

Macron extends olive branch to Eastern Europeans

Макрон поширює оливкову гілку на східноєвропейців

Президент Франції Емманюель Макрон на конференції в Словаччині намагався налагодити відносини зі східноєвропейцями, сказавши аудиторії, переважно з регіону, що він хоче більшої співпраці з колишніми радянськими державами. «Ми недостатньо прислухалися до вас і до ваших закликів визнати вашу історію та болючі спогади», — сказав він аудиторії на форумі безпеки GLOBSEC у столиці Словаччини. «Деякі казали, що ви втратили можливість мовчати; Я кажу, що ми іноді втрачали можливості послухати вас. Цей час минув», — сказав він, маючи на увазі випад колишнього президента Франції Жака Ширака в 2003 р., який образив східноєвропейців. «Я не думаю, що існує західна і східна Європа, стара Європа і нова; Є лише одна Європа ... з бажанням будувати єдність», — сказав він.

<https://www.politico.eu/article/emmanuel-macron-ukraine-volodymyr-zelensky-should-get-strong-and-tangible-security-guarantees/>

The French president was applauded for hitting several popular policy notes in the east.

French President Emmanuel Macron sought to mend fences with Eastern Europeans at a conference in Slovakia, telling an audience largely from the region that he wants a more collaborative relationship with ex-Soviet states.

“We didn’t listen enough to you, and your calls for your history and painful memories to be acknowledged,” he told an audience at the GLOBSEC security forum in the Slovak capital.

“Some said you missed opportunities to stay silent; I say we sometimes missed opportunities to listen to you. That time is over,” he said, referring to a swipe by former French President Jacques Chirac in 2003 that offended Eastern Europeans.

“I don’t think there is a western and an eastern Europe, an old Europe and a new one; there is only one Europe ... with a will to build unity,” he said.

Policy notes that played well with Eastern Europeans included saluting the strength of NATO, acknowledging the experience of many countries formerly under Soviet rule, and supporting a pathway for Ukraine toward NATO membership.

The French president also said that although France had been criticized as being “arrogant,” “faraway” and “not interested” in the region, he has tried to engage more. His comments appeared to hit a chord among the delegates, who applauded him heartily during opening remarks.

The speech represents a shift in tone for the French president, who previously distanced himself from a more hard-line approach against Russia taken by ex-Soviet states. In the past, Macron had warned against aligning with more hawkish countries, thus risking extending the conflict in Ukraine.

And in the east, there is little love lost for the French president. Since the start of the war, Macron came under fire from Eastern European leaders for pursuing dialogue with Russia and clocking hours of calls with Vladimir Putin.

“It was logical to me that with a strong U.S.-German relation nowadays, Russia out of the picture, France should look for improving its relations with” Central and Eastern Europe, said a senior Central European diplomat who complimented the speech.

Previously, Macron’s statements that Russia should not be humiliated or that it should be given security guarantees have contributed to the perception that he has an ambiguous attitude toward Russia’s aggression.

But in Bratislava, the French president hammered home his commitment to supporting Ukraine “in the long-term.”

“We need to help Ukraine lead an efficient counter-offensive. What is at stake is lasting peace. We must be clear: A ceasefire is not enough, we will recreate a frozen conflict that will be another war for tomorrow,” he said.

Support for Ukraine

At GLOBSEC, Macron also called for “strong and tangible” security guarantees for Ukraine ahead of a key NATO summit in Vilnius in July. In recent weeks, Ukrainians have renewed their lobbying push for a concrete path toward membership, working hard to sway wary members of the alliance. The French president said Ukraine should be given security guarantees — not only because it is “protecting Europe,” but also because it is “so well-equipped.”

“If we want a sustainable peace and want to be credible toward Ukraine, we must include it in an architecture of security,” he told delegates at the forum.

While there is a broad understanding Ukraine will not be able to join the alliance while it is still at war with Russia, NATO members are divided on how they should respond to Ukraine’s current push for membership.

Macron’s comments are likely to be read as a gesture toward many Eastern Europeans that think Ukraine’s allies should send positive signals on its NATO membership bid.

In Bratislava, while Macron said it was unlikely there would be consensus on full membership for Ukraine, he did give a sense of what option he might back for Ukraine.

“We have to build something between Israel-style security guarantees and fully-fledged membership,” he said.