

French neo-fascists present anti-EU, anti-immigrant program in 2017 elections

By Alice Laurençon
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After her campaign launch in Lyon, the neo-fascist National Front's (FN) presidential candidate, Marine Le Pen, released her 144-point election program. It proposes a raft of vicious anti-immigrant and particularly anti-Muslim measures, law-and-order policies, and military escalation, as well as attacking the NATO military alliance and the European Union (EU) from the right.

The hostility towards these policies in a majority of the French population notwithstanding, Le Pen still has a strong chance of winning the April-May presidential elections. According to an Ipsos poll published on Thursday, she would win the first round of the election with 25 to 26 percent of the vote, ahead of PS-linked independent candidate Emmanuel Macron, with 20 to 23 percent of the vote.

This reflects the bankruptcy and unpopularity of the Socialist Party (PS) of President François Hollande, who is in the final months of a presidency dominated by austerity, war and its imposition of a state of emergency in France. The PS is divided over the winner of the PS presidential primary, Benoît Hamon, with much of the party backing Macron, a former investment banker.

The right-wing Les Républicains (LR) is also in the throes of a deep crisis, after allegations that its candidate, François Fillon, paid nearly €1 million of public funds to his wife for a fictitious job as his parliamentary attaché. Le Pen is seeking to benefit from the collapse of bourgeois democracy in France and growing popular disgust with the political establishment in France and across Europe.

Macron, the former economy minister in Hollande's government, has also benefited from the crisis in these two parties, and polls currently show that he would beat Le Pen in the second round. However, referring to

an Ifop survey showing that only 36 percent of current Macron voters are sure of their decision, Ifop co-chief Frédéric Dabi stated: "Marine Le Pen is the most serious candidate for the second round, given the continuity of the FN's score since 2012."

He added, "[Macron] is benefitting from the expectations of change, he is benefitting from the difficulties of the candidates from government parties, Benoît Hamon and above all François Fillon, but his share of voters are the least sure of their choice, the most undecided".

The French ruling elite, and in particular the PS, is increasingly anxious over the widespread disillusionment with the traditional parties and the growing possibility of an FN victory. On Thursday, *Le Monde* wrote: "Within the Socialist Party, there's panic. Not so much because Hamon is a bad candidate, but because fortune is smiling on Marine Le Pen. ... The victory of Donald Trump, the anti-elite candidate, at the head of a democracy as old and as powerful as the United States shows that populism can win over even an educated people at the forefront of the most advanced technology."

Trump's election has intensified the deep uncertainty and political tensions in Europe. Le Pen has endorsed Trump, whose administration is backing the FN—an endorsement that the media and political circles have glossed over, despite Trump's overwhelming unpopularity in France. The FN programme echoes Trump's condemnation of the EU as the tool of Germany and his celebration of last year's Brexit vote.

In the very first article of its programme, the FN commits to calling a referendum on France's membership of the EU, declaring that France must "Regain our liberty and the control of our destiny". The FN claims it will withdraw from NATO, echoing

Trump's remarks that the alliance is “obsolete”, and assert a more independent foreign policy, including “an autonomous Defence capacity in every area.”

Le Pen's militaristic proposals include an increase in defense spending to 2 percent of GDP from her first year in office and then to 3 percent by the end of her term, the reinstatement of compulsory military service for at least three months, and a renovation and increase of France's nuclear arsenal.

This militarisation is not aimed solely at targets overseas, but also at the working-class at home. The FN pledges to “massively rearm the law and order forces”, including with the recruitment of 15,000 new police officers and “modernisation” of their weaponry. The FN programme calls for targeting poor suburbs of France's major cities and “taking back control of lawless zones by the state.”

Le Pen has also indicated her desire for closer ties with Russia, and has repeatedly called for lifting US-EU sanctions against Russia. Her orientation to Moscow has led to unsubstantiated accusations in the press that the Kremlin plans to interfere in the French elections in favour of Le Pen and against Macron, allegations mirroring those made against Donald Trump's campaign in the United States.

Intense divisions have erupted in the European ruling elite over how to respond to the crisis in the EU and the election of Trump. Many elements in the French ruling class are desperate to prevent an FN presidency, which could portend the complete disintegration of the EU.

However, significant sections of the French bourgeoisie, reflected in Le Pen's campaign, have concluded that the single European currency is disadvantageous for France and favours Germany. Faced with France's growing economic weakness vis-à-vis Germany, they are considering a strategy of allying with Russia, the Trump administration, or both to pressure Berlin.

This break-down of the post-World War II international capitalist order has given the FN an opening to develop as a central force in bourgeois politics. It has sought to rebrand itself as a “mainstream” party, expelling its founder Jean-Marie Le Pen in 2015 over his remarks defending France's Nazi-collaborationist Vichy regime and minimising the Holocaust. The expulsion of the older Le Pen was a tactical move, as his unabashedly reactionary views

hindered his daughter Marine's efforts to ‘normalise’ the FN—for which the PS and the pseudo-left have provided endless assistance.

PS attempts to inscribe deprivation of nationality into the constitution, a principle invoked during the deportation of Jews to concentration camps during the Nazi Occupation, show the PS's adaption to the FN's politics. The PS also imposed a state of emergency, brutally dismantled the refugee camp in Calais, and supported bans on full-face veils and Muslim “burkini” swimwear. After the November 2015 attacks in Paris, Hollande repeatedly invited Marine Le Pen to the Elysee Palace, in the name of “national unity”.

The pseudo-left New Anti-Capitalist Party (NPA) and Workers' Struggle (LO) have played no less a dirty role. By indicating their support for Hollande in 2012 and by working with the trade unions to suffocate working class opposition against hated PS policies, like the 2016 Labour Law, they blocked opposition to the PS from the left and handed political initiative to the far right.

The support of the NPA and most explicitly of the LO for the ban on Muslim veils and burkinis, in the name of secularisation and gender equality, provides an open road for Le Pen to formulate further measures against Muslims and immigrants. In the section of its programme entitled “Make France a Country of Liberties Again”, the FN uses similar rhetoric to demand more attacks on Muslims, proposing to defend women's rights by “fighting against Islamism.”

The FN's anti-immigrant agenda also includes increasing border controls; removing the right to French nationality for children born on French territory to foreign parents; making it impossible for illegal immigrants to become naturalised French citizens; and simplifying the process of their deportation.

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