


France's Macron holds 'frank exchange' with Putin

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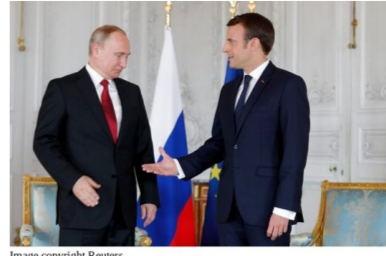


Image copyright Reuters
Image caption Mr Macron (right) believes it is essential to talk to Russia

French President Emmanuel Macron says he held a "frank exchange" with Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin in their first face-to-face talks.

The pair discussed "disagreements" in the meeting, held at the sumptuous Versailles palace near Paris.

But Mr Macron said he wanted to work with Russia over the conflict in Syria in the struggle against terrorism.

Meanwhile, Mr Putin said he wanted to strengthen economic ties with France after the restrictions of recent years.

Both leaders were keen to signal a new beginning in Russian-French relations that have been under considerable strain recently, says the BBC's Hugh Schofield in Paris.


Mr Macron's election team accused Russian agents of [launching cyber attacks](#) against them during his campaign for the presidency.

Tensions have also risen over the conflicts in Ukraine and Syria, where France and

What did they say about Syria?

France is in the coalition backing Sunni Arab and Kurdish rebels opposed to Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, who has strong military help from Russia and Iran.

However, in the joint news conference after Monday's talks both leaders said there were opportunities for their countries to work together more closely.



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Russia back opposing sides.

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Image copyright AFP
Image caption The first Macron-Putin *te-te* took place in the royal splendour of Versailles

Mr Macron said he wanted France to "strengthen" its "partnership with Russia" in its fight against so-called Islamic State (IS) in Syria. He said he favoured "a democratic transition" that would "preserve the Syrian state".

But the use of chemical weapons would be a "red line" that would draw an "immediate response" from France, he added.


Mr Putin agreed that uniting against terrorism would achieve "positive results" and

Did Russia meddle in the French election?

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REUTERS

Marine Le Pen had an audience with President Putin in Moscow in March

But Mr Putin told Monday's news conference: "This doesn't mean that we somehow tried to influence the election at all... that would have been impossible as well."

He also said there was "nothing to discuss" when asked by journalists about allegations Russia has tried to meddle in foreign elections.

Before becoming president this month, Mr Macron accused Russia of pursuing "a hybrid strategy combining military intimidation and an information war".

On Monday he accused pro-Kremlin news outlets Russia Today and Sputnik of

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have been ratcheted up since pro-Russian rebels carved out a breakaway region in eastern Ukraine.

President Putin used the news conference to call for these sanctions to be lifted, saying they did not help create stability in the east.

But both leaders agreed to revive joint working groups, and to resume talks with Germany.

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Image copyright Reuters
Image caption Marine Le Pen had an audience with President Putin in Moscow in March

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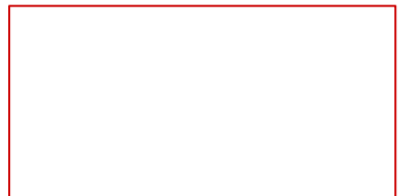
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AFP

Amnesty International activists staged a protest in front of the Eiffel Tower on Monday, calling for an end to homophobia in Chechnya

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Afterwards, Mr Macron told French media the exchange was "not innocent" and he had wanted to "show he would not make small concessions, not even symbolic ones, but also not overdo things".

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Donald Trump's handshakes with world leaders have been closely watched

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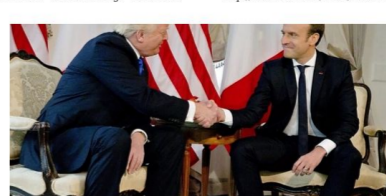
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