

Le Pen and Macron battle for different futures of the EU

I do not interfere in elections in foreign countries. I do not express preferences between candidates. I am interested in the debates they hold and in the possible outcomes.

On current polling Macron will narrowly defeat Le Pen on Sunday week. The contest is much closer than many thought a few weeks ago and looks certain to be much closer than in 2017 when they last fought each other for the Presidency. Macron entered the contest late using the advantages of incumbency to dominate the political news by acting as President and concentrating on Ukraine, the main news of the moment. Le Pen campaigned around the country on cost of living issues and narrowed the gap with Macron. Now Macron the candidate is shifting position on a number of domestic issues and campaigning intensely. The one big debate between them could be important and swing votes.

Macron wants a more integrated EU with a strong foreign policy and a beefed up military force to back its approach to world affairs. He sees an opportunity to increase French leadership at a time of German weakness following a shift to a new and difficult three party coalition and problems from depending too much on Russian gas. He will claim Le Pen's proposals to ease financial pressures on people are unaffordable.

Le Pen wishes to stay in the EU and Euro but wants at best a semi detached relationship with the supranational body. She sees Hungary and Poland as potential allies for a renegotiation to take back more powers for national determination. She also wishes to cut French financial contributions. She would not welcome the more integrated and more powerful EU Macron seeks.

Le Pen offers a major cut in VAT on fuel and other measures to ease the squeeze.

Whichever wins they will prove France is fairly evenly split between two wildly different views of the EU. It will be interesting to see how much ground Macron changes on domestic economic issues at a time of severe income squeeze.