

The extreme right and the french right wing politics essay



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In the recent years the attention of the whole world was drawn to the political situation of France. The highly developed country with one of the longest parliamentary traditions in the world is now ruled by a president from the right-wing party while showing great support for the far right party - Front National - that is the precedent for the whole European Union.

The purpose of this paper is to investigate if there is a link between far right and right wing parties in France. Here there will be highlighted the history, prerequisites of the rise of the parties, their characteristics and possible link between them.

Due to the restriction in size of this paper this article will deal only with the biggest and most important parties in France, i. e. Front National and Union for a Popular Movement.

France is a unique country in political terms as it was the first who came up with the division to right and left parties. This division was born out of the French Revolution when in 1789 national assembly which had to deal with the development of new institutions for transition from absolute to constitutional monarchy got split into two parts on the question of the power assigned to the king. The main question was about the veto right. It was that time when the supporters of granting the king with larger powers grouped on the right side of the hall and those who were against such an initiative grouped on the left. In such a way a three layers society was replaced with the bipolar structure that was formed in the times of origin of parliamentarism. The question about the role of the state in the field of private property and social

security has become the central element of the opposition between right and left for a long time.[1]

France has had a saturated political life for the last few decades, but one of the most important events was the 2007 elections with the victory of the Nicolas Sarkozy and his party " Union for a popular movement". This event was crucial as at this time the older generation of the rulers of the country was changed by the younger and the policy of Gaullism that determined the political image of the country during the second half of the 20th century was abandoned.[1]

The basis for the " Union for popular movement" (UPM) became the neo Gaullist right party " Rally for the Republic" created by Jean Chirac in 1976 as well as such parties as the " Union for French Democracy" and the " party of liberal democrats" that were numerous and had a heavy ideological impact on the UPM. The prerequisites for the union of " Rally for the Republic" and " the Union for French Democracy" appeared in 1980th when both parties had the almost the same ideology. Both parties had moderate liberal views in the sphere of economics and supported the West European integration. However, in the following years the merging of the parties did not occur mostly due to the ambitions of their leaders. Nevertheless, situation changed after the first round of 2002 elections when together with Jacques Chirac the leader of far right wing party " Front National" Jean-Marie Le Pen went to the second round. Such a situation was an evidence of a crisis of a French politics and in 2002 on the April 23 J. Chirac announced the decision of creating " the Union for the Presidential Majority". In the second round of the presidential elections, the left wing parties were forced to

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support Chirac as the “ lesser evil” compared to Le Pen and obviously, J. Chirac gained 82% of the votes. After the victory in the national Assembly, “ Union for the Presidential Majority” was renamed into “ The union for the popular movement”.[1]

In the first years of its existence, party was not concentrated on the creation of innovative proposition as it was focused on the struggle for power in the left wing. Thou J. Chirac had a few people in mind as his heirs all of them failed and in this time and N. Sarkozy came into play. Thou Nikolas Sarkozy said that it was E. Balladur who assisted him; it is considered that it was with the help of J. Chirac that N. Sarkozy was able to come into the “ big politics”.

[2]

In 2002, N. Sarkozy joined the J. Chirac’s team and took the position of the minister of internal affairs. Due to his successes in dealing with crime and illegal immigration, he quickly gained popularity. In 2004 when party lost the regional elections, it became clear that party needs strong and enthusiastic leader with fresh ideas. This was the time when N. Sarkozy became the president of the UPM.

As a new president, he took the course of enlargement of his party by recruiting new members. In 3 years, from 2004 until 2007, the number of the members of the party increased from 111, 000 to 337, 000 people and it such a way UPM became the most numerous party in France. So, no wonder that it was personality of N. Sarkozy that attracted people. As the enlargement occurred mostly due to the new leader, he had no problem taking the party under his control.

N. Sarkozy was elected candidate for the president elections from UPM in January 2007 with the support of 98% of the voters. He also gained support of his opponents in the right wing, as received approval from J. Chirac in such a way all the important figures of the right wing showed their support to N. Sarkozy

The party program for the 2007-2012 was developed in such a way that though it was democratic the initiatives came from N. Sarkozy that yet again proved his unquestioned leadership in the party. In this new party program the essential point missed, i. e. the question of the external policy of the EU. J. Chirac was the supporter of the Charles de Gaulle multi-oriented course of the external policy, and N. Sarkozy in his term advocated for the closer cooperation with NATO and the USA.

In the sphere of the economics, liberal ideas were set forward like taxes cuts, lifting up certain unnecessary restrictions on the labor market. However, those liberal ideas were combined with the principles of the social oriented model of country's development and active involvement of the state. " Union for a popular movement" has also supported the labor immigration, but opposed the " family" immigration.

During his presidential campaign, N. Sarkozy criticized the excessive liberalization of the trade but in the same time, as it was state only contributed to the liberalization. Such statements were made to gain support of the working layer of the society that supported Front National. Besides that, Sarkozy incorporated the promises of Jean-Marie Le Pen to fight the crime among immigrants. Those times it was possible to hear from him,

something like “ Those who doesn’t like France has only one way out and that is out of France”. In general, the program of the UPM touched important issues and for the voters was somewhat a compromise to other parties, as it tried to please rich and poor layers of the society.

Therefore, it was not a surprise when N. Sarkozy gained a clear victory in 2007 president elections. To his victory contributed the party program, the integrity of the right wing and lack of the alternative, as his opponent in the second round Marie-Segolene Royal did not was not so popular and did not have such a charisma as N. Sarkozy had.

Having come to the power N. Sarkozy showed unexpected results in external policy that resulted in the reintegration with NATO. However, those successes can be prescribed to the reluctance of the public in forming of the external policy due to the existence of more important issues, such as immigration and economical decrease.

Thou, lately party has shown some weakness that resulted in the decrease of the popular support it is still the biggest party in France and has all chances of winning the 2012 president elections. The only “ threat” to its victory can pose Front National with its new charismatic leader, daughter of Jean-Marie Le Pen, Marine Le Pen. Other political forces are simply unable to make a competition to the UPM due to the internal problems.[III]

Another significant player on the political arena of France is “ Front national” which was founded in 1972 out of the movement “ New Order”. The leader of the party is Jean - Marie Le Pen. The history of the Front National is

particularly interesting as until 1984, it was in the constant political oblivion, <https://assignbuster.com/the-extreme-right-and-the-french-right-wing-politics-essay/>

but after that year on every election it scored not less than 10% of the votes, that is a huge success for a far right party. The greatest victory for Front National and its leader was the 2002 president elections when J. M. Le Pen managed to come to the second round. It was a shock for the political community, so in order not to let far right party to come to the power Le Pen opponents had to unite.

The first program was adopted in 1972 and created under the influence of the „ national revolutionist” and was a compromise between conservatism and revolution nationalist. The general principles of the programs were directed at the protection of small trade and private property, at the fight with big business and at the creation of the new ideological path, which would differ from Marxism and liberalism.[IV]

What concerns ideology, Front National is clearly far right party, though in his own words J. M. Le Pen calls himself “ neither left nor right, but French”.[V]

The program of the party should be described in more details, as it will clearly show that such vector appeals to the electorate, though it hardly can be implemented in the real politics. To begin with, Front National says that the first that should be done is to exit the Euro zone and NATO and to take an independent position in decision making on the questions of foreign policy. Then follows the restriction of the immigration including stopping immigration from non-European countries and tighten the requirements for granting French citizenship. Front National insists on the return to the traditional values of the society, like saving French culture, cherishing big

families and prohibiting abortions. In addition, they insist that on the position of protectionism towards French small business.[VI]

In the first program there was proposed the solution for the immigration problem i. e. to adopt the most radical means to stop the flow of the immigrants from the third world countries that posed threat to the identity of French people. However, in the mid 70th the immigration problem was not so acute so the first program was not supported by the masses.

In 1974, Le Pen ran for president for the first time and got only 0. 7% of votes, which was a great failure and meant that the political agenda had to be changed from the extremist and fascist one. Therefore, the party started to create the image of the respectable and moderate party.

However, at first the adoption by the FN of the new direction did not have any effect on votes. Surprisingly it was quite opposite that in the following years i. e. 1978-1981 is considered to be the „ unluckiest» years for the party. For example in 1978 on the national assembly, voting Le Pen got only 0. 29 of votes. In that time it seemed that this party is doomed for the oblivion but in following years it proved quite opposite despite the prognoses.

To the rise of FN contributed crises in the political and economical sphere, as well as what was called the “ identity crises”.

In that time, neither left nor right could deal with the problems, which generally affected the quality of life in France. Disappointment in the policy of the left government and deep crises of the political system has

contributed to the support by masses of the extreme right parties and especially to the FN. It was the time when the party fulfilled its rows with the supporters of the left-wing parties. The right also failed and lost support of the people as could not adopt tougher approach towards immigration problem.

The economical crisis in 1979 with the high rate of unemployment created the opportunity for FN to win the votes of the masses. People were insecure of the jobs and financial position and in this time, the solution for the immigration problem seemed like a way out. Another factor is that in the economy recession period the crime rate increases and FN also benefited from blaming the immigrants.

The root of the Front National popularity is directly connected with the problems with which France has confronted and the people who vote for the party. For example, in 1980th, the supporters of the Front National program were mostly people with secondary education and the percentage of the people with higher education was low. In 1990th a new tendency appeared. In that time, only people with elementary education or with no education at all continued to support the party. For example in 1997 of all the voters, 20% did not have secondary education.[VII] Such an idea of forming its electorate can be explained in a way that it is much easier to convince people that all the problems lie are connected to the immigration, as those people can't comprehend the full scale picture where economy and foreign policy is involved. It is also proven that racism and xenophobia directly connected to the level of education of the person[VIII]

In addition, the last but not least is the France's Identity crises. It has thought to be the most important factor, which contributed to the rise of FN. In that time in France, there were many Muslim immigrants from northern Africa. The people were not confident about the future of France in the era of globalization. No wonder that in those times xenophobia became increasingly pronounced for the reasons that have roots in history and culture. FN opposed the construction of mosques in French cities and held the course of non-islamization in general.

Today FN constitutes a party that has huge support among the population of France and that can change the situation in the country. For example among the initiatives of the party was the " headscarf ban" that is very controversies. Thou it is doubtful that in any other European country it is possible to introduce such a radical towards minorities law.

According to the available official information and overlooking the available literature, (sources in English and Russian, as well as translations from French were available) it is problematic to determine if it was and is a connection between the right wing and far right parties. Thou it is not clear what connections do the parties and their members have between each other, it is obvious that in different periods both parties benefited from using opponents' failures. That is using by N. Sarkozy the slogans and ideas of Front National to win the votes of a certain group of the electorate and instead Front National used the failures of the right and left wing parties and won support and popularity for the next two decades. Thou, the connections are not obvious; they are likely as parties have common ideological features.