

Emmanuel Macron urges Germany to step up to 'its responsibilities' at historic moment for EU reform



President Macron and Chancellor Merkel embrace at the Charlemagne Prize ceremony in Aachen CREDIT: WOLFGANG RATTAY/REUTERS

President Emmanuel Macron of France has urged Germany's leaders to "live up to their responsibilities" in Europe amid foot-dragging from Angela Merkel over his ambitious reform plans for the bloc.

The French leader issued the plea hours before receiving the Charlemagne Prize for his "contagious enthusiasm" for strengthening EU cohesion and integration.

Mrs Merkel praised Mr Macron in a speech at the highly-symbolic prize-giving ceremony in Aachen, residence of Charlemagne, often dubbed "the father of Europe" for having united much of western Europe in the ninth century.

"With Emmanuel Macron, a dynamic young politician has entered the European stage, for whom European integration and the common currency are a clear course."

Yet hamstrung by six months of negotiations over forming a new coalition government, Mrs Merkel has shown little enthusiasm for the French president's

call for a common finance minister or budget.

Mr Macron countered claims that Germany was the main stumbling block to further European integration, saying: "Certain people say Germany is selfish and doesn't want to reform Europe, I say this is false."



France's President Emmanuel Macron said that he would continue to push for a eurozone budgetCREDIT: PATRIK STOLLARZ/AFP

But he re-issued his eurozone plea after receiving the prize, saying: "I believe in a much more ambitious European budget... I believe in a more integrated eurozone, with its own budget."

With America at odds with Europe on a string of areas from the Iran nuclear deal and the Paris climate accord to threats of punitive trade tariffs, Mr Macron said Europe stood at a "historic moment".

"Europe is in charge of guaranteeing the multilateral order that we created at the end of World War II and which today is sometimes being shaken," he told German broadcasters in an interview.

The time for action had arrived, he insisted, urging "Germany to draw up its response by June" on proposed European reforms.



Merkel, Macron and his wife Brigitte arrive to attend mass at the Cathedral of Aachen CREDIT: LUDOVIC MARIN/AFP

The two leaders have promised to agree a common roadmap for the future of the EU by the time of a major summit in Brussels in June.

“I very much hope that the chancellor and her government will live up to their responsibilities at this historic moment.

“We need to do everything to make Europe stronger, more united, more sovereign, more democratic,” stressed Mr Macron.

Previous winners of the Charlemagne Prize include Churchill and Tony Blair. There have been criticisms of the decision to award this year’s prize to Mr Macron, with commentators saying he has not yet done enough for European integration to merit it, and comparing it to Barack Obama’s Nobel Peace Prize at the start of his presidency in 2008.

Despite rolling out the broad brushstrokes for European reform in speeches in Athens, the Sorbonne in Paris and to the European Parliament, Mr Macron has failed to force much momentum in a string of areas including a joint military “rapid reaction force” or an EU tax on the revenues of technology giants.

German enthusiasm is even lacking in seemingly more consensual areas like plans for a European banking union or the reinforcement of the European Stability Mechanism for to ward against financial shocks.

“Instead of countering with her own ideas, Merkel is buying time and, by doing so, creating the risk that a historic opportunity will be missed – that of a joint relaunch of the currency union together with the French president,” wrote Der Spiegel’s Michael Sauga.

Mr Macron’s calls for a more integrated Europe come amid a populist, nationalist backlash in a string of EU countries from Hungary to Italy, as well as Brexit.

Elysée sources said Mr Macron will detail his long-term goals for Europe, focusing on the horizon of 2030 to 2050. The French president will also take part in a town-hall debate with around 1,000 students in Aachen.

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