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# For an ecologist candidacy in the Primary of the Left

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**On October 1, 2009 an internal referendum was held in France's Socialist Party (PS), in which 68% of over 96000 votes approved the principle of Primaries to choose the "Candidate of the Left" for the 2012 Presidential Elections - Primaries that would be open to all left-leaning voters. It was understood that the other parties of the left would be free to present candidates of their choice at these Primaries, while the PS candidates would have to meet certain sponsorship conditions internal to the Party.**

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For various reasons the left-wing parties, including Europe Ecologie-Les Verts (EELV) declined in 2010 the Socialist Party's offer to designate candidates in a « Primary of the Left » - all except the Parti Radical de Gauche which set certain conditions and which presented (on 6 July 2011) the candidacy of its president, Jean-Michel Baylet. As a result, the Primary organised by the PS (Socialist Party) is now not just a « socialist primary » but potentially a « Primary of the Left », and would more certainly become truly that if the EELV joined in the process.

The winner of the ecologist Primary will be known on 12 July. The day after, EELV's executive committee could, with the candidate's agreement, designate him or her as its candidate in the Primary organised by the PS. That would suit the interests of the Left, Ecology, France, Europe and the planet Earth. And even those of EELV, from a strictly partisan point of view.

### **The interests of the left.**

As the « Dominique Strauss-Kahn Affair » proves, many things can occur and alter the situation in the nine months from now to the Presidential Elections. Therefore we need to envisage all eventualities, including the hypothesis that would be the most flattering to the ecologists (and most improbable) : a duel in the run-off between their candidate and Marine Le Pen, and the least pleasant, a repeat of the Jacques Chirac - Jean-Marie Le Pen run-off, this time with Nicolas Sarkozy and Marine Le Pen. If she (the daughter and successor of Jean-Marie Le Pen) were to get 17% of votes, or even over 20%, and if Sarkozy pulls off his undemanding plan of being in the top two, this hypothesis is far from unlikely. It will be even less unlikely if the ecologist vote and the leftwing protest vote (Front de gauche, Nouveau Parti Anticapitaliste...) are sizeable and serve to weaken, at least partly, the socialist candidate, who might be knocked out in the first round.

So far EELV says it is determined to « *maintain to the end* » its candidate and achieve « *the best possible score* ». That would be a Pyrrhic victory: the more they achieve it, the more probably the Left would fail. Suppose that the PS, EELV and Front de gauche were to score almost equally: none would then reach the run-off. So, a few weeks before the first round, there's a risk that EELV will have to speculate on the basis of polling data whether to withdraw their candidate or to share responsibility for the failure of the Left. Wouldn't it be better to think this through beforehand?

### **The interests of ecology.**

Participation in the Primary of the Left would mean proposing ecological alternatives to productivism, firstly to the socialist and ecologist activists and other left-leaning sympathisers right up to the end of the Primary (9 & 16 October), then to all French citizens during the campaign of the candidate selected. For if participation implies supporting the eventual winner, it also implies logically the right for the other parties to take part in all the campaign meetings and to say on what basis they are bringing their support. It's an excellent way to advance EELV ideas within the Left and within the public opinion... and why not (if these ideas are convincing) among the socialist leaders, one of whom will perhaps emerge as President of France! These exchanges would favour the elaboration of

common platform for government, prefiguring the future task of governing. And the EELV candidate, even if unsuccessful in the run-off of the Primary, would be in a position to support the socialist candidate whose thinking is most similar - perhaps even ensuring the success of that congenial candidate.

### **The interests of France and Europe.**

In many domains France needs to break with five years of Sarkozysm, and several decades of wild globalisation and European deficiency. Only the Left can bring this hope. But not just any Left. We need a social, ecological, democratic Left that is European without being Europeist, a Left where the parties really take account of the voters' wishes, in designating its presidential candidate and in elaborating a common project for governing. A « Primary of the Left » can be very useful for that.

### **The interests of the planet Earth.**

One of the most sensitive stumbling-blocks between the PS and EELV is the phasing-out of nuclear technology, both civil and military. These are not trivial matters. Fukushima has reminded us cruelly of this: radioactivity knows no frontiers, and the risks of disaster from power-plants as from nuclear bombs concern all of France and Europe and the planet Earth. That is why it would be unforgivable to return Nicolas Sarkozy, a nuke-merchant, an arms trader, a man unfit to carry the nuclear codes. Even without him personally, it would be terrible to leave things as they stand for another five-year term. EELV would not deserve to gain power if doing so required accepting the *status quo* in this domain in exchange for a few cabinet portfolios and two dozen MPs conceded by a PS « dominant and sure of itself ».

To persuade the PS leadership to begin phasing out nuclear power as soon as possible and to commit France to joining a process for abolishing nuclear weapons (or at least to organise a referendum on this question), a solid index of strength would be a useful adjunct to intellectual arguments. And how could that be achieved? Through Primary of the Left, where the first-round results would serve as a point of reference.

### **The interests of EELV.**

It is in the interest of the EELV party. Approaching the Presidential Elections in dispersed formation is risky for the Left as a whole - and for France - but it is also far from certain that it is advantageous for each individual party. We have seen this with the PS. We may see it also with EELV. A recent exit poll in the first round of the ecologist Primary gave 6.5% results for both Nicolas Hulot and Eva Joly. But that was out of context, and if the risk of vote-splitting became reality, the « useful vote » could easily bring the EELV vote in 2012 down below 5%, if not down to the abysmal 1.5% gained for the Greens in 2007 by Dominique Voynet, although she was not without merit.

EELV could avert such a nightmare and obtain (without risk) a much better result by participating in the Primary of the Left, which has a pool of voters much more sympathetic to it than French electors as a whole. The resulting index of strength would have the virtue of reflecting the proportional influence of different ideas among left-leaning people.

If EELV's executive committee is not mandated by the Federal Council in Nantes on July 9, it could very well take this decision, since to do so would open the presidential path *right to the end* (run-off included) for the EELV candidate. Within the Primary of the Left, the chances are slight, admittedly ; but outside of it... the chances are zero !

All the arguments point to this: EELV should now renounce the plan to go it alone, which is mere presidential fetishism. By joining the Primary it would serve the general interest without renouncing or harming its own. The «

people of the Left » will appreciate this. So will the French public, who are weary of party quarrels.

Saintes, le 8 juillet 2011

### **Jean-Marie Matagne**

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