FRANCE'S NEW PRESIDENT AND THE ARMENIANS

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As expected, François Hollande was elected as President of France. Perhaps due to the resentment towards Nicolas Sarkozy within Turkish public opinion, although it cannot be characterized as purely sympathy, some kind of tolerance exists towards Hollande. But does Frances new President really deserve that? If we analyze the past, we see that Hollande has unwaveringly supported Armenian views. Let us provide some examples. While serving as General Secretary of the Socialist Party, Hollande, together with Chairman of the French Dashnak Party Mourad Papazian (who is still Hollandes special advisor), signed a declaration in 2004 regarding that Turkey must recognize the Armenian genocide allegations before the membership negotiations with the EU begins. In the following years, heve always advocated Armenian views and also did not neglect to pay homage at the Genocide Memorial by visiting Yerevan. During the presidential elections campaign this year, he continued his pro-Armenian stance without any reservations and had delivered a speech at the genocide memorial in Paris on April 24. During this campaign, he had promised the Armenians that if elected, he would fulfill the following: One. During the first months of his presidency, he would work towards the re-drafting of the bill regarding the punishment of those denying the Armenian genocide allegations, which was previously annulled by the Constitutional Council, Two. He would support the stipulation of the recognition of the Armenian genocide allegations as a criterion for Turkey to become a member of the European Union, Three. For the commemoration of the 100th anniversary of the genocide allegations, he favors the establishment of a memorial-museum of the Armenian genocide in Paris, which would be funded by the State, Four. He will show special efforts for the prevention of further conflicts in Karabakh (if we recall President Alievs statement that Azeri territories could be liberated through force if all peaceful measures fail, it could be understood that Hollande would support Armenia in the Karabakh conflict). With the exception of the re-drafting of a new bill, all the other points were not addressed by Nicolas Sarkozy. From this aspect, Hollande has gone way further than Sarkozy in his pledges made to the Armenians. Following the parliamentary elections which is due next month, the Armenians will insist on the fulfillment of these promises. Will these promises be kept? Or will Hollande behave as President Obama has? As could be remembered, while President Obama was emphasizing before the presidential elections that he would recognize the Armenian genocide allegations, after being elected he conducted his first visit to Turkey and refrained from openly recognizing the genocide allegations despite all insistences. Concerning the promises made to the Armenians, the following points should be taken into consideration.

First of all, France has no benefit from continuing a policy of hostility towards Turkey. Secondly, since both Sarkozy and Hollande acknowledged the Armenian demands to draft a new punishment -which is their essential request- the Armenian votes have been divided between them; in other words, these votes have not benefited either side. In principle, presidential and parliamentary elections will not be held during the next five years in France. In other words, during this period, there will be no need for the Armenians within the political field. On the other hand, Hollande said he does not believe that Turkey will become a member of the EU during his presidency. Therefore, he has signaled that his country will continue to support Germany on Turkeys membership issue. However, by doing so, he has also indicated that France does not have the opportunity to use the EU membership card against Turkey in the next five years. Regarding the EU issue, the new French Government could develop a formula through which France would accept the negotiation of some chapters and in return expect Turkey not to object to the fulfillment of the promises Hollande made to the Armenians. However, since this will mean giving less and taking more, it does not serve Turkeys interests. In short, François Hollande and his government will in the near future find itself in a position where it will no longer need the Armenian votes and will lack a serious power of dissuasion against any objections, reactions and perhaps sanctions coming from Turkey regarding the Armenian issue. After the excitement of the presidential elections fades and the Parliamentary elections are held, Hollande and his Government will try to determine a new policy against Turkey in order to repair as much as possible the damages done during the Sarkozy period, but then it will emerge that the primary obstacle to satisfying Turkey is the promises made to the Armenians during the elections. This will most probably lead to a reconsideration of these promises.

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