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**KEY FACTORS IN THE  
TRANSFORMATION OF THE  
NATIONAL RALLY RHETORIC ON  
EUROPEAN INTEGRATION**

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## **KEY FACTORS IN THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE NATIONAL RALLY RHETORIC ON EUROPEAN INTEGRATION**

The phenomenon of Euroscepticism occupies an important place in the study of European integration, since it expresses intra-European doubts about the feasibility of the existence of the European Union or selected practices of the EU supranational institutions. Brexit has shown that leaving the EU is possible. However, Britain's exit from the EU, which initially served as a historical precedent, did not become an example for the other 27 countries that are still members of the EU. So why the predictions of analysts and the plans of hard<sup>2</sup> Eurosceptics to leave the EU did not come true? How has the discourse of French Eurosceptics changed and why are they no longer in favor of France's exit from the EU? The answer is that today Euroscepticism is becoming a long-playing ideology, which now consists not in denying European integration, but in the party integration in the political system both inside and outside the state. One of the key factors in the systematization of the National Rally is the transformation of Euroscepticism. In this study, the author will attempt to analyze the National Rally 2014 and 2019 programs and identify the key factors of a renewed Euroscepticism.

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<sup>2</sup> According to Taggart and Szczerbiak, hard Eurosceptics want their countries to leave the EU

## Introduction

The European Union (EU) is a successful integration project. However, there are a lot of limitations and crises within the EU currently. For this reason, the discussion over the advantages and disadvantages of European integration is heated and ongoing. Moreover, the alarm is raised to the Euroscepticism that is a counterbalancing movement to Eurooptimism. Even though the Euroscepticism concept has existed for many years, Eurosceptical parties have recently become a significant political force (Vasilopoulou, 2009). Therefore, the Parliament elections of 2014 and 2019 demonstrated a high level of French citizens' support for Eurosceptics. Besides, Brexit undermined the concepts of the integrity and continuity of the EU that strengthened the Eurosceptical positions. That means the growing interest in Eurosceptical political power. Consequently, it is essential to examine Euroscepticism due to the above reasons.

There are many studies on the topic of Euroscepticism. Taggart's paper (1998) reveals that the growing Euroscepticism is the corollary of the increased European integration. Besides, deepening integration became one of the most critical factors that have led to the apogee of Euroscepticism in the twenty-first century (Leconte, 2010). Therefore, the failed attempt to take integration to a higher level in 2005 by creating the European Constitution demonstrated people's unwillingness to deep integration and led to an increase in Euroscepticism (Lubbers & Scheepers, 2010). Moreover, Brexit has shown that Euroscepticism is no longer the only concern of political parties, it is now an issue that affects almost every citizen of the EU (De Vries, 2018). Nevertheless, these studies focused on the causes of the growth of Eurosceptical sentiments within the Europe rather than on the transformation in the rhetoric of Eurosceptics between 2014 and 2019.

The purpose of this research is to examine the extent to which the radicalism of Eurosceptics has changed. There are several reasons for the transformation of Euroscepticism in the period from 2014 to 2019. Firstly, it is the need to respond to the sentiments of society in order to attract the electorate. M. Le Pen calls the decision to change their rhetoric pragmatic. Moreover, Eurosceptics have finally recognized the adherence of Europeans to European integration. Secondly, the National Rally now has allies in the European arena. One of them is the «Lega» party in Italy. Thirdly, French Eurosceptics have recognized the complexity of Brexit. For this reason, they no longer are in favor of Frexit.

It is important to note that, besides the transformation of French Euroscepticism, the positions of Eurosceptics are still different from those of the establishment. For example, the French authorities consider it necessary to enhance integration in depth. Eurosceptics oppose this and

propose to reform the existing integration with a decrease in the number of ties between participants.

From the central questions of this study, what are the main changes that occurred in the positions of Euroscepticism in France and how it influences French citizens sentiments towards the EU, the following hypothesis emerges: a decrease in the level of the radicalism of the rhetoric of Eurosceptics in France and Italy has occurred that leads to the support of Eurosceptical parties.

This paper will aim to use the content and event analysis to examine the rhetoric of Eurosceptics. Moreover, the document analysis will be the essential part of this study. Finally, the comparative analysis will help us compare the Parliament elections programs in 2014 and 2019 to clarify the main rhetorical differences.

This study might prove that the numbered changes occurred in the rhetoric before the elections of 2019 in comparison with Eurosceptics' positions in 2014. Moreover, the results of this research will provide information concerning the incentives of this transformation that might be useful for the future research on Euroscepticism and European integration.

## **2014 National Front Program VS 2019 National Rally Program**

2014 was marked in the history of the EU by stunning results of elections to the European Parliament, as in a number of European countries the victory was won by Eurosceptic parties, including the French representatives of Euroscepticism - the National Front (at that time - the National Rally). The first triumph of the National Rally (NR) in France became the starting point for the future movement of the NR towards the mainstream parties, as well as for its further systematization. The «political earthquake» (Узнародов, 2015) in the form of the victory of the Eurosceptics also affected France, and was also the beginning of the confident progressive political consolidation of the NR.

The rhetoric of the 2014 election campaign was distinguished by its radicalism, particularly on such issues as EU membership, membership in the Eurozone, and the Schengen area. However, it is noted that by 2019, French Euroscepticism has undergone several changes and has become less radical. The leader of the French Eurosceptic movement argues that the transformation of the rhetoric is based on the fact that the great chances for the victory, which the NR planned to win in the 2019 elections to the European Parliament, forced them to change their programs and abandon many radical initiatives (Regnum, 2019). Reducing the radicalism of the program allowed the NR to win the elections to the European Parliament in 2019. This result were one of the stages of the movement of the NR to systematization at the supranational level. Thus, the victory of Eurosceptic parties in several EU countries, consolidated the success of the 2014 elections and proved that Euroscepticism is no longer a peripheral ideology but is confidently moving towards the mainstream parties. In this regard, the study of the topic of Euroscepticism remains highly relevant in the inter-election period, namely until new initiatives that will be put forward for the elections in 2024. The reason for this is that they will either further attract the voter and thereby strengthen the position of Eurosceptics on the way to systematization or cause a wave of negative reaction. Moreover, the leader of the right-wing Eurosceptics in France, M. Le Pen, put forward her candidacy for the presidential election in 2022. In the 2017 elections, she took 2nd place after the incumbent president, which indicates significant support for M. Le Pen from the French population. Consequently, M. Le Pen broadcasts to the masses initiatives that respond positively to a third of the population of France. This is another important factor why the study of Euroscepticism is so essential.

The rhetoric of NR in the framework of the election campaign in 2014 and 2019 contained the same issues, such as membership in the EU, the Eurozone, the single market, the EU institutions, immigration, the position towards Russia. However, as mentioned above, the rhetoric

of 2014 differs from the rhetoric of 2019 in its radicalism, categorical nature, and the initiatives that the NR members put forward to solve the key, according to Eurosceptics, problems of the EU.

### *EU membership*

The secession from the EU was at the head of the election campaign of NR in 2014. Thus, the leader of NR, Marine Le Pen, in 2014 said that if she became president, she would hold a referendum on France's secession from the EU (Обичкина, 2015). It is worth noting that she expressed this in a rather ultimatum form, saying that she would resign from the presidency if the French wish to remain in the EU following the results of this referendum. Such an ultimatum form of rhetoric by the leader of the right-wing Eurosceptics of France testified to the strong adherence of opponents of European integration to the idea of a «divorce» between France and the EU in 2014. Thus, according to the logic of the French Eurosceptics in 2014, the expediency of France's existence within the EU was minimized, which led them to put forward the idea of Frexit.

In addition, since the victory of the frontlists in the elections to the European Parliament in 2014 was their first triumph, M. Le Pen called this success «a historical moment, one of the bursts of French history, which marked the will of the people to get out of the yoke, and also the desire of the French for freedom and independence» (Le Figaro, 2014). The yoke, expressed in subordination to the supranational institutions of the EU, acted, in the opinion of the French Eurosceptics of the right-wing, one of the main constraints on the development of France. Consequently, with this statement, M. Le Pen and her colleagues once again demonstrated their belonging to tough Euroscepticism, the main principle of which is the idea of leaving the EU (Taggart & Szczerbiak, 2001).

In the subsequent inter-election period, the divorce rhetoric between France and the EU continued. Thus, in 2016, M. Le Pen, wishing for France the same fate as Great Britain, called Brexit the most important event since the fall of the Berlin Wall, since it was the beginning of the destruction of the «Brussels Wall» (BBC, 2016). In 2017, M. Le Pen also said that France could «become a great nation again if it leaves the EU» (The Lowy Institute, 2017). Moreover, M. Le Pen's speeches also contained the idea that the threats that arise in connection with EU membership can be equated with the humiliation that French society is exposed to. Thus, the rhetoric of the period 2014-2017 was aimed at spreading ideas about the need for Frexit, the return of France's national sovereignty, and the negative consequences that overtook France due to its entry into the EU.

Summarizing the above, the Eurosceptic rhetoric of the times of 2014, as well as the subsequent inter-election period, was distinguished by its categoricalness on the issue of EU

membership, since France's secession from the EU was practically the only possible outcome and solution to the problems of France as a country within the EU.

For the 2019 election campaign, the NR rhetoric on France's EU membership has changed. The idea of Frexit was no longer put at the head of the election program. Moreover, NR announced its rejection of this initiative (See Tab. 1). For example, in an interview with M. Le Pen, the weekly newspaper *Corriere Della Sera*, she said that the real prospect of winning the European Parliament elections prompted them to abandon the idea of leaving the EU and the Eurozone (Regnum, 2019). Moreover, on the eve of the elections to the European Parliament, M. Le Pen said the following: «We have changed a lot in our position in the last two years» (BBC, 2019). The leader of the French Eurosceptics explains this by the fact that earlier France had only two possible ways of development: either to submit to the EU or withdraw from it entirely. Now, these outcomes for France have disappeared since the Eurosceptics have «acquired» allies. Under the allies, it is assumed the Italian Eurosceptic party «Lega» («League») under the leadership of the former Minister of Internal Affairs of Italy M. Salvini. During the 2019 election campaign, joint meetings and demonstrations of the NR and the «Lega» were held. The leaders of the Eurosceptics voiced similar programs. As a result of the elections, both parties won in their countries. They became the largest parties within the Identity and Democracy fraction in the European Parliament. This, in turn, determines the prospects for future cooperation between France and Italy if Eurosceptics come to power in their countries.

It is also worth noting that the position on the Brexit issue has changed. Although in 2016, M. Le Pen admired the UK's decision to leave the EU, in 2019, she acknowledged the complexity and negative consequences of the «divorce» process between the EU and the UK, which also influenced her decision to abandon the Frexit idea (Euronews, 2020).

It is also important to pay attention to the fact that in addition to abandoning the idea of leaving the EU, Eurosceptics have presented by 2019 a project to create a new association called «the European Alliance of Nations». It envisioned reforming individual EU practices and cooperation based on the former EU. Experts say that «the European Alliance of Nations» manifesto is a Eurosceptic representation of «what the EU might look like under the sauce of sovereignty» (Euronews, 2020), since the role of supranational institutions is significantly reduced in this context comparison with what powers they now have. All initiatives within the framework of creating «the European Alliance of Nations» were to be carried out through the reform of the EU, and not its destruction, as in 2014. This is the main characteristic feature of the updated discourse of the French Eurosceptics in 2019 from the discourse of 2014.

The new concept of «the European Alliance of Nations» suggests several measures that need to be taken in order for the EU countries to embark on the correct path of development without various kinds of restrictions. Thus, in its program, NR puts forward the idea that national interests should be the only guideline in determining policy by the leaders of states. The economic power of the country and the well-being of the population are the main motives that will have to guide governments. The legitimacy of a political system can only be offered by the state and not by supranational institutions. Global security can also be ensured exclusively by the state. Therefore, national sovereignty is the only sovereignty that can exist. Since a priori, the European people cannot exist naturally, consequently, European sovereignty.

It is worth dwelling on the NR thesis that European sovereignty cannot initially exist. The international company Ipsos surveyed in 2021 in eight European countries, including France. The poll results show that 37% of the French surveyed do not understand what «European sovereignty» is (Russia Today, 2021). Moreover, those who understand what is meant by «European sovereignty» believe that the words «Europe» and «sovereignty» should not be used together (Russia Today, 2021). Consequently, one of the principles of the «European Alliance of Nations» about the fact that there is no «European sovereignty» is synchronized with the opinion of a part of the French.

It should be noted that much attention is paid to cooperation in the Manifesto of the European Alliance of Nations. It is supposed to take place at the intergovernmental level. Intergovernmental cooperation enters into a counterbalance to today's interaction, which, according to Eurosceptics, is carried out based on the principles of supranationality and federalism (Rassemblement national, 2019:1). In particular, states will enter into partnerships voluntarily, and at any time, will be able to withdraw from them on conditions agreed in advance. Moreover, the desire to end cooperation within the alliance cannot cause pressure or sanctions from the states remaining in the alliance. This principle was put forward in connection with the problematic Brexit conditions for the UK.

It is also essential to pay attention to the fact that within the framework of this partnership, cooperation in certain areas will be possible due to the high volatility of the association, for example, from the UK, Serbia, and Russia.

Summarizing the above, in the period from 2014 to 2019, there was a transformation of the position of the NR on the issue of France's membership in the EU. Recognizing the population's commitment to France's participation in European integration, NR abandoned the idea of leaving the EU and proposed a new way of developing European integration, which should be implemented following the results of EU reforms.



## *Eurozone*

The Eurozone, although it does not include all EU countries, is one of the most important components of European integration. Since to be a member of the Eurozone, one must abandon using the national currency, Eurosceptics strongly criticize membership in the Eurozone. In 2014, the NR advocated the withdrawal of France from the Eurozone and drew attention to the need to return the franc to circulation in France. Former deputy chairman of the NR F. Filippo said that «leaving the euro area and independent management of the national currency is an absolute necessity for France» (Парламентская газета, 2014). According to statistics from French customs, France's share of the Eurozone market fell from 17% to 13.6% between 2000 and 2015 (The Independent, 2017). In this regard, the NR had reason to demand that France leave the Eurozone. In 2017, during the campaign during the presidential elections, M. Le Pen also continued promoting the idea of France's withdrawal from the Eurozone, justifying this by the fact that the euro should only be a commercial currency used for intra-European trade.

Eurosceptic rhetoric on the use of the euro in France changed for the 2019 European Parliament elections (See Tab. 1). Eurosceptics had to acknowledge the commitment of the French to the euro and adjust their programs to the request and desires of voters. Thus, according to a survey by Elabe, in 2017, 73% of French respondents were against France's exit from the Eurozone (Красная весна, 2017). In this regard, the Eurosceptics, in their program developed for the 2019 European Parliament elections, put forward initiatives to reform monetary policy within the Eurozone. The program states that the euro serves to enrich the German economy. Therefore, it is necessary to subordinate the euro to national economies by increasing the share of debt that national banks must hold. The powers of the ECB should be minimal only for the solution of specific tasks (Rassemblement national, 2019:2). Thus, the NO proposes to introduce a mandate system for the ECB. For example, the ECB will be given the mandate to resolve a lousy unemployment situation. The mandates, in turn, will be determined by the European Council and the European Parliament. Thus, Eurosceptics propose to return monetary policy to the national authorities and national banks, which should become one of the stages for the future economic growth of the states belonging to the Eurozone.

The initiatives regarding the Eurozone, spelled out in the manifesto of the European Alliance of Nations, are backed up by M. Le Pen's rhetoric. The NR leader said that leaving the eurozone is no longer a priority, calling this change in the Eurosceptic discourse «a pragmatic, not an ideological solution» (Caro, 2019). As mentioned above, Eurosceptics were forced to admit the desire of citizens to use the euro as a currency for life in France, which led to the transformation of

the Eurosceptics' position on this issue, since within the framework of the election campaign. In other words, it was necessary to respond to public requests. For instance, the French political scientist and lecturer at the University of Montpellier E. Ranot believes that M. Le Pen has concluded that the calls for France to leave the Eurozone hinder the expansion of the electorate (Caro, 2019).

Thus, a change in position, particularly the rejection of the idea of leaving the Eurozone and of the initiative to restore the operation of the franc in France, is one of the key characteristic features of the updated program of the French Eurosceptics for 2019.

### *Single market*

Eurosceptics also saw several problems in the existence of a single market. Therefore, they considered it necessary to change some of the principles of its operation both in 2014 and in 2019. Thus, in 2014, NR put forward an initiative to replace the «wild» globalization with a «regulated» one implied the assumption of reasonable protectionism (Mestre, 2014). The main goal of this requirement was to restore fair competition with those states whose competitive advantage was based on low social standards. From the point of view of M. Le Pen, «the EU prohibits protection from imports from countries with unfair competition, France's doors are open to all impulses of ultraliberal globalization, and the EU prohibits any reasonable protectionism» (Piquet, 2014).

Moreover, according to Eurosceptics, open borders have deprived the indigenous people of France of a vast number of jobs. Thus, the abandonment of the principle of free trade was aimed at creating favorable conditions for the functioning of the French market. Products that threaten the demand for domestic products should not enter the territory of France. In addition, the labor market should be composed only of the French, so they are provided with jobs in the first place.

By 2019, Eurosceptics also proposed reforming the principles of the single market in the EU. Thus, «the European Alliance of Nations» assumed the operation of only European companies on the territory of the EU. Also, the European labor market was supposed to consist of citizens exclusively from EU countries. Goods and services that meet the interests of only Europeans should enter the EU. Trade deals should replace free trade agreements. EU companies are expected to enter the European market, benefiting the European consumer from healthy competition and reasonable prices. Also, cooperation will be carried out at the intergovernmental level, not only in order to create healthy competition but also to jointly confront external suppliers that can potentially compete with products manufactured in the EU.

In addition, the NR is taking the initiative to abandon «free trade» («libre échange») and move to «fair trade» («juste échange») (Rassemblement national, 2019:1). (See Tab. 1) The main difference between the latter will not be in the complete absence of any customs tariffs, quotas, subsidies, and other restrictions, but in the introduction of reasonable barriers that will protect the national product if it is more profitable to produce it on the territory of a particular state than to import it from partner country. With this initiative, Eurocritics are trying to draw attention to the need to establish reasonable limits, namely, as Eurosceptics stated in 2014, the introduction of «reasonable protectionism».

Based on the above, the rhetoric on the single market has not undergone several changes. On the contrary, it became more detailed and contained expanded ideas from 2014, when Eurosceptics declared the need to protect the domestic product and limit the labor market to citizens of their countries.

### *EU Institutions*

European critics have always criticized supranational institutions since they were an integral part of European integration, the principles of which imply the delegation of a part of powers by national institutions to supranational ones. It should be noted that the criticism from the French Eurosceptics in 2014 was categorical. It did not contain any reform proposals. By 2019, the NR presented a plan to transform some supranational EU institutions, particularly their powers and functions (See Tab. 1).

In 2014, M. Le Pen said that in France, «... it is not François Hollande who decides, but earlier it was not Nicolas Sarkozy who decided. Brussels decides. From there they impose on us all these saving measures» (Узнародов, 2015). Thus, according to M. Le Pen, in practice, the functionality of the European Commission was not limited only to the supranational level, which created barriers to the full-scale development and independent government of France. Also, M. Le Pen believes that the French are tired of external control, that they want to get rid of supranational pressure and interference, which is confirmed by the following quote: «Our people demand a single policy, a policy developed by the French for the French ... People in our country are more they do not want to be ruled from outside, do not want to be imposed on the laws for which they did not vote, do not want to obey the European Commissioners, whom they did not elect directly» (Узнародов, 2015). It is a well-known fact that the people do not elect European Commissioners. The EU Council approves the composition of the European Commission after countries nominate their candidates. Since the citizens of the EU countries do not directly participate in this procedure, the European Commission, in the opinion of the NR, does not have sufficient legitimacy. In

addition, Eurosceptics demand the restoration of the supremacy of national law over European (Toute l'Europe, 2014). Proceeding from this, in 2014, the NR appealed to the non-election of the European Commission and, consequently, the impossibility of endowing this supranational institution with legitimacy. Any influence of the European Commission on national policy is considered a serious flaw in the EU's institutional system.

Despite M. Le Pen's declared readiness in 2019 to «defeat the Brussels monster» (Toute l'Europe, 2014). The rhetoric on the issue of supranational institutions was less radical and focused on the need to reform the supranational institutions of the EU. As in 2014, criticism of EU institutions in 2019 was that they impose various initiatives, norms, and rules from above, which led to the fact that by 2019 supranationality went beyond what was expected at the time of creation of the EU institutions (Rassemblement national, 2019:1). According to Eurosceptics, citizens are very far from making decisions, which creates a huge gap between the population of the EU and its supranational institutions. Moreover, critics of European integration associate the paralysis of institutions and delays in decision-making with the enlargements that the EU has experienced: «how can one succeed at 28 or 27 in something difficult to tackle at 15?», - declare the members of the NR party (Rassemblement national, 2019:1).

NR has proposed several measures to transform EU institutions within the European Alliance of Nations framework. Among them was the European Commission. The criticism of Eurosceptics is aimed at the fact that the European Commission has excessive power to the detriment of other institutions since the Commission's powers exceed those of the government. It is noted that there are among them such as legislative initiative, EU regulation, control over the implementation of laws. This, in turn, makes the European Commission the «treaties custodian» (Rassemblement national, 2019:2). In this regard, Eurosceptics want to abolish the European Commission in its current form and transform it into the «General Secretariat of the European Council», and endow the European Council and the European Parliament with its previous functions.

First, the legislative initiative must belong to the European Council since it consists of legally elected heads of state and government, which makes it legitimate.

Secondly, the European Parliament must consider, discuss, vote, and ratify the treaties, texts, and directives proposed by the European Council. Finally, as Eurosceptics say, it is necessary to redefine the functions of the European Parliament and reorient it from the «registration chamber of the Commission» to a body «serving the people». Consequently, the NR is putting forward an

initiative to abolish the European Commission as the highest executive body of the EU and proposes to form an administrative body based on the former European Commission.

Attention is also paid to one of the principles of the «European Alliance of Nations». Any legislative initiatives affecting the sovereignty of member states will be implemented only unanimously. If one of the association members is against it, the ratification of the treaty will become impossible.

Consequently, the NR proposes a redistribution of responsibilities and powers of supranational institutions, including by depriving the highest executive body of the EU of the functionality that it currently possesses.

### *Immigration*

The problem of refugees occupies an important place in the rhetoric of Eurosceptics. In 2014, Eurosceptics believed that the main solution to the problem of overpopulation of the EU by immigrants was the return of France to its national borders and the withdrawal from the Schengen zone. Such initiatives were put forward since the EU was perceived by Eurosceptics as a sluggish integration association, unable to solve the problem of illegal immigration and only respond to this crisis by encouraging the massive hospitality of the EU countries (Mestre, 2014). This initiative aroused interest among citizens due to their dissatisfaction with the situation with immigrants. According to the international research company Ipsos, in 2016, 57% of French people surveyed believed that the country was too overpopulated with immigrants (Bardon, 2016). Furthermore, 67% of the population viewed immigrants as assimilated with terrorists, which exacerbated the radicalization of Islamist sentiments (Bardon, 2016). 45% were in favor of the fact that France should be closed to immigrants (Bardon, 2016). Thus, taking into account the level of dissatisfaction of the French society on the problem of immigration, it can be concluded that the position of the NR regarding the overpopulation of the EU by immigrants and the threat arising from their residence in the EU, were often synchronized with the position of society and Islamophobic sentiments.

The 2019 rhetoric also addressed immigration. However, it is worth noting that the NR no longer offered to leave the Schengen area but was only aimed at expressing dissatisfaction with this situation. (See Tab. 1) This is the main difference between the rhetoric of 2019 and what the Eurosceptics proposed in 2014. Thus, during her speech, M. Le Pen stated that «globalization with the unjustified opening of borders has subjugated French streets, neighborhoods, cities, and villages of insane immigration, which is transforming some places in a zone outside France» (L'Express, 2019) M. Le Pen also argued that «it is time to put an end to all this since the French is at home»

(L'Express, 2019). Consequently, the NR expressed its concern about the refugee situation since, according to Eurosceptics, this creates discomfort for the French population.

In addition, shortly before the start of the 2019 election campaign, a document appeared that was dedicated to the problem of migration. The main theses of this document are that countries receiving migrants are largely destabilized, which poses a threat to the socio-economic balance. In addition, the peoples of the host countries develop a sense of cultural deprivation, which affects their perception of themselves in society. In the host countries, the radicalization of Islamism is growing, which also poses a threat to the local population (Rassemblement national, 2018). All this, according to Eurosceptics, creates uncomfortable living conditions for the French. In addition, Eurosceptics believe that the main problems associated with the influx of immigrants are the costs of housing refugees, job cuts for French citizens, the imposition of cultural values and traditions by immigrants, and the threat of terrorism. Consequently, the NR states that the influx of refugees leads to several problems that could lead countries to a crisis.

Summarizing the above, Eurosceptics opposed full participation in assistance to refugees both in 2014 and in 2019. However, if in 2014, one of the possible solutions to the problem of Eurosceptics saw the withdrawal from the Schengen zone, in 2019, they refused this idea. However, the NR continued to state that the influx of refugees negatively affected both the social and economic spheres.

#### *Position towards Russia*

Members of the NR have always perceived Russia as an important player in international relations. Both in 2014 and 2019, the NR strongly supported the policy pursued by Russia and advocated the improvement of relations between France and Russia. (See Tab. 1) Thus, in one of her interviews, M. Le Pen said that «she has been advocating the deepening of relations between France and Russia for a long time» (TACC, 2014). In addition, the NR saw Russia as «a critical element in the balance of power that can tame globalization» (Le Point, 2017) The above factors directly explain why the concept of «Europe of Nations», developed by 2014 and implying a common economic and political space on the territory of the Eurasian continent, provided for Russia to join it.

In addition, the NR supported Russia in the events of 2014. Thus, J.-L. Schaffhauser, a member of the European Parliament and a representative, together with a former adviser to the French Eurosceptics E. Leroy, arrived in Donetsk in 2015 to celebrate the founding of the DPR (Daily Beast, 2017). In addition, NR from the very beginning of the sanctions war with Russia

opposed it, declaring the following: «We are foolishly depriving ourselves of the sales market in Russia, supporting the policy of erroneous EU sanctions» (Russia Today, 2015). According to a study by the French Center for the World Economy (Center d'Etudes Prospectives et d'Informations Internationales), France received less than \$ 200 million over the year of sanctions (CEPII, 2016). In addition, according to the Federal Customs Service of Russia, in 2015, imports to Russia from EU countries decreased by 40.2%. Over two years of sanctions, total imports from EU countries decreased by \$ 64 billion (РБК, 2015). In connection with the above figures, it becomes clear why the NR opposed the sanctions imposed on Russia and, as a result, retaliatory sanctions from the West.

It is also worth noting that the desire for cooperation and a high level of support for Russia has always occupied an important place in the rhetoric of the NR in 2014 since Russia is interesting in the NR both for economic cooperation and in order to ensure security.

In 2014, Russia acted for NR as a country with which it is possible to establish partnerships both in economics and in political aspects.

By 2019, the position of the NR concerning Russia has not changed. Thus, according to Eurosceptics, Russia remained in 2019 «the most important element of the security and stability of Europe» (Rassemblement national, 2019:1). Moreover, according to the NR, the sanctions war with Russia continued to hurt the Russian economy and the economy of the EU and, in particular, France. It is also worth noting that the leader of the French Eurosceptics M. Le Pen characterizes the EU's opposition to Russia's participation in the G7 as «an absurd parody of the Cold War» (Лента, 2019). In her opinion, the anti-Russian policy is a relic of the past, which does not correspond to the interests of the EU countries and causes damage.

Thus, NR in the period from 2014 to 2019 maintained its position as a friendly party towards Russia, opposing the sanctions war between Russia and the West. The NR also remained committed to the fact that Russia plays a vital role in ensuring security on the continent and in the economic well-being of the transatlantic region.

## Conclusion

The radicalism of the French Eurosceptic rhetoric declined between 2014 and 2019. The key features of the updated discourse are the refusal of France to leave the EU, the Eurozone, the Schengen area. In 2014, Eurosceptics considered EU membership to be destructive for France, while by 2019, Eurosceptics came to a conclusion about the possible existence of France in the reformed EU and «the European Alliance of Nations» created on its basis. The transformed Euroscepticism also consists of recognizing the need to use the euro on the territory of France, but subject to its subordination to the national economies of the union. The problem of a single market by 2019 was still relevant. In order to resolve it, Eurosceptics have expanded initiatives to reform the principles of its operation, including the principle of open borders for products coming to countries from outside. The rhetoric of Eurosceptics regarding institutions still contained criticism. However, since Eurosceptics abandoned the idea of exit, they recognized the very fact of supranationality as one of the fundamental principles of European integration but requiring some reform. NR programs 2014 and 2019 differed from each other and on the issue of immigration. The radicalism of the rhetoric regarding the refugee problem also decreased as Eurosceptics abandoned the initiative to withdraw France from the Schengen zone. Finally, the position of Eurosceptics has remained unchanged regarding Russia and the need to cooperate with it. During the inter-election period, Eurosceptics maintained a friendly attitude towards Russia and tried in every possible way to promote the idea of the need to end the sanctions war with Russia.

Such a transformation was needed for Eurosceptics to consolidate them in the ranks of the systemic parties of European integration and the transition of Euroscepticism from the status of a peripheral ideology to the status of a long-term one. Whether the elections will reduce the rhetoric of Eurosceptics in 2024 depends on the needs of society and the challenges of the time, including the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the internal interaction of EU countries and on the historical experience of assistance provided or not provided in time to individual EU countries.

**Tab.1. 2014 National Front Program VS 2019 National Rally Program**

Topic	2014	2019
EU membership	withdrawal from the EU (Frexit)	EU membership «European Alliance of Nations»



		Eurozone membership
Eurozone	Eurozone withdrawal	subordination of the euro to national economies
		ECB functionality restriction
		rejection of the free trade principle («free change»)
Single market	rejection of the free trade principle	introduction of the fair trade principle («juste échange»)
	protectionism	rewriting contracts into commercial transactions
		unification within the outside world
		redistribution of powers of supranational institutions
EU institutions	French policy for the French	European Commission reorientation to the European Council General Secretariat
	the imposition of rules and regulations	
	criticism of supranationality	transfer of legislative initiative to the European Council
	non-election of the European Commission	paralysis of the supranational system due to a large number of participants
	Schengen area withdrawal	destabilization of host countries
Immigration	closing borders	threat to socio-economic balance
	EU is a sluggish union, unable to solve the problem	a sense of cultural deprivation
		radicalization of Islamist sentiments

Position towards Russia

intensification of relations with the Russian Federation

ending the sanctions war with Russia

Russia is a critical element of the balance of power that can tame globalization

supporting Russia's position in the Ukrainian crisis

intensification of relations with the Russian Federation

ending the sanctions war with Russia

Russia is the most important element of security and stability in Europe

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