

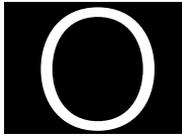
# PRESIDENT FRANÇOIS HOLLANDE ON THE FOREIGN POLICY FRONT

*The newly elected French President, François Hollande will face significant challenges in the domestic, European and foreign policy arenas. This article highlights some major and pressing foreign policy issues that will be high on the French President's agenda, such as the prospects for the withdrawal of French troops from Afghanistan, mending relations with Turkey, and engaging with the Arab Spring countries. The article also elaborates on the challenges President Hollande will face concerning France's role within the EU.*

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n 15 May, François Hollande officially became the new President of France. Almost immediately he was thrown into a frenzy of summit meetings: a G 20 summit in Camp David on 18-19 May, a NATO summit in Chicago on 20-21 May, a European Council meeting in Brussels on 24 May.

These summits take place against the background of the Euro-zone crisis, a radical change of guard in many Arab countries, relentless massacres in Syria, a withdrawal from Afghanistan and a stalemate on Iran's nuclear program, to take but a few examples.

With such a tight and momentous international agenda, the preparedness, style and standing of the new French President is now under close scrutiny, especially as he is a total newcomer and has campaigned on two platforms clearly at odds with some of his counterparts and both with international consequences: a faster than agreed withdrawal of French troops from Afghanistan and a renegotiation of the Treaty on Stability, Coordination and Governance in the Economic and Monetary Union – also called the Fiscal Stability Treaty.

### ***Europe and Globalization***

The hottest issue for the new President is undoubtedly the introduction of growth-stimulation measures in an EU Treaty focused on fiscal stability. This was one of François Hollande's key campaign themes. It is also a major issue in Greece as reflected in the results of the 6 May legislative elections. Yet, the issue is a divisive one within the EU, especially with the strong objections voiced by Germany.

One of the striking features of the French presidential campaign was the broad distaste for European integration, the criticism of EU institutions, and the little that was understood of globalization. None of the candidates, and this includes Hollande, entertained the concept of France in a globalized world – a world where the center of gravity has moved to Asia and a world where a country like France cannot compete alone and must act within the EU framework.

The weakest spot in French politics is the remarkable inability of its politicians to explain why the country must act as a global economic power. All political parties blindly espoused the protectionist leanings of the citizens, although they know that such solutions do not make sense in today's world. For example, one of the leading French brands with a global outreach, Renault, is regularly criticized for producing in Romania and Morocco (Dacia) and Turkey (Oyak Renault), although these are amongst its most profitable operations, helping the firm to remain a true global brand and a profitable one for the country.

The fact that France lags behind Germany in economic competitiveness weighs heavily as well in the somber Europe-wide economic picture. But most measures apt to boost competitiveness in France run counter to the Socialist presidential program. Hard choices and straightforward pedagogy are ahead for the new President.

### **Afghanistan**

The faster than agreed withdrawal of French soldiers from Afghanistan, i.e. by the end of 2012, was a campaign promise of François Hollande. Politically, this is a largely symbolic issue, since the “draw down” of ISAF troops had already been agreed. In addition, the nearly 4,000 French troops represent a mere three percent of the total.

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An impediment to implementing President Hollande’s intentions lies with technicalities: the withdrawal of a force of 4,000 involves moving a large quantity of vehicles, telecom equipment, ammunitions and supplies, as well as a number of helicopters. A military withdrawal in hostile territory is indeed a meticulous job.

In a NATO context, it is true that historically the institution has had to come to grips with different or even diverging national positions of its members. This was clearly the case during the 2011 campaign in Libya with the specific positions of Germany and Turkey for example. This being said, France’s partners in NATO are logically invoking a clause agreed from the outset: “in together, out together”.

### **Turkey**

Turkey is one the thorniest issues for the new French President, because the relationship between the two countries has been badly damaged by a series of skirmishes between President Hollande’s predecessor and the Turkish prime minister. France has lost billions of contracts as a result. What is urgently needed is a pacified relationship. One can be optimistic that President Hollande’s polite approach will improve the atmospherics, but difficult substantive issues remain.

First, it is clear that France –and the EU– need Turkey as a booster to its competitiveness and as a fast-growing internal market. The recent acquisition by Aéroports de Paris (ADP), at a dear price, of 38 percent of the Turkish airport builder and manager TAV is a case in point: ADP declared to its shareholders that it was buying a double-digit growth firm, a rare example of a French firm acting globally.

Secondly, France and the EU need a politically stable, fully democratic and economically dynamic Turkey, a Turkey at peace with herself internally and at peace with its neighbors, in particular Armenia and Cyprus. This can only be achieved through a functioning accession process of Turkey to the EU for the simple reason that this process includes Turkey's alignment to EU laws and standards. In addition, experience has proven that the citizens of Turkey are keen to see their country moving towards EU standards.

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This is not equivalent to saying that Turkey must enter the EU anytime soon, as many challenges to the accession process remain. In addition, the process is twice conditional through the accession criteria and because 27 + 1 ratifications are needed.

However, the accession process remains the best vehicle to modernize Turkey and, accession or not, this is in the EU's and France's utmost interest. The French President will have to explain this to the French people. In the short term, he can start restoring France's ties with Turkey by lifting the negotiation chapters blocked by his predecessor, without compromising the dual conditionality of the accession process.

France and Germany are equally worried about a possible enlargement to Turkey for fundamental reasons: for the first time ever, the EU institutional system would be under the strong influence of a non-founding member. Turkey's weight in membership of the European Parliament and in the voting system in the European Council would, under the current rules, take precedence over that of Germany and France.

Yet, the Turkish Government is placing high hopes on President Hollande's future policy on Turkey. At the same time, it is well aware of Mr Hollande's long-standing position on the Armenian genocide laws in France.

### ***The Arab Transition Process***

The dramatic changes in the Arab world present another major foreign policy challenge for the new French President. His predecessor entertained a privileged relationship with Tunisia's Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali, had made Syria's Bashar al-Assad a special guest at a military parade, and unilaterally promoted Egypt's Hosni Mubarak to the status of co-chair of the Union for the Mediterranean to the great

dismay of other heads of state and government. All this finally crippled the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership by forcefully imposing the new mechanism of the Union for the Mediterranean.

In short, the previous French policy in the Arab region has been shattered by the 2011 revolutions. Worse, Arab countries, especially those in the Maghreb, have been vexed by the xenophobic tones used by the right and the extreme right candidates.

President Hollande will now have to re-build decent relations with largely unknown political partners – Islamists now dominate the political game in Egypt and Tunisia for example and are influential elsewhere. New generations of politicians are coming to power in Arab countries and nobody can tell how they will shape their respective countries' relations with Europe and the West.

In this new state of things, President Hollande will also need to work with Arab leaders more through the EU framework, rather than through the strictly bilateral one preferred by his predecessor's. A fresh start is clearly needed, both in style and substance.

Beyond these few examples, many foreign policy challenges await President Hollande from the outset. Yet, two of the strongest cards in his hand are the legitimacy deriving from his victory on 6 May, and his calm, polite demeanor. In the summitry business, these are no small things.

The confidence and personal relationship which the new President will establish amongst the European Council members –i.e. the Prime Ministers of the other 26 EU Member States– and the European Parliament –which has seen its powers expanded under the Lisbon Treaty– will be a decisive factor.

President Hollande is no doubt aware that France's European partners in the European Council and the European Parliament were not just weary of his predecessor's style, they are also puzzled by the anti-Europe and France-centered wave that has characterized this presidential election.

A French president working positively and cooperatively is what the European Union urgently needs. France and the European Union will only surmount the momentous crises ahead of them, at home and abroad, if they play together.