

Meanwhile, what of the union which we're leaving?

Amidst all the kerfuffle of the Labour Party conference and the German General Election, a most important speech has rather slipped off many people's radar.

France's President Macron set out his vision of the future of the EU in a speech lasting nearly two hours. It echoed in many ways the vision articulated by Jean-Claude Juncker, the President of the European Commission, in his "state of the Union" address earlier this month. More Europe, inevitably, is the way forward, said M. Macron, at least in as many words. "At the beginning of the next decade, Europe must have a joint intervention force, a common defence budget and a joint doctrine for action," he said, adding "The Europe that we know is too weak, too slow, too inefficient, but Europe alone can give us the ability to act in the world faced with big contemporary challenges."

The most bizarre statement, however, was his assertion that ""In a few years, if it so wishes, Britain could regain the place that belongs to it."

At the moment, there is much wishful thinking going on in remainiac circles, even though 75% of the electorate, so we were told at last Monday's Labour Euro Safeguards Campaign fringe meeting, just wants the government to "get on with it." I believe that Brexit will happen, for reasons stated in this piece, and therefore at the very earliest, it is likely to be the middle of the next decade at the earliest before the UK electorate could ever be asked if it wants to re-join. By this time, Macron hopes that the EU will have been re-launched – to be more precise, possibly in 2024, when Paris hosts the Olympic Games. It's hard to see any enthusiasm for re-joining an EU re-launched according to the Macron/Juncker vision. as

it consists of a beefing up of every aspect of EU which we will be the most delighted to leave behind.

Macron advocated a European rapid reaction force, a European common Asylum policy, a European carbon tax, Europe-wide lists for candidates in the 2019 European parliamentary elections and deeper Eurozone integration.

Given that the UK would not be guaranteed its opt-outs from the Single Currency or Schengen and would also lose the Fontainebleau rebate negotiated by Mrs Thatcher, it is hard to see what the appeal of re-joining could possibly be.

But let's not jump the gun. Before M. Macron's speech ever gets translated into policy, it will face a number of hurdles. Eurozone economic data points to an improving picture across the 19-nation bloc, but political differences, which could pit north against south and east against west are still lurking beneath the surface. Juncker stated in his speech that some form of treaty change will be necessary. If this change means closer integration, as it probably will, it will face a rough ride in Hungary and Poland for starters. Angela Merkel's less than resounding election victory means that any talk of debt mutualisation within the Eurozone will face a very rough ride in the German Parliament. It's not just AfD who don't like the idea – some in her own party are none too keen either. Without Eurobonds, however, closer integration across the single currency area will make little progress.

Furthermore, even before Mrs Merkel has sorted out her coalition, the forthcoming election in the Czech Republic is likely to provide a further harsh dose of reality for federalist dreamers like Juncker and Macron. It is widely expected that Andrej Babis, a billionaire who heads up ANO, a strongly Eurosceptic party, could become the next Prime Minister. Mr Babis has said, "We don't want the euro here, it gives Brussels another area for meddling" and only one third of his countrymen view the EU as a good thing. Czech

opposition to accepting refugees is likely further to intensify. Indeed, in a recent Europe-wide survey, the Czech Republic stood out as the only other member state apart from the UK which would vote to leave altogether in the event of an independence referendum being held.

Macron is none too popular in Italy either, whose press cynically refer to him as "Micron" or "le petit Napoléon." The country faces a general election next year which could see an assortment of euroseptic parties win a majority of the vote.

While no one should expect the EU to implode any time soon – or indeed, any other member state to secede, it is quite obvious that even reviving the Franco-German integrationist engine is going to be hard enough for M. Macron given the weakened position of the German Chancellor. It will be child's play, however, compared with encouraging some other member states to get on board. The gap between the Macron/Junker vision of the EU's future and the predominant vision in Warsaw, Budapest and – even before its general election – Prague, shows no sign of narrowing.