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The outcome of the second round of the French Presidential election on 24 April may be a key inflection point for the future of the European Union. Mathew Doidge reflects on the contrasting visions of the two candidates: Emmanuel Macron and Marine Le Pen.

On the evening of 7 May 2017, in the courtyard of the Louvre amidst waving Tricolore and the flash of smartphone cameras, Emmanuel Macron, basking in victory over his far-right

Macron will again face Le Pen in the second round of the French Presidential election, the third time in the last 20 years in which a far-right candidate has made it to this point.

In the run-off on 24 April, Macron will seek to become the first President in 20 years to be re-elected, an outcome that, at this stage, is by no means a foregone conclusion. The 2022 campaign has been the most far-right in modern French history, with Le Pen and Eric Zemmour together garnering more than 30 per cent of the vote in the first round. Even candidates of the traditional right pandered to the interests of the radical right constituency, speaking to issues of immigration and the place of Islam in France and, in the case of [Valérie Pécresse of les Républicains](#)

As a consequence, where Macron defeated Le Pen by a margin of 32.2 percent of the vote in 2017, ten days out, polling is far narrower at 53.5 per cent for Macron and 46.5 per cent for

2021, succeeding Angela Merkel who had dominated the European scene for the previous 16 years, it can be expected that Macron will seek to play something of an elder statesman role in the Franco-German partnership at the heart of Europe. What remains unclear is whether the exigencies of the Ukraine crisis, including the need to reinforce European unity, will alter

been a strong voice, warning as recently as January that _____
_____.

Le Pen: FREXIT by any other name

By contrast, a victory for Marine Le Pen would have potentially severe consequences for [free France from _____](#). She advocated withdrawal from the Eurozone and, should the EU not agree to transform itself into a looser coalition of states and reintroduce internal border controls, from the Union itself. Fast forward to the 2022 campaign, as the consequences of BREXIT have played out in the United Kingdom, and Le Pen has officially abandoned the policies of withdrawal from the euro and FREXIT. This change, however, is more rhetorical than real.

2017, in essence amount to much the same thing. At the centre of her approach is a fundamental _____, in contrast to

explicitly targeting the role of the European Commission – the embodiment of the principal of supranational cooperation at the European level. While no longer calling for the [abolition of the Commission as she did in 2019](#), she seeks to transform it into little more than a secretariat for the Council, shifting powers definitively back into the hands of the Member States.

Another focus of this transformation is attacking the notion of equal treatment in France, on which the four fundamental freedoms of the EU are built. If elected, she has committed to establishing legal discrimination between foreigners and French nationals by restricting access to social benefits, social housing and healthcare for non-French citizens, and by prioritising the employment of citizens over EU (and other) nationals. She would also prioritise French firms in offering local or national government contracts. National preference, in other words, would be a direct violation of the fundamental laws and principles of the European Union.

billions per year, to effectively abandon Schengen by reimposing border controls with other Member States, to increase the agricultural subsidies provided to French farmers, and to establish the primacy of French law over that of the EU ([mirroring recent events in Poland](#))

would lead to a de facto FREXIT in all but name.

While it would be difficult for Le Pen to achieve these aims at the European level – many of her intended measures are likely to be rejected by domestic or European courts as violations of the treaties on which the EU is built – a Le Pen presidency would still cause major

problems for the practice of cooperation within the existing European framework. It can, for example, be foreseen that the Franco-

Le Pen significantly adjusts the relationship with Berlin. A freezing of major areas of cooperation between the two is to be expected, with an announcement already made that [joint arms cooperatio](#). Instead, Le Pen can be expected to draw closer to other illiberal leaders notably in Hungary and Poland and act as a block on cooperation at the European level. Among other things, French support

violations and democratic backsliding. Le Pen is also likely to oppose the creation of further EU Free Trade Agreements, something that will impact New Zealand in particular. In other words, even where Le Pen is unable to pursue her policies for fundamental transformation of the EU, her presence is likely to lead to conflict and paralysis within the Union itself.