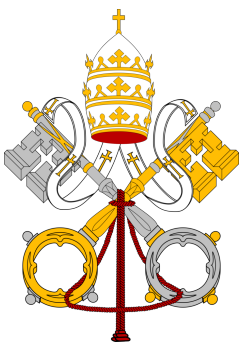


Macron and Pope talk poverty, migration and Europe in long meeting



The two talked together for nearly an hour in the official papal library in the Vatican's Apostolic Palace, about twice as long as Francis usually spends with heads of state or government.

They discussed "protection of the environment, migration, and multilateral commitment to conflict prevention and resolution, especially in relation to disarmament," a Vatican statement

said.

They also spoke about prospects for resolving conflicts in the Middle East and Africa and the future of Europe, it said.

At the end of the private part of the audience, Macron gave Francis a rare copy of Georges Bernanos 1936 book "Diary of a Country Priest".

"I've read this book many times and it has done me good. It is a book that I have always loved very much," the pope told Macron, 40, who was accompanied in the public parts of the meeting by his wife Brigitte.

Francis gave Macron a medallion depicting Martin of Tours, a 4th century saint who is depicted cutting his cloak in half to give it to a beggar in winter.

"This means the vocation of those who govern is to help the poor. We are all poor," Francis told Macron as he was giving him the medallion.

Macron earned himself the nickname "president of the rich" in France after scrapping a wealth tax and cutting a popular housing allowance in the first year of his mandate, hurting his popularity with the working class.

As Macron left the library, he and Francis exchanged a two-cheek kiss, another very unusual gesture between a pope and a visiting head of state.

The Vatican was expected to issue a statement later on the themes discussed during the private talks.

Two months ago, Macron called for stronger ties between the state and the Catholic Church, a move critics said blurred a line that has kept French government free of religious intervention for generations.

The issue is particularly sensitive in historically Catholic France, where matters of faith and state were separated by law

in 1905 and which is now home to Europe's largest Muslim and Jewish communities.

France's guiding principles also hold that religious observance is a private matter, for all faiths.

Macron was raised in a non-religious family and was baptized a Roman Catholic at his own request when he was 12.

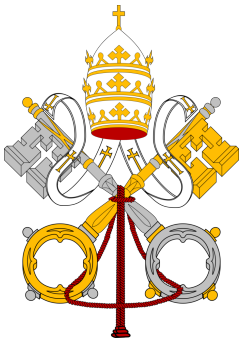
After leaving the Vatican he was installed as the "First and Only Honorary Canon" of the Rome Basilica of St John's in Lateran, which is the pope's cathedral in his capacity as bishop of Rome.

Under a tradition that began in the 15th century when France was a monarchy, French leaders are automatically given the title.

Macron took his seat of honor in basilica's elaborately carved wooden choir stall to the applause of those in attendance, including members of the local French ex patriot community.

Additional reporting by Michel Rose in Paris, Editing by Richard Balmforth

Première rencontre entre Macron et le pape au Vatican



Le chef de l'Etat français, qui sera accompagné par son épouse Brigitte, des ministres Gérard Collomb (Intérieur et Cultes) et Jean-Yves Le Drian (Affaires étrangères) est attendu à 10h au Saint-Siège pour un tête-à-tête qui devrait durer une trentaine de minutes.

Il s'entretiendra ensuite avec le cardinal, secrétaire d'Etat Monseigneur Pietro Parolin, qui sera également présent à un déjeuner à la villa Bonaparte, le siège de l'ambassade de France au Vatican, avant une rencontre avec la communauté française et une conférence de presse.

Un an après leur premier entretien téléphonique, Emmanuel Macron "aura à coeur de présenter au pape son approche transversale" sur la question migratoire, souligne l'Elysée,

et insistera sur l'importance d'améliorer la réponse européenne, à quelques jours d'un Conseil européen qui s'annonce houleux.

Le pape, qui avait réservé l'un de ses premiers déplacements en 2013 à l'île italienne de Lampedusa, où il avait fustigé "l'indifférence" du monde à l'égard de migrants, n'a pas mâché ses mots ses cinq dernières années sur la gestion européenne des flux de migrants traversant la Méditerranée.

Dans une interview à Reuters la semaine dernière, François a notamment mis en garde l'Europe contre un "hiver démographique" si le continent se fermait aux migrants et dénoncé les "psychoses" alimentées selon lui par les populistes.

"PAS DE DIMENSION SPIRITUELLE"

La question des Chrétiens d'Orient, qui sera au coeur d'une mission qu'Emmanuel Macron entend lancer dans les prochains jours et qui devrait déboucher sur un rapport dans trois mois, sera également abordée. Celles du climat et de l'aide au développement pourraient également être évoqués.

Emmanuel Macron prendra symboliquement possession au cours d'une cérémonie de la stalle qui marque son titre de premier et unique chanoine d'honneur de la basilique Saint-Jean du Latran. Ce titre est remis de façon automatique aux dirigeants français en vertu d'une tradition qui remonte à Henri VI.

A l'exception de Georges Pompidou, de François Mitterrand et de François Hollande, tous les chefs d'Etat français de la Ve République depuis le Général de Gaulle en 1967 ont fait le déplacement à Rome pour prendre possession de ce titre.

Anticipant les potentielles critiques sur une atteinte à la laïcité, l'Elysée a insisté sur le fait que cette cérémonie n'avait "aucune dimension spirituelle mais une signification honorifique et historique".

“Chanoine n’est pas un titre religieux mais laïc (...) il n’y a pas d’enjeu de laïcité”, a-t-on souligné, deux mois après le discours des Bernardins qui avait été bien perçu par les catholiques mais décrié par l’opposition comme une “atteinte sans précédent à la laïcité”.

Interpréter cette visite au pape “comme un nouveau pas en avant vers les catholiques paraît complètement abusif puisque chacun de ses prédécesseurs l’a fait”, a-t-on ajouté. Emmanuel Macron “a dit à maintes reprises qu’il était agnostique, il revendique sa formation jésuite, il revendique d’avoir été baptisé à 12 ans mais il revendique aussi aujourd’hui d’être en marge de l’Eglise”.

UK could face court action over air pollution after EU warning: ‘We can delay no more’



Proposals made on Tuesday are 'not substantial enough to change the big picture'

Nine European countries including the UK could face legal action if they fail to make progress on reducing air pollution, the EU's top environment official has warned.

The intervention came as legal air pollution limits for the whole year were reached within a month in London.

Brixton Road, Lambeth, has seen levels of pollutant nitrogen dioxide exceed average hourly limits 18 times so far this year, the maximum allowed under European Union air quality rules.

Inaction by national governments over the issue prompted the European Commission's environment commissioner, Karmenu Vella, to warn of legal action after talks with ministers from nine EU countries including Britain, France, Germany, Spain

and Italy – all of which regularly flout the bloc's air quality standards.

“Every year, an astonishing number of citizens' lives are cut short because of air pollution,” Mr Vella said.

“We have known this for decades, and the air quality limit values have been in place for almost as long.

“And yet, still today, in 2018, 400 000 people are still dying prematurely every year because of a massive, widespread failure to address the problem.”

He continued: “The deadlines for meeting the legal obligations have long elapsed... we can delay no more.”

Poor air quality caused by vehicle emissions, industry, power plants and agriculture is known to cause or exacerbate asthma and other respiratory problems.

Air pollution also has significant economic impacts, increasing healthcare costs, reducing employees' productivity and damaging crops, soil, forests and rivers, according to the European Environment Agency's latest annual report.

It has taken the London longer to reach the air pollution limit this year than last year when legal levels were breached less than a week into the new year.

But while campaigners welcomed action by London Mayor Sadiq Khan to tackle pollution, they warned the relative delay in reaching the limit this year could be down to weather conditions dispersing the dirty air.

Environmental groups called for the Government to take urgent steps, including creating and funding clean air zones in pollution hotspots across the UK where 85% of areas still break air quality rules which should have been achieved in 2010.

Government estimates suggest compliance for levels of nitrogen dioxide, much of which comes from road transport, particularly diesel, will not be met until 2026.

The most recent data shows that around 7 per cent of the urban population within the EU was exposed to fine particulate levels higher than the EU-stipulated limit in 2015.

If the stricter World Health Organisation limits are applied, that rises sharply to 82 per cent.

The countries represented at Tuesday's summit have been given ten days to submit new proposals for meeting EU air quality standards regarding particle levels.

In Mr Vella's opinion, the proposals offered by the nine offending countries were "not substantial enough to change the big picture".

He insisted that the only way to avoid court action was to take "all possible measures without delay".

Reacting to the outcome of the summit, ClientEarth lawyer Ugo Taddei said: "Commissioner Vella was evidently unimpressed.

"The European Commission should now follow this blatant inaction through to its legal consequences and trigger court actions without further delay.

"The people of Europe have waited long enough to breathe clean air."