

France

Melenchon woos voters

Far-right contender Eric nailed for 'hate speech'

PARIS, Jan 18, (AP) — French far-right presidential candidate **Eric Zemmour** was convicted Monday of inciting racial hatred over 2020 comments he made about unaccompanied migrant children.

A Paris court ordered Zemmour to pay a fine of 10,000 euros (more than \$11,000) and several thousand euros in damages to anti-racism groups.



Zemmour

Zemmour's lawyer, Olivier Pardo, said he advised his client to appeal the decision.

Samuel Thomas, president of the Maisons des Potes ("Homes of Friends"), a network of anti-racism associations, said the sentence is "very light."

"We had hoped for him to be deprived of civic rights," Thomas said. "So Eric Zemmour will be able to continue his political career." He added: "When you're inciting racial hatred, you're also responsible for crimes that are committed by far-right thugs."

Zemmour, who has two prior hate speech convictions, went on trial in November on charges of "public insult" and "incitement to hatred or violence" against a group of people because of their ethnic, national, racial or religious origin.

The former TV pundit, who is running in April's presidential election, is drawing fervent audiences with his anti-Islam, anti-immigration invective. He is considered being among the major challengers to centrist President Emmanuel Macron, who is seen as the front-runner, according to polls. Macron has yet to confirm he will run for a second term.

The case against Zemmour focused on September 2020 comments that he made on French news broadcaster CNews about children who migrate to France without parents or guardians.

"They're thieves, they're murderers, they're rapists. That's all they are. We must send them back," he said. "These people cost us money."

Zemmour wasn't present at court for his trial or the verdict. In a statement in November, he denounced "an attempt to intimidate (him)" from prosecutors and anti-racist groups. He maintained his comments and said the political debate doesn't take place in courts.

Appeal

Zemmour is also set to go on appeal trial on Thursday on a charge of contesting crimes against humanity - illegal in France - for arguing in a 2019 television debate that Marshal Philippe Petain, head of Vichy's collaborationist government during World War II, saved France's Jews from the Holocaust.

A court acquitted him last year, saying Zemmour's comments negated Petain's role in the extermination, but explained that he wasn't convicted because he had spoken in the heat of the moment.

Zemmour has repeated similar comments in recent months, and lawyers contesting his acquittal plan to cite that point as evidence in the appeal trial.

Zemmour previously was convicted of incitement to racial hatred after justifying discrimination against Black and Arab people in 2010, and of incitement to religious hatred for anti-Islam comments in 2016. He was sentenced to pay court costs and a 5,000-euro (\$5,660) fine.

He has also been tried in other cases where he was acquitted.

Zemmour is a descendant of Berber Jews from Algeria. He was born in France in 1958 to parents who came from the North African country, then a French colony, a few years earlier.

Meanwhile, far-left French presidential candidate Jean-Luc Melenchon embraced migrants and Russia and derided campaign rivals Sunday as he sought to reinvigorate his flagging campaign for April's election with an unusual "immersive and olfactory" rally.

Yes, olfactory: The campaign team diffused various smells into the exhibition hall in the western city of Nantes, surrounding participants with screens and speakers.

While the videos were powerful, with ocean waves and starscapes transporting the crowd as Melenchon talked about sea pollution and the dangers of wars in space, the aromatic part was a bit of a flop. The masked crowd had trouble smelling anything at all, or identifying the scents -- some described fruity or marine aromas, others reportedly smelled gasoline - or their connection to what Melenchon was saying.

Fractured

The event came as the once-powerful French left wing is deeply fractured and struggling to make its voice heard in a campaign where far-right and conservative figures have grabbed most of the attention so far. Melenchon - a political firebrand with a notorious temper - refuses to form a united front with other left-wing candidates against centrist President Emmanuel Macron, who's expected to seek reelection.

At Sunday's rally, Melenchon promised to guarantee jobs for everyone, raise the minimum wage, lower the retirement age to 60 and hike taxes on multinationals and rich households. His campaign platform calls for France to pull out of NATO, disobey EU rules, legalize cannabis, renationalize some businesses, block energy price rises, and spend more on fighting racial and other discrimination.

While other candidates are railing against migration, Melenchon said migrants are "welcome" in France, calling immigration the "No. 1 factor" in human progress.

He also proudly called Russia a "partner," even as European governments are scrambling to find ways to avert a possible Russian invasion of Ukraine.

And he had little kindness for his rivals on the left. "We don't need union. We need clarity and people's mobilization," he said. "I'm not their friend."

Melenchon has criticized the French government's vaccine and virus rules as too restrictive, but his team distributed masks at the entrance to Sunday's event.

The 70-year-old Melenchon drew attention in the 2017 presidential race for holding simultaneous campaign rallies via hologram. A similar show is planned for early April.

He was the strongest-performing left-wing candidate in 2017, winning 19.6% of the vote, but came in fourth. This time there are six left-wing candidates vying for the April 10 first-round vote, and polls suggest none will make the likely runoff of the top two vote-getters on April 24.

Many voters are undecided and the field of candidates is still shifting. According to pollsters, Macron's strongest challengers so far are far-right leader Marine Le Pen, who he beat in the 2017 runoff; conservative Republican candidate Valerie Pécresse, who visited a migrant camp in Greece this weekend to push for stemming migration to Europe; and populist far-right pundit Eric Zemmour, who has been repeatedly convicted of hate speech.

Other contenders include Socialist Paris Mayor Anne Hidalgo, Greens party candidate Yannick Jadot, and former justice minister Christiane Taubira.



Norwegian mass killer Anders Behring Breivik (right), is escorted by police as he arrives inside a makeshift courtroom on the first day of a hearing where he is seeking parole, in Skien, Norway, Tuesday, Jan 18, 2022. Breivik, the far-right fanatic who killed 77 people in massacres in Norway in 2011, appeared at a parole hearing Tuesday, seemingly more focused on spreading white supremacist propaganda than gaining an improbable early release from prison. (AP)

Mass murder

Far-right fanatic killed 77 people

Breivik appears for parole hearing

SKIEN, Jan 18, (AP) — Anders Behring Breivik, the far-right fanatic who killed 77 people in massacres in Norway in 2011, appeared at a parole hearing Tuesday, seemingly more focused on spreading white supremacist propaganda than gaining an improbable early release from prison.

A decade ago, the Norwegian mass killer was sentenced to 21 years in prison for a bombing in Oslo and an armed rampage on the island of Utøya. That term can be extended as long as the court decides Breivik is a danger to society.

But under Norwegian law, Breivik, 42, is eligible to seek parole after serving the first 10 years.

Breivik, sporting a stubble beard and a two-piece suit, walked into a prison gymnasium-turned-courtroom with white supremacist messages pinned to his blazer and his bag. He held up a sign with the same message.

As he did during his trial, he made Nazi salutes as he entered Tuesday. He also presented himself as the leader of a Norwegian neo-Nazi movement. The Associated Press resists being used as a conduit for speech or images that espouse hate or spread propaganda and is not publishing images showing Breivik's Nazi salutes and other white supremacist propaganda.

Breivik's actions suggest he saw the hearing as an opportunity to disseminate his racist views, though he tried to make the case that he is no longer a threat to society. He told the Telemark District Court that he would refrain from violence, despite continuing to espouse neo-Nazi beliefs.

"Today, I strongly dissociate myself from violence and terror," he said in a speech that lasted more than an hour. "I hereby give you my word of honor that this is behind me forever."

If granted parole, which experts say is unlikely, he also offered to live in the Arctic or a non-Western country.

His defense lawyer, Øystein Storrvik, said during break that "this is not how an ordinary defender wants to start a criminal case."

Prosecutor Hulda Karlsdottir said that the hearing would focus on the danger Breivik, who legally changed his name to Fjotolf Hansen in 2017, still poses. The conditions of his imprisonment would be "completely subordinate," she said.

Danger

"The main topic here is the danger associated with release," she told the court.

Breivik listened motionless as she detailed the killings and named the victims. He once tried to comment on Karlsdottir's description but was ordered not to interrupt her by Judge Dag Bjørvik.

Breivik's actions Tuesday morning appeared to confirm the fears of survivors and families of his victims that the hearing would give him a platform to air his hateful views.

"The only thing I am afraid of is if he has the opportunity to talk freely and convey his extreme views to people who have the same mindset," Lisbeth Kristine Røyne, a fellow member of the European Socialists' group, marked Scholz's first foreign trip this year, after visits to Paris, Brussels and Rome since taking office. (AP)

On July 22, 2011, after months of preparation, Breivik set off a car bomb outside the government headquarters in Oslo, killing eight peo-

ple and wounding dozens. He then drove to the island of Utøya, where he opened fire on the annual summer camp of the left-wing Labor Party's youth wing. Sixty-nine people there were killed, most of them teenagers, before Breivik surrendered to police.

The court convicted him that same year of terrorist acts after finding him criminally sane, rejecting the prosecution's view that he was psychotic. Breivik didn't appeal his sentence.

During his trial, he entered the courtroom daily flashing a closed fist salute and telling grieving parents that he wished he had killed more. He has been trying to start a fascist party in prison and reached out by mail to like minded extremists in Europe and the United States. Prison officials seized many of those letters, fearing Breivik would inspire others to commit violent attacks.

He has always been isolated from other inmates at the Skien prison, 100 kilometers (60 miles) southwest of Oslo, where he is held.

The court is set to sit until Thursday and a ruling is expected later this month - but experts say he is likely to remain behind bars since he has shown no remorse.

Ahead of the hearing, Randi Rosenqvist, the psychiatrist who has followed Breivik since 2012, said she could "not detect great changes in Breivik's functioning," since his criminal trial when he bragged about the scale of his slaughter, or his 2016 human rights case, when he raised his hand in a Nazi salute.

"In principle and practice someone seeking parole would have to show remorse, and to show that they understand why such acts cannot be repeated," she said.

ment, he added. (KUNA)

Chiefs of Germany, Spain meet: German Chancellor Olaf Scholz and Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez met Monday in the Spanish capital to align their left-wing agendas and plan how to boost progressive policies in the 27-nation European Union.

After taking over last month from Angela Merkel as leader of the EU's most populous nation and its largest economy, Scholz joined Sánchez in a select group of progressive EU politicians holding office. Both leaders also head unprecedented coalition governments in their respective countries.

Germany and Spain share the goal of using part of the bloc's unprecedented 750 billion-euro (\$855 billion) fund for pandemic recovery to complete the "green transition" and "digital transformation" of their economies, Sánchez said Monday after the talks, something he said should be done upholding social justice values.

But differences existed on whether nuclear and gas-generated energy should qualify for sustainable investment - a debate that

has confronted several major EU nations - as well as the bloc's reexamination of its migration and asylum policies and tight EU fiscal rules on national debt that were suspended during the pandemic, Sánchez said.

The Spaniard said, nevertheless, it was possible to find common ground in future talks with Scholz.

Standing at the stairs of the Moncloa Palace, which hosts the Spanish prime minister's office and residence in the outskirts of Madrid, Sánchez called Scholz "a friend." The meeting with Sánchez, a fellow member of the European Socialists' group, marked Scholz's first foreign trip this year, after visits to Paris, Brussels and Rome since taking office. (AP)

Unvaccinated people face fines: Greece imposed a vaccination mandate Monday for people 60 and older as a spike in infections has put sustained pressure on Greek hospitals, where most of the seriously ill patients belong to that age group.

Older people failing to get vaccinated will face penalties, starting at a 50-euro

(\$57) fine in January and followed by a monthly fine of 100 euros (\$114) after that.

About 69% of Greece's 10.7 million people are fully vaccinated, just under the EU average of 70.3%. COVID-19 deaths and daily hospitalizations in Greece have increased following the arrival of the highly contagious omicron variant, although the overwhelming majority of people in the hospital or dying of the virus have the delta variant. Pressure on ICU capacity has eased slightly.

Health Minister Thanos Plevris said the fines would be collected through the tax office with the money going to help fund state hospitals.

"The age factor is important because of its impact on the public health service," Plevris told private Open TV on Sunday.

Greece imposed a vaccination mandate for health care workers last year. And starting Feb. 1, vaccination certificates for adults will expire after seven months unless the holder receives a booster shot.

New infections surged sharply in early January but have eased over the past week. The vaccination mandate for the 60 and older age group was announced in late December and, according to government data, 41.5% of the 530,000 people targeted by the measure are now fully vaccinated.

Opinion polls suggest strong public support for the mandate, but some lawmakers across party lines have questioned the legality of singling out a specific group. The government defended the measure as constitutional, citing a 2020 high court decision allowing public day care centers to refuse children who had not been vaccinated for childhood illnesses.

Government spokesman Giannis Oikonomou said only people with legitimate health exemptions, those who had suffered a recent infection and applicants for home vaccination appointments that were delayed would be spared the fine.

"The law will be fully enforced," Oikonomou said.

Greece has the seventh oldest population in the world, as measured by share of residents aged 65 and over, according to the U.S.-based Population Reference Bureau. It has seen nearly 22,000 virus-related deaths in the pandemic. (AP)



Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez arrives to welcome German Chancellor Olaf Scholz for a meeting at the Moncloa palace in Madrid, Spain, Monday, Jan 17, 2022. (AP)



Parolin



Metsola

Europe

Police break prostitution ring: Spanish police have broken up a human trafficking ring that forced Chinese women into prostitution in Spain.

The gang approached the women in China and promised them well-paying jobs in Europe, Police Commissioner Carlos Rio-Miranda Iglesias said Tuesday.

Each woman paid the gang between 8,000 and 10,000 euros (\$9,100-\$11,400). After being flown to Spain, however, they were told they had a debt to the gang, held in unhygienic conditions in apartments and forced to work as prostitutes 24 hours a day, Rio-Miranda Iglesias told a press conference.

The gang took away the women's passports and anyone who opposed the gang's demands was drugged, he said.

The apartments were in the Spanish capital of Madrid and the northern Spanish cities of Zaragoza and Bilbao.

Police acted on a tip-off and arrested 63 people, including 60 Chinese citizens, two Spaniards and a Pakistani.

The alleged ringleader in Spain was a Chinese woman, although the gang's true bosses are believed to be in China, police said. (AP)

Vatican No. 2 test positive: The Vatican secretary of state and his deputy have both tested positive for the coronavirus, Vatican officials said Tuesday.

Cardinal **Pietro Parolin**, who serves as the Vatican's secretary of state and the pope's No. 2, has "very light" symptoms, while Archbishop Edgar Peña Parra is asymptomatic, officials said.

There was no immediate comment on their last contact with Pope Francis. It wasn't clear if Francis has received a booster shot, which has been administered to his predecessor, Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI.

These are the first cases of COVID-19 confirmed so high up in the Vatican hierarchy since the pandemic began. (AP)

EU Parliament elects Metsola: Members of the European Parliament on Tuesday overwhelmingly voted in Malta's **Roberta Metsola** as the EU legislative body's new president, the first woman to assume the post in two decades.

Metsola, who belongs to the European People's party (EPP), won 458 votes out of a total of 705 lawmakers who participated, as the election of the 43-year-old Maltese politician follows the death last week of European Parliament president David Sassoli.

Metsola takes control of the EU's legislative body for two and a half years until next elections in 2024.

"She will open the next chapter for the European Parliament after the first half of the mandate was marked by pandemic disruptions," said EPP Group Chairman Manfred Weber MEP after today's election.

"The result shows that our candidate was convincing, Roberta Metsola presented the right initiatives to make Europe more democratic and to strengthen the European Parli-



Pope Francis caresses a baby at the end of his weekly general audience in the Paul VI Hall, at the Vatican, Wednesday, Jan 12, 2022. (AP)