

European issues

n°431

25th April 2017

Emmanuel Macron will face Marine Le Pen in the second round of the French presidential election on 7th May next

Corinne Deloy

After a totally unique electoral campaign the results of the first round have confirmed the exceptional nature of the presidential election that took place in France on 23rd April.

As forecast by the polls Emmanuel Macron (En Marche) came out ahead in the first round. The former Minister for the Economy, Industry and Digital Affairs (2014-2016) won 24.01% and drew ahead of Marine Le Pen (Front National, FN) who won 21.3% of the vote (+ 3.4 points in comparison with the first round of the presidential election on 22nd April 2012).

François Fillon (Les Républicains, LR) came third winning 20.01% of the vote. *"In spite of all my best efforts, my determination, I did not manage to convince you. The obstacles placed in my way were too numerous, too cruel. The truth of this election will be written. I assume my responsibilities, this defeat is mine, it is up to me to bear it alone,"* declared the former Prime Minister (2007-2012) when the results were announced.

Jean-Luc Mélenchon (Front de gauche, FG) came fourth with 19.58% of the vote (+ 8.4 points in comparison with 2012). Initially the MEP refused to acknowledge the election results, indicating until late in the night that he might garner more votes but this did not happen. Although he did not qualify for the second round Jean-Luc Mélenchon can rejoice in the fact that he won the battle on the left, of which he has been dreaming since he left the Socialist Party in 2008, and that he is now well positioned to take the lead of this political trend.

For his part Socialist Party candidate (PS) Benoît Hamon suffered a serious defeat: he won just 6.36% of the vote, the lowest score ever won by a socialist in the presidential election since 1969, the year in which Gaston Defferre won 5.01% of the vote. *"I failed to foil the disaster that had been brewing for many months. I take full responsibility for this without blaming the last five years and the betrayals. This failure is a deep wound, of which I gauge the historic, legitimate sanction expressed in regard to the Socialist Party. The elimination of the left by the far right for the second time in fifteen years is not only an electoral defeat. It is also a moral one for the country,"* declared Benoît Hamon when the results were announced. The candidate certainly suffered because of the divisions within the party, with some socialists not forgiving him for having taken part in the rebellion against the outgoing government in the second half of François Hollande's five year term.

Nicolas Dupont-Aignan (Debout la France, DLF) won 4.7% of the vote. He came out ahead of independent Jean Lassalle who won 1.21% of the vote; Philippe Poutou (Nouveau Parti anticapitaliste, NPA), 1.09%; François Asselineau (Union populaire républicaine, UPR), 0.92% ; Nathalie Arthaud (Lutte ouvrière, LO), 0.67% and Jacques Cheminade (Solidarité et progrès), 0.18%.

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Turnout was slightly lower than that recorded during the first round of the presidential election on 22nd April 2012. It lay at 78.69%.

For the first time in the history of the 5th Republic, the candidates of the country's two main government parties – the Socialist Party (PS) and the Republicans (LR) – were severely sanctioned and eliminated in the first round of the election. Together they rallied 26.37% of the vote, i.e. -9.84 points in comparison with the first round of the presidential election of 2002 when the socialist candidate Lionel Jospin came third, beaten by Jean-Marie Le Pen (FN).

Fifteen years later the Front National has qualified for the second time for the second round of the French presidential election. Its representative, Marine, (48 years), daughter of Jean-Marie, will face a young candidate (39 years), unknown to the man in the street until three years ago, never elected previously, positioned outside of the traditional parties and the right/left split (neither left nor right or left and right) and leader of the movement "En Marche" that was created just three years ago, who

won his wager and qualified for the second round of the presidential election.

Emmanuel Macron, whose talent is undeniable, also had a great deal of luck during the entire campaign. Indeed the primary elections led, on the right – for whom the presidential election was impossible to lose – as on the left – where it was thought to be unwinnable – to the victory of the radical candidates. After this "the scandals" in which François Fillon was involved, then his indictment for the embezzlement of public funds, complicity and the concealment of the embezzlement of public funds, complicity and the concealment of the misuse of company assets and failure to make truthful tax declarations, a first under the 5th Republic, meant that the former Prime Minister was inaudible in the campaign and made an easy path for the representative of En Marche.

A page is now turning in French political life which should lead to many reshuffles.

"In one year we have changed the face of French political life," indicated Emmanuel Macron. In spite of the results and the qualification of the populist

Results of the first round of the presidential election of 23rd April 2017 in France

Turnout: 78.69%

Candidates	No of votes won	% of votes won
Emmanuel Macron (En marche, EM)	8 528 585	24.01
Marine Le Pen (Front national, FN)	7 658 990	21.3
François Fillon (Les Républicains, LR)	7 126 632	20.01
Jean-Luc Mélenchon (Front de gauche, FG)	7 011 856	19.58
Benoît Hamon (Parti socialiste, PS)	2 268 838	6.36
Nicolas Dupont-Aignan (Debout la République, DLR)	1 689 686	4.7
Jean Lassalle (indépendant)	433 996	1.21
Philippe Poutou (Nouveau Parti anticapitaliste, NPA)	392 454	1.09
François Asselineau (Union populaire républicaine, UPR)	329 951	0.92
Nathalie Arthaud (Lutte ouvrière, LO)	231 660	0.67
Jacques Cheminade (Solidarité et progrès)	63 076	0.18

Source: Home Affairs Ministry <http://www.interieur.gouv.fr/Elections/Election-presidentielle-2017/Election-presidentielle-2017-resultats-globaux-du-premier-tour>

candidate for the second round of the election, matters are very different in 2017 from those in 2002. The left/right split is floundering – it is a system/anti-system split that seems to be emerging, together with a pro-European/anti-European divide. The “En Marche” candidate, Emmanuel Macron, aims to rally left and right; like his Front National rival – he wants to transform the political system. “*The challenge is to break with the system that has been unable to solve problems for the last thirty years,*” he repeated during the campaign.

If he wins against Marine Le Pen on 7th May he will then have to win a majority in the National Assembly in the general elections that will follow on 11th and 18th June. To do this Mr Macron has called on a wide assembly “*of all the progressives*” to form his parliamentary majority: “*The French have expressed their will for renewal. Our attitude is now that of assembly that we shall continue until the elections.*” Undeniably Emmanuel Macron is the grand favourite in the second round. He has a great reservoir of votes and when the results were announced many personalities, both on the right and the left, called for people to vote for him on 7th May next.

On the left, Benoît Hamon called to vote him declaring that he wanted a “*barrier to be created against the far right*”; government spokesperson Stéphane Le Foll (PS) and even the leader of the National Assembly, Claude Bartolone (PS) called for the same action. Outgoing President of the Republic François Hollande (PS) is due to do the same in the days to come.

On the right, François Fillon immediately called for a vote in support of the En Marche candidate in the second round. “*Extremism can only bring misfortune and division to France. There is no other choice but to vote against the far right. I will vote in support of Emmanuel Macron. I believe it my duty to tell you in all honesty, it is with your conscience to think about what would be best for your country and your children,*” indicated the former Prime Minister. The leader of the region of Provence-Alpes-Côte d’Azur, Christian Estrosi (LR), the Senator and Mayor of Troyes, François Baroin (LR), the leader of the Senate Gérard Larcher (LR),

and former Prime Minister (1995-1997) and present Mayor of Bordeaux Alain Juppé (LR) said that they would vote for Emmanuel Macron.

However Jean-Luc Mélenchon did not give any voting directions for the second round. “*I have not been given any mandate by the 450,000 people who supported my candidacy. They will be called to vote,*” said he said. Philippe Poutou and Nathalie Artaud for their part said that they would vote blank on 7th May next.

“*This result is historic (....) I am the candidate of the people. I am calling on all sincere patriots, where ever they might come from and whatever their experience and their vote, to leave their feelings behind because there is a higher interest for the country. What is vital is now at stake: the survival of France. I am calling on national unity behind our project for recovery,*” declared Marine Le Pen on the announcement of the results.

Although the Front National candidate can be pleased with her qualification for the second round she is certainly disappointed with her result, which was below what she had hoped for, and her second position behind Emmanuel Macron.

After the first round the dynamic is more on the side of En Marche, who is however the person that Marine Le Pen wanted to confront the most.

Until now the populist candidate has never been able to assert her favourite themes (national identity, anti-globalisation) in this unique campaign. Between tours things will be different, such is the difference between the projects and visions for the future between the two candidates. Emmanuel Macron represents social liberalism, opening, Europe; his rival demands economic Statism, the nation, protectionism, and she challenges European integration and the euro.

Marine Le Pen, who claims to be the representative of the people, is due to depict her rival between rounds as the legacy of the outgoing President François Hollande and the candidate of the elites ad of Europe. Emmanuel Macron is indeed the most pro-European candidate of all of those who stood and he won the first round. Europe, like globalisation, are

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to feature at the heart of the debate in the campaign in the second round.

A “*Republican front*” emerged as soon as the results were announced. This will however be weaker than the one that caused the failure of Jean-Marie Le Pen in 2002. For the time being all of the polls credit Emmanuel Macron with victory in the second round of the presidential election on 7th May next with around 65% of the vote.

The result will be decisive on the one hand because the En Marche candidate will, if he wins, have to build (to earn) his parliamentary majority after the presidential election, which is far from being a certainty, and on the other hand, because the Front National with 35% of the vote and possibly even 40% would be able – given the state of collapse in which the Socialist Party and the Republicans find themselves, become the country’s leading opposition party.

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