
FREE TRADERS BUCKLE UP FOR FRENCH EU PRESIDENCY

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France's presidency of the Council of the European Union is still six months away, but the cries of alarm are already going up about what will happen to trade policy from January, with the French finding it hard to shake off their reputation as the bloc's arch protectionists and dirigistes.

Diplomats from liberal, free-trading nations say they now face a race against the clock to try to push through as many files as possible under the Slovenian presidency. Nobody expects anything to happen on trade once the French are in charge, said one national official in charge of trade policy.

After all, President Emmanuel Macron is hardly likely to want to upset French farmers by throwing his political weight behind trade deals with agricultural powerhouses like New Zealand, Australia and Latin America just as he faces re-election in April. A free trade agenda could lose him votes.

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