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<http://www.newsweek.com/2010/04/15/europe-s-new-politics-of-fear.print.html>



## Europe's New Politics of Fear

by Denis MacShane April 16, 2010

There is a new divide in Europe. Not an iron curtain, but an iron intolerance as politicians revert to blaming minorities for their nations' woes. In Western Europe it is Muslims. In Eastern Europe they are Jews, Roma, and gays. In the Netherlands, Geert Wilders surged to an election victory in March on the back of anti-Muslim, anti-Quran populism. In Hungary the Fidesz Party won big in recent elections with attacks on "Jewish capital... which wants to devour the entire world." To the right of Fidesz is the openly anti-Jewish Jobbik Party, which won just two seats fewer than the Socialists. Its leaders want to wear the neo-Nazi uniform of the pre-1939 Hungarian Guard when they take their seats in Budapest's Parliament.

Contemporary political scientists do not like to highlight anti-Semitism. They prefer the term "radical populism," but to anyone with half a sense of European history, the parallels with an older, Jew-baiting politics can no longer be dismissed. Economic dislocation and a rapid loss of confidence in traditional politics gave rise to ultranationalist movements in the first half of the last century. Now a global recession and the hunt for someone to blame as jobs and incomes disappear is producing the same toxic politics.

The Fidesz leader, Viktor Orban, was a youthful evangelist for liberalized open markets after 1990. Now he strikes a much more nationalist tone. His Socialist opponents had to accept an austerity IMF package. Unlike Greece—which is being helped, so far, by its euro-zone partners—Hungary was alone as boom-time euro loans to buy houses and cars had to be paid back in an ever-devaluing forint. Blaming the Socialist government, globalization, and international capital was easy. But Fidesz went further. In a bid for votes on the far right, a Fidesz parliamentarian, Oszkar Molnar, says it's time to give "primacy to Hungarian interests over those of global capital, Jewish capital."

Like Jean-Marie Le Pen's National Front in France, Jobbik has the support of about 15 percent of Hungarian voters. The Czech right-wing ODS Party has had to dismiss its leader, former premier Mirek Topolánek, after he attacked the Jewish origins of the current Czech prime minister and castigated the gay transport minister. In a new book, *The Populist Radical Right in Poland*, the Oxford-educated Warsaw political professor Rafal Pankowski writes: "Antisemitism is crucial to the Polish populist right. The number of Jews in Poland today is minimal, but the anti-Jewish prejudice serves as a code for a general hostility to diversity and to Polish [liberal] democracy." For the time being, criticism of nationalist politics is suspended as Poles mourn President Lech Kaczynski and other national leaders killed in the air-crash tragedy this month. But the record of his party activists—including Michal Kaminski, Poland's best-known M.E.P. and leader of a small right-wing group in the Strasbourg Parliament—is disturbing. An admirer of the late Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet, Kaminski uses ugly language about gays, and says he will apologize for the killing of Jews on Polish soil in World War II when "Jews apologize for killing Poles."

Mainstream political parties have sought to play down the rise of minority bashing. But Fidesz is affiliated with the center-right European People's Party, which groups Angela Merkel's ruling Christian Democratic Union Party in Germany, Nicolas Sarkozy's Union for a Popular Movement government in France, and ruling conservative parties in Sweden, Italy, and Belgium. When Austrian rightist Jörg Haider entered a coalition in Austria a decade ago, the European Union held Vienna in a political quarantine until Haider was removed. But Fidesz has a massive majority built on attacking "Jewish capital" in language even Haider didn't dare utter.

So radical populism—anti-Muslim in Western Europe, anti-Jewish in Eastern Europe, and anti-foreigner and anti-immigrant rhetoric everywhere—is no longer fringe politics. In Britain's general election, all the main parties are seeking to appease anti-foreigner feeling with language on immigrants that they would not tolerate if applied to British citizens living and working abroad. Comparisons with prewar Europe should not be overdrawn. Fascism is dead and not coming back. But a new politics of intolerance is afoot in Europe, and no one knows how to deal with it.

<http://www.newsweek.com/2010/09/05/how-marine-le-pen-is-changing-french-politics.print.html>



# What a Tea Party Looks Like in Europe

## Marine Le Pen is moving her father's rabble-rousing, far-right party away from the fringe, and redefining French politics in the process.

by [Tracy McNicoll](#) and [Christopher Dickey](#) September 05, 2010



Samuel Bollendorff / The New York Times-Redux

Marine Le Pen is the heir apparent to the leadership of the National Front, the right-wing party her father Jean-Marie (left) leads today

Jean-Marie Le Pen, the 82-year-old firebrand of France's far right—the man who for decades has played on the inchoate fears, xenophobia, knee-jerk racism, and ill-disguised anti-Semitism of many of his supporters—had just finished speaking to the faithful on a farm not far from the English Channel. As members of the youth wing of his National Front party feasted on barbecue and apple pie, they were thrilled to see the grand old man hold forth, still the “provocateur” taunting the establishment, the “toreador” who hides the sword in his cape and lets the press run at him like a bull. Even these youngsters knew, however, that Jean-Marie's time in the ring is nearing an end. The old man himself made it clear he's determined to step down. All eyes this day were on his daughter Marine. “She has the will, the courage, the temperament necessary, and the competence,” Le Pen told reporters at the farmhouse. “It seems to me indisputable that she is our camp's best candidate for 2012.”

Tall, blonde, plain-spoken, and thick-skinned, Le Pen's youngest child, at 42, is the heir apparent to his party. She's expected to win the contest for its leadership in January, and she's a passionate advocate of its core message: strong French nationalism, [relentless Euro-skepticism](#), and a lot of hard-nosed talk about fighting crime and immigration. She's a fresh face, a new look, and, with rising poll numbers placing her third in a crowded field of possible 2012 candidates, [a new threat in French politics](#). In the eyes of many, she's more effective—and thus more dangerous—than her father.

It's a measure of the Le Pens' enhanced power that they've managed to push President Nicolas Sarkozy to the right and cast their own party as mainstream. Over the summer, Sarkozy essentially gave up his flirtation with the left, which began after his election in 2007. He had cherry-picked popular Socialists for his centrist government, dividing their party. But in elections this past March, Sarkozy's UMP party managed to keep control of only one out of 22 regional governments. So he decided to [swing back to the right](#) by playing on fears about public safety and immigration. He proposed taking citizenship away from some criminals of immigrant background and launched [a campaign against Roma \(or “Gypsies”\), booting hundreds out of the country](#). While the measures proved popular in opinion polls, Sarkozy, ironically, did not. His abysmal approval ratings remain in the low 30s.

The younger Le Pen takes great pleasure in watching Sarkozy squirm. “I think I get on [his] nerves quite a bit,” she says. “My profile is much more complicated for him to deal with than that of my father.” The old man could be painted as a creature of the past, a purveyor of old prejudices with a “sulfurous” reputation, says Marine. Today, however, the Front wants to bill itself as “neither left nor right.” If that means losing some fringe elements (many of whom support Marine's rival, Bruno Gollnisch), well, *“tant pis,”* she says.

Other right-wing movements in Europe are also pushing into the political mainstream. The government of Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi in Italy has long relied on its alliance with two groups that used to be considered extreme—one of them the former Fascist Party under Gianfranco Fini, the other the secessionist Northern League of Umberto Bossi. A falling-out between Berlusconi and Fini has left [Bossi as the current kingmaker in Italian politics](#). In the Netherlands, [the militantly Islamophobic Geert Wilders](#) won enough seats in the last elections to become a pivotal figure in the drawn-out process of trying to build a new coalition government.

Yet these movements often differ in significant ways from the right wing that's made in the U.S.A. Put aside the usual caricature of “people in pointy hoods and the Ku Klux Klan,” Marine Le Pen says, and she still believes “the American right is much more to the right than the National Front.” She might agree with those who want to manage American frontiers more effectively and prevent massive illegal immigration, but she's also a big believer in the state's ability and obligation to help its people. “We feel the state should have the means to intervene,” she says. “We are very attached to public services *à la française* as a way to limit the inequalities among regions and among the French,” including “access for all to the same level of health care.”

Le Pen grew up in a household that was all politics all the time, with her father the object of sometimes violent attacks by competing factions on the right, as well as by the left. When Marine was just 8, someone set off a 20-kilo [bomb in the family's Paris apartment building](#). Miraculously, no one was killed or seriously injured, but the front of the building was brought down. The crime has never been solved. “The worst part wasn't just the attack, it was that not a single politician sent a word of condolence,” she says. “It was difficult, but it builds character, it hardens you.”

That's a real asset in political life anywhere. If Sarkozy finds himself facing off against Marine Le Pen in the presidential race a year and a half from now, he may find himself wishing her old man had stayed around a little longer.

*With Barbie Nadeau in Rome*