

[Print this story](#) | [Close window](#)

Mail & Guardian online

www.mg.co.za

Sarkozy wins mandate for reform

Paris, France

07 May 2007 07:11

Nicolas Sarkozy was on Sunday night handed a mandate to change France after a massive turnout in one of the most divisive presidential election campaigns in the country's history.

As rioting broke out at Bastille, on the other side of central Paris, the right-wing former interior minister promised to make France love itself again. Sarkozy, who was criticised for exploiting racial and social divisions in his campaign and accused of brutality by his opponent, the Socialist Ségolène Royal, declared: "Tonight is not the victory of one France over another."

He vowed would represent "all of France and leave no one by the side of the road".

But as he talked, there were reports of car-burnings in the suburbs and trouble flaring in Lyon, with police firing flashballs after skirmishes between left-wing activists and Sarkozy supporters.

In a master stroke of political showmanship, Sarkozy staged a huge celebration rock concert to launch his "economic revolution" in Paris's Place de La Concorde, where heads rolled from the guillotine during the first French revolution. But on Sunday night, he promised no less than a national resurrection built on hard work.

"I want a France where everyone has a chance -- but chance comes for those who work for it," he said, echoing his campaign slogan that he would represent the silent France "that wakes up early". There would be a national reconciliation based on everyone, no matter what background, being given equal "dignity and respect".

'The French have chosen'

French newspapers said on Monday that Sarkozy had won a clear mandate to carry out tough social and economic reforms but must work to unite the country as he pursues his programme.

"The authoritative election of Nicolas Sarkozy is certainly one that will make a lasting mark on the history of the country," the conservative *Le Figaro* said.

"With the strong legitimacy his indisputable electoral performance gives him, the new president of the republic can now begin his great transformation, while taking care, of course, to reconcile the French, divided by the campaign."

Even the country's left-wing papers conceded that Sarkozy had won a major victory.

Under the headline "The Shock" against a black background, the communist daily *L'Humanite* called Sarkozy's election a "catastrophe" for workers and young people, but admitted, "The victory of the right cannot be disputed."

"Nicolas Sarkozy is a legitimate president, elected without rotten tricks or hesitation," *Libération* said in a commentary, while *La Croix*, a left-of-centre Catholic paper, noted: "The French have chosen. Their message is clear."

Sarkozy's campaign was based on the theme of "la rupture" -- a clean break from past policies which he blames for creating France's runaway debt, high unemployment and festering discontent in the mainly immigrant suburbs.

His plans include the abolition of tax on overtime, big cuts in inheritance tax, a law guaranteeing minimum service in transport strikes, and rules to oblige the unemployed to take up offered work.

On the social front he has pledged minimum jail terms for serial offenders and tougher rules to make it harder for immigrants to bring extended families to France.

His right-wing programme was in sharp contrast to Royal's promise to extend state protection, create 500 000 jobs, and increase the minimum wage.

The regional newspaper *Ouest-France* urged Sarkozy to follow through on his victory pledge to be president for all the French.

"We are counting on the new president, to not only prove his effectiveness, but to also forge a unity based on a respect for equality, as that is the main condition for renewal," said France's largest-circulation daily.

France's left-wing papers were not ready to concede defeat ahead of parliamentary elections next month.

"The other France will seek to make up for it at the ballot box in the legislative elections," wrote *Libération*.

L'Humanite called for a counter-offensive.

"The voters cannot give the Sarkozyist right complete power ... The political landscape for the next five years will only be decided by the legislative elections on June 10 and 17," it said. - Guardian, AFP