
Macron's 'grand national debate' starting today is like 'SLEEPING GAS,' Yellow Vests say

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French President Emmanuel Macron hopes to use nationwide debates, set to kick off on Tuesday, to tackle anger emanating from the Yellow Vests, but protesters and the opposition remain skeptical that he seeks genuine change.

By launching "*grand national debates*," the president has promised to reach out to citizens and listen to everyone. "*For me there is no banned issue*," Macron [wrote](#) in an open letter to the nation, published on Monday.

We won't agree on everything, which is normal in a democracy. But at least, we will show that we are a people who are not afraid of talking, exchanging, debating.

The first round of the debates is [set](#) to kick off in the northern town of Grand Bourgtheroulde on Tuesday, with the president expected to attend. He is scheduled to hold a meeting with 600 mayors and local officials there.

Macron hopes that a frank nationwide discussion will lead to reconciliation with the Yellow Vest protesters whose massive rallies have been rocking Paris and other

towns across France since November. Started as a grassroots movement against planned fuel tax hikes, the Yellow Vests evolved into broader voice to vent the anger towards the government. Their demands grew to include the resignation of President Macron.

The clashes with police and the chaotic atmosphere during the rallies have left at least 10 people dead and more than a thousand have been detained.

[Also on rt.com Police employ tear gas & water cannons as Yellow Vest protests enter 9th week \(VIDEOS\)...](#)

In his letter, Macron offered to answer a variety of questions, such as which taxes should be lowered and whether France should have more referendums.

Some of the issues put up for debate were ostensibly not connected with the recent protests, like the question over whether the government should set annual immigration targets.

The protests have already prompted Macron to offer concessions. He promised a minimum wage rise and to roll back the planned fuel tax hike. While pledging more dialogue on Monday, the president emphasized that he will not allow a complete redo of his pro-business reforms and won't return the scrapped wealth tax.

"We're not replaying the election," the government's spokesperson Benjamin Griveaux explained.

This attitude led the opposition to believe that Macron just wishes to tweak the system a little bit, instead of fixing it. Leader of the left-wing La France Insoumise, Jean-Luc Melenchon, dismissed the 'grand debate' as a *"big diversion,"* suggesting that the government had already decided its outcome.

The issues singled out for discussion are *"limited"* and it is unclear who will be organizing the process, noted Marine Le Pen of the right-wing National Rally (formerly the National Front). The government has been announcing policies before the talks even started, she said.

[Also on rt.com Organizer of Macron's 'grand debate' with Yellow Vests defends her 'shocking' €176,000 salary...](#)

The Yellow Vests and regular citizens don't feel too enthusiastic either. Many are skeptical of the government's intentions and doubt that Macron has a real desire to listen.

"We don't care about the national debate because we know it won't change anything," a Yellow Vests activist told RT. Others suspect the whole approach is

designed simply to placate popular anger.

In demonstrations they use tear gas against protesters. This national debate is like sleeping gas.

The proposed discussion will be "useless" because the officials stated that they won't review anything done in the last 18 months of Macron's presidency.

Yellow Vests campaigner Elodie Crisias told RT France that the protesters would like to put all issues up for referendums, but the French officials already indicated that it is impossible.

"In the end, the government and Emmanuel Macron don't hear what we, the French people and the Yellow Vests, want. In a democracy, all decisions are made by the people, but in this case we can't decide on anything."

President Macron had earlier been accused of being out of touch when trying to tackle the protests. Last week, he was roasted for [saying](#) that many French citizens think it is possible to "obtain something without proper effort."

The timing of the debates also coincides with the upcoming crackdown on the unauthorized protests, announced earlier by Prime Minister Edouard Philippe. The measures are [expected](#) to tackle "continued unacceptable violence" across the country, Philippe's office said.