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French President Emmanuel Macron said Wednesday he would push to have the right to abortion and defence of the environment added to the EU's Charter of Fundamental Rights, as his country takes on the bloc's rotating presidency.

"We must update this charter to be more explicit on protection of the environment, the recognition of the right to abortion," Macron told lawmakers at the European Parliament in Strasbourg, eastern France.

"Let us open up this debate freely with our fellow citizens... to breathe new life into the pillar of law that forges this Europe of strong values," he said.

The call to enshrine a woman's right to abortion in the European Union's charter, ratified by member states in 2000, comes just a day after the parliament elected Malta's Roberta Metsola, a staunch abortion opponent, as its president.

Macron nonetheless congratulated Metsola on her election in his opening remarks, acknowledging her belief in "our Europe, this Europe sustained by the values that bind and unite us."

He also urged lawmakers to accept "this task of ours, and surely of our generation, to respond profoundly to the renewal of its promises."

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