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Macron, Europe's wannabe president

Throughout his visit to China, Macron spelled out objectives for the EU and its incoming Commission.

Макрон зображує президента Європи

Протягом свого візиту до Китаю, Макрон чітко визначив цілі для ЄС та його Комісії. Емманюель Макрон стояв перед європейським прапором у Великій народній залі Пекіна. Поруч з ним стояв його китайський колега Сі Цзіньпін із прапором своєї країни. Вони обоє посміхалися камерам, але французького прапора не було видно. Це було надзвичайно незвично, – вважає автор публікації, – враховуючи, що Е. Макрон не має офіційного мандата ЄС, але, схоже, це свідчить про те, що, принаймні, для Китаю французький президент розглядається як лідер Європи. Обидва лідери споглядали, як міністр торгівлі Китаю Чжун Шань та комісар Європи з питань торгівлі Філ Хоган підписали угоду між ЄС та Китаєм щодо географічних ознак, що забезпечує захист інтелектуальної власності для експорту європейських товарів в Китай. Протягом свого візиту до Китаю Е. Макрон окреслював цілі для ЄС та Європейської Комісії, критикував її минулі результати та підкреслював ще недосягнутий потенціал ЄС як глобальної державу так, ніби він виступав як єдиний її представник. Його рішення так часто та публічно обговорювати справи ЄС під час закордонної поїздки за межі блоку було вражаючим, вважає автор. "Я обговорював з президентом Сі Цзіньпіном своє бажання створити більш міцний європейський суверенітет, і я дуже глибоко вважаю, що інтересом наших великих партнерів є об'єднана і сильна Європа як співрозмовник перед великими сучасними проблемами", - сказав Е. Макрон у спільній заяві для преси в Пекіні.

<https://www.politico.eu/article/emmanuel-macron-europe-president-china-trade/>



French President Emmanuel Macron reacts during a meeting with Chinese Premier Li Keqiang | Pool photo by Jason Lee/AFP via Getty Images

BEIJING — Emmanuel Macron stood in front of the European flag in Beijing's Great Hall of the People. Next to him stood his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping with his country's flag. They both smiled for the cameras, with no French banner in sight.

It was a highly unusual scene given that Macron has no formal EU mandate, but it appeared to show that, for China at least, the French president is viewed as the leader of Europe.

Both leaders looked on as the Chinese Minister of Commerce Zhong Shan and incoming EU Commissioner for Trade Phil Hogan signed an EU-China [agreement on geographic indications \(GI\)](#) providing intellectual property protections for European gourmet food exports to China. The ceremony had lost some of its impact after the French president made [a pre-emptive announcement](#) of the European Commission's deal by some 48 hours.

Throughout his visit to China, Macron spelled out objectives for the EU and its incoming Commission, criticized its past performance and underlined its yet-unachieved-potential as a global power, if only it would act as one. His decision to discuss the EU's affairs so often, and so publicly, while on a foreign trip outside the bloc was striking, and suggested a leader straining for a more cohesive European position abroad — with himself leading the charge.

"I discussed with President Xi Jinping my desire to build a stronger European sovereignty, and I very deeply believe it is in the interest of our big partners to have a united and strong Europe as an interlocutor in the face of big contemporary issues," Macron said at a joint press statement with Xi in Beijing on Wednesday.

Never before has a president of an EU member state approached a state visit in such an explicitly European multilateral way.

The *mise en scène* of the GI signing ceremony implied that Hogan is Macron's subordinate, which technically is not the case, but may turn out to be closer to reality. Macron took a leading role in choosing the new Commission's president-elect, Ursula von der Leyen, and much of her agenda has mirrored his European priorities.

An Elysée official explained the thinking behind the optics. "There was a desire, by all sides, to do this signature at the presidential level to underscore the importance of the agreement, and [Macron's] visit provided the best opportunity," the official said.

Negotiations on GI have been ongoing for years, with France making another push when Macron hosted Xi in Paris in March and included German Chancellor Angela Merkel and outgoing EU Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker in the meeting. The decision for Macron to be present at the signing ceremony was taken in coordination with Merkel and Juncker, the official added.

France also has significant skin in the game, given that a quarter of the 100 European GIs included in the deal relate to French products.



Macron and Chinese President Xi Jinping | Pool photo by Florence Lo via Getty Images

But protecting luxury food names is also central to EU trade policy. In the great global trade power game between the EU, U.S. and China, locking down the rules on some of the EU's most lucrative agricultural products with Beijing is vital to closing out American competition.

The deal means that a Chinese dairy producer can't produce knock-off gorgonzola or grana padano and sell it in China. Importantly, nor can a cheese-maker from say, Wisconsin, export products with those names to the country. That restricts the scope of any future trade pact between Washington and Beijing.

And the deal is yet another victory for the EU, after deals with Japan, Mexico, Canada and the South American Mercosur bloc, in its quest for establishing the GI system. That is despite aggressive lobbying by Washington of countries around the globe to not sign up to EU demands to protect its luxury foods.

Never before has a president of an EU member state approached a state visit, which are diplomatic bilateral affairs *par excellence*, in such an explicitly European multilateral way.

Yes, Macron pocketed a [slew of deals](#) for French companies — the standard fodder for such visits. But his assertive choice to embody European leadership on the international stage risks ruffling feathers in Brussels and some other European capitals.

But its substance is also recognized by some at the core of European power and wasn't limited to the optics of a signing ceremony.

Unlike Merkel's strictly German delegation, Macron chose to bring Hogan, and the German Minister of Education and Research, Anja Karliczek, who was representing Merkel, with him to China to present a united European front and strengthen his negotiating hand with the world's second-largest economy.

*The incoming trade commissioner didn't speak publicly on Wednesday.
Instead Macron spoke twice.*

Not only did Hogan and Karliczek agree to Macron's invitation, they also participated, with German and French business executives, in a meeting he led on Monday in Shanghai to survey European business needs in China on the eve of the inauguration of the China International Import Expo.

"We thought it was important to have a moment of European coordination," Macron said in his opening remarks at the event. "I think the more we take a Franco-German and a European approach, the more we have credibility and results."

He then appeared to steal Hogan's thunder by hailing the EU-China geographic indications agreement two days ahead of the Commission's official announcement Wednesday.

That didn't stop Hogan from recognizing Macron's leadership.

"President Macron is certainly somebody that's leading from the front in relation to many of the issues," Hogan told the audience.



Macron arrives at a press conference at the French embassy in Beijing | Ludovic Marin/AFP via Getty Images

The incoming trade commissioner didn't speak publicly on Wednesday. Instead Macron spoke twice, making a statement to the press alongside Xi, and holding a separate press conference later in the day, that again undercut the presser Hogan is holding Thursday.

On this trip alone, Macron said Europe lacked momentum on climate change; blamed the austerity policies the EU imposed during the 2008 eurozone crisis for driving countries like Greece or Italy into the hands of China; and derided the EU as being inept at making proposals without relying on the "American older brother."

Macron may just be the president of France, but with the European Commission stuck in transition limbo, he looked like a man with higher ambitions.

CORRECTION: This article has been updated to correct the English name of the building where the signature ceremony took place. It's the Great Hall of the People.

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