Tens of thousands rally against far-right ideas in France

Protesters take part in a "Freedom march" on June 12, 2021, in Paris. (Photo: AFP)

Paris, June 14 (RHC)-- Tens of thousands of people have taken to the streets to demonstrate against the rise of far-right extremism across France, as tensions run high over the prospect of Marine Le Pen being elected president next May. More than 100 left-leaning organizations staged nationwide "Liberty March" rallies on Sunday to demonstrate against "attacks on freedoms."

Organizers said around 70,000 people participated in the rally in Paris and 150,000 around the nation. Authorities, however, put the number of participants in Paris at 9,000 and 37,000 nationwide.

Demonstrators protested against what they charge is a creep of far-right ideas into the mainstream ahead of next year's elections. Far-right ideas "are no longer the monopoly of far-right parties and ... have now largely penetrated the political class," said Benoit Hamon, who was a Socialist presidential candidate in 2017.

The country's left has lost its political voice amid divisions since President Emmanuel Macron won office four years ago against his far-right opponent Le Pen. Macron replaced Socialist Francois Hollande, who chose not to run in the 2017 election. Le Pen has now returned to her far-right, anti-Muslim and anti-immigration campaign. She has already proposed a controversial ban on Muslim headscarves in all public places.

"I consider that the headscarf is an Islamist item of clothing," she said in January, as she had also proposed a new law to ban "Islamist ideologies," which she called "totalitarian and murderous."

Le Pen was tried and cleared of inciting religious hatred after comparing Muslims praying in the streets to the Nazi occupation, six years ago. Opinion polls on next year's presidential election show that Le Pen is in a tight race with Macron.

Many say a runoff between the two is seen as the most likely scenario for the second round of the vote.

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