



Macron faces backlash over U-turn on rape law

Description

EU : The President of France Emmanuel Macron has come under fire after saying he was in favor of incorporating the notion that a sexual act without consent should fall under the country's criminal definition of rape.

The statement came as a surprise for the public, given that Paris had opposed the same idea in a European Union (EU) directive last month.

Macron's statement was made on March 8, when he met members of the feminist association Choisir la cause des femmes (Choosing Women's Issues), to mark International Women's Day.

According to a video seen by AFP this week, the French president told the women's rights group: "I fully agree that it should be incorporated into French law, that consent should be enshrined," adding "I'm going to enshrine it in French law."

The legal definition of rape in France includes the notions of "violence, coercion, threat or surprise," but makes no mention of "consent." Women's rights advocates have been calling for the law to be tightened by including the concept so that any sexual act without consent constitutes rape. Only a tiny fraction of rapes or attempted rapes lead to a conviction, they claim.

Meanwhile, Macron's comments sparked public backlash since they are in total contradiction to France's official stance on the issue. France was one of several countries to argue against including a consent-based definition of rape in EU law passed last month.

The states in opposition, including Hungary, Germany, Poland, and the Netherlands, argued that rape does not have the cross-border dimension necessary for it to be considered a crime that comes with common penalties across the bloc.

Macron stated in the March 8 video that he did not believe rape was a "Eurocrime," but that he did want to change French law.

"We fought for two years to convince France of the importance of adopting this European definition of

rape” according to which a sexual act without consent is rape, MEP Nathalie Colin-Oesterle (EPP), her group’s rapporteur on the EU directive, told Euractiv.

“For months, [French Justice Minister] Eric Dupond-Moretti has been explaining to us ... that incorporating the notion of consent into the Criminal Code would be absolutely counterproductive and dangerous for women victims, since it would place the burden of proof on them.”

“What an instrumentalization of the cause of women, just a few weeks before the European elections!” Colin-Oesterle concluded.

A group of French lawmakers is currently working on a report on whether to add ‘consent’ to the law that they are to present in mid-April, according to media.

Last year, Spain approved new legislation, dubbed the ‘Only yes means yes’ law, under which all non-consensual sex is seen as rape. Sweden, Denmark, Finland and Greece have all passed similar laws.

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