

## France must stand together



Not all of those who vote for Emmanuel Macron next weekend would have done so two weeks earlier. Still, they would have felt that the En Marche! (On the Move!) candidate was better placed than his rival to deliver a way of life in tune with their aspirations.

Yet if we are to believe the candidates who didn't make it to the second round, as well as what we hear in the press and social media, millions of their supporters say they are determined not to choose between the two finalists, deeming them both unacceptable, even interchangeable. Hatred is at work, stirred up by the bitterness of defeat.

That the hard-left Jean-Luc Mélenchon won almost 20 percent in the first round is not a cause for joy among all his supporters. This is the case even though National Front founder Jean-Marie Le Pen, (the estranged father of Macron's opponent, Marine Le Pen) ever willing to pour fuel on the fire, acknowledged that his political mirror image ran a good campaign.

The pair of them cling to one another, could not exist without the other; they are two sides of the same hologram. A question of class runs through the social media comments and criticisms of Macron, who is leading in the polls. Because he worked in a bank he is a "banker". Because he counts businesspeople among his supporters he is a "puppet of the oligarchs."

Out of respect - not towards those who utter them but towards the readers of this commentary - I won't repeat the unspeakable comments about Macron's wife. The 8.6 million people who voted for Macron in the first round, therefore, allowed themselves to be seduced by the embodiment of speculation and petrodollars. There was only one savior who could make them see reason and he had his chance.

He deserved victory, but because dark forces robbed him of it, the duty to keep in place a democratic regime is left to others. It's a regime replete with faults but which allows, it cannot be gainsaid, solidarity to be expressed within its institutions. It's a regime whose fundamental values are individual freedom and the protection of the weakest. If you read the foreign media it's clear that beyond our borders our best friends are counting on us.

Electing someone who represents an open France with a large majority is important for those facing the same radicalization as we are. Not all these friends are bankers and oligarchs. Mine are rather professors, psychologists, people who did not choose their profession for the lure of money and who are dedicated to doing what they can to ensure the young have a good life. Out of spite, the abstentionists mean to shirk their duty to voters.

They say so loud and clear, often aggressively. I would like them to hear the difference between their tone and that chosen by a foreign ministry civil servant, Étienne Cardiles, in his eulogy to a policeman, his partner Xavier Jugelé, who was shot dead last week on the Champs-Élysées. The moving tribute lasts six minutes, and every sentence deserves attention because they all show strength in the face of adversity, confidence in everyday choices, solidarity among individuals and with the state, a solemn salute to what the populists choose to call "the system". I tried to find a particularly poignant phrase with which to conclude this column.

But the tribute forms a whole, and it its entirety which gives its meaning, just as for all of us, who are all children of France. Let us stay together. Let us not confuse things. Let us unite in debate. Let us elect the best or the least troubling of the candidates as best we can, according to our needs and our convictions. Let us help them head in the right direction. And let us not insult those who have lived through fascism by hitting them with the claim (that I have heard and read, even from eminent academics), that the two candidates brought forth through universal suffrage are both creatures of such a regime. Even if - and how! - liberalism has its victims, let us preserve a society that, by its very nature, expects all of us to work to make it better.

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