

A majority to François Hollande?

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D-7
7 Days before
the poll

Five weeks after electing François Hollande (Socialist Party, PS) as President of the Republic, 46 million French citizens are being called to ballot again on 10th and 17th June next to renew the 577 members of the National Assembly, the lower chamber of parliament. This parliamentary election is the first to take place after the electoral redistribution of France in January 2010.

6,611 people, including 2,641 women (39.94%) are officially in the race, i.e. 11 on average per constituency. Europe Ecology-the Greens (EELV) are the best performers in terms of parity (49.57% of women); the Socialist Party is putting 45% women candidates forward and the Union for a Popular Movement (UMP), the main opposition party, less than 26%. The UMP's secretary general, Jean-François Copé chose not to respect male-female parity that has been obligatory since the law on parity on 6th June 2000, which forces political parties to put forward as least 50% of women candidates (give or take 2%). "I took this decision with my friends of the Union for a Popular Movement which will cost us dearly in terms of a fine. Everyone has to understand that at the moment we absolutely must have a maximum number of MPs and this will be achieved via influence and the local establishment of many of us," in other words, male MPs.

The 8th constituency of Paris (a part of the 12th and 20th arrondissement) holds the record number of candidates: 23. For the first time, the French living abroad will be electing their representatives in 11 constituencies (six in Europe, two in Africa, the Near and Middle East, two in the Americas and one, whose range extends from Russia to Australia and New Zealand and across Asia). The constituency with the greatest numbers of voters (157, 363) is the first (US and Canada), the one with the least (79,756) is the 11th which is also the biggest. 700,000 French citizens living abroad (out of 1,075, 744 registered in all) have chosen to vote via the internet, a measure that is appreciated by those who sometimes live far from the polling stations (786 in all will be open abroad). The electronic vote took place between 23rd and 29th May in the first round and will take between 6th and 12th June in the second. 178 candidates are running for the eleven seats representing French citizens living abroad.

The electoral campaign for the general elections started on 21st May last.

What kind of majority will there be for the left?

The left does not seem in a position to cause a landslide victory and no is forecasting an absolute majority for the Socialist Party and its EELV allies on 17th June. Prime Minister Jean-Marc Ayrault (PS) will lead the PS's electoral campaign. "Cohabitation would lead to an extremely serious political crisis," declared Najat Vallaud-Belkacem, the Minister for Women's Rights and the government's spokesperson, in order to motivate those voters who say they are not really interested in the general election.

Negotiations between the Socialist Party and the Left Front, which rallies the Communist Party (PCF) and the Left Party (PG) led by Jean-Luc Mélenchon have failed. "Work was undertaken with the Communist Party in a excellent atmosphere but there were disagreements within the Left Front," declared Martine Aubry, the Socialist Party's Secretary General. "Given the magnificent courage on the part of the Left Front in the second round of the presidential election which took a decision in spite of everything because without the four million votes on the part of our party, however brilliant he might have been, François Hollande would not have succeeded in achieving a majority and we

deserve to be respected," declared Jean-Luc Mélenchon. The latter chose to continue the battle against the National Front leader, (FN), Marine Le Pen and is standing in the 11th constituency of Pas-de-Calais. Under the banner "*La Gauche sans complexe et sans casserole*" (the Left, simple and transparent), he is undertaking an extremely social campaign (increase of the minimum salary to 1,700€) and is counting on division amongst the local Socialist Party. The Left Front leader's wager is not as dangerous as it might seem since François Hollande won 60.44% in this constituency in the second round of the presidential election.

The agreement signed previously (November 2011) between the Socialist Party and the EELV attributes 63 constituencies to the ecologists who will be facing leftwing dissidents in around twenty of them. The danger of seeing the left eliminated in the first round in event of the populist National Front (FN) achieving high scores is a reality in five of ten constituencies. EELV is putting 471 candidates forward in all, 236 of whom are women.

On 16th May last François Hollande appointed Jean-Marc Ayrault as Prime Minister. He formed a government comprising 34 people (18 ministers and 16 delegate ministers) most of whom (29) have never held any ministerial responsibilities. For the first time in its history France is being led by a President and a Prime Minister who have never been government members.

The government team respects the political balance in the Socialist Party (all of the trends are represented) and more widely the balance that exists on the left (two ecologists, two radical left ministers). The most obvious absentee from the government is Martine Aubry, the Socialist Party's Secretary General who declined all other positions other than Matignon (the Prime Minister's seat in France). She also announced that she would be

giving up her post as head of the party, without however giving any precise date of her departure. This government is also the first government with an equal number of men and women in the 5th Republic: 17 men and 17 women. The only regret is that equality in number does not cover equality of status, since only one woman occupies a strong position: Christiane Taubira (PRG), as Justice Minister.

The configuration of the government is not due to change after the general elections.

24 ministers are running in the general election on. President François Hollande informed his ministers that all of those who were beaten would have to give up their posts. Some decided not to stand such as Christian Taubira and Najat Vallaud-Belkacem. Several ministers are in a difficult position and these are: the Culture and Communication Minister, Aurélie Filipetti, in the 1st constituency of Moselle; delegate Budget Minister, Jérôme Cahuzac, in the 3rd constituency of Lot-et-Garonne; the Social Affairs and Healthcare Minister, Marisol Touraine, in the 1st constituency of Indre-et-Loire ; the Economy, Finance and Foreign Trade Minister, Pierre Moscovici in the 4th constituency of Doubs; delegate Minister for Crafts, Trade and Tourism, Sylvia Pinel, in the 2nd constituency of Tarn-et-Garonne ; delegate Minister for the Handicapped, Marie-Arlette Carlotti, in the 5th constituency of Bouches-du-Rhône and finally the Agriculture and Agrofood Minister, Stéphane Le Foll in the 4th constituency of Sarthe.

During the first Council of Ministers, and in line with the campaign pledge taken by François Hollande, the salaries of the Head of State, the Prime minister and the Ministers were reduced by 30%. Each minister has also signed a deontological charter promising not to have more than one mandate and to preserve themselves from all types of conflict of interest.

Cohabitation is unlikely

The main opposition party, the Union for a Popular Movement, which is campaigning according to the motto *"Together we are choosing France"* is using the high score achieved by former President (2007-2012) Nicolas Sarkozy in the second round of the presidential (48.38%). *"We must place ourselves across the country in a position of conquest,"* maintained the Mayor of Bordeaux, Alain Juppé (UMP) who also gave up running in the 2nd constituency of Gironde, saying that he wanted to devote himself to his town council and prepare for the elections in 2014.

"I don't want cohabitation for cohabitation's sake but a balanced vote of power and protection of the French citizens' pay sheets and tax forms," declared former Labour, Employment and Healthcare Minister (2010-2012) and the UMP's former secretary general (2009-2010), Xavier Bertrand, adding, *"the party has to give its all and campaign with the same energy as Nicolas Sarkozy did, delivering a convincing campaign, that is totally committed, combative and feisty. But that does not mean aggressive."*

The Union for a Popular Movement's programme wants to counter welfare handouts and the fiscal pummelling of the middle classes, communautarism, the right for foreigners to vote, lax attitudes on Europe's borders and the excesses of globalisation and relocations. It is proposing a 13 billion € reduction on social charges on labour so that 14 million jobs will be protected, the reservation of 20% of public procurement markets for SME's and the upkeep of tax free overtime and a net increase in salaries by means of a four billion euro reduction in employee contributions.

On the right the party's Secretary General, Jean-François Copé has to fight Marine Le Pen's National Front. *"I would like to say to the French who*

want or would like to vote for the National Front that by doing this we shall put the left in power," he warned. *"We are clear: no alliance with the National Front. I would like to take the time to ask François Hollande about his alliance with Jean-Luc Mélenchon and the Greens,"* he added.

The UMP has already started the battle of succession to the former President, which will take place next autumn. Indeed according to the party's statutes, in the event of its candidate's defeat in the presidential election the party has between four to six months to organise a congress and appoint its new chairman, deputy chair and its secretary general.

"The Union for a Popular Movement no longer has a natural leader," declared former Prime Minister (2007-2012) François Fillon to the weekly 'Figaro Magazine', without fearing the battle this might launch. *"It is clear. Nicolas Sarkozy is missing from the UMP, he was largely behind this political party's success and there has been a vacuum since his departure which no one can deny,"* he explained. The former Head of Government is due to face – amongst others – Jean-François Copé, in the fight for the post as leader of the party. *"The future chair of the UMP in 2012 will firstly have to be a fighting chairman, a warlord in the democratic sense of the term,"* said the Secretary General. *"That there should be various candidates and therefore various competitors for the chair of the party during the congress is completely normal but it is not the time to talk of this now,"* he also said hoping to reveal his rival, François Fillon, as the man of division at a time when the priority should be unity.

"I hope these are just unfortunate words (...) we are committed to a legislative battle that may lead us to victory, the condition for this being of course our unity. The priority of priorities is unity," decla-

red Alain Juppé. *"With others I founded the UMP. I will do everything I can to avoid this advantage being brought into question,"* he added.

The number of MPs seats won by the opposition on 17th June next and notably the way these will be spread amongst the supporters of either one or the other of the personalities hoping to succeed Nicolas Sarkozy as head of the UMP, will be decisive. For the time being, the electorate on the right seems more interested in the effects of the socio-economic crisis and the future of their buying power than in the leadership of the party.

A Dangerous Election for the National Front

The National Front (FN), which is not represented in Parliament, hopes of course to win seats in the National Assembly. However the majority two round voting method does not lean in its favour. The National Front's electorate (just like all of the French) will be less motivated for the general elections than they were for the presidential. If turnout is low on 10th June next, for example around 60%, all parties must absolutely win over 20% of the votes cast to achieve the 12.5% of those registered which is vital to remain in the second round.

The FN's goal is firstly to show its ability to rally, to form alliances with others parties, in short to be seen as an attractive political force. This is why the National Front is running in the elections on 10th and 17th June under the banner *"Rassemblement bleu marine"*. The party has succeeded in rallying to its new name Bernard Dutheil de la Rochère (Republican and Citizens' Movement, MRC), Olivier Eyraud (UMP) who has now been excluded from his party because of this, and Nathalie Huiart, the local leader of Chasse, Pêche, Nature et Traditions (Hunting, Fishing, Nature and Traditions – CPNT). *"There are some good people at the UMP, there are some good locally engaged MPs, there are many voters who do not understand the barrier that has been set up between the UMP and the National Front the means and ends of which they*

cannot see" declared Marine Le Pen on 22nd May. She also said that her party might *"exceptionally call for a vote in support of UMP candidates or the Socialist Party depending on their human value."*

The National Front is putting 572 candidates forward including 289 women. Eleven of its candidates are not party members, such as the lawyer Gilbert Collard, who is standing in the 2nd constituency of Gard, the only department where Marine Le Pen came out ahead in the first round of the presidential election on 22nd April last, or Jacques Peyrat in the 1st constituency of Alpes-Maritime. Apart from these two departments the party hopes to win seats in Moselle, Vaucluse and Pas-de-Calais. The party set the goal of being present in 150 of the 200 constituencies in the second round. It is campaigning on the theme of protection – economic, social, physical – national priority, support to pensioners and the fight against communautarism.

What future for François Bayrou?

Finally the Democratic Movement leader (MoDem), François Bayrou will find it difficult to retain his seat as MP in the 2nd constituency of Pyrénées Atlantiques. *"There is obviously a political equation that is not easy to settle,"* he declared. Taking fifth position in the first round of the presidential election on 22nd April last with 9.13% of the vote, François Bayrou then announced that he would be voting for François Hollande in the second round. *"After great debate I decided to oppose Nicolas Sarkozy whose obsession with Islam was dangerous for our country,"* he recently declared in explanation of his choice, adding *"it seemed to me that the country needed change."*

The party is standing under the label of *"Centre for France"* (CpF) with 471 candidates, a quarter of whom are not members of the Democratic Movement. *"My commitment in the general elections is that the National Assembly needs voices that say when it is fair and conversely when it isn't. If we want to serve the country then we need balance. If*

per chance the right should win the majority in the hemicycle, I can say that it will be a catastrophe for the country. We just have to look at the present atmosphere in the two camps. Violence has entered the debate which is damaging. The risk of have a warring majority against the new President is real. Jean-François Copé himself used the word "war", warned Jean-François Bayrou. "France has no chance of recovering if the next elections end in cohabitation and stalemate," the leader of the Democratic Movement also pointed out calling for the new President François Hollande "to review in depth his economic programme" because "the financial crisis is not yet behind, but ahead of us."

It is likely that the French will give François Hollande the majority that will enable him to govern for the next five years. The general elections or-

ganised just after presidential vote have always confirmed the choice made in the latter election. According to the most recent poll by Ipsos on 25th and 26th May last, the UMP is due to win 35% of the vote, the Socialist Party 31%. The National Front is due to win 15%, the Left Front 8% and EELV 6%. IFOP published a poll on 30th May crediting the socialists with 34% of the vote and the UMP with 32%. The FN is due to win 15.5% of the vote, the Left Front, 7% and EELV 3.5%.

The UMP is calling for voters not to give power to the left, which now holds the presidency of the republic, the Senate (the Upper Chamber of Parliament), the great majority of the regions and departments and also the country's main towns. The right has been in this position twice, for the first time between 1995-1997 and the second between 2002-2004.

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