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France's 2017 Presidential Election: In Brief

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Overview

French voters will elect France's next president in a runoff election scheduled for May 7, 2017. They will choose between the top two finishers of the presidential election's first round, held on April 23—Emmanuel Macron of the centrist *En Marche!* (Moving Forward) political movement and Marine Le Pen of the far-right, nationalist *Front National* (National Front).

The presidential campaign has exposed apparent wide-scale public dissatisfaction both with the presidency of outgoing President François Hollande (of the center-left Socialist Party) and, more broadly, with a French political establishment perceived by many as self-entitled and increasingly out of touch with the French electorate. This is the first time in the history of France's Fifth Republic (established in 1958) that the top two presidential candidates represent political parties outside the mainstream.

The presidential candidates' calls to uproot a French political system long dominated by one large center-right and one large center-left party appear to be resonating with an electorate that has experienced a decade of economic stagnation and a series of terrorist attacks that claimed the lives of more than 240 people over the past two years. Consequently, many analysts in France and elsewhere maintain that the 2017 election could have far-reaching implications for the French political system, French society, and even the future of the European Union (EU).

France, which is one of Europe's most globally engaged and militarily capable countries, is a close ally of the United States, especially in confronting common security challenges such as Islamist terrorism. Neither of the presidential candidates has explicitly advocated a significant change in France's relations with the United States. However, while Macron has criticized President Donald Trump and expressed unease about Trump's views on Europe, Le Pen advocates a nationalist policy approach that is considered similar to that of the U.S. President.

Despite some apparent similarities between Le Pen's and President Trump's policy approaches, Le Pen's commitment to a nationalist foreign policy predicated on distancing France from the EU and NATO could have significant implications for U.S.-French relations. In this regard, Members of Congress who favor continuity in U.S.-French relations could stress the importance of stability in France's relations with the EU and NATO. By contrast, others may view the election as an opportunity to explore a new model for bilateral relations, less connected to NATO and the EU.

The First-Round Election: Results and Main Candidates

Eleven candidates competed in the presidential election's first round on April 23, 2017. The top five finishers were Macron with 24% of the vote; Le Pen with 21.3%; François Fillon of the establishment center-right party, *Les Républicains*, with 20%; Jean-Luc Mélenchon of the far-left *France Insoumise* (Unbowed France) with 19.6%; and Benoît Hamon of the Socialist Party with 6.4%.¹ (See text box on the "Top Presidential Candidates and Their Platforms," below, for more on the candidates and their policies.)

¹ For complete results from the election's first round, see French Ministry of the Interior, *Election Présidentielle 2017*, at http://elections.interieur.gouv.fr/presidentielle-2017/FE.html?utm_source=POLITICO.EU&utm_campaign=1b415992f3-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2017_04_26&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_10959edeb5-1b415992f3-189139529.

Voter turnout for the election's first round was about 77%, slightly lower than the 79% who voted in the first round of the 2012 election, but still higher than some analysts expected, given apparent widespread dissatisfaction with the political establishment.

Exit polls from the first round and the geographic distribution of support for the top two candidates suggest that Macron received more electoral support than Le Pen in urban areas and among individuals with higher income levels. Le Pen, who achieved the highest vote total in her party's history, received strong support in more economically depressed areas in eastern France as well as in southern France, where the National Front has strong roots. Exit polls suggest that Le Pen was the most popular candidate among lower-wage earners, followed closely by Mélenchon. Exit polls also indicate that Le Pen received more support than her competitors among younger voters, aged 18-34, as well as voters aged 35-49.²

Until mid-January 2017, polls predicted that François Fillon of the center-right *Les Républicains* would convincingly beat Le Pen in a second-round runoff. However, Fillon's campaign was beset by controversy over payments he made to family members while he was in parliament. Despite Fillon's failure to advance to the runoff election, some analysts maintain that *Les Républicains* could be favored to win a majority in a legislative election scheduled for June 2017 (see "Looking Ahead: June 2017 Legislative Election" below).

Many analysts view the poor electoral result of Benoît Hamon as an indication of broader challenges facing the Socialist Party, long the dominant political organ of the French left. While past Socialist Party leaders have managed to maintain support from both the centrist and left wings of the party, the party splintered under President Hollande. Key ministers in the Hollande government endorsed their former colleague Macron over their party's chosen candidate. The far-left candidate Jean-Luc Mélenchon appears to have gained support from the left wing of the Socialist Party, from which Hamon received most of his support in the party's primary election.

² For a survey of exit poll data, see "Macron vs Le Pen: The Voters they Attract," *Financial Times*, April 25, 2017.

The Top Presidential Candidates and Their Platforms

Emmanuel Macron, *En Marche!* (Moving Forward). Macron is a 39-year-old former investment banker who had no political experience before Hollande appointed him economy minister in 2014. He was the chief architect of Hollande's efforts to liberalize the labor market and deregulate some sectors of the economy. In August 2016, Macron resigned from government to lead his new centrist political movement, *En Marche!*. Macron says he is neither of the left nor of the right. His campaign has focused almost exclusively on his plans to restore economic growth and reduce unemployment. Macron is a strong proponent of free trade and the EU. He has at times blamed France's economic woes on "insiders" who enjoy labor protections and other privileges at the expense of "outsiders," mostly the young and the poor. Macron's youth and lack of political experience initially caused many to doubt his staying power.

Marine Le Pen, *Front National* (National Front). As France's two main parties have struggled, the French political establishment has expressed alarm at the rise of the nationalist, far-right, anti-immigrant, anti-EU National Front. In recent years, the National Front has gained in popularity under the leadership of Le Pen, who has worked to distance the party from a reputation for caustic xenophobia and anti-Semitism. Her campaign is predicated on countering what she characterizes as the "two totalitarianisms" of economic globalization and Islamic fundamentalism. She proposes a statist economic policy of "intelligent protectionism" and a crackdown on immigration and Islam's influence in French society. Le Pen has pledged to withdraw France from the EU's common currency, the euro, and to hold a referendum on EU membership within six months of taking office. She also proposes withdrawing France from NATO's integrated command structure. Le Pen is openly supportive of Russian President Vladimir Putin and has said Crimea is rightfully Russian territory. Analysts view Le Pen's economic policies as an attempt to draw support from disaffected left-wing voters. She also has advanced proposals to reduce carbon emissions and increase renewable energy use, another apparent effort to broaden her appeal.

Le Pen is the daughter of National Front founder and long-time party leader Jean-Marie Le Pen, who has in the past been convicted of anti-Semitic crimes. The elder Le Pen sent shock waves through the French political establishment during the 2002 presidential election when he beat the Socialist Party candidate in the first round of voting before losing in the final runoff election. Marine Le Pen and the National Front formally expelled the elder Le Pen from the party in 2015, after a string of anti-Semitic comments.

François Fillon, *Les Républicains*. Fillon is a veteran conservative politician who was prime minister under former President Nicolas Sarkozy. He represented the more conservative wing of his party, with strong support among Catholics and other social conservatives. Fillon's victory in the party's primary in late 2016 was a surprise. He advocated significant cuts in public spending, including cutting 500,000 civil service jobs. He also called for an end to economic sanctions on Russia and a more cooperative relationship with Moscow. Fillon was the prohibitive favorite to win the presidency but was unable to overcome negative fallout from revelations that he paid his wife close to €1 million in public funds as his parliamentary assistant, even though she has publicly acknowledged performing little, if any, work in that capacity.

Jean-Luc Mélenchon, *France Insoumise* (Unbowed France). Mélenchon is a former member of the left wing of the Socialist Party who broke from the party in 2008 to found the Left Party. He founded the *France Insoumise* movement in early 2016 and says he ran in 2017 "outside the frame of political parties." Mélenchon's platform focused on wealth redistribution and an end to fiscal austerity. He advocated a reduction in the workweek from 35 hours to 32 hours, and a drastic increase in public spending. Similar to Le Pen, Mélenchon is critical of free trade and called for a renegotiation of France's relations with the EU to end constraints on government spending.

Benoît Hamon, *Socialist Party*. Hamon, a staunch member of the Socialist Party's left wing, was the surprise victor of the party's January primary election. He resigned as education minister in the Hollande government after only four months, in protest of what he viewed as Hollande's rightward shift. Hamon called for a universal basic monthly income of about €750 (about \$800) for all French residents, introduction of a 32-hour workweek, a tax on robots, and legalization of marijuana.

The May 7 Runoff Election: Context and Possible Outcomes

Macron's and Le Pen's success in the election's first round was widely viewed as an unprecedented rebuke by French voters of France's established center-left and center-right political parties. Indeed, ahead of the first round, both candidates focused largely on criticizing and setting themselves apart from an unpopular political establishment. The final stage of the presidential campaign is expected to focus more exclusively on their significantly divergent

political visions and policy platforms. Regardless of who prevails, many analysts maintain that the election has already shaken the French political landscape in ways that could have major longer-term implications for France's political system.

As of April 27, 2017, opinion polls were predicting a resounding win for Macron in the May 7, 2017, runoff election, with about 64% of the vote.³ The projected rise in electoral support for Macron is expected to come largely from voters who are considered to be more opposed to Le Pen than supportive of Macron, however. In the days following the election's first round, the leaders of all of France's main political parties, with the notable exception of Mélenchon, called on their supporters to vote for Macron, primarily in order to oppose Le Pen. The staunch opposition to Le Pen is rooted in a long-standing public perception of the National Front as a fringe, anti-Semitic, xenophobic party. Nevertheless, Le Pen's success in the first round could be a testament to her efforts to transform the party's image.

Despite Macron's strong poll numbers, some analysts point to several factors that could boost Le Pen's electoral fortunes. First, Le Pen could capitalize on the fact that more than 40% of voters in the first round supported candidates who, like Le Pen, are critical of the EU and the kinds of liberal economic reforms espoused by Macron. Mélenchon's refusal to explicitly endorse Macron (Mélenchon has, however, voiced clear opposition to Le Pen) has fueled expectations that significant numbers of Mélenchon voters could either abstain or vote for Le Pen. Le Pen could also benefit from Macron supporters' apparent relative lack of loyalty to their candidate. According to exit polls, 54% of Macron voters said he was their preferred candidate rather than a tactical choice, the lowest number of all the candidates. In contrast, Le Pen is considered to have more reliable base support, with 80% actively supporting her for president.⁴

Looking Ahead: June 2017 Legislative Election

Analysts point out that whoever wins the presidential election could face a major challenge in a two-round election to the French parliament's National Assembly scheduled to take place on June 10 and June 17, 2017.⁵ Le Pen's National Front currently has only two representatives in the Assembly, and Macron's *En Marche!* has none (the party was formed in 2016, after the last parliamentary elections). The French parliament is relatively weak compared to the presidency, but its approval is nonetheless needed to support the government, and to pass major legislation and the budget. With little-to-no base in the institution on which to build, both the National Front and *En Marche!* could struggle to win the number of seats in the National Assembly necessary to pass legislation and avoid parliamentary gridlock.

Both Macron and Le Pen say that their parties will compete in each of the National Assembly's 577 constituencies. In the event that the new president's party fails to achieve a parliamentary majority, she or he would likely be compelled to appoint a prime minister who has the backing of the majority party or coalition of parties in the National Assembly. Such a governing arrangement, where the president and the prime minister represent different political parties, is

³ Poll data in this section are taken from the *Financial Times*' regularly updated survey of French opinion polls, accessed on April 27, 2017. See "French Election Poll Tracker," *Financial Times*, updated regularly, at <https://ig.ft.com/sites/france-election/polls/>.

⁴ "Macron vs Le Pen: The Voters they Attract," *Financial Times*, April 25, 2017.

⁵ France has a bicameral parliament, composed of the 577-member National Assembly (lower house) and the 348-member Senate (upper house). The National Assembly is considered the more powerful and politically important of the two bodies. The National Assembly's members are directly elected by constituency, whereas senators are elected indirectly, by designated officials.

referred to in France as “cohabitation.” Based on assessments of the three periods of cohabitation in France since 1958, as well as additional political factors, most analysts agree that the arrangement could limit the president’s ability to advance an ambitious policy agenda.

Key Campaign Issues

As noted above, much of the initial presidential campaign focused on addressing public fatigue with, or even disapproval of, the French political establishment. In the campaign’s final weeks Macron and Le Pen both have sought to frame the election less as a choice between traditional left and right political parties and more as a choice between Macron’s globally oriented, economically liberal outlook versus Le Pen’s nationalist, anti-EU, antiglobalization outlook.

Chief among the issues being debated by the candidates are the French economy and plans to restore economic growth and reduce unemployment. Much of the debate on the economy has centered on Le Pen’s criticisms of economic liberalism and globalization.

A second key issue, which has been less contentious, is counterterrorism. Macron and Le Pen both advocate maintaining or even strengthening counterterrorism policies that grant law enforcement and intelligence agencies robust authorities to detain and monitor terrorist suspects. However, the campaign has also brought to the fore more contentious debates about the role of Muslims and Islam in French society.

Finally, France’s role in Europe and as a member of the EU has been debated. Le Pen advocates a drastic renegotiation, or even break, with the 28-member bloc and an exit from its currency union. In contrast, Macron argues that France must work to strengthen the EU and deepen European integration.

The Economy

Perhaps the key policy concern for French voters is the state of the country’s economy. Although the French economy remains strong—it is the world’s fifth-largest economy and the second-largest economy in the Eurozone, after Germany—it has yet to fully recover from the global economic downturn of 2008-2009. Analysts underscore that France’s current economic troubles did not originate with Hollande; the economy has averaged below 1% growth since 2008.⁶ Unemployment is just under 10% and close to 26% for those under age 25.

Le Pen’s, and Mélenchon’s, popularity appears to reflect growing concerns among French voters about perceived economic and social injustices resulting from a globalized economy, market liberalization, and free trade. Le Pen, like Mélenchon, advocates statist economic policies that she says are intended to address the negative effects of globalization. She has called for curbs on free-trade agreements and foreign ownership of companies in France and for increased state intervention to support the economy and create jobs.

On the other side, Macron defends economic liberalism and free markets as essential for boosting economic growth, though he also has stressed the need to ensure that economic benefits are shared by all. He advocates structural reforms that would increase labor market flexibility and deregulate markets. He also argues that the government must reduce public spending, which, at about 57% of gross domestic product (GDP), is the highest in the Eurozone. By contrast, Le Pen’s

⁶ After GDP growth of 2% in 2011, the economy grew by 0.2% of GDP in 2013, 0.7% of GDP in 2013, 0.2% of GDP in 2014, and 1.2% of GDP in 2015 and 2016. The Economist Intelligence Unit, *Country Report: France*, March 2017.

proposed economic policies suggest that fiscal consolidation would not be a priority, though the potential effects of her policies on growth and unemployment are subject to much debate.

Should Macron win the presidency, he likely would have to contend with strong public opposition to spending cuts and economic reforms. As Hollande embarked on a series of structural economic reforms during the second half of his presidency, he faced widespread and occasionally violent protests from unions, students, and other powerful interest groups.

Islamist Terrorism and Muslim Integration

Over the past two years, France has suffered at least 14 terrorist attacks, in which at least 240 people have been killed and more than 600 injured.⁷ Most recently, on April 20, 2017—three days before the first-round election—an assailant killed one police officer and wounded two others on one of Paris's main shopping thoroughfares, the Champs Élysées. Although some of these attacks appear to have been “lone wolf” attacks carried out by individuals acting alone but inspired by Islamist propaganda, others were perpetrated by individuals who were trained by and/or received direct support from terrorist organizations such as the Islamic State (also known as ISIS or ISIL). The Islamic State has claimed responsibility for the April 20, 2017, attack, though the extent of the group's involvement has yet to be confirmed.

French governments have long viewed Islamist terrorist organizations such as Al Qaeda and, more recently, the Islamic State as the chief security threat facing the country. However, coordinated attacks in Paris in November 2015 that killed 130 people prompted a major escalation in what President Hollande characterizes as a “war” against the Islamic State.⁸

Three Most Deadly Terrorist Attacks Since 2015

- In January 2015, three terrorists killed 17 people in three related attacks in Paris that targeted the satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo*, police officers, and a kosher supermarket. The perpetrators were all French citizens and had each been under state surveillance at various times prior to the attacks. At least one of the attackers reportedly spent time in Yemen with members of Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, and another pledged allegiance to the Islamic State.
- On November 13, 2015, coordinated terrorist attacks in Paris left at least 130 people dead and more than 350 injured at six locations throughout the city. The attacks constituted the deadliest-ever terrorist incident on French soil. At least six of the reportedly nine or more perpetrators were French citizens (the other identified attackers were Belgian citizens); most if not all of the attackers reportedly had spent time with the Islamic State in Syria, and at least two previously had been under state surveillance.
- On July 14, 2016, a Tunisian citizen living in France killed 84 people and injured 202 when he drove a 19-ton truck into a crowd during National Day celebrations in Nice. Although the Islamic State claimed the attacker acted on its behalf, the perpetrator reportedly was self-radicalized a relatively short time before the attack and was previously unknown to intelligence authorities.

Source: “Paris Attacks: Who Were the Attackers,” BBC News, at <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-34832512>.

Despite Hollande's unpopularity, his government's general approach to terrorism, focused on bolstering law enforcement and intelligence budgets and granting broad authority to detain and monitor suspects, is supported by a significant majority of French voters. Most notably, voters

⁷ For more on recent Islamist terrorist attacks in Europe, see CRS In Focus IF10561, *Terrorism in Europe*, by (name redacted) and Carmyn A. Chapman; and CRS Insight IN10209, *European Security and Islamist Terrorism*, by (name redacted) and (name redacted)

⁸ France in the United States: Embassy of France in Washington, DC, “Speech by the President of the Republic Before a Joint Session of Parliament,” November 16, 2015, <http://ambafrance-us.org/spip.php?article7185>.

appear to support a government-declared state of emergency that has been in effect since the November 2015 attacks.⁹ The state of emergency grants law enforcement officials expanded authorities to search, seize, and detain terrorist suspects indefinitely and without a judicial warrant.

Of the top presidential candidates, only Mélenchon said he would lift the state of emergency, which he contends allows law enforcement to unfairly target innocent citizens. Le Pen has advocated more aggressive counterterrorism and counter-radicalization policies, focused on curbing the influence of Islam in French society and further prohibiting religious practices deemed incompatible with French norms. Although Le Pen's main opponents, including Macron, all have criticized her condemnation of Islam and her calls to curb immigration drastically, these criticisms have not been a centerpiece of their campaigns.

Analysts view the relative lack of robust campaign debate on counterterrorism and the role of Islam in French society as a reflection of broader public fear following the attacks of the past two years. Nonetheless, many advocates for French Muslims, and some counterterrorism analysts, have criticized what they view as a heavy-handed, law enforcement-centric approach to these issues. Among other things, they argue that to prevent radicalization effectively the government must do more to better integrate the estimated 5-6 million Muslims in France (about 8% of the total population) into French society and to reverse the significant socioeconomic disparities between "native" French citizens and those of North African and/or Muslim descent.

Those who criticize the treatment of Muslims in France tend to argue that many policies adopted in the name of France's secularist values, including restricting the wearing of head scarves and banning the full face veil, may serve to further alienate Muslims who already feel disenfranchised. Some critics also argue that stringent new counterterrorism laws may increase a sense of discrimination and further impede efforts to better integrate French Muslims.¹⁰

Foreign and Defense Policy and Relations with the EU and NATO

Both Le Pen and Macron assert that they would seek to maintain France's strong diplomatic and military capabilities. However, Le Pen says she would seek to drastically renegotiate France's relations with the EU or seek to leave the bloc altogether, thus calling into question a longtime pillar of French foreign policy. Le Pen has also said she would withdraw France from NATO's integrated military command structure, as was the case before 2009.

Relations with the EU

Le Pen, who has been a member of the European Parliament since 2004, is an ardent critic of the EU and its common currency, the euro, which she views as infringements on national sovereignty. As noted above, she has said she would drop the euro and would hold a referendum on exiting the EU within six months of taking office unless she was able to drastically renegotiate the terms of French membership. Mélenchon also argued that France should leave the EU unless it can negotiate an end to EU fiscal policies that call for low budget deficits and low levels of public debt. By contrast, throughout the campaign, Macron has offered strong support for the EU and

⁹ Just before the July 14, 2016, terrorist attack in Nice, Hollande signaled that he was planning to lift the state of emergency (which originally was imposed for three months, but has been extended repeatedly). These plans were abandoned after the Nice attack.

¹⁰ See, for example, Scott Sayare, "Whatever Happened to France's Famed 'Liberté'?", *New York Times*, March 30, 2017.

further European integration, which he views as an essential component of French economic strength and global geopolitical influence.

With the United Kingdom's recent decision to leave the EU ("Brexit"), the EU is facing a period of uncertainty about its future shape and character. France is a founding member of the EU and its predecessor institutions, and the country has always been viewed (along with Germany) as a key driver of the European integration project. An electoral victory for Le Pen could put further pressure on the EU as an institution and heighten questions about its future viability. It also could strain France's relations with Germany, creating tension between the two countries long viewed as "Europe's engine."

Some analysts maintain that Le Pen's staunch opposition to the EU may be out of step with a majority of French voters, who support EU membership. These analysts argue that public support for the EU and its common currency could limit Le Pen's ability to carry out her pledges should she be elected. Nonetheless, she appears to have struck a chord with a portion of the electorate that views the EU as a key enabler of broader global economic trends benefiting corporations over individual workers. As noted above, in the election's first round, more than 40% of French voters backed candidates critical of the European Union, free trade, and globalization.

Relations with NATO

Le Pen has said that she would once again withdraw France from NATO's integrated military command structure. Between 1966 and 2009, France was a member of NATO but opted not to participate in the alliance's military decisionmaking structures. In 2009, then-French President Nicolas Sarkozy chose to reintegrate France fully into these structures, arguing, among other things, that France should exert a degree of influence over the strategic direction of the alliance that was proportional to the country's participation in alliance operations. The move was opposed by Le Pen, who argued that full reintegration could limit France's military independence.

Defense Policy

The main presidential candidates have not advocated other significant changes to an ambitious defense policy that has enabled France to remain a pivotal actor in the West's response to common security challenges, particularly in Africa and the Middle East. However, France's next president could face significant budgetary constraints in maintaining France's significant global military footprint.¹¹ French military commanders reportedly have expressed concern for some time about their ability to sustain the current scope and pace of French military operations without additional resources.¹² In 2016, France's defense budget amounted to about 1.8% of GDP, below NATO's target of 2% of GDP.¹³ Nonetheless, along with the United Kingdom's military, the French military is widely regarded as Europe's most capable.

¹¹ In addition to 13,000 French soldiers deployed in France to enhance domestic security, more than 5,000 French troops are currently participating in military operations in Africa and the Middle East. This figure includes 3,500 troops undertaking counterterrorism operations in West Africa's Sahel region and 1,000 troops combating the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria and supporting Iraqi forces.

¹² Nathalie Guibert, "Hollande: More Wars, Fewer Resources," *Le Monde*, November 16, 2014. Accessed via Open Source Center, EUR2014111726072746.

¹³ NATO, *Defence Expenditures of NATO Countries (2009-2016)*, March 13, 2017.

Relations with Russia

Under President Hollande, France has joined fellow EU member states in strongly condemning Russian actions in Ukraine and has supported targeted EU sanctions on Russia's financial, defense, and energy sectors. Along with Germany, Russia, and Ukraine, France is a member of the so-called Normandy Format, which has negotiated two cease-fire agreements—the “Minsk Agreements”—to the conflict in eastern Ukraine since mid-2014.¹⁴

Some critics of French policy toward Russia have questioned France's commitment to sustaining sanctions against Moscow. In particular, they cite a perceived reluctance to further exacerbate tensions with Russia and harm French and European business interests. Marine Le Pen has expressed admiration for Russian President Vladimir Putin, argued against EU sanctions on Russia, and said she supported Russia's annexation of Crimea. Although Macron has criticized Russian actions, he at times has also expressed skepticism about the effectiveness of EU sanctions on Russia. Continued concerns about Russian actions in Ukraine and elsewhere and concerns about possible Russian interference in the French election potentially could change the candidates' views on Russia (See text box on “Alleged Russian Interference in French Politics and the Presidential Election,” below).

Alleged Russian Interference in French Politics and the Presidential Election

In recent months, some French political leaders have grown increasingly concerned about France's vulnerability to possible Russian efforts to influence the presidential election. On February 13, 2017, Emmanuel Macron's campaign publicly accused Russia and its state-owned media of hacking Macron's party's electronic infrastructure and disseminating “fake news” aimed at undermining Macron's candidacy. Previously, the Socialist Party's security chief in parliament, Sebastien Pietrasanta, warned that the presidential campaign is at high risk of being hacked and noted that campaign staff have limited training in how to stop cyberattacks.

Le Pen and the National Front have received attention both for pro-Russia views and for receiving funding from Russian banks. In 2014, the National Front received a loan of about €11 million (about \$11.5 million) from a Moscow-based lender, First Czech Russian Bank. Also in 2014, a political fund controlled by Marine Le Pen's father and National Front founder Jean-Marie Le Pen received a loan of about €2 million (about \$2.1 million) from a Cypriot fund reportedly controlled by a former KGB agent, Yuri Kudimov. The loans reportedly were used to fund regional election campaigns. The National Front's efforts to secure additional financial support from First Czech failed in 2016, when Russia's Central Bank revoked the lender's license. The National Front reportedly had been seeking to raise at least €20 million (about \$21 million) from the bank to fund its presidential campaign.

National Front leaders have not denied seeking funding from Russian banks. The party's chief financial officer has said that the fact that the party was paying 6% interest on the 2014 loan suggested “it was no special favor.” Party head Marine Le Pen has protested that the National Front was forced to turn to Russian banks due to French banks' refusal to loan to the party.

Nonetheless, the loans have drawn significant attention, not least due to Marine Le Pen's pro-Russia views. In late March 2017, Le Pen traveled to Moscow to meet with Russian President Vladimir Putin. According to a Le Pen aide, the two leaders discussed international affairs and counterterrorism issues. The aide reportedly said that Putin wished Le Pen good luck in the election.

Sources: Michael Stothard and Kathrin Hille, “Macron Campaign Accuses Russia of Using Fake News to Disrupt Presidential Race,” *Financial Times*, February 13, 2017; Nicholas Vinocur, “France and Risk of Being Next Election Hacking Victim,” *Politico.eu*, January 5, 2017; Helene Fouquet, Gregory Viscusi, and Henry Meyer, “Le Pen Struggling to Fund French Race as Russian Bank Fails,” *Bloomberg*, December 22, 2016; Suzanne Daley and Maia de la Baume, “French Far Right Gets Helping Hand with Russia,” *New York Times*, December 1, 2014; “Aide to France's Le Pen Says Putin Wished Her ‘Good Luck’ with the Election,” *Reuters*, March 24, 2017.

¹⁴ Many observers assert that Germany has played a more active role than France in the negotiations and in shaping broader European policy on Russia and Ukraine. See, for example, Anne-Sylvaine Chassany and Stefan Wagstyl, “Ukraine Ceasefire Talks Revive Franco-German Entente,” *Financial Times*, March 18, 2015.

Implications for U.S.-French Relations

France, as one of Europe's most globally engaged and militarily capable countries, is an important U.S. ally, though the relationship has not been without tensions. In recent years, U.S. leaders have welcomed French foreign policy and military engagement, especially with respect to counterterrorism operations in Africa's Sahel region and in the fight against the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq. According to some analysts, U.S.-French cooperation in Africa is closer today than it has ever been.¹⁵ France also has been at the forefront of the international coalition conducting military operations against the Islamic State. About 1,000 French troops currently are participating in the mission, including by carrying out air strikes in both Iraq and Syria.

On April 7, 2017, President Hollande issued a joint statement together with German Chancellor Angela Merkel in support of U.S. missile strikes on a Syrian military installation in response to Syrian President Bashar al Asad's alleged use of chemical weapons earlier in the month. France and Germany share the U.S. view that the Asad regime targeted chemical weapons at Syrian civilians.

Although Macron has not advocated a significant change in France's relations with the United States, he has expressed unease about the direction of U.S. policy toward Europe under President Trump. In particular, he has taken issue with President Trump's criticisms of the EU and with his efforts to drastically curb migration to the United States from certain countries. Macron has also stressed his belief in the importance of the EU and other multilateral institutions and in upholding international humanitarian law, including with respect to granting asylum to refugees.

Le Pen was the only French presidential candidate who enthusiastically welcomed President Trump's election, which she portrayed as a validation of her nationalist approach. However, some observers note that her support of Trump also could be a political liability given the U.S. President's apparent unpopularity among French voters.¹⁶ Le Pen criticized the aforementioned U.S. military strike on Syria in April 2017, asserting that "Trump had said repeatedly that he didn't intend the United States to be the world's policeman any longer, and that is exactly what he did."¹⁷

Despite potential disagreements between the next French president and President Trump, most analysts suggest that the U.S.-French relationship would likely continue to be driven by close cooperation in response to key shared security challenges. Chief among these would be the fight against the Islamic State and other Islamic terrorist groups in the Middle East and North Africa.

The United States could view a potential decision by Le Pen to withdraw France from NATO's integrated military command structures as an impediment to NATO and to U.S. security interests in Europe. However, most analysts expect that France would maintain a strong military and continue to be an active participant in NATO operations as it was during much of the more than 40 years it spent outside the NATO command structure.

¹⁵ France has sought and received U.S. assistance for its African counterterrorism operations from the United States, including up to \$95 million between 2013 and 2015 in Department of Defense services and materiel provided under the President's "Special Drawdown" authority. The FY2016 National Defense Authorization Act created a new authority enabling such support to continue through FY2018 (P.L. 114-92, §1207).

¹⁶ See, for example, James McAuley, "Marine Le Pen's Tricky Alliance with Donald Trump," *Washington Post*, April 2, 2017.

¹⁷ Marine Le Pen, as quoted by Mark Landler, "A Marine Le Pen Victory Wouldn't Necessarily Be a Win for Trump," *New York Times*, April 25, 2017.

Some observers also have noted that each of the leading presidential candidates, and particularly Le Pen, has at various times advocated improved French and EU ties with Moscow. Depending on the future direction of U.S. policy toward Russia, this issue also could be a point of contention.

If Le Pen were to win the election and succeed in withdrawing from or radically restructuring France's relations with the EU, the decision could have a major impact on U.S.-French and U.S.-European relations more broadly. Most important, such a decision could alter the structure of the EU significantly and ultimately could decrease the bloc's importance to the United States. A diminished EU could prompt a rethinking of more than 70 years of U.S. policy in support of European integration. This rethinking, in turn, could lead to a shift in U.S. policy toward Europe, including through prioritizing bilateral relations with individual European countries over relations with the EU. How the Trump Administration would react to such changes is unclear. President Trump has praised the United Kingdom's decision to leave the EU and at times has expressed a preference to deal with national governments in Europe bilaterally. On other occasions, he has expressed support for the EU.

Many Members of Congress have expressed support for close U.S.-French cooperation in a range of areas, including defense cooperation to counter terrorist threats. These Members of Congress may have an interest in maintaining continuity in U.S.-French relations, especially with respect to bilateral defense cooperation. Insofar as defense cooperation is bolstered by France's full participation in NATO's command structures, Members of Congress could consider articulating their support of France's role in NATO to the next French president. The same could hold true with respect to France's membership in the EU. More broadly, an election outcome that results in significant changes to France's domestic and global policy outlook could have implications for the way the country manages its relations with the United States. From this perspective, Members of Congress could seek to emphasize the importance of stability in the bilateral relationship. In contrast, those critical of the current state of the U.S.-French relationship could see the election as an opportunity to explore a new model of bilateral relations.

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