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COUNTERPOINT

Populist Rhetoric: Front National

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This series of briefings examines the rhetoric of populist politicians in the European Parliament. We analyse exchanges between populists and their fellow MEPs and give recommendations for how to respond effectively to their rhetoric. The briefings are for politicians and campaigners who are looking to build a response to populist parties both inside and outside the Parliament. Building on our extensive research on populist parties, we hope that they can be a useful advocacy tool for political parties and NGOs to counter populism successfully.

In creating these briefings, our main concern is with the danger that populist parties pose to open societies in Europe. As a result, we focus on rhetoric that seeks to undermine openness and tolerance, whether it emphasises immigration, Roma inclusion or minority rights.

We argue that:

- While populist parties vary significantly according to national context, they share similar tactics and rhetoric;
- The plenary debates in the European Parliament are a valuable resource for understanding this rhetoric; and
- This rhetoric poses a threat to open societies in Europe by paralysing the European Parliament and delegitimising institutions that protect minority rights.

Populism: different contexts, similar rhetoric

On May 22-25, as voters across the EU go to the polls to elect a new European Parliament, populist parties across Europe are expected to perform strongly. These parties range from the moderate, agrarian Finns Party to the anti-immigration Front National in France and the extremist, anti-Semitic Jobbik in Hungary. Their policy prescriptions, voter bases, and hot-button issues differ according to national context.

Despite their policy differences, some populist parties have promised to work together. Geert Wilders, leader of the populist PVV in the Netherlands, and Marine Le Pen, leader of the Front National in France, announced in November 2013 that they intend to build a new alliance. Since then, other parties, such as the Austrian Freedom Party, Vlaams Belang in Belgium and Lega Nord in Italy, have also shown an interest in joining forces.¹ While such alliances have occurred before and have been ill-fated, it is worth wondering whether a significant increase in the number of populist MEPs could impart a new set of dynamics after these coming elections.

Aside from the collaboration between members of the new populist alliance led by Wilders and Le Pen, populist parties more broadly share a range of tactics and rhetoric. Populist politicians of whatever stripe are relentless in their defence of the “ordinary people”, positioning themselves as the representative of the common man and woman in opposition to a fickle, self-interested elite. They depict themselves as rebels and their mainstream counterparts as crooks

complicit in a rotten system. At the same time, they often try to co-opt values like democracy, tolerance, freedom and human rights and use them against mainstream politicians. In these briefings, we illustrate, with a series of examples, how populist politicians from across Europe use these tactics again and again. And how this approach is effective despite its apparent lack of sophistication.

The debates in the European Parliament: a valuable resource

These briefings focus on debates in the European Parliament for two reasons. First, because a good deal more populist politicians are likely to be in the European Parliament after the 2014 elections. We therefore expect that MEPs from the mainstream political groups will spend more time engaging with populists. These briefings provide a guide for how populist rhetoric has been handled in the past and how it can be dealt with in the future.

But these briefings are also intended for those working beyond the walls of the European Parliament. So the second reason for our focus is that it provides a vital resource for understanding how populists interact with other politicians. The European Parliament is a perfect laboratory for exploring which responses to populist rhetoric work – and which do not.

Introduction (continued)

How populist rhetoric can delegitimise institutions and put minority rights at risk

In the European Parliament, populist politicians are not just speaking to their supporters. It is therefore much harder for them to make directly discriminatory statements in this setting. Outside of Parliament, politicians from the same parties have crossed the line and made statements that are more clearly xenophobic and racist (such as Geert Wilders encouraging his supporters to chant that they want “fewer” Moroccans in the Netherlands² or Lega Nord MEP Mario Borghezio describing the Italian government as “bongo bongo” due to the inclusion of Cecile Kyenge, Italy’s first black minister).³ But in the European Parliament they tend to tread a much more careful line, weary of their most immediate audience, the Parliament’s other members.

This means that monitoring the rhetoric of populists in the European Parliament becomes a far murkier affair: in true populist fashion the targets of their speeches are often not minorities but the political elite – the other MEPs who they hold responsible for “selling out” the sovereignty and rights of “ordinary” people. But even though populist MEPs generally avoid “frontal” attacks against minorities, their rhetoric towards other parliamentarians still poses a danger. Populists do not follow the standard, informal rules of debate in the European Parliament: their attacks can be aggressive, unrelenting and infuriating. This can be extremely difficult to handle. Populists break expectations and protocol in ways that are fundamentally destabilising—and difficult to counter without resorting to the same

unsavoury tactics. MEPs are damned if they do engage in similar ways—and damned if they don’t. En masse these tactics can create institutional paralysis and weaken the effectiveness of the Parliament, an institution that has done a great deal of work to defend Europe from xenophobia and intolerance.

But can rhetoric really cause that much damage? In the current Parliament, where populists make up a small minority of the total number of MEPs, their rhetoric only has limited effect. In the next Parliament things could change significantly. With more populist MEPs in the Parliament, debates on sensitive issues could be hijacked by these voices. And this really could shift the terms of the debate – a first step to deeper policy changes in the future. Outside the European Parliament, too, populist rhetoric – combined with success at the polls – has influenced mainstream party policy. So far mainstream voices have struggled to find a response that really stops the populists in their tracks.

In sum, populists from a range of different traditions often engage in rhetoric about immigration and minority rights in the European Parliament in ways that can be highly debilitating. We give examples of this rhetoric and discuss how campaigners and politicians can develop an effective response.

In this briefing we focus on the Front National (FN).

Context

The Front National is one of Europe's most renowned and long-standing populist parties. The party was founded by Jean-Marie Le Pen in 1972.⁴ It rose to prominence in the 1980s after strong performances in European Parliament elections and local elections in the town of Dreux.⁵ The party is known for its fierce anti-immigration position and its hostility to the political class. Le Pen, who led the party for nearly forty years, in the past courted controversy for his insensitive comments about the Holocaust and unsavoury connections with extremist movements. He presided over the rise of his party, reaching a personal high point with his second place finish at the 2002 presidential election.⁶ But in the 2007 presidential election the FN suffered as centre right candidate Nicolas Sarkozy successfully wooed their voters.⁷

In 2011, Marine Le Pen, Jean-Marie's daughter, succeeded him as leader, promising to "de-demonise" the party and remove any extremist or anti-Semitic associations. She has focused her attacks on financiers, rating agencies, multinationals and EU institutions, advocating protectionism and deriding "ultra-liberal" economic policy, and has argued that parts of Islamic belief conflict with France's republican values.⁸ Since the younger Le Pen took to the helm, the party has gained ground, performing strongly both in the 2012 presidential election and the 2014 local elections.⁹ The Front National's electoral support is multi-layered and varies according to region – the political scientist Joël Gombin argues that "the strength of the FN comes from the fact that it has diverse electorates", held together by a belief that the political system does not take into account their concerns.¹⁰

FN rhetoric

The FN's rhetoric is composed of a number of interlocking frames, each one reflecting a different aspect of their worldview. Each frame contains a number of elements: the *actors* – individuals, organisations, and institutions – that the frame refers to, and their relationships; the *problem* that the frame identifies; and the *solution* that the frame suggests. Drawing on the FN's speeches in the European Parliament as well as their language outside the Parliament, we have identified three frames that guide their discourse. For each frame, we discuss the different components, the values they activate, give particular thematic applications, and illustrate with examples of particular rhetoric. When taken together, the frames below show the narrative that the FN aims to present.

1. Order versus chaos

Actors: the people who long for order and stability and the bringers of chaos and uncertainty.

Problem: the bringers of chaos have undermined order, destroyed the social fabric, and wreaked havoc on people's lives.

Solution: return to a state of order.

The frame activates the following values:
Control, Order, Solidarity

Applications: The prime application for the FN is immigration: a prior age of order, simplicity and homogeneity has become fundamentally disrupted by agents of chaos. These actors, including national and EU politicians and big business, have undermined the social order. Working people, who desire order and fear "insecurity", face on-going social fragmentation and instability, including the weakening of the welfare state and of French identity. To reverse this disaster, immigration needs to be reduced and priority needs to be given to French nationals.

Tied in with this frame is the metaphor of the nation as a family. As cognitive linguist George Lakoff explores in his book *The Political Mind*, the family is a recurring source of metaphors in US politics for both the left and the right. As Lakoff argues, both conservatives and liberals project their own versions of the ideal family (the "strict father" model for conservatives and the "nurturant parent" model for liberals) onto the US' different governing institutions. For the FN in France, the family represents security, stability, and strong social ties. The metaphor of the nation as a family consequently evokes feelings of order and solidity; immigration threatens to disrupt these familial bonds. The next example illustrates Le Pen's use of the family and the "order versus chaos" frame.

Examples: "Putting a stop to immigration is of urgent social need. Solidarity does not just happen. Solidarity is a sentiment that can only exist as long as there is a community of values, a common cultural base, within which everyone

FN rhetoric (continued)

recognizes him or herself. And ever since our societies have been organized as nations, the nation is the natural framework for the exercise of solidarity. Social security, our whole system of social protection, our consent to pay taxes rest on this principle. The only reason we are willing to pay for each other, to insure each other against the risks of life, to protect each other is that we recognize that we are of the same family. And this family is France (...). [M]ass immigration carries with it the seeds of the destruction of our national solidarity.” *Marine Le Pen*¹¹

“You had promised the convergence and the harmonisation of European countries. Today, you are pushing us towards a social and political explosion.” *Marine Le Pen*¹²

2. Exploited by the powerful

Actors: the powerful and the exploited.

Problem: the powerful exploit others for their own gain.

Solution: the exploited need to rise up and make themselves heard. Their suffering must be addressed. The powerful must be punished for their exploitation.

The frame activates the following values: Justice

Applications: The FN applies this frame in many different ways, but three particularly key policy areas stand out:

economic policy, where the powerful are financiers, EU institutions and US multinationals and the exploited are French farmers; immigration policy, where the powerful are national governments and the exploited are working class French citizens who face lower wages, higher unemployment and strained public services as a result of immigration; and EU policy, where the powerful are the EU institutions and the exploited are the European people who suffer from authoritarian, misery-inducing and ineffective EU policies (for example, the troika imposing the provisions of the memorandum on the Greek government).

Examples: “Mr President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, the harm caused by credit rating agencies is now plain to see. The sovereign debt crisis has just confirmed their pro-cyclical nature. Blind as they were before the fire started, credit rating agencies are now acting like arsonists, fanning the flames of the crisis.” *Marine Le Pen*¹³

“And those princes of finance and banking who are nothing more than a global mafia and exploit people with no-one controlling them” *Marine Le Pen*¹⁴

The natural counterpart to this frame in our analysis of UKIP’s rhetoric¹⁵ is the “Ruled from above” frame. In this frame, too, there are also two sets of actors, one of which dominates the other – the rulers and the ruled. The key difference between these two frames is that UKIP primarily appeals to the value of liberty in the “Ruled from above” frame, while the FN primarily appeals to justice. Le Pen

borrowes the language of the left – the language of exploitation and equality. UKIP politicians, on the other hand, mine a British tradition of libertarianism, speaking, for instance, of freedom from the heavy hand of EU bureaucracy and from the British “big state”.

3. Reinstating common sense

Actors: the bookish, disconnected professional politicians vs the down-to-earth, practical real representatives of the people.

Problem: the professional politicians are in charge. Their ideas border on the absurd but are nevertheless being implemented to disastrous effect. They have subverted the natural order of things, because they have no appreciation of nature, “real life” or the heartland.

Solution: we need to listen to the non-professional politicians who have other forms of experience – they are in touch with reality and can find the way out of the mess the politicians have gotten us into.

The frame activates the following values: Natural Order, Competency

Applications: for the FN, the EU is the archetypal case of an institution dominated by professional politicians. The FN, on the other hand, is composed of outsiders and

FN rhetoric (continued)

dissidents, who have a unique connection with ordinary people and who are willing to take on the EU elite.


Examples: “We are, in a way, dissidents just as you once were.” *Bruno Gollnisch, FN MEP, talking to Jerzy Buzek, former President of the European Parliament, in 2009. Gollnisch is referring to Front National MEPs and other populists in the European Parliament.*¹⁶

“It’s the bureaucrat’s dream: a completely uniform, formatted Europe”, *Aymeric Chauprade, FN leading candidate for the European elections*¹⁷

This frame also repeatedly occurs in UKIP’s rhetoric, as we argued in our third briefing.¹⁸ One notable difference, however, is that for UKIP the professional politicians are for the most part benign yet naïve; for the FN, though, the political class is more commonly portrayed as fundamentally deceptive. This gives the FN’s language a somewhat more uncompromising slant in comparison to UKIP’s.

Case studies from the European Parliament

In this section we look at three case studies that illustrate how the above frames work in practice. These case studies are exchanges between FN politicians and other MEPs in the European Parliament. We offer suggestions on how MEPs can respond effectively to this rhetoric.



...Order versus chaos - the social fabric has been destroyed and ultra-liberalism has taken root. Without order, the people are now...

...Exploited by the powerful - but the FN, the outsider party, will restore justice by...

...Reinstating common sense - disconnected politicians have brought about instability; this is a battle between...

Figure 1:
The relationship
between the three
FN frames

Case study 1: Posting of workers¹⁹

In April 2014, the European Parliament passed legislation to improve the rights of posted workers (employees working within the EU who are sent by their employers to temporarily work in another EU member state). One of the aims of the legislation was to address “social dumping” (when local businesses find themselves undercut by companies from countries with weaker labour regulations),²⁰ something that Marine Le Pen has often highlighted as a major issue for French workers. The legislation reformed the 1996 Posting of Workers Directive. At a plenary debate on the legislation, Marine Le Pen addressed other MEPs.

Marine Le Pen (non-attached):

Mr President, in the run-up to a likely outcry against Brussels in a few weeks, the frightened advocates of the European framework are attempting to show a different face by strengthening the directive on the posting of workers, the most potent symbol of this ultra-liberal and antisocial Europe that the people no longer want.

Adopted in 1996 under the guise of improving the freedom and protection of European workers, the directive on the posting of workers has become within a few years the most powerful means of aligning wages in Europe with the lowest salaries and of implementing social dumping.

Over the years, we helped the flood of low-cost workers into our countries. According to the statistics, they will amount to more than 500,000 – in France alone – in a country, which, I reiterate, has over 5 million unemployed people. Faced with this organised unfair competition, local businesses have no other option but to import low cost workers or vanish. In my region, on the methane terminal at the Dunkirk site, no less than 40% of employees are low cost workers. They amount to so many that the administration in charge of work controls is no longer in a position to verify

whether these workers have a job contract or whether they are working on the black market.

To try and absolve yourselves from your tragic errors, you seek to marginally amend this text – a crime against the dignity and wellbeing of employees – by allowing states to strengthen controls. How laughable and hypocritical! When, at the same time, you demand that States suppress whole areas of their administration to save the euro.

I have said it and I will solemnly say it again: strengthened or not, the directive on the posting of workers is a terrifying social dislocation time-bomb. There is only one solution: this text must be suppressed.

This is why we will abstain from the compromise amendment, a real piece of political trickery.

Le Pen begins her speech with a clear attempt to reframe the issue of posted workers to her advantage. She does this by telling a story, embarking on a historical account of the Posting of Workers Directive and its effects. By going back to 1996, Le Pen makes her mark on this issue; rather than

getting straight into policy details, she sets the stage for her own critique. Throughout this story, the European Union and its representatives are portrayed as devious and opportunistic. They are the professional politicians of the “Reinstating common sense” frame, combining callousness (with no interest in the “wellbeing of employees”), naivety (their “tragic errors”), insincerity (“how laughable and hypocritical!”), and political clumsiness (hence their ham-fisted attempt to address people’s concerns weeks before the European Parliament elections). On the other hand, Le Pen depicts herself as someone who has direct, practical experience. She has been to the methane terminal in Dunkirk and has experienced first-hand the people in the “heartland” suffering under the hands of EU legislators. Le Pen’s insinuation is: you have not seen the pain that immigration has caused; as a consequence, you have no democratic legitimacy.

Towards the end of Le Pen’s speech, she also makes a striking use of the “Order vs Chaos” frame. Le Pen describes the Posting of Workers Directive as a “terrifying social dislocation time-bomb”. The metaphor of a bomb associates the directive with terror, violent destruction, and chaos. Bombs physically devastate and disrupt; the EU’s policies accordingly tear at

Case study 1: Posting of workers

(continued)

the social fabric. Le Pen's underlying message here is not just an economic one, about the threat of immigration to jobs and wages. Immigration is portrayed as a phenomenon that undoes the social glue holding together French society. This is what allows Le Pen to describe the directive as a "crime against the dignity and wellbeing" of French workers. The metaphorical use of the word "crime" brings with it the images and ideas that are normally associated with criminal acts. It indicates that in her view the French public have been morally violated; and that the criminals responsible – the politicians – must be punished for their crime. It further implies that the law, being a crime, is effectively illegitimate.

Marek Henryk Migalski
(European Conservatives and Reformists):

You call this a criminal directive. Don't you think that your fear of a flood of immigrants that want to work in your country is a manifestation of nationalism, protectionism and socialism. The richest country in the world, the most powerful country in the world, the United States, was formed in the main by immigrants. Shouldn't you be concerned with how to make the French economy more open and liberal, rather than scaring your citizens about floods of people from Poland and other countries, who want to work, who don't want to take your jobs but just want to work?

Marine Le Pen (non-attached):

Mr President, the United States was not founded by immigration but by colonisation and a very brutal colonisation at that, because they made the people they replaced disappear. That's the first point already.

Secondly, yes, I do find it a crime against workers for them to be put in competition with other workers who are obviously paid 30 to 40% less than the pay advertised because of the level of social dumping.

So, evidently, sir, businesses will have a great time finding very cheap labour. When there are 5 million unemployed in a country, giving work to 500,000 people that come from abroad is not allowed. 500,000 today!

Suggested Response:

Migalski's response to Le Pen is understandable and in earnest: his effort to show that Polish immigrants just "want to work" is laudable given the barrage of criticisms Poles have faced. But Migalski makes at least two important mistakes. First, he plays into Le Pen's hands by repeating her language ("criminal directive") and by referring to the United States, a traditional target of FN censure. This allows Le Pen to reiterate her point that the directive is a "crime against workers" and portray him as in league with businesses rather than workers and the unemployed. Second, he does not address the fundamentals of Le Pen's critique – that the impact of a

liberal immigration policy is not just about jobs but about the tearing of France's social fabric. A stronger response would avoid Le Pen's own frames and yet would take on her claim that immigration threatens social cohesion:

"Mr President, I am an optimist who believes in a strong, vibrant Europe. I believe that immigrants, whether they are planning to settle or are temporary workers, have a huge amount to contribute to strengthen our societies. I am no pessimist like Ms Le Pen, who has so little faith in her own country that she believes it will collapse with more immigration. But where Le Pen and I agree is on the issue of social dumping: I too am concerned about a "race to the bottom" where workers lose out on fair wages. That is why it bemuses me that she will not vote in favour of this proposal, which aims to do something about just that! Why, Ms Le Pen, are you so adamant to not address a problem that you yourself have so often raised?"

Case study 2: Free movement and Roma²¹

In January 2014, amid criticisms from a number of populist parties, transitional controls for Romanian and Bulgarian immigrants were removed in the nine EU member states, including France, that were still imposing restrictions.²² In the same month, the European Parliament held a debate on the free movement of labour. Marine Le Pen had the opportunity to speak.

Marine Le Pen (non-attached):

Mr President, dearest colleagues, free movement in the European Union has now reached its limits. Intra- and extra-European mass immigration, the Roma problem and the Posting of Workers Directive that has brought about unrestrained competition and social dumping among European workers have legitimately awakened anger and Euroscepticism.

The debate on intra-European immigration is intensifying in France, Great Britain and Germany, what with the opening of the market to Romanians and Bulgarians from January 1st. And the European Council's response? Increased controls through work inspections to avoid fraud and abuse, but under no circumstances has the posting of workers directive been suppressed.

Concerning the Roma, member states are obliged to commit to national strategies of integration by providing access to employment, to education, to housing and to healthcare whilst numerous nationals are victims of unemployment and poverty because of the economic crisis and cures of austerity.

It is high time that the sovereignty of States is re-established, that the principle of free movement is called into question and that borders are re-established. Those who defended the free movement dogma in defiance of all wisdom and

against all logic cannot today provide solutions to problems that they themselves created.

*In this speech, Marine Le Pen approaches the debate on the free movement of labour from the perspective of the “**Exploited by the powerful**” frame. According to this application, “nationals” are exploited and abused by insensitive EU officials, more concerned about the conditions of the Roma and the interests of big business than they are with unemployment and poverty. It is “nationals” who are squeezed as the EU forces ahead tough austerity measures. Le Pen’s evocation of “sovereignty” should be understood in this context: underlying it is an appeal to French republican values (such as solidarity and equality) that have been trampled on by external forces. The actors exploited, then, are not just the “victims of unemployment and poverty”, but the French state itself, forced to become subservient to a higher power.*

*In her final sentence, Le Pen draws again on the “**Reinstating common sense**” frame, making a distinction between the fonts of wisdom and logic, the practical and sensible – Le Pen, her party, and the European people – and the emotional and ideological – the EU’s political class. Le Pen portrays the EU as trapped in a political cocoon, so encased in their philosophy that they for a long time they were incapable of perceiving what had gone wrong, let alone rectifying it. Indeed, Le Pen’s pro-free movement politicians were not just ignorant;*

they defended their positions “in defiance of wisdom”, as if they were aware of the facts but, led by ideology, marched on regardless. This is a piercing critique by Le Pen because, if accepted, it nullifies any response made by a mainstream politician: they can be readily dismissed by her as naïve or short-sighted.

Suggested Response:

An effective response, then, should not just focus on the question of reforming the free movement of people. It needs to take on Le Pen’s complaint that mainstream MEPs are the enemies of rational thought. Simply put, it needs to explain why they should be taken seriously and why Le Pen shouldn’t. One possible response is the following:

“Mr President, the free movement of people is one of the most popular things that the EU has ever done. It has given new jobs, new opportunities, new horizons, to people in every EU member state. Free movement has given people the chance to do things they would never dream of doing before. Ms Le Pen is right to be concerned about unemployment and poverty. But you don’t solve those problems by taking away people’s opportunities. The truth is that it is Ms Le Pen, not us, who is captured by dogma – a dogma that says the EU must always be wrong, whatever it does. When will you wake up from this ideological slumber, Ms Le Pen, and face up to making policy in the real world?”

Case study 3: Lampedusa²³

In October 2013, a boat carrying immigrants from Libya was shipwrecked on its way to Lampedusa, an island off the coast of southern Italy, resulting in the deaths of 366 people.²⁴ A debate in the European Parliament one week later on migratory flows in the Mediterranean focused on how to ensure that this tragic event would not happen again.

Marine Le Pen (non-attached):

Mr President, following the tragedy in Lampedusa the European governments are paving the way to provide far greater access to European territory to foreigners. Yet, it is evident that diplomacy based on emotion is the most dangerous and least adapted to the situation. We must do exactly the opposite.

As soon as you allow these men and women to think that they can risk their lives, and that, if they succeed in setting foot on European territory, they will then be saved; that they will then be able to stay on European territory, that they will then be looked after, that their children will then be educated “for free”, that they will be then be cared for “for free”; when I say “for free”, that’s in inverted commas, because it’s not free of course, it’s paid for by the national communities; that they will benefit from a council home, that they will benefit from social welfare that we are all nevertheless finding increasingly difficult to accord to our own fellow countrymen; they will risk the venture. They will risk the venture and you personally will be morally responsible for the dead that will be strewn along this path and for this terrible risk-taking.

Evidently, the only way to stop these deaths that are multiplying is by sending out a clear message of firmness, and by explaining that risking this crazy adventure is futile because we will have a firm reaction and we will send these illegal immigrants back home.

Here is the only solution that is humane for them and that is viable for us.

*Marine Le Pen begins her speech by drawing an opposition between the emotional response of European governments to illegal migrants travelling to Lampedusa and the reasoned, logical approach of the FN. This contrast between reason and emotion serves two purposes for Le Pen. First, like Le Pen’s reference to the “free movement dogma” of MEPs in the previous case study, it evokes the FN’s “**Reinstating common sense**” frame, portraying Le Pen’s opponents as naïve and wide-eyed in their slavish attachment to pro-EU, pro-immigration ideology. Second, it deflects the major criticism often levied against Le Pen that she herself is irrational. The frame of Le Pen’s opponents contrasts responsible, evidence-led government with populist, fear-mongering rabble-rousers. Le Pen’s opening here seeks to disrupt and undermine that frame by providing a counter-frame to turn the argument on its head – it is Le Pen, not the mainstream, who is the exemplar of responsible government.*

*The guiding frame of Le Pen’s main argument is the FN’s “**Exploited by the powerful**” frame: the patience and generosity of the French people are being stretched in order to benefit immigrants and the government and big businesses that need their labour. The underlying value of this frame is justice, and Le Pen accordingly emphasises the inequity between French*

*citizens and immigrants, with her repeated sarcastic use of “for free” (“*gratuitement*”) driving home both the unfairness of the situation and the unwillingness of France’s political leadership to address the problem for what it is. From Le Pen’s perspective, of course, she is the exception, capable of seeing the inverted commas around “for free” while others stick their heads in the sand.*

*The other key theme of Le Pen’s speech is an emphasis on “firmness” – immigrants need to be treated with a kind of tough love, as that is what is best for them. The FN and other populist parties often advocate tough law and order policies using a similar kind of logic. The advantage of Le Pen’s emphasis on “firmness” in the context of Lampedusa is that she again pre-empts a common critique against her: that she has no empathy for migrants seeking asylum in France. Le Pen’s underlying message evokes the “**Order versus Chaos**” frame: of course I care about this terrible tragedy, she implies – indeed it is the EU, not I, who puts the lives of migrants at risk. This is because Europe, for Le Pen, is composed of profoundly weak institutions, too feeble and irresolute to ensure order and stability. Any response needs to address this challenge head-on.*

David Casa (European People’s Party):

I would like to ask whether Ms Le Pen is telling us that when there is a boat in distress and sinking, we should save the

Case study 3: Lampedusa

(continued)

lives of these immigrants. Good. We agree here. However, if they are being persecuted in their country, should we still send them back to be killed by their dictatorial governments? Is this what Ms Le Pen is suggesting?”

Marine Le Pen (non-attached):

Sir, the number of asylum seekers has exploded by 72% in the last 5 years. How many asylum seekers do you think we can take in?

It's clear that the European capitals bear a heavy responsibility, since the victims of the Lampedusa tragedy, that happened a few days ago, were leaving Eritrea or Somalia to escape the reign of terror imposed by Islamist governments. And yet instead of combatting these governments, the European capitals have created Islamic governments through direct military intervention in Libya and perhaps tomorrow in Syria.

Suggested Response:

Casa's response is effective in cornering Le Pen on her empathy for the migrants who travel to Lampedusa. This is clearly an issue she realises is difficult for her, given that she makes efforts to pre-empt this attack in her speech by accusing the mainstream of having a significant share of responsibility for the Lampedusa tragedy. But Casa can do more to address the core frames underpinning Le Pen's rhetoric. He should address in particular the “Exploiting the powerful”

frame – is compassion for migrants necessarily in conflict with justice for Europe's current citizens? It is also essential to demonstrate that Le Pen is wrong when she suggests that the European mainstream is weak-willed and spineless. This is our suggested response:

“Mr President, I would simply like to ask Ms Le Pen: should we stand by while tragedies like the one last week occurred? Or do our governments have the strength, the resources, the self-confidence to help some of these people find a legal way to escape danger and come to Europe? You say we should be firm – I say yes, we should be firm: we should be firm in supporting refugees from Syria and Libya, firm too in protecting our own citizens from any adverse effects; and, most of all, firm in monitoring the border so that tragedies of this sort never happen again. That's what firm, strong leadership is about, Ms Le Pen, not callously exploiting the deaths of hundreds for your own personal gain.”

23. Migratory flows in the Mediterranean, with particular attention to the tragic events off Lampedusa (debate)', European Parliament, 9 October 2013, <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP/TEXT+CRE+20131009+ITEM-016+DOC+XML+V0/EN&language=EN>
24. 'Lampedusa shipwreck migrants 'raped by traffickers'', Telegraph, 8 November 2013, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/italy/10436645/Lampedusa-shipwreck-migrants-raped-by-traffickers.html>

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