France's Macron takes on Facebook's Zuckerberg in tech push (Update)

May 23 2018, by Angela Charlton And Sylvie Corbet

Facebook's CEO Mark Zuckerberg, arrives to meet France's President Emmanuel Macron after the "Tech for Good" Summit at the Elysee Palace in Paris, Wednesday, May 23, 2018. French President Emmanuel Macron seeks to persuade Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg and other internet giants to discuss tax and data protection issues at a Paris meeting set to focus on how they could use their global influence for the public good. (AP Photo/Francois Mori)

French President Emmanuel Macron took on Facebook CEO Mark

Zuckerberg and other internet giants Wednesday at a Paris meeting to discuss personal data protection and taxes as France pushes for tougher European regulations.

Macron welcomed Zuckerberg and the leaders of dozens of other tech companies, including Microsoft, Uber, and IBM, at a "Tech for Good" conference meant to address how they could use their global influence for the public good.

The meeting came as Facebook, Google and other online giants are increasingly seen by the public as predators that abuse personal data, avoid taxes and stifle competition.

Macron, who also met privately with Zuckerberg at the presidential Elysee palace, said beforehand that he would keep asking the Facebook co-founder to make "commitments."

"France defends the idea of tough regulations" such as a 3 percent digital tax on tech companies' gross revenue in the European Union, Macron said, adding that it's "crucial" that internet giants pay taxes. He also wants new regulations to combat extremist propaganda online and cyber-bullying.

Privacy was another issue Macron raised with Zuckerberg and the other tech executives in one-on-one meetings and at a group lunch in the presidential palace with philanthropists and politicians.

Facebook's CEO Mark Zuckerberg, right, shakes hands to IBM's President and CEO Virginia Rometty during a family picture with guests who attend the "Tech for Good" Summit at the Elysee Palace in Paris, Wednesday, May 23, 2018. (Charles Platiau,Pool via AP)

Zuckerberg came to Paris after facing tough questions Tuesday from European Union lawmakers in Brussels, where he apologized for the way the social network has been used to produce fake news and interfere in elections.

Facebook "didn't take a broad enough view of our responsibilities," he said, adding: "That was a mistake, and I'm sorry for it."

But Zuckerberg also frustrated the EU lawmakers as the testimony's setup allowed him to respond to a list of questions as he sought fit.

Macron sees himself as uniquely placed to both understand and influence the tech world. France's youngest president, Macron has championed startups and aggressively wooed technology investors.

Facebook's CEO Mark Zuckerberg, left, talks with Microsoft's CEO Satya Nadella during a family picture with guests who attend the "Tech for Good" Summit at the Elysee Palace in Paris, Wednesday, May 23, 2018. (Charles Platiau,Pool via AP)

But Macron is also one of Europe's most vocal critics of tax schemes used by companies like Facebook that deprive governments of billions of euros a year in potential revenue. And Macron has defended an aggressive new European data protection law that comes into effect this week. The so-called GDPR regulation will give Europeans more control over what companies can do with what they post, search and click.

Several companies took advantage of the meeting to announce new initiatives.

Microsoft said it would extend the new European data protection law to its clients worldwide. Google committed $100 million over the next five years to support nonprofit projects such as training in digital technologies.

Uber said it will finance insurance coverage to better protect its European drivers in case of accidents at work, serious illness, hospitalization and maternity leave. And IBM announced the creation of 1,400 new jobs by 2020 in France.

Facebook's CEO Mark Zuckerberg, right, takes a selfie with Tony Elumelu, Chairman of United Bank of Africa, during a family picture with guests who attend the "Tech for Good" Summit at the Elysee Palace in Paris, Wednesday, May 23, 2018. (Charles Platiau,Pool via AP)

Tencent, China's biggest tech company by market value, presented online education programs to bring art classes and other resources to rural students around China, and projects to dispel rumors online and teach users to be more discerning.

French Prime Minister Edouard Philippe called Wednesday's announcements "a turning point for companies that were navigating somehow on the edge" and are now "choosing to bear their responsibilities."

It's unclear, however, whether Zuckerberg's Europe trip will lead to shifts in Facebook practices. And concerns remain that technology companies will abuse their unprecedented power over consumers, notably as new innovations emerge.

Macron, Zuckerberg and others are expected to attend the Vivatech gadget show in Paris on Thursday.

Facebook's CEO Mark Zuckerberg listens to French President Emmanuel Macron after a family picture with guests of the "Tech for Good" Summit at the Elysee Palace in Paris, France, Wednesday May 23, 2018. (Charles Platiau/Pool photo via AP)

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