FRENCH PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES AND TURKEY

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There is a conviction within Turkish public opinion that the reason for Nicolas Sarkozy and François Hollande, who have made it to the second round of French Presidential elections, to support Armenian views is to gain the votes of the Armenians. Upon observing this issue more closely, it could be seen that when children and the elderly are subtracted from the 450.000 Armenians in France and those not voting are taken into consideration, an electorate of a maximum of 350.000 Armenians exists. This number is quite low and is almost insignificant for the Presidential election which does not require regional votes. On the other hand, as mentioned above, both candidates supporting Armenian views causes the Armenian votes to be shared between the two. In other words, no Armenian votes remain that must be gained separately. In this situation, both candidates visiting the Armenian Memorial in Paris on 24 April with an unusual gesture creates a situation that must be explained. Following the French National Assembly recognizing the Armenian genocide allegations in 2001 and with the persistent attempts of the Armenians, French public opinion has believed more in the Armenian genocide thesis and has started perceiving the Armenians as an oppressed community that must be defended. Therefore, an action taken in favor of the Armenians also gains the appreciation of non-Armenians and influences the votes of some of them. As a second issue, we must take into consideration Islamophobia which is increasingly spreading in France and the fear against the Turks which is a part of this, originating from the possibility of Turkey becoming an EU member. Within this framework, criticizing Turkey or opposing Turkish initiatives on the Armenian or on another issue gains the appreciation of extreme rightist circles in particular. It should not be forgotten that the votes of more than 17%, which the extreme rightist party National Front has gained in the Presidential elections, will also be used in the second round of elections. By visiting the Armenian Memorial in Paris on 24 April and criticizing Turkey there, although with moderate statements, President Sarkozy has been successful in winning the appreciation of non-Armenian French as much as the Armenians. Socialist Party candidate François Hollande, who has been informed of the Presidents visit to the Memorial beforehand, has been obliged in conducting the same visit there and delivering a speech on the same day. In his speech, Nicolas Sarkozy has praised the Armenians and has supported the Armenian views in general. Meanwhile, he has pointed out that in order to be a great country Turkey must look at its history with confidence and must face its history as France has done, that it should not consider this as a weakness and that as long as it is not accepted that a mistake has been made, this mistake cannot be forgiven, calling on a great nation like Turkey to accept its mistake. What he means by

mistake is the Armenian genocide allegation. Furthermore, Sarkozy has emphasized the punishment of those denying the genocide allegations and has expressed that the law repealed in February by the French Constitutional Council will be submitted again to the National Assembly in June. François Hollande, in his speech at the Memorial the same day but at a different time, has addressed similar issues. The Turkish Foreign Ministry has displayed strong reactions against the speeches of these candidates. In a press release on this issue, it has been stated that controversial historical issues are abused for internal political calculations, prejudiced and discriminatory approaches can serve neither justice nor a correct understanding of history, what is expected from French politicians is not to foment hatred, but to act with the responsibility of statesmen to encourage the Turks and Armenians to reach together a just memory, that it is not possible to obtain results through artificial external impositions on issues between countries and such statements impede efforts to establish peace and tranquility in the region. The French Presidential candidates supporting the Armenian views without reservations, while Turkey criticizing these views and indicating that it will not change its approach shows that the disagreement between France and Turkey that has settled for some time will be rekindled again in the upcoming months.

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