



ORIGINAL PAPER

The Poster Child for the Radical Right Ascent: *Rassemblement National* and the 2024 European Elections

Luiza-Maria Filimon¹⁾

Abstract:

In the three elections cycles for the European Parliament (EP) organized between 2014 and 2024, *Rassemblement National* (National Rally) (RN) has consistently placed in the first place, each time comfortably receiving more than 20% of the votes (in 2024, even crossing the 30% threshold). These results, in turn, enabled it to claim the most numbers of seats in the EP from those apportioned to France. RN's victory in the 2014 European elections – while not singular – marked the beginning of a radical right trend that would come to dominate European politics for the next decade. While to an extent, RN's performance can be attributed to the second order nature of the European elections, the consistency of the results coupled with the broader radical right trend at the European level are indicative of the fact that European elections are turning into critical contests that allow these parties to strive and challenge the mainstream status quo in order to advance their political agenda in the national arena. The present article analyses the political manifesto that RN adopted for the 2024 EP election, with the research providing a qualitative framework to identify and categorize the prevalent themes used by RN during the electoral campaign, in order to assess the extent to which the party stayed within the established right-wing patterns rooted in Euroscepticism and anti-immigration, or, on the contrary, whether, it had moderated its stances in order to appeal to a broader electorate.

Keywords: *European elections, European Parliament, political manifesto, radical right parties, Rassemblement National.*

¹⁾ Assistant Professor, PhD, “Ovidius” University of Constanta, Faculty of History and Political Sciences, Constanta, Romania, Phone: 0040724108285, Email: luiza.filimon@365.univ-ovidius.ro. <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7916-0562>.

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Introduction

Over the last decade, the claim that radical right parties have an uphill battle to establish themselves as serious electoral contenders has been steadily contested by their results in European elections. The case of *Rassemblement National* (RN, Eng. trans.: National Rally) – the perennial fringe party in French politics (Bell, 2017; Hainsworth, 2004; Marcus, 1995; Fysh & Wolfreys, 1992) – is notable because for the last three European electoral cycles (2014, 2019, 2024), the party has emerged not just as a viable challenger, but, as a matter of fact, it has become the party to beat in this type of election. An argument can be made that these results are a by-product of the European elections' second order character (Wondreys, 2023; Filimon, 2016) which fosters uncanny electoral behaviors that would not be otherwise replicated in national elections. However, what is striking in this case, is the consistency with which RN has dominated the European electoral contest over a decade: while there was an ebb in the vote share from 2019 compared to 2014 (– 1.52%), the number of votes increased (+ 565,478), and, in 2024, RN's gained near ten percentage points (+ 8.03%) relative to 2019, crossing the psychological threshold of 30% in voters' support (France Politique (n.d.); Guillou, 2024).

Moreover, due to a series of unforced errors, precipitated by President Macron's decision to dissolve the National Assembly and call for immediate snap elections in the aftermath of the 2024 European elections, RN – which until then had remained an unpalatable option at the national level, was not only able to replicate the level of support from the European elections, but, once again it improved its score. Receiving over ten million in both rounds of the legislative elections, RN's results surpassed even the gains from the European elections, by over two million votes (+ 2,881,975 in the first round / + 2,343,105 in the second round, compared to the European elections) (see Table no. 1). RN would be shut out from the government negotiations, the centre-right parties erecting a fragile *cordon sanitaire* that also excluded the winners of the elections, the left-wing coalition *Nouveau Front Populaire* (Eng. trans.: New Popular Front). The emerging minority government would be short-lived – arguably, the shortest-lived since the establishment of the Fifth Republic in 1958 (Breteau, 2024). Per the French constitution, which affirms that the Assembly cannot be dissolved within one year from the previous elections, the earliest date when elections can be convened again would be in the summer of 2025. In light of these results, we can posit that the national elections' proximity to the European ones created a spillover effect and enabled RN to build on the momentum accumulated from the European elections, for which the RN average voter assigns first order significance since it is an arena that their party dominates in French politics.

Table no. 1: *Rassemblement National's* Results in the 2024 European and National Assembly Elections

2024 Elections Results in France							
European Elections	Vote Share	1 st Rd. of Legislative Election	Vote Share	+ / –	2 nd Rd. of Legislative Election	Vote Share	+ / –
7,765,939	31.37%	10,647,914	33.2%	+ 2,881,975	10,110,079	37.1%	+ 2,343,105

The present article analyses the messages disseminated throughout the campaign for the European elections by RN, with a focus on RN's political manifesto as a primary

source of research. Using textual analysis to extract the main topics addressed, the study assesses how the party frames certain issues (the European Union, migration, economy) on a radical – moderate axis, seeking to determine whether the party upholds a narrative premised on traditional radical rhetorical framings or whether it moderates its rhetoric to broaden its electoral appeal. The analysis finds that RN's electoral narrative simultaneously both conceals and reveals a radical dynamic in order to expand the voting pool without alienating the traditional RN/FN voters. In subsidiary, the article also reviews the topics addressed in the manifesto launched by Patriots for Europe for the 2024 European elections, the Euro-group of which RN was a member of, in order to assess whether there exists an overlap between the issues identified or as concerns the courses of actions proposed to maximize the electoral potential of these actors

Overview of RN's Electoral Evolution in European Politics

From a historical perspective, the evolution of RN's performances in the European elections is noteworthy: its participation, under the initial *Front National* (FN, Eng. trans.: National Front) designation, began with the second election for the European Parliament (EP) in 1984, when it was the last party to cross the electoral threshold, occupying the fourth place, though notably, not with an insignificant margin of the vote share (10.95%). The score obtained in the 1984 European elections marked a turning point in the party's political evolution because it came after a series of consecutive electoral defeats between 1973 and 1981: not only did FN fail to enter the National Assembly, but it did not even qualify for the second round in the either of the elections from 1973, 1978, and 1981, with the scores worsening from one election to the other (0.5% in 1973; 0.3% in 1987; 0.2% in 1981). In the presidential elections from 1974, the party's founder, Jean-Marie Le Pen came in the seventh place, obtaining 0.75% of the votes and under 200.000 votes, while in the elections from 1981, Le Pen was unable to obtain the 500 sponsorship signatures mandated by the electoral law and therefore failed even to meet the criteria required to have his name placed on the voting ballot (DeClair, 1999, 44).

As can be seen from Table no. 2, the four decades in which RN participated in European elections can be grouped under three cycles, each comprised of three sets of European elections, where we can discern that the party's performance ebbs and flows, registering consistently high or low scores during a cycle (the first cycle, marking the party's political establishment, covers the elections from 1984, 1989, and 1994; the second one, characterized by degrowth, contains the elections from 1999, 2004 and 2009; while the third cycle, of resurgence, encompasses the elections from 2014, 2019, and 2024).

This last cycle ushers in the era of respectable politics for European radical parties (McDonnell & Werner, 2020; McDonnell & Werner, 2017), which the party marks with a rebrand in June 2018. In a move to peel off its extremist past and under the spirit of *dédiabolisation* (Eng. trans.: de-demonization), the party's name changes from *Front National* to that of *Rassemblement National*. As testament to FN's toxic brand, Marine Le Pen justified the party's renaming on the basis that "The National Front name carries an epic and glorious history that no one should deny. But you know, for many French people, it is a psychological blockage. For some it's a brake on joining us or voting" (McNicoll, 2018). Erwan Lecœur posits that "the aim is to give the impression that it is renovating the FN to open it up to new alliances in order to gain power" (Le Monde, 2018).

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Table no. 2: *Front National / Rassemblement National's* Performance in European Elections (1984-2024). Source: France Politique, “Élections européennes (1984-2024)”, <https://www.france-politique.fr/elections-europeennes.htm>.

No.	Year	European Elections	Placemen t	Vote Share	+ / – %	No. of votes	EP Seat s	Gaine d/ Lost Seats
1.	1984	Second EP	4 th place	10.95%	new	2,210,334	10	new
2.	1989	Third EP	3 rd place	11.73%	+ 0.78%	2,129,668	10	0
3.	1994	Fourth EP	5 th place	10.52%	– 1.21%	2,050,086	11	+ 1
4.	1999	Fifth EP	8 th place	5.70%	– 4.82%	1,005,113	5	– 6
5.	2004	Sixth EP	4 th place	9.81%	+ 4.11 %	1,684,792	7	+ 2
6.	2009	Seventh EP	6 th place	6.30%	– 3.51%	1,091,691	3	– 4
7.	2014	Eighth EP	1 st place	24.86 %	+ 18.56%	4,712,461	24	+ 21
8.	2019	Ninth EP*	1 st place	23.34 %	– 1.52%	5,286,939	23	– 1
9.	2024	Tenth EP	1 st place	31.37%	+ 8.03%	7,765,939	30	+ 7

*After 2018, Front National adopted the name *Rassemblement National*

After the 2024 European elections, RN was the leading party by numbers of MEPs in the radical right and Eurosceptic Patriots for Europe (Pfe) group, providing more than a third of the 86 MEPs that form the group. At a distance, the following four places by number of MEPS are occupied by Hungary’s *Fidesz* (10 MEPs); Italy’s *Lega* (8 MEPs), Czech Republic’s ANO 2011 (7 MEPs) and tied for fifth place, Austria’s *Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs* (FPÖ) and Spain’s Vox (6 MEPs). With the exception of RN and Vox, all the other parties have been in government at some point between 2014 and 2024, *Fidesz*’s being the most notable case, establishing itself as the ruling party in Hungary at even earlier point, after the 2010 elections for the national assembly. This state of affairs where nominally radical right parties that espouse messages rooted in intolerance and discrimination that are antithetical to the principles of liberal democracy and EU’s ideal of *unity in diversity*, is indicative of a broader illiberal trend that has become pervasive throughout Europe and which is not symptomatic only in relation to European elections and Eurosceptic attitudes, but it can creep in into national politics as well with profound implications for the stability of the state (see the case of Romania in the aftermath of the cancelled presidential elections from 2024).

In the current EP, Pfe, with a share of 12% of the MEPs, is the third largest group after the European People’s Party (EPP) and the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (S&D). While, at first glance, the percentage might seem modest and uncompetitive, Pfe’s position needs to be analysed in relation to the other two right-wing groups that boast radical and even extremist members, namely, the European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) – which can be ascribed a “moderate” radical bent – and the Europe of Sovereign Nations (ESN) which swings more ultranationalist and where *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD) is the most notable presence and with 14 MEPs, the largest party in the group.

Pfe is the third iteration of a radical group that has been spearheaded by RN’s previous leader, Marine Le Pen, after the 2014 European elections, under the name *Europe of Nations and Freedom*, and which, after 2019, was reinstituted as the *Identity and Democracy* group. In all the variations enumerated, RN was the main nodal point, paving

the way for other kindred parties to follow. This marks a major shift in the dynamic of radical parties, since before the 2014 European elections, as McDonnell and Werner observe, other radical right parties such as “[the] Dutch *Partij voor de Vrijheid* (PVV – Party for Freedom), the Italian *Lega Nord* (LN – Northern League), and the Austrian *Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs* (FPÖ – Austrian Freedom Party) had disavowed any similarities to the French Front National” (McDonnell & Werner, 2020: 127-128).

Research Framework

The research focuses on the textual analysis of RN’s campaign manifesto based on the premise that political campaigns have proven to significantly impact the voters who are receptive to this form of political communication (Benoit, 2017: 4). Relative to their salience in European elections and the voters’ attitudes, three key issues are highlighted: direction of the European Union, the migration issue, and the need to *take back control* of the economy. The article also analyses the manifesto of the Patriots for Europe – the political family which RN is a member of – reviewing how these issues are addressed by the party and the group, from both an electoral and policy position.

While various factors influence electoral behavior (Fisher et al., eds., 2018; Bahnsen, Gschwend, & Stotzer, 2020; Habersack, 2024), electoral manifestos provide an overview of the ideology and policy directions, representing a distillation of the party agenda during an electoral cycle. According to Daniela Braun, “the documents represent the collective internal expression of the policy preferences of political parties” (Braun, 2023: 439). In identifying how the issues are framed, the research approach highlights to what extent the radical rhetoric is present in the construction of these manifestos or whether it is coded in order to appeal to a wider audience.

While a broader framework for discourse analysis could encompass the statements of the candidates, interviews and debates, the present analysis focuses on the deconstruction of the manifesto on account that the *objectivity* of the data included in these documents surpasses that of other sources. In this sense, Braun’s observation is once again relevant, since the issues expressed in the manifesto tend to find a correspondent in the policies stances promoted by the party once elected. Based on previous RN’s participations in European elections, the relation between RN’s Euromanifestos and the party’s stance in the Eurogroups it helped established during 2014, 2019, and 2024, is identifiable and, its impact quantifiable.

The Patriots for Europe’s Manifesto: Nations Lead the Way

At less than 550 words, PpE’s manifesto extols the virtues of nations which find themselves at a crossroad between continuing on the path to create a “European central state” or returning to their sovereignist roots. In setting up this binary framework, the document argues that the current actors in the EU are no longer divided along ideological lines, but split between the *Centralists* (or Federalists) and the *Patriots* and *Sovereignists* – the former are in a favor of a European *superstate*, the latter want to safeguard the Europe of Nations. The document states that the EU – “once a dream project” – has strayed from its original purpose, turning against the very Europeans it purports to represents and acting contrary to the interests of nations. Adopting an Eurosceptic tone, the manifesto portrays European institutions as “largely unknown” to the electorate and “removed from the European citizens, warning in a conspiratorial manner that these institutions in collaboration with a large swath of non-state actors (“globalist forces”) intend “to replace nations” (Patriots for Europe – PpE, 2024).

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PfE argues that European policy should be subordinated to the nations and the people of Europe and for this purpose, it outlines the profile of a sovereignist Europe based on a set of characteristics that European nations have or should endeavor towards: “strong, proud and independent”; “sovereign and unwavering”; embracing their European identity – product of “Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian heritage” – while cherishing diversity; “committed to peace”, but prepared to defend themselves from any threat; safeguarding “real freedoms, fundamental rights and human dignity”; vectors of innovation and excellence – “competitive, productive, efficient” (PfE, 2024). This is a Europe of Europeans that must protect its citizens from various types of threats and “preserve its cultural identity” (PfE, 2024). For this purpose, it should be able to defend its borders and prevent illegal migration.

In relation to the EU, this Europe is interconnected through accountable institutions whose “legitimacy is rooted in nations”; this Europe “respects its own mandate and rules”, “abides by the principle of subsidiarity and proportionality”, and relinquishes its hold on sovereignty; this Europe empowers nations, recognizing their right to pursue an independent foreign policy, unconstrained by shared commitments since diplomacy and foreign policy are inextricably linked to the exercise of sovereignty (PfE, 2024). In other words, PfE’s vision for the EU is that of a classical intergovernmental organization, removed from any federalist pretense.

***Rassemblement National*’s Manifesto for the 2024 European Elections: Between Radical Patterns and Moderate Outliers?**

Under the slogan *La France revient, l’Europe revit* (Eng. trans.: “France returns, Europe lives again”), RN’s manifesto was framed as a project for a Europe of Nations with the European elections providing an opportunity for historic change (“*basculément historique*”) against what it referred to as “a centralized European superstate” (Rassemblement National (RN), 2024: 2). This *super-État* had failed to adequately respond to the needs of the citizens, while, with each major crisis, it derived more and more power to the detriment of state sovereignty (“*s’arroger des compétences supplémentaires au détriment de la souveraineté des États*”) (RN, 2024: 2). The sovereignty of the state and of the people is a core theme of the manifesto, further referenced with an indirect callback to the Brexit campaign slogan – *Take back control*: “the people have the power to take back control of their destiny” (“*les peuples ont le pouvoir de reprendre leur destin en main*”) (RN, 2024: 2).

RN projected itself as the flagbearer of nations united by the pursuit of power, without which nothing could be accomplished, neither on issues of defense, nor on socio-economic matters. For this purpose, the manifesto invoked the mythical figure of de Gaulle to legitimate these claims. Relevant for the present analysis is how RN framed its vision of the European project, despite the Eurosceptic cues interspersed throughout the document. In this sense, RN’s aim is not dismantle the EU, but to reshape it according to a Gaullist-inspired organization (Eng. trans: “*une organisation qui soit pour elle un multiplicateur de puissance*”; Eng. trans: “an organization that is for it a power multiplier”) (RN, 2024: 2). For this purpose, RN advanced three policy axes that would protect, respect the voice of the people and produce the tools to “defend both the lifestyles and standard of living”, in order to make them resilient to the challenges posed by the 21st century (RN, 2024: 2). These directions of actions are presented in detail under sections titled: *A Europe that Protects*; *A Europe that Produces*; *A Europe that Respects*. Each, in

turn, is split into multiple subpoints and supported by clearly-defined measures and policy frameworks.

The manifesto was conceived around a traffic light strategy designed to take back control by rebooting the European framework using the EP as the conduit through which to implement the outlined roadmap (“*La stratégie tricolore... Au Parlement européen, ... constitue notre feuille de route*”) (RN, 2024: 5). The strategy was intended to achieve goals that could be described as reasonable from an ordinary voter’s point of view, with the tone being patriotic, but not outlandishly nationalistic: “put Europe in the service of the people, defend France’s interests, and protect the French people” (RN, 2024: 5). The traffic light colors were used to identify and delimitate between different areas of cooperation:

- *green* referred to the areas of cooperation that RN would support: industrial and technical cooperation, particularly on artificial intelligence; development of scientific exchanges; Erasmus mobilities; pooling material resources for civil protection (RN, 2024: 5);
- *orange* referred to the areas of cooperation that needed to be renegotiated: the Schengen Area, provided that free movement benefited exclusively nationals of Member States (MS); the Frontex agency, provided that it protected European borders and was authorized to return illegal migrants; the single market, provided that fair competition was restored (RN, 2024: 5);
- *red* referred to the areas of cooperation that would be rejected on account of being contrary to French interests: European diplomacy and defense; the issue of France’s nuclear deterrent; EU management of immigration within MS; European interference in matters of energy sovereignty; all forms of EU enlargement; the strengthening of the Commission’s powers; the issuance of debt and the creation of taxes by Brussels; the elimination of the states’ right of veto within the Council (RN, 2024: 5).

After laying out the tricolor strategy, the manifesto presented RN’s accomplishments in the ninth EP, outlining six areas in which the party took a stand in European affairs. These areas can be divided into three main topics: a) RN as an opposition party; b) RN as an (pro)-active party; c) RN as a party that defends French identity and the values of civilization. In the first case, the party portrayed itself as being against European policies that would have a deleterious effect on France: the only French party that opposed the Migration Pact and the Green Deal, the increase of French contributions to the EU budget, the creation of European taxes, or future enlargements.

Secondly, RN showcased its activity, signaling the extent of the party’s institutionalization in the EP (“nearly 14,000 amendments tabled on more than a thousand texts and 1,700 interpellations from the Commission, the National Rally deputies made a significant contribution to parliamentary activity to defend France and the French people”) (RN, 2024: 6-7). The leader of the party, Jordan Bardella, was credited with having an attendance record of 94% in plenary sessions. The party characterized its activity as “constructive opposition”, noting that it did not reject policies that could benefit the French people (for example, in issues concerning police and judicial cooperation, or even, battery recycling). On the issue of RN’s institutionalization, we can mention that the document cites Fabrice Leggeri – who, from 2015 to 2022, was Director of Frontex – and who was the third candidate on RN’s lists for the 2024 European elections.

Thirdly, RN described the ideological breakthroughs it achieved despite being in opposition both at the European and national level, by normalizing discussions on issues

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such as “sovereignty, reindustrialization, fair competition, pragmatic monetary policy, or migration control” (RN, 2024: 6-7). On the topic of national identity and values, RN denounced Brussels’ “woke excesses” (“*dérives wokes*”) and singled out the threat posed by Islamism which the European project was unable and unwilling to address (“*Au Parlement européen, ils ont dénoncé l’entrisme de l’islamisme*”) (RN, 2024: 6-7).

On the topic of the economy, RN’s vision for *Europe that Protects* focuses on the trade and competition sectors, emphasizing the issues affecting the single market, stemming, on the one hand, from the successive waves of enlargement, and, on the other, from opening the single market to the rest of the world (“*Notre économie est exposée à une concurrence déloyale sauvage*”) (RN, 2024: 8). Though the party describes itself as a “fervent promoter of economic patriotism”, it does so in a manner that also focuses on the betterment of Europe – a Europe of nations that is strengthened by fair competition and reciprocity. In other words, it does not advocate for a break with Europe or a decoupling of France from the EU.

Policy recommendations are further detailed in the section on *Europe that Produces* where it criticizes the European Commission for adopting measures in the industry, agriculture, and energy sectors rooted in a *punitive ecology* as expressed through the Green Deal, seen as responsible for the decline of the European economy. Consequently, RN proposes that in order to restore France’s economic prosperity and preserve the French social model, they would restore full sovereign control over policy areas where the MS had previously ceded control. Consequently, the party states that France should have energy sovereignty and become a *paradis énergétique*. Two directions of action are identified: at the state level – where RN advocates for cuts in the energy bill, safeguards of the French electricity mix, and ecological diplomacy – and in the business sector – where it proposes a policy of debureaucratization to foster France’s competitive realignment with Europe through a “Buy French or European” framework agreement (RN, 2024: 10-11). The recommendations have a technocratic quality, with specific measures presented in detail that would draw the attention of an informed public, rather than appeal to low information voters.

If the economic setting allows RN to couch Eurosceptic right-wing tropes into a technical, Euro-pragmatic argument (see for example: “the banning European aid that finances relocations within the single market”) (RN, 2024: 8), where security is concerned, the rhetorical coding is less stable and a racialized dynamic cannot be concealed altogether. Though it is shrouded in an appeal to security, the framing calls back to more traditional RN tropes by conflating mass immigration (“existential threat to European nations” – “*une menace existentielle pour les nations européennes*”) with great replacement dog-whistles (“major demographic shifts”) and the Islamist threat (RN, 2024: 9). At the same time, the European Commission and President Macron are criticized for being too lenient on migration, the manifesto stating that MS risk to be fined if they oppose EU migration distribution schemes (for a comprehensive counterpoint, see ENAR, 2023; Spencer & Triandafyllidou, eds., 2020). In this way, RN is securitizing French and European identity by advancing a security framework designed to ensure the historical continuity of France and Europe. As concerns the European policy on migration, the party proposes “*un tournant de fermeté en matière migratoire*” (Eng. trans.: “hard turn on migration”) which is operationalized through seven policy recommendations:

- establish a dual French and European border: control national borders, set up a border with the outside, allow Frontex to return illegal migrants;
- limit free movement within the Schengen Area only to nationals of MS;

- eliminate public subsidies to pro-migrant NGOs, combat human trafficking, and prosecute aid for illegal immigration;
- organize the processing of asylum applications in the embassies and consulates of countries of origin to prevent immigration from becoming a fait accompli;
- expel illegal immigrants, Islamists, and foreign criminals;
- make development aid paid to third countries conditional on keeping populations in their countries of origin and / or ensuring that their nationals will be returned to the countries of origin;
- organize a referendum in France to reaffirm the primacy of the French Constitution in matters of immigration (RN, 2024: 9).

We can see how the stereotype of migration as *une menace existentielle* was reconfigured through RN's employed discursive practices into a broad spectrum of options that could resonate with diverse types of voters, outside the party's electoral pool, all the more so, when coupled with an electorate dissatisfied with the performance of President Macron (Maillard, 2024).

Finally, as regards the future of the EU, the section on *Europe that Respects* envisages an intergovernmental alternative, instead of the "centralized European state" overseen by the technocratic European Commission where the power of the states is diluted and the interests of the people are impacted in a negative way. RN's proposes a European Alliance of Nations, described as "a cooperative organization serving the people, respectful of democracy and national sovereignty" (RN, 2024: 12). This part of the manifesto can be characterized as Eurosceptic, RN's criticizing the decision-making process of the EU, accusing the Commission of taking advantage of the various crises impacting Europe, to acquire more and more prerogatives that immiserate the people ("*Quand Bruxelles décide, les Français subissent.*") (RN, 2024: 12). Furthermore, states that exercise their sovereignty risk to be sanctioned by the Commission.

In this context, RN's proposal is not to dismantle the EU, but to revise the European treaties in order to rebuild the EU as a Europe of nations – an institutional organization where states are the main actors and where the Commission is transformed into a "General Secretariat of the Council without decision-making power or legislative initiative" (RN, 2024: 12). As observed throughout the document, RN integrates state-centered positions ("superiority of the French Constitution over European [...] jurisdictions"; legislative initiative, exclusive to the Council; states' right of veto, including on trade issues); identitarian stances ("defend and promote European civilization by opposing the unravelling of our history, our cultures, and our values, and rejecting Turkey's accession to the EU"); with EU law principles ("apply the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality so that all decisions are taken as closely as possible to the people"); and international standards ("adoption of the Declaration of the Rights of Peoples and Nations, an additional tool in international law to protect the sovereignty of nations, human freedoms, the diversity of civilizations, [...], and to assist in the peaceful resolution of conflicts") (RN, 2024: 12).

On the technocratic dimension, the manifesto identifies a secondary dimension, needed to develop the *Europe that Respects*, based in projects and cooperation. Along with cooperation on border issues and industrial policy, scientific innovation is paramount to ensure the prosperity of Europe, and this can be achieved by developing cohesive tailor-made projects adapted to each country's needs ("*refaire de l'Europe une opportunité plutôt qu'un frein, un pôle d'excellence qui rayonne et relève les enjeux technologiques, écologiques ou migratoires de demain*"; Eng. trans.: "make Europe an opportunity rather

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than a hindrance, a center of excellence that shines and addresses the technological, ecological, and migratory challenges of tomorrow”) (RN, 2024: 13). A separate section is dedicated to artificial intelligence which is linked to European technological independence and whose applications range from the implementation of a sovereign European cloud to bridging strategic dependencies in the defense sector (RN, 2024: 16).

The manifesto also has a section dedicated to climate change, acknowledging the challenges posed by the climate crisis in terms of the economic impact, the negative toll on the citizens, and the degradation of the environment. Far from denialism, RN, once again, integrates the climate issue into the discussion about power, supporting policies that foster “symbiosis between humans and their environment”, boasting that Europe is “at the forefront of decarbonization”, and introducing the concept of “ecological diplomacy” where France occupies a providential place due to its *virtuous energy model*, having invested in nuclear energy and developing hydrogen-based technologies (“*grâce à sa maîtrise de l’énergie nucléaire et à sa capacité de développer de nouvelles technologies*”) (RN, 2024: 14). The wellbeing of ordinary citizens and the prosperity of private enterprises are also invoked, with the party proposing an incremental transition from combustion-power cars and the modernization of the infrastructure that should not be disruptive to the economy (RN, 2024: 14).

Finally, one other topic referenced by the manifesto addresses the issue of the return of war in Europe and the need for strengthening European defense. The Russian aggression in Ukraine is given as an example of the new security environment in which Europe finds itself unprepared. While RN leadership has been inconsistent in its position towards Russia (Lefief, 2024) and belatedly reconsidered its Russophilia (Guillou, 2025), the manifesto referred to the Russian military actions as “violating international law” and exposing European vulnerabilities. This inadequacy of the defense sector was a byproduct of the “generalized disarmament” pursued by European nations, under the naïve assumption that the United States would always meet their security needs. Once again, RN links the pursuit of power with the ability to ensure one’s defense and stresses the need for military cooperation in the service of force projection. The document points to France as “the only country to benefit from a comprehensive defense capability” in the current context, arguing that Europe should prioritize the European defense industry and European arms production and focus on reducing its dependencies through cooperation in order to become less reliant on external sources of military aid (RN, 2024: 15).

Conclusions

The analysis of the manifesto has showed that RN utilizes a vocabulary that combines themes traditionally associated with the party (European identity, rejection of immigration) with contemporary issues that have a wide impact on nations and communities of people, packaged in a technocratic framework designed to appeal to a diverse audience. Moreover, in light of President Macron's unpopularity (Taylor, 2024), the voters had an additional incentive to be drawn to RN. In this regard, the manifesto also functioned as an indictment of the president, criticized for implementing policies that had weakened the French state and affected the wellbeing of French citizens.

Another significant aspect to consider is the extent to which the Brexit campaign appeared to be a source of inspiration, from invoking the mantra of *taking back control* to the talking point about “giving the French their money back”, which referred to the amount of money France sends to the EU versus what it receives in return (“*L’UE coûte plus cher qu’elle ne rapporte*”) (RN, 2024: 13). RN referred to this states of affairs as “a

real waste of taxpayers' money", citing again several actions that could be taken to address this issue (RN, 2024: 13).

Where RN's manifesto was steeped in policy recommendations ranging from the single market to artificial intelligence and the climate crisis, the PpE manifesto was a stark contrast, solely dedicated to extolling the virtues of nations and sketching a handful of proposals to reform the EU, meant to subordinate the decision-making process to the wills of the nations. The vague and laconic nature of the document could be indicative of the parties' different, even, contradictory stances on the various issues that RN addressed in a comprehensive way in its manifesto.

Lastly, though RN pursues a policy of respectability and professionalization, the radical impulses remain in the open, intertwining anti-immigration screeds with the supremacist view of Europe as a locus of identity and a matrix of civilization. This matrix is currently being tarnished by migrants and its integrity would be further jeopardized if the EU would continue to impose on the nations its enlargement and migration policies. Though this is consistent with the party's history and its voters' attitudes, the direct references to this radical framework are also indicative of a larger change affecting the attitudes of the general audience, who is being pulled by the slippery siren song of radicalization into embracing illiberal policies designed to reshape them, the state, and the EU in the image of these radical actors, such as *Rassemblement National*.

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