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By Nicolas Camut

Macron faces backlash after Jewish ceremony at presidential palace

Макрон стикається з негативною реакцією після єврейської церемонії в президентському палаці

Емманюель Макрон стикається з широкомасштабною критикою, навіть у власних рядах, з боку критиків, які кажуть, що президент порушив давню історію секуляризму Франції після того, як він відвідав єврейську церемонію в Єлисейському палаці. Макрона запросили отримати нагороду за боротьбу з антисемітизмом і захист релігійних свобод на щорічному заході від Конференції європейських рабинів. Під час заходу головний рабин Франції Хаїм Корсія запалив церемоніальну свічку, а присутні співали традиційні ханукальні пісні на івриті. Запалювання свічок на канделябрах з кількома гілками, звані менора, є єврейським ритуалом, який є частиною святкування Хануки. Макрон заявив під час візиту до собору Паризької Богоматері, що він «зовсім не шкодує про те, що сталося».

<https://www.politico.eu/article/emmanuel-macron-israel-under-fire-over-jewish-ceremony-at-french-presidential-palace/>

Hanukkah candle sparks controversy in France.

Emmanuel Macron is facing widespread pushback, even from within his own ranks, from critics who say the president breached France's long-standing history of secularism after he attended a Jewish ceremony in the Élysée Palace on Thursday.

Macron had been invited to receive an award for fighting antisemitism and safeguarding religious freedoms at an annual event from the Conference of European Rabbis.

During the event, France's chief rabbi Haïm Korsia lit a ceremonial candle as members of the audience sang traditional Hanukkah songs in Hebrew. Lighting candles on a multi-branched candelabra, called a menorah, is a Jewish ritual that is part of the Hanukkah celebrations, which this year began on Thursday and will last until next Friday.

Macron said Friday, during a visit to the Notre-Dame cathedral in Paris, that he didn't regret what happened "at all."

"I think that on this point we need to keep our heads cool," the French president told reporters. "Secularism isn't about erasing religions. It's about the fact that everyone has the right and freedom to believe and not to believe."

Because of the French state's sacrosanct principle of being strictly secular, Macron's presence at a religious ritual in an official building had sparked criticism from all sides — including from some Jewish groups.

Yonathan Arfi, president of the French Jewish federation CRIF who also attended the event, told radio broadcaster Sud Radio on Friday that the lighting of the candle was "a mistake" and "should not have happened."

"The Élysée is not the place to light a Hanukkah candle because the Republican DNA is to stay away from anything religious," Arfi added.

Pierre Henriot, an MP from Macron's own centrist Renaissance party, "strongly condemn[ed] this attempt at religious preferences," adding, "By this act, Emmanuel Macron breaks with his role as guarantor of the neutrality of the State."

Manuel Bompard, a lawmaker from the far-left opposition France Unbowed (LFI) party, said Macron had made "an unforgivable political mistake."

Laurence Rossignol, a socialist lawmaker who is vice president of the French Senate, compared Macron to "a 10-year-old kid [playing] with a little chemist's kit, but [with] real nitroglycerine and real matches."

The far-right National Rally, meanwhile, claimed that Macron's attendance at the Élysée event was meant to make up for his absence at a march against antisemitism in November, which sparked criticism for the French president.

“By lighting a candle for the religious holiday of Hanukkah at the Elysée ... Macron has scorned our Jewish compatriots and at the same time our secularism,” National Rally spokesperson Julien Odoul said. “This president will never have understood France.”

The display of religious signs in public spaces and by state officials is a particularly sensitive issue in France, where church and state have been strictly separated by law since 1905, which often ignites fiery political debates. The 118th anniversary of the law’s implementation will coincidentally be celebrated on Saturday.

In September, Macron was criticized for attending a mass given by Pope Francis, head of the Catholic Church, at a football stadium in Marseille.

The French president has also been under increasing pressure to show his support to French Jews following the October 7 Hamas attacks on Israel, which triggered massive Israeli retaliation in the Gaza Strip. A sharp rise in antisemitism has followed the escalation of war in the Middle East.

Faced with the mounting criticism, Macron’s lieutenants went to bat for him Friday morning.

The French president “is a defender of religions ... he respects them all as head of state, and there is no violation of secularism,” Interior Minister Gérald Darmanin — in charge of religious affairs through his Cabinet role — told public broadcaster Franceinfo.