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UK's 'yes or no' Brexit vote was mistake, says Emmanuel Macron

French president says UK took risk in way it let voters decide ‘very complicated subject’



The French people would probably vote to leave the EU if presented with a similar choice to the Brexit referendum, Emmanuel Macron has said, arguing that the UK had taken a big risk by asking “yes or no on a very complicated subject”.

In an interview on BBC One’s *The Andrew Marr Show*, the French president also criticised Donald Trump for calling developing countries “shitholes” and warned Theresa May her government could not cherry-pick benefits of EU membership.

Macron was interviewed during his visit to the UK earlier in the week, during which he had held talks with May. In extracts released before Sunday's broadcast, Macron said the UK could win a bespoke Brexit deal but it would not involve full single market access.

In the full interview, Macron questioned the way the UK had chosen Brexit. Asked if the French would vote to leave the EU in the same way, he said: "Yes. Probably, in a similar context. But our context was very different, so I don't want to take any bets. I would have definitely fought to win."

"But I think it is a mistake to just ask yes or no when you don't ask people how to improve the situation and to explain how to improve it."

He added: "You always take a risk when you ask in a referendum yes or no on a very complicated subject."

Any future relations the UK had with Brussels "will be by definition less deep than today", Macron said.

"The deepest possible relationship is being a member of the European Union. So you have to be realistic, and be fair with people – as you decided to leave and not be part of the single market, that's a function of the nature of the negotiation," he said.

"You can have some deeper relations than some others. For instance, we have a deeper relationship with Norway than the one we have with Canada. So it depends on the outcome of the negotiations.

But for sure – except if you change your mind – you will not be part of the single market, as you will not be part of the European Union."

Asked about Trump's "shitholes" comments – which the US president denies saying, despite several people present recounting that he did – Macron was asked if he shared the outrage of the countries so described.

"For sure. It's not a word you can use if you want precisely to build peace, developments in these countries and a respectful relationship," he said.

Macron said politicians should try to ignore Trump's Twitter outbursts as much as possible: "I think we should not overplay the situation in these tweets. It's a sort of mix between personal and political reaction."

Describing Trump as "not a classical politician", Macron said he sought to work closely with him, as he had been elected by the US people, even though they "disagree on several topics".

He was "always very direct and frank" in their chats, Macron said, adding: "Sometimes I manage to convince him, sometimes I fail."