



Macron on collision course with Brussels as France plots to force EU rules on ENTIRE world

EMMANUEL MACRON's bid to woo French farmers with reform of EU trade deals ahead of the April Presidential election will be met with resistance by the European Commission.

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The French leader is proposing to impose so-called "mirror clauses" in all future trade deals the EU signs with third-party countries, in order to impose the bloc's standards of production on goods imported into the EU.

But in an interview with Groupe d'études géopolitiques, the Director General of the European Commission's DG Trade and former Deputy Chief Negotiator for the Brexit negotiations, Sabine Weyand, warned Mr Macron's proposal risks being discriminatory.

She said: "This subject illustrates the evolution of the trade policy debate. In the previous century, trade policy was almost exclusively concerned with the removal of physical and technical barriers.

"Today, there is much more discussion of issues related to the conditions of production within the jurisdictions of different countries.

"As such, I believe it is necessary to take a granular approach to the issue of mirror clauses, which are often superficially addressed in the public debate.

"First of all, it is important to remember that all products on the European market, whether they are manufactured inside or outside the Union, must comply with its criteria and standards that concern the characteristics of the product itself.

"It is out of the question that a product containing pesticides banned in Europe circulates on the European market.

"Things get more complicated when we talk about production methods in a third-party country that do not impact the characteristics of goods stricto sensu. For example, what should we do

when a pesticide that is not authorised in Europe is used in a third-party country without ending up in the end product?

"In such cases, the solutions are much more complex and our new strategy on mirror clauses aims to address this issue."

She continued: "Given that there is a strong cross-border and international dimension to this debate, it is critical that measures do not arbitrarily discriminate and that they are proportional to desired goals. It seems to me to be the case with this proposal because the proposed rules allow deforestation-free trade to continue unimpeded and without discrimination, while at the same time offering mechanisms to make it easier for producer countries to comply with our regulations.

"When these mirror clauses are justified by an international challenge such as environmental protection, and when they do not create arbitrary obstacles to trade, they appear legitimate and can be envisioned in the framework of our trade agreements.

"Is this the best approach? This question must be addressed on a case-by-case basis.

"If we only regulate the conditions under which forest-based products can enter the European market, we are ultimately dealing with a relatively small percentage of the overall production that risks being fuelled by deforestation.

"If we wish to take more meaningful action — and not only on products exported to the EU — we need to look for other means of international cooperation in forums intended for this purpose.

"In other words, autonomous legislation alone can never replace cooperation."

Earlier this month, EU Trade Commissioner Valdis Dombrovskis also showed resistance to Mr Macron's proposals, saying "there are many restrictions" to mirror clauses and that any attempt to ramp up non-EU countries' production standards must "minimise disruptions of trade [and] need to not be more far-reaching than strictly necessary".

The move could also be seen as a restriction to trade under World Trade Organisation rules.

According to Inu Munak, an international trade law expert at the Cato Institute think tank, "If you interpret WTO law very strictly, this is seen as a restriction of trade and not allowed".