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The Creeping Integration of Far-right Parties in Europe

Where Far-right Parties Are Integrated into the EU System and Where They Are Not

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The European Union operates largely in accordance with the principles of consensus democracy – that is, it seeks to integrate as many parties spanning the political spectrum of its member states as possible. Amid the recent growth of far-right parties at both the national and European level, this approach has led to the increased participation of such forces in EU institutions. Analysis of key actors at the EU level shows that since no later than the 2024 European elections, representatives of far-right parties have been involved in all major EU decisions. The centres of their influence are the European Council and the Council of the EU, where they participate as leaders or partners in national governments. But they are increasingly becoming more influential in the European Parliament, which has shifted to the right and where alternative majorities are now possible. At the same time, significant differences remain between the far-right parties. Ultimately, the extent of their influence and which far-right trend predominates within the EU system depends mainly on the largest force in European politics – the European People's Party.

For several years now, far-right parties have been significantly gaining ground in many EU member states. In the 2024 European elections, support for these forces increased in 22 of the 27 EU countries. If independent members of the European Parliament (MEPs) are excluded, far-right parties now hold just over a quarter (26 per cent) of the seats in the European Parliament (EP) (see SWP Comment 44/2024). Though still far from enjoying a majority, they have reached a strength at which they are able to influence the balance of power within the EU's political system — a system that is geared towards consensus and broad majorities. But how far does this influence already extend?

In the following analysis, "far right" is used to refer to "(populist) radical", national-conservative and "extreme" variants of right-wing politics. It serves to designate collective political actors at the European level who are to be found on the outer right edge of the ideological left-right spectrum and therefore to the right of the Christian Democratic-Conservative parties that belong to the European People's Party (EPP). This means that the classification of parties as "far right" in this analysis is based in the

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first instance on their membership of one of the three EP political groups to the right of the EPP: the European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR), the Patriots for Europe (PfE) and the Europe of Sovereign Nations (ESN) group. In the second instance, the authors have examined whether the party in question was classified as "far right" in the research project The PopuList.

Fragmentation within the 'far-right' camp

The far-right camp remains highly fragmented at the European level. The ECR group, which is considered "moderate", represents national conservative and "soft" Eurosceptic positions. Founded in 2009, it emerged from a cooperation initiative between the UK's Conservative Party and Poland's Law and Justice (PiS) party. Over the years, it has expanded to include national-conservative and EU-critical parties but does not present itself as a political force radically opposed to European integration. Rather, it is critical of the current political course of EU institutions, which it believes are pursuing a federalist agenda that undermines the sovereignty of the member states.

During previous legislative periods of the EP, the ECR group often played a cooperative role. Its member parties, including Giorgia Meloni's Brothers of Italy *(Fratelli d'Italia)* party and Poland's PiS, voted with the EPP on many issues and managed to project an image of being able to work with other forces in the parliament. However, their national-conservative orientation is clearly evident on issues such as migration, equality and the rule of law; and this makes it difficult to clearly distinguish the ECR from the PfE and ESN groups in terms of substance.

Post-Brexit, the "hard Euroscepticism" advocated by large parts of the PfE group is aimed predominantly not at leaving the EU but at fundamentally reversing European integration. The ultimate goal is to significantly curtail the powers of the European Commission and the European Parliament and return to a Europe that is organised primarily on an intergovernmental basis and engages in economic cooperation only. Internally, the group is influenced by large member parties such as Viktor Orbán's Fidesz and France's National Rally *(Rassemblement National)* under Marine Le Pen and Jordan Bardella.

At the same time, the PfE group is increasingly showing willingness to transition from fundamental opposition to playing an active role in policymaking — for example, by filling the post of rapporteur for the negotiations on setting the new climate target for 2040. For its part, the ESN group, which includes some right-wing extremist parties, has maintained the character of an "AfD plus" group that is unable to gain any real significance in the EP owing to its fundamental opposition role and small size.

Gains at the national level

Besides political shifts at the European level, it is, above all, national dynamics that determine the extent of the influence that political parties wield within the EU system. This is evident not least when far-right parties either assume government responsibility or gain blocking positions, as the new Polish president is currently able to do. But even if far-right actors at the national level fall short of gaining executive power, their stronger presence in the national parliament can bolster their influence to such an extent that it eventually has an impact at the EU level. This is particularly the case in those Member States where far-right parties are the leading opposition force, as indicated by opinion polls or parliamentary strength, such as in France or Germany, as they exert considerable influence on the discourse on European policy.

As of September 2025, far-right parties head the governments of four member states — Belgium, Italy, the Czech Republic and Hungary. The parties in power in Belgium (N-VA) and the Czech Republic (ODS) belong to the more moderate wing of the

ECR. Hungary is the exception among the four member states that have far-right parties at the head of government: its ruling Fidesz party belongs to the PfE group of the EP. In five member states — Bulgaria, Finland, Italy, Croatia and Slovakia — far-right parties serve as junior partners in government coalitions, while the Sweden Democrats party (ECR) has been supporting that country's minority government since 2022. Slovakia is a special case: a far-right party (SNS) that is not represented in the EP serves as junior partner in the government of Prime Minister Robert Fico and his originally left-wing party, Smer. The latter, which was expelled from the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (S&D) group of the EP, is moving increasingly to the fringes of the political spectrum. And since Geert Wilders's PVV left the Dutch ruling coalition, the only EU member state to have a government with a PfE or ESN party as coalition partner is Italy with the Lega (PfE). Thus, one third of all member-state governments are either led or supported by far-right parties.

Also evident from the party-political composition of the member-state governments is the significance of the EPP group: in seven of the nine countries in which far-right forces are part of the government — the two exceptions are Slovakia and Hungary — EPP parties are included in the governing coalition.

Looking ahead, a systematic analysis of the national elections that are due to take place within the EU by the end of 2027 shows that the following is likely to be particularly relevant: in the Czech Republic ANO (PfE) is leading in the polls ahead of the elections due in early October 2025. Unlike the ODS (ECR), ANO has sought to join forces with Orbán's Fidesz and, together with Slovakia, a new far-right Visegrád trio could be formed (without, for the time being, the participation of Poland). It is equally conceivable, however, that there will be a countervailing trend in Hungary: after many years of dominating the domestic political landscape, Fidesz is currently polling in second place in the run-up to national parliamentary elections due to take place in April 2026. The year 2027 is likely to be particularly important: presidential elections are due in France, where the National Rally is clearly in the lead. In Spain, Vox (PfE) is currently the third-strongest force; and in Poland, the PiS (ECR) is once again polling neck and neck with Donald Tusk's Civic Coalition (EPP). Thus, there could be significant political change in three of the largest and most influential members states in 2027, resulting in the increased influence of the far right in governing coalitions across Europe. At the same time, this would coincide with the critical phase of negotiations on the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF), affecting political stability at the EU level.

Influence at the EU level

Despite the growing electoral success of far-right parties and their increased participation in governments at the national level, this has not yet translated into equal influence at the European level. There are two conflicting principles at work here.

On the one hand, owing to the dual legitimacy endowed by the member states and their citizens, the EU is geared towards integrating as all major political forces as far as possible and making as many decisions as possible by consensus or through broad majorities. The aim is to avoid structural minorities and ensure that there is broad-based democratic legitimacy across the EU, which remains very heterogeneous. It is only the EP that is based on the pure majority principle; but even here, it is usual for oversized and frequently changing majorities that cover the broad democratic spectrum to be formed.

On the other hand, because of their experiences during World War II, many European societies have developed a cordon sanitaire around far-right parties. Accordingly, despite their growing electoral success, these forces were long excluded from European consensus democracy; before the early 2020s, they were rarely involved

in national governments. Thus, they have been of little relevance for the Council system and were excluded from the formation of majorities in the European Parliament. With those forces now gaining influence at both the national and European level, this is beginning to change: their increased participation in the EU institutions is already evident.

Direct influence in the European Council and the Council of the EU

The most direct channel of influence for national governments is through the Council structure of the EU, which is where the member states represent their interests. There is no cordon sanitaire against governments with far-right parties here. The only instrument available is the suspension of certain membership rights, such as the right to vote, in the event of a serious and persistent violation of the EU's fundamental values (Article 7 TEU). However, this "nuclear option" requires a unanimous vote by all other member states and has not yet been used (see SWP-Aktuell 50/2024). Moreover, national governments generally take care within the EU system to show respect for one another largely irrespective of their political agendas. While in 2000, the participation of the FPÖ (now PfE) in the newly formed coalition in Vienna led to the isolation of the Austrian government by the then 14 other member states — a move that was later reversed — the inclusion of the PVV as the largest coalition partner in the Dutch government a quarter of a century or so later (in June 2024) was treated by European partners as nothing out of the ordinary.

It is in the European Council, which is composed of the heads of state and government, that the political leanings of national governments have the most direct impact. As of September 2025, the European Council is dominated by those national leaders who belong to EPP parties (11 out of 27 members, representing 43.5 per cent of the EU population). Three members (Belgium, Italy, Czech Republic) are from the ECR camp and play a role commensurate with the size of their respective countries — in particular, Giorgia Meloni as head of the Italian government. However, unlike in the EPP and S&D, there is no systematic coordination ahead of European Council meetings in either the ECR or the PfE. In any case, Viktor Orbán is currently the only representative of the PfE in the European Council, where he stands out on account of his growing alienation from the rest of the EU and his transactional use of vetoes.

Since the European Council makes decisions by unanimous vote — with a few exceptions, such as the nomination of the president of the Commission — there is a strong potential for blockades. Clear differences exist between the ECR and the PfE in this regard: while hardly a European Council meeting passes without Orbán and, increasingly, Slovak Prime Minister Fico threatening to impose a veto, heads of government from the ECR are an integral part of the negotiating rounds and compromise building that take place on the sidelines of the European Council. However, under the influence of Trump's second presidency, many member states are increasingly willing to isolate veto players or take decisions outside the EU framework in order to ensure they are able to act. For example, in 2025 the European Council has issued several statements in the EU-26 format — that is, without Hungary — on Ukraine.

The situation is different in the Council of the EU, where the member states are represented by their ministers, leading to constantly changing party-political constellations owing to the different coalition compositions. In May 2025, for instance, even before the PVV left the Dutch government, the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, led by a Conservative, spearheaded a group of 20 EU member states that accused Hungary of violating fundamental EU values. The group sharply criticised Hungary in the Council of the EU for its actions against the Budapest Pride Parade.The influence of governments in the Council of the EU also varies depending on the decision-making

procedure. Where unanimity is required — for example, in foreign and security policy or enlargement policy — the same applies as in the European Council: individual governments can block decisions at any time by vetoing them or forcing concessions; but in votes by qualified majority, individual member states can be outvoted. While national governments generally strive for consensus and outvoting remains the exception (see SWP Comment 16/2024), Hungary once again stands out here. In 2024, it voted "no" in 15.8 per cent of all public votes in the Council of the EU, which was more frequent even than the United Kingdom before Brexit. Neither Italy nor the Czech Republic stand out in this way: in terms of voting behaviour in the Council of the EU, both are to be found in the middle of the pack (see SWP Council Monitor).

The formation of a blocking minority — that is, a group of at least four member states representing at least 35 per cent of the EU population — is crucial for influencing decisions that require only a qualified majority in the Council of the EU. Combined, Italy, Hungary, the Czech Republic and Belgium currently account for around 20 per cent and, together with Slovakia, some 21 per cent. This means that they fall short of a blocking minority; however, if far-right parties were to gain power in just one large member state (such as France), a blocking minority would be possible. More important, however, is the fact that so far, the governments of these countries have formed neither a coherent group nor a coordinated political force — the coalition constellations and the ideological lines of the respective far-right parties are currently too diverse for that to happen.

Institutional differentiation and practical cooperation in the EP

Since the beginning of the current legislative period, two parallel developments have been evident in the EP. First, there has been increasing institutional differentiation over the cordon sanitaire in favour of the ECR group, which is much more deeply integrated into the EU system than either the PfE or the ESN. In the previous term, the ECR group was represented in the Bureau of the EP and was entrusted with the chair of the Budget Committee. It now has two vice-presidents in the Bureau and chairs three committees, including those dealing with such influential issues as the budget and agriculture. The PfE group, on the other hand, despite its nominal strength, is institutionally marginalised by the EP majority, as is the ESN group. Accordingly, they are not represented in the Bureau, nor do they hold any committee chairmanships (see SWP Comment 44/2024). However, in July 2025, the PfE assumed the post of rapporteur for the negotiations on setting the new EU climate target for 2040, while the ECR secured the corresponding post for the planned EU Space Act. Thus, the two far-right groups are leading the EP's negotiations with the Council of the EU and the Commission on two key legislative projects, which gives them the opportunity to exercise significant influence over the design of the legislation. Although the majority in the EP continues to be based largely on the pro-European majority of the EPP, S&D, Renew and, to some extent, the Greens, cracks are increasingly appearing in the long-established cordon sanitaire.

Second, new forms of practical cooperation have emerged in the EP. As early as September 2024, just a few months after the new Parliament was constituted, the EPP, the ECR, the PfE and parts of the ESN formed a majority for the first time to pass a resolution in response to Venezuela's sham elections. Previously, centre-left and centre-right actors had failed to reach agreement on the text of a resolution. The EPP's increased willingness to form majorities involving far-right groups has been evident throughout the current legislative period, particularly in the area of European climate and environmental policy. In November 2024, for example, the EU Deforestation Regulation was significantly watered down by the votes of the EPP, the PfE, the ECR and the ESN — for instance, the date of

its entry into force was pushed back. And in the summer of 2025, the EPP, the ECR and the PfE secured the establishment of a working group to investigate the EU financing of NGOs.

In the past, such cooperation between the centre-right and far-right was much rarer. During the previous (ninth) legislative period, the EPP had formed majorities with what were then the far-right ID and ECR group only to a limited extent. For example, the three groups cooperated over a legislative proposal on genetically modified plants submitted by the Commission in the ordinary legislative procedure, as well as in two votes on artificial intelligence and fisheries policy that led to resolutions being passed against the votes of the S&D and the Greens. In two other cases, majorities were achieved with just one of the two far-right groups: with the ID on development aid policy and with the ECR on financial market issues. By contrast, there has been more willingness to cooperate during the current (tenth) legislative period.

Within just one year, the EPP formed majorities with the ECR, the PfE and parts of the ESN for two legislative proposals (besides the Venezuela resolution and the deforestation regulation) in the ordinary legislative procedure, on cohesion and social policy, and for one resolution on the Committee on Petitions.

This form of majority building is based — at least in the case of the ECR group — on a partial convergence of views. An analysis of the overall voting behaviour during the ninth legislative period shows that the EPP recorded the highest level of agreement with Renew (93 per cent), S&D (89 per cent) and the Greens/EFA (80 per cent). The ECR follows in fourth place with 68 per cent. A breakdown by policy area reveals that the level of agreement between the EPP and the ECR in key areas such as environmental and climate policy, foreign and security policy, industrial and economic policy, and agricultural policy exceeded 65 per cent in each case. Agreement with the ID group — whose key members and policies have since been largely absorbed into the PfE group — was just 40 per cent, which was even lower than that with the Left.

A similar trend in overall voting behaviour can be observed in the first year of the tenth legislative period. The level of agreement between the EPP and the ECR currently stands at 72 per cent, while the PfE (43 per cent) and the ESN (23 per cent) occupy the last two places. This indicates that selective strategic alliances do not necessarily go hand in hand with a more comprehensive convergence in terms of overall policy. At the same time, this intermittent willingness to form tactical majorities with far-right actors is not without consequences, including for the pro-European centre on which the Commission relies. In the wake of the no-confidence vote against Ursula von der Leyen initiated by the ECR in July 2025, the EPP's willingness to seek majorities on the right wing came under strong criticism from within the ranks of the S&D and Renew, to the point of those forces threatening to terminate cooperation.

Limited role in the European Commission

The participation of politicians from far-right parties remains least pronounced in the European Commission. Members of the Commission are nominated by national governments and appointed by the Council after hearings and a vote of approval in the EP (Article 17 TEU). Legally, they are supposed to perform their duties in complete independence. However, because each member state nominates only one member of the Commission, the latter generally reflect the party-political orientation of the largest governing party at the time of being nominated.

As a result of the composition of national governments in July 2024, the direct involvement of the far right in the College of the European Commission is limited to two commissioners. The first is Raffaele Fitto, a member of Brothers of Italy (ECR) is currently executive vice-president of the European Commission for Cohesion and Re-

forms. His nomination by the Meloni government was strongly criticised by the centre-left of the EP. However, he prevailed in the hearings with the support of the EPP. The second is Hungary's Olivér Várhelyi, formally unaffiliated but politically close to Fidesz (PfE), who is responsible for health and animal welfare. Following controversial statements made by Várhelyi during his hearing — for example, on vaccinations and issues related to sexual and gender diversity — parts of his portfolio were taken away from him, including the area of reproductive health. But since the new Commission entered into office, there has been little public controversy surrounding either Fitto or Várhelyi.

Increasing integration into the EU

Overall, the integration of parts of the far right into the EU's political system is already well advanced and continues to grow. The member parties of the ECR, in particular, are now treated as normal political actors in many areas: in the European Council, in the Council of the EU, in the European Commission and as part of changing majorities in the EP. This normalisation can be attributed to the EPP parties, which increasingly find common ground with the ECR on industrial and climate policy issues. For their part, the Social Democrats, the Greens and the Liberals have a very different attitude towards loosening the cordon sanitaire and are much more critical of cooperation with ECR parties.

This attempt at institutional differentiation regarding the cordon sanitaire is likely to be particularly challenging because of the blurred dividing line between the ECR and the more radical or extreme forces. Several member parties of the ECR formerly belonged to the part of the ID, while parts of the PfE were formerly members of the ECR. And because the boundaries are so fluid, integration into the EU institutions encompasses the broader far-right spectrum: Viktor Orbán influences every decision in the European Council through his vetoes. Although governments with far-right parties have not formed a group in the Council of the EU, those forces are also regularly involved in the decisions made by this body. Most important, however, is that alternative majorities without centre-left parties are possible in the EP only if the ECR *and* the PfE agree.

Three factors determine how significant this integration is for EU policy. First, as is so often the case in the EU, the different decision-making procedures play an important role. If unanimity applies in the European Council or Council of the EU, all national governments must ultimately agree. While the political reality is that the power of the respective national governments varies depending on their political and economic weight, the lowest common denominator will necessarily include governments led by far-right parties when major European decisions are being made. But if qualified majority voting applies and the EP is involved, the co-decision rights are more diffuse. In this case, individual governments led by far-right parties can be outvoted or have to compromise more, whereas in the EP itself the influence of far-right groups depends on how the majorities are formed.

The second factor is the extent to which the various far-right parties are politically united at the European level, both as representatives of national governments and in the EP. This is particularly evident in foreign and security policy — not least with regard to Russia, Ukraine and China. While MEPs from the PfE and the ESN often oppose the pro-European parliamentary majority in this area, the ECR is clearly willing to align itself with the centre-right (see SWP Comment 8/2024). There are also considerable differences in economic policy between the libertarian and protectionist approaches, but these do not necessarily run along the ECR-PfE axis. The similarities are greater on issues related to culture wars and, above all, on climate and migration policy.

The third factor is the overlap with the political positions and behaviour of the EPP. Whether at the national level or in the EP, it is usually the case that far-right

parties obtain majorities and thus political power only with the support or as junior partners of the centre-right. As a result, their influence at the EU level is strongest when they can offer the EPP the option of forming alternative majorities and the latter is ready and willing to do so. In the current legislative period, this has not yet happened for fundamental decisions on European integration or foreign, security and defence policy, but it is increasingly happening in the area of economic, climate and migration policy.

Thus, because of its relative strength at both the national and European level, the EPP will play a central role in European integration in the coming years. Its policy and strategic orientation will be decisive in determining whether the EU can continue to rely on a pro-European centre. In the long term, the EPP will have to decide whether and to what extent it wants to carry on playing its tactical game of utilising shifting majorities across the political spectrum. The far-right parties will offer substantive proposals in an attempt to persuade it to make a complete policy change. But if the EPP wants to remain loyal to the pro-European camp, it will have to abandon sooner or later its pursuit of an increasingly contradictory course of value-based positioning, on the one hand, and selective majority-building with far-right actors, on the other. This is because the growing reservations about and tensions vis-à-vis the EPP within the centre-left camp threaten to upset the existing balance and render the pro-European majority even more fragile.

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