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By Sylvie Corbet

## Macron takes aim at migration with eye on French election

### *Е. Макрон націлений на міграцію з огляду на вибори у Франції*

*Президент Франції Емманюель Макрон ставить за мету вирішити проблеми міграції — основне питання президентської кампанії країни — шляхом посилення зовнішніх кордонів Європейського Союзу проти людей, які нелегально потрапляють на територію блоку без паспортів. Очікується, що Е. Макрон балотуватиметься на другий термін на президентських виборах у Франції. Консервативні та ультраправі кандидати зробили міграцію головною темою кампанії, критикуючи те, що вони бачать як бездіяльність Е. Макрона щодо стримування міграції. Тепер Е. Макрон вважає, що треба «охороняти зовнішні кордони та стежити за тим, хто входить до ЄС». Е. Макрон також заявив, що міграційну політику необхідно обговорювати в рамках конкретного політичного органу, який зможе передбачати та розробляти плани запобігання криз.*

<https://apnews.com/article/immigration-travel-france-elections-migration-fc176fc1d6099fdbf0fbc142718dda08>



*France's President Emmanuel Macron delivers a speech during a meeting, in Lievin, northern France, Wednesday, Feb. 2, 2022. French President Emmanuel Macron is pushing for strengthening the European Union's external borders to prevent migrants from entering illegally into the bloc's passport-free area — as the issue is also central to France's ongoing presidential campaign. (AP Photo/Michel Spingler, pool)*

TOURCOING, France (AP) — French President Emmanuel Macron is taking aim at migration — a core issue in the country's presidential campaign — by pushing to strengthen the European Union's external borders against people illegally entering the bloc's passport-free area.

Macron is expected to run for a second term in France's April 3 presidential election. Conservative and far-right candidates have made migration a top campaign theme, criticizing what they see as Macron's inaction on stemming migration.

“Our passport-free area (in Europe) is being threatened if we don't know how to guard our external borders and monitor who is entering in,” Macron told the La Voix du Nord newspaper.

Macron met with the EU's interior ministers in northern France on Wednesday evening, as the country holds the bloc's six-month rotating presidency. He also met earlier in the day with local officials to discuss economic issues in the former mining region.

Macron said migration policies need to be discussed within a specific political body that will be able to anticipate and draw plans up to prevent crises.

"We want to establish a real Schengen Council to supervise the (passport-free) Schengen area, like what we have for the eurozone," Macron said in a speech in the city of Tourcoing on the Belgian border. He proposed that the first meeting of the council be held next month.

The Schengen area comprises 26 countries — including non-EU nations Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland. During the pandemic, many Schengen nations erected temporary border controls that went contrary to the zone's 'freedom of movement' ideal.

Macron also wants to create a "rapid reaction force" to help protect EU states' borders in case of a migrant surge and is also pushing for a rethink of the bloc's asylum application process.

The EU's 27 national leaders agree that changes are needed in the bloc's immigration policies but disagree on how to go about it.

The arrival in 2015 of well over 1 million people, many of them refugees fleeing war in Syria, sparked one of the EU's biggest political crises. Greece was overwhelmed by tens of thousands of people landing in its islands from Turkey. But other EU countries refused to share the burden of caring for the refugees.

In December, the EU's executive arm overhauled the rule book governing free movement in Europe amid EU accusations that Belarus President Alexander Lukashenko was exploiting migrants in a "hybrid attack" on the bloc by offering them passage to the borders of Poland, Latvia and Lithuania.

Macron also said he wants the EU to be more efficient in deporting those refused entry.

The French president is also looking to reduce the number of visas issued to non-EU nations that are reluctant to take back their citizens who have been refused asylum in the EU. He said the issue will be discussed at a summit between the European Union and the African Union later this month. On average, only around 40% of people refused entry to the bloc are ever actually sent home.

At home, Macron has been under harsh criticism from political rivals over migration, especially after 27 migrants died when their smuggling boat sank in the English Channel in November.

Far-right presidential candidate Eric Zemmour in January visited the northern town of Calais, where migrants gather in makeshift camps as they try to reach Britain. Zemmour said migrants are dying at sea "because we're not tough enough with them. If we had told them ... you won't come to France, you will be deported as soon as you arrive, they would not be dead."

A record-high 52,000 people tried to cross the English Channel last year, with more than half making it to Britain, according to the French Interior Ministry.

The other French far-right presidential candidate, Marine Le Pen, travelled last month to the border area between France and Spain in the Pyrenees mountains, which is used as an entry route by migrants coming in from Africa. She called for re-establishing national border controls.

Conservative contender Valerie Pécresse recently made a campaign trip to Greece to visit a camp for asylum-seekers who want to enter Europe from Turkey. She also stressed the need for strong European borders.

“It is not at all fortress Europe, but it is not a supermarket Europe either.... There are doors and you must go through the door,” she said.

Zemmour, Le Pen and Pécresse are considered Macron’s main challengers in the presidential election to be held in two rounds, with a first vote on April 10 and a runoff between the top two contenders on April 24.

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AP Writer Lorne Cook contributed from Brussels.

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