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Europe

The resistible rise of the far right in Europe

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In France, the far right is likely to be the leading political force in the European elections of 9 June 2024, and probably the second (or third) force in the European Union. A relatively large number of far right parties are now on the winning side in national elections, and are even taking part in national governments.

European overview

In Italy, the far right, with Giorgia Meloni's *Fratelli d'Italia* party and the Lega (formerly the Northern League), have together led the government since the parliamentary elections of 25 September 2022, in addition to the right-wing Forza Italia party of the late Silvio Berlusconi.

In Sweden, two weeks earlier, the Sweden Democrats (SD) were among the winners of the parliamentary elections of 11 September 2022. [1] Winning 20.5%, the SD became the country's second largest political force in terms of votes, behind the Social Democratic Party (30.3%), now in opposition. The Moderate party (classic right, 19.1%) then succeeded in forming a coalition with the Christian Democrats, the Liberals and the SDs. Although the latter party did not hold any ministries, it did have a governmental parliamentary majority dependent on it and a seat on the "coordination" committee of the coalition parties. The governmental agreement largely bears its signature on immigration and security.

In Finland, following the parliamentary elections of 2 April 2023, the True Finns party became the second political force with 20.1% of the vote, nipping at the heels of the traditional right-wing party, the National Coalition Party (20.8%). Here, the far right has entered the government of the conservative Petteri Orpo, occupying ministries alongside the main right-wing party as well as the Christian Democrats and the Swedish minority party. The True Finns hold the ministries of Economy, Finance, Interior, Justice and Social Affairs. Remarkably, since the summer of 2023, Finland has been gripped by a succession of strikes and university protests against the anti-social "reforms" implemented by this government, the latest of which was a strike described as political (even though a draft law is intended to ban so-called political strikes) lasting fifteen days from 11 March 2024, against new employment legislation.

In other European countries, the far right is in a strong position. In the Netherlands, Geert Wilders, founder in 2008 (and legally the only member to date) of the Party for Freedom (PVV), emerged as the leader of the leading electoral force in the last parliamentary elections on 22 November 2023, with 23.49% of the vote, after having obtained 10.79% in 2021. Although the PVV subsequently failed to form a government with Wilders as Prime Minister due to a lack of parliamentary support, the Netherlands appears to be moving towards a coalition government with the PVV as the leading force. In addition to the PVV, a future coalition is expected to bring together a farmers' party that protests against environmental standards (the BBB), a right-wing liberal party (the VVD) and a split from the Christian Democratic Party.

In Austria, the fragile federal government has brought together the conservative right (ÖVP) and the Greens since January 2020. But the far-right FPÖ party is expected to win the forthcoming general election in autumn 2024, where it is projected to receive around 30% of the vote. [2] In the meantime, the FPÖ is currently in government in three of the country's eight regions.

In Eastern Europe, while the national-conservative PIS party lost the parliamentary elections in Poland on 15 October 2023, Prime Minister Viktor Orban's Hungarian Fidesz party, in power since 2010, still governs in Budapest. The two parties cover a spectrum that, in France, would encompass both the right and part of the far right. In Hungary, they are joined by a far-right party that is not part of the government, Jobbik ("The Best"); this party has tried to refocus in the most recent period, but at the risk of splitting off from a harder, more extremist current that gave rise in 2018 to the Mi Hazánk ("At Home") movement. The polls currently forecast Jobbik's share of the vote to fall to less than 3%, compared with 6.34% in 2019 and 14.67% in 2014, but the new Mi Hazánk formation is expected to break through with more than 8%.

Two groups in the European Parliament

The far right in the European Parliament is represented mainly in two separate groups. On the one hand, the Identity and Democracy (ID) group, created in 2019, which includes the French Rassemblement national (RN), the Italian Lega, the Dutch PVV, the Austrian FPÖ and the German AfD party. [3] On the other, the European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) group, whose backbone was initially made up of the British Conservatives until they left the European Parliament following Brexit, which includes Fratelli d'Italia, the Swedish Democrats, the True Finns and the Spanish party VOX. The Polish PIS is now the largest force.

However, in March 2021, Fidesz left the European People's Party (EPP, which brings together the classic bourgeois right) and is negotiating to join other groups, including the ECR and ID. The Hungarian party could play a pivotal role, bringing these two groups closer together. Although there are noticeable divisions between the ID and ECR, particularly on economic issues, the majority of ECR members are more or less neoliberal on economic issues, even if part of the ID group emphasizes populist social demagoguery like the French RN - at least as long as these parties are in opposition in their respective countries.

Lastly, the French *Reconquête* party, which is also presenting a list for the European elections but is not guaranteed to pass the 5% vote threshold required to enter parliament, currently sits in the ECR group with its only outgoing MEP, Nicolas Bay, elected in 2019 on the RN list. However, in addition to belonging to different parliamentary groupings, there are deep divisions - apparent or real - running through the far right "family".

Cleavage over Russia

The majority of these parties in the European Union, especially in the western part and in Germany, were historically very supportive of, and even explicitly linked to, the Russian regime in the years after 2000. But this position has become much more difficult to assume publicly since the start of the war against Ukraine.

The French RN is currently one of the most outspoken critics of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The reason is simple: France's main far-right party believes it is so close to coming to power nationally that it cannot afford to adopt a stance that would put it at odds with majority opinion. As during the 2022 presidential election campaign, when, after the announcement of the start of the war in Ukraine, the RN was forced to throw out 1.2 million copies of an eight-page leaflet because it was illustrated with a photo showing Marine Le Pen with Vladimir Putin to demonstrate her qualities as a "stateswoman". In the days that followed, Marine Le Pen claimed that Ukraine was a positive illustration of a "national liberation struggle", claiming that her party was following the same logic.

Other parties, structurally allied to the French RN, are not taking the same position. This is the case of the FPÖ,

which has also had a formal cooperation agreement with Putin's United Russia party since 2016. Some of its representatives now claim that the agreement was "only formal". However, Karin Kneissl, the foreign minister appointed at the end of 2017 at the suggestion of the FPÖ (although she does not hold a party card), invited Vladimir Putin to her wedding in August 2018. In September 2023, Kneissl announced that she was moving to St Petersburg. Moreover, since the arrest on 29 March 2024 of a former agent of the Austrian National Security and Intelligence Directorate for spying for Russia, the Austrian state apparatus has been rocked by revelations of pro-Russian activities.

At no time has the French RN questioned its alliance with the FPÖ, which is a pillar of its policy of European alliances. Worse for the RN's current official position, their parliamentary group (ID) expanded its ranks at the end of February 2024 to include the Bulgarian party Vazradjane ("Renaissance") and the Slovak National Party (SNS). Both are close allies of Vladimir Putin's regime within the European Union. As far as the Bulgarian party is concerned, three of its deputies took part in a United Russia meeting in Moscow on 16 February 2024. As for the SNS, in Bratislava it is part of a coalition government which, along with Fidesz in Hungary, has the most pro-Russian foreign policy of all the member countries of the European Union.

Pseudo-cleavage on "remigration"

Another, largely artificial, divide emerged in February 2024. Since mid-January 2024, there had been massive demonstrations against the German AfD party, with over a million people taking part in various German cities. The motive was the publication on 10 January 2024 of a report shot on hidden camera about a meeting held behind closed doors between AfD party executives, members of the identitarian movement, representatives of the most right-wing wing of the CDU (Christian Democratic Union, classical right-wing) and a section of the employers' association. At the conference, the Austrian identitarian activist Martin Sellner - who has since been banned from entering Germany - spoke out on the subject of "remigration". [4] Sellner had fantasized about deporting two million people, including German nationals who were "poorly integrated" or "complicit in mass immigration", to an unidentified model state in North Africa that would take them in.

Marine Le Pen then distanced herself from the German party, publicly questioning whether she should continue to work with it in the European Parliament. The co-president of the AfD party, Alice Weidel, wrote her a public letter, citing translation errors and claiming that her party was only calling for convicted foreign criminals to be deported "in accordance with the law".

The fact remains that this divide is largely imaginary, with Marine Le Pen's public stance due solely to her desire to put on a good show in the eyes of public opinion, wishing to avoid any "extremist" appearance. However, one of the pillars of the ID group in the European Parliament, the FPÖ, and in particular its president Herbert Kickl - who was Austrian Minister of the Interior from 2017 to 2019 - has been shamelessly using the term "remigration" for years, without Marine Le Pen having found fault with it, until now.

Another Europe, free of fascism

The real divisions are not within the far right, whose positions can be very elastic, but between the far right and its opponents. European leaders need to revive and reorientate their national economies (budget cuts; increased exploitation; "structural" unemployment), against a backdrop of a race to war. In the face of popular discontent, reactionary, patriarchal and xenophobic demagoguery, combined with the repression of mobilizations, leaves plenty of room for the far right, which often appears to be the only real opposition party. In this sense, the necessarily

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neoliberal policies of the European Union are a stepping stone for European fascism.

It is up to us to fight on the basis of fundamental positions, rejecting their ideas, which remain unacceptable in all forms. We demand open borders and a Europe-wide redistribution of wealth. Immediately, we are in favour of a European minimum wage and equal social rights for all. This means breaking out of the shackles imposed by the EU, and will require major victorious mobilizations across the continent.

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Translated by **International Viewpoint** from [Revue l'Anticapitaliste](#).

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[1] Founded in 1988, the Sweden Democrats were initially an openly neo-Nazi party, which has now “normalized”.

[2] The FPÖ, the Freedom Party of Austria, was created in 1955 from the rubble of Nazism by transforming the “League of Independents”, itself created in 1949. Austria's political life was controlled by the Allies during the Second World War until 1955, when the Treaty of Neutrality was signed, restoring full sovereignty to the Austrian Republic. Until 1955, it was impossible to reconstitute a party that was too close to historical Nazism. As soon as the obstacle was removed, the FPÖ was set up, its first president Anton Reinthaller (who died in 1958) having been Secretary of State for Agriculture under Adolf Hitler.

[3] Founded in 2013, the AfD (Alternative for Germany) is a far-right party expected to win around 18% of the vote in the coming European elections.

[4] “Remigration” is a concept coined by Renaud Camus, a French far-right writer.