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France and Austria: A Vote Against Euro-Atlanticism

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The French resolution, calling upon President François Hollande to reverse the anti-Russian sanctions, which was adopted by the French National Assembly, is the first document of its kind to appear since the West declared a war of sanctions against Russia. Although the resolution itself is non-binding, it is proof that the «Russian factor» will play a key role in the April 2017 French presidential elections.

All three of the country's leading politicians – François Hollande, Nicolas Sarkozy, and Marine Le Pen – have already announced their plans to run for president. But when it comes to French-Russian relations, the views of the last two differ from the official stance taken by Paris and the European Union leadership. Sarkozy's supporters voted to approve the resolution, despite the opposition of deputies from François Hollande's ruling Socialist Party.

The resolution demanding an end to the sanctions against Russia was proposed by Thierry Mariani, a member of the parliamentary Foreign Affairs Committee, who called the sanctions «completely ineffective» and a threat to French interests. The authors of the resolution cited the «war on terror» – a goal shared by both Russia and France – as another argument for the reversal of the sanctions: «*We can't ask Russia to be our partner in the fight against Daesh while simultaneously hitting Moscow with sanctions*». It is significant that in addition to Sarkozy's supporters, the call to abolish the anti-Russian sanctions has also been publicly supported by

former French Prime Minister François Fillon. «*I hope that this vote will help the government expedite the process of lifting the embargo*», he said.

The vote in the French National Assembly is notable for more than just the precedent it has set. The EU has scheduled a special summit in late June to discuss the future of the anti-Russian sanctions, but as that date approaches sentiments in Europe are shifting. That was evident during the first round of the Austrian presidential elections on April 24, which were a real eye-opener. «*Three-quarters of all voters manifested either disappointment or even rage toward the government*», wrote the Swiss *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, which called the results of the first round a «political earthquake».

The pro-government media in Austria are trying to downplay the significance of Norbert Hofer's success in the first round, in which this candidate from Austria's Freedom Party won 35.1% of the vote, according to the preliminary numbers. However, it is important to acknowledge that Austrians voted against the government line for many reasons not limited to the problems created by migrants.

The leading Austrian newspaper *Die Presse* noted the revealing comments made by the Chief of the General Staff of the Austrian Armed Forces, Othmar Commenda, during a visit to Moscow in early April. In an interview with the Chief of the General Staff of the Russian Armed Forces, Valery Gerasimov, General Commenda stated, «*We're not about to let others dictate to us about who we can or can't communicate with. I won't let anyone tell me who I can talk to and who I can't. That's why I said that I definitely want to visit you*». And although Othmar Commenda later tried to tone down this statement, which had so shocked the Euro-Atlantic establishment, *Die Presse* claims that based on its own inquiries 🗃️, «*the recording of the conversation appears uncut, with no noticeable signs of being altered*».

One can imagine that if the highest Austrian military officials are sounding off in such manner, the public mood must be even more grim. More than a third of all votes were cast for the candidate from Austria's Freedom Party – which was a vote against the dictates of Washington and Brussels and against the imposition of alien political models onto sovereign states. Incidentally, that party wants to reorganize and divide the eurozone into two different regions, one with a strong «northern euro» and another with a weak «southern euro». It is also interesting that the Austrian Freedom Party supports Serbia in its fight for Serbian Kosovo.

Norbert Hofer's success is already reverberating throughout Europe. His victory in the first round was welcomed by the spokesmen for parties and movements such as France's National Front, the People's Parties of Denmark and Switzerland, the Sweden Democrats, the Slovak National Party, the Dutch Party for Freedom, and, of course, the Alternative for Germany, which is sucking away political oxygen bit by bit from the CDU/CSU and SPD coalition.

The second round of the Austrian presidential elections is scheduled for May 22. And no one in Vienna, Brussels, or Washington can guarantee today that the head of the Austrian state won't be

a staunch opponent of Euro-Atlanticism like Norbert Hofer and that Austria itself isn't going to begin turning away from the European Union.