

France Makes Its Case as High Tech and Research Center

A key argument that French President Macron made, during his election campaign, and as a newly elected president, is that France's future economic strength lies in its development of new technologies to meet the demands and challenges of the future.

France has a passion for technology, explained by a centuries-long legacy of excellence in mathematics and engineering dating back to René Descartes. In 2017 the « Abel Prize » considered by many to be a maths equivalent of the Nobel Prize, was awarded to a Frenchman for his theory that links maths, information technology and computer science.

For Macron, this national human resource just needs to be supported and funded for France to become an international center and hub for high technology. But as a political message, calling for greater investment in « jobs of the future » and technology is not particularly unique nor necessarily credible. Events over the last year have changed that.

« Send us your researchers, entrepreneurs, and engineers... »

In June 2017 the Trump Administration withdrew the United States from the Paris Climate Agreement. Within days of the announcement, President Macron made an unprecedented video message to the American researchers, entrepreneurs and engineers working on climate change to come to France to continue their work (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pIBNqP9nZM8>). In flawless English he told this scientific and entrepreneurial group of Americans that France would welcome them as a second home. In addition to the invitation, Macron was able to assume an international mantle of leadership for himself and France by his call to « Make Our Planet Great Again ! ».

French Technology on Display

It was impossible to miss the French presence at the CES, Salon of World Tech held this January in Las Vegas.

« CES is the world's gathering place for all those who thrive on the business of consumer technologies. It has served as the proving ground for innovators and breakthrough technologies for 50 years — the global stage where next-generation innovations are introduced to the marketplace. »

French companies had more than 360 exhibits at this year's CES (British representation was less than 100) and they were second only to the Americans in number of exhibitions. In fact, President Macron had attended and prioritized this international venue when he served as Minister of Economy, Industry and Technology under the previous government, but under his administration France's corporate attendance has tripled since 2015.

Tech Giants Meet Macron and Announce Investments

As Tech company giants made their way to Davos Switzerland for this year's international economic summit...they **ALL** made a stopover...at Versailles for France's « Choose France ! » summit. Specifically designed to highlight the tax and labor changes instituted by the new Macron government this gathering was strategically held just a week before the publicity rich Davos event.



Google, Facebook, and the German software heavyweight SAP all sent their top people...and each one held highly publicized tête-à-tête meetings with Macron. From expanding their current R&D activity in France to SAP's 2 billion investment over 5 years, all the Tech companies were positive about the government changes. "There is a real sense of economic momentum in France," SAP Chief Executive Bill McDermott said in statement after meeting with Macron.

In addition, Switzerland's Novartis pharma group which in October 2017 acquired the French nuclear medicines business Advanced Accelerator Applications, used the occasion to announce 900 million euros investment in French based research and clinical trials.

The Macron government promised relief to the business community in the form of changes in employment regulations and decreased corporate taxes. It is now making its case as a welcoming and attractive location for High Tech companies. "An engineer costs three times more expensive in San Francisco than in Paris, he will probably not be better and more likely to leave. The quality, cost and loyalty of the French teams are a real asset," says Jean-David Chamboredon, a founding member and co-Chairman of the France Digital Association, which promotes digital activities in France.

Will these early successes, and interest by High Tech companies in France continue and build ? President Macron is on the offensive. And as one of the many positive articles in Les Echos closed with : « Add to that a pinch of Brexit and a good dose of Donald Trump – and France seems more attractive. »



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