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The French presidential election: towards a sustainable and multilateral world

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The programmes of the two candidates running for the second round of the French presidential election present two diametrically opposed visions of France's position in globalisation (what the country has to lose or gain in this process), of international cooperation and of the role of the European Union. In fine, French people have a choice between two radically different approaches to socioeconomic development: a national preference in Marine Le Pen's case, versus international (and in particular European) cooperation for Emmanuel Macron. It is nevertheless worth pointing out that sustainable development received very little attention during the presidential campaign, and was notably absent from the televised debate held between the two rounds.

An exclusively national response to the global challenges of sustainability, based in particular on a weakening of the European Union and more broadly of the multilateral cooperation system, is unrealistic in an increasingly interconnected and interdependent world, and can by no means be a solution; this isolation would in fact aggravate the symptoms of the environmental, social and economic crisis underway in France, as well as in other countries. Pursuing the work undertaken by the European Union over the last 60 years to coordinate strategies and to pool efforts to achieve safer, more democratic and more sustainable societies is a necessity. France can and must continue to play a major role in this process, demonstrating conviction and based on its legitimacy, thereby contributing with its partners to the necessary renewal of the European project and to the inevitable shifts within our societies towards greater economic, social and environmental sustainability.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are central to this agenda for change, and are an important (geo)political tool for France. These global goals adopted by the international community in 2015 have established sustainable development as an issue of solidarity and justice, defining our common future prosperity: each country must do its part, in cooperation with other countries, for greater feasibility and ambition, while providing its support for the most vulnerable. France and the European Union, which fed the negotiation process for these goals with this progressive approach to development, need to set an example when it comes to their implementation. This is not yet the case for France, which can nevertheless—as some countries are already doing—give a strong political impetus to make the SDGs its framework for public policy reform and improvement. Likewise, in an uncertain geopolitical context, France, the legitimate guardian of the Paris Climate Agreement, has the capacity, with its European partners, to maintain the momentum of the commitments and actions initiated during COP21 in 2015. Where agriculture is concerned, France needs to be a source of proposals, for the long-term socioeconomic and ecological viability of the sector as well as for an ambitious reform of the European Union's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP).

The implementation of sustainable development cannot be achieved without the European Union and multilateral cooperation. When it comes to choosing between two radically opposed visions, only this framework for international governance, within which the candidate Emmanuel Macron is positioned, will enable France to work towards achieving a regulated, fairer and cohesive globalisation project. Once this choice is made, proactive efforts will be required to address this major challenge.