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‘People no longer have the confidence that their problems are being addressed in Paris’

Adrienne Woltersdorf on the government reshuffle in France, the dissatisfaction in the country and the success of Marine Le Pen

Prime Minister Elisabeth Borne has resigned in France. President Macron is also rumoured to be planning to replace numerous cabinet members. What is the reason for the government reshuffle?

Emmanuel Macron has not yet made an official statement on the matter. But there has certainly been much speculation in Paris in recent days. The government suffered a major setback in December with the draft bill for a new immigration law. This has opened up considerable ideological rifts in Macron’s *Renaissance* party between the right and left wings. The Macron camp is thus very weak. It seems that the president wants to put himself and his party in a better position for the European elections in June, as the election forecasts for the political centre are rather gloomy.

As part of the immigration law, Macron had to make concessions to the conservatives in December — including Marine Le Pen’s *Rassemblement National*. How much pressure is he under?

Macron has not had a majority in either the National Assembly or the Senate since the 2022 parliamentary elections, which has characterised and also damaged Borne’s time in government: after the socialist Michel Rocard, she is the prime minister who has governed most frequently by a decree despised in France — Article 49.3 of the French constitution. This authorises the French president to ‘rule through’, even without the approval of a parliamentary majority. Borne did this 23 times during her 20 months in government. The question asked by many critics is whether France is still a democracy at all or whether it is only governed by decree. This shows that the Macron camp is no longer able to achieve much democratically,

except by using the political cudgel that the French presidency is entitled to.

Borne's successor, Gabriel Attal, is already in the starting blocks. What direction does the new prime minister stand for?

Attal was previously the spokesman for Macron's government and most recently Minister of Education in Borne's cabinet. At the age of 34, he will be the youngest prime minister France has ever had. He is regarded as a political careerist who can hardly be categorised politically. He is more or less a younger version of Macron. Attal also pursues politics without ideology and tends to solve things technocratically. Macron also took similar approaches back in the day.

Can Le Pen's victory in the European elections still be prevented?

At the moment, the Le Pen camp is effortlessly leading the polls, in some cases with a 30 per cent lead in the EU elections. That is a very gloomy outlook for the Fifth Republic. Everything points to the right gaining strength. While Le Pen supporters and those who sympathise with them are highly motivated and will definitely go to the polls, the remaining voters are at a loss.

The left-wing camp is decidedly weakened by internal disputes. It seems that there is simply no longer a political centre. In any case, it does not look as if the French will once again show goodwill and vote for Macron just to prevent Le Pen. In this respect, a clear victory for the political right is also to be expected in France.

Why are the French so dissatisfied at the moment?

This stems from a perceived and real deterioration in living conditions. Above all, the issues of migration and declining purchasing power dominate. The mood after the raising of the retirement age last year is poor. Many important reforms, both in the social systems and in the education system, have stalled. One could say, not unlike in Germany. The biggest danger for Macron and the traditional parties is not so much that their supporters will defect to the Le Pen camp. It is more likely that there will be a large abstention on election day. The largest group among eligible voters could be the non-voters. Surveys show that many people have simply given up on being listened to in this political system of rule-by-rule. Macron's style of governance has contributed massively to this, as have the many social upheavals. Many people simply no longer have the confidence that they and their problems are being addressed here in Paris, which is why even this government resignation and the appointment of Attal hardly seem to be of any real interest.

This interview was conducted by Nikolaos Gavalakis.



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