

French Legislative Elections: Part 1

by Nidra Poller



The sun is shining, the air is sweet and breezy, the birds are chirping and the jacandas are ablaze in purple blossoms. I'm like a restless pupil in summertime, looking out the window and aching to run out of the classroom and dive into glorious nature.

Far away in Paris, François Hollande is handing over to Emmanuel Macron the nuclear scepter and other secret codes and coded secrets of the Elysée Palace. There will be all sorts of media winks and hints with flashbacks to the last such exercise when the newly elected Hollande nastily skipped the courtesy of escorting outgoing President Nicolas Sarkozy and his wife Carla Bruni to the car that would carry them to their new civilian life.

I can't cheat on time, place & perspective. Instead of

following the inauguration as if I were there, I want to see it from this perspective, from Israel...where the question of Aliyah hovers over French Jews, those that have already made the choice, and the others.

My dear friend and colleague Moti Kedar asks me if France is doomed. His parents made Aliyah from Poland in the early 30s, he was born in Israel where he has fruitfully multiplied. Demographically, he says, France doesn't add up. It subtracts. How did he put it? A nation that doesn't make children is heading straight for the museum. I am always at a loss to answer this existential question. Of course I respond at great length and exhaustively, but without any statistics or hardware to justify my long term predictions. Or is it simply hope? Not idle hope, not "where's the problem?" Simply hope instead of dejection, hope as a form of light, my default mode.

Election night

Since my last report at 8 PM on election night, the figures have been refined. The final count is:

	percentage	votes
Emmanuel Macron	66.1 %	20,753,797
Marine Le Pen	33.9%	10,644,118
Abstentions		12,101,416
Blanks		3,019,735

Exit polls were posted on non-French media several hours before the official announcement of the results. The candidates and their supporters knew, of course. Stiff silence at the Front National venue at the Chalet du Lac in the Bois de Boulogne where Marine obviously would not be celebrating a victory. At the Louvre, Macron fans were rushing into the courtyard, grabbing pastel t-shirts and French flags from the *ellpeurs* [helpers] like marathon runners reaching for water

bottles without losing a step. Everyone remembers the proliferation of huge foreign flags, mostly from Muslim countries, at the Bastille where François Hollande celebrated 5 years ago. Nothing was left to chance this time. The roving mike did catch some uninhibited folklore from an ecstatic African supporter: "I was on my way to the toilets to pee," she said, "when I heard them announce that Macron is the winner!!! Wow!!!

The acceptance speech, broadcast from En Marche headquarters, was brief, sober, and disconcerting: Emmanuel Macron with his facial lights turned off. A solemn acknowledgment of the enormous responsibility that now weighs on his shoulders. Promises to protect and unite the people of France, "heirs of a great nation that carries a message." Defense of Europe and our way of life. A fraternal greeting to the nations of the world (all eyes on us). Hope, renewal, determination, and respect for one and all. A better world. Fears pacified, optimism renewed... the challenge of high tech and climate change... fight with all my might against terrorism.

Motorcade to the Louvre where crowd-warming musicians had been holding the stage as the fans poured in and royal blue darkness crowned the scene. Emmanuel Macron the Young, made a very long very solo very dramatic entrance. "Bonaparte," said the media in hushed tones to underscore his youth. And his pretensions?

The speech to his roaring supporters was more buoyant but also brief. First Lady Brigitte Macron made a swift and modest appearance, joined hands at arm's length with the president, placed a whisper of a kiss on his hand. Nothing like the "kiss me on the lips" muttered for all the world to see by Valerie Trierweiler -remember First Girlfriend?- to an awkward François Hollande surrounded by row upon row of supporters on the stage at the Bastille. It wasn't long before Trierweiler became First Jilted Girlfriend, replaced by First Paramour Julie Gayet who, it is assumed, has been trysting with the

president ever since.

The election night staging was truly elegant. The contemporary pyramid dazzled like a diamond set in a frame of palatial architecture, magnificent images from every angle, the essence of France in all its glory, the virile femininity of Paris, and the height of ambition of the dashing new president. Press photographers were kept at an uncomfortable distance, while handpicked En Marche image-makers occupied forward positions. Another example of a certain En Marche arrogance. Speaking of the Louvre, whatever happened to the well-healed Egyptian jihadi that flew in from Abu Dhabi in February to commit a massacre at the Louvre? He got no further than a vicious machete swipe at the soldiers that happened to be patrolling at the Pyramid entrance when he barged in, expecting to hit a soft target. Severely wounded, he was reportedly interrogated once, before relapsing. And we have never heard another word since. Was he exfiltrated? What about his connections with a fellow Egyptian in Poland? And all the usual jihad friendly information that started to emerge? Vanished. Where is he?

Back to Paris briefly

As I write, the modest French equivalent of an inauguration is underway. Hollande out, Macron in, and a merciless downpour drenching the party. President Macron will soon go down the Champs Elysées under thick black clouds and slapping wind.

Emmanuel Macron has repeatedly postponed the promised announcement of his choice for Prime Minister. What is going on behind the scenes? The decision is crucial. Though pollsters are already predicting the president will get the majority he sorely needs, it certainly doesn't look that way now. François Bayrou is grumbling. The April rupture I had predicted didn't happen. I suppose that's because Bayrou was sure he had negotiated choice spots in more than 100 districts for his Modem party candidates. Now En Marche bigwigs say they don't make backroom deals, that's old fashioned politics. Then

Bayrou claims his demands have been met. But the president's men say there's no deal. The presidential party is now called La République en Marche or LRM. A bit tricky, no? President Macron has been desperately pulling for support from Les Républicains, or LR. Would he go so far as to introduce confusion in the ballot box?

Wasn't he banking on a gold rush from the Républicains? Orphaned by the elimination of François Fillon they should flock to the winner and fulfill his ambition to smash both the Right and the Left, leaving nothing but his majesty and a lame opposition composed of the variously defeated: the Mélenchon Bolivarians more in the street than in Parliament, the Socialists at death's door, anemic Greens, faded Communists, and shreds of the Front National.

If that's the plan, so far, not so good. Les Républicains are sticking together, determined to win a majority in the legislature which, in the 5th République, means running the government. Marine's ambition to crush the Républicains like so many cockroaches and become The Opposition is belly up. Her party is unraveling, her niece, the up and coming young Marion Maréchal Le Pen, wants out. For the time being. At the age of 27 she can afford to back out and let them tear each other apart. Some factions are burying Frexit, no longer an issue, no longer a drawing card. Others, on the contrary, are threatening to leave the FN if liberation from the Eurozone is no longer a hallmark issue. And what has become of Nicolas Dupont-Aignan who was polishing his shoes on the way to the prime ministry just ten days ago? All dressed up and nowhere to go. He and Marine couldn't even make a deal to share out the districts. They'll be competing for seats in the legislature.

At least he deserves his fate. The insult to Manuel Valls is, I think, ominous. It's like a biblical story of the wicked son and the noble son. Emmanuel Macron was a high ranking

presidential advisor and then minister of the economy in the Hollande administration. Manuel Valls was interior minister and then prime minister with strong bipartisan approval. One son sneaked out at night to build a tree house and raise himself to the throne. The other son served his master with unfailing loyalty. By the time the faithful son publicly called his slippery brother to order, it was too late. Emmanuel Macron flew the coop, turned his movement into a party, and zoomed himself into the presidential palace.

Valls climbed out of the wreckage of the Socialist party, swallowed his pride, and announced he would run for the legislature on the LRM ticket. Did they say come along, brother, good to have you with us? Not at all. The great LRM ordinator crisply replied: no special privileges for a former PM. You apply and wait your turn. Choking on what was left of his pride, Manuel applied. And got blackballed. They say he doesn't pass muster for an LRM candidate. Tough luck, hombre.

Then, noblesse oblige, the Marcheours refrain from running a candidate against Valls in his duchy. They showed more consideration for a shady candidate in hijab or the ambiguous Mohamed Saou than they grudged to an upstanding politician like Valls.

Doesn't anybody want to debate with me?

I would have dropped the question if it didn't boomerang again: Eileen Toplansky uses Bruce Bawer's third "why not Marine?" article: