

Macron hops like a frog, says rival Hollande

President accused in his predecessor's book of jumping between beliefs and dividing France

By Henry Samuel in Paris

EMMANUEL MACRON is a lily-livered president with no political vision who has split France, according to a book in which François Hollande, his former boss and predecessor, lambasts him.

Mr Hollande, 67, describes Mr Macron – whom he plucked from political obscurity to become his adviser and then finance minister – as a “travel-

ler without a compass” prone to “jumping from one belief to another like a frog on water lilies”.

Affronter (Confront) is the latest and most vitriolic of attacks by the socialist – whose term ran from 2012 to 2017 – on his erstwhile protégé whose shock rise to power, it is said, is seen by Hollande as an act of betrayal that scuppered his slim chance of re-election in 2017.

Some suggest the latest broadside could signal that Mr Hollande, whose popularity was so low at the end of his mandate that he chose not to have a crack at a second term, may be angling for an unlikely comeback given the parlous state of the Left in France. However, Mr Hollande insists he has no

intention of coming out of retirement.

Anne Hidalgo, 62, the mayor of Paris, is the official Socialist candidate for next year's presidential election but she is polling at a paltry 5 per cent support.

Mr Macron, meanwhile, leads the polls on 24 per cent, with the rising star of the far-Right, Eric Zemmour, in joint second with Marine Le Pen on 16 per cent each.

After winning power on promises to soak the rich and clamp down on “evil” finance, Mr Hollande then sought to win over business leaders by making Mr Macron – a former merchant banker 24 years his junior – his presidential adviser at the Elysée Palace in 2012 and finance minister two years later. How-

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ever, Mr Macron chose to leave the government in 2016 to form his own party and run for office himself.

In *Affronter*, and in media interviews to promote the book, Mr Hollande said he bore “no grudge” before giving Mr Macron both barrels. “This term has been marked by a lack of coherence and by the absence of a doctrine, which has led the president to multiply U-turns on essential issues, such as the role of the

state, ecology and security,” he told *Le Parisien*.

In another interview, on France Inter radio, he said Mr Macron “represents a technocrate that thought it could do better than politicians ... but it has one major failing: it is cut off from society”.

He said his successor's successful attempts to poach from both Left and Right “at the same time” had sowed “disorder and political confusion”.

He added: “He should have tried to reconcile the French. Instead ... France seems split between a minority which is doing well and the rest.” Under Mr Macron, “the very rich have become even richer,” claimed Mr Hollande.

Asked about the attacks, Mr Macron's

spokesman, Gabriel Attal, said: “We're used to it.”

While Mr Hollande continues to pay lip service to Ms Hidalgo, he sniffed that other Left-wing candidates were “lilliputian”, suggesting a fresh figure may be required.

Meanwhile, Mr Zemmour, who has said he wants to curtail the power of the French media, sparked outrage yesterday while attending at a security fair near Paris.

He pointed a sniper rifle at a group of journalists, telling them: “Now who's laughing? Get back. Move back.”

He later insisted that it was a “joke” and that “there was no political message, no threat”.

MEPs threaten to sue Von der Leyen to force hand over Poland dispute

By Joe Barnes in Brussels

MEPs have threatened to sue Ursula von der Leyen unless she follows through on threats to withhold tens of billions of euros in EU funding from Poland in a battle over the rule of law.

In an escalation of the dispute between Brussels and Warsaw, leaders from the European Parliament said they would launch legal action if the European Commission president refused to use the bloc's “conditionality mechanism” to block funding to Poland.

Warsaw has infuriated the EU by refusing to override a decision by its constitutional court, which last month ruled that it has supremacy over the bloc's laws.

The move by MEPs is an attempt to force Mrs Von der Leyen's hand amid mounting fears the row could lead to the EU's collapse.

EU leaders will today challenge the EC president to make good on her promises to withhold money or strip the country of its voting rights at a summit in Brussels. Ahead of the gathering, David Sassoli, the European Parliament's president, announced the plans to sue Mrs Von der Leyen.

“EU Member States that violate the rule of law should not receive EU funds.

Last year, Parliament fought hard for a mechanism to ensure this. However, so far the EC has been reluctant to use it,” Mr Sassoli said.

“The European Union is a community built on the principles of democracy and the rule of law. If these are under threat in a member state, the EU must act to protect them.

“I have therefore asked our legal services to prepare a lawsuit against the Commission to ensure that EU rules are properly enforced.”

The move was agreed by political leaders from the Parliament, including an ally of France's Emmanuel Macron. Stéphane Sejourne, a French MEP who recently became the most senior liberal in the Parliament, said the legal action should be carried out “as soon as possible”. He condemned the EC for “failure

to apply the rule of law conditionality mechanism against Poland”. “We need to act now for the freedoms and rights of Polish citizens,” he added.

Esther de Lange, a Dutch MEP and senior member of the European People's Party, of which Mrs von der Leyen is a member, warned that the EU risked collapsing “brick by brick” unless Poland is brought back into line.

Poland stands to lose out on €57 billion (£48 billion) from the EU's pandemic recovery fund.

European Council president Charles Michel agreed to address the rule-of-law dispute at the gathering after initially attempting to keep it off the agenda, under orders from France and Germany. A senior EU diplomat said: “We cannot not address it because it is a very serious issue.”

The source, however, played down

'We're facing the biggest onslaught of challenges in our lifetime, there are many reasons the EU must act'

fears that Poland could become a “dirty remainder” by blocking EU legislation. They said: “We're talking about 27 dirty remainders because every member state at some point has had issues.”

Ms de Lange said: “If we allow this foundation to be taken apart, country by country, brick by brick, the entire house we built of peace, of freedom, of opportunity, is in danger.”

Iratxe Garcia Perez, leader of the bloc of social democrat MEPs, warned the row threatened to endanger the EU. She said: “It shouldn't continue to endanger the future of the European project. We're facing the biggest onslaught of challenges in our lifetime, there are many reasons the EU must act urgently.”

Meanwhile, Jaroslaw Kaczynski, leader of Poland's ruling Law and Justice party, has announced plans to introduce further reforms of the country's judiciary system, which are expected to challenge the EU's democratic values.



Cub snout A nosy lion cub roars at the sound of a remote camera as it tries to face down the device in Kenya's Maasai Mara National Reserve. Priyanshi Nahata, 34, from Dubai, set up the camera so he could capture wildlife from a safe distance.

Forget cherry-picking, for now Warsaw can enjoy having its cake and eating it

Analysis



By James Crisp
EUROPE EDITOR

Poland has, to borrow a phrase from Michel Barnier, learnt the lessons of Brexit.

The European Commission president and Poland's prime minister both warned that the EU could collapse on Tuesday, amid fears of a looming Polexit.

The Polish Constitutional Tribunal

triggered a crisis when it ruled that national law supersedes European law, which contradicts a cornerstone of the EU's treaties.

However, Poland is pursuing what some in Brussels call “an intelligent Brexit”.

After the Brexit referendum, EU leaders were united that there could be “no negotiation without notification” of Article 50. In Brussels, there are rarely talks without talks about talks, but Theresa May fell for the bluff.

She set the clock ticking on two years of Brexit negotiations with the threat of “no deal” behind it to draw last-minute concessions.

Mateusz Morawiecki and Jaroslaw

'It can simply ignore those EU rules it doesn't like and continue to bank the cash from Brussels'

Kaczynski, the true leader of the ruling Law and Justice party, will not make the same mistake.

Poland has received €195 billion (£164 billion) in EU funds for only about €62 billion in fees since it joined the bloc in 2004. The EU budget guarantees Warsaw another €139.4 billion in subsidies and €34.2 billion in repayable aid from 2021 to 2027.

Little wonder Mr Morawiecki has branded Polexit fake news.

There is no legal way to kick a member state out of the EU, and Mr Morawiecki faces no domestic pressure to trigger Article 50 because most Poles support EU membership.

Instead, it can simply ignore those EU rules it doesn't like and continue to bank the cash from Brussels. The UK in contrast paid more into the EU budget than it received back in funding.

Ironically, Donald Tusk, the former European Council president, is leading the domestic opposition.

He infamously warned Mrs May against “cherry-picking” while offering her a slice of cake at a humiliating Salzburg summit.

The commission claims it will use all its powers “within days” to bring Poland to heel, but it needs strong support from other member states.

Brussels can hit Warsaw with lawsuits and, its strongest card, withhold approval of the disbursement of €57 billion of Covid recovery funds.

That carries political risk, but alternative routes to freeze EU budget funds are limited and lengthy.

Mechanisms to strip rogue member states of EU voting rights are hobbled by the need for unanimity among the 27 governments. Poland and Hungary,

'Even if there is a summit showdown, indecision and division are paralysing EU capitals'

veterans of rows with Brussels over the rule of law, have a deal to block any such attempt against the other.

Law and Justice are not freedom fighters. It is a homophobic, nationalist and authoritarian party given to stuffing courts with its political allies.

However, as a member of the club, rather than one on the way out, it can veto key EU legislation and gum up the Brussels machine.

That is one reason why Angela Merkel is pushing for the row to be kept off the agenda of today's EU summit. Despite Emmanuel Macron's support, she may not get her wish.

Even if there is a summit showdown, indecision and division are paralysing EU capitals. They are expected to dodge the issue and kick the can down the road.

Britain was repeatedly told in the Brexit negotiations that it could not enjoy the privileges of EU membership without its obligations.

But, for now, Poland is having its cake and eating it.

WORLD BULLETIN

German ex-soldiers accused of terror plot

Police yesterday arrested two former German soldiers accused of trying to form a “terrorist” paramilitary group to fight in Yemen's civil war. Named only as Arend-Adolf G and Achim A, the pair had taken steps to create a unit of up to 150 men composed of ex-police officers and soldiers, the Karlsruhe prosecutor's office said.

New Paris police force unable to issue fines

The new municipal police force unveiled this week by Anne Hidalgo, Paris' Socialist mayor and presidential hopeful, cannot fine anyone in the French capital because they have not yet sworn an oath before a court of law.

It is hoped the force will return order to Paris, amid complaints about dirt, crime and the impact of crack addiction.

Bolsonaro could face charges over pandemic

A Brazilian senate committee has recommended that Jair Bolsonaro, the president, face at least 10 charges over his handling of the Covid-19 pandemic. After six months of hearings, the committee of inquiry requested charges against around 60 people. The draft report still needs to be voted on by the senate commission.

Fourteen killed in bus explosion in Damascus

A blast on an army bus in Damascus yesterday killed 14 people, state media reported. It is the deadliest bombing in the Syrian capital in years.

The bus carrying troops was blown up near a bridge in the centre of the city. It was quickly followed by army shelling in rebel-held Idlib, which rescue workers said killed 12 people.

Germany sends troops east to halt migrant crossings from Belarus

By Justin Huggler in Berlin

GERMANY announced joint patrols on its border with Poland yesterday in an effort to stem the flow of illegal migrants travelling to Europe via Belarus.

Horst Seehofer, the German interior minister, accused Belarus of “state-sponsored human trafficking” over its policy of encouraging people to use its territory to enter Europe.

More than 5,000 people have entered Germany illegally via the route through Belarus and Poland since August and police have recently reported more than 100 crossings a day.

President Alexander Lukashenko is openly encouraging migrants to enter Europe by allowing them to enter Belarus by air provided they travel on to the European Union by land. Iran, Pakistan, South Africa, Egypt and Jordan were recently added to his “welcome” list in

'Belarus is taking part in state-organised or at least state-sponsored human trafficking'

a tit-for-tat policy that comes in the wake of EU sanctions on Minsk.

They were introduced after the “hijacking” of a Ryanair flight which was diverted to Minsk in June to allow Belarusian officials to detain an opposition activist.

Mr Seehofer described Mr Lukashenko's regime as a “hybrid threat”, adding: “State-organised or at least state-sponsored human trafficking is taking place in Belarus.”

Poland has already responded by erecting a fence on its border with Belarus and Germany is seeking to impose further sanctions backed by the EU.

German troops being sent to the border “will serve primarily on Polish territory, naturally under the command of Polish border guards”, Mr Seehofer said.

However, German activists have argued that the measures go against the United Nations refugee convention.

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