

France's new President Emmanuel Macron vows to fortify European Union, revamp politics

15/05/2017 09:07 by admin

Paris: In ceremonies marked by youthful optimism and old-world Napoleonic pomp, Emmanuel Macron swept into office Sunday as France's new president pledging to fortify the European Union, redesign French politics and glue together his divided nation.

France's new President Emmanuel Macron

Macron's presidency began with a visit to troops wounded in overseas combat – a reminder of France's large global military presence and role in fighting extremists from Syria to Africa.

He's expected to name a prime minister imminently, and to show his commitment to reviving European unity. Macron takes his first presidential trip Monday to Berlin to meet Chancellor Angela Merkel.

In a lofty but lucid inaugural speech, Macron vowed to lift France out of its sense of decline and lost purpose, and seize again its place in the world.

“The time has come for France to rise up to the occasion. The division and fractures across our society must be overcome ... because the world expects us to be strong, solid, clairvoyant.”

He promised to take France's responsibilities to tackle today's crises – the migration crisis, the climate challenge, authoritarian abuse, the excesses of capitalism in the world and of course terrorism. Nothing now strikes one and spares the other. We are all interdependent. We are all neighbors.

The 39-year-old Macron is the youngest president in the country's history and the eighth president of France's Fifth Republic, which was created in 1958. A former economy minister with pro-business, pro-European views, Macron is the first French president who doesn't originate from the country's two mainstream parties.

After Macron was formally declared president at the Elysee Palace, 21 cannon shots were fired from across the Seine River at the Invalides monument, where Napoleon is entombed.

Macron later solemnly paid tribute at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier beneath the Arc de Triomphe, greeting veterans and military officers in formation beneath the imposing arch.

Macron takes charge of a nation that, when Britain leaves the European Union in 2019, will become the EU's only member with nuclear weapons and a permanent seat on the U.N. Security Council.

Reviving support for European unity will be among his top priorities. France is a founding member of the 28-nation EU and its third-largest economy after Germany and Britain.

“We will need a more efficient Europe, a more democratic Europe, a more political Europe because it's the instrument of our power and our sovereignty, I will work on that,” he said Sunday.

Before the ceremony, he met for an hour with his predecessor, Francois Hollande, taking a last few minutes to discuss the most sensitive issues facing France, including the country's nuclear codes.

In a visibly moving moment for both, Macron accompanied Hollande to his car, shaking hands and applauding him along with the employees of the French presidency who had gathered in the palace's courtyard.

The two men had known each other well. Macron was Hollande's former adviser, then his economy minister from 2014 to 2016, when Macron quit the Socialist government to launch his own independent presidential bid.

About 300 guests, officials and family members gathered in the Elysee reception hall, including Macron's wife, Brigitte, wearing a lavender blue dress by French designer Nicolas Ghesquiere for Louis Vuitton.

Macron himself wore a dark suit from French brand Jonas and Cie, a tailor based in Paris. It cost 450 euros (\$491), according to his team.

The new president arrived on the Champs-Elysees Avenue under a heavy rain "recalling Hollande's inauguration five years ago. But unlike his predecessor, Macron managed to avoid getting wet. The bad weather often associated with the former Socialist president has become a joke for the French.

After his time at the tomb, Macron went to shake hands with supporters along the Champs-Elysees, who were taking selfies and waving French tricolor flags, before coming back to the palace for a lunch with his family.

Earlier, he and France's new first lady briefly posed for photographers at the front porch of the palace after Hollande left. The couple will now live at the Elysee Palace.

Macron met with Paris Mayor Anne Hidalgo later Sunday and visited the Percy military hospital in the Paris suburb of Clamart to meet with two soldiers injured during French operations in Mali last year and one wounded in Afghanistan in 2010. The media wasn't allowed to cover the visit.

Macron has promised to reinvigorate French politics by bringing in new faces, and will form a government in the coming days.

His Republic on the Move movement "barely a year old" is hoping to elect a majority of lawmakers in next month's parliamentary elections so that he can pass his programs. It has announced an initial list of 428 candidates for the 577 seats up for grabs in France's lower house of parliament in the vote on June 11 and 18.

Many of the candidates are newcomers in politics. Their average age is 46, compared to 60 for the outgoing assembly. Half of them are women. Only 24 are lawmakers running for re-election.

Hollande, meanwhile, went on Twitter to describe the "terrible ordeals" that marked his five-year term, from deadly attacks to Greece's debt crisis. He defended his unpopular presidency in a series of tweets minutes after leaving the Elysee Palace.

Hollande noted his accomplishments in getting the Paris Agreement on climate change, legalizing gay marriage and doing "everything possible to ensure that Greece stays in Europe."

"We lived through crises but we held together. France remained France," he tweeted.

- IT