**France on the move**

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There is good news from Europe this week, although along with terrible news from the Russian war in Ukraine. The good news is that President Emmanuel Macron (44) has won a second 5-year term as President of France, with close to sixty percent of the vote against his opponent Marine Le Pen (53), a populist, nationalist, and right-wing politician. About seventy percent of eligible voters cast their votes, but some thirty percent stayed at home, not liking any of the candidates or finding it worthless to vote in any case. The fact that Le Pen secured some 40 percent of the vote was a major achievement on her part, making her party a force in the country and Europe, but also in many ways casting shadows over democracy.  
Still, the election in France must be seen as successful and important for democracy on the world’s most democratic continent. Macron is a strong supporter of the European Union (EU) with 28 member states and a total population of four hundred and fifty million. The EU commission’s president Ursula von der Leyen was quick to extend her congratulations to Macron upon his winning of the election, saying they would work closely together on the many important issues facing the continent and the world. Le Pen on her side, is quite anti-EU and also sceptical to the NATO defence alliance, and if she had been elected, she had promised to pull France out of the joint military command structures of the defence alliance, which France joined in 2009. She has been EU commissioner, but feels that it is too bureaucratic an organisation, as she also feels the UN is, and that member states give away sovereignty to supranational organisations. That goes along with her nationalistic views of ‘France first’ and the ‘French first’; the latter can easily lead to discrimination of immigrants.  
However, the sizeable support for Le Pen means that France in many ways is divided between a populist politician and a moderate pragmatist, Macron, who again is also criticised from the left who says that the economy has grown during his first term in office but redistribution of wealth has stagnated or benefitted the already wealthy. This is the case in many European countries, but will be a major issue during Macron’s second term. Furthermore, it is essential in any country that people feel they are included and considered equal. If many fall outside the mainstream and do not really have a stake in the political, economic and social development that can lead to major frictions and unrest, which France has already seen. Since the French are good at complaining and criticising, it is important to improve the situation and make all people in the country feel included—in a country with high self-consciousness on the French variable.  
In some weeks, on 9 and 12 June, France will have election of members of parliament, whom they call ‘deputies’, elected for five years (as is also the president’s term). The government (cabinet) is formed by the majority party or parties in parliament, led by a prime minister. ‘La Republique En Marche!’ (LREM), Macron’s party, had majority in parliament during his first term as president, forming government with two other parties. However, the majority in parliament can also come from another party or parties, and this time it could be that Le Pen’s party, ‘National Rally’, (RN), gets a high number of votes. Also, the socialists on the left are likely to get a high number of votes as their candidate for president in the first round for president received almost as many votes as Le Pen. The parliamentary election will certainly be important, and it could become a lively parliament if Macron’s LREM loses majority.  
If the socialists secure many seats, along with LREM, it would be easier for Macron to work with them. After all, Macron was a socialist, or social democrat, before he formed LREM and won last presidential election. It is worth noting that the two old regular parties on the left and right have minimal support today as new parties have changed the political landscape. LREM is a party formed by and around Macron, and it needs to organise itself more as a traditional party in order to become a lasting force in French politics. Politics and parties are unique to each country they belong to. Yet, there are also similarities with sister parties in other countries, and in Europe in is common to have common associations, such as for the socialists, social democrats, liberals, conservatives, and right-wingers. It is important that parties share experiences. France has much to teach others about democracy, historically and currently, as the country can learn from others.  
Pakistan can draw lessons from France, as I am sure it does. One important lesson concerns the fact that France in many ways has become a divided country, with groups of people, and their values, being far apart. Pakistan must watch out for that not going further at home at a time when economic differences grow also here, as they have done in France, in USA, and in most countries. It is indeed important to work for reducing differences and inequality. Furthermore, it is important that politicians use language and approaches that are inclusive, showing respect for political opponents and all people. It is also important that certain issues are above party-politics, treated cautiously in debates, seen as national and state issues that all parties can rally around. Nation-building never ends, indeed not in big and diverse countries such as France and Pakistan.