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THE RISE OF THE FRONT NATIONAL

Bachelor's Thesis

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I declare I have written the Bachelor's thesis independently.

All works and major viewpoints of the other authors, data from other sources of literature and elsewhere used for writing this paper have been referenced.

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ABSTRACT

Far-right movements have been an essential part of French political culture for decades. Now, however, the French Front National (FN) is more powerful than ever before. Founded in 1973 by Jean-Marie Le Pen, it was first marginalized as a racist, sexist, anti-Semitic party. In the presidential election of 2002, Le Pen led his party to a substantial electoral victory as he made it to the runoff. This was seen as the major breakthrough for the party, and it was clear that the FN was here to stay. As Marine Le Pen became the leader of the party in 2011, she has been effectively de-demonizing the party image, even expelling her father from the FN due to his anti-Semitic comments. Even though Marine Le Pen's efforts to improve the party image are an important factor, the circumstances in France are auspicious for far-right factions to prosper: the European Union is viewed increasingly unfavourably, alongside with globalization. France has experienced numerous terror-attacks, which have increased Islamophobic attitudes. As evidenced by the presidential election of 2017, the French see the FN as an increasingly attractive party. Even though Le Pen lost the presidency to Emmanuel Macron, the final election result can still be seen as a victory for French far-right: the FN should not be seen as a political pariah anymore, but as a serious contender in the French political arena.

Keywords: Far-right, Front National, Jean-Marie Le Pen, Marine Le Pen, de-demonization

INTRODUCTION

When the Front National (FN) was founded in 1972, it was not able to gain much support. Its first real breakthrough at the national level happened in 2002, when the leader and founder of the FN, Jean-Marie Le Pen, made it to the second round of presidential election. However, Le Pen's performance in the next presidential election of 2007 was not effective enough, and he came fourth in the first round, thus he was unqualified for the second round. The party seemed to be in a dead-end: various racist and anti-Semitic comments from Le Pen and quarrelling inside the party had done some serious damage to the party image, and consequently the French people started to alienate themselves from the party. However, in 2011, Le Pen's daughter, Marine, became the leader of the party. Things took a more positive turn for the party quite rapidly after this. In the presidential election of 2012, Marine Le Pen received more votes than her father ever did. This positive trend continued in the presidential election of 2017, and she able to attract enough votes to make it to the second round. Even though she lost the presidency, Le Pen still received a larger number of votes than the party ever had before. Approximately 10 million French voted for her in the second round.

This paper is divided into four parts, all of which explain or demonstrate the popularity of the FN. The first part covers the foundation of the FN. In the first section, this paper introduces the roots of right-wing extremism in France, and draws parallels between early far-right thinkers (Charles Maurras and Maurice Barrès) and Jean-Marie Le Pen. Furthermore, the early phases of the party are reviewed, later looking at Marine Le Pen's accession of power. The differences between Marine Le Pen and Jean-Marie Le Pen are analysed and a particular importance is given to Marine Le Pen's aspirations to de-demonize the party, which has turned out to be a success. The second part covers the presidencies of Nicolas Sarkozy and François

Hollande, both of which strengthened the FN, in different ways. The third section addresses the FN in the 21st century and discusses its main policies. To demonstrate how the FN has been able to perform better (due to of the leadership change in the party, better party image and policies that resonate well with the French public), a brief section of diversified electorate is added to this part, as well. The last part covers the presidential election of 2017, which was taking place during the writing process of this Bachelor's thesis.

This Bachelor's thesis aims to explain the reasons for the rise of the FN. While scholarly works on the topic tend to emphasize one aspect over the other, this paper argues that there are various reasons for the current popularity of the FN, which are all intertwined with each other. The falsifiable hypothesis of this Bachelor's thesis is that even though the FN has increasingly gained ground, Marine Le Pen will not win the race for the Élysée Palace. However, the FN should not be seen either as a marginal party or as a protest vote anymore. This might have been the case during the most of Jean-Marie Le Pen's leadership of the party, but various reasons that are covered in this work, show that the FN should be taken as a serious competitor.

The main reasons for the surge of the FN are analysed by mainly using a qualitative research method that is conducted by analysing relevant secondary sources such as academic articles, books and in-depth analyses. Certain primary sources, namely interviews with Marine Le Pen and different periodicals that were written during the writing process of this Bachelor's thesis, are taken advantage of, as well. Quantitative research methods are also utilized, as a part of comparison between Jean-Marie Le Pen and Marine Le Pen, as well as when looking at polls predicting the results of the presidential election of 2017.

1. INTRODUCTION TO THE FRONT NATIONAL

This section will clarify the role of right-wing extremism, which has always been a part of French political culture. In addition, the influence of Maurice Barrès and Charles Maurras on the development of far-right ideology is examined briefly. Jean-Marie Le Pen was able to systematize the movement into a significant political party in the post-WWII era: various right-wing factions, had existed before him, most importantly Action Française (*French Action*, AF) that still exists but is no longer influential. What will also be noted are the differences between Jean-Marie Le Pen and his daughter, Marine Le Pen, who is the current leader of the FN. Some importance will be given to the changes that Marine orchestrated when she displaced her father. These differences between Jean-Marie and Marine have made the FN more approachable to voters, such as the populist nature of the party. However, it is essential to realize that even though Marine made certain amendments, she kept certain elements intact. Therefore, it is important to give recognition to Jean-Marie Le Pen's creation of the FN.

1.1. Roots of right-wing extremism in France: from Maurice Barrès and Charles Maurras to Jean-Marie Le Pen

This section addresses the similarities between early radical right-wing thinkers, namely Maurice Barrès and Charles Maurras, and Jean-Marie Le Pen and his idea of the FN.

According to Williams, far-right movements were able to prosper in the atmosphere of the Third Republic (1870-1940). The situation changed, when the Fourth Republic was established and democracy was reinstated: far-right movements started to lose their popularity in France (Williams 2011, 680). Jean-Marie Le Pen was the first one to establish a far-right movement in France during the Fifth Republic. During the early 80's, the FN started to gain more popularity, slowly but steadily. Thus, it is important to analyse what is behind its success.

Goodliffe provides a framework for analysing French extreme right-wing factions. He lays out five distinguishing features that unite these movements (Goodliffe 2012, 37-38):

1. hostile attitude towards communism and socialism
2. opposition to economic and political liberalism
3. strong and charismatic leading figure
4. concept of national identity and its protection
5. will to create a society in which a homogeneous population shares the same social, political and cultural values

When comparing the AF and the early FN, one can quickly see the similarities. As Crook notes, Le Pen repeatedly claimed that his party was not “*an extreme right-wing party*”, but his efforts to distance himself from Barrès and Maurras were failed attempts. For example, Le Pen had the same ideology with Barrès and Maurras with the issue of heterogeneity of the population. For Barrès, the problem was certain groups of people: for him, it was particularly the Jews that do not have their roots in France, thus their values are incompatible with the French ones. Not only are they not ideal French citizens, but they are also a threat to the national identity of the French people. Maurras, on the other hand, used a term “*racaille*” (scum), to define these uprooted individuals and believed that “*in France, one comes at ease, does whatever one pleases and leaves only if one wants to*”. They both have the same conclusion on the topic: foreigners on the French soil pose an imminent threat to French national identity and have no loyalty to France. This is very similar to Le Pen's argument, even though he did not primarily target the Jews: instead, he scapegoated immigrants. Le Pen argued that immigrants, especially those of Northern African descent, would always have their allegiance to their own country, never to France. What is more, he found certain aspects of their lifestyles and traditions conflicting with the French ones, like both Maurras and Barrès did as well. All three men highly value the idea of one's “Frenchness” (Crook 2016, 15, 21, 24, 31, 40, 44). Maurras and Barrès

also believed in something that Le Pen was able to put into words, a concept called “*préférence nationale*” (national preference), which simply means that French nationals should come first. This idea will be discussed in further detail later in this work.

1.2. The foundation of the Front National

The Front National was the brainchild of Jean-Marie Le Pen: in his mind, France lacked a party that defended French values and traditions. The party was founded in the early 1970’s, with the strong sentiment of anti-communism. The FN was treated as a threat to democracy for a long time, and it was not seen as a serious party. A recent poll made by Kantar France Insights shows the development of the views of the party quite elaborately:

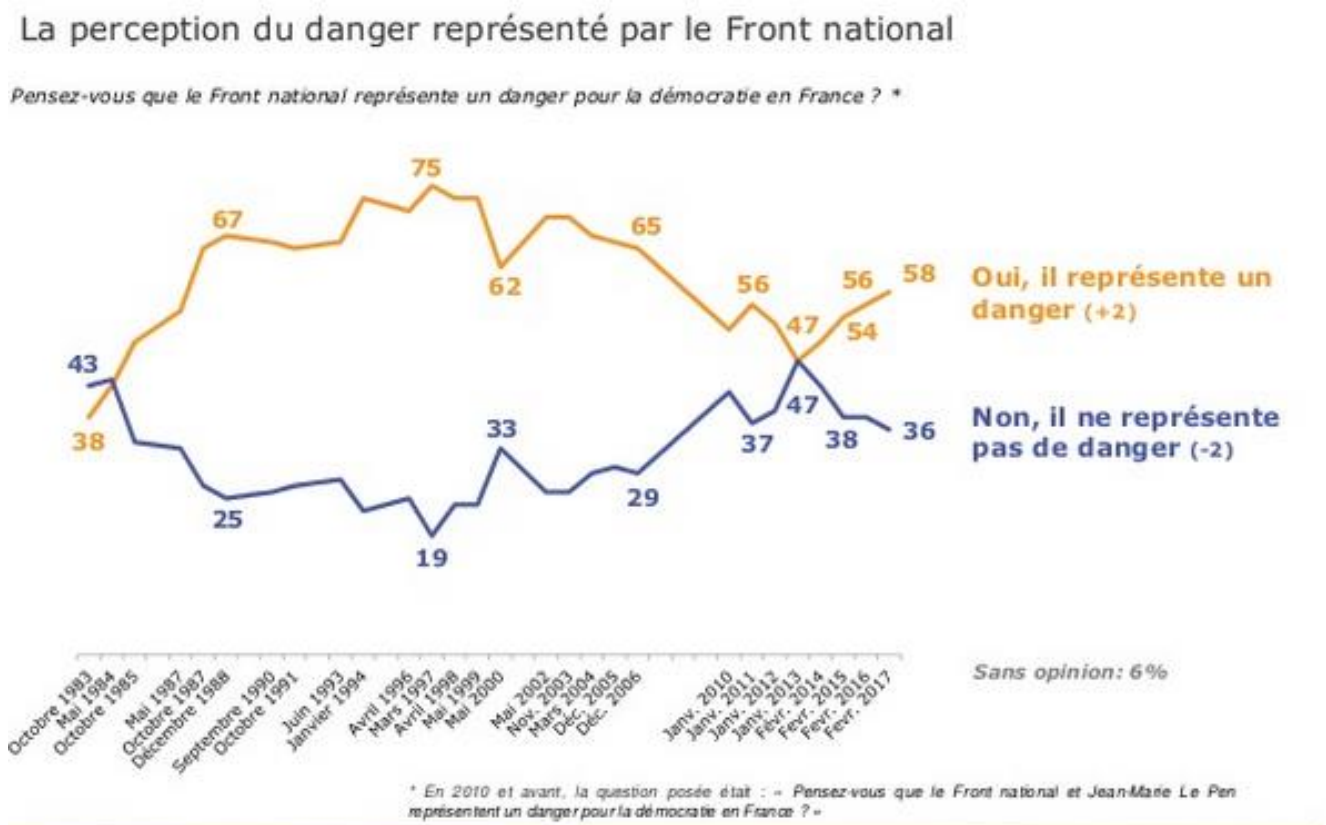


Figure 1. The danger represented by the Front National. (“Do you think that the Front National represents a danger for French democracy?”)

Source: Kantar Public (7.3.2017):

As evidenced by the graph, the FN was considered to pose a grave threat to French democracy during the late 80's and through the 90's, as well. In the early 2000's, the FN began to make efforts to clean up its reputation, and it was not considered to be that big threat any longer: this is mainly due to Marine's concept of *dédiabolisation*, which can be roughly translated as de-demonization of the party, which will be addressed later in this work.

However, another poll compiled by Kantar Insights France shows that even though the FN was deemed to be a threat to democracy, especially during the 80's and the 90's, there was still a rather big percentage who considered themselves to be “in total accordance with the ideas of the FN”:

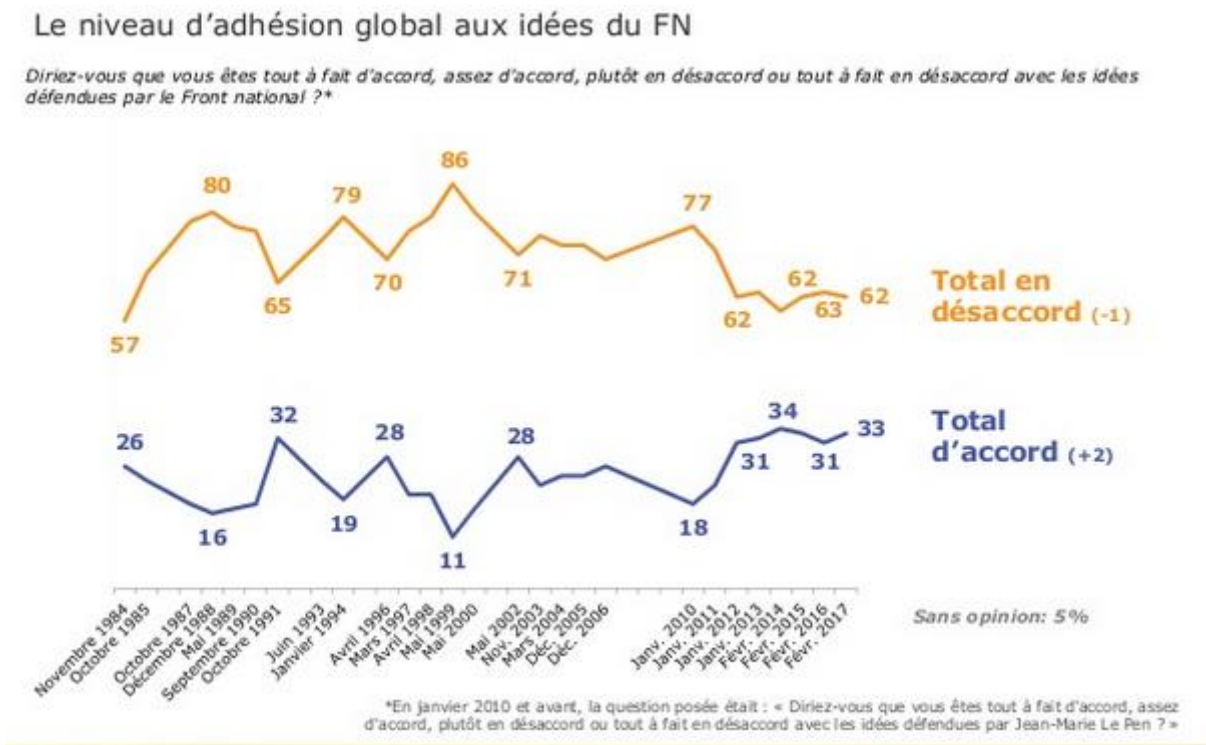


Figure 2. The level of accordance with the ideas of the FN. (“Would you say that you strongly agree, somewhat disagree or strongly disagree with the ideas defended by the Front National?”)

Source: Kantar Public (7.3.2017)

The question asked in this poll is roughly translated as “the level of agreeing with the ideas of the FN”. These two polls reflect a contradiction within the society: in 1991, about 25% of the people polled considered the FN as a threat to democracy, yet 32% of the people were “in total accordance” with the views of the FN. Additionally, this graph shows that the support for the FN during the leadership of Jean-Marie Le Pen (1972-2011), was very volatile:

for example, in 1996 the support was 28 % and two years later it had dropped to only 11 %, but after another two years it was back at 28% again. The FN was able to form its voter base during the 80's and 90's and in 2002 Le Pen was able to make it to the second round in the presidential election against Jacques Chirac: it was finally official that the FN was here to stay. In 2011, Le Pen's daughter Marine Le Pen, overtook the reins of leadership of the party. Marine Le Pen has deliberately tried to distance herself from her father, due to his disputed character and controversial statements. According to Bisserbe, Marine decided to expel his father from the party in 2015. The reason for this was his anti-Semitic statements concerning the Holocaust, claiming that it was "*a minor detail in history*" (Bisserbe 20.8.2015). This was not the first nor the last time he made such remarks: in April 2016, he made a comment that "*Nazi gas chambers were a detail of World War Two*", and was fined (BBC 6.4.2016). As Alduy expresses: "*Jean-Marie Le Pen was easy to hate; his daughter is hard not to like*". This is partly due to Marine's concept of de-demonizing the party image, since she had to get rid of her father's legacy in order to attract more popularity and voters. To illustrate this change of leadership, Marine has condemned her father's anti-Semitic rhetoric, for example (Alduy 2013). Even though anti-Semitism is no longer a part of the political agenda of the FN, the party still remains strongly xenophobic and nationalistic. However, as the previous graph shows, the popularity of the FN has been rising ever since Marine has been in charge.

When the party was founded in 1972, the main policy theme was anti-communism, as both Hainsworth and Shields point out (Hainsworth 2004, 105 and Shields 2011, 80). This is not too surprising, when taking into account the popularity that the left wing used to enjoy in France. According to Shields, when Jean-Marie Le Pen ran for president for the first time in 1974, immigration did not play a significant role in his presidential campaign: instead, it was more concentrated on battling against socialism and rallying for traditional French values. However, as this was already the party platform of the mainstream right, the FN was left without much attention: Le Pen was able to attract only 0,74 % of the vote. Immigration began to play a more important role in the party's agenda in 1978, due to rising levels of unemployment and economic recession. It is worth mentioning that the addition of immigration to the political agenda of the party was nothing unprecedented: Jacques Chirac, who was the Prime Minister at that time, had already in 1976 stated that something must be done in order to decrease the number of immigrants coming to France. During the late 70's the FN concentrated on making immigration one of their core policy issues, without too much support (Shields 2011,

82, 84).

In 1981, the Fifth French Republic elected its first socialist president, François Mitterrand. This meant a new era in the Fifth Republic, as certain policies were modified considerably: for example, the death penalty was abolished during Mitterrand's first term. Mitterrand's presidency was important for the FN as well, because immigration policies were also revised. According to Watts, Mitterrand decided to loosen regulations concerning immigration and at the same time expand the rights of immigrants. This situation gave an opportunity for the FN to be even more vocal about the issues it claimed to be caused by immigration (such as unemployment and economic instability) and gain popularity through this. In the legislative election of 1986, the Socialist Party (*Parti Socialiste*, PS) was not able to attract enough votes and the Socialists lost the majority in the National Assembly, and conservative parties, the Rally for the Republic (*Rassemblement pour la République*, RPR) and the Union for French Democracy (*Union pour la Démocratie Française*, UDF) were able to form a coalition that was stronger than the Socialists (Watts 2002, 47).

As Shields points out in his article, the had FN tried to shed its stigma of being a single-issue party, by applying a better marketing strategy, but it was only after Marine Le Pen started to claim her position as an influential politician that the FN really succeeded in this (Shields, 2011, 80). The party added other policies to its agenda as time went by, such as security, employment and the protection of traditional French values. Nevertheless, immigration remained as the core issue, and practically everything could be derived back to immigration or to the problems it was argued to cause. This anti-immigration feeling was endorsed by mainstream political parties: according to Watts, during the 80's, the new conservative government used somewhat similar rhetoric as Le Pen. For example, Prime Minister Chirac linked immigration directly to various social issues, just what Le Pen had done before him (Watts 2002, 47). This was one of the ways how the FN was able to raise its popularity, when other parties, mainly those parties that were more inclined to practise right-wing politics, began to embrace some of the policies that the FN promoted, such as stricter rules for immigration.

As Shields notes, the agenda of the FN began to stress immigration policies even more in the 90's. In 1991, under the direction of the chief strategist, Bruno Mégret, the FN published a program that called for radical changes on immigration policies: for example, the concept of national preference was evoked in employment, education, taxation, housing and

welfare benefits. However, these measures were violating not only the Constitution of the Fifth Republic, but also various other conventions that France had signed earlier such as the United Nations Convention on Racial Discrimination. The 1995 presidential campaign of the FN reflected these ideas, since Jean-Marie Le Pen made an unprecedented pledge: if Le Pen was elected, he would repeal the Constitution of the Fifth Republic and establish the Sixth Republic based on the concept of national preference. However, here it seems that the FN ran into a dead-end: it had received the label of being a single-issue party, mainly concentrating only on immigration. It was both the party's weakness and strength. Anti-immigration policies defended by the FN gave the party its supporter base of 10-15 % of the population, but this was not enough to make any electoral success, exactly for the same reason: it was campaigning only for one issue (Shields 2011, 87-89).

Le Pen was able to make it to the second round in the presidential election of 2002, which was an unprecedented move: it was the first time a party that was seen to represent radical far-right had been in a serious contest with a legitimate democratic party. Le Pen's presidential campaign was different from his previous ones, since in 2002, he promised he would pull France out of the European Union (EU) and re-negotiate the treaties he saw as an obstacle for French sovereignty, such as the Schengen Agreement. Even though the FN had been against the EU ever since the creation of the party, this was the first time when Le Pen made such a pledge. However, the French united almost unanimously against Le Pen in the second round of the presidential election, as he lost to Chirac with a large margin. Nevertheless, this was seen as a victory for the FN, and its supporters were hopeful for the future victory, now that the glass ceiling for far-right was shattered.

However, already in the presidential election of 2007, the FN faced a huge disappointment, as Le Pen was able to gather about 10% of the votes cast. The same downward trend continued in the European Parliament Elections of 2009. According to Stockemer, this was one of the worst performances yet; only in 1999 had the FN received an even worse result in the European Parliament Elections, but that was partly because Jean-Marie Le Pen was not a candidate. This was because his civic rights were suspended for 2 years, because he physically assaulted another candidate a couple of years earlier, and thus was disqualified from running in the election. The FN was in deep trouble, not only because it was not able to attract voters, but because it was divided internally, as well. There were essentially two factions inside the group: those who followed Le Pen and those who saw Mégrét as a potential leader. Mégrét wanted to

create alliances with other far-right parties outside of France, while Le Pen did not show any interest in such activity, mainly because he was reluctant to call the FN a far-right party. After Le Pen had sabotaged his chance in the European Parliament Elections of 1999, Mégret publicly announced that Le Pen was a burden for the party. Consequently, Mégret and his followers were expelled from the party (Stockemer 2017, 21-22).

The FN was faced with a difficult choice: either continue in the path set by its founder, or try something new. Fortunately for the FN, the choice was the latter in the form of Marine Le Pen. The FN during Jean-Marie Le Pen's leadership was a blend of nationalist pride, mixed with anti-immigration and anti-establishment feelings. However, this was not enough for the French public. Marine Le Pen started to emerge as a potential leader in the early 2000's, and slowly started to de-demonize the party image. In 2011, she became the leader of the party and started rather quickly to steer away from the path that her father had been going on for decades. Even though in essence, the FN still defends the very same ideals that it has practically always stood for, the approach is somewhat different. In the next chapter the differences and similarities between Jean-Marie Le Pen and Marine Le Pen are discussed and analysed.

1.3. Differences and similarities between Jean-Marie Le Pen and Marine Le Pen

Even though Marine Le Pen arguably benefitted from her father's work, she also had a somewhat burden to get rid of, which ironically was her father. From time to time, Jean-Marie Le Pen used inflammatory rhetoric and made racist remarks about various minority groups which hurt the credibility of the party during his leadership. However, as Figure 3 proves, Marine has been rather successful in her goal of de-demonizing the FN, which can be seen in the share of votes in different elections. For example, in the European Parliament Election of 2009, the FN attracted only 6 % of the votes, gaining only three Members of European Parliament (MEPs). However, at the time of the European Parliament Election of 2014, the FN had a massive electoral victory: almost 25 % of the votes cast in France were for the FN. This made the FN the largest French party in the European Parliament (EP) with 24

seats. In her first presidential election, Marine Le Pen also received more votes than her father was ever able to attract. She improved her result in the presidential election of 2017, when she became the second in the first round, and therefore she was qualified for the second round. She made a historical result also in the second round, as about 10 million people voted for her.

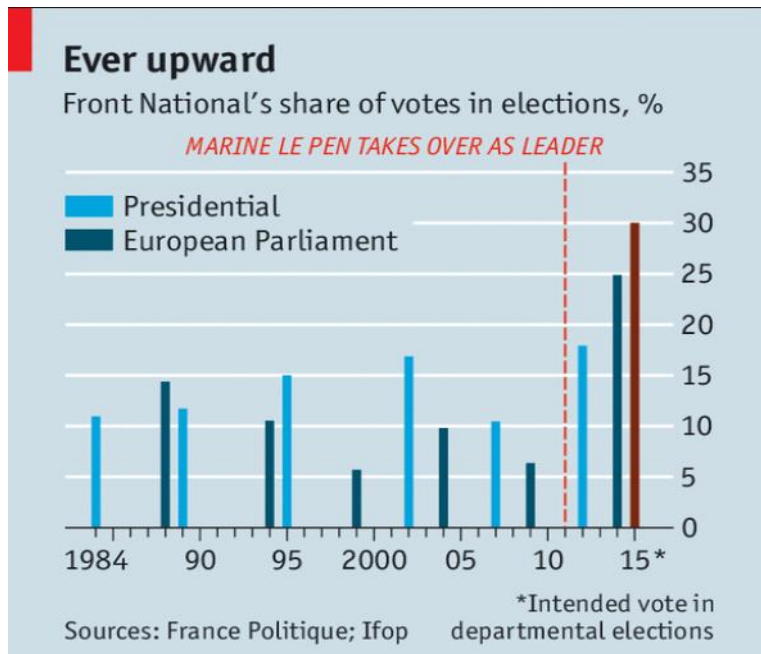


Figure 3. Front National's share of votes in elections, %

Source: The Economist (12.3.2015)

Evidently, Marine Le Pen's somewhat different approach towards certain issues has been beneficial in gaining more support for the party. De-demonization is only one of the aspects why the FN is on the rise, but it is nevertheless one of the most important factors. Other reasons, such as problems caused by globalization and the incapacity of the EU to find a satisfactory solution to certain issues, have resulted in changes in the electorate: the FN has been able to broaden its voter base substantially. These issues will be covered later in the work.

There have been various studies published on the differences between father and daughter. The connecting factor between these analyses is that many scholars argue Marine to be better at marketing the FN. She has been able to disguise the party beliefs and policies in more accepting terms, while cleaning (or de-demonizing) the party's image. Nevertheless, the core values remain the same: nationalism decorated with xenophobia. However, Marine Le Pen has successfully added an aspect to the essence of the FN that is nowadays inseparable: the party's populist nature. For example, her campaign slogan for the presidential election of 2017

is clearly a populist message: “*au nom du peuple*”, which translates into “in the name of the people”. The same can be said about her previous rallying cry for the presidential election of 2012: “*la voix du peuple, l’esprit de la France*”, which can be translated as “the voice of the people, the spirit of France”.

However, here it is crucial to define what is meant by “populism” in order to avoid confusion. Both Müller and Panizza find certain features that are characteristic of populist politicians, such as how they portray themselves: they claim that they are the only ones who truly represent the people (Müller 2016, 16 and Panizza 2005, 20-21). As Müller points out, populism is often connected to right-wing politics, but there are populists on the left-side of political spectrum, as well. Right-wing populists usually see immigrants, asylum seekers, techno-bureaucrats of the EU or the political elite as the enemy. On the other hand, crucial themes for left-wing populists are for example anti-capitalism, anti-globalization and the class struggle. (Müller 2016, 7-10). Another distinction between left-wing populists and right-wing populists is that while left-wing populists usually try to play with the hopes of the people, right-wing populists tend to appeal to the fears of the people. According to Panizza, one crucial aspect of populism is the antagonism it seeks to create between “the people” and “the other”. The difference between the two groups can be economic, social, ethnic, religious, political or some other distinctive feature, depending on whether we are talking about right-wing or left-wing populism. A strong leader is also mentioned as one of the signature aspects of populism, but this is not necessarily an essential feature. However, if that kind of leader exists, he/she usually portrays him/herself as an outsider by making a statement that he/she is not a regular politician, because he/she comes from the outside of the political realm and because his/her movement speaks for “the people”, unlike the other political parties that defend “the other” (Panizza 2005, 3-5, 17-18). Many scholars agree that Jean-Marie Le Pen used certain populist undertones, but Marine has taken this to a whole new level.

Stockemer argues in his article that one of the main reasons why the FN has started to gain more ground is due to Marine Le Pen’s different tone: she traded her father’s provocative language for a populist and easily-approachable message. Even though the policy issues that Jean-Marie Le Pen’s FN defended are somewhat similar to the FN under leadership of Marine Le Pen, the way she has decided to approach them is different. The FN under both Le Pens has remained deeply xenophobic and nationalist party, but Marine Le Pen has been able to portray herself as more moderate than her father. For example, she has threatened to sue anyone who

claims that the FN is a far-right party: she does not see the FN as neither leftist nor rightist, but merely as another republican party. However, Marine argues that the ideas of the FN are just massively different from the parties that represent the mainstream left-wing and right-wing, such as the Republicans (*Les Républicains*, previously known as *Union pour un mouvement populaire*, UMP) and the PS. What is more, she has also threatened to expel anyone who makes racist comments in public. For example, as previously mentioned, she suspended her father due to his anti-Semitic remarks (Stockemer 2016, 4, 6).

However, one might notice certain inconsistencies here: Marine Le Pen insists that the FN is a republican party, but represents different ideas. At the same time, she claims that her party is the only one that truly represents the will of the people and that she is “an outsider” and not like the regular politicians. In other words, she is trying to legitimize the role of the FN as a serious contender in the political realm, while simultaneously trying to convince the public that she does not belong to the very same domain. Another issue that is in contradiction is her zero-tolerance for public racism: according to Breeden, a lawsuit was filed against Marine Le Pen in 2011 after she had compared Muslims praying on the street to the German occupation of France during World War II. However, she was not found guilty of hate speech (Breeden, 15.12.2015). Nevertheless, she is still believed to be more moderate than her father, even though she has faced practically the same charges as him.

Stockemer continues with the differences, arguing that Jean-Marie Le Pen’s fixation on immigration was one of the reasons why the FN did not live up to its full potential. His policies circulated only around immigration, while Marine Le Pen has seen various other policies that she has added to the agenda of the party (Stockemer 2016, 8). Marine Le Pen published her presidential election manifesto, in which she had seven distinctive themes: namely how to make France free, safe, prosperous, fair, proud, strong and sustainable. Even though immigration still plays an important role, she brings up other policy issues as well, such as defence (leaving NATO), social issues, and women’s rights (Le Pen 2017, 1-24). One might say that Marine Le Pen’s campaigns are more sophisticated, with a populist twist, which makes her easy to approach. While her father was a blatant racist, she makes some effort to hide her racism that can still be seen between the lines, a form of indirect racism. Marine Le Pen has also enforced the Huntingtonian approach that the likelihood of not getting along is bigger if people come from different cultures.

Another clear difference between Le Pens is the willingness of Marine to create

alliances with foreign similar minded parties. According to Shuster, the leaders of European far-right parties held a meeting in January 2017, where they discussed and shared their views about Europe and the world. One of the most important topics was Donald Trump's victory, which is believed to give more support for the far-right factions in Europe (Shuster 23.1.2017).

There are certain clear similarities between father and daughter, as well. Both Le Pens are furiously stirring up an anti-establishment feeling: as previously mentioned, when Jean-Marie Le Pen was running for president in 1995, he called for constitutional change and promised to establish the Sixth Republic. However, while there is no mention about that in Marine Le Pen's manifesto, it is only because her anti-establishment enemy is the EU. Even though Jean-Marie Le Pen was also against European integration, her daughter has made this one of the cornerstones of the party. Marine Le Pen's first promise in her manifesto for the presidential election of 2017 is to hold a referendum for leaving the EU and this way restore French sovereignty (Le Pen 2017, 3). Both Le Pens have stressed the importance of national identity, which should be protected by the concept of national preference. However, under Marine's leadership of the FN, national preference is called *priorité nationale*, national priority. This characterises the difference between Le Pens: the ideas that they are rallying for are essentially the same, only the packaging is different. Marine Le Pen's conquest of de-demonizing the FN can be described as a success, since the support of the FN is higher than it has ever been before.

However, de-demonizing the party image is only one part of the explanation for the surge of the FN. Certain circumstances have changed drastically in the last ten years, and the FN has seen the opportunity to take advantage of them. The next section will cover other issues that offer an alternative explanation for the rise of the FN: the legitimization of rhetoric used by the FN by Nicolas Sarkozy and the incapability of François Hollande to solve the problems he was faced with during his time as president.

2. SARKOZY AND HOLLANDE: PRESIDENCIES THAT PAVED THE WAY FOR THE FRONT NATIONAL

In the following paragraphs, the importance of the presidencies of Nicolas Sarkozy (2007-2012) and François Hollande (2012-2017) for the surge of the FN is addressed. Even though the two presidents did not share a lot in common, they were still treated rather similarly by the French public. Neither Sarkozy nor Hollande will go down in history as popular presidents of the Fifth Republic. Due to their unpopularity, they were presidents only for one term. However, Sarkozy and Hollande contributed to the rise of the FN in very different ways. It can be argued that Sarkozy made more conscious choices than Hollande, when it comes to aiding the FN in its struggle for power. Hollande, who is often described to be a victim of challenging circumstances, made certain mistakes as well, both when running for president and while in office.

As Bell and Gaffney note, one very distinctive feature of the presidency of the Fifth Republic is that it is persona driven. Charles de Gaulle, the first president of the Fifth Republic, had a clear vision what the presidency of the Republic should be, which was mainly based on his own character. After all, he was a decorated war hero who had fought in both the First and Second World Wars. His vision of leadership in the Fifth Republic enjoyed a romanticised form: the president had to be a strong, exemplary and inspiring leader, who was able to present his political views in such a way that it was almost a performance of its own and in this way able to gain more support (Bell and Gaffney 2013, 6). It is thus justified to look at the presidencies of the two very different men, not only in terms of their policies, but also in character.

First, Sarkozy's presidential term will be looked at: the policies that he pushed for

and an especial importance is given to the rhetoric used during his presidency. It can be argued that this indirect racist choice of language helped Marine Le Pen significantly while she was trying to cleanse her party's image. Next, the incapability of Hollande to reclaim his campaign promises and the general lack of enthusiasm that hunted him during his entire presidency will be covered. The fact that the Socialist Party is currently suffering from a great lack of support can be derived back to Hollande's weak performance as president. While both parties, the UMP and the PS were having their own difficulties, the FN saw the opportunity to exploit the disarray in the French political arena, and thus claim more support.

2.1. The Sarkozy presidency – legitimatization of the rhetoric of the Front National

According to a poll compiled by Kantar TNS, Nicolas Sarkozy's approval ratings were relatively high when he began his first and only presidential term in 2007, since 63 % of the French population had confidence in Sarkozy, while 34 % did not. However, his honeymoon period was rather short: in May 2008, his approval ratings were almost an exact reversal of his ratings a year earlier. He was not able to correct the situation, but remained a rather unpopular president for his entire term, ending his presidency with unflattering figures: only 37% of the population approved of his actions while 60 % did not (Kantar TNS 2012).

As Knapp notes, there were various reasons why Sarkozy's popularity plummeted: for example, even before his inauguration he was seen as the president of the rich, and his bill in 2007 that was seen to be benefiting only the wealthy did not particularly help to shed this image. What is more, his conduct of his personal life was not in accordance with the conservative values that the UMP has traditionally supported: his public divorce and a new relationship caused irritation among the party's voters. His presidency was one scandal after another, from illegitimate funding allegations to judicial investigations (Knapp 2013, 36-37).

For the purpose of this work, it is crucial to note the language which Sarkozy used while campaigning and while being president. Sarkozy's campaign in 2007 deliberately borrowed the same rhetoric that the FN had been using for years, thus he was able to woo potential voters of the FN to his side. This is one of the reasons why Jean-Marie Le Pen was

not able to attract enough voters in 2007. However, this came with side-effects: by using the rhetoric that most people connected with the FN, he legitimized not only the language, but the FN as a whole.

As Mondon points out in his articles, the extreme-right has always been able to make good use of crises. In 2007, when Sarkozy was running for president, he decided to use the same tactics that the far-right had been using for years. He made a notion that the country is suffering from a crisis of national identity. This is nothing new in French politics, per se, but the importance he gave to the questions of national identity and immigration was unprecedented in French mainstream politics. He made the issues his two most important campaign themes, while painting threatening pictures of “the other”, this usually referring to immigrants and other minorities. Sarkozy made a similar comment on immigrants as Le Pen had done before him: certain immigrants, usually those from Northern Africa, had a lifestyle that is incompatible with the French one. He was clearly making a connection between the crisis of identity and the rising number of immigrants. Sarkozy urged the French to be proud of their “Frenchness”, and claimed that the colonization of Africa did not play a significant role in the crises, which the continent currently suffers from. Le Pen, a veteran of the Algerian War, had made similar comments before. Sarkozy also flashed the possibility of abandoning the Schengen Agreement, which was also one of Le Pen’s visions for the future of France (Mondon 2013, 29, 36 and Mondon, 2014, 304).

When Sarkozy came to power, he quickly continued with actions that somewhat matched with his (or the FN’s) rhetoric. As Gastaut points out, Sarkozy tightened the immigration laws and reduced the rights of immigrants considerably, while at the same time scapegoating them. His main target was the Muslim population in France. For example, Sarkozy’s attitude against the burka was clear: “*the burka is not welcome in France*”. He claimed that the burka was not a religious problem, but it was a symbol of degrading women, which was against the French ideals. The so-called “burka ban” was adopted in 2010, outlawing to wear clothes that are face-covering. However, the number of women in France who actually wore face-covering veil before it was banned was almost non-existent: less than 400 women in about 65 million. The law was seen purely as a tool to discriminate against Muslims (Gastaut 2012, 388-389).

Sarkozy sent another clear message, both to the Muslim community and the FN, when in 2011 his administration decided to outlaw street prayers, as Reuters reported (Reuters

16.9.2011). This was originally Marine Le Pen's idea, as mentioned earlier in this work. However, this was a clear tactical decision by Sarkozy, as the next presidential election started to approach. This ban was seen as an attempt to win the FN sympathizers to his side, much like in the previous election.

According to Mondon, Sarkozy legitimized the FN once and for all, when he expressed his views about the FN. During an interview in 2012 before the presidential election, he claimed that the FN under Marine Le Pen was "*a democratic party*" and that its values were "*in accordance with the Republic*" (Mondon 2014, 311). As it has been stated previously in this work, the FN did not actually experience an ideological change, even though this is what Sarkozy implied. This was also seen as an attempt to sway voters from the FN electorate to his side.

Sarkozy's plan to rally far-right supporters to his camp had worked in 2007. However, by the time of the presidential election 2012, Marine Le Pen had confirmed her role as the new leader of the FN, and Sarkozy's attempts to repeat the trick again failed. His plan backfired, since he did not only lose the election, but he also fortified the far-right at the expense of his own party. According to Kantar TNS, the UMP's popularity was at its highest two months after Sarkozy was elected, as 53 % of the French population had a positive image of the party, while 36 % had a negative opinion. However, this situation changed as rapidly as Sarkozy's popularity: only one year later, the figures had been turned on their head. The popularity of the party has remained low ever since (Kantar TNS 2017a). Voting for Marine Le Pen was no longer seen as a taboo, after Sarkozy had used similar rhetoric and scapegoated Muslims, like Marine Le Pen. Sarkozy tried to make a political comeback in 2016, as he was running for the nomination of the Republicans' presidential candidate. However, this attempt ended with a humiliating result for Sarkozy, as he was beaten with clear numbers by his former prime minister, François Fillon.

2.2. The Hollande Presidency – low expectations, low performance

As previously mentioned, François Hollande's popularity was never great. This can be seen from Figure 4 which is the latest poll compiled by Kantar TNS. When Hollande began

his term, his approval ratings were historically low. Only 55 % of the population had confidence in him, while 37 % did not share the opinion. It did not take even a year for him to turn the numbers upside down, and he was not able to change the situation. He has been able to increase his popularity significantly only once and that was also only for a small period of time: after the November 2015 Paris terrorist attack, his popularity was at its highest after the inauguration. However, it quickly plummeted again, and two months later, he was as unpopular as he had been before the attacks. His popularity has remained low during his last spring in office, and Hollande ended his term with rather discouraging numbers: only 14 % of the population had confidence in him, while 83 % of the French disagreed.

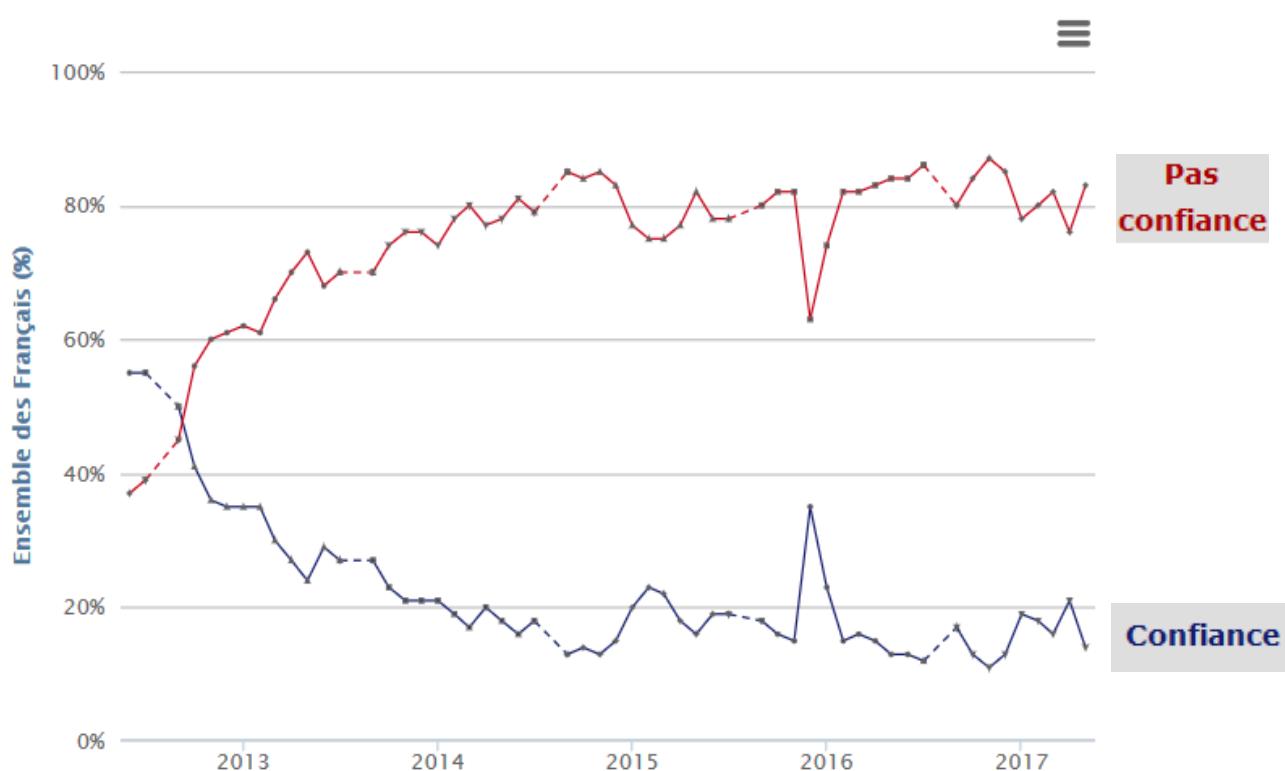


Figure 4. Cote de Confiance – François Hollande (Approval rating of François Hollande)

Source: Kantar TNS (2017b)

Due to his unpopularity, he did not even try to run for the second term, handing it over to other candidates of the PS. However, the damage had already been done: the Socialist Party has never been this unpopular and Benoît Hamon, the candidate to represent the PS, was not able to make it even to the second round of the presidential election of 2017.

The Fifth Republic has only had one Socialist president before Hollande, François

Mitterrand (1981-1995). After his presidential reign was over, right-wing politics dominated France up until 2012. Grunberg gives four distinct reasons why the Socialists were able to cut the streak of failures in 2012. First of all, the unpopularity of Sarkozy had created a general feeling among the French population that “anyone but Sarkozy” would be a better option. Second, Hollande’s political career was rather impressive: he had had a long and close relationship with the PS, and had been a part of the Mitterrand administration, working as an economic advisor. Third, the PS decided to introduce an open primary, which interested both the media and voters. Lastly, as the Fifth Republic is a mixture of parliamentary and presidential regime, the president needs to have a majority in the National Assembly. The National Assembly is the lower house of the bicameral parliament and enjoys more prominence than the upper house, the Senate. When Hollande won the presidential election of 2012, this success had a spillover effect in the legislative election of 2012, and the PS became the majority party in the National Assembly, and thus the president was, at least in theory, able to exercise his executive power to its full extent (Grunberg 2015, 74-75, 79-80). Nevertheless, this did not save Hollande: on the contrary, people were even more eager to blame him, since in principle the Left was completely in control.

For the purpose of this work, Kuhn provides two explanations for Hollande’s unpopularity: Hollande’s incapability to bring the unemployment down and boost the economic growth, two things that he promised in his campaign. He is often described to be a lucky candidate, but an unlucky president. What this means is that Hollande got the PS nomination almost by accident. Dominique Strauss-Kahn was the strongest candidate of the PS to run for president but the situation changed in spring 2011, when he was charged with sexual assault. Hollande was essentially the second best option the PS had. When it comes to his unluckiness as president, the growing unemployment and the economic situation made him look weak and unprepared for the task. However, there were certain obstacles in his way that did not allow him to tackle these issues as efficiently as one could hope: namely the EU and globalization, which happen to be the arch-enemies of the FN. Being a member of the Eurozone, France cannot devalue its currency and thus boost its economic growth. What is more, another important constraint imposed by the EU is the level of public deficit, which is set at 3 % of gross domestic product (GDP). This also restricts manoeuvring the economy efficiently.

Globalization, on the other hand, is said to generate winners and losers inside a country: this is also true in the case of France. In France, the winners have been, for example,

owners of big companies, while losers have been those of low education levels and skills – especially the manufacturing sector has had a rough time (Kuhn 2014, 437, 442-443). That segment of the population has traditionally been the electorate of the Socialists. However, first betrayed by Sarkozy and then their own man, Hollande, people are starting to lose hope and look it from places that they have never even considered worth looking: the far-right party, the Front National. It is understandable, since after all, the FN has made a promise of leaving the EU, and Marine Le Pen has an isolationist approach in economic matters. It is always easier to blame “the other”, here “the other” being the incumbent president and his government.

As mentioned earlier, Sarkozy acknowledged the changed party image of the FN and made a case that the new FN under Marine Le Pen is a democratic party and a serious contender in the political arena. However, Hollande’s position to the FN has not been as lenient, as an interview with Kauffman for *Le Monde* shows. Hollande called the possible presidency of Marine Le Pen “*a threat*” and claimed that “*France will not yield*” to populists (Kauffman, 6.3.2017). In the end, this approach might be counterproductive. By saying that Marine Le Pen is “a threat” not only to France but to Europe as well, Hollande does not only demonize the FN, but also the voters of the party. The voters, and more importantly, potential voters of the FN might feel even stronger that Marine Le Pen is truly the one and only candidate that cares for them and shares their concerns.

2.3. Hyper-président vs Président normal: the personification of politics

Because politics is very persona-driven in France, especially at the presidential level, it is important to briefly compare the characters of the two presidents, Sarkozy and Hollande. Even though the two men are very different, neither was able to keep up their popularity until the end of their term. Sarkozy tried to continue his presidency, but lost. Hollande, on the other hand, made the decision not to even run for second term in office.

As Gaffney notes, Sarkozy was described as the “hyper-president” due to his efforts to solve various enormous problems at the same time, but failing in most of them. Hollande, on the other hand, made various comments during his campaign trail how he would

be “a normal president”, in contrast to Sarkozy. His whole presidential campaign was all about assuring people that he would be different from Sarkozy. That was a vague statement, and a lot of questions were floating around, since the majority of the French public seemed not to know what was meant by this, and Hollande’s character remained a mystery until his term began. In practice, Hollande was a colourless figure, who did not have the same charm as the first Socialist president of the Fifth Republic, Mitterrand. As Hollande was unable to solve rising unemployment and during his presidency economic growth was not as fast as one might have hoped, these failures were not only connected to his government, but to his personality, as well (Gaffney 2015, 16, 19, 67).

At the end of the day, two very distinct presidents ended up almost equally as unpopular. Not only that, but also their parties’ popularity ratings were stuck in the mud. The FN, however, has been able to exploit this situation, as the two mainstream parties, the Republicans and the PS have let their voters down. The next section will address the capability of the FN to take advantage of the problems caused by the changed circumstances: namely, increased European integration, globalization and immigration, phenomena of the 21st century. The ability of the FN to target these issues has increased its support among various groups of people, which will also be noted in the following section.

3. THE FRONT NATIONAL IN THE 21ST CENTURY

This subsection covers the cornerstone policies of the FN that the voters of the FN find especially appealing. Firstly, the Eurosceptic nature of the party is addressed, with the definition of the term Euroscepticism. There has always been a segment of population in France that has been relatively Eurosceptic from the beginning of the European project and the FN has been able to take advantage of this growing mistrust towards the EU. Secondly, the FN opposes globalization, arguing that this phenomenon can and should be stopped. Le Pen argues that globalization is one of the main reasons why France is experiencing low economic growth and rising unemployment at the same time. Le Pen is a strong advocate for protectionist measures and a majority of the French find this appealing, since they see globalization increasingly in an unfavourable light. The FN portrays both the EU and globalization as issues that come with only negative effects, such as job outsourcing, loss of sovereignty and immigration, which is the third major policy issue covered in this section. The party's strong antagonism towards immigrants cannot be ignored, as it is one of the strongest links between the FN under Jean-Marie Le Pen and the FN led by his daughter. According to Marine Le Pen, immigrants who are coming to France are a threat in more ways than one. She links immigration closely to the loss of national identity, the deteriorating security situation, and the high unemployment rate. Le Pen tends to target Muslim population, and has portrayed herself as the only candidate that can protect the French against "Islamic fundamentalism", and calls for stricter immigration policies. Again, a big segment of the French population is in favour of this. The FN has been able to take advantage of the issues that the French consider to be more important now than ever before. These three core messages of the FN support each other and thus give cohesion to the political party platform of the FN.

In addition, this section includes a brief overview of the diversified electorate of the FN. More people are willing to vote for Marine Le Pen due to policies mentioned above and changes the FN has went through under her leadership. During Jean-Marie Le Pen's reign, the party's voter base was limited to mainly certain types of people, which guaranteed the party's existence in the political arena. However, Marine Le Pen has been able to increase the party's support among the people who previously had a negative image of the party.

3.1. Euroscepticism

Euroscepticism as a phenomenon has been studied carefully, and various studies have been conducted on the topic. In this work, the framework provided by Taggart and Szczerbiak is employed in the case of the FN. According to Taggart and Szczerbiak, Euroscepticism can be divided into two different subcategories: soft and hard Euroscepticism. Soft Euroscepticism does not oppose the EU, per se. Political parties that can be categorized as followers of soft Euroscepticism do not make a case for abolishing the Union or for withdrawing from its membership. However, this faction opposes specific policies of the EU. Soft Euroscepticism is not principally against further integration, but it does not agree with the way how integration is implemented. Hard Euroscepticism, on the other hand, opposes the EU as a whole: it opposes any further integration and parties that characterize themselves as 'hard Eurosceptics' support the idea of withdrawing from the Union (Taggart and Szczerbiak 2002, 7-8).

Thus, the FN falls into the latter category. The FN under both Le Pens has been against the EU. Marine Le Pen has made the EU her main enemy: the first promise she makes in her presidential manifesto is to pull France out of the EU (Le Pen 2017, 3). She has given various interviews in which she has described the EU with negative connotations: for example, she has made a connection between the EU and the Soviet Union by calling the EU as "*the European Soviet Union*" (Der Spiegel 3.6.2014). She has held speeches in which she claims that "*the EU will die*" (Reuters 27.3.2017) and "*the Euro is a knife in the ribs of the French*" (Reuters 2.4.2017). She has been campaigning for a "new Franc" that would replace the common currency of the EU.

This anti-EU stance of the FN is increasingly appealing to the French. The FN got a strong mandate in the European Parliament Elections of 2014, which made the party the biggest French party in the EP. In addition, the French are increasingly dissatisfied with the EU, which plays well with Le Pen's policies. According to the Eurobarometer of 2016, the French opinion on the EU is among the worst of the member states. 81 % of the French population do not trust the institutions of the EU. The French were more inclined to see the EU more negatively than the European average, when asked what the EU represents: the French were more willing to see the EU to represent "*a waste of money*", "*not enough control of external borders*" and "*unemployment*", than their European counterparts. A slight majority (51%) of the French population is pessimistic about the future of the EU, which is again over the European average (44 %) (Eurobarometer Spring 2016, 44, 69, 157). According to the Pew Research Center, 61 % of the French population views the EU in an unfavourable light, while 38 % of the population views the Union favourably (Pew Research Center, 7.6.2016). Thus, Marine Le Pen has a strong support base among the French population, who distrust the EU. She is the only serious presidential candidate that promises the so called Frexit – a French exit of the European Union. She has promised to re-establish national borders by leaving the Schengen Zone and at the same time bring unemployment down.

France is not the only member country of the EU that is suffering from Euroscepticism. The United Kingdom European Union membership referendum, the epitome of Euroscepticism, took place in summer 2016. The UK and the EU are currently in the middle of complex negotiations about how to implement Brexit. In the Netherlands, Geert Wilders' far-right populist anti-EU party, the Party for Freedom, was able to gain the second most seats in the House of Representatives in the General Election of 2017. In Austria, Norbert Hofer, who was the Freedom Party's presidential candidate in 2016, flashed the possibility of a referendum on the membership of Austria in the EU. He was able to make it to the runoff, after winning the first round with clear numbers. However, he was defeated by the Green Party's candidate, Alexander Van der Bellen.

Brack and Startin point out that the Eurozone crisis has had a deteriorating effect on the public opinion on the EU, which has increased Euroscepticism in the parts of society that were generally thought to be pro-European. Previously, Euroscepticism was considered to prosper only in the peripheral parts of a country, but this has changed: Euroscepticism is currently on the rise in cities, as well. This was demonstrated in the European Parliament

Elections of 2014. The results of the elections were a huge blow for the pro-European parties, while Eurosceptic parties were able to grow their representation in the Parliament significantly (Brack and Startin 2015, 239, 242-243).

Ironically, despite Le Pen's furious opposition of the EU, her party has benefitted greatly from being a part of the EU, as Reungoat argues in her article. Due to the structure of the French electoral system, small and new parties are often completely neglected on the national political level. The Republicans (and its predecessors, the UMP and the RPR) and the PS have dominated the French political arena during the Fifth Republic, leaving almost no room for other parties. There are currently two representatives of the FN out of 577 in the National Assembly. Without the EU and the European Parliament Elections, the FN would have remained as a marginal party. In addition, the FN success in the European Parliament Elections gave it both domestic credibility and publicity. The European arena has been a useful tool for Marine Le Pen in more ways than one: she has been a MEP since 2004, and she has actively pushed her concept of de-demonization of the party ever since, with successful results. Marine Le Pen was faced with criticism before she became the leader of the party, since certain party members claimed that she would not be able to replace her father, who was known to be an excellent speaker: the EP provided her with a platform where she could prove herself to be as tough as her father. Lastly, it can be argued that the FN could not be as important a party as it is currently without the financial support it receives from the EP (Reungoat 2015, 298, 300-301, 306). Nevertheless, the message of the FN is clear: to get France out of the EU as quickly as possible, and re-establish France that is fully sovereign and not accountable to Brussels.

3.2. Globalization

Another enemy of Marine Le Pen's FN is globalization. She ran a presidential campaign that constantly vilified globalization, and she ruthlessly incriminated "the elite" by making statements such as "*Our leaders chose globalization, which they wanted to be a happy thing. It turned out to be a horrible thing*" (Politico 5.2.2017) and portraying herself as the only candidate who can save France and the French from "*savage globalization*" (Reuters 17.4.2017). As Morini points out, the FN is against social, cultural and economic globalization. The party sees the EU as partly guilty, as the Union is a strong advocate for globalization.

Globalization, the FN argues, destroys small businesses and local entrepreneurs: as it so happens, these people form an essential part of the voter base of the party and the FN sees them as a symbol of French identity and tradition (Morini 2017, 3-4, 11).

According to Böhmer et al., France has not benefitted from globalization in terms of economic growth as much as certain other countries, such as Germany. When it comes to France's global market shares, the country has faced large losses due to declining competitiveness, while for example China has risen because of its increased competitiveness. (Böhmer et al. 2016, 14, 23, 31, 33). France's competitiveness has been suffering for example because of restrictions of working hours: France is currently the only European country that has a 35-hour working week by law.

The FN accuses globalization of job outsourcing, which has resulted in high unemployment. Globalization has caused low skilled workers to lose their jobs, and small business owners have had to give way to big companies. This explanation pleases especially the supporters of the FN, but globalization is increasingly seen negatively in France. According to the Eurobarometer of 2016, 55 % of the French population viewed the term "*globalization*" negatively, while 34 % saw the phenomenon in a positive light. The French differ from their European counterparts on the issue, as the European average was 45 % positive to 40% negative. When asked if globalization represented an opportunity for economic growth, a slight majority of the French agreed (51%). Nevertheless, the French were again more pessimistic than the European average (Eurobarometer Spring 2016, 143, 150).

Thus, Le Pen's message on the negative aspects of globalization falls on fertile ground. However, in this battle against globalization it is necessary to remember that globalization might not be the only reason for job outsourcing and layoffs: especially in the manufacturing sector, advancements made in technology might be as big of a reason for workforce reduction. Globalization as a force is impossible to stop, but anyway, Le Pen wants to give her best shot at it. It is true that globalization can be slowed down with certain protectionist measures that Marine Le Pen advocates for. However, this might come with a cost of even less economic growth, since the economies of today are more intertwined than ever before.

Le Pen has another reason to oppose globalization than the economic aspect of the issue. Cultural globalization, which the FN argues to be caused by mass immigration, is a threat to France, as well. This aspect will be covered in the next subsection.

3.3. Immigration & Islamophobia

The FN has always been an anti-immigration party. Jean-Marie Le Pen made immigration the party's core policy, which guaranteed its voter base in the early days of the party. However, the FN quickly got the stamp of being a single-issue party, because of everything it advocated for could be derived back to immigration. Marine Le Pen has been able to change this, while still retaining a strong anti-immigration message. Marine Le Pen has promised in her presidential manifesto huge changes to the immigration policy of France: she has promised to drop legal immigration to 10,000 people a year, while making deportations easier and obtaining citizenship harder. She promises to re-establish national borders of France by leaving the Schengen Zone and hiring 6000 customs officers (Le Pen 2017, 6). In addition, she made a pledge in her recent rally that she would “*suspend all legal immigration*” for a while, in order to get France back on track (BBC 18.4.2017). She has continually expressed her views about negative aspects of immigration: statements such as “*behind mass immigration, there is terrorism*” and “[immigration and Islam are] *not a chance for France but a tragedy*” (The Local 18.4.2017) correlate with her immigration policy.

As Hainsworth notes, immigration is probably the most important issue for parties on the far-right. Such parties tend to portray immigrants as threats in various ways. Immigration is seen as the main cause for declining security, rising unemployment and for the loss of national identity (Hainsworth 2008, 70). This complies with the rhetoric of the FN: Le Pen has made several remarks how immigration causes the security situation to deteriorate. Her main target is immigrants coming from countries with predominantly Muslim population. She has made various comments on the incompatibility of Islam with the French traditions and culture, thus threatening French national identity. When it comes to unemployment, Le Pen has promised to force French companies to take into account “*national priority*” (Le Pen 2017, 7). In practice this would mean prioritizing French natives over immigrants in the job market.

Again, various studies imply that the majority of the French agrees with Marine Le Pen on these issues, to some extent. As the Eurobarometer of 2016 shows, main concerns of the French are both immigration and terrorism. Here the French do not differ from the European average, as these issues were seen as the most important ones in the majority of the member countries of the EU (Eurobarometer Spring 2016, 33). Chatham House, the Royal Institute of

International Affairs, published a poll concerning immigration from predominantly Muslim countries to European countries. 61 % of the French population agreed with the statement “*all further migration from mainly Muslim countries should be stopped*”, while 16 % of the population opposed the statement (Chatham House 7.2.2017). A study made by Ipsos Mori shows that the French have somewhat a perception gap, when it comes to Muslims in France: 1000 respondents estimated that the current Muslim population in France is 31 %, while in reality, Muslims make up 7.5 % of the population. The same overestimation occurred when the respondents were asked to give an estimation of the future Muslim population in France: the polled people thought the Muslim population to be 40% in 2020, when as a matter of fact the number of Muslims in France is projected to be 8.3 % by 2020 (Ipsos Mori Autumn 2016) In addition, another Ipsos poll was conducted in order to find out the French opinion on religion and what role it plays in the presidential election of 2017. The study revealed that among 1000 people, 61% of the respondents saw Islam as “*incompatible with the values of France*”. In comparison, only 6 % and 17 % of the respondents felt that Catholicism and Judaism conflicting with the French lifestyle, respectively (Ipsos March 2017, 10). Even though samplings in the latter researches are relatively narrow, they can still give some guidelines on how the French view Islam and its place in the French society.

Thus, Le Pen’s Islamophobic message has a potential group of sympathizers among the French public. She has been able to exploit various terror attacks in France for the good of her party: for example, after the Nice terror attack in July 2016, Le Pen argued that terror attacks occur in France due to “*the rise of Islamic fundamentalism*” that “*we [the French] let develop in our country*” (Politico 16.7.2016). Even though she has faced charges for inflaming hate speech, she does not consider herself a racist: instead, she calls herself a patriot, who is deeply concerned of the wellbeing of the French people.

Marine Le Pen’s anti-EU, anti-globalization and anti-immigration policies, as well as her successful de-demonization of the party are the biggest reasons why the French vote for the FN. She has been able to diversify the electoral audience of the FN, and the French find her and the policies she advocates for increasingly attractive. In the next subsection, broadened electorate of the FN is covered. The FN, mainly due to Marine Le Pen’s influence, has been able to gain support among certain groups of the population with which Jean-Marie Le Pen had difficulties to attract.

3.4. Diversified Electorate of the Front National

Due to Marine's effective policy of de-demonization, which has resulted in softened party image, more people are willing to vote for the FN now, than during her father's reign. While Jean-Marie Le Pen's personality and his 'macho-appeal' were attractive to some, certain groups of people found him and the policies he advocated for repulsive. Even though the main support of the FN is still tightly connected with the countryside of France, Marine Le Pen has been able to increase the party's popularity among the people from at least three different demographics which her father struggled with: women, younger population and the working class.

Mayer and Sineau point out that there was an obvious gender gap among the supporters of the FN: men were more inclined to vote for Jean-Marie Le Pen than women. There are various reasons why the FN under Jean-Marie Le Pen was unable to attract as much female as male voters. First of all, the FN was seen as a sexist, patriarchal party that advocated for gender hierarchy. Women were portrayed as either mothers or housewives: one social policy of the FN was to increase the birth rate in France, thus the most important responsibilities of women were giving birth and raising children. This was tightly connected to the idea of protecting national identity, as well. The FN also opposed abortion, gay marriage as well as interracial marriage, while advocated for restoring the death penalty. Secondly, Catholicism is offered as a possible explanation why women opted out of voting for the FN. Those women who were "*regularly practising Catholics*" were one of the smallest groups, who voted for the FN. On the other hand, this phenomenon did not occur with men: there was not a great difference between men who considered to be devout Catholics and those who were not practising Catholicism regularly. Mayer and Sineau offer a possible explanation by arguing that the Catholic Church teaches different values for women and men. While men are taught to value "*virility, strength and authority*", women are taught "*obedience, gentleness and dedication to others*". Thus, the policies of the FN were seen to be in a stark contrast with the values of the Catholic Church in the eyes of women, while men could agree with them better. Lastly, women did not see the FN attractive due to the lack of women representatives in the party. The female candidates of the FN were often portrayed as either mothers or wives. While there was a small portion of female representatives of the FN that were not connected with the traditional role of

women, it was always made clear that these women had a strong male connection inside the party, the most obvious example being Marine Le Pen (Mayer and Sineau 2002, 50, 54-55, 58, 72, 74).

On the other hand, Marine Le Pen's FN has been more successful with women supporters, due to various reasons. One of the simplest explanations is the change in leadership: Marine has broken the traditional vision how the FN has seen women during her father's leadership: she is a relatively young party leader who is making a career of her own, she is a double divorcée and is currently living with a domestic partner, and even though she is a mother of three, she does not overemphasize it. Thus, she is modernizing and softening the party image just by being herself. In addition, according to the BBC, she has a more accommodating attitude towards abortion, stating that "[abortion is] *a sad necessity*" and even though she is officially against same-sex marriage, she does not condemn sexual minorities outright: one of her closest advisors is openly gay, and she did not participate in protests that were organized against the legalization of same-sex marriage (BBC 14.3.2017). This is much in contrast with her father, who once described homosexuality as "*biological and social anomaly*" (Halliburton 24.1.2015). In her presidential manifesto, Le Pen pledges to defend women's rights, for example by creating a national plan that would close the gender pay gap. She also mentions her fight against Islam, which she believes to be oppressive and violating women's rights (Le Pen 2017, 4). According to Al Jazeera, Le Pen was able to cause controversy during her recent trip to Lebanon, where she refused to cover her hair with a veil before her planned meeting with the Grand Mufti, the most prominent Sunni cleric. Her supporters saw this as an act of standing up for women's rights, while others called it foul play: she wanted to meet the Grand Mufti only to be able to decline from wearing a headscarf and thus sending a message to her supporters at home. She was informed beforehand of the requirement to cover her hair when meeting the Grand Mufti (Al Jazeera 21.7.2017). In Lebanon, women are required to use the veil in two occasions: when going to a mosque or meeting the Grand Mufti.

The abovementioned changes have made the FN more attractive for women. According to Mayer, this could be seen in the results of the presidential election of 2012, when more women voted for the FN than ever before. The percentage of female FN voters was 17 %. The percentage of men voting for the FN was 19%, but the difference is smaller than in any of the presidential elections when Jean-Marie Le Pen was running for president. For example, in the presidential election of 2002, 14 % of the votes Jean-Marie Le Pen received were from

women, while 20 % were from men (Mayer 2013, 170).

When it comes to young people, the reasons mentioned above are partly the explanation why younger generation is more inclined to vote for the FN now than before. Marine Le Pen has been able to modernize the party image, which is more appealing to young people. Furthermore, younger people might not have such close ties to the old mainstream parties that older generations might still have, and thus might be more willing to vote for the FN. Another important factor is tightly connected to the current situation in France: high youth unemployment, which refers to the number of unemployed people between the ages of 15 and 24. According to the data compiled by the Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD), the youth unemployment rate in France is at its highest for over a decade. The youth unemployment rate in France was 24,5 % in 2016 (OECD 2016). According to Sergent and Lee, young people are eager to put the blame on François Hollande, which suits with Marine Le Pen. Another attractive feature of the FN is their young representatives. The FN has a relatively large portion of important party members, such as Marion Maréchal-Le Pen. She is Marine Le Pen's niece and the youngest Member of the National Assembly ever elected: at the time of the legislative election, she was 22 years old (Sergent and Lee 7.10.2016). According to Mayer, in the presidential election of 2012, Marine Le Pen was able to attract younger voters than her father in his previous elections. She does better with every age group, except with those of 65 years and above (Mayer 2013, 170). One reason for this is the possibility that older people are not intrigued by her more accommodating attitude towards social liberalism.

The third important electoral audience Marine Le Pen has been able to lure to her camp, is the working class. This is also connected to the current state of France, and how the French feel about the Socialist Party, which has traditionally been the party of the working class. Le Pen's furious anti-globalization message resonates well with the working class, since this group is more often than others portrayed as "the losers of globalization". She gives a pleasant explanation to the working class: the EU has failed, globalization has taken the jobs in the manufacturing field, and immigrants are not helping the situation one bit. The unsuccessful presidency of Hollande and the current unpopularity of the PS show that the working class has turned their back at their traditional party, and are looking for other alternatives: the FN is more attractive to them now more than ever before. According to Chassany, about 45 % of the blue-collar workers see Marine Le Pen as a potential president of France, and are willing to vote for

her (Chassany 21.10.2016). According to Mayer, in the presidential election of 2012, Marine received a substantial support from the working class: 33 % of her voters were from the working class, making this group her largest occupational supporter group. This is much in contrast to her father, as his largest supporter group was the self-employed people, meaning small shop keepers and artisans (Mayer 2013, 170).

Even though it was already during Jean-Marie Le Pen's leadership relatively difficult to describe a stereotypical voter of the FN, now it is even harder. Marine Le Pen has been able to successfully raise popularity among various groups of people, and voting for the FN is no longer seen as a taboo. With Marine, the FN is seen as a credible and modern party that should be taken as a serious contender in the political arena. This can be seen in the following section which covers the presidential election of 2017 and what it means for France and for the EU, as well.

4. THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION 2017

This section covers the essential questions of the French presidential election of 2017. Firstly, the presidential election system is explained, and the main candidates are introduced. Marine Le Pen and Emmanuel Macron are paid more attention to, due to their popularity in the presidential race. France's importance in the EU is also briefly addressed, as well as the possibility of France leaving the Union. Le Pen's victory would not only be a difficult situation for the EU, but to France, too. The second subsection covers the results of the first and second rounds.

4.1. Preview of the presidential election

The process of electing a President is explained in the Constitution of the Fifth Republic. The Constitution was adopted in 1958, and has since been amended over 20 times. The latest amendments concerning the process of presidential elections have taken in place in 2000 and 2008. In 2000, the length of one term was reduced to five years in contrast to previous seven years, and in 2008, it was set that a president cannot serve more than two consecutive terms. According to the Constitution of the Fifth Republic, the President of the Republic is elected by direct universal suffrage. A qualified voter must be a French citizen and at least 18 years old. If no candidate is able to receive an absolute majority of votes cast, a second round will be organized after two weeks. The two candidates who obtained the most votes in the first

round are qualified for the second round. The candidate who receives the most votes in the second round shall be the President of France (The Constitution of the Fifth Republic amended version 2008, 4). The first round of the French presidential election of 2017 was held on the 23rd of April, and the second round took place on the 7th of May.

Various news sources, both French and foreign, thought that this election will be a contest between right and far-right: namely, between François Fillon, who is the candidate of the Republicans, and Marine Le Pen. However, the so called “Penelopegate” was a serious setback to his campaign. *Le Canard enchaîné*, which is a weekly satirical newspaper, made a claim in one of its January editions that Fillon’s wife, Penelope Fillon, would have received a considerable amount of public money by working as her husband’s parliamentary assistant. However, there is no proof that she actually worked for the money. In addition, two of Fillon’s children are facing similar allegations that they were also paid for non-existent jobs. François Fillon was charged with embezzlement in March. This scandal almost cost him his candidacy of the Republicans: he had already won the candidacy, but the French public was unimpressed by this behaviour that there were talks that Fillon should be replaced by someone else. Fillon, nevertheless, proclaimed his innocence and insisted that his wife and children were not paid for nothing. Whatever the case may be, Penelopegate and formal investigation caused by it, were a major blow to his campaign, since he had emphasized his honesty and integrity: for example, his early campaign slogan was “*Le courage de la vérité*”, which translates into “the courage of the truth”. However, Fillon did not step down, but his chances of making it to the second round were seriously damaged by the scandal, and he took the third place in the first round.

Benoît Hamon’s (the candidate of the PS) popularity remained relatively low during the whole campaigning process. The unpopularity of the Socialist Party among the French public hindered Hamon’s possibilities of getting enough votes in order to be qualified for the runoff, and he came the fifth in the first round. Jean-Luc Mélenchon, who ran for president as the candidate of the movement called Unbowed France (*La France insoumise*), which represents far-left, had more votes than Hamon. This is one of the reasons why the presidential election of 2017 is drastically different from the previous ones: traditionally, the mainstream parties have dominated presidential elections. Candidates of the mainstream parties, the PS and the Republicans (or its predecessors), have generally faced each other in the second round. This year, both candidates, Marine Le Pen and Emmanuel Macron who proceeded to the second round, are the leaders of their own movements, marking a historical

moment in the history of the Fifth Republic.

Emmanuel Macron, is a former member of the Socialist Party, but in the presidential election of 2017 he is running for president as a candidate of a party he founded himself in 2016: On The Move! (*En Marche!*, EM). Macron is the youngest candidate in the race for the French presidency and he has been neck to neck with Marine Le Pen for the past couple of months. Policies that Macron advocates for are in a stark contrast with those of Le Pen: he is pro-EU, pro-globalization, and does not have as divisive an attitude towards Islam and immigrants as Le Pen. However, while their policy proposals are quite different from each other, there are certain similarities between the candidates. According to Accetti, Macron has claimed to be neither left nor right wing, like Le Pen. Both candidates have emphasised their separation from the political class, and claim to be outsiders in the race. However, it is worth noticing that both candidates are actually prominent politicians: Macron was appointed as the Minister of Economy and Finance in 2014 and served until 2016, when he founded his own party. Le Pen, on the other hand, practically inherited her position as the leader of the FN, and has been a professional politician for her whole adult life (Accetti 6.2.2017).

If Le Pen should win the presidency, it might be the end of the contemporary EU. Le Pen has promised to hold a referendum for leaving the EU, and if she succeeded to get enough support, it would have drastic consequences not only for France, but for Europe as a whole. Douglas Webber, a political science professor at INSEAD, points out that Le Pen's victory would have long-lasting consequences. He argues that the EU can survive without the UK being a part of the bloc, but not without France (Forbes 9.4.2017). France is one of the main contributors to the budget of the EU, France has the second most MEPs in the European Parliament and France's central geographical location are only a couple of demonstrations that show France's importance in the EU. If France was to leave the EU, it would weaken the Union considerably, while possibly strengthening Russia. Le Pen has said that she admires Vladimir Putin, and she does not agree with the EU's decision to impose sanctions on Russia due to the conflict in Ukraine and Russia's role in it.

Le Pen's victory would be a difficult choice for France, as well: as previously stated in this work, the structure of the French electoral system does not favour smaller parties. The Republicans (and its predecessors) and the Socialist Party have dominated the political arena. France will face another important election in summer, as the legislative election of 2017 will take place. This election will determine the composition of the National Assembly. In

theory, in order to be an effective president, he/she needs the majority in the National Assembly. Currently, the FN holds only two places in the National Assembly. While it is true that Macron does not belong to either of the mainstream parties, it is probable that he would be able to get the support of the Socialist Party, for the very least. However, Le Pen's situation is a bit different: her policies are rather far from any of the mainstream parties, and if she was to win the presidency, France would be facing an internal political chaos as a result.

4.2. Results of the presidential election

The first round of the presidential election of 2017 was held on the 23rd of April. The winners of the first round were Emmanuel Macron and Marine Le Pen: according to the French Ministry of the Interior, Macron came first with 24% of the votes cast and Le Pen came second with 21% of the votes. Fillon was able to attract about 20% of the votes and Mélenchon got about the same result as him. Hamon, on the other hand, got about 6% of the votes, which is a historically low result for the candidate of the PS. The voter turnout was about 78 %, which is a bit less than what it was in the previous presidential election (Ministry of the Interior 24.3.2017). Even though various pollsters show Macron to beat Le Pen in the second round with clear numbers, recent phenomena, such as Brexit and Trump's victory, have shown that polls can be deceiving. A poll published by Bloomberg, which takes an average of various surveys, shows Macron winning the race by 60% of the votes. Le Pen is forecast to receive approximately 40 % of the votes (Bloomberg 28.4.2017). However, it should be taken into consideration that there are also voters, who have decided to abstain from voting in the second round. According to Bordenet, certain voters of Fillon and Mélenchon are not pleased with the result of the first round, and have decided not vote at all on the 7th of May. Many justify this decision by claiming that since Macron is the favourite to win by a large margin, it does not really matter, whether they vote or not. Others have decided to abstain from voting, because the choice is too difficult between "*hatred*" and "*maintenance of capitalism*" (Bordenet 28.4.2017).

Since Fillon and Mélenchon received a relatively high number of votes, the result of the second round depends on their voters. According to Le Monde, when Fillon conceded his defeat, he appealed to his supporters to vote for Macron in the second round. Various other prominent right-wing politicians, such as Alain Juppé, have also shown their support for

Macron (Le Monde 24.4.2017a). When Mélenchon conceded his presidential race, on the other hand, he did not endorse either of the candidates (Le Monde 23.4.2017). The Socialist Party, on the other hand, supports Macron: for example, Hamon has endorsed Macron, and incumbent president François Hollande urged the French to vote for Macron, calling Le Pen “*a risk for the country*” (Le Monde 24.4.2017b).

The second round was held on the 7th of May. According to the French Ministry of Interior, Macron won with a large margin, as he was able to get about 66% of the votes cast. Le Pen, on the other hand, made also a historical result for the FN, as she attracted about 34% of the votes: approximately 10 million French voted for her. The voter turnout was historically low: the voting turnout has generally been around 80%, but this year it was around 74%. Also the number of empty and invalid votes was larger than before (Ministry of the Interior 8.5.2017).

Even though Marine Le Pen lost the presidency, the election result is a victory for far-right. It is clear that the FN has a substantive number of supporters, and the party under Marine Le Pen has been able to change its image: the FN has a firm place in the French political arena. It should be noted that this presidential election was a remarkable milestone in the history of the Fifth Republic: old mainstream parties were rejected in favour of “outsiders”. The next president of France will face difficult challenges both at home and abroad, since the problems France currently suffers from are not going to disappear overnight. Even though Macron was able to defeat Le Pen, it does not mean that she loses her popularity among her voters, and the party gets forgotten. On the contrary, as Nigel Farage, a British politician who was previously the leader of the UK Independence Party (UKIP), points out. He wrote a column in the Telegraph a few days prior the second round, where he argues that if Marine Le Pen loses this election, she will be victorious in the next one, which will take place in 2022 (Farage 3.5.2017). President Macron has to work hard in order to bring Le Pen’s voters to his side. If he fails to do so, and France does not experience economic growth and declining unemployment during his first term, Mr. Farage’s prediction might become reality. After all, both old mainstream parties, the Republicans and the Socialist Party, were rejected in favor of newer parties. The French still remember the Sarkozy and Hollande presidencies, which were not successes in the history of the Fifth Republic. If President Macron is not successful, the French might see the FN and Le Pen as the only choice they are left with.

CONCLUSION

This Bachelor's thesis covered the reasons for the rise of the Front National in France. The falsifiable hypothesis presented in the introduction was proven true: Marine Le Pen was not elected president, but she was qualified for the second round and received a substantial number of votes. Her popularity shows that it would be a serious underestimation to claim this to be caused solely by protest votes. The FN has stepped out of the shadows of being a marginal party and has thus strengthened its position in French mainstream politics.

The surge of far right in France is a sum of various factors. Marine Le Pen has had a better marketing strategy for her party, though in reality, the party has not changed much: it still has the same core values that it had under Jean-Marie Le Pen. Nevertheless, Marine Le Pen has been able to disguise the party as something very different, by distancing both herself and the party from its founder. De-demonizing the FN has been successful, and many French see the party in a different light now that Marine Le Pen is leading it. With Marine, the FN has been able to acquire a party image that appeals to a very diversified electorate which has aided the party in its struggle for power. A strong female-leader, who stands up for women's rights appeals to female voters, since the vast majority of French women did not agree with the vision of women that the FN under Jean-Marie Le Pen advocated for and thus his electoral audience was mainly composed of men.

However, while Marine's influence on the better party image is indisputable, there are other reasons for the surge of the FN, which should be taken into consideration, as well. The presidencies of Sarkozy and Hollande aided the FN in different ways: Sarkozy legitimized the rhetoric used by the FN and eventually made a claim that the values and policies of the FN comply with those of the Fifth Republic. He also made it increasingly acceptable to target the Muslim population in France. Sarkozy's choice of language gave the French an example of a prominent, legit politician, who was able to gain support by using the rhetoric of a far-right

movement. Hollande, on the other hand, was incapable to cope with the rising unemployment situation and stagnant economic growth, which made the population to lose their trust not only in Hollande, but in the Socialist Party as a whole. This can be seen in the new electorate of the FN, as well: the working class was first betrayed by a right-wing politician and after that by a left-wing politician. The Socialist Party has traditionally been the party of the working class, but the FN has been able to gain more and more support in the regions which were previously held by the Socialists.

All these reasons combined have made the FN more appealing to younger voters, as well. High youth unemployment, which Marine Le Pen argues to have been caused by globalization and the EU, are a pleasant explanation for younger generation. Marine's more liberal social policies have been approved by the majority of the FN's voters.

It is clear that the Front National is here to stay. Marine's success in the first round of the presidential race has proved that there is a place for a nationalistic party in the French political arena. This presidential election marks a new era in French politics in other ways, as well: for the first time in decades, mainstream parties are not represented in the second round of the presidential election. Even though Marine lost the presidency, she won in other terms: the FN got more publicity and her result in the second round was impressive, as about 10 million French voted for her. If President Macron is not able to fix the issues France suffers from, Le Pen might have a real possibility to win the presidency in the future.

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