

France, Japan back Renault-Nissan alliance despite Ghosn case

April 23 2019



It wasn't clear whether the Ghosn scandal was addressed at talks between French President Emmanuel Macron and Japan's premier Shinzo Abe in Paris

French President Emmanuel Macron and Japanese Prime Minister

Shinzo Abe on Tuesday pledged their backing for the alliance of car giants Renault and Nissan, despite the strains caused by the arrest of the alliance's former boss Carlos Ghosn.

Paris and Tokyo insist their relations are based on a "special partnership" rich in economic and military cooperation.

But the charges of alleged financial misconduct against Ghosn, a French national, have introduced a tricky ingredient since his initial arrest in November.

Abe held talks and lunch with Macron on the first stop of a major tour of Europe and North America to press the priorities of Japan's presidency of the G20 ahead of the Osaka summit in late June.

But the Ghosn case loomed large, with the once-revered auto tycoon hit with fresh charges on Monday in his fourth indictment.

Macron and Abe indicated that the case should not affect the strategic alliance between Renault and Nissan, which is backed up by a cross-shareholding and has existed since 1999, the Elysee Palace said.

The two leaders "reaffirmed their attachment to the Renault-Nissan alliance which is going to celebrate its 20th anniversary and is a major symbol of industrial cooperation between France and Japan," it said in a statement.

In regards to the Ghosn case, France respected the independence of the Japanese judiciary but was "very vigilant concerning the respect of the rights and integrity of Mr Ghosn as a French citizen".

The Elysee emphasised that like any French citizen, Ghosn had a right to the presumption of innocence and consular protection.

A Japanese official did not immediately confirm if the Ghosn case had been raised at the talks but said it was up to the French side to bring it up.

If pressed by Macron, Abe would "give a general explanation of how our judicial authority works. It works according to due process," said the official.

Renault, Nissan and the third player in the alliance, Mitsubishi Motors, had in March created a new management structure headed by Renault Chairman Jean-Dominique Senard.

In a complicated management structure, Renault—15-percent of which is held by the French state—owns a 43-percent stake in Nissan.

The Japanese official meanwhile said that French-Japanese cooperation needed to be particularly tight to ensure "synergy" as Japan heads the G20 and France the G7.

Joint maritime exercises were also planned in the Indian Ocean with France's Charles de Gaulle aircraft carrier, the Japanese official said, although it the vessels was not expected to go to Japan.

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Citation: France, Japan back Renault-Nissan alliance despite Ghosn case (2019, April 23) retrieved 30 June 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2019-04-france-japan-renault-nissan-alliance-ghosn.html>

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