

研究报告

第 4 期

上海欧洲学会

2012 年 5 月

Abstract: This report analyzes the French general election with its impact on the European integration and the France-China relationship. The author argues that no matter who wins, Mr. Sarkozy or Mr. Hollande, France's basic position to the integration and policy to China will not change with the change of the government.

Prof. Dai Bingran is Jean Monnet Chair, Professor of Centre for European Studies, Fudan University and President of SIES.

Thoughts over French Election

Dai Bingran

French general election is just off in a few days now. Although it is expected that it will eventually be a contest between Mr. Nicolas Sarkozy, the current French president of the central-right Union pour un Mouvement Populaire, and Mr. Francois Hollande of the central left Socialist Party, a guess of the final winner could still run a 50 to 50 risk, because of the numerous uncertainties. But if we must stake on one of them, I am not on Mr. Sarkozy.

Reasons are simple: in time of peace, election as such is more a game of domestic performances rather than of external gains. Mr. Sarkozy showed off in the limelight, and played prominent in the Greek debt crisis, but the majority of the voters count more on their own well-beings. Ambitious as Mr. Sarkozy is, his presidency has accomplished little in this respect, and antagonized quite a lot. And he is unlucky to meet an unprecedented global financial crisis, entailing rising unemployment and social tumults, and severe contraction that no one is happy with. If Mr. Sarkozy finally loses to Mr. Holland, it is not that the Socialist Party has a

new recipe to offer, rather that the current government has failed and disappointed the people. And it is very often the dissatisfied that turn out to vote.

If Mr. Sarkozy could survive the first round, the votes that go to the extreme right would be decisive in the second. Here, Mr. Sarkozy has a slim chance too. According to the logic of the extreme right, it might prefer to be in opposition to the leftist. Experience tells that turnout ratio of the voters would not be very high. Mr. Sarkozy's last chance would be to persuade those who had refused to vote in the first round to support him in the second. This exists however, more in theory.

People should not worry, or expect, too much of the election result. No matter who wins, there will hardly bring drastic changes domestically or externally. "You learn of the dear prices only when you are in management of the household"; one could talk romantic when in opposition, but has to be realistic when in power. This is for one. Second, there is an apparent tendency for convergence in the policies of the ruling parties, as has happened in the UK, Germany and France. Third, the financial crisis is not all over yet, and the debt crisis is likely to press on still. The EU countries have few scopes for manoeuvre. Either Mr. Sarkozy or Mr. Holland has to take economic recovery as his first priority, and the difference will be more on manner than on essence. In this respect, reelection of Mr. Sarkozy might ensure a continuity in policy.

As at level of EU, France's basic interests still rest in integration, and would not change with the change of the government—it might not all too assertive to say that were the extreme right come to power, it would not choose to leave the EU. During the current crisis, the missed "Franco-German axis" seemed to come back: Mr. Sarkozy's reelection might save the time for another "grinding-in".

Neither the change of the leadership in France will alter its interests in keeping good relations with China. The relationship witnessed some ups and downs when Mr. Sarkozy first came into power, but was soon recovered, and has since sustained the few years when "demonization" of China was in height in the world. There is no telling whether France-China relations will need another period of time for adjustment,

if the Socialists take power in France. For sure is that in its ideology, China's socialism has nothing to do with their socialism, and the clashes on values are likely to increase, and that might be felt in France-China or even EU-China relations. But we should respect in our heart the choice of the French people, and have the confidence that our common interests will bridge any differences.

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地址:上海市威海路 233 号 803 室, 200041

电话/传真: 0086-21-6327-6919

网址: www.sies-cn.org