

The French Elections

Internal and external policy impacts



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TURKEY - GAZIANTEP
info@jusoor.co
www.jusoor.co

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Preface

Winning the second round of elections in France by Emmanuel Macron, was announced on 7/5/2017 after making a landslide victory against his rival Marine Le Pen with 66.1 % to 33.9%.. These results showed great differences between the first round of elections (which favoured Le Pen) and the second one.

Macron's (39 years old) winning, has a great importance because he is the youngest president to take the lead in the history of France after Napoleon Bonaparte, also first one to be chosen away from modern parties which emerged in 1958.

Macron represents an exceptional situation in the French political setting because he doesn't have any experience in policy-making on the contrary of previous presidents (well-known of spending decades in political domain prior to their standing for elections), Macron didn't get involved in the political setting until he became an advisor to François Hollande five years earlier and minister of economy between 2014 and 2016 later!.

On the other hand, Le Pen advancement to second round against rest of parties candidates, made a turning point in the role and interactivity of Extreme Right represented by the National Progressive Front in France. Even though the Extreme Right has lost the elections, it turned this party into a tough opponent in the political equation and there is a possibility of gaining a broad representation in the upcoming parliamentary elections.

Moreover, the abstention rate is considered a remarkable indicator in the elections at which reached 25.44% meaning that quarter of voters didn't find any of candidates as their representatives.

As of externally, Macron is considered as a president who cares more about economic aspect than any other issues in France, therefore, there may be a link between Macron's policy and several affairs related to gains and losses of economy. Based on what said previously, most of Macron's anticipated attitudes and moves to Middle East affairs in particular, could be linked with the interest of the whole European Union.

The conduct of first and second round of Electoral process

First round

This round witnessed a rivalry among 11 presidential candidates, most notably: Marine Le Pen (The National Progressive Front candidate) along with Emmanuel Macron (candidate of Straight Ahead Party), Francois Fillon (candidate of republicans' Center-Right Party), Benoît Hamon (candidate of Socialist Party) and *Jean-Luc Mélenchon* (candidate of Unbowed France Party) and others.

Opinion polls indicated that Macron and Le Pen were advancing with equal opportunities in qualifying to second round with a tough rivalry from Fillon⁽¹⁾.

Macron's election manifesto has increased the chances of winning the first round because it adopted poverty and middle-class affairs, carried out economic reforms for unemployed and the previously mentioned classes, harmonized between protection and freedom. Macron's manifesto was focusing on developing economical aspects through France role in EU.

Le Pen in return, was pursuing a completely different manifesto comparing to Macron as she focused on France exiting EU and applying taxes on imported goods also suspension of Schengen convention to face the influx of refugees to France, restricting their choices to enter France. The speech of Right Party candidate has met a huge approval from French people who suffered lately from terrorist attacks that undermined the sense of settlement and security⁽²⁾.

As for the rest of notable candidates' speeches and election manifestos, they were supporting either Macron or Le Pen speeches with great chances of making an advancement in the first round.

Results of first round put four candidates in the front with a tight race:

23.75 % for Macron – 21.53 % for Le Pen – 19.91 % for Fillon – 19.64 for *Jean-Luc Mélenchon*.

With these figures Macron and Le Pen continued to the second round. It was notable that both Fillon and Mélenchon were urging their supporters

to vote for Macron in the second round which contributed mainly in supporting and helping Macrons to win⁽³⁾.

The second round

Each candidate attempted to adhere to their agendas promising French people of better future. Le Pen fuelled the mounting of her Right agenda and focused on counter-terrorism along with the fight of immigration, a common agenda with Macron was, supporting the unemployed and forgotten people through taking economic measures allowing France to be free from EU economic restrictions.

A lot of French however, held demonstrations against Le Pen and Extreme Right policies, expressing their categorical rejection to Le Pen assuming presidency⁽⁴⁾.

As for Macron, he stressed on the necessity of supporting French economy by intensifying cooperation with EU and touched upon counter-terrorism issue represented by ISIL through cooperation with international coalition. From what mentioned previously, there is an indicator showing that Macron is more open to France Foreign Relations than Marine Le Pen whose agendas indicates to turn inward and isolation.

Handling Middle East Issues during the elections

Each candidate gave a priority to Middle East issues, migrants and Muslims in France, turning the election (one way or another) into a poll towards Islam and Muslims.

Macron rejected to condemn Islam, stressing that “no religion is a problem for France also showing that his country was wrong in targeting Muslims unfairly sometimes and it should be a neutral state (which is the main core of Secularism), allowing each person to practice the religion with dignity”.

Macron showed (during a visit to Algeria) in his campaign, a notable attitude considering France’s acts in Algeria were a crime against humanity, causing a considerable controversy against him.

Macron pledged to examine asylum applications to France within six months after assuming the presidency.

These positions played a role in achieving popularity for Macron among French Muslims or Muslims migrants in France also, made a lot of electors to vote for him especially in the second round during his rivalry with Le Pen (well-known of her inimical towards Muslims and migrants).

Concerning his attitude towards Turkey, he called upon supporting his allies in EU to handle and find ways to deal with the issue of Turkey joining EU.

As for Syria, the newly elected president upheld interference against Al-Assad regime after using chemical weapon in Khan Sheikhoun, confirming that the solution will not be military. Moreover, he suggested to work indirectly with allies to determine a solution for Syrian conflict, contrary to the opinion of Iran and Russia, giving an indicator that France may not play any active role against Russian actions in Syria.

Macron considered Bashar Al-Assad as a dictator who committed crimes and couldn't be equaled with rebels also, added that "peace can't be implemented without just". He emphasized that "France will not hold talks with Al-Assad however, it's possible to hold talks with Syrian government representatives, deeming the claims of Al-Assad protecting Christians of the East, is a diplomatic and moral error because it's leading to have a dialogue with a bloodlust dictator" the thing that shows France as a country maintaining its stance position against Syrian regime ⁽⁵⁾.

However, Marine Le Pen has a significant different position by showing Islam as a threat to culture and social fabric in France. She demanded to ban both Islamic Brotherhoods from entering the country and wearing veils along with "Burkini" or so-called "legal swimsuits" in public places. Moreover, considering French colony of Algeria in the past was positive act.

As for migrants, she takes a firm stance calling upon suspending the regular migration process in addition to, tightening asylum procedures and reunification also, demanded to expel aliens after committing crimes in France.

On the other hand, Le Pen is on the same page with Macron concerning the position towards Qatar as she said: "foreign support to terrorists from Qatar must be stopped, which brings up a critical question: Should we stay as allies to Qatar? Which means that nature of relationship with the Arabian

Gulf to be reconsidered, particularly after their demand of rapprochement with Russia and Iran concerning issues in the region.

From another prospective, she assured that keeping Al-Assad regime ruling along with supporting it fighting terrorism, is better than ISIL taking over in Syria, deeming that severing diplomatic ties with Syrian regime was a big mistake expressing her astonishment from USA strikes against Al-Assad military airport after chemical attack by Syrian regime forces on Khan Sheikhoun ⁽⁶⁾. It seems that if Le Pen were to assume presidency, she would provide more international momentum on the behalf of Syrian regime, forging an alliance with Russia, the thing that affects negatively on EU and other countries disapproving Syrian regime actions.

Challenges of domestic policy

It's expected that Macron will face so many obstacles, most notably the divide in the French society as the abstention rate along with those who voted (both parties are eligible to vote) to Le Pen, has reached 60% thus, Macron should work on building trust between him and French people through fulfilling his electoral promises especially the economic ones.

Moreover, his relation with other political parties in France is another obstacle because the upcoming parliamentary elections will be a significant challenge for Macron during his task of claiming enough seats in the parliament however, expectations indicate that chances will be equal between major powers and parties in the country, which means that Macron's future resolutions might be undermined by parliament in case he couldn't form alliances with socialists and republicans who supported him in the second round of elections.

Popularity of Extreme Right (whose candidate has lost the elections) is another challenge for him because votes were an obvious indicator of representation for this party contrary to the situation in Britain.

The future of internal and external policies

Macron gained external encouragement and support after vote count of first round sometimes outside of boundaries of diplomatic conventions. Jean-Claude Juncker, President of European commission congratulated Macron,

wishing him luck in the second round of elections. Sigmar Hartmut Gabriel, Foreign minister of Germany declared that he was sure of Macron's winning and expressed his delight.

Notably, Barack Obama (previous president of USA) reached Macron (as candidate) wishing him luck in the second round on 20/4/2017, also he recorded a video message showing his support to French people and Macron ⁽⁷⁾.

The foreign support has contributed in increasing Macron's supporters' trust knowing that he didn't assume any official position before, the thing that gave a positive indicator about the upcoming ties between EU and France.

Even though there is a huge difference between Macron's and Trump's political agenda, business sector backgrounds of two newly elected president's may aid them to build ties based on common interests and outcomes. The two presidents will meet for the first time in Brussels on the margins of NATO leaders' summit on 25/5/2017. However, Macron's vital area, is EU (who comprehends well) and expect to focus on enhancing France position in order to compete for leadership position. Concerning the rest of foreign issues, it's expected that main responsibility in French policy formulation is going to be upon foreign minister shoulder due to Macron's limited experience ⁽⁸⁾.

As for the situation in Syria, Macron is expected to continue in the same approach of his predecessor (François Hollande) through an advanced role against Al-Assad and his international allies. On 5/5/2017, foreign minister of Syrian government, Walid Al Muallem, expressed the Syrian regime disappointment with Macron's assuming presidency in a press conference, avoiding any expected welcoming protocol also, pointing out that his country doesn't rely neither on France nor on Europe ⁽⁹⁾.

Moreover, under president Macron, no future improvement in French-Russian ties is expected, who is not on the same page with Moscow about a number of main issues contrary to Le Pen who was seeking to build tight ties with Putin.

On 5/5/2017, Macron's campaign was under a massive electronic breakthrough (it's thought that the cyberattack is conducted by Russians in a deja vu to what happened to Democratic Party before American elections)

⁽¹⁰⁾. It seems that Macron will start his foreign policy towards Russia with escalation which was obvious through his foreign ministry advisor statement after Macron's winning "Macron administration will respond to Russian cyberattacks or any other kind of these actions" ⁽¹¹⁾.

As for Middle East, Macron is improving relationships with Arab Maghreb States (which have a close relationships with France). Macron's visit to Algeria (during his campaign) and the statement of "France colonization of Algeria was a crime against humanity", made a good gesture however, his approval of Algerian historic request of confirming his statement was out of question.

Concerning relationships with Turkey, France and EU policies are expected to be in line however, Macron (whose foreign policy is established on chances and risks) rejects to close the door on Turkey's membership in EU, considering this process as a great chance for Europe and may help New France to play a vital role of mediator between Turkey and EU ⁽¹²⁾.

Margins

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جسور للدراسات
JUSOOR for STUDIES

Kavalik Mah. Fevzi Çakmak CD.
Sevil Apt. N11 D8, 27060
Gaziantep - Turkey
+90 537 558 5821

info@jusoor.co
www.jusoor.co



@jusoorstudies