

## Is the Perspective of a Closer French Policy toward Russian a Threat for Eastern European Countries?

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### Abstract

*The current world is not moving as all specialists predicted. Brexit, Trump, everyone was wrong. This paper will have two targets: describing the French policy toward Russia, making a perspective on the future policy, whatever the new French presidency in 2017, Francois Hollande will transmit the key to his successor with new election. He refused to compete for a second mandate. It is good to remind that Hollande was involving in the Ukrainian affairs and had managed with Germany the Minsk I and II agreements. He also had suspended Mistral ships selling and approving sanctions against Russia. How will be the future with François Fillon, Marine Le Pen or other? The analysis will be focusing on the future relationships toward Russia and Eastern European Countries.*

*Keywords:* French policy, Russia, Eastern European Countries, perspective, François Fillon, relationships.

### Introduction

2016 has seen many surprised and unexpected events: Brexit, Donald Trump elections. All institutes had been mistaken about prediction and the feeling of populism, nationalism and insiders is not an exaggeration but reality. Inside France, current President François Hollande will not bring a new mandate. He is victim of his unpopularity, the economic crisis, his own miss of leaderships and absence of vision inside France and Europe. During his mandate, he had much more reaction than action. On the right side, Nicolas Sarkozy had also failed but about primary election of “les Republicains”. It had seen victory of his ex-Prime Minister François Fillon.

Marine Le Pen is still powerful and represents a threat for France and also Europe. She will try to play with all the fears of migration, European policy and the populism contagion which happened in Poland or Hungary. But with A program based on the restauration of a strong stage with French and catholic identity, François Fillon is able to catch Marine Le Pen electors.

François Fillon never put a shadow on his national and foreign policy. From French point of view, he is a liberal, has closer idea from Margaret Thatcher's policy and the motivation to transform France and making reform.. During his prime minister mandate, he had good relationships with Vladimir Putin and since this date, he always

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complains and militates against economical sanction to Russia in consequence of Crime annexing.

Eastern European countries and especially Poland and Baltics countries have fears of Russia threat. If western European countries could think about a certain paranoia, the communism period and the recent Russian aggression with Ukraine and violation area of NATO countries as France and Baltic countries, all these fact proved that the big Russia is “playing” with fire and the fact than European Union is divided about its own policy and action toward Russia.

What should be and would be the future French policy toward Russian and Eastern European countries? Would it be a great opportunity for France to restore its influence inside Europe? Is it the time for France to understand more Eastern European countries behavior and maintaining Russia as a real partnership who could be more containing? Or is it time for France to understand more the globalization phenomena and the fact that the world has changed?

## **1. The view of Eastern European from France**

### **a) The doubts and opposition of Mitterrand.**

In 1963, Robert Schuman, one of the E.E.C founder had say “we must build Europe in the interest of people's freedom ... but also to welcome eastern Europe people who would ask adhesion and moral support”. In 2004, his declaration became reality. Countries from Baltic, Poland or Hungary took part of European Union. But it is honest to say they were no enthusiasm feeling inside France. It didn't realize that globalization was also inside the E.U. and the fears of this movement will now take place. France took conscience that its leadership with Germany could be contested. M. Schroder and specially M. Merkel know much better this area than French.

The typology of French diplomacy toward the openness to Eastern Europe was to underline the threat of this event much more than the opportunities it could do. During the nineties, France had this cliché to slow down enlargement to post-communist countries. This bad behavior is currently in action and handicap seriously France for building a real trusting relationship.

In 1988 and before the communism's collapse, French President François Mitterrand had visited countries as Bulgaria, Tchecoslovaquia for convincing them to trust Gorbatchov reform and perestroika policy. But Mitterrand, despite his cleverness and his history sense, didn't feel the wind of change in Hungary, Poland and the raising of democracy in Eastern Europe. In fact, he was more concentrate about his relationship with Western Germany and Kohl presidency. Moreover, the new USSR policy of glasnost and perestroika from Gorbachev was enough for canalizing all this area and preparing a transition. But for France, this transition didn't mean communism collapse or unification of Germany. About this last point, Mitterrand was both septic and afraid about a new big Germany.

During this time, the French diplomacy was not active with opposition leaders in Eastern Europe countries. As usual, the French arrogance and fears was working on. For France, enlargement to the East could mean the end of the future common market in Europe and its own meaning. So status quo would be a good agreement. That is why Mitterrand and his advisers proposed to the new tchecoslovaquia president, Vaclav Havel I 1990 a new confederation project which will manage the field of Transport,

energy and environment.

This one would be open to USSR for straitening its acreage in Europe and would exclude USA. But in 1991, after the Praha confederation, the project had failed and proves the misunderstanding of France toward Eastern Europe. The reason is easy to guess: Eastern Europe countries all had this target to become as soon as possible member of E.U. Why France should propose a substitute in state of a real future equal to equal in a same organization? The motivation was principally to get closer to the occidental world. One of the other reasons of this failure was the association of USSR inside this.

It is important to notify the influence and the role of American diplomacy in this frailer. United State was involving in the cold war and has more military capacities than France. Other big detail: United States encouraged and supported more Eastern European countries for liberty, capitalism way of life and the perspective of a future adhesion inside NATO. About this last point, this famous anecdote and promise to USSR from Georges Bush and Francois Mitterrand than NATO will never be extended to Baltic countries and Poland...

At the Copenhagen summit of 1993 and in opposition of Helmut Kohl position who was in favor of these potential new adhesions, Mitterrand declared that the adhesion is a hope but there are many steps and problems to resolve... He also insisted on the economical field and said that these countries would see in the future invasion of companies and production from western Europe. All French journalists knows that Mitterrand was not an economist and this argument showed to Eastern European countries that France doesn't want enlargement from this miss of economical view.

#### **b) The Jacques Chirac mandate : a capitalistic and strategic vision**

In 1995, Jacques Chirac became new President. On the French foreign policy, he assumed the role of Charles De Gaulle's son. One of his first decisions was to make new nuclear test to confirm the place of France in the world, which provoked scandals and indignation from many states.

Chirac was in favor of new adhesion for eastern European countries. His policy was to point his opposition of his predecessor on this subject and also to satisfied French company for this new opening market. The same year, Germany and Austria were more in advance about business and partnerships than France, which is logical in regard of what we explained above. France realized at this time its delay in comparison on the activism of Helmut Kohl in this process of enlargement to the east. Kohl was the first to declare how favorable he was to a polish adhesion in European Union near 2000. As a sport competition, Chirac declared his wish about Czech, Poland and Hungary future adhesion.

But we can't ignore the nature and geography. France is an occidental and Mediterranean country with its influence zone in Africa. Despite all the good intention, its own interest in Eastern Europe is not natural but just reaction without any kind of realistic vision (if we except business). The debate of enlargement doesn't interesting French media and society. After the "no" to French referendum in 2005 about European constitution, the population showed how they distrust European system and its own fears of enlargement, globalization and social dumping from Poland and Romania. We can remind this polemic about the polish plumber and the Bolkeinstein direct about European workers.

But the Chirac's vision of Europe was also to reinsert France in the European Game with a "De Gaulle" posture. His vision was an independent policy from the United States. That could explain his opposition of a military intervention in Iraq on 2003, even if France was right about lies and wrong allegation of chemical weapon and Al Qaida link with Saddam Hussein. Poland and Hungary were bringing military troops to support American and British operations in Iraq. The contract agreement and sales of Boeing between United States and these countries made Chirac angry and a little diplomatic crisis. Instead of Airbus, these new European countries had bought American plane. He declared that they had lost an occasion to be silent. This decision straight the French feeling of carefulness against this new European area.

If we stay longer on the Polish case, the new nationalist government didn't improve the relationship with France. The disagreement about migration's management phenomena and recently the cancelation of fifty helicopter's sales confirm the atlantist view of Poland. This last made warning about Russian threat and asked for a NATO mobilization and strengthening.

To sum up France position, Eastern European countries have a pro American policy and sympathy. They considered Europe as a market and an opportunity to have subvention, to install Western Europe factories with low salary. But with all these wrong or true cliché, France lost opportunities. During the last decade, Poland grew up its own influence inside European Union and can introduce more atlantists and pro NATO opinions. But we will not accuse Poland and put all fault on it. It is also the duty of France to understand more the Polish context. The weight of history is still in Polish mind and we cannot ignore the Russian threat which disturb and provoke fears in Eastern Europe.

## **2. A new European vision including Russia is in the interest of France, Europe, Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova**

### **a) The French politic context**

In 2017, France will have a new President. As usual, all slogans are on the way of "now it is time to change!". It is time to change for France and for many reasons. France forgot to observe that the globalization is a reality for everyone and it is a waste of time to deny it. Globalization, euroseptism, the euro currency are easy guiltees for France. There is currently nostalgia about the "glorious thirty years" between 1945 and 1975. France was powerful with Charles De Gaulle, but had at this time a real European and foreign policy. This one was conducting on the "independence of France" from United States and Nato. De Gaulle had made visit to China and USSR, made nuclear test and no matter what the American will think or say.

Today France has much more an atlantist policy closer to Nato and United States. Even if the general French feeling toward United States is the fears of their arrogance, their domination in the world and all their policies mistakes like Iraq war in 2003. They put American responsible of all this trouble and the birth of ISIS is one of these consequences. But in the same time, French people appreciate Coca-Cola, American movies or series, their culture. France has two paradoxes: they refuse to change themselves and accepting globalization just because it is France and they want to keep all their advantages and staying in a closing area. But the other one is that French are one of the most pessimistic populations in the world, more than Afghan or Irakian

people!

About the new French policy; candidates like Marine Le Pen or François Fillon want and assume their pro-Russian position. Fillon is the favorite candidate and winner for 2017. The socialist part is like a ghost without credible leaders. For Fillon, we must talk and collaborate with Russia and Putin. He assumes and recognizes that Russia is a great nation and the usefulness to collaborate deeper with it. When he was Sarkozy's Prime Minister between 2007 and 2012, Fillon had seen Poutin and already believed that he's a key and a solution about Iran, Syria and Irak issues. But Fillon knows his own limit. For example, he doesn't want to recognize the Crimee annexation. But about the Ukrainian conflict, his position is not clear. Just some word like "we have to find a solution" or "Ukraine must find the way of democracy and fight against corruption". Unfortunately for Ukraine, France and other European countries doesn't have real solution for Ukraine as this Eastern Europe partnership without future adhesion perspective.

#### **b) What about Eastern Europe?**

Let's be honest: For France, Eastern Europe is still like a mystery and a unknowing part. It is exaggerated of course: the phenomena of "Francophonie" is present in Romania and Moldova. France has a good image about its history, culture, and gastronomy. The history with the French monarchy, Napoleon Bonaparte is unfortunately the past. Excepting the past and all the cliché, the French policy is not involving with Eastern Europe like Germany for instance.

Eastern Europe countries could means for France poor countries with low salaries. Even it is not the case; there is a kind of fear toward social dumping and migration. When we talk about Eastern Europe, we mean much more Russian. The country size and influence is not a surprise for this reasoning. All the interest with investment, gas agreement and Russian lobby could explain why Russia is the perfect

About the Eastern Partnership's agreement is an opportunity for countries like Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova to get closer to European Union without adhesion perspective. German Chancellor Angela Merkel had declared that "the partnership is not one an instrument for the extension but for the link with the European Union. You should not arouse false expectations. We need to be frank with them. "It was actually important to clarify things in advance. But it is obviously necessary to go much more far. And France has to play its driving role and assert its difference.

François Fillon seems to go deeper with a Russian collaboration. It is also the feeling of French population. The American domination around the world makes French unsatisfied.

The future French President has to put more psychology with Mister Vladimir Putin. He works in the balance of « hard power » and "soft power "which showed Europe lately was only consolidating his ambitions and least rough attitudes. Europe has to pursue the way of soft power but with more ambition and firmness. France thus has to show this way.

During 1980s, Mikhail Gorbatchev had expressed his wish of a «European Town Hall ", expression which could resume Charles de Gaulle's policy. The previous attempts of Russia integration within political and security Europe failed. Europe would have to lose everything in the fact that Russia moves its pivot towards Asia and creates "big Asia ". It is nobody's interest if Russia becomes isolated. This scenario

could destabilize more Ukraine or Georgia. The surrounding countries must be aware of their interdependence.

France has to introduce a big changing in the ideology of the relations Europe-Russia or French-Russian. For both of them, it has to join pragmatism and the research for the common interests. The valuation of the numerous convergences points would allow taking out of paradigm "looser-looser" who favors China and the United States, to the detriment of Russia and the European Union.

Unfortunately, if we want to be realistic and not too much optimistic, Eastern Europe is not French priority. France has two important partners in Europe: Germany and Russia. The French influence is more present in Africa and North Africa. The next French President has to be smart and realistic: Donald Trump wants to get closer to Russia? Let's do the same but in a very honest and pragmatic way. But France has also to take care of Eastern Europe and to reassure countries about the threat and fear. In a general sentence, we have to take care to our friends and getting closer to our enemies. France has to get closer to Russia for managing the Ukrainian crises and the Polish-Baltic fear. France is the founder country of European Union and it is its duty to assume this role.

If France wants to stay a big and influent country inside Europe, it must be more credible also toward Germany. There is currently a serious credibility problem of France with the economic reforms to do, the respect of promises about deficit and debts. The future President will have all these challenges: creating a new French-German couple, getting closer to Eastern Europe and managing Russia and Putin Ambition. Russia appears as a problem today but it is also the solution France often distinguished itself in the world by its independent diplomacy. its brave positions during the Iraq War in 2003 by threatening to use her veto against an American resolution, its Arab and African policy and its influence now have to serve for a new collaboration with Russia. Russia is the solution not only for Europe but this new space out Europe-Russia will allow protecting Europe of the current conflicts in the Middle East and all which is in touch with the international terrorism. The Eastern Partnership can only win in this way.

## Conclusion

The future will tell us if France has taken a new and realistic way for Eastern Europe relationships. 2016 had seen many surprising and unexpected events. The next months would be crucial for France and its place inside Europe and the world.

Eastern Europe countries are worried. Worried about Russian threat and provocations, about Russian aggression inside Ukrainian neighborhood, worried about Russian provocation in Baltics countries. Putin knows how divided is Europe because this Europe is weak.

A Stronger Europe means a new French-German couple, a stronger Europe means maybe a new Weimar triangle including the "new Poland", which represents the new voice of a new Europe. It is currently impossible to ignore and close our door to Russia. Europe has the duty to invite Russia for dialogue and maintain the cold war is over. United State is an allied but not a master who will conduct European policy.

This is how France would manage its new policy. For this, it must accept globalization, making reform to be more credible and just opening its eyes: Europe has changed and France has to show to the rest of Europe that it will be change.

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