

MARINE LE PEN: 'THE EU IS DEAD'

After losing the presidency to Emmanuel Macron in 2017, Marine Le Pen looked like a spent force. The success of right-wing parties in Europe has given her fresh hope and a new strategy: to undermine the EU from the inside



When the French far-right leader Marine Le Pen imploded in the last televised debate of the 2017 presidential election, many thought her political career was over.

Le Pen says she suffered from a crippling ophthalmic migraine on the day she debated Emmanuel Macron. The excuse didn't change anything. Her financially bankrupt party was hounded by the European Parliament for misappropriation of EU funds. Its legacy of racism and anti-Semitism was so pungent that Le Pen changed the party's name from Front National to "Rassemblement National", also known as RN, or National Rally.

The RN headquarters in a residential street in Nanterre is an hour by metro and bus from central Paris. A shabby statue of Joan of Arc, historic symbol of the Front founded by Le Pen's father Jean-Marie, stands forlorn between the front door and the parking lot. St Joan looks like a rescue from a flea market, her gold paint weathering off.

There is a chasm between the role the Le Pens have played in France and Europe, and their exiguous means. In a 90-minute group interview last week with the Anglo-American Press Association in Paris, Marine Le Pen repeatedly and proudly called the RN "the leading opposition party". But the RN's headquarters, where the interview takes place, resembles a prefab office building in a former Eastern Bloc country.

Internal feuds have prevented the Rassemblement National building up a cadre of educated, experienced officials. Jordan Bardella, the 23-year-old head of the RN list in next May's European elections, "was born and raised in a bad neighbourhood", Le Pen tells us. "He knows the daily problems of immigration, unemployment and sectarianism."

On radical Islam 'The threat is extremely grave'

Le Pen has tried to make the country forget her father's jokes about gas ovens, his comments about the Holocaust being a "detail" of history, and his praise for the second World War collaborationist leader Marshal Philippe Pétain. In her quest for respectability, she even expelled Jean-Marie from the party he founded.

The daughter apparently believed that by discarding anti-Semitism but retaining anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim rhetoric, she could win over large segments of the French electorate. She was not entirely wrong.

Now the party's history has returned to haunt Le Pen. On February 11th, France's interior ministry announced a 74 per cent increase in anti-Semitic acts last year.

This month alone, a tree planted in memory of Ilan Halimi, a Jewish youth who was kidnapped and tortured to death by a self-called "gang of barbarians", was cut down.

Someone daubed swastikas on Paris street art portraying the French stateswoman and Holocaust survivor Simone Weil. The philosopher Alain Finkielkraut, who is Jewish, was accosted in the street as a "dirty Zionist" by a man wearing the yellow

vest of the *gilets jaunes* protesters. In the hours before a Paris protest march against anti-Semitism on February 19th, it emerged that a Jewish cemetery in Alsace had been desecrated.

An 80-year-old Jewish woman called Mirielle Knoll was murdered, allegedly by a Muslim neighbour, in Paris in March 2018. The Jewish organisation Crif had opposed Le Pen's presence at a march in honour of Knoll. Le Pen went anyway, and was booed.

Le Pen also threatened to sue Agnès Buzyn, the health minister, who accused her of being "two-faced" on the issue and "running to Austria or Brussels with all the neo-Nazis every time she gets a chance".

Stanislas Guerini, the head of Macron's LREM party, said the RN "was built on anti-Semitism, on fascism".

"I expelled from the FN everyone who was even vaguely connected with racism or anti-Semitism," Le Pen protests plaintively in our interview. "All the murders of our Jewish compatriots have been done by Islamic fundamentalists."

Le Pen admits the RN has welcomed former members of the *Identitaires*, a far-right group who oppose immigration and Islam, and who first came to attention for occupying the construction site of the grand mosque in Poitiers in 2012.

Like many RN members, the *Identitaires* believe Renaud Camus's theory of the "great replacement" of the white European population by Arabs and Africans.

"The *Identitaires* have never been banned or convicted for violence," Le Pen says. "They're being prosecuted for a banner against migrants. I'm sorry, but I don't see what is reprehensible about that."

Le Pen seems so preoccupied by Europe, Macron and the *gilets jaunes* that she no longer launches into spontaneous tirades against radical Islam.

"The threat is extremely grave in France, because radical Islam prospered here," she says when I ask if Islamic State has been conquered. "It's an octopus with tentacles everywhere, in the [immigrant] neighbourhoods, the associations, the sports clubs. They're still financed from abroad, because no one has decided to eradicate radical Islam in this country."

On the EU 'It works against the people'

For a long time, the Le Pens were on the fringes of Europe. Other far-right populists shunned them because of their sulphurous reputation. If Marine Le Pen is cheerful and punchy these days, it is because she has found fellow travellers.

Last October, Le Pen travelled to Rome to see the Italian interior minister, head of the far-right Lega and Italian government strongman Matteo Salvini. A poster at RN headquarters shows Le Pen and Salvini side by side, before the French and Italian tricolours. "All over Europe, our ideas are coming to power," it says.

A poll conducted by the European Parliament this week concluded that Salvini's party is likely to win 32 per cent of the Italian vote and 27 seats in the European assembly in May, giving the Lega the largest portion of the vote in Italy and making it the second-largest party in Strasbourg, after the German centre-right CDU.

Salvini, Le Pen and the Polish Law and Justice party say they will join forces after the election.

The success of populist right-wing parties has changed Le Pen's strategy. She no longer wants a referendum on "Frexit". She would rather undermine the EU from the inside.

"We are no longer isolated at all on the European stage," Le Pen says. "Like the Lega in Italy, or the Swedish Democrats [a far-right party that is now the third largest

in Sweden], we can legitimately hope to change Europe from within... This path was opened to us by the rise of movements that defend the same ideas we do, some of whom are in government. That is the case in Hungary, Austria and Italy.

"It is extremely encouraging for us. We can turn our backs on all that made European peoples suffer, on policies that led to the economic and social failure of the EU. I summarise it this way: the European Union is dead. Long live Europe."

Le Pen bears particular animus towards the European Commission, whose members are nominated by national governments. She wants to replace it with "a simple technical secretariat" that would serve the European Council, as the heads of state and government are collectively known.

"The commission has appropriated powers far beyond those attributed to it in the treaties," Le Pen claims. "Particularly in matters of immigration. Why should the European Commission force a country to accept migrants, impose the conditions in which they are received, and determine the number of migrants? Where is that written, in what treaty?"

"One sees that the EU is adrift, that it has distanced itself from people, that it now works against people, after ignoring them in the past."

On the gilets jaunes 'I foretold this movement'

Le Pen maintains an ambiguous relationship with the *gilets jaunes* – or yellow vest – protesters, who have destabilised France over the past three months. On the one hand, she says she's not sure who they are. But she insists that the riots and vandalism that have characterised the movement are the work of the far-left.

"For years and years, every time a social movement has emerged the extreme left has infiltrated it and brought violence," Le Pen says. She accuses the government of "giving [far-left vandals] the benefit of total impunity so as to destroy the credibility of the *gilets jaunes* movement".

Several *gilets jaunes* have attempted to constitute lists for the European elections,

but each time they are attacked by their cohorts and give up. Polls indicate a *gilets jaunes* list could siphon votes from Le Pen's party. Others expect her to invite yellow vests to join RN lists.

Le Pen evades that question, but claims a form of parenthood over the movement. "It is the France of the forgotten, that I've been talking about for years, that has revolted," she says.

"When I said there was great suffering in the country, that many people could not live decently even though they were working, that it was unjust, that whole swathes of the country were abandoned, that the state did not care about them, I was foretelling this *gilets jaunes* movement."

On Macron 'He has brought division and chaos'

Le Pen speaks most scathingly of Macron, her nemesis in the 2017 presidential election. She called on him at the Elysée on February 6th, as part of Macron's consultations in the "great national debate" he has organised in the hope of ending the *gilets jaunes* crisis.

To hear Le Pen tell it, she read the riot act to Macron, telling him he must establish proportional representation, which would give the RN far more seats in the National Assembly, establish referendums by popular initiative, as Salvini and his populist allies have done in Italy, dissolve the legislature and hold new elections.

"I told him that he cannot pretend to be a new and different president, that he cannot claim to represent a new world, if he reacts exactly like the old one."

At the end of January, Manlio Di Stefano, an undersecretary for foreign affairs and a member of the populist Five Star Movement which shares power in Italy, said Macron "suffers from small penis syndrome".

Le Pen claims she was unaware of the insult, but then turns the question around to attack Macron.

"It seems to me that Macron fired the first shot, when he referred to the 'populist leprosy' of Italian, Polish and Hungarian leaders," Le Pen says. "These insults obviously created tension which pushed some

European leaders to raise their voices, including, and I regret it, unfortunate remarks about Emmanuel Macron.

"During the [presidential] campaign, Macron's supporters said it was him or chaos," Le Pen continues.

"Well, in 18 months he has brought total chaos to France. He has brought violence and division, and he's sown chaos and division in Europe too. This man takes chaos everywhere he goes."

Macron and Le Pen both claim to have blown apart the traditional left-right divide in French politics. They use the same vocabulary, but with different meanings. Both talk about globalisation. He is for, she is against. And nationalism. He is against, she is for. And sovereignty. She wants to "reclaim" national sovereignty for France. He wants sovereignty for Europe. The French need protection, Le Pen says. Since the *gilets jaunes* crisis, Macron has talked more about the protective powers of Europe.

The polls Not a spent force

France's two-round, majority voting system deprives the RN of significant representation in domestic politics. But the then Front National won the last, single-round European elections five years ago, with nearly 25 per cent of the vote, four percentage points ahead of the runners-up, the conservatives who now call themselves Les Républicains.

At the end of 2018, polls indicated that in May the RN would again win the European elections.

But an Ifop poll published on February 20th confirmed Macron has reversed the situation, at least for the time being. His LREM party is now in the lead, at 24 per cent of the vote, to 20 per cent for Le Pen's RN. Les Républicains are third at 10 per cent, the ecologists fourth at 9 per cent, and the far-left LFI has shrunk to 7.5 per cent.

So Le Pen is not a spent force after all. By winning one-third of the presidential vote in 2017, and by confronting Macron in the European poll, she can credibly call herself the leader of the French opposition. She may be a flea market Joan of Arc, but it's a role she relishes.

■ Top: Marine Le Pen apparently believed that by discarding anti-Semitism but retaining anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim rhetoric, she could win large segments of the French electorate. She wasn't wrong. Below: With Jordan Bardella, head of her party's list in May's European elections. Le Pen says he 'knows the daily problems of immigration, unemployment and sectarianism'

PHOTOGRAPHS: GETTY IMAGES

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Why should the European Commission force a country to accept migrants, impose the conditions in which they are received, and determine the number of migrants?

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TDs unimpressed by temporary withdrawal



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More money, more problems

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Opinion

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Notre Dame, symbol of Paris, destroyed



Lara Marlowe
in Paris

Onlookers crowded behind the police line on the quai Montebello, silent and gape-mouthed, as if watching a horror film or a funeral. Some wept.

Notre Dame, world treasure, symbol of Paris and France, was burning.

The news spread just before 7pm. Everywhere the clamour of sirens, smoke, ash falling on the boulevards. No one knew last night how the fire started, though there was speculation it was related to renovation work that covered much of the structure in scaffolding. A workman's cigarette? No one dared suggest arson, though the Paris police opened an investigation for an unspecified crime.

Notre Dame celebrated the 850th anniversary of its foundation in 2013. Oak timbers in the roof were 1,000 years old.

A rose window looked like a ball of flame. The north belfry glowed orange. A spokesman for the fire department said it was in danger of collapsing.

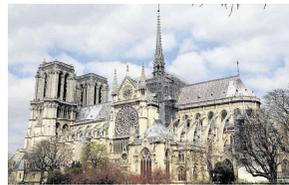
The spire at the centre of the Gothic cathedral burned like a torch, leaned to the right and collapsed into the sanctuary.

"The spire has fallen! The spire has fallen!" a child cried from a balcony. Crashing sounds as ancient timbers fell into the nave. Soon the entire peaked roof had disappeared, leaving the cathedral a flat, burning ship, curved at the stern. Flames lapped the delicate tracery of the balustrade where the roof had begun.

Solitary fireman

Four hundred firefighters tackled the fire, but the means seemed desultory. A solitary fireman in a crane-lifted pod sprayed water at the facade, but the water fell short of its target. The cathedral is 100m high; the range of a power hose is 30m.

Notre Dame saw the trial of Joan of Arc, the crowning of



Mary Stuart as Queen of France, the coronation of Napoleon. Victor Hugo made the cathedral the central character of his 1830 novel. One half expected to see his fictional hunchback, Quasimodo, scampering through the flames.

When Paris was liberated in 1944, Gen Charles de Gaulle attended Mass there, and eluded an assassin's bullet. The bells tolled for the victims of the 2015 and 2016 terrorist attacks.

"It breaks my heart," said Martine, a pensioner standing beside me at the police line. "When I was a child my grandmother took me on the bateaux mouches at night so we could see the stained glass lighted from the inside. She is our soul, even if one is not a believer."

Onlookers suggested the white smoke was wood burning, while yellow smoke came from melting lead. It took 200 years to build the now collapsed spire. By chance, 16 copper statues that were part of Viollet Le Duc's 19th-century restoration were removed from the roof last Thursday.

The spire collapses as smoke and flames engulf Notre Dame in Paris last night. Left, a photograph taken last month showing scaffolding around the spire, as part of the cathedral's restoration. PHOTOGRAPHS: (TOP) HENRY WOOD/EPH/PHOTOFEST; (BOTTOM) LUDOVIC MARIN/AP/GETTY

do you see? One. There is a large garden behind the cathedral where they could easily park fire engines. There are floating reservoirs in the Seine. Roissy and Orly airports have fire trucks with foam hoses. Why aren't they using tanker helicopters?"

A spokesman for the fire department said helicopters risked collapsing the vault of the cathedral.

"I went to the cathedral often. I am devastated," said Bernard (80), a retired chemical engineer. "At my age, I will never see it rebuilt. The only thing that comforts me is that I believe the whole world will help us rebuild it."

Macron pledges to rebuild cathedral: page 8

pod presents

BULMERS FORBIDDEN FRUIT FESTIVAL

ELBOW FIRST AID KIT

SPIRITUALIZED . RY X

JULIEN BAKER . SAINT SISTER

GLASSHOUSE PRESENTS HOLOCENE

BARNES COURTNEY . TOUCAN

PILLOW QUEENS . I HAVE A TRIBE

The Jamal Khashoggi I knew was a chameleon who lived astride fault lines



Lara Marlowe

Paris Correspondent

It's a strange feeling to learn a colleague you knew and liked died atrociously

I first met Jamal Khashoggi in January 1992, when we were both covering the military coup that prevented the Islamic Salvation Front winning parliamentary elections in Algeria.

In the coffee shop of the El Djazair Hotel, Jamal told me about an exciting young preacher who had helped to drive the Soviets out of Afghanistan and who was building a following across the Arab world. His name was Osama bin Laden. Jamal had interviewed him, and helped western correspondents meet bin Laden in Sudan and later in Afghanistan.

It would be easy to misunderstand Jamal's admiration for the man who would mastermind the 9/11 attacks. Our conversation took place seven years before al-Qaeda bombed US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, and nearly a decade before 9/11. When I met Jamal, bin Laden and the mujahideen he led in Afghanistan had not completed the transformation from CIA and Saudi proteges into the world's most wanted terrorists.

Bin Laden was incensed that the Saudi royal family had invited tens of thousands of "infidels" to the cradle of Islam to combat Saddam Hussein in 1991. Bin Laden's two main arguments—that the House of Saud was corrupt and unworthy to guard the holy places, and that the US played a destructive role in the Middle East—were immensely appealing to many Arabs, including Jamal.

After Jamal's death, the *New York Times* reported that he mourned the assassination of Bin Laden by US commandos

in Pakistan in 2011. "I collapsed crying a while ago, heartbroken for you, Abu Abdullah," Jamal tweeted, referring to bin Laden as "father of Abdullah". "You were beautiful and brave in those beautiful days in Afghanistan, before you surrendered to hatred and passion."

Helpful colleague

To me, Jamal Khashoggi was just a friendly, helpful colleague whom I was pleased to run into when reporting stories. I knew few people as skilled at explaining the mood of the Arab street and the intricacies of Arab politics. He somehow embodied more than half a century of Arab history: frustration and impotence over the fate of the Palestinians; the temptation of radicalism; the necessity of finding a modus vivendi with dictators; the search for an accommodation between religious faith and freedom.

The last time I saw Jamal, more than 20 years ago, we had lunch in Cairo with his Saudi wife, from whom he was divorced at the time of his death. She was a pretty, petite woman, dressed from head to

“I knew few people as skilled at explaining the mood of the Arab street and the intricacies of Arab politics

toe in a white headscarf and long-sleeved robe. We spoke briefly about their children, after which talk turned to Middle Eastern politics and she fell silent.

In Algiers, Jamal wore slacks and a jacket, as he did on October 2nd, when he entered the Saudi consulate in Istanbul. In Cairo he wore a long, white Saudi *dishdasha* and Arab headdress. It was as if he became more Arab, more Muslim, the closer he travelled to the heart of the Arab and Muslim world. He was a chameleon who impressed western friends with his easy-going manner and the English he mastered at Indiana State University. Muslims noticed his piety.

He was by no means a zealot. The *New York Times* published



■ **Jamal Khashoggi: a friendly, helpful colleague whom I was pleased to run into when reporting stories.**

PHOTOGRAPH: HASAN JAMALI/AP PHOTO

a photograph of him at a Thanksgiving dinner in Washington last year. There were a half dozen wine bottles on the table, yet Jamal tweeted the photo to his 1.7 million followers—something no Islamic fundamentalist would ever do.

Dangerous place

Jamal lived astride fault lines between East and West, and between establishment and radical Islam. Any seismologist will tell you that the fault line is

the most dangerous place to be. To advise Saudi princes, as Jamal did, was a plunge into shark-infested waters.

Jamal supported the Muslim Brotherhood, which was mercilessly repressed in Egypt and Syria over decades. The Saudi monarchy also supported the brotherhood, until it backed Marshal Abdel Fattah el-Sisi's overthrow of Egypt's democratically elected president, Mohamed Morsi, in 2013.

If Christian democracy was possible in Europe, why could Arabs not be ruled by Muslim democracy, Jamal asked. That may explain his friendship with Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who on Tuesday denounced Jamal's "savagely murder" by the Saudis. Er-

dogan constituted the greatest hope of Muslim democracy, until he too turned into a despot.

It's a strange feeling to learn that a colleague you knew and liked died atrociously. I have been surprised and heartened at the scale of the international reaction to Jamal's murder. One hopes that something good may come of it. Angela Merkel's announcement that she is halting all arms sales to Saudi Arabia is a positive sign.

The disgrace of the Saudi crown prince could foil Donald Trump's hopes of "regime change" in Iran. And it is just conceivable that Jamal's death may hasten the end of the disgraceful war that has claimed at least 10,000 lives in Yemen.

