Tomorrow's Affairs
Analysis of today
Assessment of tomorrow

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Is there life for the far right in France after the political death of Marine Le Pen?

Marine Le Pen, the leader of the French far right, has suffered the most severe outcome among the various options expected from the trial.

The verdict imposes a fine of EUR 100,000, a four-year prison sentence, of which two are suspended, and an additional two years under house arrest. Probably the harshest punishment for her is a five-year ineligibility period, which takes effect immediately and effectively disqualifies her from the French presidential race in 2027.

"Incredible" was all that could be heard from Marine Le Pen at the moment of verdict, after which she left the courtroom without a word. However, that is enough to suggest that she was anticipating some of the previously mentioned milder options on the scale.

She has been aware for months of the high probability of an outcome that would exclude her from French political life at a time when her party, National Rally, is stronger than ever and sees the 2027 presidential election as an achievable goal.

"It's my political death they are after," she said in November, two months after she and a group of her party colleagues went on trial for embezzling European Parliament funds.

Political consequences

And indeed, the political consequences of the verdict are colossal for the political life of France, but also of Europe, as the whole case has had a strong political focus from the outset.

Moreover, Le Pen and her supporters and friends in the country and Europe have categorised the trial as a threat to democratic order.

Concern for democracy was at the heart of the Kremlin's reaction to the verdict against Marine Le Pen, which Putin's spokesman, Dmitry Peskov, described as a "violation of democratic norms."

The French far-right have so far portrayed the trial as a political construct directed against their growing influence. Their strategy will follow the verdict of the Paris court, which effectively ends their leader's political life.

> "Millions and millions of French people would see themselves deprived of their candidate in the election" - Marine Le Pen

“There are 11 million people who voted for the movement I represent. So tomorrow, potentially, millions and millions of French people would see themselves deprived of their candidate in the election," said Le Pen in front of the court before she was sentenced.

The court did not ignore the political aspect of the trial, including the sentence it imposed, albeit with arguments that warn of the danger to the democratic order when a person with serious and proven criminal charges plays an important role in it.

“The court took into consideration, in addition to the risk of reoffending, the major disturbance of public order if a person already convicted was a candidate in the presidential election,” says the verdict announced by the presiding judge, Judge Bénédicte de Perthuis.

Is there a plan B?

The verdict is compelling Le Pen's National Rally to consider a plan B starting today. There are still two years to go until the presidential elections. That seems to be enough time for Europe's largest anti-migrant and Eurosceptic party to recover and put forward a strong candidate.

However, there is no one in sight who could replace Marine Le Pen in this role, except the NR president, Jordan Bardella. Despite becoming the party's leader three years ago with guidance from Marine Le Pen, Mr Bardella is unlikely to emerge as a genuine leader given the circumstances following the

verdict and Le Pen's exclusion from political life.

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Mr Bardella will be less than 32 years old at the time of the race for the Élysée Palace, which is probably not enough for the tastes of many French people who would like to see someone with more experience at the head of state.

His starting position, if considered today, is quite favourable, as the National Rally is the most popular party in France, with more than 30% support. On the other hand, the disapproval rating for President Emmanuel Macron is very high (over 70%), which is an important indicator of the state of his entire policy, regardless of the fact that he will not be able to run in 2027.

Washington—a powerful ally

The French far-right can find a powerful ally, and they will certainly look for it outside France. The support of like-minded Euro-right for Marine Le Pen is strong, and they see her case as a model for the fight they themselves are waging against what they call the alienated establishment, the "deep state" and the mainstream liberal parties and judiciary that are supposedly sympathetic to them.

What's more, Le Pen and her allies will be able to count on the support of the Washington administration, which itself is based on the same values.

“Democracy rests on the sacred principle that the voice of the people matters. There is no room for firewalls... You cannot win a democratic mandate by censoring your opponents or putting them in jail—whether that’s the leader of the opposition, a humble Christian praying in her own home, or a journalist trying to report the news,” US Vice President JD Vance said at the Munich Security Conference in February.

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His speech at the time was greeted with indignation by most European leaders and was considered the beginning of a major divergence between the transatlantic partners.

The support that JD Vance and Elon Musk gave directly to the German far-right AfD in the run-up to the elections on 23 February was a clear sign of Washington's shift towards the European far right, including Le Pen's National Rally, although it did not fully support Donald Trump's decisions.

The French right, handicapped by the political absence of its leader, will be counting on the support of the Trump administration, not only ideologically but also by the similarity of the "sacrifice" it is making.

Even more, they will be hoping for a similar outcome to the conflict with the establishment and the judiciary that Trump won in last November's election.