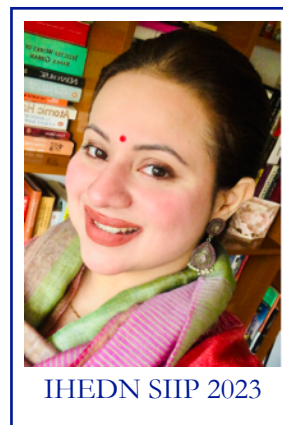


India's Perspective on Europe's elections

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2024 is the year of global elections. Modi 3.0 has made a comeback in India, although with a humbled mandate. With regard to Europe- two crucial set of elections have caught the Indian voters' attention. The first has been the European Parliament election and second is India's foremost partner in the region, France's historic snap elections. The results of the first are out while those of the second are almost certain, with unpleasant news for Emmanuel Macron.

The election results for Europe, the second-largest democratic electorate in the world after India, have been more or less similar to the latter. Centrist parties have made a comeback although with fewer seats compared to 2019.

Ursula Von der Leyen is most likely to be back as the Commission President while firebrand Estonian PM, Kaja Kallas is set to become the new HR/VP.

The rise of far right was expected in Europe as shown by the success of two of its female leaders, Georgia Meloni of Italy and Marine Le Pen of France. Le Pen's National Rally did way beyond expectations in France winning 31% of the seats while President Emmanuel Macron's Renaissance party got merely about 15%. In Germany, AfD's performance dulled due to the scandals.

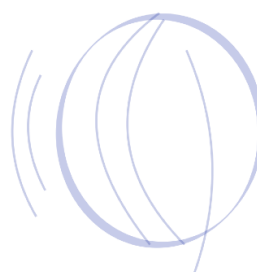
In this election, the biggest consolation to Centrist parties is the divisions within the far right that is stopping the extreme bloc from radically altering the political vision of the European Union. For now it helps that the two main faces, Georgia Meloni and Marine Le Pen,

have been pro-Ukraine and have upheld European solidarity against Russia. However, how long will Le Pen remain pro-European security cannot be guaranteed.

Continued Convergence between Delhi and Brussels

It suffices to say that there will be an overall continuity between India and the EU over key areas of convergence and consistency in their bilateral policies. From New Delhi's perspective, substantial losses for the Greens could translate into a favourable situation. The EU might begin reassessing its strict sustainability agenda, which has been increasingly misaligned with its economic security goals. This misalignment has been particularly troubling in the EU's approach to free trade agreements. For example, the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism is viewed as a non-starter in FTA negotiations with emerging economies like India.

In New Delhi, the Lok Sabha election results have pushed the government to prioritize tangible development and economic outcomes over cultural nationalism. This shift might lead



to a more measured approach in considering the EU's requests for bilateral investment guarantees, which India has been hesitant to provide so far.

The ongoing negotiations for a bilateral investment treaty could attract significant investments that the EU aims to redirect from China, currently flowing to Vietnam and Singapore instead of India. While enhancing India's investment ecosystem requires comprehensive reforms that will yield positive results over time, addressing legal barriers could be the initial step forward.

Both parties should strive to implement their promising Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on semiconductors within the next five years and develop a vision for economic security through the Trade and Technology Council established in 2023.

Aligning on maritime security issues will also be a priority. With new initiatives like *Aspides* and tools such as the 'Coordinated Maritime Presence,' the period leading up to 2029 will witness closer collaboration between Brussels and New Delhi in enhancing maritime domain awareness and addressing hybrid threats in the broader Indo-Pacific region.

New Delhi's response to French conundrum:

The political situation in France, India's closest ally in Europe and the epicentre of India's expanding footprint in the continent, has stirred maximum interest and curiosity in India.

Macron, known for his bold decisions has perhaps gone too far while expressing the dissatisfaction with his party's performance compared to Le Pen's. While he certainly did not need to do it, he called for snap elections as an acknowledgement of his people's will.

Trends have shown that anti – incumbency is

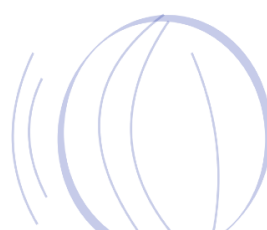
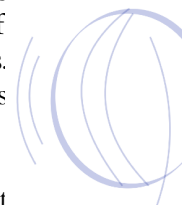
ubiquitous. Macron's party has slim chances of winning as votes are expected to swing between far right and the far left. In fact, the far right has already surged ahead in the first round of country's first snap parliamentary elections. Macron's centrist coalition finished third as the far left has come second.

The sudden decision has thrown the fate of not only Macron's centrist party in uncertainty, but has also raised questions on the stature of Europe's second biggest economy and its ability to steer the Franco-German engine which is at the heart of the EU Machine. The situation has also raised doubts over the future of Macron's political legacy.

For the record, regardless of the results of the election, Macron will continue being the President. However, in the likely event of a National Rally winning the elections, the French politics will enter a situation termed as 'Co-habitation' where the president, in charge of security, defence and foreign policy, and the Prime minister in charge of domestic policies and economy, belong to different parties. To complicate matters further, in the present scenario, the President and the PM could belong to radically different camps if one of the opposition parties wins an absolute majority. In that case, Macron will have to appoint a prime minister from an opposing camp with a radically different view on French politics and economy. The resultant co-habitation could be a very arduous path to tread for the French government. Unfortunately, as the polls suggest, France could land in that rather complicated situation after 7 July 2024.

Domestically, it would be a different vision for policies on immigration and perhaps on the long standing commitment to Ukraine.

From India's perspective, while continuity can be observed in the larger foreign and defense policy, which is a "reserved domain" of the



French president, a domestically diminished stature of Macron might adversely impact France's capacity for leadership in foreign affairs. The economic policies proposed by both the far right and far left will land France in greater debt and will bring more economic strain.

New Delhi would have rather welcomed a situation where Macron would have tried forging a coalition of his Renaissance party with the pro-republican parties until the end of his term in 2027. However, the decision of snap elections has ended that option.

Looking ahead into Future:

Two documents will guide the broad direction of India- France ties-- the Horizon 2047 signed during Modi's visit to France in July 2023 and the defence industrial roadmap signed during Macron's visit to India in January 2024. The latest joint statement spans across 41 points that cover the exceptional nature of the relationship. It not only launched the much touted defence industrial roadmap, but also underscored

convergence of interest in the Indo-Pacific, joint exercises, trilateral overtures, and surveillance missions in the Indian Ocean Region through frameworks such as the Maritime Cooperation Dialogue.

The frequency of high profile visits between the two sides has increased in the last two years. French support to India's stated goal of "self reliance" in defence equipment has also stayed consistent.

New Delhi expects the same consistency in the commitment on 'co-designing, co-development, and co-production' of defence equipment in the run up to 2026, which has been declared as the year of Indo-French innovation.

Such deliverables will be ascertained by a realistic assessment of French capabilities in times to come.

However, whether France, under 'co-habited' Macron will be able to play a more geopolitical role, remains to be seen. ■

At MP-IDSA **Dr. Swasti Rao** has undertaken significant projects in collaboration with India's Ministry of External Affairs and Ministry of Defence. As a widely published scholar, her ongoing research focuses on Europe in the Indo Pacific. She represented India at the flagship EU Security Dialogue, the Schuman Forum, held at the European Parliament in 2023.

Au MP-IDSA, le **Dr Swasti Rao** a entrepris d'importants projets en collaboration avec le ministère indien des Affaires étrangères et le ministère de la Défense. En tant qu'universitaire largement publiée, ses recherches en cours se concentrent sur l'Europe dans la région Indo-Pacifique. Elle a représenté l'Inde au dialogue phare de l'UE sur la sécurité, le Forum Schuman, qui s'est tenu au Parlement européen en 2023.