



**10 Minutes For The Planet**  
**The Presidential Debate... so Little**  
**About Environmental Issues! ©**

*by Valentine Rinner*

Hello everyone and welcome to this week's episode of 10 Minutes for the Planet.

The five most popular candidates for May's presidential elections met for a televised debate together, for the first time on March 20th. The debate saw François Fillon representing The Republicans, the Socialist Benoît Hamon, Marine Le Pen from the National Front, Emmanuel Macron and Jean-Luc Mélenchon. What is astounding however, is that during those three and a half hours for the debate, less than ten minutes were dedicated to environmental issues.

Three of the candidates did mention environmental issues in their introduction. They were Mélenchon, Hamon and Macron. Macron simply alluded to climate and environmental change as one of the current threats faced by our country. Mélenchon referred to himself as the ecologist candidate needed to meet the challenge of our current environmental issues; and Hamon invited our nation to take more care of the world we are leaving to our children.

Only Hamon and Mélenchon spoke briefly about the matter of climate refugees, when the discussion moved into the larger issue of refugees. Hamon referred to the threat of an exponential increase of climate refugees, saying they could reach a full billion. Mélenchon wanted to act fast and take a collective approach in dealing with consequences of climate change: and his new 6th Constitution would include a "green law" that would forbid taking more from nature than it can provide. In other words, if you are a regular here at Ten Minutes for the Planet, he would like to push back Earth Overshoot Day to December 31st. He also declared that he would like to transition away from chemical-led agriculture towards smaller and more sustainable systems.

Hamon, for his part, accused Macron of potentially catering to his rich supporters from the pharmaceutical, chemical and oil industries, who are usually the last defenders of the environment. He mentioned the pressing issue of endocrine disruptors, as well as diesel legislations, that kill tens of thousands each year. Hamon made clear he would advocate strong state actions to fight against atmospheric pollution and other health factors linked to the way industry is currently run.

One of the main historical political disagreements in France is where nuclear energy is concerned. Are you for it? Against It? It is quite a dividing factor in the French opinion and a deal-breaker for a considerable number of voters. The question made up most of

the ten short minutes relegated to environmental issues. Hamon and Mélenchon are set on closing all nuclear power plants at the end of their life cycle, which represents almost half of all French nuclear power plants, requiring an estimated 100 billion euros to extend their life-cycle. However, this kind of investment could go instead towards a renewable energy transition, according to both left-wing candidates, and would be an investment that would also create more jobs.

In Fillon's opinion, transitioning out of nuclear energy is clearly against public and economic interest, while Macron was very careful on the issue, supporting a low-carbon footprint nuclear plan, while reducing our dependence.

A couple of other environmental issues were very briefly introduced from the liberal candidate Macron and the protectionist candidate Le Pen, such as diesel legislation, but this was discussed from an economic point of view. Macron would like to stop regulating prices differently between diesel and petrol, while Le Pen castigated him for disadvantaging the middle class and asking for more state regulation.

In the end, there were no surprises. In French politics, the environment has always largely been a left-wing concern. The right would like to continue as we've always done, looking towards fostering growth. It looks like Emmanuel Macron also follows this option. And finally, for the extreme-right, these are yet further arguments to support the need to run the country with a nationalistic approach.

In the next episode of 10 Minutes for the Planet we'll start looking a bit deeper into the candidates' approach to environmental issues. Have a good week!