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Russia Reacts to Macron's Victory

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Thibault Camus / AP

Russia's characterization of the French presidential election was a familiar one: a pro-Russian, right-wing populist versus a pro-NATO, liberal internationalist.

But unlike the American election, Moscow has little to celebrate in the aftermath. Emmanuel Macron, the liberal, is France's new president. Marine Le Pen, favored by Russia, is not.

Russia's enthusiasm for Le Pen was barely concealed. So too was its opinion of Macron. On May 4, the Komsomolskaya Pravda newspaper published an outrageous report on Macron with the headline "Rothschild puppet, psychopath, and Mr. Nobody." The report focused on Macron's sudden rise within French politics and his marriage to an older woman.

Le Pen was openly supported by the Russian government. On March 24, in the run-up to the first round of the French presidential election, Le Pen visited Moscow. There, she met with die hard fans like Russian nationalist Twitter star Maria Katasanova. She also met with President Vladimir Putin and heaped praise upon the Russian leader for his bold vision.

“He represents a new sovereign nation,” Le Pen said after meeting Putin, “I think he also represents a new vision.” The world belongs to men like Putin, she continued, as well as populists like Donald Trump in the U.S., and Narendra Modi in India.

But that vision was disappointed and the French electorate didn’t buy it. Le Pen lost to Macron by over 30 percent.

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To soften the blow, RIA Novosti ran a story about a poll conducted by French newspaper Le Figaro. The newspaper asked its readers whether or not they believe Macron will make a good president. RIA reported that 55 percent of the almost 20,000 polled online responded “no.”

Regardless of what Le Figaro’s readers think, Moscow is now forced to pick up the pieces and learn to work with Macron, a leader who will be far less sympathetic to Russia’s view of the world than Le Pen would have been.

Putin delivered the usual diplomatic platitudes following Macron’s victory. According to the Kremlin press service, he reminded the new French president of the difficult security environment in Europe, the shared threat of international terrorism, and the need to overcome mutual mistrust between Russia and the West. He also wished Macron good health.

Russian media and official reactions have been, on the whole, restrained.

Leonid Slutsky, head of the State Duma’s foreign affairs committee, said that France under Macron will pursue a pro-Western, pro-NATO agenda. But he held onto the possibility that Macron, being a young politician, still has the potential to see the light and come Russia’s way down the road.

And, ultimately, Slutsky said Macron’s victory had nothing to do with Macron. “This was a vote not for Macron, but a vote against the possibility of a Brexit scenario in the Fifth Republic,” he was quoted by RIA Novosti as saying. “And, of course, the West used all of their influence and threw their entire propaganda machine in France and abroad behind Macron.”

The loudest anti-Macron voice in Russia was, again, Komsomolskaya Pravda. The author of the May 4 "Macron is a Rothschild puppet" report appeared again on May 8 with a bold condemnation of the French people, who reportedly demonstrated a lack of a respect for Soviet sacrifices in World War II.

Embed:

> Major Russia newspaper @kpru: French "should go through globalist hell—they don't deserve the democracy paid for w/millions of Soviet lives" pic.twitter.com/JQGZJdiH28
>
> — Alec Luhn (@ASLuhn) May 8, 2017

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