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Intersections:
Macron's election and the European project

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(music)

PITA: Welcome to Intersections, part of the Brookings Podcast Network. I'm your host, Adriana Pita. So this weekend France held its final round of voting for the election of a new president, which pitted centrist Emmanuel Macron against the far right National Front candidate Marine Le Pen. All eyes have been watching this election as potentially a third major disruption in Europe and Trans-Atlantic relations following the UK's Brexit vote and the US election of President Trump. Macron of course was the victor, so here with me today to discuss what happened in France and also to tell us what he might glean from it in terms of broader trends in Europe, are Constanze Stelzenmüller, senior fellow and Philippe Le Carre was a visiting fellow with our center on the US and Europe. Felipe and Constanza thank you much for being here.

STELZENMÜLLER: Very welcome.

CORRE: Thank you.

PITA: Felipe I think I'm going to turn first to you to basically give us a quick overview about what happened in this election. What Emmanuel Macron's policies are going to be standing for and what happens next. Now that he's been elected.

CORRE: Well it's been quite an extraordinary election. When you think about it none of the traditional parties have made it to the second round. You had in the first round of this presidential election on April 23rd you had both the Socialist Party the outgoing party in power and the traditional rights the Republican Party now as it's called were eliminated and voters had to basically choose between two nontraditional candidates the National Front the far right. Marine Le Pen and Emmanuel Macron

whose party En Marche has only had a year of existence. And it's a fairly extraordinary performance. So he's made it. He's now the president elect and he'll be in office just about a week from now. So it goes very quickly. Yes. Not like in the US. Basically all long term is ending on May the 15th and the new president is taking over. But there's you know problem starts. He's going to have to appoint a prime minister, a cabinet, and then he is facing a very tough legislative elections. As I said a new party with no members of parliaments whatsoever no elected officials. He himself actually has not been elected anywhere. He's got just about two years as a minister, unelected minister. In terms of government experience. So his problem is to identify the right person to be the prime minister and as well as ministers in order to win these parliamentary elections so that he can implement his platform and his program. And it's not going to be easy because the traditional parties they have not gone away. They are still there, and the National Front is still there. They, I mean she, made Thirty-four percent of the votes. That's not bad really. I mean that's much better than what she did last time and that's much better than what her father did. We might come back to that if we talk about populism but basically you know there are two options. Either he wins a majority in this national assembly but there are 577 seats so that's quite a lot of seats to win when you're a new party, or he ends up with a good chunk of seats but not enough to form a majority government. Therefore, you have to make a coalition which I think is the most likely scenario. But will these tradition of parties I'm not talking about the National Front there which is probably going to be to stay on the sideline. But I'm talking about the Republican Party or the Socialist Party. Will they agree to be in power with En Marche? That is something we haven't seen yet because obviously you know it's a new

organization and being neither left or right is a very new concept in France. It's a very divided country in terms of politics, a bit like here. So he's reinventing politics, but it's going to be a tough campaign. And his choice of cabinet members will be very interesting most probably will choose a very experienced politician as prime minister and he'll have to start introducing reforms or at least you know trying to do something otherwise you know people say why should we vote for you in the elections. You haven't done anything. But then he's only got about six weeks. So that's a bit tough.

PITA: Is En Marche, because they're so new, do they have a full slate of candidates running for parliament for almost or every seat?

CORRE: They have, they will announce the full list this week, Secretary-General of En Marche, who is a member of parliament, has already announced that the list is ready. And I suspect it will be a mixture of people coming from the civil society as well as traditional politicians. But obviously the politicians that belong to another party will have to sort of come out of the closet and say well I'm actually for En Marche, I'm actually not for my original party. So you know it's going to be a lot of withdrawing of the electoral map and then the legitimacy system is pretty similar to the presidential system in the sense that it's a majority election. But there are two rounds. So basically for the second round you can have up to three or even four candidates which means that the one with the most votes gets elected. You can have a triangular or quadrangular election and that means the National Front will often be there and will have very little chances to win constituencies. But they will win some. They only have two in place now that's not very much really. So they'll probably get you know maybe 20 or 30 especially northern France and in eastern France where Marine Le Pen perform very well. It's

possible she might change the name of her party maybe not before the legislative elections or maybe next year when the National Front has its Congress. That will be a bit strange because the National Front has this history but maybe that's the reason why maybe they want to make it to the next general election. But they are not here to leave the scene. And the last one I should mention is the far left Jean-Luc Marshall who came forth in the first round of the presidential election has said that he's going to be part of the opposition. So you already have a sort of anti-Macron wave building with people who think he is a kind of you know closet republican or socialist and being a centrist doesn't mean anything. What does it mean in a very polarized world to be neither left or right? So most probably he'll have he'll be facing a lot of positions. But you know he's got his youth, he's got his energy. He's got 66 percent of the French people behind him, at least those who voted in the second round, not necessarily the whole population. And you know it's created a dynamic. So you know there's a lot of hope there and expectations.

PITA: I do want to ask you to talk a little bit about what we know about his policies and what he ran on. And he was as you mentioned Hollande's economic minister. He did win 66 percent of the vote a very high percentage of our Le Pen. But there were at least for France anyway a great number of abstentions of people who either didn't show up to vote or even you know marked abstain or spoiled their ballots in some regards. As you say there was a lot of opposition to him as well. So what can you tell us about what he stands for and maybe what the people who didn't vote what they weren't hearing from him?

CORRE: Well yes. I mean the problem is in France the anti-globalization movement is not new. It's been around for 20-25 years. The Communist Party in France used to be very strong. Now the Communist Party is almost disappeared. But there's this new far left movement represented by this man Milan who very unhappy about not being in the Elysee Palace but there was little chance of this. But he is basically saying his movement is called unsubmitted France so we need to define the mainstream capitalism. We disagree with the big business and all this. So that's one part of the angry people come from him. And it's possible actually some of the far left voters actually voted for the far right which you know sort of goes with the idea that you know there is a populist wave of unhappy people who dislike global trade. And you know they have been left out of all this and that the professionals the businesspeople the ex-pats the younger people who are also some young voters will pen but you know a lot of energy came from this working international people who voted in support of Macron. So now he's got to handle all this and he realizes there's a lot of anger. It's going to be difficult because you can't please everybody at once. And he's announced a number of reforms, tax reform. He's got to cut government jobs much less than the traditional right. It's going to be around a hundred thousand maybe two hundred thousand at the most. In the next five years some of them will be basically retired people that will not be replaced. And he will try to help young people to find jobs. But not just young people who would try to create an atmosphere where there is no such thing as an unemployed. So we try to encourage part time jobs entrepreneurship and startups and things like that. And then of course he will. And we'll talk about that in a minute. But he will also try to create this pro-EU atmosphere where you know it's actually good to be part of Europe

because you can access to a wider market and that France is stronger is a stronger country and a stronger Europe not as an isolated. So you know you had basically a clash of two ideas in this election between France that was closing its borders to immigrants and in France that was engaging with the rest of the world that was opening. I mean not opening its borders because I have to add that of course the security dimension and the terrorist attacks that were perpetrated on French soil over the past two years had a damning effect on the society and people are still worried and I suspect that some of the Le Pen voters didn't trust Macron maybe as the commander in chief and there are still some doubts about this because the man you know has a background as an investment banker he was economic advisor to the president he was minister for just two years in charge of economics. What about you know international affairs, security, counterterrorism all these things. Will he be able to talk to you know his counterparts? So I mean the reassuring thing is that you know the French military you know will still be there and the French diplomacy will still be there. There won't be any budget cuts if you know what I mean. And also he's got the support of the current defense minister Jean-Yves Le Drian, who was here at Brookings a few months ago and who is a safe pair of hands and who might actually stay on for a short while in government. It's even been rumored as a possible prime minister although he is a little old but he's had a strong impact on Macron, and he's a very popular defense minister. And people know that security is very important. And Macron himself has said that he will continue to engage France on various overseas futures when its security is at stake. And of course we'll continue to protect the French people.

PITA: Thank you for that. Constanze, can I ask you to jump in and talk about some of the similar dynamics as we see them in Germany. You and I have talked before about globalization and those left behind Germany of course weathered the big 2008 recession much better than a lot of other folks election for the Chancellorship That's coming up in September. The two major parties are not quite so far apart as it was between Le Pen and Macron. Could you talk a little bit about what the picture looks like in Germany there and what the two parties are representing and the other parties as well.

STELZENMÜLLER: The Germans are holding the last big European state national elections, in the course of this year on September 24th. And to some degree they are profiting from the knock on effect of a whole series of elections that started with the American election in November of last year and then continued with the Dutch election, and the French election. And what you can see and of course the whole Brexit process and we are going to have a UK snap election on June 8th and what we're seeing in the German political landscape at least we can see that from both the polls and some important regional elections that we've just had is dare I say a Trump and Brexit effect which is pushing German voters away from the extremes and hewing towards the mean. And as a result the most significant result I think has been that the alternative for Germany, Germany's own right wing party which has had double digit electoral results in some states peaking at twenty-four point six. I think a couple of months ago is now back in single digit territory. We just had elections in northwestern German state of Schleswig-Holstein. They came in for the first time. So there are now 12 out of 16 state legislatures but they only got 5.5 percent so they scraped and barely

above the threshold of 5 percent. So that's one thing. The other thing is that the Social Democrats who are now in a coalition a grand coalition with Chancellor Merkel's conservatives and who had been having a bit of a bump from a new challenger or a new candidate. Martin Schultz, who used to be president of the European Parliament and for a while or a couple of months ago they were seeing thousands of particularly young people joining the party of Martin Schultz again something that's quite unusual in German terms and he was polling practically neck to neck with the chancellor. That too I think has petered off somewhat. She's now the clear front runner again. But instead of that in those last regional elections you had double digit numbers for the Greens and the liberals which means also that two forces which have been traditionally strong in German politics and which really are quite mainstream in many ways have sort of come back from the dead. So again we are being normalized I think in reaction to all this but I would also add that there are angry voters in Germany too. There are of course always voters who are ashamed to say that they will vote for an extreme party. So I would guess that current polling numbers for right wing or left wing parties are slightly understated and I think that the fundamental question of how to deal with the problem of the dark side of globalization, the fact that there are people who have legitimate grievances because they have suffered more than others under conditions of globalization. Open borders that has yet to be addressed across Europe including by now President Macron but we'll also have to be addressed in the German elections and afterwards.

PITA: Sure, you mentioned the Dutch elections and as you say there had started to be some gains in the previous year by further right wing often specifically anti-Muslim

or anti-immigrant parties at sort of the legislative and parliamentary levels and a lot of places across Europe, the Dutch elections was one of the first sort of turnaround points when Geert Wilders party did not win the prime ministership there. Macron's election is also seen by some as OK this is the second step away from that. The Daily Beast proclaimed it very dramatically. They talked about the crashing wave of populism that has come to a halt. Is it too soon to say that as you say there are still angry voters out there worried about these things. Is it too soon to say like OK we can all breathe easy now. This is an end to it or are we seeing sort of a turn of the tide of OK people are angry but they've realized they shouldn't go quite so far.

CORRE: If I may say I don't think it's the end of this. First of all because as I explained you know in the second round of the French presidential election a lot of people voted for Macron by default because they couldn't vote for the far left or even for the traditional rights. And you know there's been protests as well against Macron already. A lot of people already claim to be in the opposition to Emanuel Macron. I mean it's not going to be a walk in the park it's going to be difficult for him and his agenda pro European. Almost doesn't say like it is. But it's almost pro-globalization it's not going to be easy to sell to a country with a 10 percent unemployment rate. The asylum seeker crisis is still going on. There are still migrants trying to come to Europe from Syria from Libya from sub-Saharan Africa. There's still terrorism that mainly the fact you know creating industrial jobs is the key issue that governments have to deal with. And that's going to be a real challenge. So it's nice to create a good business atmosphere. But if you're 55 or 56 and you don't have a job and you were blue collar or working in the mine or something or in factory in that factory is closing your village and

he's not going to reopen. Or if you are employed by the military in some of these military regions and the Defense Ministry reform has led to closing some of these military bases what will happen to these people that these kind of questions that has led to you know far left or far right votes they are not going to go away. So he'll have to address this rather than you know trying to do some grand diplomatic project. I think this is really the job of the French president now.

STELZENMÜLLER: Let me add two points if I may. One is that apart from the economic reform issues that Philippe has just described, the entire Western world is facing an industrial revolution a fourth industrial revolution in automation, which will have profound effects on the labor market and none of us have quite figured out I think how to address that in our welfare policies. It's significant that social democratic parties across Europe and the Social Democratic center left party family of course is the one that claims to be in favor of the working man in favor of social justice in favor of fair economic conditions and inclusive social contract. None of these parties anywhere have really found an answer to this problem. The only answer that's being discussed and that appears to be attractive now even to conservatives because of the situation because they understand just what lies in store is that of a universal basic income. That shows you just how worried people are. My second point is that even though populist parties have not had the electoral successes that some predicted six months ago I think it's important to see that they have managed to change the political agenda of the mainstream by pushing them to radicalize a little bit at least or to speak to some of the topics that the supporters of the radical parties care about. And that was very evident in the Dutch elections. Prime Minister Mark Rutte won precisely because he developed a

more aggressive tone particularly on issues like immigration and relations with Turkey. There is a very high per capita proportion of people of Turkish origin living in the Netherlands even more than in Germany and that I think has had an impact it's had a somewhat similar impact in Germany where as I said the alternative of Germany is in 12 out of 16 state legislatures. They have shown very little inclination to do anything about solving the actual problems that their voters are angry about but because they are there as a rhetorical force they managed to shape the debate. And I think we're going to see that effect continuing.

PITA: Can we have a little comparison about how Germany has handled the migrant crisis the influx of immigrants and how France has handled it and what are those differences reflected in how people are reacting at the polls to their parties?

CORRE: Well France has not actually taken on that many refugees from Syria maybe because of the upcoming elections that were coming and that maybe one of the reasons and also because we are dealing with an integration. I mean, I'm not saying that as an excuse, but as an integration issue which is well known it is a pretty high percentage of the population that is Muslim and now it's a very mixed community. I mean Muslim community but there are people you know who have been radicalized. A very small percentage but still. So therefore I mean Germany you know did the right thing in welcoming a very large number of Syrian refugees in particular. France did less much less but also had to cope with different areas such as the Kalai in this area called the jungle which was about 12000 people that wanting to go to. And that was sort of permanently renewed with newcomers coming from different part of the world. People wanted to go and live in the UK and the UK would reject them. And so I mean you know

the society has been also affected by these waves of people and you know anybody has been to Paris know that it's a very mixed society of all colors of all races and of course that's going back to the subject of globalization and the fact that France no longer looks like what it looked like 50 years ago. You know it's there are many people from Africa from the Middle East from Asia. And it's a good thing but at the same time it's no longer the old France with baguette and barrette, you know it doesn't look like this anymore. And you know a lot of people would actually vote for one of the extremist parties because they want to go back to the old France with very little chances of this to happen.

STELZENMÜLLER: Now it's true that we've all become much less white and Protestant or Catholic. And in the course of the last 20-30 years it is true for all of Europe. But let me introduce what I think is an important distinction and that is that France has a very large group of Muslims with French passports as a result of the decolonization of the end of France's colonies abroad and many of the inhabitants of these colonies were given French passports and migrated to France, and France has a sort of highly assertive and extremely secular policy of integration which is basically you subscribe to the principles of being a citizen of France if I understand it correctly and your religion is your private affair. In fact, you are not supposed to wear overt signs of your religious persuasion in public such as the book or the veil. The other element that I think plays a role both in France and Great Britain is that some of these decolonization processes from between the 1950s and the 1970s took place in the form of wars. And there are historical traumas and hang ups associated with that that people bring with them. You can see that certainly in Britain. Germany lost its colonies in 1919 as a result

of having lost World War I. So we have mainly economic migrants and political refugees or did until the refugee crisis in 2015 and I'm leaving out the influx of ethnic German Russians after the dissolution of the Soviet Union and of Russian Jews who also sought refuge in Germany. In other words, the conditions under which people came are different and the conditions in which they are being integrated or not are also different. And this is quite important now for Germany. Germany actually has a population of Germans of Turkish origin of three and a half million. Well it also has to be said with all humility that Germany frankly did a bad job in attempting to integrate them because the assumption was these were economic migrants and they would go back. They didn't. They had families and their children had families. As a result, you now have a sort of small group of very well integrated or even assimilated German Turks many of whom have German passports. And then you have a larger group of German Turks who feel alienated, have at best mixed views about Germany who feel tied to their country of origin Turkey, and who have double passports or only Turkish passports and some of these have become so alienated that they have become at risk to the seductions of ISIS recruiters and others al-Qaeda who try to entice them to go to Iraq or Syria and fight. And then sometimes they return and attempt to commit terrorist acts. So that's an issue that we have dealt with badly and that we're now only really beginning to grapple with. And so this Syrian refugee wave of 2015 came on top of that it was nearly a million in the course of a few months. Eight hundreds of thousands of those have stayed and of course those hundreds of thousands drew after them. A lot of economic migrants or political migrants from other countries who were hoping that the same kind of asylum humanitarian asylum exceptions would be applied to them or that they could just

pretend to be Syrians. So that has been something that we also have been grappling with, with mixed results. Interestingly the German state was completely overwhelmed by this. For months. You had very bad conditions in some of the refugee reception camps you had crime by refugees and crime against refugees. And meanwhile German civil society again to my great surprise was actually doing a lot to pick up the slack including friends of mine who sort of have busy working lives and who were waiting and volunteering. By now, I think there has been a sort of winnowing out process. Most of these refugees have been distributed to permanent housing they're being given language training and work training. And I think a third of them have been determined not to qualify for asylum and therefore have to be sent back. And one of the problems with that of course is that a lot of them lost their papers or threw them away in the process of fleeing to Germany and their countries of origin sometimes don't want them back. And so the terrorists in Berlin who committed an attack using a truck against a Christmas market just before Christmas December 18th. He was a Tunisian who had actually been watched by the authorities in Italy and in Germany. But Tunisia didn't want to issue papers for him to be sent back. And so he had the opportunity to commit these horrific attacks which I think a dozen people died. So you know it's a very mixed bag but I think it's highlighting for all of us in Europe including in my own country Germany the need to do better at both integrating those whom we deem can stay and keeping in mind that we all have demographic problems which I think in the long run make it important for us to attract immigration and qualified immigration and to send back those who don't qualify for asylum. And that's a really big public policy problem that I think will take us many years to resolve completely. And of course I mean let me add one thing

the other end of the solution of that problem was of course this deal with Turkey by which Turkey agrees to keep people in its own refugee camps rather than send them on to Europe in a sort of uncontrolled manner. And the EU including Germany and France are paying Turkey billions of euros for those camps in Turkey to be maintained and of course that also gives Turkey's authoritarian leader Erdogan political leverage over Europe at a time when his behavior is somewhat less than deserving of this kind of leverage.

PITA: To turn back the economic side of things a little bit. While the election of Macron sort of has eliminated the risk of a frexit, France exiting the EU much in the way that Britain is now going there is still of course the process of Brexit going on to happen which is going to be a whole thing. I think there are regional elections in England just had some conservative victory it starts looking like there may not be the stop to Brexit that people thought or at least a slowdown or lessening of its effects that some people thought might happen. So France is definitely staying in the EU either Angela Merkel she certainly seems to be well poised to win again for the continuation of the current governing coalition that there, there are of course other stress points in the EU. Can you talk a little bit about Greece, Italy of course. And I think it will lead to having elections next year. Can you talk a little bit about some of the stresses that are still there and how now that it's going to be up to Macron and whatever parliamentary coalition comes together in June and how they might be working together to handle some of this?

CORRE: So as you mentioned the Brexit situation is clearly under way although it's barely started in the way because as you know Article 50 was only triggered a few weeks ago by a prime minister Theresa May. The election coming up June is a bit of a

surprise. A snap election as sources said and most probably she's organizing these elections because she's going to win them and most probably that will give her a mandate to what she thinks will give her a sort of stronger hand in negotiating with the EU and perhaps negotiating domestically against her opponents. But I don't believe actually she'll be much stronger against a well elected president Macron and probably well reelected Chancellor Merkel at least at the helm of a coalition. But the two systems are quite different. In fact, Macron may be also having a coalition so it's the another Europe of coalitions. In any case Theresa May will probably not have a coalition but she's going to be alone facing EU leaders the 27 leaders and certainly Macron is not in favor of granting market access to the U.K. while reducing circulation. In other words, you can't have it both ways. If you're out of the EU you're out of the markets. But are still the shoes of people of British people living in the EU of Europeans living in the U.K. that needs to be sorted. So I think you know the Brexit, you can see it as an opportunity for Europeans to get together especially newly elected leaders or re-elected. Italy remains an issue and especially the banking crisis the level of debt is extremely high. We're not quite sure when the elections will take place until Renzi seems to be heading back towards power at least he wants to be prime minister again. He would not be a newcomer anymore. I mean he's not everybody's 39 years old. He's actually a bit more than that. He was actually was he was very young when he was elected prime minister. But in any case I think this group of 27 nations called the European Union has got a unique opportunity to get together and possibly to reinvent a different type of European Union especially around the Eurozone which really needs to be reorganized a little bit. And there are a number of countries in this group of EU countries you mentioned the

word Frexit, which some people have used. And obviously in the U.K. The U.K. Independence Party was very keen on using that word in the tabloid press that was accompanying them. Their mission was so. Repeating it altogether but actually you know there's a clear majority of the French people that do want to stay in the Eurozone just because it would be an economic catastrophe to get out of the euro. I mean going back to the French franc would be a complete disaster and people are not stupid. That's the reason why they voted Macron. By and large. And in fact you know Marie Le Pen herself completely messed up her euro strategy a few weeks before saying that after all she may not have a referendum on the euro that you know she will consult and she will have EU fellow leaders and so people do understand with her pose was are you pro EU, are you against EU? At the end of the day you know it didn't make any sense. And the French do not want to go back to French franc. So here we are now with a group of 27 countries having to negotiate with the U.K. and it's going to be a tough negotiation. Macron is not going to be that easy when dealing with the British government. And I think you know eventually we need to agree on how to run the Eurozone. I think the idea is to have a finance minister for the Eurozone that will put together all these group of finance minister even more tightly so that you know it's not only one or two countries that benefits from having a common currency. In any case it's not going to be easy for people to leave the Eurozone. And in any case the UK has never been part of it but will have nothing to do with this process. No we have to do is EU because it's leaving in the next two years.

STELZENMÜLLER: Perhaps a couple of additional points. The chief negotiator for Brexit it of the EU Commission is the Frenchman Michel Barnier who I think will be at

least as tough as the Germans, if not tougher. I think in some ways Angela Merkel I think might be the more moderate and more pragmatic than some members of the EU Commission and Brussels in these negotiations will see but perhaps also a note on history here. The euro was France's price for German reunification in 1990. The French got the euro which meant that the power of the Deutsche mark was to set the conditions in the European markets was reduced. It gave France more influence over the currency. And what the Germans got in exchange was agreement to the political unification of Europe. So sometimes one of the things that Marie Le Pen was saying was that the euro was a German imposition. The opposite is true. I think one of the points that Marie Le Pen was trying to score with her opposition to the euro was that she was suggesting she was using this as her part of her anti-globalization, anti-Europe narrative and so get suggesting that leaving the euro would give France back more a notional sovereignty that I think none of us have anymore because we're so deeply and economically integrated with each other all of us in Europe including the Brits of course. And I think she must have realized from the poll results that the French weren't buying this and then shifted her narrative to other issues like immigration. Now Brexit also clearly is having an impact on attitudes to the EU and continental Europe. You can see in national polls across Europe that support for the EU is going up and there is even now this sort of rather endearing movement of demonstrations for the E.U. called pulse of Europe where people are going out on Sunday afternoons on central squares across Europe including in my own country in Germany in Berlin to demonstrate for the E.U. and holding impromptu speeches and saying why Europe is important for them. I see this on my Facebook page and I find it sort of endearing. There is as Philippa's said of course

the problem of the Italian economy which is far worse off than the French economy is, and particularly the Italian banking sector. That's something that I think is still a potential source for economic crisis. And of course the Greeks while they're currently continuing their negotiations with EU, you never know what happens to that economically or politically. So that's I think also a continued source of risk. And finally I think one thing that we haven't mentioned and that's also really important is all authoritarianism within the EU in Hungary and in Poland where political leaders Hungary's Viktor Orban and Poland's Yaroslav Kocinski have been trying to reorganize their country's constitutions in such a way as to guarantee their parties stay in power. They have been undercutting the balance and separation of powers and the freedom of the media in ways that are very worrisome. And it took the E.U. and the member states of the European Union very long to make any principled objection to this. This is finally now coming to a head over Viktor Orban's attempt to basically disenfranchise the Central European University in Budapest which has had a significant role funded to a large degree by George Soros the financier of Hungarian origin who has funded NGOs who undertake or support democratic transformation across the European Union region across Eastern Europe. And he's trying to disenfranchise that arguing that Soros is somehow trying to instigate regime change and Hungary and this is finally I think gotten member states and the EU Commission back up to such a degree that there is now a procedure under way to obligate Viktor Orban to stop this. And I think this is going to be a really important test of Europe's ability to stop this kind of thing to stop this kind of authoritarian undermining of foundational European principles. But that's a big challenge and it's not something that we've had before or we've had it in one way with Austria which elected a rightwing

political leader a couple of years ago. And they're Europeans had genuine problems in deciding whether to ostracize him or just to let him let him go on. So this is a big challenge. And of course let's not forget there are all these foreign policy challenges still there is still a horrific humanitarian crisis in Syria and failing regional order in the Middle East and in Northern Africa most particularly in Libya. That's an ongoing risk for new massive refugee flows into Europe. There is a very complicated relationship with Russia which continues to foment aggression in Ukraine and in Europe's east and periphery and of course has been meddling in elections and supposedly also in the French election. And the head of the German intelligence service has publicly said that he is convinced they are already doing it. And the German public space as well. And finally you know there's not uncomplicated relationship with the new American administration parts of which are very very skeptical towards the EU in ways that haven't been seen in a very long time

CORRE: And vice versa. Because I mean I don't believe many candidates for the French presidential election nor any recent European election has claimed to have the support of Donald Trump. And I do believe the anti-Trump sentiment is really there. And while Marie Le Pen did attempt to make it to Trump Tower in December in the end that meeting never took place. But just like being anti-European doesn't seem to win you many votes. Being a supporter of Donald Trump doesn't also seem to attract a lot of popular support. Having said that former President Obama did say that which is quite unusual send a message of support to Emanuel Macron between the two rounds of the elections which was heavily criticized by some of the right wing media. But Obama has a good image in Europe because he represents a certain America of mixed races and

openness, yes. And he did great for America's image. Now the current president obviously has not so far demonstrated his love of transatlantic affairs and certainly not of Europe and the threats during the campaign of making Europeans pay more for you know the NATO and security and all of this and also the criticism the direct criticism against the European institutions by himself the president or by some of his associates and advisors was really considered as a slap in the face by many of the of the European leaders including some of some of those we've discussed today. So you know we've got to rebuild the E.U. in some ways or at least to strengthen it. I should say because it's still there and minus the U.K. which is on its way out. But we also have to rebuild the transatlantic relationship which has somewhat been in limbo for the past few months.

STELZENMÜLLER: Let me just add a footnote to that. I mean it has been duly noted in Europe that representatives of the right wing of the American Republican Party like the members of Congress Stephen King and Dana Rohrabacher posted photographs of themselves with Marie Le Pen with the caption celebrating our joint commitment to liberty and freedoms. That's sort of the opposite of what Obama was doing. And even Trump seemed at some point to be endorsing Marie Le Pen, that I'm sure is also registered in Europe quite forcefully. Also there appeared to be contact between the American alt-right and populist movement of the right wing in Europe. And finally Breitbart News which has played a not unimportant role in the American election process has been attempting. It is said to open offices in France and Germany and it already has an office in the Vatican. So there are all these connections that of course worry Europeans and they are asking which side are you on. Mr. President

CORRE: And the other problem if I may say is also mean the support for brig's which is kind of stunning fall from a European point of view considering that you know Nigel Farage was after all just a member of the European Parliament. As strange as it may sounds but who was welcome you know by the by the president elect and also you know hes been invited at least once since the election commission and who has been advising you know indirectly the administration on how to deal with Europe. Now this is completely in contradiction to the results of yesterday of the Dutch elections and of the general sentiment of Europeans that the EU is actually a good project or not too bad project the worst of the good ones. After all this is a project post-war that has allowed European nations to work together to build the community and it's much better than what was there before. And that's something that the rest of the world acknowledges. For example, you know China most Asian nations think it's a good thing to have a common market and common policy. But you know it's not always the case coming out of Washington. So I hope you know and I guess we both hope that things will improve on this front.

STELZENMÜLLER: Let me just add a thought onto that. It's completely right what Philippe is saying. I think some of the European Union's critics on the American right underestimate just how deep the commitment to the European Union is not just among European policymakers or what they would call disparagingly elites or the establishment but the European public because we can literally see its benefits in our lives whether it's from having a common currency and not having to change money all the time from Erasmus scholarships for students all across Europe or because of the enormous amount of money that go into European infrastructure projects like roads in

poor zones. But I think there's also a feeling that this administration may underestimate just how important European unity is to American strategic interests. That free trade zones in Europe actually help American companies and the jobs that these American companies create and which increase American income and that European unity really helps. And backstopping American security through its diplomacy through trade through development aid and through specialized military capabilities and not least through the possibility of having American bases in Europe which makes it a lot cheaper for America to get to zones of interest like the Middle East or Northern Africa. And yes Europeans and indeed Germans pay for nearly 40 percent of those basing costs. That's also forgotten here.

PITA: Yeah I've missed that number. So it's good to know. We are just about out of time. So can I ask you both if you have any last comments. We've mentioned the U.K. election in French and German elections. What are the next big things coming up for Europe that people should keep their eyes on and what's ahead for the EU zone?

CORRE: Well I mean as I said the French legislative elections are very important because that will allow the new presidents to implement this pro-reform program. France needs economic and social reforms. He wants to create this new dynamic create jobs and help the unemployed to make sure that you know they're not left out of the mainstream and then need to make sure this Brexit negotiation goes well and we have to really define the European projects so that the countries that do not fully agree with this process and possibly not in the same driving seat as the others. What I mean by that is that you have a few core nations in Europe that created the European project originally. They need to be in the driving seat because when you when you have a weak

France like we had over the past decade it's not good for the future of Europe. And I'm sure Constanze will have a lot to say about this. Germany alone doesn't want to you know run Europe. So we need some kind of Franco-German engine especially with the two countries being quite complementary to each other.

STELZENMÜLLER: I'd say we need to watch the British election on June 8th to see whether Theresa May is bet that this will strengthen her hand and enable to get rid of some of the more extreme Brexiteers in her own cabinet in her own camp. Whether that bet works out. I suspect that labor under at least under its current leadership in Britain under Jeremy Corbyn is a spent force but it will also be interesting to find out whether voters who are unhappy about Brexit and who are unhappy about the way in which it's been negotiated will find a way of saying that apart from voting for Corbyn, and then of course the German elections in September 24th which currently look as though they will bring the current set up with Chancellor Merkel in the driving seat back to power. But you never know it's what is going to happen between now and September. Many things can happen. And finally Philippe says correctly that there needs to be a sort of restarting of the European project. I have personally although I'm a citizen of one of the founding members of the EU have mixed feelings about saying it should be the original six founding countries who should be in the driving seat of deeper integration because I think that that is resented by some of the newer members. And I have some sympathy for that. I think the Franco-German tandem is really important for all the reasons that Phillip says including Because Germany is now shouldering a burden that is too large for it. And I would quite like to see the French persuade the Germans that some of their positions on economic austerity are too intransigent. But I

think that if you don't have participation in this project from some of the newer members of Europe it will be less legitimate and therefore possibly doomed to fail.

PITA: All right well thank you both very much for your time today and for explaining for a lot of our listeners what is going on over there. I want to let our listeners know that they can follow you both on Twitter @constelz and @phlecorre. And of course they can follow us on Twitter as well as, @policypodcasts. Thank you both very much.

CORRE: Thank you.

STELZENMÜLLER: Thank you for having me.

(music)