No Respite For Emmanuel Macron As France's Parliamentary Elections Loom

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France elections: Emmanuel Macron needs to win again in legislative elections in June to push his agenda

Paris: French President Emmanuel Macron enjoyed no respite from his political opponents on Monday as, hours after he won re-election by defeating the far-right's Marine Le Pen, radical parties called on voters to deny him a parliamentary majority.

Macron, who pledged to work harder as a unifying force in a divided country, said his second mandate would be different after his sometimes high-handed manner alienated many voters during his first term in office.

But he will now need to win again in legislative elections in June. If he fails to do that, he will struggle to push forward with his pro-business agenda, including unpopular plans to push back the retirement age.

Senior politicians on the far left and far right urged the electorate to put a stop to those reforms.

"Don't leave all the power in Emmanuel Macron's hands," said Jordan Bardella, a close Le Pen ally, urging voters to back the far-right National Rally in the two-stage parliamentary vote on June 12 and 19.

"If you want men and women who will ... protect you from the brutality of Emmanuel Macron's policies, you must elect hordes of National Rally lawmakers," Sebastien Chenu, a spokesman for Le Pen, told BFM TV.

France's unemployment rate dropped to its lowest in 13 years during Macron's first mandate, and its economy outperformed other big European countries as well as the broader euro zone.

But his pro-business and security reforms triggered much discontent, and Macron acknowledged in a low-key victory speech that many had voted for him mainly to thwart his far-right challenger..

The hard left's Jean-Luc Melenchon, who came third, just behind Le Pen, in the presidential election's first round, said Macron had been elected "by default."

"Don't give up," he told his supporters. "You can beat Macron (in the parliament elections) and choose a different path."

COHABITATION RISK

In recent French legislative ballots, the president's party has always won a majority in parliament.

Should the outcome be different this time, Macron would have little choice but to name a prime minister from another party, ushering in what has traditionally been a tense period of cohabitation during which presidential powers are severely curbed.

During a cohabitation, the president remains the head of the armed forces and retains some foreign policy influence but

the government has responsibility for most other day-to-day matters of state and policy.

"The recomposition of the French political landscape is not over. The majority that emerges from the parliamentary elections will be decisive for economic policy," said Amundi Chief Investment Officer Vincent Mortier.

Final results of Sunday's runoff showed Macron won 58.54% of the vote. While a clear win, the result also gave the far right its biggest share of the presidential ballot on record.

Macron and his allies pledged to govern differently and listen more to voters, hoping it will help them win a majority in parliament.

"Many in this country voted for me not because they support my ideas but to keep out those of the far-right. I want to thank them and know I owe them a debt in the years to come," Macron said his late-night speech.

"We will have to be benevolent and respectful because our country is riddled with so many doubts, so many divisions."

After a first mandate in which many criticised Macron's sometimes abrasive style, the message on Monday was that things would be different this time.

"Our first job will be to unify," parliament leader Richard Ferrand, a close ally of Macron, told France Inter, saying lawmakers would involve voters more in their decision-making.

FEET OF CLAY

Macron's margin of victory was well below the 66.1% he scored against Le Pen in 2017.

The conservative daily Le Figaro wrote in its main editorial on Monday: "In truth, the marble statue is a giant with feet of clay. Emmanuel Macron knows this well ... he will not benefit from any grace period."

That also means Macron can likely expect more of the protest rallies that marred some of his first mandate.

"He's not going to do another five years of the same mandate, that's clear. We won't let him do it," said 63-year-old administrative worker Colette Sierra.

"If he does, I think people are ready to take to the streets if there isn't the right kind of coalition government."

But some voters were genuinely happy with Macron's win.

"I'm very happy about the result because this president has already steered us through several challenges," said 65-year-old lorry driver Lucien Sozinho. "He has shown courage, and there you have it, that's the result."

- Reuters