

France's Le Pen Says Admires Putin as Much as Merkel – Magazine

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Marine Le Pen, leader of France's far-right National Front, said she admired Vladimir Putin as much as German Chancellor Angela Merkel because the Russian president did not allow other countries to impose decisions on him.

Le Pen's anti-immigrant, Eurosceptic party scored its first nationwide poll victory in European elections last week and has since said it is close to forming a political group in the European Parliament.

In an interview with German news magazine Der Spiegel, Le Pen said she had respect for leaders who defended their country's interests and added that Merkel's policies were good for Germany, though they would hurt others.

"I think [Putin] puts the interests of Russia and the Russian people first so in this regard I have the same amount of respect for him as for Ms. Merkel," she said in the interview.

"A lot of things are said about Russia because for years it has been demonized on U.S. orders.

It should be one of the great characteristics of a European country to form its own opinion and not to see everything from the perspective of the U.S."

On Wednesday Le Pen's party struck a deal with four other Eurosceptic parties — Geert Wilders' Dutch Freedom Party, Italy's Northern League, Austria's Freedom Party and Belgium's Vlaams Belang. To form a faction, parties must have at least 25 to 30 members elected in at least seven EU member states.

Le Pen said she was optimistic the National Front could forge a bloc with other parties in the European Parliament.

"I have got a whole series of meetings soon," she said.

Asked if she would like to work with the anti-EU U.K. Independence Party, or UKIP, she said: "It would be possible. We have the same fundamental position on Europe."

UKIP leader Nigel Farage has, however, ruled out working with France's National Front. "They come from a different political family," he told the BBC in an interview. "We want nothing to do with that party at all."

On whether the National Front would work with the Eurosceptic Alternative for Germany, or AfD, Le Pen said: "They have not expressed any such wish up until now. We share certain views with the AfD but it's a popular party — it is an elite one and it has a completely different structure."

Asked if she saw her party getting to the second round of a national presidential election in 2017, Le Pen said that was a "very credible hypothesis" and added that her party had at least as much potential among nonvoters as among voters.

"I believe that we'll get into power in the next 10 years — perhaps more quickly than some people imagine," she said.

Calling the 28-nation EU a "big disaster, an anti-democratic monster," she said she wanted to destroy the EU but not Europe.

"I want to stop it getting fatter, continuing to breathe, touching everything with its paws and reaching into all areas of our legislation with its tentacles," she said, adding people were allowing their right to self-determination to be stolen.

She said Germany had become the Europe's economic powerhouse "because our leaders are weak" but said its neighbor should never forget that France was the "political heart" of Europe.

She said a strong euro was ruining France and leaving the single currency bloc would represent "an incredible opportunity" for France, which she said was on the way to "underdevelopment."

Le Pen denied her party was xenophobic, saying she did not hate anyone but she added that France, where the number of unemployed rose to a record in April, could no longer afford immigration. She said France needed to save on its welfare system "which gives our citizens

the same protection as illegal immigrants."

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