Going Right the French Way: Front National

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France’s Front National (FN) is a populist nationalist party with an anti-EU, anti-immigration, but a left wing, protectionist economic agenda. The party has a membership of 75,000 and holds two seats in the French National Assembly, three seats in the European Parliament, and 118 seats in Regional Councils throughout France. An IFOP poll in October 2013 showed the party having 24% of the vote for the May 2014 European Parliament elections, ahead of the center-right UMP (22%) and the governing Socialists (19%).

According to a survey by Le Monde, 45% of the party’s voters are low-income workers, 19% are retired, and 13% are inactive (unemployed). The main party strongholds are in the North East (Nord-Pas-de-Calais, Picardie, Haute-Normandie, Champagne-Ardenne and Lorraine) and the South East (Langedoc-Roussillon, Provence-Alpes-Cote d’Azur). FN’s voters in the North are more sensitive to social issues; 81% of them are workers, retired or inactive. FN’s voters in the South are more diverse and include small business owners and artisans attracted by FN’s Poujadist promises (fewer taxes for small businesses).

Front National’s Main Geographical Strongholds

The party’s current leader, Marine Le Pen (45), is the youngest daughter of long time FN president Jean-Marie Le Pen. She served as an immigration lawyer at the Paris Bar Association between 1992 and 1998, representing illegal immigrants who could not afford legal representation. She joined FN at the age of 18 serving as president of Generations Le Pen – an association trying to “de-demonize the National Front.” In 1998, Marine took the leads of the party’s juridical branch; she became the party’s Vice-President in 2003 and President in 2011. Marine Le Pen ran for France’s presidency in 2012, where she obtained 17.9% of the votes.
FN's Agenda

Under Jean-Marie Le Pen, Front National (1972) was an ultra-nationalist xenophobic, anti-Semitic party with changing agendas, pro-monarchist at times, anti-communist, pro-Catholic, supporting a French Algeria (Jean-Marie fought in the Algerian war) and neoliberal economics. FN had negligible voter support until 1984 when the party won 10 seats at the European Parliament elections. Originally pro-EU, the party added Euroscepticism to its agenda in the '90s.

More moderate than her father, Marine transformed the party, softened its xenophobic image and its stance on immigration, and now threatens to sue anyone who claims her party is "extreme-right." Playing on anti-Islamist and recession insecurities, she supports re-nationalization of strategic services, a bigger role for the state with enhanced welfare policies for the French citizens (not for immigrants though), secularism, anti-globalization and anti-capitalism. Her message reaches many in a country with more than three million unemployed.

- Reduce illegal immigration to zero
- Reaffirm the republican model and values “against Anglo-Saxon multiculturalism:” legal immigrants should assimilate into the mainstream
- Renegotiate the European Convention on Human Rights
- Ban state medical aid for illegal immigrants
- Prioritize social housing to French nationals
- Uphold the 1905 law for secularism
- Withdraw from NATO and the Schengen Agreement, reintroduce border controls; form a trilateral alliance Paris-Berlin-Moscow
- Reject Turkey’s accession to the EU
• Oppose gay marriage and the right to adopt children by homosexual couples
• Ban “positive discrimination practices” (Affirmative Action)
• Zero tolerance on law and order, harsher sentencing, increased prison capacity, referendum for reintroduction of the death penalty
• Reindustrialize France with central planning; set quotas and tariffs on imports; allow full state control for fixing tariffs in energy and transportation; stop privatization of public services; nationalize public regional transport services
• Stop austerity policies; reintroduce the franc currency; reintroduce a “polymetallic standard;” sign the Havana charter; apply the 1933 Glass-Steagall Act (separate deposit and investment banking)
• Ban speculative derivates
• Increase military spending to 2% of GDP (currently 1.6%); reorganize the defense industry in cooperation with European partners and Russia; increase the size of the Navy.

Critique

In 2010, Marine Le Pen compared Muslim prayers on the streets of France with the Nazi occupation; in the wake of that statement, the state prosecutor in Lyon opened up a case against her for incitement to hatred and discrimination. As a result, she lost her immunity in the European Parliament and is currently awaiting trial.

In October 2013, she criticized the appearance of four hostages released from Niger, after three years of captivity: “Two of them had beards cut in a rather strange way. Their clothing was strange. One hostage had a scarf on his face. That all calls for some explanation on their part,” Le Pen said after watching scenes of their arrival at a military airport in Paris. Asked whether she thinks they were converted to Islam in their captivity, she told Le Figaro, “I’m not a psychiatrist … but it’s not inconceivable to think that they might be victims of the Stockholm syndrome.” Socialist party spokesman, Eduardo Rihan Cypel said that “Ms. Le Pen is so blinded by her hatred of Muslims that she can’t even join the rest of the nation in rejoicing at the release of our hostages.”

Far Right Alliance

In November 2013, Le Pen visited far-right Dutch politician Geert Wilders to explore the possibility of a Eurosceptic alliance for the 2014 European Parliament elections. Wilders also appealed to British far right political leader, Nigel Farage, to join their new movement.

But if their anti-immigration and particularly, anti-Islamist agendas unite them (Wilders claims Islam to be a “Fascist ideology”), their Euroscepticism is of opposite sources. Nigel Farage wants Britain out of a “red” EU, which overregulates banks and businesses, and has too many welfare provisions. Wilders’ economic agenda is neoliberal as well, while Marine Le Pen sees the Euro as “an instrument of a globalist ultra-liberal ideology and interests of the financial sector,” and seeks protectionist and anti-capitalist measures.

EuroPoint: Most points on FN’s agenda have gone from one extreme to the other (Catholic to secular; neoliberal to statist; pro-EU to Eurosceptic), but the opposition to immigration has remained constant. Today’s FN is trying to exploit people’s economic insecurities by using the EU as a scapegoat to attract more votes.