

Marine Le Pen and the “Detoxification” of France’s National Front

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Region: [Europe](#)

“I fear for my country, I fear that it will smash itself to pieces against the Front National.” – Manuel Valls, The Guardian, Mar 11, 2015

It has been on her agenda for some time. Marine Le Pen of the nationalist Front National (National Front) wants France out of NATO, and, by virtue of that, the US out of Europe. It is a form of neutering that doesn’t excite the warriors in Brussels, nor the imperial denizens in Washington. After all, NATO needs every military contribution it can get, all part of the grand policing plan Washington, and European belligerents, had had in mind for some time. If Le Pen’s presidential ambitions are realised, the security chiefs will have their work cut out for them.

It may seem rich to the observers, but an individual like Le Pen has the US security establishment by its unfortunate goolies. She can throw the book of righteousness back at the CIA and company. They, it has been said, did it – abandoned recourse to law, followed brutal interrogation procedures.

Not that torture is something Le Pen is entirely dismissive of. In December last year, she did suggest that it could be useful in some cases, though she subsequently rephrased the issue as one of misinterpretation.[1] “I believe that the people responsible for getting information out of terror suspects that can save civilian lives do a responsible job.”

She doesn’t want to scrap it entirely from the instinctive use by security forces; but she is content reminding Washington that the CIA was an inappropriately behaved terrier when it came to its own programs. “If indeed everyone is outraged by the tortures used by the US then, let’s leave NATO.”[2] Torture is a matter of proprietary self-interest – its fine until it is practised against you.

Le Pen also causes disquiet in the transatlantic community for one strong propensity: her eyes towards Moscow. For one thing, she is sceptical about Western sanctimony over Ukraine, with its supposed interest in the legality of Kiev’s actions. “The settlement of the Ukrainian crisis is a very complicated question. But I think that it was possible to solve it by giving a neutral status to the country” (*Pravda*, Feb 9).[3]

The conflict, for Le Pen, was a strategic blunder of monumental proportions, an attempt, not merely to move away from the Russian bosom, but to the arms of NATO itself. “Ukraine’s aspirations to become a member of NATO lies at the heart of the conflict.” The result of the mess: an illegal government in Kiev, the shelling of civilians in Donetsk and Lugansk, and the preponderance of submissive behaviour from “American lackeys”.

Ultimately, it is the electoral and political battles of France that will matter most to Le Pen.

She is doing well in the polls, humming her way up the scales of electoral favour, and frightening her opponents. One poll suggests that the FN will top the first round of voting in the March 22nd elections, nabbing some 30 per cent of the vote (*The Economist*, Mar 14). An army of candidates has been readied.

The “detoxification” campaign of Le Pen’s National Front has also been taking place with medical proficiency. Much of this has involved a symbolic fratricide, ditching many of the more outlandish claims of her father, Jean-Marie. The Holocaust, for instance, has been deemed the apotheosis of barbarism, something her father found a trifling detail. The closet of conspiracy theories is being emptied.

The changes have worried observers – at least those who see trouble on the horizon. In its latest piece on Le Pen, *The Economist* describes a scene in Picardy with some trepidation. “Retired couples and mothers with pushchairs shove forward; smartphones are thrust into the air to capture the moment. Even before Ms Le Pen arrives on a bright market day, a crowd gathers on the pavement in the hope of catching a glimpse of her. ‘Perhaps she’ll be the one to save France,’ says a middle-aged woman with chilling sincerity.”[4]

Le Pen plays both the clown and the fiend in such commentaries. She is considered “daft” for the most part – at least when it comes to her economic policies, be they the promised restoration of the franc, the lowering of the retirement age, or the increase of import tax. But when it comes to eyes that look eastwards, she becomes the fiend, opening doors to the equivalent of Tartar hordes and socially regressive policies. “The nastier stuff includes a desire to build closer ties to Vladimir Putin’s Russia; to make sure the French state serves its own citizens better than foreigners; and to bring back the death penalty” (*The Economist*, Mar 14).

In 2014, similar remarks were made by John Vinocur in *The Wall Street Journal* (May 26, 2014). Vinocur did not even do Le Pen the courtesy of treating her like a political agent of self-will, but “Vladimir Putin’s Woman in Paris.” Naturally, such accusations had to come with the whitewashing of Ukrainian nationalism and the blunders of its governments. France, argued Vinocur after the European elections, had thrown off its enlightenment robes to embrace “a spectacle of nihilism that damages the West and delights Vladimir Putin.”

Political strategists have been putting their heads together in an effort to dampen the FN’s momentum. One of them is via the customary accusation of corruption and financial irregularity. President of the European parliament, Martin Schultz, has gone so far as to alert Olaf, the EU’s anti-corruption agency, over allegations that 20 people remunerated by the EU budget as parliamentary assistants to FN MEPs were also working for the party structure. As the European parliament has stated, “Assistants paid by the European parliament must perform work directly linked to the exercise of a member’s parliamentary mandate” (*The Guardian*, Mar 11). They will have to much better than that to arrest the seemingly inexorable rise of the French far right.

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Notes:

[1] <http://www.france24.com/en/20141210-french-far-right-leader-le-pen-defends-use->

[torture-national-front-usa-cia/](#)

[2] <http://rt.com/news/214227-france-nato-le-pen/>

[3] http://english.pravda.ru/news/world/09-02-2015/129734-marine_le_pen_nato_war_russia--0/#.VPtkmG31MgU.facebook

[4] <http://www.economist.com/news/europe/21646237-national-front-surges-polls-its-leader--strives-show-reassuring-face-operation>

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