

POLITICO. – 13.12.2021

Rym Momtaz and Lili Bayer

Macron in Hungary: No rule of law progress until April

Е. Макрон в Угорщині: верховенство права не буде прогресувати до квітня 2022 р.

Угорщина не поступиться у протистоянні з ЄС через верховенство права перед загальними виборами у квітні 2022 р., вважає президент Франції Емманюель Макрон після зустрічі з прем'єр-міністром В. Орбаном. "У цих питаннях є дуже незначний прогрес, є чітка угорська воля не досягти прогресу в цих питаннях до квітневих виборів", - сказав Е. Макрон під час свого одноденного візиту до Будапешта. Е. Макрон двічі плутав Угорщину з Польщею у своїй відповіді на запитання журналістів, але ясно, що він прямо обговорював питання, пов'язані з верховенством права, правами меншин, включаючи права ЛГБТК+, і корупцією в Угорщині під час зустрічі з В. Орбаном один на один. "У нас є розбіжності, які я дуже чітко підтвердив", - заявив Е. Макрон. В. Орбан поділився цією оцінкою на заключній пресконференції саміту Вишеградської групи, під час якої обидва лідери виявляли теплу налаштованість один до одного, часто зустрічаючись один з одним під час розмови, навіть якщо вони були на сцені зі своїми польськими, чеськими та словацькими колегами. В. Орбан сказав, що між ним і Е. Макроном часто відбуваються «серйозні дебати», а іноді й «гострі дебати», але йому подобаються аргументи. «Дебати погані лише тоді, коли в них немає якості; якщо дебати мають якість, це добре».

<https://www.politico.eu/article/emmanuel-macron-hungary-rule-of-law-progress/>

Hungary won't budge in its standoffs with the EU over the rule of law before a general election in April, French President Emmanuel Macron said after meeting Prime Minister Viktor Orbán in Budapest on Monday.

"There is very little progress on these issues, there is a clear Hungarian will not to make progress on these questions before the April elections," Macron told a group of reporters, including POLITICO, during his one-day visit to Budapest.

Macron twice confused Hungary with Poland in his response to questions by reporters but was clear he had explicitly discussed issues related to rule of law, minority rights — including LGBTQ+ rights — and corruption in Hungary in his one-on-one meeting with Orbán.

"We have disagreements that I reaffirmed very clearly," Macron asserted.

Orbán shared that assessment at the final press conference of the Visegrad Group summit, during which both leaders showed a warm disposition toward each other, often facing one another when they spoke, even though they were on stage with their Polish, Czech and Slovak counterparts.

Orbán said there are often "serious debates" and occasionally "sharp debates" between himself and Macron but that he likes the arguments.

"Debate is only bad if there is no quality in it; if a debate has quality that's good."

At the press conference, Orbán claimed Hungary's allocation from the EU's coronavirus recovery fund was being withheld due to the country's controversial anti-LGBTQ+ law, at which point Macron jumped in to clarify that in fact, it was because of issues related to corruption and public procurement.

Macron's main objective in coming to Budapest to meet with Orbán and take part in the Visegrad Group summit was to secure the support of the Central European countries for the main themes of an ambitious agenda he set for the upcoming French presidency of the Council of the EU, such as moving forward on an EU migration pact, climate action, the so-called "Strategic Compass" plan meant to bolster the bloc's military capabilities, as well as "strategic autonomy" for both the EU's economy and its defense.

It also allowed Macron to keep a promise to visit all 26 EU member states before the end of his presidential term.

“I’d like to make clear that Hungary’s relationship with President Macron is that of respect,” Orbán said during joint statements to the press earlier in the day. “We are political opponents and also European partners.”

Far-right French presidential candidates Marine Le Pen and Eric Zemmour have rushed to Budapest in recent weeks to meet with the Hungarian prime minister, looking to burnish their Euroskeptic, ultra-nationalist street cred ahead of France’s own election in April.

Macron has not yet officially declared his run for reelection and was careful to frame his visit as part of his consultations ahead of his presidency of the Council of the EU.

Opposites attract

Orbán and Macron formally belong to polar opposite ends of the political spectrum.

Е. Макрон в Угорщині: верховенство права не буде прогресувати до квітня 2022 р.

The Hungarian leader has aspirations to create a new, pan-European alliance of nationalist and Euroskeptic parties. Macron’s La République En Marche, meanwhile, stands at the center of a progressive movement, Renew Europe, and is allied with some of Orbán’s most vocal domestic opponents.

But the two leaders have largely avoided public spats, working together behind the scenes when their interests converge on the European stage.

“Macron formed an axis with the Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán in the Council,” European People’s Party group leader Manfred Weber complained in 2019, following his failed bid to become president of the European Commission.

And while he has repeatedly criticized the French leader over migration policy, Orbán has over the years also sought to highlight what they have in common.

On Monday, Orbán said he and Macron agree on three things: that they love their homelands; that both are working to strengthen Europe; and that Europe needs strategic autonomy. For Hungary, according to Orbán, strategic autonomy means a European defense industry, nuclear energy and a strong agriculture sector.

The French president also met with a group of Orbán’s political rivals, including Péter Márki-Zay, a conservative mayor who is the opposition’s candidate for Hungarian prime minister in next year’s parliamentary election.

Macron “very firmly said there is no compromise on rule-of-law questions,” MEP Klára Dobrev, a member of the left-liberal Democratic Coalition — part of the Socialists and Democrats group in the European Parliament — who attended the meeting, told POLITICO.

At his press conference with the Visegrad leaders, Macron, standing next to Orbán, was careful to justify that meeting by saying they were part of the Renew group in the European Parliament, which is now presided over by his former political adviser Stéphane Séjourné, and that as such it was “legitimate.”

He also started his visit to Hungary by visiting the tomb of Hungarian philosopher Ágnes Heller, who was an outspoken critic of Orbán.