

THE 2024 EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT ELECTIONS
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The 2024 European election in France:
Continuity and innovation amid
domestic and international turmoil

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1. Political and institutional framework

France, officially the French Republic, is one of the founding members of the European Communities. A speech given by Foreign Minister Robert Schuman on 9 May 1950 is widely seen as a foundational act in the European integration process¹.

France's institutional framework is currently defined by the Constitution of 4 October 1958, adopted after Charles de Gaulle returned to office. The Constitution of the Fifth Republic was elaborated at a time when the Algerian crisis was at its peak; to manage the conflict with the National Liberation Front and to provide a way out, the new Constitution addressed the chronic weakness and instability of the French executives. The Constitution of the Fourth Republic, enacted in 1946, was decried as epitomizing all the flaws of the *régime des partis*, as France's party-dominated parliamentarism was polemically known. The Constitution of 1958 is based on two pillars. First, although the government is responsible to the National Assembly (that is, the lower house of the French bicameral Parliament), the former has a very strong position in the legislative process thanks to the entrenchment of several tools of *parlementarisme rationalisé*. Second, the constitutional role of the President of the Republic is considerably strengthened; Article 5 of the Constitution (hereinafter Const.) confers on the head of state, among others, the power to "ensure, by his arbitration, the proper functioning of the public authorities and the continuity of the state". By virtue of Article 19 Const., some important presidential acts, including the decision to dissolve the National Assembly, do not need ministerial countersignature to take effect; in the intentions of the

* The text is an anticipation of the final - updated and revised - version that will be included in the volume "*The European Parliament elections of 2024*", published by Giappichelli, Turin.

¹ See critical appraisal by F. SCHORKOPF, *Die unentschiedene Macht. Verfassungsgeschichte der Europäischen Union, 1948-2007*, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen, 2007, pp. 36-53.

drafters of the Constitution of 1958, this would allow the President to act as a genuine counterpower vis-à-vis the *régime des partis*. Since the adoption of a groundbreaking constitutional amendment in 1962, the President of the Republic has been elected by direct universal suffrage.

A defining feature of the French form of government is the presence of a diarchic executive, with a directly elected President of the Republic and a Prime Minister responsible to the National Assembly. In the founding years of the Fifth Republic, General de Gaulle actively contributed to cementing a distinctive reading of the constitutional provisions, whereby the President of the Republic defines the major policy orientations, and the Prime Minister is in charge of the day-by-day political routine. Article 9 Const., according to which the head of state presides over the meetings of the Council of Ministers, has been key to fostering this evolution. Barring periods of *cobabitation*, the President of the Republic, although the Constitution does not confer on him the power to dismiss the Prime Minister, may expect to secure the latter's resignation whenever he asks him or her to leave. The dominant role of the head of state has been further enhanced by a constitutional amendment adopted in 2000, which reduced the duration of the presidential term from seven to five years. At the same time, the electoral calendar was redefined so as to have presidential elections followed by legislative elections. The combined effect of these reforms was to confirm presidential dominance within the executive and to make the presidential election the cornerstone of the whole electoral calendar.

In constitutional and comparative scholarship, there is no consensus on how the regime of the Fifth Republic should be classified. A number of French scholars emphasise the fact that the executive is responsible to the National Assembly (Article 20(3) Const.) and the President of the Republic has the power to dissolve the lower house (Article 12 Const.); having this in mind, France has a quite peculiar parliamentary form of government². In Italy, many scholars agree with Maurice Duverger³ that the form of government of France is a combination of presidential and parliamentary features and should, consequently, be labelled as semi-presidential⁴. France's membership of the European Union (EU) may have breathed new life into this discussion. Alongside Lithuania and Romania, France is one of the few member states that are represented by their head of state within the European Council, the institution that "provide[s] the Union with the necessary impetus for its development and [defines] the general political directions and priorities thereof" (Article 15(1) of the Treaty on European Union)⁵. This reflects

² See É. ZOLLER, W. MASTOR, *Droit constitutionnel*, 3rd edition, Presses universitaires de France, Paris, 2021, p. 24.

³ See, among others, M. DUVERGER, *Un régime semi-présidentiel*, in *Le Monde*, 26 November 1969.

⁴ See, for instance, M. VOLPI, *Le forme di governo contemporanee tra modelli teorici ed esperienze reali*, in *Quaderni costituzionali*, no. 2, 1997, pp. 260-271; A. DI GIOVINE, *Le forme di governo*, in P. CARROZZA, A. DI GIOVINE, G.F. FERRARI (edited by), *Diritto costituzionale comparato*, Laterza, Roma-Bari, 2009, pp. 728-734.

⁵ The other exception, Cyprus, is less relevant since it is the only presidential system within the European Union. See R. IBRIDO, *La classificazione delle forme di governo europee caratterizzate dalla commistione tra fiducia ed elezione diretta del Capo dello Stato*, in *il Filangieri*, 2023, pp. 106-108.

the prominent role of the President of the Republic within the executive, even in times of *cobabitation* with a hostile parliamentary majority. Presidential pre-eminence in foreign policy and security policy emerged in the 1960s, when General de Gaulle extensively relied on his constitutional position as “Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces” (Article 15 Const.); according to de Gaulle and his successors, foreign and military affairs represent a preserve (*domaine réservé*) of head of state⁶.

On a different note, the emergence of the European Council as a crucial player among the institutions of the EU can be interpreted as a typical product of French influence, as

“the institutionalisation of summitry was, in many respects, an old institutional preference of the French government. De Gaulle wrote for instance in his memoirs that the cooperation between European States necessarily called for ‘un concert organisé, régulier, des gouvernements responsables’. This idea had been formulated in the 1961 Fouchet Plan which failed partly because of the smaller countries’ opposition to the Gaullist project. Another example was Monnet’s proposal for a *Gouvernement européen provisoire*. Lastly, and most famously, the creation of the European Council is attributed to the personal initiative of Giscard”⁷.

Since 1958, the Constitution of the Fifth Republic has been amended twenty-five times. In 2008, a comprehensive reform of the institutional framework was adopted at the instigation of then President Nicolas Sarkozy, with the aim of strengthening the Parliament vis-à-vis the executive. With hindsight, many of the promises of the 2008 amendment have not been maintained⁸. Despite some attempts, no amendments were adopted under President François Hollande (2012-2017) and during Emmanuel Macron’s first term of office (2017-2022). In March 2024, Article 34 Const. was modified to entrench abortion as a “guaranteed freedom”. Other constitutional bills have been discussed or planned in the last few months, with focus on, among other issues, the status of New Caledonia (see below at 4) and Corsica⁹; however, the dissolution of the National Assembly on 9 June 2024 (see below at 6) has temporarily put an end to these reform endeavours.

Within the Constitution of 1958, Title XV (Articles 88-1 to 88-7), deals specifically with the EU. According to Article 54 Const., the ratification of international treaties that contain clauses contrary to

⁶ See R. IBRIDO, *Forma di governo parlamentare ed equilibrio di potenza nel quadro della società internazionale. Problemi comparatistici*, Wolters Kluwer Cedam, Milano, 2020, pp. 199-200; É. ZOLLER, W. MASTOR, *Droit constitutionnel*, cit., pp. 503-504.

⁷ E. MOURLON-DRUOL, *Filling the EEC leadership vacuum? The creation of the European Council in 1974*, in *Cold War History*, no. 3, 2010, p. 318.

⁸ See E. BOTTINI, M BOUAZIZ, S. HENNETTE-VAUCHEZ, *Un juge activiste? Les choix du Conseil constitutionnel dans les décisions n° 2023-4 RIP et n° 2023-849 DC du 14 avril 2023*, in *La Revue des droits de l’homme*, Actualités Droits-Libertés, May 2023 (available [here](#)).

⁹ See J.-J. URVOAS, *Leçons parlementaires pour une révision réussie*, in *Le Club des Juristes*, 5 March 2024 (available [here](#)).

the Constitution can only be authorised after amending the Constitution itself; it is for the *Conseil constitutionnel* to review the compatibility of treaties with the existing constitutional order. Title XV was added to the Constitution, and modified at different times, during the semi-permanent Treaty revision process¹⁰. Accordingly, the Constitution was amended prior to the ratification of the Treaty of Maastricht¹¹, the Treaty of Amsterdam¹², the Constitutional Treaty¹³, and the Treaty of Lisbon¹⁴. Moreover, the Constitution was modified to allow for the transposition into national law of the framework decision on the European arrest warrant. Therefore, most constitutional amendments related to the EU have been adopted following decisions of the *Conseil constitutionnel*, and the ‘European clauses’ of the Constitution have been gradually adapted to the evolution of supranational primary law¹⁵.

2. Parliamentary seats and electoral system

At the 2024 election, eighty-one members of the European Parliament (MEPs) were elected in France. If compared with the latest election in 2019, this means that two more MEPs were elected in France, that is, the second-largest delegation after Germany. Until 2009, France, Italy, and the United Kingdom had been allocated the same number of seats; aside from the withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the EU, the subsequent developments have reflected France’s demographic growth (as well as Italy’s stagnation).

In accordance with the Direct Election Act of 1976, as amended in 2002, MEPs are elected in France by proportional representation. In its current shape, the French electoral law for the European Parliament displays two major differences with respect to the Italian one. MEPs are elected on closed party lists in a single national constituency. Lists that get less than 5 percent of the votes on national scale are excluded

¹⁰ As defined by B. DE WITTE, *The Closest Thing to a Constitutional Conversation in Europe: The Semi-Permanent Treaty Revision Process*, in P. BEAUMONT, C. LYONS, N. WALKER (edited by), *Convergence and Divergence in European Public Law*, Hart, Oxford, 2002, pp. 137-160.

¹¹ *Conseil constitutionnel*, decision no. 92-308 DC of 9 April 1992, *Traité sur l’Union européenne*; decision no. 92-312 DC of 2 September 1992, *Traité sur l’Union européenne*. See para. 14 of decision no. 92-308 DC: “However, should an international agreement entered into to this end involve a clause conflicting with the Constitution or jeopardising the essential conditions for the exercise of national sovereignty (*conditions essentielles d’exercice de la souveraineté nationale*), authorisation to ratify would require prior amendment of the Constitution” (official English version available [here](#)).

¹² *Conseil constitutionnel*, decision no. 97-394 DC of 31 December 1997, *Traité d’Amsterdam modifiant le Traité sur l’Union européenne, les Traités instituant les Communautés européennes et certains actes connexes*.

¹³ *Conseil constitutionnel*, decision no. 2004-505 DC of 19 November 2004, *Traité établissant une Constitution pour l’Europe*.

¹⁴ *Conseil constitutionnel*, decision no. 2007-560 DC of 20 December 2007, *Traité de Lisbonne modifiant le traité sur l’Union européenne et le traité instituant la Communauté européenne*.

¹⁵ See L. BURGORGUE-LARSEN, P.-V. ASTRESSES, V. BRUCK, *The Constitution of France in the Context of EU and Transnational Law: An Ongoing Adjustment and Dialogue to Be Improved*, in A. ALBI, S. BARDUTZKY (edited by), *National Constitutions in European and Global Governance: Democracy, Rights, the Rule of Law*, Asser Press, The Hague, 2019, p. 1194 (available [here](#)); M. MORABITO, *Histoire constitutionnelle de la France de 1789 à nos jours*, 17th edition, LGDJ, Paris, 2022, p. 521 (“almost systematic modifications of the Constitution”).

from representation in the European Parliament. Male candidates and female candidates alternate throughout party lists.

The single national constituency was reestablished in 2018. Different arrangements had applied in the three previous elections due to a law passed in 2003, which had divided the French territory into eight constituencies for the purposes of European elections. In 2018, the legislature decided to revert to one national constituency because of the limited success of the 2003 reform, which had not “made it possible to strengthen the proximity between voters and elected representatives”¹⁶. This claim was apparently confirmed by the increasing levels of abstentionism. On a different note, the existence of eight superregional constituencies had been detrimental to the representation of smaller political parties, contrary to “the vocation of the European Parliament, that is, reflecting the pluralism of ideas and currents of opinion within the member states of the European Union”¹⁷.

The constitutionality of the 5 percent threshold was upheld by the *Conseil constitutionnel* in 2019, a few months after the European elections. Echoing previous judgments rendered by the Czech Constitutional Court and the Italian Constitutional Court¹⁸, the *Conseil constitutionnel* held that “the legislator intended to favour the main currents of ideas and opinions expressed in France being represented in the European Parliament, and as such to reinforce their influence within the European Parliament. On the other hand, the legislator intended to support the advent and consolidation of European political groups of significant size”¹⁹. In setting the threshold at 5 percent, “the legislator maintained methods that do not impact equality before suffrage in a disproportionate manner, and that do not excessively infringe on the pluralism of ideas and opinions”²⁰.

In 2024, the electoral campaign ended on 7 June at 23.59 CET. The voting process took place on 9 June 2024 in metropolitan France, that is, mainland France and Corsica. However, the French citizens residing in the Americas and residents of the overseas territories of Saint-Pierre-et-Miquelon, Saint-Barthélemy, Saint-Martin, Guadeloupe, Martinique, French Guiana and French Polynesia cast their votes on 8 June.

¹⁶ See the [explanatory report](#) attached to the governmental bill.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ See G. DELLEDONNE, ‘A goal that applies to the European Parliament not differently than it does to national parliaments’: the Italian Constitutional Court vindicates the 4 percent threshold for European elections, in *European Constitutional Law Review*, no. 2, 2019, pp. 376-389; A. ANTONUZZO, N. LUPO, *The thresholds for the EP elections: the EU Electoral Act, national legislation and the case-law of Constitutional Courts*, in T. MARGUERY, S. PLATON, H. VAN EIJKEN (edited by), *Les élections européennes 40 ans après. Bilans, enjeux et perspectives. The European Elections, 40 Years Later: Assessment, Issues and Prospects*, Bruylant, Bruxelles, 2020, pp. 119-146.

¹⁹ *Conseil constitutionnel*, decision no. 2019-811 QPC of 25 October 2019, *Mme Fairoux H. et autres*, para. 10 (official English version available [here](#)). See in this respect G. DELLEDONNE, *Costituzione e legge elettorale. Un percorso comparatistico nello Stato costituzionale europeo*, Editoriale Scientifica, Napoli, 2019, pp. 253-254.

²⁰ *Conseil constitutionnel*, decision no. 2019-811 QPC, para. 12.

French citizens residing in Africa, Asia, Europe and Oceania, as well as residents of the overseas territories of Wallis and Futuna, New Caledonia, La Réunion and Mayotte voted on 9 June.

3. The 2019 European election

Like in most member states of the EU, in France the 2019 European election was marked by a significant increase in turnout, which lay at 50.12 percent, that is, the highest percentage since 1994²¹.

The election results confirmed a trend that had already emerged at the presidential election two years before, when Emmanuel Macron and Marine Le Pen went to the runoff. In 2019, the political landscape was dominated by a dialectic between the pro-Macron, pro-European camp, and the sovereigntist right²². Two years after Emmanuel Macron's stunning electoral victory and some months after the beginning of the Yellow Vests protests, the European campaign was also perceived as a mid-term vote on the President's policies and governing style.

As had occurred in 2014, *Prenez le pouvoir*, the list sponsored by Marine Le Pen's *Rassemblement national*, won a plurality with 23.34 percent of the votes. It was closely followed by *Renaissance*, a list supported by all the components of the centrist presidential majority that obtained 22.42 percent of the votes. Four other lists got access to representation in the European Parliament. On the right, two years after François Fillon's dismal result in the first round of the presidential election, classic conservatives continued their decline: at 8.48 percent, the *Union de la droite et du centre*, a list supported by *Les Républicains* and their allies, emerged as the fourth most popular option. The same applied to *Envie d'Europe écologique et sociale*, a list supported by the *Parti socialiste* and other centre-left movements, including Raphaël Glucksmann's *Place publique*. *Envie d'Europe écologique et sociale* obtained 6.19 percent of the votes, in continuity with Benoît Hamon's poor performance at the presidential election of 2017. On the left, two other lists were more successful. *La France insoumise* got 6.31 percent, but a real surprise came from *Europe Écologie*: at 13.48 percent, the green list came third, just behind *Prenez le pouvoir* and *Renaissance*. The strong showing of *Europe Écologie* was in line with the breakthrough of Green lists in several member states in 2019²³.

In terms of seats, *Prenez le pouvoir* and *Renaissance* got twenty-three MEPs each. Thirteen seats were attributed to *Europe Écologie*, and eight to the *Union de la droite et du centre*. *La France insoumise* and

²¹ For an overview of the 2019 election results, see G. ALLEGRI, *Elezioni europee 2019 in una Francia tripolare. La maggioranza presidenziale di Macron tra nazionalisti ed euro-ecologisti*, in *federalismi.it*, no. 11, 2019, pp. 12-13; T. SCHÜBERL, C. KELBEL, J. NAVARRO, *The 2019 EP election in France: second-order or second-hand?*, in S. KRITZINGER, C. PLESCIA, K. RAUBE, J. WILHELM, J. WOUTERS (edited by), *Assessing the 2019 European Parliament Elections*, Routledge, London, 2020, pp. 132-148.

²² See G. GOODLIFFE, *Macron versus the RN? The Battle Lines of French Politics Following the 2019 European Elections*, in *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 2020, Annual Review, p. 57.

²³ See G. ALLEGRI, *Elezioni europee 2019 in una Francia tripolare*, cit., p. 15.

Envie d'Europe écologique et sociale won six seats each. In a nutshell, “the 2019 European election confirmed the implosion of the French party system that was first observed in the 2017 presidential race. Specifically, a new principle of division emerged with the rivalry between LREM and the RN on the one hand and the fragmentation of support among the remaining parties on the other”²⁴.

4. Electoral campaign and competing political forces

The 2024 electoral campaign bore some resemblance to 2019. In April 2022, President Macron was re-elected into office; nevertheless, his victory was undermined by the outcome of the legislative election in June 2022, and the beginning of his second term has been tumultuous. At the legislative election, the pro-Macron, centrist coalition lost its majority, and both the radical right and the radical left made major gains. The existence of widespread dissatisfaction with President Macron was further highlighted by the fact that both Richard Ferrand and Christophe Castaner – that is, respectively, the sitting President of the National Assembly and the parliamentary leader of the presidential party La République en marche – were defeated in their own constituencies. The legislative election of 2022 gave rise to an almost unprecedented situation²⁵, as the government was supported by a mere plurality of the members of the National Assembly and could only survive insofar as the far-right and left-wing opposition groups were not willing to converge on the same motion of no confidence²⁶. Meanwhile, under Prime Minister Élisabeth Borne (2022-2024) the executive made extensive resort to the tools of *parlementarisme rationalisé* to have its legislative proposals passed²⁷. Political tension and social unrest peaked during the debate about the pensions reform in Spring 2023. Riots raged in June 2023 after the shooting of Nahel Merzouk; more recently, a constitutional bill related to the enlargement of the electorate in New Caledonia was heavily contested in that overseas territory. To face violent protests, a state of emergency was declared in New Caledonia on 15 May 2024 and lasted until 27 May. Amidst an increasingly dysfunctional political system, the President of the Republic has been targeted by protesters of all sorts and has been likened to a lightning rod²⁸.

President Macron repeatedly suggested that he would not remain inactive in the face of a parliamentary rebellion: should the National Assembly have passed a motion of no confidence, the head of state would

²⁴ G. GOODLIFFE, *Macron versus the RN?*, cit., p. 62.

²⁵ In 1988, the Parti socialiste fell short of a majority, albeit by few seats. Some figures from the moderate opposition joined the Socialist-supported executives, which relied on the occasional support of either the Communists or smaller centrist factions. See P. PICIACCHIA, *Semipresidenzialismo francese e ruolo del Parlamento: dai tentativi di rivalutazione dell'istituzione parlamentare alle più recenti sfide nel contesto di trasformazione del sistema dei partiti*, in DPCE online, no. 1, 2023, pp. 989-990.

²⁶ Under Article 49(2) Const., a motion of no confidence is approved if it is supported by a majority of the deputies.

²⁷ See E. BOTTINI, *Constitutional? Perhaps. Democratic? Not so much. On the French Government's Maneuver to Pass the Law on Retirement*, in *Verfassungsblog*, 27 March 2023 (available [here](#)).

²⁸ See M. MARCHI, L. RANIERI, *Il motore franco-tedesco nell'Unione che verrà*, in *il Mulino*, no. 2, 2024, p. 94.

have immediately dissolved the lower house and called for a snap election. Still, opinion polls were not pointing to significant changes in the public mood with respect to Spring 2022. If Macron had called for an early election, he should not have expected a radically different electoral outcome. Early in 2024, one poll even indicated the possibility of the Rassemblement national winning a plurality or even an outright majority of seats in the National Assembly²⁹. The European election on 8 and 9 June 2024 was the first vote of national significance since the beginning of Macron's second term.

After a major reform of migration law was adopted by the Parliament in December 2023, Macron decided to breathe new life into his policy action, also with an eye to the imminent European elections³⁰. To do so, the head of state resorted to the most typical tool available to a French President, that is, he changed his Prime Minister. Although the Constitution of 1958 does not provide the head of state with the power to dismiss the Prime Minister, the sitting Prime Minister will invariably tender his or her resignation whenever the President of the Republic asks him or her to do so³¹. In January 2024, Prime Minister Élisabeth Borne reluctantly accepted to resign; in the aftermath, President Macron appointed Gabriel Attal, until then Minister of Education in the Borne Government, as the new Prime Minister of France. At first sight, the electoral campaign in 2024 can be described as a re-run of the 2019 campaign, as some of the main political parties did not change their lead candidates since then. This is the case, among others, of the Rassemblement national, Les Républicains, La France insoumise, and the Parti socialiste. The lead candidate of the Rassemblement national was Jordan Bardella, who has sat in the European Parliament since 2019. Bardella succeeded Marine Le Pen as the new party leader in November 2022 and is occasionally referred to as a possible internal competitor to Le Pen with a view to the next presidential election in 2027. Gabriel Attal's appointment as the new Prime Minister can also be explained in the light of a need to oppose a youthful figure to Bardella's relatively fresh image. Les Républicains confirmed François-Xavier Bellamy as their lead candidate. Bellamy, a conservative intellectual, has been a MEP since 2019. On the side of Jean-Luc Mélenchon's La France insoumise, Manon Aubry was renominated as lead candidate. Aubry, a former spokesperson of Oxfam France, was also first elected to the European Parliament in 2019. Finally, the Parti socialiste and Place publique stuck with Raphaël Glucksmann. Glucksmann, a journalist and film director by profession, is the son of a prominent representative of the New Philosophers and was first elected to the supranational legislature in 2019. Ahead of the election

²⁹ See M. LAGRAVE, *En cas de dissolution, le RN pourrait obtenir la majorité à l'Assemblée nationale selon un sondage*, in *Le Figaro*, 15 March 2024 (available [here](#)).

³⁰ See P. PICCIACCHIA, *Dalle elezioni senatoriali alla legge sull'immigrazione (guardando al nuovo Governo Attal e alle sentenze del Conseil): l'Esecutivo francese in affanno e la continua ricerca di una strategia*, in *Nomos*, no. 3, 2023, p. 2.

³¹ This is true when the Prime Minister stems from the same political party or coalition as the President. In periods of *cohabitation* with a hostile parliamentary majority, the President may not be able to induce the Prime Minister to resign (see M. MORABITO, *Histoire constitutionnelle de la France de 1789 à nos jours*, cit., pp. 471-473).

day(s), the Socialist list was expected to make a good showing and to get support among voters from the moderate left who are unhappy with Macron's policy line.

Among the political parties that crossed the 5 percent threshold in 2019, Renaissance and the Greens selected new lead candidates. Until the government reshuffle in January 2024, Stéphane Séjourné, a longtime associate of President Macron and chair of the Renew Europe Group in the European Parliament, was seen as a clear favourite to lead the pro-Macron list in the upcoming election. After Séjourné was appointed Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs in the Attal Government, Valérie Hayer, a less known figure, replaced him as the new chair of the Renew Europe Group. Shortly afterwards, Hayer was announced as the lead candidate of *Besoin d'Europe*, a list including all the components of the pro-Macron camp. In 2019, Yannick Jadot had been the Ecologist lead candidate; after running for President of the Republic in 2022, Jadot left the European Parliament for the French Senate in October 2023. In 2024, the lead candidate of *Europe Écologie* was Marie Toussaint, a first-term MEP who rose to national prominence thanks to the *Affaire du siècle* campaign³². Like other Green parties in most of Europe, *Europe Écologie* was expected to suffer a major setback in the polls.

All the above-mentioned political parties had a good chance of crossing again the threshold and getting access to representation in the European Parliament. Another list was expected to cross the threshold, that is, *La France fière*. *La France fière* is a list sponsored by *Reconquête*, a radical right party established in 2021 by journalist Éric Zemmour. The launch of *Reconquête* at the presidential and legislative elections of 2022 was not particularly brilliant; this time, the logic of proportional representation helped them obtain a better result. The lead candidate of *La France fière* was Marion Maréchal, Marine Le Pen's niece and Jean-Marie Le Pen's granddaughter. By the way, the fact that the European Parliament is elected on the basis of proportional representation, as well as the existence of significant disagreements on the future course of European integration, allow explaining why the four main political parties of the left did not join forces (as they had done at the legislative election in 2022) but ended up presenting four distinct lists³³.

The presidential majority tried to frame the upcoming European election as yet another showdown between the pro-European camp and Le Pen's sovereigntist list³⁴. Emmanuel Macron and Gabriel Attal were directly involved in the campaign, with little-known Valérie Hayer relegated to a secondary role. On 23 May, a debate between Prime Minister Attal and Jordan Bardella was broadcast on television; days

³² See L. DEL CORONA, *Brevi considerazioni in tema di contenzioso climatico alla luce della recente sentenza del Tribunal Administratif de Paris sull'«Affaire du siècle»*, in *La Rivista Gruppo di Pisa*, no. 1/2021, pp. 327-335.

³³ Alongside *La France insoumise*, the Socialists and the Ecologists, a Communist list labelled *Gauche unie pour le monde du travail* was led by Léon Deffontaines. See C. GENTILHOMME, *Européennes: sans accord avec la NUPES, le PCF va désigner sa propre tête de liste*, in *Le Figaro*, 21 June 2023 (available [here](#)).

³⁴ See M. MARCHI, *La politica francese alla vigilia delle Europee*, in *il Mulino*, 3 June 2024 (available [here](#)).

later, President Macron challenged Marine Le Pen to discuss face to face in another televised debate³⁵. These moves were sharply criticised by Raphaël Glucksmann and François-Xavier Bellamy, and representatives of the Parti socialiste and Les Républicains filed a claim with the regulatory authority for audiovisual and digital communication (Autorité de régulation de la communication audiovisuelle et numérique, Arcom) complaining a violation of equal treatment during the campaign. Be that as it may, Le Pen rejected Macron's invitation, unless the latter undertook to resign or to dissolve the National Assembly in case of electoral defeat. Bardella also claimed that a snap legislative election would be the inevitable consequence of a great victory of his list on 8 and 9 June. By contrast, the pro-Macron camp objected that a European election cannot dramatically affect national politics and, consequently, the President's tenure as well as the continuation of the 16th parliamentary term until 2027 were not at stake³⁶. Due to the relevance of France as a member state of the European Union, the French electoral campaign was not without implications on a wider scale. This shows that national issues, for instance, President Macron's record after seven years in office, were closely intertwined with genuinely supranational concerns.

Within the European People's Party (EPP), prominent representatives of Les Républicains were most vocal against Ursula von der Leyen being nominated as their lead candidate. Ahead of the EPP Congress in Bucharest, the leader of Les Républicains, Éric Ciotti, publicly announced that his party would not support von der Leyen's re-election bid. In a letter to EPP President Manfred Weber, Ciotti reproached von der Leyen for being too close to President Macron and for embodying an unfortunate "technocratic drift" during her first term as President of the European Commission³⁷.

Within the far-right Identity and Democracy Party (ID Party), Marine Le Pen, former leader of the Rassemblement national and runner-up in the presidential elections of 2017 and 2022, occasionally showed embarrassment about the extreme views of leading representatives of the Alternative für Deutschland (AfD), one of the most prominent members of the ID Party. After Maximilian Krah, lead candidate of the Alternative für Deutschland, made controversial statements about the Nazi SS, senior members of the Rassemblement national claimed that they would no longer sit in the same group as the AfD³⁸. This move is part of Le Pen's long-standing *dédiabolisation* strategy, whose aim is to improve the

³⁵ See P. THÉVENIAUD, *Emmanuel Macron: "Je suis prêt à débattre maintenant avec Mme Le Pen"*, in *Le Parisien*, 25 May 2024 (available [here](#)).

³⁶ See J. TOUSSAY, *Européenne 2024: Thévenot renvoie le RN, qui évoque une dissolution, à "ses cours d'éducation civique"*, in *Le HuffPost*, 23 May 2024 (available [here](#)).

³⁷ Éric Ciotti's letter to Manfred Weber is available [here](#). See also G. GOTTI, *La selezione degli Spitzenkandidaten da parte dei partiti politici europei in vista delle elezioni del 2024*, in *Diritti comparati*, 15 April 2024 (available [here](#)).

³⁸ See N. MASSOL, *Parlement européen: le RN rompt avec ses alliés allemands de l'AfD après des déclarations sur les SS*, in *Libération*, 21 May 2024 (available [here](#)).

public image of the Rassemblement national³⁹, and may prelude to tectonic shifts in the space between the Identity and Democracy Group and the European Conservatives and Reformists Group.

Finally, President Macron has openly tried to delegitimise the *Spitzenkandidaten* process, which he decries as an unwarranted attempt to politicise the Commission and to strip the European Council of its own powers⁴⁰. Meanwhile, pro-Macron MEP Pascal Canfin explicitly admitted that “France and everyone in the presidential ecosystem would like [Mario] Draghi to play a role” during the 2024-2029 EU institutional cycle⁴¹. In addition to criticising the selection of lead candidates by the main European political families, Macron further articulated his vision for the EU. On 25 April 2024, seven years after his first major address on the future of Europe, the President of the Republic made a speech at Sorbonne University in Paris⁴². Back in 2017, Macron had “proposed to build a more united, more sovereign and more democratic Europe”; seven years later, he admitted that not all efforts had been successful, “particularly when it has come to making our Europe more democratic. It is clear that progress has been limited on this point”. Still, “there have been successes, particularly in terms of unity and sovereignty”, and despite an “unprecedented accumulation of crises, Europe has rarely made so much progress”. By now, Macron polemically added, “nobody really dares to call for an exit from Europe or the Euro anymore”⁴³. Amid multiple proposals, which were met with some scepticism by the public, Macron quoted Paul Valéry and warned that “our civilisations are mortal. We must be clear on the fact that our Europe, today, is mortal. It can die. It can die, and that depends entirely on our choices. But these choices must be made now”.

5. Electoral results

In line with the 2019 election, there was a modest increase in turnout. 51.49 percent of the registered voters cast their ballots, that is, the highest percentage since 1994. Interestingly, turnout was higher in the 2024 European election than in the 2022 legislative election, when it stagnated around 47 percent⁴⁴. This testifies to the growing political relevance of European Parliament elections, which have long been classified as second-order elections⁴⁵. The increase in turnout in France reflected a wider trend that, however, was not evenly distributed among the other member states.

³⁹ See M. MARCHI, *La politica francese alla vigilia delle Europee*, cit.

⁴⁰ See Y.M. CITINO, *The Spitzenkandidaten Practice in the Spotlight*, in *Verfassungsblog*, 3 April 2024 (available [here](#)).

⁴¹ See N. CAMUT, A. LATTIER, P. DE SAINT REMY, *Close Macron ally says Paris wants top EU job for Draghi*, in *Politico*, 23 May 2024 (available [here](#)).

⁴² President Macron’s speech is available [here](#) (in English).

⁴³ With respect to the 2019 campaign, see G. ALLEGRI, *Elezioni europee 2019 in una Francia tripolare*, cit., p. 10.

⁴⁴ See A. DUROVIC, *Rising electoral fragmentation and abstention: the French election of 2022*, in *West European Politics*, 2023, pp. 614-629.

⁴⁵ See K. GATTERMANN, C.H. DE VREESE, W. VAN DER BRUG, *Introduction to the special issue: No longer second-order? Explaining the European Parliament elections of 2019*, in *Politics*, 2021, pp. 423-432.

	Number of votes	% (out of the registered voters)
Registered voters	49,462,981	
Total votes	25,470,472	51.49%
Blank votes	346,240	0.70%
Invalid votes	370,459	0.75%
Valid votes	24,753,773	50.05%

Source : French Ministry of the Interior (official data available [here](#))

In many respects, opinion polls were proved right. Seven lists crossed the 5 percent threshold and got access to representation. These were the same lists as in 2019, with the sole addition of La France fière, a Reconquête-supported list. Despite these superficial similarities, the results in 2024 were clearly different from the previous election (see above at 3). Just like in 2019, La France revient!, supported by the Rassemblement national and led by Jordan Bardella, emerged as the strongest list. This time, however, the competition between the Rassemblement national and the pro-Macron list was far less close than in 2019. With 31.37 percent of the valid votes, Bardella's list was considerably stronger than five years before and got more than twice as many votes as Besoin d'Europe, the centrist list led by Valérie Hayer. To add insult to injury, Besoin d'Europe was followed closely by the Socialist list Réveiller l'Europe, whose remarkable showing was interpreted as a sign of recovery of the centre-left and was explained in the light of Raphaël Glucksmann's explicit disagreement with Jean-Luc Mélenchon, the charismatic, controversial leader of La France insoumise. The radical-left list, led by Manon Aubry, fared better than in 2019 and got 9.89 percent of the valid votes. Although François-Xavier Bellamy's campaign had been hailed as powerful, the performance of the conservative list was somewhat disappointing. At 7.25 percent, La droite pour faire entendre la voix de la France en Europe, as the list supported by Les Républicains and their allies was labelled, suffered a slight decrease with respect to 2019. Europe Écologie was another clear loser, as it lost eight percentage points compared to 2019 and barely crossed the threshold. La France fière got slightly more than 5 percent, a lacklustre performance in line with the party's disappointing results in the presidential and legislative elections of 2022.

The magnitude of the electoral success of the Rassemblement national is further highlighted by a look at the map of France. La France revient! was the strongest list in all the departments of metropolitan France, with the exception of four departments in Île-de-France. Bardella's list also got a plurality of votes in the overseas territories of Saint-Pierre-et-Miquelon, Guadeloupe, French Guiana, and La Réunion; it even obtained 52.42 percent in Mayotte. The pro-Macron list Besoin d'Europe came first in prosperous Hauts-de-Seine, among the French citizens residing abroad, and in the overseas territories of French Polynesia, New Caledonia, Saint-Barthélemy, Saint-Martin, and Wallis and Futuna. Glucksmann's Socialist list was strongest in Paris. Finally, La France insoumise - Union Populaire was the strongest list in the overseas

department of Martinique and in Seine-Saint-Denis and Val-de-Marne, two departments in the historic Red Belt around Paris.

In terms of relative weight, two French political parties have emerged as particularly strong within their own European political groups. On the one hand, the Rassemblement national, thanks to the 30 MEPs elected from the Bardella list, will be the strongest member of the Identity and Democracy Group. On the other hand, La France insoumise will be the strongest party within The Left in the European Parliament – GUE/NGL. Reconquête, which did not contest the European election in 2019, will now join the European Conservatives and Reformists Group.

List (lead candidate)	Number of votes	% (out of the registered voters)	% (out of the valid votes)	Seats
La France revient! Avec Jordan Bardella et Marine Le Pen (Jordan Bardella)	7,756,936	15.70%	31.37%	30
Besoin d'Europe (Valérie Hayer)	3,614,646	7.31%	14.60%	13
Réveiller l'Europe (Raphaël Glucksmann)	3,424,216	6.92%	13.83%	13
La France insoumise - Union populaire (Manon Aubry)	2,448,703	4.95%	9.89%	9
La droite pour faire entendre la voix de la France en Europe (François-Xavier Bellamy)	1,794,171	3.63%	7.25%	6
Europe Écologie (Marie Toussaint)	1,361,883	2.75%	5.50%	5
La France fière, menée par Marion Maréchal et soutenue par Éric Zemmour (Marion Maréchal)	1,353,127	2.74%	5.47%	5
Other lists	2,991,091	6.05%	12.08%	0

Source : French Ministry of the Interior (official data available [here](#))

6. Political comments and future scenarios

The discussion about the results of the European election was overshadowed by a dramatic development on 9 June in the evening. Shortly after the polls closed, President Macron gave a televised speech from the Élysée Palace. Macron acknowledged that “the parties that defend Europe, including the presidential majority”, had been defeated. He also noticed that radical right parties had emerged as particularly strong in France, with almost 40 percent of the valid votes. Meanwhile, Macron stated, France was being captured by “disorder” and dissatisfaction. For this reason, the President of the Republic announced the dissolution of the National Assembly in accordance with Article 12 Const. The snap legislative election will be held on 30 June and 7 July. According to Macron, France “needs a clear majority to act in serenity and concord”.

Macron’s decision came as a surprise to commentators but also to many figures in his inner circle. Under Article 12 Const., before announcing the dissolution the President has to consult with the Prime Minister, the President of the National Assembly, and the President of the Senate. According to media reports, the President of the Senate, Gérard Larcher, received a phone call from Macron just ahead of the latter’s televised speech. Prime Minister Attal and the President of the National Assembly, Yaël Braun-Pivet, were informed of Macron’s decision during a meeting with the President and some key ministers in the

afternoon. President Braun-Pivet criticised this move, as she argued that a bilateral meeting was needed to have a proper consultation for the purposes of Article 12 Const. For critics, Macron's decision epitomised the problematic aspects of the "hyper-presidential" interpretation of the Constitution that has established itself in the last few decades⁴⁶.

If Macron's announcement is put into historical perspective, the uniqueness of the 2022 dissolution clearly emerges. It has been the sixth dissolution since the entry into force of the Constitution of 1958, and the first one since the length of the President's term was reduced from seven to five years in 2000. The President has not reacted to a conflict between the executive and the legislature, as was the case with General de Gaulle in 1962. He is not in the early weeks of his term, as was the case with François Mitterrand in 1981 and 1988: on both occasions, the Socialist leader had just won presidential elections and wished to foster the emergence of a likeminded parliamentary majority to implement his policy agenda. Neither has Macron exploited an apparently favourable situation to call for a snap election, as Jacques Chirac did in 1997 (actually to his own detriment). Some similarities may possibly be detected with 1968, when General de Gaulle dissolved the lower house to put an end to a major social crisis⁴⁷. This time, President Macron is halfway through his second (and last) term of office. Since the legislative election in 2022, the pro-Macron camp has no longer had an outright majority in the National Assembly; still, the Borne Government, was able to have some major legislative reforms passed. After the pro-President camp suffered a major setback in a non-national vote, the head of state decided to play all-in and to appeal to the voters⁴⁸.

The campaign for the next legislative election is outside the reach of this piece. As things stand, it is possible to draw tentative conclusions. The election results in France have had a major impact both at national and European level. Within France, the European election has given rise to a major political crisis that may cast a shadow over, and even doom, the remaining part of President Macron's second term. At the European level, the defeat of the Hoyer list has clearly rescaled Macron's ambition to play a decisive role within the European Council in the initial phase of the 2024-2029 institutional cycle. As a logical consequence of Macron's electoral defeat, the likelihood that Ursula von der Leyen is confirmed for a second term as President of the European Commission has symmetrically increased. These developments, both national and supranational, show that the interplay between the national and European political arenas has been further strengthened, and no analysis of the functioning of domestic forms of government is possible without duly considering the influence of supranational concerns.

⁴⁶ See C. CERDA-GUZMAN, F. SAVONITTO, *Macron, la dissolution la plus hyperprésidentielle de la V^e République*, in *Libération*, 17 June 2024 (available [here](#)).

⁴⁷ See the classification provided by B. MATHIEU, M. VERPEAUX, *Droit constitutionnel*, Presses universitaires de France, Paris, 2004, pp. 505-506.

⁴⁸ See A. LEVADE, *Dissolution: les conséquences d'une décision "surprise"*, in *Le Club des Juristes*, 11 June 2024 (available [here](#)).