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The new configuration in European politics

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2017 will probably be remembered as the “year of change” in the history of European politics. This does not apply only to the European Union and its transformation within but also pertains to the future of Europe’s relations with the rest of the world. Turkey, for that matter, is part of the rest who tries to remain in the west.

Elections in France are dominating the agenda. On April 23, the first round of the French presidential elections ended with Marine Le Pen of the National Front and Emmanuel Macron with his own political party, named “En Marche,” to become the two front runners for the next round on May 7. Macron is a former economy minister and describes himself as a left-wing liberal.

What is so striking about the French presidential elections is that for the first time in recent history, the mainstream political parties will not be running in the second round. If, as expected, Macron makes it to Elysee in the final round, he will have to work hard to obtain a favorable parliamentary majority in the forthcoming National Assembly elections in June.

Macron’s success is yet another manifestation of the European electoral behavior, which follows

the pattern of anti-establishment voting tendency. Macron's political party is not expected to make a significant impact on the parliamentary elections. It is important, however, to underline that both the socialist and republican candidates who lost in the first round immediately called for support for Macron in the second round.

If Macron's success cannot be translated into a further electoral success of "En Marche" in the National Assembly in June, the new president of France will have to survive an awkward cohabitation because of the semi-presidential system that France enjoys, obliging him to face a strange composition of parliament with political parties ranging from far-right to far-left, probably with a coalition government. This would be quite a novelty in French politics.

Another novelty is happening in the United Kingdom, too. Prime Minister Theresa May called for snap elections for June 8, in a surprise move, apparently to enhance the Conservative Party's majority and self-confidence in the British parliament. At a time when the U.K. is negotiating with the European Union for an honorable Brexit, May's move will give her the opportunity to define the best terms for a deal with the continent. Britain did not have snap elections without completing at least half of the parliamentary term in the last 40 years.

In Germany, elections in autumn may also end up with a change in the prime ministerial chair, if not necessarily a change in the grand coalition. The Social Democratic Party's (SPD) choice of Martin Schulz as the new chairman seems to have affected the chances of the party in the elections. Although the Christian Democratic Union of Germany/ Christian Social Union in Bavaria (CDU/CSU) alliance enjoys a five-point lead in front of the SPD, the latter has made a significant progress in the last few weeks.

In any case, European politics will be affected with the result of all these elections and the new configuration will affect what Europe's vision will be in the years to come. Macron will probably pursue a policy of flexible integration for a federal Europe, which may not necessarily be challenged by Germany. His left-wing liberal synthesis of economic policies may also find a positive response from Berlin, and bring about a more favorable commonality of interests with Paris, something that Merkel failed to establish with François Hollande.

Paris and Berlin will probably be more forthcoming in terms of global free trade and this may influence a reasonable free trade deal with the U.K. EU will find it harder, however, to come to terms with the United States for President Donald Trump does not favor global free trade and has suspended the talks for the Trans-Atlantic Trade and Investment Partnership. To obtain a new opening on that front, Europe will need strategic patience.

Similar indulgence is also needed in Europe's relations with Turkey. The referendum in Turkey on April 16 has amplified concerns in Europe that Turkey is shifting away from basic tenets, principles and criteria so meticulously developed by the EU.

Statements by Turkey's high-level politicians on testing the feeling of Turkish public through a referendum vis-a-vis the continuation of accession negotiations, and as regards to the re-introduction of capital punishment into the Turkish criminal code do not help European leaders to look favorably at the future of Turkey's relations with Europe.

As Europe is preparing itself for a new political configuration, Turkey's post-referendum politics also needs to come forward with a new understanding with a view to re-adapting itself to changes in Europe. For that, Turkey also needs a new political configuration.