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MACRON HURLS CHALLENGE TO EUROPE: REFORM OR DECLINE

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By Michel Rose ATHENS (Reuters) □ Europe risks subjugation to China and the United States unless it becomes more sovereign and democratic, French President Emmanuel Macron said on Thursday in a speech underlining the scale of his ambition to reform the European Union. In a speech delivered symbolically on the Athens hill where ancient Greeks gave birth to democracy a few thousand years ago, Macron, a fervent europhile, said the continent would face its demise without a radical overhaul of its governance. In order not to be ruled by bigger powers such as the Chinese and the Americans, I believe in a European sovereignty that allows us to defend ourselves and exist, Macron said at the top of the hill of Pnyx, with the spectacular backdrop of the Parthenon temple in the sunset. Are you afraid of this European ambition? Elected four months ago, the 39-year-old leader wants a giant leap in European cooperation which, at the economic level, would see the creation of a euro zone budget, finance minister and parliament. Macron said more democratic institutions would help respond to a populist wave which has seen the rise of far-right leaders such as Marine Le Pen, whom he defeated in May, and helped fuel the successful Brexit campaign which led to Britains vote to leave the EU. He said he would unveil a road map for the EU in a few weeks, after Germanys Sept. 24 election, and wanted European leaders to agree before the end of the year to launch public debates in the first half of 2018 during which citizens will be able to discuss their vision for the bloc. I dont want a new European treaty discussed behind closed doors, in the corridors of Brussels, Berlin or Paris, Macron said. These debates □ so-called democratic conventions, which he proposed during his French presidential campaign □ would help lay the foundations of Europe for the next 10 to 15 years. Macron also said he backed the idea of giving Britains 78 seats in the European Parliament to pan-EU representatives elected by all of the EUs citizens after Brexit.

(Reporting by Michel Rose; Editing by Mark Trevelyan)

Kaynak/Source: