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Similar or different? The FN's and the LFI's position on the EU during the 2017 elections

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I. Introduction

“The European Union is a dinosaur without force, impotent, forced in its defence to agree to be a protectorate of the United States” (Le Pen, 2008, 01.05).

The French presidential elections of 2017 can be described as peculiar elections. Although the far-left and the far-right are separated on the political spectrum, both parties revealed in their program that the EU was an important issue to address. This importance is due to an increase of fear amongst the population of Europe after the sudden eurozone crisis in 2008, the migration crisis in 2015 and the result of the Brexit referendum in 2016. In spite of the fact that both parties agree to revoke the EU membership as well as international trade deals, their approach to this matter is different. Since their politics on leaving the EU differs for both extreme parties it suggests that the only idea they have in common is the thought of leaving.

The newly founded far-left party, La France Insoumise, with Jean-Luc Mélenchon as a candidate proposed to renegotiate the EU treaty and abolish the Vth Republic creating a VIth Republic attracting young voters who are unhappy with the current Republic. On the opposite side, we find the candidate for the Front National Marine Le Pen who comes from a party known for its Eurosceptic and protectionist views.

Both parties, although LFI is a rather new party but with a known political candidate, have expressed their desire to exit the European Union. A Union they see as damaging France in multiple ways. The EU was created with a vision of a peaceful continent after decades of war and the fact that France has been a member of the European project since the European Coal and Steel Community does not mean that the parties support the close union. As a matter of fact, both parties illustrate it as the reason for the country's various problems, such as unemployment and poverty. The EU is therefore described as the evil union in Brussels that dictates over every member and imposes laws to the countries according to the FN and the LFI.

The unusual elections in France started with a wave of nationalism, after Donald Trump's election in the USA in 2016, where the results could be seen in the French polls as Marine Le Pen had successfully managed to get ahead of the other candidates (Beltran, 2016, p. 23). The party decided to use the relatively new crisis in their favour, such as the migration crisis,

blaming it for the rise of terrorist attacks in the country and using Brexit to illustrate that their anti-European goal could happen (Perrineau, 2017, p. 252). Although both candidates, Marine Le Pen and Jean-Luc Mélenchon, announced their candidacy for the presidential elections early, in February 2016, few people expressed their worrying thoughts about the LFI as the party was unclear if it wanted to leave the EU or not.

By using the presidential and legislative elections of 2017, I will compare how both parties have depicted the EU and Europe. In this paper, I will refer to the Rassemblement National with their previous name, Front National, as they changed their name in March 2018. In order to explain how the two opposite parties are interpreting the EU, we need to use a case study. Comparing by using a case study means that not all aspects of the case will be investigated, instead, we will focus on the important aspects (Manners, 2015, p. 227). In this case study, we will study both parties during the presidential elections and the legislative elections of 2017 in order to comprehend how the two parties illustrate the EU. The comparison of the two parties is done by using sources such as party manifestos and speeches as well as tweets the candidates have tweeted. By doing this analysis we will get a clearer analysis of how the two extreme parties have depicted the EU as well as understanding how the elections were a crucial moment for parties since they are forced to position themselves on the topic. The hypothesis linked to the research question suggests that both parties portray the EU as the evil player that will force laws upon member states. By analysing the data of the presidential and legislative elections collected we will explore if this hypothesis is true.

In the first section I will explain the FN and the LFI, two parties that are on the opposite side of the political structure yet have some political ideas in common. In the second section I will explore different concepts such as nationalism and communism as well as populism, a concept both parties share. In the third section I will describe the FN and the LFI during the presidential and legislative campaign of 2017. This section will serve as my case study for this paper. The fourth section examines the FN's portraying of the Europe and the EU over the years. The following section will do the same but with the point of view of the LFI. In the sixth section I will compare the two parties portraying of Europe. The paper argues that the way the two parties describe the EU are in reality not very different. While the parties are in fact placed on the opposite side of the horseshoe theory interpretation, they have more in common with each other than with the centrist parties.

II. The FN and LFI: two parties on the opposite side of the French political spectrum

a. Front National (FN)

The official version of how the party was founded gives Jean-Marie Le Pen a greater role than the one he actually had. Whereas, in the real version he was merely a strategic piece in the creation of the party. The far-right party was created as the neo-fascist movement “Ordre nouveau” saw the need for a political movement in 1972 (Bénard, 2017, 07.05). This explains why the party has fascist origins, as it was the direct consequence of the post-war conditions and the open possibilities for such a party to develop. In addition to this the political party’s logo, the flames with the French flag, is inspired by the Italian movement MSI. This party is known for being the first one to declare themselves as extreme right party, and not a neo-fascist party as FN did (Ignazi, 2007, p. 1).

The new party’s main goal was to unite the Far-Right parties under one party of nationalism, stating that nationalism was one of the many things they had in common. Due to the fact that it had failed to collect the obligatory 500 signatures to run in the 1981 presidential elections, the party which had turned their anti-immigration views into the single-most important issue only received 0.2% votes during those elections. The low voting percentage as well as a lack of candidates to represent the party resulted in political analysts to believe that it would be the last time that the FN would participate (Ellinas, 2010, p. 176).

The Front National was placed on the political map when it made a breakthrough two years later in the local by-elections by winning the northern France commune Dreux. This resulted in increased media coverage and gave them the opportunity to elaborate the party’s anti-immigration message. In spite of the fact that the party made a breakthrough by being elected to the second round in the presidential election in 2002. The following presidential elections in 2007 were catastrophic for the party. Similar to the elections of 1981, this resulted into many believing that this could be the last that they saw of the far-right party and the return of the bi-partisan structure of political competition (Goodliffe, 2013, p. 85). The fear that voters had felt in 2002, especially after the terrorist attack of 9.11, had worn off by 2007 resulting in a bad election for the far-right. There was, therefore, no direct need for the FN’s xenophobia

and nationalism in order to reassure France from terrorists although the party had started to advocate more openly about the EU dictatorship.

The party has a history in emerging for the local and regional elections and did so in 2010 and 2011. Yet, what gave the party a new start was that Marine Le Pen was elected to take over the party of her father in 2011 (Goodliffe, 2013, p. 85). The fact that Marine Le Pen took over her father's party did not stop her from making changes in order to get rid of the images her father had left behind damaging the last name as well as the party's reputation. By trying to "de-demonize" the party, a tactic that is known to be effective for the right-wing populist parties as it places the party in a "us versus them" light, Marine Le Pen tried to get rid of xenophobic rhetoric and hatred her father had managed to spread in the years of his leadership (Beltran, 2016, p. 24). With this in mind, the party went from one defending the Vichy regime and denying the Holocaust, to one playing the victim of globalization and Europeanization instead (Goldhammer, 2015, p. 135). Immediately the numbers of member rose, and she decided to take her political stance a step away those of her father. Later, she expelled her father from what used to be his own party in order to detox it from his anti-Semitic views which would be reflected in his politics (Jansen, 2016, p. 21). The expulsion might have been the best for the party, as the old leader is known for denying the Holocaust three times which only results in damaging the party and receiving a fine each time (Chrisafis, 2016, 06.04).

The Front National growth over the years is due to its protectionist politics, which is due to the immediate response to the economic crisis and the presence of immigrants, as well as the EU membership. By using a 'supply and demand' framework, the part has managed to renew its populist image as well as keeping its dominant and recurring theme, immigration. This has resulted in the party receiving new supporters and renewing support with old sympathizers (Stockemer, & Barisione, 2017, p. 101). The party which can be described as a xenophobic movement, wishes to create a society founded on cultural homogeneity, which can be illustrated by the slogan "Put France in order" (Leiser, 2017, 26.04) where Marine Le Pen expressed her nationalist belief against immigration. This can also be illustrated during the migration crisis of 2015 where the party decided to strengthen its anti-immigration rhetoric and suggested that massive immigration could threaten the national identity. In spite of the fact that the party originally had no illusions on gaining access to power, the radical party has managed to build itself primarily on an electorate that is poor and unemployed.

b. La France Insoumise

At the end of the term of Francois Hollande in 2017, the left-wing was deeply divided. This was mainly due to his high unpopularity, but this affected the left-wing in general and raised the question of the possibility of new parties forming (Martigny, 2017, p. 47). Jean-Luc Mélenchon, a popular figure of the left-wing, states that the left-wing was dead because of all the division that had occurred. In the light of the fact that the left-wing is divided, Jean-Luc Mélenchon expressed his wish in February 2016 to end the coalition between the socialist party and the communist party in order to form his own party, La France Insoumise. As a matter of fact, the establishment of an active website confirms the candidate's wish to the presidential election in 2017 (Cautrès, 2017, p. 176).

His newly founded party found itself immediately popular amongst the youths that wanted France out of the EU and creating the VIth Republic. According to his wish forming a VIth republic would create a stronger direct democracy as well as it would give the citizens the control over its elected officials and businesses (Wormser, 2017, p. 14). Although this would mean that the party would separate itself from the traditional left-wing and reassemble the anticapitalistic left-wing.

In spite of the fact that many would place the candidate on the far-left side of the political spectrum, the candidate himself does not agree with these presumptions. Instead the candidate will not give his movement a left or right label and will not call it a political movement. Instead Jean-Luc Mélenchon will call the LFI a network (Melenchon Oui Mais, n.d.). Yet, we will continue to refer to the LFI as a far-left party.

Although the movement is located on the left side of the political spectrum, Mélenchon has expressed his wish to in no way be associated with socialism and communism, which he means are older left-wing ideas and symbols. The movement has managed to attract a great number of students, as Mélenchon only wants to install a simple philosophy of insubordination and wants to reshape the French democracy, by for example creating a VIth Republic (Hamburger, 2018, p. 106). His new vision of how to structure a party without a clear ideology, in contrary to other political movements, but mainly on popular rage has attracted many followers as they see this as a breath of fresh air and a political movement that finally listens to them.

The party that promises a revolution and denounced politicians as corrupt has refused the invitations to ally themselves with parties such as the socialist party (PS) and the communist party (PCF). But this does not mean that the party is against allying itself with other left parties, instead, the LFI wants them to agree to their terms in order to work with them. Although the party has managed to use the mainstream media in their favour and claim to have the recipe in order to win back the working-class voters, regions where the far-right are strong, it lacks what it needs to coordinate the divided left side. In addition to this, by rejecting potential allies based on the factum that the LFI are convinced of the superiority of its populist strategy partially explains why they did not qualify to the second round (Hamburger, 2018, p. 107). In spite of the fact that the party is relatively new, the far-left party managed to make its self-noticed early with their campaign.

The relatively newly founded party, La France Insoumise, did not lose any moment to start its campaign. As a matter of fact, the party started early and mapped out the correct topics to discuss which lead them to have a chance at making it to the second round of the presidential election. With an original campaign and a left-wing that was deeply divided, Jean-Luc Mélenchon did the impossible and received more votes than the Socialist Party candidate, Benoit Hamon, who had earlier asked him to step down in order for the left-wing party to qualify for the second round (Cautrès, 2017, p. 176). With this in mind, Mélenchon's new founded party found popularity amongst young voters. The fact that he promised a new France, a new republic with the abolishment of the president role might have been appealing for 18-24 years old (Cautrès, 2017, p. 187). Although he was one of the oldest candidates to run for the presidency, he managed to combine the question of renewal with aspects of the left-wing which many believed gave hope for a new France with a new left-wing.

III. Concepts

The terms “extreme right” and “extreme left” are credited to the French revolution where the parties were separated depending on seating arrangement in the National Assembly. The right parties were categorised as conservatives while the left were renovators (Ignazi, 2007, p. 4). In order to understand why both parties are against the integrated union and why their arguments are different, we must explain the definition and key concepts of the far-right and

far-left. In doing so it will give us a clearer sight of why the parties are against integration altogether. As stated previously, the LFI is considered to be a network that is neither on the left or on the right by his founder, yet we will explain the far-left as it is the closest that fits the ideology of Jean-Luc Mélenchon.

a. The far right

The far-right movement is inspired by fascism. As the fascist movement was facilitated by the post-war period, the historian Robert Paxton argues that fascism has developed as the reaction against modern democratic society, individualism, constitutionalism and the left. Fascism was popular during WWII as it was used by Mussolini during that period. The fact that the ideology came much later than its rivals, socialism, conservatism, and liberalism, might explain why modern far-right parties have decided to reject it (Carter, 2005, p. 21). In addition to this, the ideology was little developed in contrary to the other ideologies. Since fascism developed as a reaction against modern democratic society, it rejects universal values making the ideology more diverse than other political movements. Yet the rejection of the fascist ideology has resulted in a blurred line between conservatism and extremists as it is difficult to define both political movements. The quote of Robert Paxton, “The themes that appeal to fascist in one cultural tradition may seem simply silly to another”, suggests that the definition of the term fascism depends on the country, that one cannot jump to the conclusion when using this term as its themes vary (Carter, 2005, p. 22). With this in mind, the parties with a fascist ideology tend to grow based on the fact that they promise the people a certain amount of power and uses it in order to gain attention. The extreme ideology can, therefore, be defined as a network of relationships (Wolfreys, 2013, p. 22).

In spite of the fact that far-right parties can be found on the same political spectrum, each party has embraced a different ideology (Carter, 2005, p. 6). There are five main features that appear frequently as core ideological elements of far-right parties: nationalism, xenophobia, racism, anti-democratic sentiment, call for a strong state (Carter, 2005, p. 15). Suggesting that not all far-right parties advocate for the exact same features at the same time, yet most far-right parties share an anti-democratic sentiment. Although most far-right parties have started to reject the fascist ideology this does not suggest that their core ideology has changed since the 1970s. In fact, most far-right parties have managed to keep the same ideology since the

birth of the party despite getting mostly record low electoral scores than high electoral scores (Carter, 2005, p. 3).

i. Nationalism

Nationalism in France can be traced back to the age of Enlightenment, more specifically to the French revolution, when the national motto “Liberty, Equality, Fraternity” appeared. Granted that it only became the national motto during the third Republic, in 1870, it has been used by Parisians in order to intimidate inhabitants of other cities. Although the term nationalism was not used to describe this effect, it can be used as an example to prove that nationalism was not a term made famous by the far-right movement. In contrary, the far-right movement has managed to use the term nationalism in their favour, spreading fear amongst people. Nationalism, according to Elisabeth Carter, is one of the main features of the far-right extremism (Carter, 2005, p. 15). As a matter of fact, the extreme right ideology is based on an extreme nationalism that is anxious to defend a given people in a given territory (Jamin, 2013, p. 39). Nationalism can partly be defined as the fear of foreigners or enemies as the far-right politicians describe them as.

With this in mind, nationalism is not only putting one’s own nation and support for interest above the others, but it can also be described as an obsession. More specifically an obsession of superiority as nationalists often develops into thinking that they are superior to others. By believing that their country is above all others, nationalist might refuse any sort of trade deals as they believe their country is sufficient on its own. This results in protectionist politics where foreigners are not welcome and politicians advocate for politics that blames migration for the rise of unemployment.

The European Union has over the years attempted to build and maintain trust between the 28 member states. The lack of a common nationality, although the EU has tried to create a common nationality, might have impacted how far-right parties look at the EU. Nationality can be regarded as the cement of society, with one missing it destroys the people’s sense of belonging to a country or to Europe (Føllesdal, 2000, p. 504). Far-right parties have a tendency to use it in their favour when explaining the rise of unemployment, stating that the reason behind it is foreigners taking their jobs.

ii. Anti-immigration and anti-multiculturalism

As stated previously, not all far-right parties share the same features, meaning that not every far-right party will have a tendency to be against immigration and multiculturalism. Needless to say, anti-immigration parties have been gaining electoral success due to the populations fear after the migration crisis of 2015 (Van Spanje, 2010, p. 564). It is common that all far-right parties have a stronger immigration politics compared to the rest of the parties. With this in mind, the voters tend to be people that see immigration as a threat to their local or national culture and will, therefore, vote in favour for the politicians advocating for stronger immigration politics.

Multiculturalism can be described as a set of commonly reinforcing approaches concerning the incorporation and participation of immigrants and ethnic minorities and their modes of cultural and religious difference. Suggesting that it is not always linked to moving and it can appear on a large or a small scale within a nation's community and, therefore, does not mean that it will affect the whole community. Since the EU can be described as a multicultural union it is not peculiar that the far-right parties have a tendency to be against it. Although, in order to conclude that a party is against multiculturalism we have to take into consideration the sociological, economic and political factors before concluding (Lubbers, Gijsberts & Scheepers, 2002, p. 370).

b. The far-left

The far-left can be categorised by two main subtypes. The first one being the radical parties, which on paper accept democracy although they prefer it combined with direct democracy. The second subtype can be explained as extreme left parties. They are known to denounce all compromise with "bourgeois" political forces (March, 2011, p. 125-126). Left-wing extremism, in contrary to the right-wing extremism, does not reject the principle of fundamental human equality (Carter, 2005, p. 16). The far left is subject to four ideologies: communism, democratic socialist parties, populist socialist parties, social populist parties. Since some of the subject's idea overlap, I will only explain communism and socialism.

i. Communism

Communism developed itself during the modern industrial times when the working class felt oppressed as the elite bourgeoisie was developing.

Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels developed communism as they meant that the elite has always had the upper hand when it came to development. This ‘natural superiority’ that the authors explain in their manifesto suggests that they believe it is time for them to feel superior (Marx, Engels, Taylor & Moore, 1985, p. 82). This can be compared to far-left parties of today, as they also feel suppressed by the political elite. Communists believe that the way to abolish certain features of society is by creating a revolution, such as the French Revolution which abolished feudal property. As a matter of fact, communists hope to abolish private property. This is something Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels believe sums up their movement in one sentence “abolition of private property” (Marx, Engels., Taylor & Moore, 1985, p. 96). Although the far-right can be defined by the word ‘obsession’, the far-left can be explained by the word ‘abolition’ as the movement typically believes in the breaking of set norms and that a revolution might be needed to be heard.

However, for some far-left parties, the communist ideology is not extreme for them and will, therefore, not fit in the category of communist.

ii. Socialism

The term socialism can be explained as an economic and political system in which the ownership of factories and offices are shared between those working there and those depending on them, suggesting that the value should be shared between the people (Alexander, 2015, p. 987). Socialism as Karl Marx imagined it, consists of networks and relationships between those living there or belonging to this party. This is something we can relate to the French far-left party, LFI, as Jean-Luc Mélenchon has stated this party resembles more a network than a political party.

One of its theories is called Marxist theory which calls for a social state between capitalism and communism. Karl Marx argued that the only objective possibility of socialism was immanent to capitalism (Alexander, 2015, p. 987). Marxism can be described as a stage that leads to communism as we know it.

Consequently, socialism and communism share some main ideas since they share a founder, Karl Marx. One of the differences between the two theories is that one believes in a revolution to make a change, communism, and the other does not, socialism.

c. Populism

The term populism is as a matter of fact used to a particular political style since it brings parties that are ideologically distinct from each other (Carter, 2005, p. 23).

According to Cas Mudde, populism can be defined as a “thin-centred ideology” which believes that society is left to the ‘pure people’ versus the ‘corrupt people’. With this in mind, populism can, therefore, be used by the radical right and the radical left, although it is more common to find it in the radical left parties since both sides claim to eradicate the elite and to represent the people (Ivaldi, 2018, p. 4).

According to Veda Elizabeth Beltran (2016), right-wing populism can be defined as:

“based on a definition of the people as culturally homogenous and the immigrants attempting integration in these western countries threaten the sense of identity and common interests of the people (p. 6).”

With this in mind, many Westerns would act by judging another culture mainly based on the preconceptions that are found in their culture, also known as ethnocentrism (Beltran, 2016, p. 6). Radical right populism can be defined as a combination with exclusionary nativism and authoritarianism. Since far-right parties have a tendency of being nationalist, it is no surprise that populist radical right advocate for the defence of nationalist interests. By doing so, the party attracts supporters that reflect a high level of cultural exclusionism, that have a tendency to be against immigration and multicultural society (Ivaldi, 2018, p. 4). A case in point, far-right populism is often called “heritage populism” as it is a combination of anger against the elite, the EU, immigration and Islam (Reynié, 2016, p. 47).

As a matter of fact, 2016 saw the rise of a number of populist and extremist political actors that decided to threaten the liberal democracy that the West has established. Populism is, in reality, a hateful ideology that will threaten the liberal democracies in the West if it manages to grow bigger (Beltran, 2016, p. 9).

As stated previously, populism can appear in both radical left and right although their ideology differs. The radical left populism explained by Gilles Ivaldi has a “more socially inclusive notion of the people which is essentially pit against an economic elite” (Ivaldi, 2018, p. 3). After all, their supporters are driven by economic equality and support for redistribution (Ivaldi, 2018, p. 4).

IV. The 2017 presidential and legislative elections

The 2017 presidential elections represent a series of atypical elections. The left-wing was deeply divided into three parties and weakened by the unpopularity of Francois Hollande. This leads the 2017 elections to become the first where four parties were relatively close when it came to votes. In addition to this, the usually left-party and right-party duel was not going to happen as the LFI received more votes than the left-party “Parti socialiste” and the FN received more votes than the right-party “Les Républicains”.

Due to the fact that the French presidential elections are known for being a crossroad for European history, it is peculiar to notice the lack of attention to the EU and to foreign policy during the main debates of the candidates as it was mostly discussed during small debates and interviews with some candidates. During the campaign, the European Union has been represented without any historical perspective as if it was the origin for all the evils of the country (Gomart, 2017, p. 1). Furthermore, as stated previously the EU has been one of the main topics discussed by candidates during the small debates or interviews, with TF1 deducing that a total of 29 minutes of their 20 o’clock news from October 2016 until May 2017 was dedicated to the EU topic. With Brexit happening and most of the parties being open about their anti-EU views it is relatively peculiar that it was not a more discussed topic.

In regard to Marine Le Pen’s announcement of candidacy 56% of the viewers declared that “The FN represents a danger for democracy” (Perrineau, 2017, p. 254). In addition to this, the presidential elections were an unusual political landscape as there was no usual left- and right-wing block, instead it replaced with a four-party block. Where two of them were newcomers, La Republic En Marche with Emanuel Macron and La France Insoumise with Jean-Luc Mélenchon. Where none of them had a clear political affiliation with either the left

or the right. The four-party block also included the Front National candidate, Marine Le Pen as well as Francois Fillon from the right-wing party, Les Républicains.

During the first presidential debate, all the 11 candidates had the chance to present their program as well as debate on certain topics. By analysing the three-hour long debate, we can interpret that the far-left party decided to lead a strong anti-EU and anti-international view program. This can be illustrated by the fact that Jean-Luc Mélenchon wished for France to leave the EU as well as the CETA (Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement) and TAFTA (Transatlantic Free Trade Area). Although both parties are in favour of refusing international cooperation such as leaving TAFTA and CETA, the LFI is the party that is more vocal about it. This might be because Jean-Luc Mélenchon has been vocal about his stance on refusing TAFTA since 2009 (Mélenchon, 2017, 17.02). On the opposite side of the political spectrum, Le Pen decided to soften her anti-EU views by stating that France needs to become more protectionist in similarity with Switzerland (CNEWS, 2017, 04.04). Although the debate lasted for three hours, each candidate was restricted to a minute per topic, which was not always respected.

The legislative elections of 2017 were regarded as the honeymoon phase, suggesting that they usually have a confirmatory role. Although Marine Le Pen did not succeed to win the presidential elections, she succeeded in receiving a place in the national assembly. Due to the fact that a newcomer had won the presidential election, the legislative elections were in the danger of being regarded as a confirmatory election. Although there had been a decline in support for the two main party alternatives, there was an alternative that the legislative elections could end up in a cohabitation (Evans & Ivaldi, 2017, p. 328-329). With this in mind, coalition governments are not highly regarded, as they have proven to be low efficient (Paparo, De Sio & Michel, 2017, p. 77).

Although it is said that the French president is one of the most powerful chief executives in Europe, the president does not have that power unless he has a supportive parliamentary majority as they are to function as an effective policy-maker. The legislative elections saw the rise of tensions on issues along the lines of Europe and how to deal with the far-right and the challenges the party brought. Yet the legislative elections cannot deal with these topics in particular. Both the FN and the LFI saw the struggle of winning seats in the national assembly due to the fact that the elections focused less on policy issues and leadership than the

presidential elections. In addition to this, both candidates were elected to represent their constituencies, making campaigning in other regions of France difficult. Yet, had the parties sought alliances with other parties it could have gained the majority of the seats and therefore made it difficult for Macron to imply his program into laws. Although it would not have given them a platform to introduce their program.

V. The FN's portraying of the EU

a. FN vis-à-vis the EU in the past

The anti-EU image the FN has decided to opt for did not always exist the way it does today. As a matter of fact, the far-right party showed their support for the European project in the early 1980s. The idea of a common currency and defence was something that the party believed the European continent needed after years of war and in order to fight the Soviet threat. When the question of a European project arose, the FN stated that “the patriotism of the nations would save Europe against the Soviet threat”. As a matter of fact, the far-right party supported the idea of a common currency as well as a common border control in the middle of the 1980's. The party proclaimed in the early 1980s that “it is the patriotism of the nations that will save Europe against the threats of the Soviet hegemony” (Reungoat, 2015, p. 228), suggesting that when Soviet was a threat the party would rather support a strong and unified Europe rather than see it being under Soviet threat.

Their support for the European project did not last long as it shifted after the Maastricht treaty, they did not accept the EU's wish of deepening the European integration something they implied would be a “collective suicide” for the member states. Instead, Jean Marie Le Pen had hoped for a confederal Europe, one with a strong Christian tradition, typical of the right and far-right wing (Reungoat, 2015, p. 230). Additionally, the far-right party began to criticise the EU and going against it in its politics, in fact, the opposition in Brussels is a continuity with the legacy of the past that Marine Le Pen has kept in the party (Reungoat, 2015, p. 225). But, the hatred for the unified Europe did not stop at the Maastricht treaty, in fact the Schengen agreement, implemented in 1995, worsened the FN's belief in the EU as it would abolish the borders and therefore let Europeans move freely across each member states (Reungoat, 2015, p. 230). The open borders that Schengen would bring to the EU went

against everything that the party stood for. Suddenly anyone was free to travel across the EU without passing the passport control, something the far-right party meant would give a free access to the country.

Sine the EU has gone through multiple integrations, the European Union has developed itself from a coal and steel community and into a broad political and economic union, but according to the FN, the union is in their books an anti-democratic and subservient by the United States. By blaming the EU for the country's problems, the FN has often nicknamed the integrated union as the "EU of unemployment". This can be illustrated by the fact that the FN believes that the union is to be blamed for moving French jobs abroad and therefore receives support as they promise to get those jobs back to France (Reungoat, 2015, p. 231). Believing that the EU are taking away peoples work; her voters hope to get a job in return to voting for her.

By advocating for a Frexit, Le Pen wants to remove all EU flags from public buildings, and instead only leave the French flag. The French flag is a part of the political party's image and would, therefore, manifest their win. It is to be expected that France would have a loose relationship with the EU, the close union occupying a "sui generis category between international organization and states" as Craig Parsons states. However, it is quite the opposite according to French theorists who argues that France would be in a difficult position if it decided to leave the EU (Parsons, 2016, p. 585).

The current migration crisis, as well as the terrorist fear, might have been factors that secured the party so many votes, as many agree with Marine Le Pens anti-immigration ideas. The programme for the Front National, now called Rassemblement National, clearly calls for France to regain the sovereignty it lost by entering the ECSC which later evolved into the EU as we know. By exiting the EU, France would regain its identity and its destiny according to Marine Le Pen's views. The country would leave NATO, and therefore be excluded by all European cooperation, but Marine Le Pen suggests that this has to be done in order for France to regain its lost values and traditions. The program also goes against Islam, and states that by going against Islamism women will get to defend their rights, it does not explicitly explain how this is done, it just states that Islamism is in the way of women gaining their fundamental liberty (Party programme, 144).

b. The FN discourse of the EU during the presidential elections

During the presidential elections Marine Le Pen decided that leaving the eurozone, Schengen and invoking article 50 straight away, similar to Britain with Brexit, would not be her top priority. Marine Le Pen has, therefore, decided to defend a softer Eurosceptic stance. Something that is unusual for a far-right party, since they are known to being vocal about their nationalist politics which results in them being anti-EU. While, Marine Le Pen probably realised that leaving the EU in a brutal way would not benefit the country, and possibly not be the wish of the country which she seems to talk for with her slogan "au nom du peuple" (in the name of the people). In earlier elections, the far-right party has decided to only hold a referendum on the question of abolishing the euro and directly imply article 50 (Rassemblement National, 2017). Yet her party program remains vague on this topic as it puts eurozone, Schengen and leaving the EU in the same and only bullet point addressing Europe and does not explain in detail what could happen.

In the last presidential debate between Marine Le Pen and Emmanuel Macron, Marine Le Pen proved her strong Eurosceptic views on the EU topic. She, in the first place, called Europe "Europe a la schlag", using a German pejorative term to connote the EU (LCI, 2017, 04.05). In the second place, she promised that a referendum on the EU would serve as her weapon to convince the opposite parties that were unclear on their stance regarding the EU. According to her the EU, who wants to be obeyed, will impose laws on member states without taking into consideration the opinion of the people. To a certain point this contradicts her campaign that we will discuss later.

Although she has ran a Eurosceptic campaign, she strategically signalled that leaving the euro was no longer a priority, possibly hoping that she will gain more voters by appearing less anti-EU than what she is. The 2017 elections proved that a French exit of the union was not something that would happen soon as many saw the consequences of Brexit and how difficult it is to leave close union even if Le Pen claimed that "after Brexit, now France" (Ivaldi, 2018, p. 286). After the results of the Brexit referendum, Marine Le Pen acclaims those who voted to leave by tweeting "Victory of liberty! (MLP_officiel, 2016, 24.06)" as well as urging her country to do the same, to leave the European Union. Her tweet two days before the second round of the presidential elections illustrates that she "wished to change this European Union into an alliance of free nations and sovereignty" (MLP_officiel, 2017, 04.05).

VI. The LFI's portraying of the EU

a. The far-left vis-à-vis the EU in the past

Granted that the La France Insoumise is a relatively new party in comparison with the Front National, we can only make hypothesis of the far-left's Eurosceptic positions in the past. Because of the fact that some far-left parties are more concerned over the possible loss of voters not every party are, therefore, vocal about their Eurosceptic politics and decide to remain quiet about it. On one hand, the Eurosceptic topic is viewed by some far-left parties as something that belongs to the far-right, as they are more nationalist orientated. On the other hand, the far-left parties tend to be in favour of international cooperation. However, they see the current integration as a threaten to their ideology and will, therefore, advocate for the withdrawal the country from the EU (Williams & Ishiyama, 2018, p. 447).

b. The LFI's discourse of the EU during the presidential elections

Jean-Luc Mélenchon argues that France should end all sorts of international cooperation, although it states in the party program that the party will accept to negotiate a new deal with the EU. This can be illustrated with his refusal of treaties such as TAFTA or CETA (Cautrès, 2017, p. 177). Although the FN is known for being anti-EU, the LFI follow close behind with a party program that is more explicit than the program of the far-right party. As stated previously, the LFI had in total 22 bullet points regarding the EU and how they could leave the union (L'Avenir En Commun, 2016, p.49-53). For instance, one of those bullet points is to "devalue the euro and return to the initial parity with the dollar" (L'Avenir En Commun, 2016, p. 51). In spite of the fact that the party states in its plan A that the people will be presented with a referendum on whether to exit the union or not, the party program states that a plan B is there in case no compromise is reached between the two parts. This could confuse the voters as it is unsure if they will have a say on the future relationship with the EU.

Mélenchon believes that the EU that was once imagined is now dead. The EU is now a free market and the people are subject to the dictatorship of banks and finance. In other words, France has to leave the union in order to regain its sovereignty back. Mélenchon portrays the EU as a doomed union that forces France to "carry out austerity policies, abolish state action

and public investment” (L’Avenir En Commun, 2016, p. 51). Although the party changed their viewpoint on exiting the EU, they believe they can negotiate a new deal with the EU for France if they manage to get to the power. Similar to the far-right party, LFI wants France to regain sovereignty by for example leaving NATO once and for all.

During the presidential elections a website called “melenchonouimais.fr” was created, where readers could find answers to the questions or statements that were usually asked about the program or the candidate. This would facilitate the task of people in doubt as they didn’t have to watch the debate or read the whole party program. One of the statements was that the candidate wanted to leave the EU to which the answer said that “since France voted in majority no on the referendum of the European Constitution Treaty in 2005 but the treaty of Lisbon did not require a referendum before being ratified by the member states, Mélenchon wants to re-establish the French sovereignty and “to propose a democratic, social and ecological re-foundation of the European treaties by the negotiation”” (Melenchon Oui Mais, n.d.). The answer did however forget to state that if both parts do not agree, then France will threaten to leave by not paying their annual payment. By forgetting to state that many might, therefore, conclude that the national debt could be paid by leaving the EU as well as forgetting all the benefits of being a part of the EU.

VII. Comparison the FN’s and the LFI’s portraying of the EU

Over the years, French citizens have expressed their concerns about it being difficult to connect their views on Europe to choices of representatives, as few politicians have expressed their views on Europe. That said, only the extremist parties have in reality expressed their position on the European question, both wishing to leave the integrated union (Parsons, 2016, p. 598). In similarity to French scholars, the LFI and the FN have expressed their mixed feelings about integration, even if it is meant in a broader context (Parsons, 2016, p. 602).

Although both parties are in reality anti-EU parties, their views on the union are different. The FN's view on the EU can be described as a "Europhobic anti-liberal populism", while the far-left party is more "Eurosceptic statism, mixed with cultural progressivism" (Kuhn, 2017, p. 489). One view the parties have in common is the fear of Germany's dominance in the EU, and the solution they see to this would be to leave the integrated union. Yet the unhappiness

with the union goes further than the fear of Merkel's power and into detailed politics such as the eurozone or Schengen. Although both parties idealise over a strong and independent France both parties wish to take the country out of all international cooperation believing that their protectionist politics would amount to creating this utopic and strong France that they dream of.

Gilles Ivaldi argues that both parties have a tendency to manipulate the Eurosceptic frames for the voter's mobilization. Both radical parties have expressed their misshapeness with the EU and how they believe it is going against the interest of the people (Ivaldi, 2018, p. 10) This can be illustrated with both party's unhappiness with the Constitutional Treaty of 2005. A Treaty that France rejected in 2005 with a referendum but was only replaced by the Treaty of Lisbon in 2007/2009. Both parties saw the EU as a union that does not listen to France as they did not get to vote or have a say on this new treaty. French rejection of the Constitutional Treaty in 2005 portrays how the right and the left could disagree on the same matter, a closer union. For many Euro-optimist this result was seen as the possible ending of a closer union, and the start of a fragmented Europe (Parsons, 2016, p. 598). In spite of the fact that the LFI party is relatively new compared to the FN, there are some geographical remains of the 2005 referendum on the European constitutional treaty, where the majority voted "non", that voted for the LFI (Cautrès, 2017, p. 182).

Furthermore, both parties made significant gains in the 2017 presidential elections. Although only the FN made it to the second round, the LFI managed to get more votes than the traditional left-wing party, the PS. Similarly, both parties have campaigned with anti-elitist and people-centred features, which reflects both parties' attachment to populism.

During the campaign, Jean-Luc Mélenchon decided to advocate for an "ecological transit", deciding to oppose his former communist allies and appeal to the younger generation. In contrary to the LFI, the FN did not address the ecology and instead focused on the reduction of immigration. In true FN style, the party called for 'national preference' during the campaign calling the EU out for letting refugees in France and taking jobs that belongs to the French citizens. As a matter of fact, both parties have an agenda that opposes European integration and economic globalization as the parties believe the European Union's interest goes against those of the people. By manipulating their Eurosceptic arguments, they manage to mobilize more voters into believing that the EU is not acting for the best of the citizens

(Ivaldi, 2018, p. 10). Although both parties have different opposition arguments, their visions of the EU are similar as both want the country out of the EU.

Although the FN is known as the party that has advocated for a French exit of the EU, often called Frexit, the LFI have decided to take it a step further. In spite of the fact that the LFI has not existed as long as the FN and the fact that the FN has been an anti-Maastricht party since 1992, the 22 bullet points of the program of Jean-Luc Mélenchon proves that he actually advocates for a hard Frexit (L’Avenir En Commun, 2016, p. 49-53). With a party program that states the consequences of not reaching a compromise with the EU as well as his claims to staying, plans A and B, in contrary to Le Pen's one bullet point about possibly leaving. Where plan A is to “propose a democratic, social and ecological foundation of European treaties by renegotiation”, and plan b would be to either open up for the idea of a new union with members that wish to follow or to cut the French contribution to the EU (L’Avenir En Commun, 2016, p. 52). We can, therefore, conclude that based on the party program that the LFI has a stronger wish to leave the integrated union. As a matter of fact, the LFI has decided to threaten the EU by cutting the contribution to the EU budget with 22 million euros per year (L’Avenir En Commun, 2016, p. 52). Despite this claim being severe and threatening, the EU could respond, either way, leaving the voters to believe that the FN's bullet point about starting with negotiations and having a referendum if nothing is reached less barbaric.

VIII. Conclusion

In this paper, I have tried to compare how two parties who are on the opposite political spectrum have portrayed the EU only to find out that there is a strong resemblance. Although, the nature behind this hatred towards the EU is different, how the two parties’ approach it is in reality similar. Since both parties wish to opt out of all international cooperation as well as the EU, we can conclude that both parties have a certain protectionist approach to this topic.

Due to the fact that both parties have clearly expressed their Eurosceptic views, it is interesting to see how both parties advocate for a referendum without fulling knowing if the whole population will vote in favour or not. We can, therefore, theorize that both parties believe they will manage to win over people’s opinion simply by pointing at all the bad things the EU has done since the beginning of its existence.

Albeit the fact that the parties are on the opposite spectrum of the horseshoe theory interpretation, we can conclude that the two extreme parties have more in common with each other than they have with the more moderate centrist parties. There are few countries in Europe where both the far-left and far-right parties coexist within the same political system. Both parties and voters are motivated by different issues and can, therefore, engender the opposite party into getting more support. Gilles Ivaldi, therefore, suggests that FN voters have a tendency to be motivated by cultural issues, such as immigration, while LFI voters are motivated by economic attitudes (Ivaldi, 2018, p. 2).

Although the country benefits from being in the EU and is known as the leading country alongside of Germany, both parties fear the German dominance and seem to wish France held that position alone. Yet, if France did, the two extreme parties would still describe the EU as a union that dictates the member countries to adopt laws without thinking about the countries interest as in their eyes Brussels is far away from France.

Despite the fact that Christopher Williams and John Ishiyama stated that far-right parties have a tendency to be more overtly Eurosceptic than far-left parties, the French presidential elections of 2017 reflect the opposite of this statement. Granted that both were open about their refusal to continue being a member of the EU as it is today, the LFI approached the topic with a strong vocabulary leading voters to believe that the far-left were more Eurosceptic than the far-right (Williams & Ishiyama, 2018, p. 447).

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