

# *France's Le Pen faces court for embezzling European Union funds*

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France's right-wing leader Marine Le Pen has gone on trial over the misappropriation of

## European Union funds a decade ago when she was a Member of the European Parliament (MEP).

Paris, September 30 (RHC)-- The former leader of the far-right National Rally (RN) party is accused of using ?3.7 million of the European Union budget to pay Brussels-hired staff for work that was unrelated to their assigned duties at the European Union.

Le Pen, who has denied any wrongdoing, told reporters upon arrival at the courthouse on Monday: "We have not violated any political and regulatory rules of the European Parliament."

She said she would present her case by proving her innocence with "extremely serious and extremely solid arguments." However, if she is found guilty, she could be fined, handed a prison sentence, and banned from public office.

Le Pen's RN party and 26 of its top officials are accused of having used funds allocated for the salaries of EU parliamentary aides to pay staff who instead did political work for the far-right political group between 2004 and 2016.

Prosecutors say Le Pen, who was the RN party's leader back then, orchestrated the allocation of parliamentary assistance budgets and instructed MEPs to hire individuals holding party positions. These individuals were presented as EU parliamentary assistants, but in reality, they were allegedly working for the National Rally party in various capacities.

Her father, Jean-Marie Le Pen, founder of the National Rally in 1972 - which was called the National Front (FN) until 2018 - was also accused of embezzlement, but judges decided the 96-year-old was too frail to stand trial.

This misappropriation case emerged in 2014, when the European Anti-Fraud Office, the European Parliament's control body, received information about possible irregularities in the contracts of FN parliamentary assistants.

In 2015, the suspicion was reinforced by the publication of an official organization chart for the FN, which included 16 MEPs and 20 parliamentary assistants with partisan responsibilities.

The European Parliament regulations explicitly forbid the appropriation of funds allocated to MEPs to employ assistants to do national political activities.

In March 2015, Martin Schulz, the President of the European Parliament back then, wrote to the French Ministry of Justice, which in turn referred the case to the French Prosecutor in Paris to pursue the matter.

Meanwhile, Le Pen, who lost to President Emmanuel Macron in the second round of France's presidential elections in both 2017 and 2022, is widely seen as a front-runner in France's 2027 presidential election.

However, political analysts say her possible conviction would be a major setback for National Rally which has made huge progress in past years, winning multiple new seats in this summer's snap parliamentary elections.

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