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Nationalism, militarism dominate final European election debate in France

The final televised debate between France’s candidates in the European elections, hosted by BFM-TV on Thursday evening, was a spectacle of political reaction, dominated by militarism, nationalism and attacks on immigrants and refugees.

The debate revealed that whatever the outcome of the elections, workers and young people in France and Europe confront a political establishment and ruling class shifting sharply to the right, preparing for war and building up the forces of dictatorship against a growing working class upsurge of strikes and protests over inequality and austerity.

Only 12 out of 34 candidates’ lists were invited to take part in the debate, including Jean-Luc Mélenchon’s Unsubmissive France (LFI), the coalition of the Movement for Democracy and President Emmanuel Macron’s The Republic on the Move! (LREM), the Socialist Party (PS), the Communist Party of France (PCF), Europe Ecology—The Greens, the Gaullist Republicans and Marine Le Pen’s ultra-right National Rally (RN), formerly the National Front.

Workers Struggle (LO) and 22 other parties were prevented from participating on the anti-democratic grounds that the television station did not consider them to be “major” candidates.

The event took place as polls forecast Le Pen’s extreme-right party winning the most seats of any French party in Sunday’s vote. It owes its growth to the climate of nationalism and anti-immigrant chauvinism promoted by the Macron government and the entire political

establishment, their social cuts that have impoverished broad sections of the working class and the political vacuum on the left.

Due to the right-wing policies of Mélenchon's LFI and the other pseudo-left parties and their promotion of the widely hated Socialist Party, RN has been able to pose as an outsider against the "establishment," exploiting the social crisis via its foul scapegoating of immigrant workers and refugees.

What was most clear from the event, however, was that in their militarism and attacks on immigrants and the working class, the other major parties have no essential differences with Le Pen. They disagree only as to the best means of aggressively asserting French imperialism's interests.

In fact, throughout the evening Raphaël Glucksmann of the Socialist Party, Nathalie Loiseau of LREM, former PS presidential candidate Benoît Hamon of Génération.s and Yannick Jadot of the Greens all attacked RN on the right-wing, nationalist basis that its criticisms of the European Union would be an obstacle to asserting French interests via the EU against its nuclear-armed rivals in China, Russia and the United States.

Italian interior minister "Matteo Salvini is letting China buy ports to consolidate its strategy of a new silk road," said Hamon. "China has an offensive strategy that is playing on divisions in Europe. And who acceded first? The Italian minister and the sovereignists [nationalists]" in Le Pen's RN.

Asked by the moderators whether the United States could still be considered Europe's ally, Glucksmann of the Socialist Party declared that "since 1945 the Europeans have been like adolescents, benefiting from the American umbrella and with no autonomy... It is obvious that the US is no longer our strategic ally. We must assume foreign and defense policy."

Referring to RN, he added that "national sovereignty, on its own, will turn us into lackeys, into slaves." France would be unable to compete with its major rivals. "We will have no mastery of our own future. The only possible control of our own future in this dangerous and multinational world is to have a European policy."

The Greens' Jadot could not restrain himself from launching into a rant on his ambitions for Africa, the Middle East and Eastern Europe. "Europe must become a world power. We often speak of Europe as a top market ... and far less often as a global political power.

Today we have a series of extremely unstable regions on Europe's borders—in Ukraine ... in all of Africa, in the Middle East—zones of instability, zones that we need.”

Loiseau, the lead candidate for Macron's list, added: “I do not want France to be forever the policeman of Africa and the Middle East just on its own.” Instead “we need to be more numerous in order to be able to intervene together. A European army is an absolute necessity,” as is “the strategic autonomy of the European Union.”

Her statements echoed the blog post of current defense minister Florence Parly—a cabinet minister in the Socialist Party government of Lionel Jospin from 2000 to 2002—published two days earlier, calling for a European army and a vote for Macron's party, “if you don't want a defenseless Europe.”

None of the candidates in Thursday's debate cared to spell out the implications of their perspective of aggressive military development in opposition to the world's major powers: the inevitable drive to world war over markets, resources and spheres of influence. All of them know that among workers and young people there is overwhelming opposition to militarism and war.

The RN's Jordan Bardella insisted that his party's opposition to both NATO and a European army had nothing to do with opposition to militarism. They were both militarily impracticable and would subordinate French interests to the United States and other European powers, he argued.

“To have a European army consists actually in giving our military technology to all the European countries who have no army, who have only a defense. We have an army. And I believe France is a great country, a great nation, which carries a strong voice,” Bardella said, which “we know how to use today in Mali.”

Manon Aubry, the lead candidate of Mélenchon's Unsubmissive France, opposed NATO in the debate on the same grounds as Bardella, asserting it was “a tool of the Cold War” and “no longer has any sense today.” In a tweet published yesterday, she added more explicitly that NATO “is aligned to the interests of Donald Trump and the United States.”

Mélenchon is a proven defender of French imperialist wars, having supported the intervention in both Libya in 2011 and Mali and the Sahel in 2013 and having served in the Socialist Party for decades. A debate moderator said to Aubry that “in the field of fighting terrorism, of the intelligence services,” Europe had “made great progress ... in

exchanging intelligence, in reinforcing barriers of verification at borders,” and asked if this were not “a good tool.” To which Aubry replied, “Of course, we have made progress.” The reactionary debate underscored the fact that there is no progressive faction of the European bourgeoisie. The independent political intervention of the working class on a socialist perspective against capitalism and the entire establishment is the only basis upon which a fight can be waged against war, austerity and the build-up of a police-state.

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