

Where does Florian Philippot's resignation leave the Front National?



Florian Philippot, one of the most influential figures in France's Front National, resigned from his position on 21 September amid tensions over the future direction of the party. [Marta Lorimer](#) explains what led to his decision and assesses where it leaves Marine Le Pen as she attempts to reform the Front National following disappointing results in the French presidential and legislative elections.



Florian Philippot, Credit: © [European Union 2015 – European Parliament](#) (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0)

On 21 September, Florian Philippot, who had served as Marine Le Pen's number two and Vice President responsible for the Front National's Communication and Strategy, announced that he was quitting the party. The decision came following a tense summer and a day after Marine Le Pen had withdrawn Philippot's mandate for Strategy and Communication, leaving him effectively as a 'Vice President for nothing'. The official reason provided was that Philippot refused to quit the presidency of his think tank/association '*Les Patriotes*' (The Patriots), however, this was only the last act of a rift that has been brewing for a long time.

The beginning of the 'crisis' can be traced back to the results of the presidential election, where Le Pen lost to Emmanuel Macron with 34% of the votes in the second round. While Le Pen received a historic level of support, it was below what the party was hoping for. Many blamed the result on a poor performance in the final debate, where Le Pen appeared unprepared and unpresidential, but within the party, it was also interpreted as a failure of Philippot's '*Ni droite, ni gauche*' (neither Left, nor Right) strategy.

Philippot joined the FN in 2009 and quickly developed a strong – some say osmotic – working relationship with Marine Le Pen. He followed her in her ambition to 'dedemonise' the party and had a key role in introducing a more 'social' and sovereigntist aspect to the FN's ideological offer. In particular, he pushed to make the EU a salient issue and indeed contributed to an increasingly critical party stance toward Brussels. Within a few years, he managed to impose himself through a relentless media presence as one of the most recognisable faces of the FN. Importantly, he also put a lot of effort into bringing young blood into the party, targeting especially individuals with a 'technocratic' profile, such as graduates from elite French schools and senior civil servants.

As much as the party tries to hide it, however, the Front National, like many other parties, is divided in currents and the rise of the Philippot line did not please everyone. The right-wing of the party felt that the social-sovereigntist line brought them too far away from their most recognisable topics of immigration and Islam. This faction was the first to seize the chance to blame the presidential loss and the underwhelming results of the legislative elections that followed it on Philippot, pushing for a return to the 'fundamentals' of the FN.

Following the party's disappointing election results, Le Pen announced that the FN would pursue a radical programme of renovation to become a 'party of government'. Around the same time, Philippot formed his group '*Les Patriotes*', officially a think tank set up to contribute to the debate within the FN on the direction of reform, but seen by many as a micro-party. Controversy over the group escalated in September, leading to Le Pen asking Philippot to make a choice between the FN and *Les Patriotes*. Philippot refused to give in and Le Pen withdrew his political responsibilities, leading to Philippot leaving the party along with many of the members that joined it with him.

While the split is not as severe as the one that touched the party in 1998, when Bruno Mégret left and took around half of the party, including many 'cadres', into his new party, the *Mouvement National Républicain*, Philippot's exit is nonetheless a major setback for the FN. First of all, Philippot represented the 'dedemonisation' of the FN: he had virtually no connection with some of the most extreme elements of the FN and advocated a rather new line for it.

Second, his leaving could lead the FN to return to basics, thus losing a number of the 'left-lepenistes' as French political scientist Pascal Perrineau has called them, that were attracted by Philippot's anti-EU and statist stance. Third, Marine Le Pen's position also appears potentially less secure. While there is no obvious replacement for her, she has now lost a key ally within the party at a crucial time of reform, and could lose her hand over the FN should a credible challenger (possibly her niece Marion Maréchal, should she decide to return to politics) emerge.

Finally, a divided party is likely to have an even harder time imposing itself as the main opposition to President Macron. In fact, Le Pen had hoped that making it into the second round of the presidential election and securing a good result in the legislative elections would make the FN the best placed party to represent the main voice of opposition to the President. However, she has so far failed to do so, leaving the bulk of contestation to the hard left Jean-Luc Mélenchon and his party, *La France Insoumise*. The coming months will be crucial for the FN, and the party congress in early 2018 will reveal if its efforts to reform can succeed or if it will remain anchored to its role as a party of opposition.

[Please read our comments policy before commenting.](#)

Note: This article gives the views of the author, not the position of EUROPP – European Politics and Policy or the London School of Economics.

About the author



Marta Lorimer – LSE

Marta Lorimer is a PhD candidate at the European Institute, London School of Economics. She holds a degree in European Studies from Sciences Po Paris and the LSE. Her research interests include far right parties, European politics and ideas of 'Europe'.