markets and to use this support of €500 billion, which will have to be repaid, as the Chancellor said, to provide funding earmarked as a priority for the sectors and regions hit hardest by the public health and economic crisis. And so to accept genuine transfers, a genuine common strategy to supplement our European budget. That is a major step forward and we hope the European Commission will further this proposal in the coming days and that all our partners will go along with it.

This recovery fund is €500 billion that will not be loans to this or that region or sector – it will go to real budget allocations drawing on our common debt, supplementing the agreement reached by our Finance Ministers for €500 billion under the Commission's "SURE" reinsurance programme, as well as loans under the European Stability Mechanism and from the European Investment Bank. €500 billion in loans, with an agreement already reached by our Finance Ministers, and €500 billion of budget through the Franco-German recovery fund proposal. That is what we think is essential to top up the initiatives that have already been taken and will continue to be taken at national level.

The third lever we are promoting together is the acceleration of the ecological and digital transitions. Our message is simple: the European Green Deal, the green transformation of our economy, cannot be called into question. It needs to be speeded up. And sector by sector, the European recovery needs to come with commitments and conditions when it comes to the climate, the environment and biodiversity.

Lastly, the fourth thrust of our Franco-German agreement is that of genuine European sovereignty. We promote this belief together, that sovereignty means reducing our dependence on outside sources in strategic sectors like the production of medicines, as well as improving the protection of our businesses, better fighting predatory investments from other powers, and attracting and bringing back key investments to Europe. Europe must not close itself off from global trade. France even less so. Sometimes it must be less naive, it must better support the most strategic sectors and we believe we need to better share a common strategy of industrial and economic autonomy. In any case, that is what we are going to continue doing and strengthening together, France and Germany.

I will not go on any longer. We will now take questions.