



Pierre BALAS

The Far-Right in the European Parliament

Focus on the Current Legislature: 2019-2022

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Summary

European far-right political parties have every interest in investing the European Union (EU), since seats in the European Parliament (EP) can bring them many benefits.

- **Material benefits:** Several allowances are available to fund the EU's political life, and far-right parties can use this significant financial resource to organise and structure themselves.
- **Immaterial benefits:** With MEPs sitting in the EP, far-right parties gain prestige and media attention. These parties also have an interest to be seen working with other forces to show their electorate that other foreign leaders share their rationale. Besides, as the EU constantly evolves, it provides far-right parties with **opportunities to appear either radical or more "respectable"** depending on their strategic interests.

After the 2019 European elections, the European People's Party Group, and the Social & Democrats, the two largest political groups in the EP, lost their absolute majority. The Greens/EFA and the Renew Europe Group did well while the LEFT lost seats. The **far-right spectrum maintained its position without, however, achieving the feared electoral tidal wave.**

The far-right spectrum in the EP is built around three poles.

- The **Identity and Democracy (ID)** group is dominated by Italy's Lega, France's RN and to a lesser degree Germany's AfD. The group also brings together historical far-right actors such as Austria's FPÖ or Netherlands's PVV. The 10 ID national delegations are from Northern and Western Europe except for 2: Czech Republic's SPD and Estonia's EKRE.
- The **European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR)** group is dominated by Poland's PiS and includes a wide range of formations (about twenty members) from the far-right to more traditional right-wing formations. Two new entrants – Vox and Fratelli d'Italia – joined the group in 2019.
- The **Non-Attached (NA)** bloc, or rather two thirds of this assembly, includes MEPs with a position close to or even more extreme than the first two poles **including ORBAN's Fidesz**. Since the Hungarian party left the EPP group, it has refused to sit with either ID or ECR.

Far-right forces fear the weakening or even the **disappearance of the nation state**, whether it is through the current trajectory of the EU – perceived as a progressive federalisation of Member States – or the absence of strict migration policies that would ultimately lead to "population replacement". Therefore, ID, ECR and Fidesz **share similar views** on three topics but not in the same terms:

- The **defence of the Member States' sovereignty.**
- The **rejection of a European federal state.**
- The **promotion of stricter measures on immigration at the EU level.**

However, ID and ECR are divided on two aspects:

- Reputation
 - **ID members are not in power in their Member States** (or are only part of a governmental coalition) and do not have much influence in the Council of the EU. **ID was shunned by other political groups** – except for ECR – and did not get any top jobs in the EP.
 - **Some ECR members are in power (Poland's PiS).** Hence, **ECR's voice is more influential in the European debate.** The group also holds some of the EP's top jobs.
- Ideology
 - [ID] **The group is sovereigntist and Eurosceptic.** Its project for the EU is to restore a framework in which the unanimity rule prevails among Member States (in extenso, there would be no more transnational rationale). The group also promotes strict migration policies and tends to be in favour of protectionist policies.
 - [ECR] is also critical of the EU but uses a more technical approach. Besides, **ECR considers the EU in its current form as a useful tool to achieve some of its political objectives.** ECR defends conservative values (and supports stricter migration policies) and is often liberal on the economic side.

The far-right in the EP experiences both unity and division:

- **Far-right leaders are becoming more European**
 - The Brexit led to the departure of the most vociferous Eurosceptic voices that refused to participate in the European game. The far-right MEPs elected in

2019 do not seem to follow FARAGE's path of total and principled opposition to Brussels.

- The other virulent parties against the EU such as the Lega or the RN have moderated their stances and have no intent of leaving the EU or even the eurozone. This moderation is due to the Brexit and their quest for respectability.
- Besides, far-right political leaders meet more often, learn to work together and even inspire each other.
- **Far-right parties have difficulty in uniting despite announcements and promises.**

- Divides outnumber the factors contributing to unity.
- Divisions range from diverging political strategies ("extremism of others" and leadership rivalries) to ideological cleavages (national histories, political traditions, economics).
- The invasion of Ukraine by PUTIN's Russia is a recent example of the numerous divergences among far-right parties.

Introduction

The influence of the far-right has globally been rising in every aspect of society (street mobilisations, political discourses, public debate, etc.). The European Parliament is not immune from this shift. Media and political commentators even feared a far-right tidal wave during the 2019 European elections campaign (9th legislature). Even if it did not occur, far-right political forces are doing well in the European Union and in extenso, in the EP.

In the context of this paper, the term "far-right" refers to the EP political groups sitting to the right of the European People's Party (EPP): Identity and Democracy (ID), European Conservatives Reformists (ECR) and some of the Non-Attached (NA).

The purpose of the paper is to investigate the far-right in the EP from 2019 until today (September 2022) on different aspects: What happened in the 2019 elections? How is the European far-right organised in the EP? What are the rallying points and the divides among far-right parties? How do they use the EU? Do they have any counterproposal to the European project?

This paper considers these questions through three main parts and two focus:

- Section I. analyses what is new in the 2019 legislature compared to the previous one (2014-2019): structure of the groups, electoral results, and impact of the Brexit.
- Section II. brings to light the far-right parties' views on the EU.
- The first focus details the reasons why it is challenging for the far-right to be united in the EP.
- Section III. lists the material and immaterial benefits for far-right parties to invest in the EU and then concentrates on the positions held by far-right parties to understand their influence in the EP.
- Section IV. draws attention to three recent votes to get a glimpse of the political rationales used by the far-right in the EP.
- The second focus is a conclusive conversation with Nathalie BRACK, political science professor at the ULB.

The present text is based upon four categories of documentation: institutional information (composition of the EP, rules of the EP, debates, votes, etc.), parties' content (website, press releases, political manifestos etc.), academic papers and, press articles. A special care was taken to collect recent data and put it on display so that readers can easily consult it if they want extra information on a subject.

For the sake of clarity, it should be noted that the document is neither an academic paper, a synthesis of the reasons for the success of the far-right, nor an exhaustive presentation of the far-right parties in EU Member States. This report is primarily intended as a handbook on the far-right in the EP for THE LEFT's staff with both descriptive and analytical elements. However, the writing's intent is to try to make it as clear as possible so that anyone interested in European affairs can read it.

Abbreviations

| ABRV. | Party | Party (EN) | Country |
|----------|--|---|----------------|
| AfD | Alternative für Deutschland | Alternative for Germany | Germany |
| BMPO | Българско национално движение | Bulgarian National Movement | Bulgaria |
| CU | Christen Unie | The Christian Union | Netherlands |
| DF | Dansk Folkeparti | Danish People's Party | Denmark |
| DUP | Democratic Unionist Party | - | UK |
| EKRE | Eesti Konservatiivne Rahvaerakond | Conservative People's Party of Estonia | Estonia |
| Fdi | Fratelli d'Italia | Brothers of Italia | Italy |
| FP | Perussuomalaiset | Finns Party | Finland |
| FPÖ | Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs | Freedom Party of Austria | Austria |
| FvD | Forum voor Democratie | Forum for Democracy | Netherlands |
| JA21 | Juiste Antwoord 21 | Correct Answer 2021 | Netherlands |
| KKE | Κομμουνιστικό Κόμμα Ελλάδα | Communist Party of Greece | Greece |
| KNP | Kongres Nowej Prawicy | Congress of the New Right | Poland |
| Lega | Lega per Salvini Premier | League for Salvini Premier | Italy |
| LLRA–KŠS | Lietuvos lenkų rinkimų akcija – Krikščioniškų šeimų sąjunga | Electoral Action of Poles in Lithuania – Christian Families Alliance | Lithuania |
| L'SNS | Ľudová strana Naše Slovensko | People's Party Our Slovakia | Slovakia |
| M5S | Movimento 5 Stelle | Five Star Movement | Italy |
| N-VA | Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie | New Flemish Alliance | Belgium |
| ODS | Občanská demokratická strana | Civic Democratic Party | Czech Republic |
| PiS | Prawo i Sprawiedliwość | Law and Justice Party | Poland |
| PNTCD | Partidul Național Țărănesc Creștin Democrat | Romanian Christian-Democratic National Peasants' Party | Romania |
| PVV | Partij voor de Vrijheid | The Dutch Party for Freedom | Netherlands |
| RN | Rassemblement national | National Rally | France |
| SaS | Sloboda a Solidarita | Freedom and Solidarity | Slovakia |
| SD | Sverigedemokraterna | The Sweden Democrats | Sweden |
| SGP | Staatkundig Gereformeerde Partij | Dutch Reformed Party | Netherlands |
| SPD | Svoboda a přímá demokracie | Freedom and Direct Democracy | Czech Republic |
| TB/LNNK | Nacionālā apvienība "Visu Latvijai!" – "Tēvzemei un Brīvībai / LNNK" | National Alliance "All For Latvia!" – "For Fatherland and Freedom / LNNK" | Latvia |
| TT | Tvarka ir teisingumas | Order and Justice | Lithuania |
| UKIP | UK Independence Party | - | UK |
| VB | Vlaams Belangs | Flemish Interest | Belgium |
| XA | Χρυσή Αυγή | Golden Dawn | Greece |

I. Far-Right in the European Parliament: How Has It Evolved Since 2019?

The aim of this section is to map the far-right forces in the EP, considering the results of the 2019 European elections but also the changes that have occurred since then. The actors' ideological positions are briefly mentioned to illustrate the lines of force that unite or distance them. These themes will be analysed in more detail in the next section.

Methodological Remarks:

■ Unless otherwise stated, the figures of the present legislature refer to the constitutive session (July 2019) and when the previous legislature (2014-2019) is mentioned, the figures are also from the constitutive session (July 2014).

1. THE FAR-RIGHT AFTER THE 2019 EUROPEAN ELECTIONS

While voter turnout had been steadily declining since 1979, **the high turnout in the 2019 European elections surprised analysts:** 50.62%, versus 42.61% in the 2014 elections. This rise was of course mixed: there was a notable increase of voters casting their ballot in Romania, Poland, and Hungary but some countries scored under the European average (Slovakia and Portugal to mention just a few)¹.

The Evolution of Political Groups (2019 versus 2014)

The 2019 constitutive session consists of seven political groups² and NA Members.

- Group of the European People's Party – Christian Democrats (EPP)
- Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament (S&D)

- Renew Europe (formerly Group of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe, ALDE)
- Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance (Greens/EFA)
- Identity and Democracy Group (ID)
- European Conservatives and Reformists Group (ECR)
- The LEFT (formerly the Left group in the European Parliament)

Political groups with the most elected MEPs can paradoxically be considered the losers of the last elections. In fact, **the first two forces (EPP and S&D) combined had an absolute majority³ of 54.86% in 2014 (412 seats for a body of 751 deputies) compared to only 44,74% of the seats in 2019.** The Greens/EFA and the Renew Europe Group did well and are the kingmakers for some of the votes of the 2019-2024 legislature. Finally, **far-right groups such as ECR and ID stabilised their position without, however, achieving the predicted or rather feared electoral tidal wave.**

1.1. ID: a Coherent Bloc

Led by Matteo SALVINI and Marine LE PEN, the ID group was established in June 2019 as a result of the unification project of far-right European parties that started during the previous legislature with the creation of the Europe of Nations and Freedom⁴ (ENF) in 2015 and was completed during the 2019 European election campaign. The unification project did not reach the initial ambitions of SALVINI and LE PEN after key actors, such as the Polish Law and Justice (PiS) and Hungary's Fidesz, refused to join with other ENF's members (See focus #1). Nevertheless, the creation of the group goes one step further than the ENF. The ID group allows a wider union (at least on a symbolic level) of

1 Ripoll Servent, A. (2019). 'The European Parliament after the 2019 Elections: Testing the Boundaries of the 'Cordon Sanitaire'', *Journal of Contemporary European Research* 15(4): 331-342.

2 To form a political group, a minimum of 25 MEPs, elected in at least one quarter (currently seven) of the EU's Member States is required (Source: European Parliamentary Research Service, [EPRS](#)).

3 "The EP works on the basis of consensus and compromise, largely determined by the need to find internal agreements that can also lead to a successful deal with the Council of the EU. [...] Most legislative procedures cannot succeed without the support of the large political groups, which explains why the EPP and the S&D have formed (formally or informally) a 'grand coalition' that structures the internal life of the EP", (Source: endnote ¹).

4 See Insert 1, on the next page.

historic actors of the far-right, such as the Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ), with more recent ones like Czech's Freedom and Direct Democracy (SPD) or Finland's Finns Party (FP).

The ID group consists of nine national parties in 2019. The Lega made significant gains with 28 elected MEPs, an increase of 23 seats. France's Rassemblement national (RN), with a solid result of 22 elected MEPs, maintained almost the same number of delegates as in 2014 (23) and is the second-largest delegation. Alternative for Germany (AfD), an ECR member in the previous legislature, won 11 seats in 2019, versus 7 seats in 2014. These three national parties are thus the leading political forces within the group since they represent respectively ~38%, ~30%, and ~15% of the group members. The six remaining national parties roughly maintained their number of MEPs between 2014 and 2019 and count only one to three MEPs. Only the Danish People's Party (DF) suffered a major electoral setback and managed to maintain only 1 seat in 2019, versus 4 in 2014.

Marco ZANNI – a former M5S MEP – was elected president of the group in July 2019 and still holds this position today. Jordan BARDELLA (RN) and Gunnar BECK (AfD) have been vice-presidents of the group since March 2021⁵.

Insert 1 – Europe of Nations and Freedom (ENF)

ENF was formed in June 2015, a year after the 2014 constitutive session. The roots of the party can be traced back to Jean-Marie LE PEN's various attempts to establish a far-right bloc in the EP.

After the 2014 European elections, Marine LE PEN and Geert WILDERS from the Netherlands's Partij voor de Vrijheid (PVV), publicly announced their will to create a group in the EP. Unfortunately for them, they were not able to meet the criteria for forming a group – they needed two other national parties from two different

Member States. It is only with the arrival of two Polish MEPs from the Congress of the New Right (KNP)⁶ and Janice ATKINSON, a British MEP expelled from the UK Independence Party (UKIP), that the far-right forces were able to join their forces within a new group in 2015.

The founding members of the ENF were LE PEN's Front national (FN)⁷ (23 MEPs in 2014⁸), Lega (5 MEPs), FPÖ (4 MEPs), PVV (4 MEPs), Vlaams Belangs (VB) (4 MEPs), KNP (2 MEPs), and ATKINSON. The members shared similar positions on European integration and immigration. There were a few differences on some topics (e.g., economic) but overall, the constituent parties share common views on many cases. This union can be considered as a "marriage of love"⁹.

ID can therefore be considered as a "larger ENF" due to the arrival of former ECR members. **Dominated by the French and Italians, it mostly includes Western and Northern formations** except for Estonia's EKRE and Czech Republic's SPD.

ID's Positions

The first chapter of the Group's statutes¹⁰ gives a clear view of the topics and positions that the ID MEPs intend to defend for the 2019-2024 term:

- "Member States have the right to take back parts of the sovereignty they lost to the EU. No new competences should be transferred to the EU. [...]"
- A better protection of the EU's external borders is needed. Every nation has the right to protect, control and supervise its own borders [...]"
- European civilisation, its Christian heritage and national identities should be protected and embraced. The negotiations on the accession of Turkey, which is not a European country, must be put to an end.
- The Group is opposed to any attempt to impose a euro-zone budget and direct EU taxes."

5 "Briefings – 03/03/22", (Source: [Contexte](#)).

6 Created in 2011, the KNP defends traditionalist, anti-EU but also libertarian positions. The party counted 4 MEPS during the 2014-2019 EP legislature but none during the current one.

7 Renamed "*Rassemblement national*" in 2018.

8 FN lost MEPs between the 2014 European elections and the creation of the ENF in March 2015.

9 D. MCDONNELL and A. WERNER (2020): *International Populism – The Radical Right in the European Parliament*, Hurst.

10 "About", (Source: [ID Group](#)).

Figure 1 Composition of the EP Compared to the Previous Legislative Period

| Political Groups | 2019 Number of MEPs | 2014 Number of MEPs | Evolution | 2019 MEPs/Total | 2014 MEPs/Total |
|------------------|------------------------|------------------------|-----------|--------------------|--------------------|
| EPP | 182 | 221 | -39 | 24,23 | 29,43 |
| S&D | 154 | 191 | -37 | 20,51 | 25,43 |
| Renew Europe | 108 | 67 | +41 | 14,38 | 8,92 |
| Greens/EFA | 74 | 50 | +24 | 9,85 | 6,66 |
| ID | 73 | - | - | 9,72 | - |
| ECR | 62 | 70 | -8 | 8,26 | 9,32 |
| The LEFT | 41 | 52 | -11 | 5,46 | 6,92 |
| EFDD | - | 48 | - | - | 6,39 |
| NA | 57 | 52 | +5 | 7,59 | 6,92 |
| Total | 751 | 751 | - | 100 | 100 |

Source: European Parliament

Figure 2 ID Group Composition in 2019

| National Parties / Countries | MEPs in 2019 | Represented in the 2014 EP? | MEPs in 2014 | Evolution (MEPs) | Political Group in 2014 | Political role in Member State |
|---------------------------------|-----------------|--------------------------------|-----------------|---------------------|----------------------------|--|
| Lega / Italy | 28 | Yes | 5 | +23 | NA | Government coalition with M5S from 2018 to 2019, opposition from 2019 to 2022, governmental coalition with Fdl and Forza Italia since 2022 |
| RN / France | 22 | Yes | 23 | -1 | NA | Opposition |
| AfD / Germany | 11 | Yes | 7 | +4 | ECR | Opposition |
| FPÖ / Austria | 3 | Yes | 4 | -1 | NA | Government coalition from 2017 to 2019, opposition since 2019 |
| VB / Belgium | 3 | Yes | 1 | +2 | NA | Opposition |
| SPD/ C. Republic | 2 | No | 0 | - | - | Opposition |
| FP / Finland | 2 | Yes | 2 | 0 | ECR | Government coalition from 2015 to 2017, opposition since 2017 |
| DF / Denmark | 1 | Yes | 4 | -3 | ECR | Opposition |
| EKRE / Estonia | 1 | No | 0 | - | - | Government coalition from 2019 to 2021, opposition since 2021 |

Source: *European Parliament*

1.2. ECR: Stable Numbers but a Profoundly Renewed Composition

The ECR group was established just after the 2009 European elections. Its creation takes root in the British Conservatives' desire to distance themselves from the EPP because they considered the largest group in the EP to be too "Eurofederalist"¹¹. British Conservative MEPs accounted for just under a half of the ECR group, Polish PiS MEPs over a quarter, and Czech MEPs just over 15%. Central European MEPs made up the remaining 10%. At the time, commentators wondered about the future of this heterogeneous union¹².

During the 2014 European elections, the ECR was still in place and even managed to increase its number of MEPs (70 in 2014 against 54 in 2009).

The results of the ECR group in 2019 could suggest stability. This impression is only true for the number of MEPs: 62 in 2019, versus 70 in 2014 (a slight decrease). However, the balance between political parties changed. On one hand, PiS achieved a good performance by winning 7 extra seats (26 in 2019, versus 19 in 2014). On the other hand, the British Conservatives collapsed, saving only 4 seats from the 19 they held in 2014. New parties such as the Spain's Vox, Forum voor Democratie (FvD) from the Netherlands, and Fratelli d'Italia (Fdi) also joined the group, whereas many ECR members were unable to maintain their seats: Reload Bulgaria, Alliance for Germany, Poland's Right Wing of the Republic, etc. Finally, one last observation to note: in 2019, two ECR members decided to join the ID group: the Finns Party (FP) and the Danish People's Party (DF).

In 2019, ECR group is characterised by a heterogeneous composition, with both experienced MEPs (PiS) and new voices of the far-right discovering the European parliamentary game. The organisation of the group reflects its mutation. Syed KAMALL – a British Conservative – co-chaired the group with PiS Ryszard LEGUTKO from 2014 until 2019, when the British MEP lost his seat, and was then replaced by Raffaele FITTO of Fdi.

Both LEGUTKO and FITTO are regulars in the EP (in 2019, they are both serving their third term in the EP). FITTO began his European career in Silvio BERLUSCONI's Forza Italia (EPP) before breaking away in 2015 to join the ECR¹³. LEGUTKO has spent his entire political career in PiS and was briefly Minister of Education in 2007 in Poland before starting his European career.

ECR's Positions

ECR MEPs have a manifesto, the Prague Declaration¹⁴, formulated at the time of the group's creation in 2009. This text officially formalises the group's positions.

"[...] the European Conservatives and Reformists Group shares the following principles:

- Free enterprise, free and fair trade and competition, minimal regulation, lower taxation, and small government as the ultimate catalysts for individual freedom and personal and national prosperity.
- Freedom of the individual, more personal responsibility and greater democratic accountability.
- Sustainable, clean energy supply with an emphasis on energy security.
- The importance of the family as the bedrock of society.
- The sovereign integrity of the nation state, opposition to EU federalism and a renewed respect for true subsidiarity.
- The overriding value of the transatlantic security relationship in a revitalised NATO, and support for young democracies across Europe.
- Effectively controlled immigration and an end to abuse of asylum procedures.
- Efficient and modern public services and sensitivity to the needs of both rural and urban communities.
- An end to waste and excessive bureaucracy and a commitment to greater transparency and probity in the EU institutions and use of EU funds.
- Respect and equitable treatment for all EU countries, new and old, large and small".

11 "UK Conservatives in the EPP-ED: Will they stay or go?", (Source: [Euractiv](#)).

12 "Parliament's new anti-federalist group: A fragile coalition?", (Source: [Euractiv](#)).

13 "News", (Source: [ECR Group](#)).

14 "Who we are", (Source: [ECR Group](#)).

Figure 3 ECR Group Composition in 2019

| National Parties / Countries | MEPs in 2019 | Represented in 2014 EP? | MEPs in 2014 | Evolution (MEPs) | Political Group in 2014 | Political role in Member State |
|----------------------------------|--------------|-------------------------|--------------|------------------|-------------------------|--|
| PiS / Poland | 26 | Yes | 19 | +7 | ECR | Governing since 2015 |
| Fdi / Italy | 5 | No | 0 | - | ECR | Government coalition Lega and Forza Italia since 2022 |
| ODS / C. Republic | 4 | Yes | 2 | +2 | ECR | Government coalition since 2021 |
| Conservatives / UK | 4 | Yes | 19 | -16 | ECR | Governing since 2010 |
| N-VA / Belgium | 3 | Yes | 4 | -1 | ECR | Government coalition 2014-2018, opposition since 2018 |
| FvD / Netherlands | 3 | No | 0 | N/A | - | Opposition |
| Vox / Spain | 3 | No | 0 | - | - | Opposition |
| SD / Sweden | 3 | Yes | 2 | +1 | EFDD | Government coalition since 2022 |
| BMPO / Bulgaria | 2 | Yes | 2 | 0 | ECR | Government coalition 2017 – 2021, opposition since 2021 |
| TB/LNNK / Latvia | 2 | Yes | 1 | +1 | ECR | Governing coalition since 2010 |
| SaS / Slovakia | 2 | Yes | 1 | +1 | ALDE | Government coalition since 2020 |
| Coal Hrv. Suvrenisti / Croatia | 1 | Yes | 1 | 0 | ECR | Opposition |
| Familie / Germany | 1 | Yes | 1 | 0 | ECR | Opposition |
| Greek Solution / Greece | 1 | Yes | 1 | 0 | - | Opposition |
| LLRA-KŠS / Lithuania | 1 | Yes | 1 | 0 | ECR | Coalition 2000-2001, 2012-2014, 2019-2020, opposition since 2020 |
| Coalition CU – SGP / Netherlands | 1 | Yes | 2 | -1 | ECR | Opposition |

Source: European Parliament

Unlike ID, ECR is more experienced but also more heterogeneous. The group is dominated by Poles and includes a wide range of formations from the far-right to more traditional right-wing formations. The common denominator between these formations remains – as for ID – the defence of Member States’ sovereignty. Nevertheless, ECR is prone to consider the EU in its current form as a useful tool to achieve some of its political objectives.

Insert 2 – Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy (EFDD)

Although EFDD may appear to be the successor of Europe of Freedom and Democracy (EFD) that sat during the 2009–2014 legislature, both groups only had two parties in common: UK’s UKIP and Lithuania’s TT.

In 2014, UKIP made significant gains: 24 MEPs in 2014 versus 13 in 2009. It became a necessity to be part of a political group that grants more resources and visibility; thus, allowing UKIP to continue its criticism of the EU from within the EP.

However, UKIP did not want to partner with “controversial” parties to avoid domestic reputational costs. For instance, Jean-Marie LE PEN, the former leader of the Front National, was depicted as a bogeyman by many political parties. UKIP preferred to partner with the M5S that had made a splash in the 2014 European elections with 17 elected MEPs sitting for the first in Brussels. M5S and UKIP decided to join their forces in a “marriage of convenience”¹⁵. This union was completed with seven other MEPs from other Member States to respect EP rules of political group formation. Contrary to the ENF, a shared intent to create a lasting and congruent union did not exist.

1.3. Non-Attached Group: A Radically Changed Group

It is here too necessary to go beyond the simple comparison of the number of NA members between 2019 (57 seats) and 2014 (52 seats) to understand the metamorphosis of this group.

Firstly, in 2014, most of the NA MEPs shared far-right positions apart from the Greek Communist Party, Tier-schutzpartei (Germany’s Human Environment Animal Protection Party), and Die Partei¹⁶. In 2019, the composition is less homogeneous: ~70% of NA MEPs share conservative, Eurosceptic or even xenophobic positions, while the remaining ~30% include 14 MEPs from the M5S party, which left the EFDD group and lost 3 MEPs (17 seats in 2014), and a group of MEPs from Spain in favour of Catalan independence, Coalition Ahora Repúblicas and Coal LLIURES PER EUROPA -JUNTS (3 seats).

Secondly, the composition of national parties differs greatly. Right after the 2014 European elections, France’s RN MEPs represented ~44% of the group (23 seats)¹⁷. The parties FPÖ, Jobbik¹⁸, Greece’s Golden Dawn (XA), Lega, and the Polish Congress of the New Right (KNP) each had 3 to 5 MPs and constituted, combined, ~44% as well. The remaining seats were shared by the VB, the Communist Party of Greece (KKE), and the British Democratic Unionist Party (DUP).

With the creation of the ENF Group in 2015 (becoming ID in 2019), the NA group lost many members and became dominated by the Brexit Party¹⁹ (See next page), which with its 29 MEPs made up about 75% of the far-right NA MEPs. The remaining 25% included Greek, Croatian, Slovenian, and Hungarian figures.

15 D. MCDONNELL and A. WERNER (2020): International Populism.

16 “Die Partei” is a satirical party advocating for ridiculous positions such as building a wall around Switzerland (Source: [Le Monde](#)).

17 RN joined ENF in 2015.

18 Jobbik was created as a paramilitary militia, the Hungarian Guard, in 2007. It used to be a Europhobic and racist party mainly towards the Gypsy minority. From 2018 to 2020, leaders and notably Tamás SNEIDER have changed a lot the party by adopting a pro-European stance, and being supportive of the rule of law and the separation of powers (Source: [Libération](#)).

19 In 2018, FARAGE decided to leave UKIP saying the party he used to lead was now unrecognisable because of the “fixation” with the anti-Muslim policies of its leader, Gerard BATTEN (Source: [The Guardian](#)). In the context of the 2019 European elections, he created the Brexit Party. After the UK left the EU in January 2020, the party became Reform UK.

Figure 4 Non-Attached Composition in 2019

| Member parties / Country | 2019 – MEPs | Repre- sented in 2014 EP? | 2014 – MEPs | Evolution | Position 2014 |
|--|-------------|---------------------------------|-------------|-----------|------------------|
| Brexit Party / UK | 29 | Yes | 24 | +5 | EFDD |
| M5S / Italy | 14 | Yes | 17 | -3 | EFDD |
| KKE / Greece | 2 | Yes | 2 | 0 | NA |
| XA / Greece | 2 | Yes | 3 | -1 | NA |
| Coal (PdCat + JXCat) – Coal LLIURES PER EUROPA (JUNTS) (Partit Demòcrata Europeu Català + Junts per Catalunya) / Spain | 2 | No | - | - | - |
| ĽSNS – Kotleba – Ľudová strana Naše Slovensko / Slovakia | 2 | No | - | - | - |
| DUP / UK | 1 | Yes | 1 | 0 | NA |
| Die PARTEI / Germany | 1 | Yes | 1 | 0 | NA |
| Jobbik / Hungary | 1 | Yes | 3 | -2 | NA |
| Coal (ERC + Bildu + BNG) – Coalition Ahora Repúblicas / Spain | 1 | No | - | - | - |
| Mislav Kolakušić – Independent Mislav Kolakušić / Croatia | 1 | No | - | - | - |
| ŽIVI ZID / Croatia | 1 | No | - | - | - |

Source: European Parliament

2. CHANGES IN GROUP COMPOSITION SINCE 2019

2.1. Impact of the Brexit

Prior to the UK's withdrawal from the EU, some initiatives were discussed in the EP and in the Council of the EU (e.g., creating a transnational list²⁰). It was finally decided that the 73 vacant seats were to be redistributed as follows: 27 seats to 14 Member States to fix the under-representation of certain Member States by better taking into account the principle of "degressive proportionality"²¹ while the remaining 46 seats were kept available for the next EU enlargements.

The departure of the British MEPs did not have a significant impact on the power balance of ID and ECR. After the redistribution of seats, the former gained 3 seats (76 seats in February 2020) and the latter lost 3 seats (59 seats in February 2020). The redistribution of these seats allowed the PVV to sit again among the ID group. In contrast, the number of NA MEPs was approximately cut in half (57 to 31 seats in February 2020).

The consequences of the Brexit are rather symbolic. **The British Conservatives left the ECR group they had initiated** and in which they enjoyed a certain prestige. They constituted a model for other members because of their long political

20 "Parliament votes down plan for pan-European MEPs", (Source: Politico).

21 Less populous Member States are allocated more seats per capita than bigger ones (Source: European Parliament).

history²² and their constant Euroscepticism. And above all, it is the end of the road for Nigel Farage and his 25 Brexit Party colleagues who left the hemicycle that they enjoyed hating so much. With Farage, European Eurosceptics had perhaps lost their most emblematic figure.

Figure 5 Composition of the European Parliament after the Brexit²³

| Political Groups | January 2020 Number of seats (Pre-Brexit) | Evolution | February 2020 Number of seats (Post-Brexit) |
|------------------|---|-----------|---|
| EPP | 182 | +5 | 187 |
| S&D | 154 | -6 | 148 |
| Renew Europe | 108 | -11 | 97 |
| Greens/EFA | 74 | -7 | 67 |
| ID | 73 | +3 | 76 |
| ECR | 66 | -4 | 62 |
| The LEFT | 40 | - | 40 |
| NA | 53 | -26 | 27 |
| Total | 751 | - | 705 |

Source: European Parliament

2.2. Main Movements Among Far-Right Parties

There have been some developments in the composition of political groups since 2019. To name a few, the ID group has seen its group shrink over the course of internal political issues: 11 MEPs left. For example, 4 RN MEPs had to join the NA bench following their decision to support Eric ZEMMOUR, a polemicist and far-right challenger of LE PEN for the 2022 French presidential elections. Lega lost 4 MEPs as well, but for individual reasons: two of them left to express their differences with SALVINI regarding its COVID

management strategy and two for other reasons. In August 2022, ID group has 62 members.

ECR dynamics are more positive: the group welcomed five extra members since January 2020 and counts 64 MEPs in August 2022. **Currently, the two main far-right groups approximately have the same number of MEPs.**

Insert 3 – Where Is Viktor ORBÁN’s Fidesz in the EP?²⁴

ORBAN has been an emblematic figure of the European far-right for many years and his party was an EPP member from 2000 to 2021. Viktor ORBAN was even one of the EPP’s vice-presidents from 2002 to 2012.

Three main elements made him choose the EPP group:

- **The importance of symbols:** ORBAN considers himself as a devout Christian and wished to be part of the European Christian democracy tradition represented by the EPP group.
- **A quest for respectability:** ORBAN wants to embody a statesmanlike stature by being part of a political group with many right-wing heads of state, but also to give the illusion that his party is different from other forces, such as PiS or SPD, by not sitting with them.
- **A political deal:** ORBAN adopted a “behaviour loyal to the Christian-democrat family in Brussels in exchange for a certain indulgence from European institutions in view of the increasingly controversial actions in domestic politics”²⁵.

This strategic loyalty worked well until ORBAN increased his attacks on the EU and his reforms in Hungary were increasingly shocking for the European public opinion (i.e., the affair of the Central European University).

In 2018, MEP Judith SARGENTINI, a member of the Greens/EFA, submitted a report to the EP in which she detailed the breaches by Hungary of the EU values. In 2019, EPP decided to suspend – but not exclude – the “turbulent” Hungarian member due to its anti-Brussels campaign and Fidesz’s attacks against Jean-Claude

22 After the US Democratic Party founded in 1828, the British Conservatives, created in 1834, is the oldest political party.

23 The differences between the number of seats from the precedent figures and figure 5 are due to the movements of MEPs that occurred from May 2019 to January 2020.

24 “History of a breakdown: Fidesz’s departure from the EPP group at the European Parliament”, (Source: Institut Delors).

25 “Orban and the EPP: A conservative family drama”, (Source: Europe Reloaded).

JUNCKER – member of the EPP and President of the European Commission, from 2014-2019 – during the European elections.

Yet it is only in 2021 that Fidesz pulled out of EPP. At that time, the EPP wanted to change the statutes of the party to better state the common European values the EPP intends to defend and to change the exclusion procedure of a member. ORBAN decided to take the lead and left the group in March 2021 before these changes backfired on his party. Fidesz now sits among Non-Attached MEPs.

- the ID group, dominated by Lega, RN and AfD, brings together various voices of the European far-right even more widely than its predecessor ENF.
- the ECR group, freed from the British Conservatives, finds a leading force in the Polish PiS that dominates a plethora of 20 different parties.
- the NA bloc, or rather two thirds of this composite assembly, includes MEPs with a position close to or even more extreme than the first two poles with ORBAN's Fidesz that currently refuses to ally with neither ID nor ECR.

From an ideological point of view, ID and ECR groups share three main values: the defence of the Member States' sovereignty, the rejection of a European federal state, as well as the promotion of stricter measures on immigration.

CONCLUSION

The Post-Brexit legislature of the EP is characterised by the absence of an EPP and S&D coalition. This new configuration suggests new strategies to obtain consensus by relying on the ecologists, the liberals and perhaps the far-right.

The far-right spectrum is now built around three poles:

On possible differences, ID emphasises the civilisational aspect of Europe, whereas the ECR seems to consider a broader spectrum of rather liberal themes: minimal regulation, small government, and promotion of the transatlantic axis in terms of security. It is therefore necessary to look at these positions in detail to see what unites and divides far-right parties in the EP (see Section II).

II. What Are the Far-Right's Criticisms of the European Union and its Counter-Projects?

The aim of this section is to bring to light how far-right parties view the EU. What do they say about the EU's functioning? What are their core ideas on the Europe-to-be? Do they suggest an alternative project? What current policies do they reject? And conversely, do they support some European corporations? It is a lot to answer in just a few pages. In this context, this section provides an answer to these questions by drawing a two-step synthesis of the main far-right voices in the EP.

- First, an analysis on the 2019 electoral programmes assesses the similarities and differences of these voices.
- Second, the study focuses on the alternative projects the far-right parties draw for Europe.
- In addition, the last sub-section summarises the ideological differences dividing the far-right political parties in Europe.

Special attention is paid to the political programmes these parties issued for the 2019 European elections. The advantage of such an approach is to collect sources of information from the same period (i.e., in the months preceding the 2019 elections). **These manifestos allow to understand what far-right political parties wished to put forward at that time. It should be kept in mind that this documentation is not the outcome of their work as political forces but their political stances and what they wish to be identified.** As this documentation did not cover the full range of topics this study examines, other resources were taken into consideration – mostly press articles but also the content promoted on ID's and ECR's official websites.

Remarks:

- For the sake of clarity, the study only focuses on the following parties: Lega, RN, AfD, and FP for the ID group; PiS, FdI, ODS, N-VA, FvD, and Vox for the ECR group; and

the Fidesz (NA). This selection covers the most representative far-right forces (selected parties represent approximately 75% of the MEPs in ID and ECR groups). The selection also covers Northern, Southern, Western and Eastern Europe as well as historical actors (i.e., RN) and new entrants (i.e., Vox). Concerning the NA group, there will only be an analysis of the Fidesz which – with its 12 MEPs and its leader ORBAN who has been in power in Hungary since 2010 – constitutes a major force of the far-right in Europe.

- It would be beyond the scope of this study to examine all the issues addressed in the 2019 political programmes. Again, a choice had to be made. That is why, the following sub-section focuses on two topics on which far-right parties are most vociferous: the EU's current institutional functioning and immigration and asylum.
- All quotations in this section are from these manifestos unless otherwise stated (for more details see "Methodological approach and remarks on data").

1. THE FAR-RIGHT'S CRITICISMS OF THE EU

1.1. *The EU's Institutional Functioning*

Far-right parties share a "Eurosceptic denominator" on the functioning of the EU: **they blame the EU for being anti-democratic, inefficient, expensive, and operating in a far from transparent manner.**

Insert 4 – Hard, Soft, and Equivocal Eurosceptics

The term "Eurosceptic" can be traced back to the mid-1980s in the UK and referred to someone who was opposed to the powers of the EU²⁶. It has since evolved in line with the European project. Paul TAGGART and Aleks SZCZERBIAK – political scientists – suggested a dichotomic definition that distinguish hard and soft Euroscepticism:

- **"Hard Euroscepticism is where there is a principled opposition to the EU and European integration and therefore can be seen in parties who think that their countries should withdraw from membership, or whose policies towards the EU are tantamount to being opposed to the whole project of European integration as it is currently conceived.**
- **Soft Euroscepticism is where there is not a principled objection to European integration or EU membership but where concerns on one (or a number) of policy areas lead to the expression of qualified opposition to the EU, or where there is a sense that 'national interest' is currently at odds with the EU's trajectory"**²⁷.

In this context, as the FvD promotes the NEXIT, it would be considered a hard-Eurosceptic party, while the PiS would appear as a soft-Eurosceptic force since it considers that debates about fundamental values must take place at the level of the nation state and not the European level.

However, the stance of political parties on the EU is ever-changing. HEINISCH, McDONNELL and WERNER showed that parties identified as Eurosceptic can offer rationales from both the hard and soft Euroscepticism and suggest a new concept: "equivocal Eurosceptics criticize European integration, the EU, its officials and policies in ways that are often as harsh in tone and even substance as that of hard Eurosceptics. Nonetheless, like soft Eurosceptics, equivocal Eurosceptics shy away from expressing an unequivocally principled objection to EU membership and deny that this is their objective"²⁸.

26 N. BRACK and N. STARTIN, Introduction: Euroscepticism, from the margins to the mainstream, *International Political Science Review*, 2015, Vol. 36(3) 239–249.

27 R. HEINISCH, D. McDONNELL and A. WERNER, Equivocal Euroscepticism: How Populist Radical Right Parties Can Have Their EU Cake and Eat It, *JCMS* 2020 pp. 1–17.

28 See footnote 27.

ID Panel + Fidesz

Most often, the parties of this panel specifically direct their criticism against the European Commission. They portray the institution as **antidemocratic** for three main reasons: commissioners are not directly elected by European citizens, the Commission has a say in decisions taken by national governments on certain areas of competence, and the power of the Commission is considered disproportionate to that of other institutions (i.e., The Council of the EU and the EP)²⁹. RN and Fidesz directly criticise the Article 7 of the Treaty on EU (See Section IV). They consider the article as an unacceptable interference of Brussels that flouts the sovereignty of Member States. To offset the Commission's influence, Lega wants to strengthen the control power on the application of the subsidiarity principle³⁰ and of the proportionality principle on National and Regional Parliaments.

Moreover, **these parties find the EU inefficient and bureaucratic**. AfD regards the EU as a "monstrous bureaucratic and administrative apparatus" while the FP estimates that "the monthly movement of the entire EU 'parliamentary machine' from Brussels to Strasbourg is producing nothing more than high costs". **Speaking of costs**, all these parties promote the dismantling of some common policies or agencies: the RN wants the end of Enlargement funds, FP suggests the abolition of the European Committee of the Regions (CoR) and the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC). Moreover, far-right parties blame the EU's lack of transparency in the decision-making process, causing different interest groups to act for their own benefit and against the interests of European citizens. ORBAN states that "Brussels has outsourced a considerable portion of its power and has handed it over to networks organised and controlled from outside Europe, primarily to the Soros networks and the Democrats of the US behind them" while the FP proclaims that "It's been evident that the European Commission has bent with pressure from the larger members when it is preparing draft regulations and directives;

these proposals have been tailored to appeal to France, Germany, Italy and Spain".

ECR Panel

ECR panel shares the same views as ID and Fidesz panels on the EU's functioning, but their tone is less severe. ECR parties want to counterbalance the Commission's influence with a greater implication of Member States and, for some of them (N-VA), local entities as an answer to the **democratic deficit** the EU is blamed for. For instance, Vox wants "the acknowledgement of the sovereign power of the States (...) and advocates for the requirement of unanimity as the main mechanism of integration as well as the practice of "opt-out"³¹, while FvD suggests to "organise blocking minorities against budgets and legislation".

Concerning the EU's efficiency, N-VA states "the European Commission should be reduced, and its efficiency improved". Nevertheless, the Flemish party seems to perceive as efficient the EU's transnational approach of the common market. For instance, ODS states that "one area where it is desirable for all Member States to participate equally is the common market." PiS associates the EU's democratic deficit to a lack of transparency: "Without increased transparency and accountability of the EU's institutions, agencies, budget and policies, then public faith and trust in the EU will continue to be eroded."

An additional remark would be that all these parties (ID + Fidesz and ECR) want to block Turkey's accession to the EU.

29 For reminder, the Commission's competences include the exclusive right to initiate legislation, to issue regulations, and to monitor their transposition into the national law of each Member State.

30 The general aim of the principle of subsidiarity is to guarantee a degree of independence for a lower authority in relation to a higher body or for a local authority in relation to central government (...). When applied in the context of the EU, the principle of subsidiarity serves to regulate the exercise of the Union's non-exclusive powers. It rules out UE's intervention when an issue can be dealt with effectively by Member States themselves at central, regional, or local level (Source: [European Parliament](#)).

31 Certain EU Member States have what are known as opt-outs, which are a means of ensuring that when a given Member State does not want to take part in a particular field of EU policy, it can opt out, thus avoiding an overall stalemate. (Source: [EUR-lex](#)).

Insert 5 – What About the Euro?

| Political Party | What is the position? | Extract |
|---|--|---|
| ECR – FdI (Italy) | Change the euro | "The euro has been a great deal for some states and a bad deal for others. [...]The nation that lost out the most was Italy (...). We will therefore ask Europe for compensatory measures (...). We need a radical reform of the European Central Bank; we need to reaffirm the public nature of Bankitalia and the gold reserves" |
| <p>Comments: FdI's position is ambivalent. The party's programme for the 2019 European elections does not call for the end to the euro. It accuses the single currency of favouring Northern European economies at the expense of the Italians and calls for reforms to correct the situation. In 2021, MELONI defended the same idea: "I have never proposed Italy's unilateral exit from the euro, but currencies are a tool, not a god. The euro has penalised some economies"³²</p> | | |
| ECR – FvD (Netherlands) | Exit the euro | "Too expensive for the South, the euro slows down economic growth there. Meanwhile, the North must transfer money to the South forever because the 'strict conditions' that were supposed to apply to the monetary union have turned out to be worth nothing in practice". The FvD wants: "a referendum on the euro" and "an end to the single currency, possibly together with some other countries" |
| <p>Comments: According to the FvD, the euro as a single currency cannot work because of the existence of different economies and cultures. The party is strongly opposed to the euro, which condemns the "frugal and serious" Dutch to pay for the mess made by the "lax and spendthrift" peoples of Southern Europe. In this perspective, the FvD sees the exit of the Netherlands from the eurozone as an intermediate step before its complete withdrawal from the EU, the NEXIT. FvD advocates that an EU membership also remains possible without using the euro.³³</p> | | |
| ECR – N-VA (Belgium) | Change the euro | "We are (...) for a strong European currency in a eurozone where clear agreements are respected. (...) The N-VA wants each country to manage its budget, keep its debt under control and ensure the competitiveness of its economy" |
| <p>Comments: The N-VA is a liberal and separatist party. The party believes that only two levels really matter: the local level, i.e., "Flanders", which deals with issues close to the people, and the supranational level, i.e., the EU, which deals with issues of globalisation, particularly economic and monetary topics. The N-VA therefore supports the euro, which would also act as a factor facilitating a possible Flemish secession from Belgium.</p> | | |
| ECR – ODS (Czech Republic) | Adoption of the euro must be voluntary | "All the experiences to date (especially the Greek crisis) clearly show that the eurozone will work best as a club of countries for which a common currency is appropriate and beneficial. The Member States that still have national currencies must be able to decide for themselves whether they wish to adopt the euro and when" |
| <p>Comments: Although no firm deadline has been set, the countries that joined the EU in 2004 are committed to adopt the euro after fulfilling the economic convergence criteria. Therefore, the ODS takes the position that only the Czech Republic will decide when it is worthwhile for its economy to join the single currency.</p> | | |

32 "Giorgia Meloni: "L'Euro non è irreversibile, è una moneta e non un dio, che cos'è ...", (Source: [La7 Attualità](#)).

33 "The Euro", (Source: [FvD](#)).

| Political Party | What is the position? | Extract |
|--|--|--|
| ECR – PiS (Poland) | Adoption of the euro must be voluntary | “Fiscal discipline, an independent European Central Bank without political agenda, and the respect of Member States’ decision not to adopt the euro, are the key ingredients of preventing future economic shocks.” |
| <p>Comments: PiS shares a similar position to that advocated by ODS. The euro changeover was announced and postponed several times in the past. Most recently, in the 2019 European election campaign KACZYNSKI, PiS leader stated: “We will adopt the euro someday, because we are committed to do so, and we are and will be in the European Union, but we will accept it when it is in our interest (...). It will be in our interest when we reach a level very close to Germany in GDP level, standard of living³⁴.”</p> | | |
| ID – AfD (Germany) | Exit the euro | “Germany should introduce a national currency like the Deutsche Mark, possibly while retaining the euro at the same time. In AfD’s opinion, the euro was a bad design for an economic area that currently comprises 19 national economies with completely different levels of performance” |
| <p>Comments: For reminder, the AfD was created by German economists in 2013 to contest the creation of a European rescue fund after the 2008 financial crisis. Since then, the party has blamed the euro because it looks upon the single currency as being unsuitable for the diversity of economies in the eurozone. The party wants to return to the Deutsche Mark but some of its members suggest another approach: the introduction of “a northern euro” to stop “paying for Southern Europe”³⁵.</p> | | |
| ID – FP (Finland) | Exit the euro | “The Finns Party believes that Finland taking up the euro was a huge political and economic mistake (...). The Party believes the way forward is to create a ‘well-controlled exit’ from the euro. The important benefit of Finland’s exit would be a return to its own independent national currency and monetary policy (...). That path would be a gradual withdrawal of Finland from the eurozone by officially introducing a parallel currency – for example, a new ‘Suomen markka/ Finnmark.’ Over time, the euro would be phased out” |
| <p>Comments: FP shares the AfD’s and FvD’s conviction on the euro: the single currency cannot function properly because of the diversity of economies. Maintaining it would put the Finnish economy at a disadvantage.</p> | | |
| ID – Lega (Italy) | Exit the euro | “The euro is the main cause of our economic decline, a currency custom-designed for Germany and multinationals, and contrary to the needs of Italy and small businesses. We have always sought partners in Europe to start a shared path to an agreed exit” |
| <p>Comments: SALVINI took over the Lega in 2013. During the 2014 European election campaign, he adopted an offensive anti-euro stance with the evocative slogan “Basta Euro”. The party remained committed to exit the eurozone until 2019 when SALVINI changed tune and declared that the euro was irreversible. The Italian political context may provide a key to understanding this change: the Lega “walked out of the coalition government with M5S in August 2019 in a failed attempt to trigger early elections. Its poll ratings have since slipped, and SALVINI has adopted a softer tone on issues like the euro³⁶.”</p> | | |

34 “Poland’s Kaczynski says ‘no’ to the euro as part of election campaign”, (Source: [Reuters](#)).

35 “Allemagne: l’AfD envisage une sortie de l’UE, mais pas à court terme”, (Source: [Le Monde](#)).

36 “Italy’s euroskeptic leader Salvini says euro is ‘irreversible’”, (Source: [Reuters](#)).

| Political Party | What is the position? | Extract |
|------------------|-----------------------|---|
| ID – RN (France) | Change the euro | "Clearly, the euro as it operates today serves Germany's interests [...] to the detriment of most of the 19 other countries of the eurozone. (...) It is therefore necessary to change the eurozone's functioning to align money creation with the needs of the real economy" |

Comments: Like the Lega, the RN has radically changed its position on the euro. During the 2014 European election campaign, the party supported the re-establishment of a national currency or even a withdrawal from the EU. Following the failure of the 2017 French presidential elections, the stance changed: there is not any mention of leaving the eurozone in the 2019 European election programme. Currently, the party's wish is to reform the structures of the single currency.

1.2. Migration and Asylum

The mobility crisis in 2015 – or the “migrant crisis” – is still a haunting thought for all the studied parties. Their concerns are mostly about the EU’s inability to stop human movements at European borders. Far-right parties all share to a greater or lesser extent the vision of a European continent beset by external forces. However, their suggestions to tackle that challenge differ.

ID Panel + Fidesz

The panel agrees on two elements. First, **the whole panel calls for stricter asylum regulation**. For instance, the RN aspires to end the automatic renewal of residence permits (visas) and legal immigration and to introduce systematic deportation of illegal immigrants. Second, **the panel wants the Member States to have more freedom in this area**. Some of them call for the end of the Schengen Agreement whose main purpose is the abolish internal border controls for all persons. Hungary’s Fidesz suggests to “erect a border fence in the South and limit illegal entry into Hungary³⁷”.

However, **the panel disagrees on the solutions to be put in place**. Some parties desire stronger cooperation in this area. The FP wants the EU to focus on strengthening the capacities and means of the EU Border and Coast Guards. SALVINI calls for greater solidarity regarding the relocation of migrants among Member States (quotas), while ORBAN explicitly rejects such a proposal: “We have the solid back-

ing of Hungarians [...] to reject any obligatory relocation plan and to defend the Hungarian way of life”.

ECR Panel

Here too exist both consensus and divergence. The parties from this panel accused the EU of powerlessness. FvD goes as far as to say that “the EU has left us completely defenceless against mass immigration”. The Dutch party is vehement and wants to cancel the Schengen Agreement to reintroduce border controls and retain the Dublin system. Vox is quite aligned with this position: “It is necessary for all states to have an unbreakable and unchangeable minimum level of protection, approved unanimously. Otherwise, the system is fallible, and Spain will be forced to suspend temporarily or definitively, in whole or in part, the effectiveness of the Schengen Agreement.”

However, ID and ECR panels slightly differ on a point. **There might be a louder call for cooperation** in the ECR group. ODS suggest financial assistance to EU border countries (Bulgaria, Greece, Italy, Spain) to fight illegal migration, N-VA wants to “strengthen Frontex, the European border and coast guard agency, and give it an adequate mandate to perform its role properly”. Nevertheless, the question of quotas divides the group as well. N-VA is in favour while Vox is strongly opposed.

37 In 2015, ORBAN decided to build a first barrier section along the Hungarian border during the mobility crisis. The aim was to defend “European and Christian civilisation” against a “Muslim invasion”. In 2017, the Hungarian government decided to build a second section of fence (Source: [Cbc](#) and [Politico](#)).

2. ID'S AND ECR'S COUNTER-PROJECTS FOR THE EUROPEAN UNION

Both panels outspokenly condemn any further evolution towards a European “superstate” and therefore agree on rejecting new transfer of power from the nations to the EU. Only the less vocal ones concede to new supranational policies if the Member States unanimously back them. Many of them plead for going back to the pre-Maastricht³⁸ European Union. But what does it mean concretely? Or to put in a different way, what do they offer instead?

2.1. ID's Europe of Cooperation

ID evidently makes it clear in the group's statutes: “[ID members] advocate **voluntary cooperation between sovereign European nations**”. To draw the consequences of this position, it is necessary to have a look on the political programmes of these parties. For instance, in their 2018 government agenda, Lega aims at **recovering sovereignty** in the fields of trade, home affairs, and law. It means specifically and respectively the end of the Commission's competence to sign international trade agreements, the repeal of Schengen and the Dublin regulation, and the end of the EU Court of Justice. **SALVINI's party suggests reinforcing subsidiarity** by restoring “to the exclusive competence of the Member States' most competing competences and all supporting competence” and by increasing “the power to monitor the application of the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality to national parliaments and regions”.

AfD in turn wants “to abolish the undemocratic EU Parliament” and calls for “multilateral treaties” between sovereign states. They think that the EU should limit itself “in shaping the framework of common, European economic activity and ensuring fair conditions of competition”. In their view, cooperation between nations remains the rule for other issues such as defence against immigration.

RN describes the Europe of nations they praise with more detail: **supremacy of national law, deletion of the Commission, transfer of the legislative initiative to the EU council, and generalisation of opt-outs**. The EP would comprise national MEPs delegated by the Member States and would draw up the texts necessary for the implementation of the cooperation decided by the European heads of state.

2.2. ECR's Will for a Confederal Association of Nation-States

The following extract issued from the ECR's website encapsulates the group's view on their Europe-to-build: “We reject the centralising federalist agenda that says the only choice is between more Europe or no Europe. The ECR group offers an alternative vision of a reformed European Union as a **looser confederal association of nation-states** who choose to work together in areas where they have common interests.” They want all Member States to have a greater independence and power in the making of EU policies just like the ID group does. There, however, ends the similarity, and two main differences seem to emerge. First, the **ECR panel does not call for the deletion of some institutions**. For instance, the N-VA simply puts about the Commission that it “should be reduced and its efficiency improved”. Second, **ECR panel is strongly committed to defend and expand the Single Market**³⁹. PiS is very explicit on the topic: “We believe that action in this sector should be focused on removing restrictions on entrepreneurs, modernising the European economy, creating a single digital market and establishing a framework that does not paralyse the development of companies”.

3. OTHER TOPICS TO CONSIDER

In the previous sub-sections, the analysis grid of group compositions (ID vs. ECR) reflects some consensus and similarities. The positions or suggestions defended by the ID

38 The Maastricht Treaty (1992) has largely shaped the EU as we know it today. It instituted greater cooperation (i.e., creation of European citizenship, establishment of a common foreign and security policy, etc.) and laid the foundations for the euro (i.e., establishment of the convergence criteria) and the ECB.

39 The Single Market is built on “four freedoms of movement” to make people, goods, services, and money move around freely in the EU.

panel are overall more radical than the ECR's – in the sense that ID challenges the “*acquis communautaire*”⁴⁰ more. Although if it is far beyond the study's scope to list exhaustively all the fault lines between and among these two groups, some should be mentioned. During the 2019 European elections, parties who were part of the same political group had different political agendas and disagreed on several areas because of different **national and economic histories**.

A striking example illustrates how the Member States' national history impacts on the positions some parties intend to defend within the EU: the question of **the independence of Catalonia that pits Vox against Belgium's N-VA** (both parties are part of ECR). In 2019, Vox benefited from the turmoil caused by the crisis in Catalonia. This explains why Vox developed a discourse that is strongly against greater rights or power to local authorities. The party categorically refuses the hypothetical accession of Catalonia to the EU if it achieves its independence: “For any European territory that has proclaimed its independence outside the constitutionally established procedure of a Member State, we demand from the EU a strict prohibition of accession negotiations in the reform of the Treaties”. This position directly runs counter to the N-VA's. If Flanders proclaimed its independence, the N-VA would be in favour of a European membership. It is then no surprise that the party states in its 2019 programme that “Federated entities of the European Union that gain independence automatically become members of the Union. The N-VA intends to remain a key player in this context and to continue to fight for a Union that defends regional autonomy”.

On the question of economy, **divides exist between Northern and Southern Europe**. Some parties from “wealthy” northern Europe are opposed to further economic integration because of the gap between northern and southern economies. The N-VA “wants each country to manage its budget, keep its debt under control and its economy competitive”. Likewise, the FvD wants money transfers to stop and states that “the North has to transfer money to the South forever because the ‘strict conditions’ that were

supposed to apply to monetary union have turned out to be worth nothing in practice”. In contrast, the Italian party FdI takes the opposite position and calls for “an end to this suffocating austerity, not to fuel unproductive public spending, but to a massive national and European plan of public investment (...)”.

Further on the question of economy, **Western and Eastern Europe are divided on the Posted Workers Directive** (See Insert 6). Political parties from Western Europe are strongly opposed to the current regulation. RN wants to end it, N-VA intends “to fight structurally against social dumping and fraud. [It] must fight unfair competition in the transport, construction, and cleaning sectors” while AfD declares that “the abuse of temporary work contracts with low-paid foreign workers in Germany should stop.” In addition, FP is quite specific on the topic: “This EU-internal labour mobility has led to a sizeable migration of young and skilled workers from Eastern Europe and the Baltic nations and resulted in the lowering of wages and working conditions in Western European countries to which they have moved”.

Unsurprisingly, the two only political parties defending the Posted Workers Directive are ODS from Czech Republic and Poland's PiS. ODS defines the free movement of people as a fundamental principle of the EU: “Free movement within the Schengen area applies only to citizens of the Member States”. PiS simply states that it will fight for the rights of posted workers and specifies that “it will look after the interests of Polish haulage companies in other Member States by pointing out violations of EU law and introducing minimum wage regulations”.

Insert 6 – The Posted Workers Directive

A posted worker “is an employee who is sent by his employer to carry out a service in another EU Member State on a temporary basis, in the context of a contract of services, an intra-group posting or a hiring out through a temporary agency”⁴¹. The number of posted workers in 2017 is estimated at 2.8 million, or 0.8% of total EU

40 The “*acquis*” is the body of common rights and obligations that binds all the EU Member States. It is constantly evolving (Source: [European Commission](#)).

41 “Posted workers”, (Source: [European Commission](#)).

employment⁴². The number of posted workers in the EU rose by 6.5% between 2016 and 2017 and has been rising steadily since 2011⁴³. The figures might suppose that the phenomenon is marginal but some sectors such as constructions or transport are deeply impacted. The countries that receive the most posted workers are Germany, France, and Belgium. In contrast, EU countries that send the most workers are Germany, Poland, and Slovenia.

The “1996 Directive”⁴⁴ sets the rules: posted workers keep their employment contract in their country of origin. Within this framework, and for a maximum period of 24 months, they are covered by the social security and social legislation of their country of origin, where they pay social contributions. In contrast, the salary paid to a posted worker must be the same as that paid to a national worker.

This directive brought some benefits for the countries sending out workers: the posting may improve the standard of living of the foreign worker once he or she returns home, his or her employer can extend the activity to the whole EU by multiplying contracts, etc. It is also an opportunity for the host country to fill its labour shortage in certain sectors. However, because of the differences in social security contributions between countries, a posted worker can be less costly for an employer than a local recruit. When the social security contributions in the country of origin are lower than in the host country, the cost of labour is cheaper. Besides, there is evidence of many abuses and frauds: companies do not respect host country pay levels and cascading subcontracting leads to an opaque situation where it is difficult to ensure that the workers at the end of the chain are properly posted, etc.

In 2016, the European Commission proposed a revision of the Directive. It was an opportunity to see the EU split into two camps:

- Northern/Western EU countries – with France in the front line – want effective rules to fight fraud and to respect the principle of equal pay for equal work.
- Eastern/Central EU countries prefer to keep the main principles of the 1996 Directive. They also argued that “when capitalist rules benefited them, (...) the finger of blame was pointed squarely at them, but that when entire sections of their economy, the banking sector for example, were brought under foreign control, no one found any fault with that”⁴⁵.

In 2018, the EU found a compromise with a revision of the 2016 Directive (EU) 2018/957. The new text consolidates the principle of “same pay for same work in the same place”, confirms the temporary nature of the posting, and provides new control measures. Eastern and Central EU countries managed to exclude transport from the directive that entered into force in 2020.

The division between these two “Europes” is reflected in the far-right too. The RN and the Lega see the Directive as a symbol of the Brussels elite imposing social dumping across the EU⁴⁶, while Central and Eastern Europe – notably Poland – see the critics of Western Europe as contempt and a way of being protectionist without saying it⁴⁷.

CONCLUSION

Far-right forces fear the weakening or even the disappearance of the nation-state, whether it is through the current trajectory of the EU – perceived as a progressive federalisation of Member States – or the absence of strict migration policies that would ultimately lead to “population replacement”.

42 “L’enjeu des travailleurs détachés dans l’Union européenne”, (Source: [Vie publique](#)).

43 “Travailleurs détachés: un mal, un bien ou les deux? Cinq questions pour mieux comprendre”, (Source: [RTBF](#)).

44 “Directive 96/71/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 December 1996 concerning the posting of workers in the framework of the provision of services”, (Source: [EUR-lex](#)).

45 “The posting of workers saga: a potted version of the challenges engulfing social Europe”, (Source: [ETUI](#)).

46 “Motion for a resolution on the Posted Workers Directive, 29.3.2016, Edouard Ferrand, Nicolas Bay, Matteo Salvini, Mara Bizzotto”, (Source: [European Parliament](#)).

47 “EU curbs on ‘posted’ workers will hit competitiveness, warns Poland”, (Source: [Financial Time](#)).

If these fears are shared among the three studied forces, far-right parties suggest different solutions. Some ID members wish to change the EU from within. Their project of a “Europe of nations” would completely overhaul the current organisation (i.e., abolition of the Commission). ECR parties do not go as far: they advocate a reduction in certain competences of the Commission, without calling for the complete abolition of this body, and remain attached to some emblematic EU achievements, such as the Single Market.

Moreover, the forces that were in favour of a withdrawal from the eurozone or even the EU in the 2010s have clearly moderated their words: although the Lega had previously campaigned on the terms “Basta Euro”, SALVINI now declares that the currency is irreversible; the FP leader⁴⁸ recently stated that he no longer wants to leave the EU, etc.

It is not a surprise that far-right parties have diverging views. LORIMER recalls, that at the beginning of the construction of Europe, the FN and the MSI (which later became the RN and FdI, respectively) could occasionally speak positively of the European project. The two parties saw the EU “as a potential (albeit imperfect) bulwark against foreign domination from the USSR and USA”⁴⁹.

What is more unexpected is how quickly some parties changed their positions on the EU.

Finally, the analysis of these programmes shows the many differences that separate these political parties. In a way, each Member State produces its own far-right, marked by the weight of its national history, its economic traditions and political culture.

#1 Focus: The Absence of a Single Far-Right Group in the EP. Why?

The purpose of this focus is to understand the challenges facing the European far-right in creating a united front. By analysing the political negotiations in the aftermath of the 2019 elections, it is possible to understand why far-right leaders failed to constitute a large, coherent, and united bloc, but also why it is unlikely to witness the creation of such a group any time soon.

1. THE WILL OF UNION: FROM AN INITIAL AMBITION TO MORE MODEST ACHIEVEMENTS

In April 2019, SALVINI publicly disclosed his purpose to create one large bloc of far-right parties that would constitute the most important group in the EP⁵⁰. In this perspective, SALVINI and his ENF colleagues organised rallies across Europe to unite far-right voices. First, LE PEN, WILDERS of the Netherlands’ PVV attended the “Movement for a Europe of Nations and Freedom” public meeting in Prague organised by Tomio OKAMURA, leader of the SPD party. The intent was to show that “the democratic movement of patriots in all

countries allows a reform of the European framework,” said LE PEN. A few days later, SALVINI welcomed far-right political leaders during a similar rally in Milan “To the Europe of Common Sense!”. SALVINI managed to invite politicians who were not members of the ENF group: AfD, DF, and FP. But apart from them, few parties attended. The attendance list of these meetings showed the difficulty to create a united front with other leaders such as FARAGE, Polish Prime Minister Mateusz MORAWIECKI (PiS), the leader of the PiS Jarosław KACZYŃSKI, and ORBAN. In other words, why did these leaders refuse SALVINI’s offer? Included below are three initial explanations:

- [Extremism of others] In May 2019, FARAGE won 26 seats with his Brexit Party. Despite this electoral success, the party’s future was uncertain: FARAGE had to consider new alliances because his former EFDD allies had lost many seats and were unable to satisfy the criteria for forming a group in the EP. ZANNI and FARAGE met in June 2019 to discuss a potential alliance, but no clear explanation was given when FARAGE refused to join the ID group dominated by the LEGA and the

48 “Le parti nationaliste finlandais renonce au « FEXIT »”, (Source: [Euractiv](#)).

49 Marta Lorimer (2020): What do they talk about when they talk about Europe? Euro-ambivalence in far-right ideology, Ethnic and Racial Studies

50 “Salvini aims high with populist alliance for Europe”, (Source: [Politico](#)).

RN⁵¹. However, his previous interviews and conversations provide some clues. Eight years ago, in an interview with the Telegraph, he expressed that “Our view is whatever Marine Le PEN is trying to do with the FN, antisemitism is embedded deeply in that party. And for that principle political reason we’re not going to work with them now or any point in the future.”⁵²

- **[Ideological dividing lines]** For MORAWIECKI, the situation is quite simple. It is impossible for his party to be part of an alliance in which political parties praise Russia, Poland’s “eternal enemy”⁵³.
- **[Leader competition]** Finally, it is worth noting that ORBAN was part of the EPP family during the 2019 European elections. Also, in a 2019 interview, the Hungarian leader explained why he was suspicious of LE PEN at that time: “I would not ally with her [LE PEN] (...) because she’s not in power (...). When political leaders are out of power, they can say and do anything they like. They can slip out of control. I don’t want to get mixed up with any of that.” Later in this interview, he explained why he preferred SALVINI: “He leads a large country. Europe can sanction a little country like Hungary. It wouldn’t dare go after a country like Italy, with 60 million people. Moreover, Italy has a powerful voice”⁵⁴.

SALVINI’s and his associates’ unfortunate efforts exemplify the different factors that impede the establishment of a single united far-right group in the EP.

Insert 7 – Update on Steve BANNON’s Project to Unify European Far-Right Parties

Steve BANNON is a US political strategist from the American traditionalist, nationalist, and populist spectrum. Before the start of his political career, BANNON was the executive chairman of Breitbart News – an American far-right news website. BANNON is depicted as TRUMP’s alt-right guru: he was Donald TRUMP’s strategist during the 2016 campaign and then was appointed as Chief Strategist and Senior Counselor to the President in January 2017. However, when he criticised TRUMP few months later, he was forced to leave Washington. His new project was then to export Trumpism to the rest of the world or as he says: “All I’m trying to be is the infrastructure, globally, for the global populist movement”⁵⁵.

BANNON considered the electoral success of far-right parties and the 2019 upcoming European elections as the perfect momentum for his project of a transnational movement of nationalist and anti-establishment parties. To do so, he created “The Movement” in Brussels that would work as “a central source of polling, advice on messaging, data targeting, and think-tank research”⁵⁶. The idea was to build something like the Open Society⁵⁷ but instead of defending liberal causes in Europe, it would defend chauvinism, anti-multiculturalism, etc. During the 2019 European election campaign, the Movement received numerous far-right leaders, and BANNON toured in Europe with the objective to create a far-right supergroup. Although some far-right European leaders welcomed the project positively, others were more sceptical. Mainly, many of them wondered how an American citizen could create a European movement⁵⁸ – here may be the limits of international nationalism. Also,

51 “Farage won’t join group that contains Salvini’s League”, (Source: [Politico](#)).

52 “Nigel Farage Ukip will not ‘get into bed’ with Le Pen”, (Source: [Telegraph](#)).

53 A. VOY GILLIS, *L’Union européenne à l’épreuve des nationalismes*, p. 187.

54 “How an Anti-totalitarian Militant Discovered Ultrnationalism”, (Source: [The Atlantic](#)).

55 “Steve Bannon Is Done Wrecking the American Establishment. Now He Wants to Destroy Europe’s”, (Source: [The New York Times](#)).

56 “Inside Bannon’s Plan to Hijack Europe for the Far-right”, (Source: [The Daily Beast](#)).

57 Created by the philanthropist George SOROS, the Open Society gives grants to promote democratic governance, human rights, and economic, social, and legal reform. ORBAN systematically attacked the foundation seen as SOROS’ tool to destroy the Hungarian nation. (Source: [BBC](#)).

58 “The Far Right in Europe: How promising is Steve Bannon’s European organization ‘The Movement?’” (Source: [Bridge](#)).

the national laws of most Member States do not allow this kind of assistance that can be considered in-kind donations⁵⁹.

After 2019, BANNON'S Movement started working with the Dignitatis Humanae Institute, an anti-choice, anti-LGBT, traditionalist and Catholic thinktank⁶⁰ to create a school in Italy for the next generation of far-right leaders. However, Bannon's legal troubles as well as the recent decision of the Italian administration to block the opening – that was originally planned for 2020 – are likely to put a term to BANNON's project⁶¹.

2. REALITY CHECK: POINTS OF CONTENTION

As explained by T. JANSSEN, “modern right-wing populists, however, no longer wish to be seen as extremists, i.e., anti-democratic and inhumane, per se. They want to be electable by a broader base of voters in the long term and have actual aspirations to come to power⁶²”. Therefore, they walk on a fine line: they need to keep their offensive positions on migration/asylum, nationalism, or social issues that appeal to their voters while avoiding (too much) extreme language (i.e., racism, homophobia, misogyny, etc.) that is condemned by the media or the public opinion. In the European context, far-right politicians need to carefully select their partners to avoid reputational damages. What would happen if an ally of a party promoted an extreme or outrageous position? The electors of the party would be offended by the position and consequently from the alliance their party made with this problematic ally. In the end, electors would be likely to cast their vote for an-

other political force. This is not pure theory: many examples emphasise the importance of reputational stakes.

- In “International Populism”, McDONNELL and WERNER conducted several interviews with far-right MEPs from 2014 to 2018. They asked a UKIP representative why his party preferred to seat with the M5S in the heterogeneous EFDD instead of joining the ENF group, with which it had a closer political proximity, but also included among its members LE PEN's FN. His answer is straightforward: “If you say “Front National” in the UK, the problem is not Marine Le Pen. The problem is not Marine le Pen's policies. The problem is when you say, “Front National” people immediately think of Jean-Marie Le Pen and all that associated history and his comment over the years... Just in case there was any doubt also “Front National” sounds like National Front⁶³.”
- It is interesting to note that the RN followed the same logic concerning other forces. They refused to seat with Jobbik and the KNP that appeared too extreme for the RN's electorate⁶⁴.
- Reputational stakes also explain the evolution of these groups over time. In 2009, the ECR group was not ready to welcome the DF because of a suspicious background⁶⁵, but in 2014, ECR members changed their minds for two reasons. First, DF had achieved national electoral success that consolidated their attractiveness. Second, Kristian Thulesen DAHL, leader of the DF since 2012, does not carry the baggage that the previous leader Pia KJÆRSGAARD did⁶⁶.

In other words, the changes among EP groups indirectly show if a party's strategy of *dédiabolisation* (de-demonisation) has worked.

59 “Steve Bannon's far-right Europe operation undermined by election laws”, (Source: [The Guardian](#)).

60 “Dignitatis Humanae Institute”, (Source: [Humanist Federation](#)).

61 “With support from Steve Bannon, a medieval monastery could become a populist training ground”, (Source: [Washington Post](#)).

62 T. JANSSEN, “A love-hate relationship Far-right parties and the European Union”, 2016.

63 The National Front is a British neo-fascist, nationalist, anti-immigration created in 1967. This party has never had representatives elected in the British or the European parliament.

64 D. MCDONNELL and A. WERNER (2020): *International Populism*, Hurst, p. 135.

65 D. MCDONNELL and A. WERNER (2020): *International Populism*, Hurst, p. 110.

66 Pia KJÆRSGAARD founded the DF in 1995. She oversaw the organisation from 1995 to 2012. In 1999, she was accused of nepotism, and she was fined for illegal weapon possession in 2003.

Ideological Lines of Division

Insert 8 (See next page) gives an insight on the topic of PUTIN's Russia and how the consequent geopolitical stakes in this area divide the European far-right.

Leadership Competition

As mentioned previously, **far-right political leaders are looking for allies to break out of their national political isolation and/or to appear more respectable**. However, they also face many other considerations and must review the pros and cons of alliance options. The statement of ORBAN regarding his need to sit with heads of state can be explained both by a reputational damage assessment and by leadership competition. ORBAN draws a line between him, SALVINI, and other heads of states versus the European far-right leaders in opposition: he attacked LE PEN on her inability to come to power in France. Two other examples illustrate other expressions of leadership competition:

- **[Balance of power]** In "International Populism" McDONNELL and WERNER explain that a reason for the departure of the DF and the FP from the ECR group is the domination of the Polish PiS. After the departure of British MEPs, the interest in being part of that group diminished⁶⁷.
- **[National rivalries]** It may appear somewhat paradoxical that Fdl and the LEGA, two political parties that are both Italian and share many ideas, do not sit in the same group (ECR for the first, ID for the latter). But this might only be a question of political strategies. From 2018 to 2019, Lega and M5S formed a governmental coalition to rule Italy. Fdl preferred to stay out from the coalition to maintain its independence and indicated its difference. Therefore, Fdl had no interest in joining the ID group. Fdl collected the fruits of this strategy recently. On September 25, 2022, Italians voted for a new parliament. Fdl scored 26% of the votes while Lega only ~9%⁶⁸. As a reminder, in the 2018 elections, Fdl had scored 4.4% and Lega 17.4%⁶⁹. It seems that Fdl's refusal to join the previous governmental coalition while defending similar positions to Lega allowed Fdl to preserve a form of political "virginity" that is attractive to Italian voters. In

contrast, SALVINI's party may have suffered the disappointments of Italians after his time in power.

It is necessary to mention another paradox that disservices the union of the European far-right. **As soon as a far-right party undertakes moderation strategies regarding its positions, the stance it once occupied is quickly replaced by a new offensive actor:** Lega vs. Fdl, RN vs. Eric ZEMMOUR's Reconquête, Fidesz vs. Jobbik, PVV vs. FVD, or DF vs. Nye Borgerlige (a far-right party created in 2015).

Insert 8 – Ideological Opposition – The Case of PUTIN's Russia

In March 2022, in the context of the Ukrainian refugee surge, SALVINI was in Poland to visit Italian organisations that helped local authorities to assist the small city of Przemysl. This was an opportunity for LEGA's leader to soften his pro-Putin reputation by taking part in international efforts in favour of Ukrainians. Unfortunately for him, the trip did not turn out as expected: the Mayor of Przemysl, Wojciech BAKUN, offered him a t-shirt with Putin's face. Why a t-shirt? SALVINI had sent a selfie of him wearing a similar outfit several years before, when it was more acceptable to support PUTIN... BAKUN also added: "What the person you describe as your 'friend' has done and what has he actually done to those people who, in the number of 50,000, cross the border."⁷⁰ The image was disastrous for SALVINI. Not only did this stunt cause a bad buzz, but it also revealed ideological tensions between European far-right parties regarding Putin's Russia.

Why is PUTIN appealing to Western-European far-right leaders?

The attraction of far-right parties can be explained by two main factors. To start with, for many European leaders Putin's Russia encapsulates the ideology they are fighting for. In an article published in 2022, M. LARUELLE details the values shared by the RN and Putin (this list works for other ID members too):

67 D. MCDONNELL and A. WERNER (2020): International Populism, Hurst, p. 209.

68 "Italian election 2022: live official results", (Source: [The Guardian](#)).

69 "Italy — 2022 general election", (Source: [Politico](#)).

70 "See what your friend Putin has done': Salvini mocked in Poland", (Source: [Euronews](#)).

- **“Political and geopolitical sovereignty: the nation state must be above international legislation and supranational organisations.**
- **Economic sovereignty: economic protectionism is a legitimate tool against the destabilising, corporate-led phenomenon of globalisation.**
- **Cultural sovereignty: the nation is perceived as a homogeneous, ethnocultural entity where minorities or immigrants are accepted only if they agree to assimilate”⁷¹.**

The attraction of far-right leaders to Russia can also be explained by the refusal of an American unipolar world and the preservation of a ‘white civilisation’ by PUTIN.

Second, PUTIN takes special care to nourish links with those leaders; he wants to demonstrate that he has allies who share his vision in (and of) the Western World (See below). It also works the other way around. At a time when they achieved electoral success but remained outcasts for other national politicians, SALVINI and LE PEN were willing to meet PUTIN or his supporters in Moscow to build their image as leaders: LE PEN went to Russia four times in 2013, 2014, 2015, and in 2017 when she met PUTIN for the first time⁷². SALVINI travelled to Russia and in Crimea in 2014 to support the Russian annexation⁷³. This special relationship went even further as PUTIN’s Russia and European far-right leaders became increasingly co-operating financially.

- **LEGA: SALVINI is suspected of concluding an oil agreement with Russia, the profits of which were allegedly used to finance Lega’s 2019 European election campaign⁷⁴.**
- **RN: in 2014, LE PEN funded her election campaign with loans worth €11m from First Czech Russian Bank – a Russian corporation.**
- **FPÖ: Heinz Christian STRACHE – leader of the FPÖ since 2005 and vice-chancellor since late 2017 – re-**

signed in May 2019 after the leak of a video footage filmed in Ibiza two years earlier in which he is seen ready to accept money from someone he believed to be a Russian oligarch close to PUTIN. The woman was in fact a comedian and the offer a trap into which the far-right leader had unwittingly fallen. The scandal was known as the “Ibizagate”.

- **Fidesz: ORBAN who has been ruling Hungary for over 12 years has brought Budapest closer to Moscow through numerous projects: “extending the Paks Nuclear Power Plant by Russian energy giant Rosatom; purchasing new metro wagons from Russia (...) and moving the headquarters of the International Investment Bank, Putin’s spy bank, to Budapest”⁷⁵.**

What does PUTIN get in return?

PUTIN has many benefits to gain from supporting the far-right in the EU, and two main reasons explain his rationale. On the one hand, the ideological cohesion between PUTIN and these leaders makes PUTIN’s world view validated by non-Russian politicians or at least less isolated. This vision is simple: “Russia is a powerful civilisation based on traditional values of the 21st century – contrary to the decadent West of “filthy” liberal values and practice”⁷⁶. By meeting with European leaders that defend his nationalist, traditionalist and authoritarian model, PUTIN showed Russia and the rest of the world that he has allies in his ideological battle⁷⁷.

On the other hand, PUTIN can count on these allies as useful assets in his realpolitik strategy. For instance, during the Crimea annexation, Moscow invited far-right politician as “neutral observers” during the referendum on whether Crimea should join Russia: “the list of observers included Béla KOVÁCS from the Hungarian far-right Jobbik Party, [...]; far-right Spanish politician Enrique RAVELLO; three representatives of the Flemish right-wing

71 Marine Le Pen, the Rassemblement National and Russia: history of a strategic alliance, (Source: [The Conversation](#)).

72 “Quels sont les liens de Marine Le Pen avec la Russie de Vladimir Poutine”, (Source: [Le Monde](#)).

73 “Guerre en Ukraine: Matteo Salvini rattrapé par son passé pro-Poutine lors de sa visite en Pologne”, (Source: [francetvinfo](#))

74 “We know Russia funds Europe’s far Right. But what does it get in return?”, (Source: [Open Democracy](#)).

75 “Viktor Orban Is the West’s Pro-Putin Outlier”, (Source: [Foreign Policy](#)).

76 P. KREKO, Putin’s far right and far left friends in Europe, Political Capital Institute.

77 PUTIN allied with more “moderate and prestigious” political figures such as French former Prime Minister F. FILLON (Source) or former German Chancellor G. SCHRÖDER (Source).

party VB; as well as Belgian activist Luc MICHEL, who began in a neo-Nazi party and now espouses National Bolshevism⁷⁸. Also, between July 2014 and July 2015, the ENF group was strongly opposed to sanctions against Russia (~93% vote)⁷⁹. While most other parties in Brussels condemned Russia, the dissenting far-right voices, supported by Russia, gave the image of a divided and therefore weak Europe. This vision can only serve the interests of Putin, who castigates the model of Western democracy.

Who are the far-right leaders opposed to PUTIN?

The European far-right voices that resist the “Putin-mania” are from EU countries bordering or very close to Russia: Poland, Finland, and Baltic countries with the noticeable exception of Hungary. The national history of these countries is marked by numerous attempts at influence, conflicts and even occupations by Russia. The memory of Soviet domination is still very present even among the younger generations. As a result, the nationalism defended by these political forces is built on the rejection of Russia as a threat to national sovereignty. For instance, in 2013, national and far-right parties from Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania signed the “Bauska declaration” (from the Latvian eponymous town) in which they called for “co-operation in combating “cultural Marxism”, multiculturalism, globalisation, and Russian imperialist ambitions⁸⁰”.

What is the situation in 2022 following the Russian invasion of Ukraine?

The invasion of Ukraine by Russian forces in February 2022 took the EU by surprise. PUTIN’s Russia was seen as a direct threat to peace in Europe. Political leaders who were previously supportive of PUTIN needed to reframe their point of view. All the pro-PUTIN political leaders

mentioned earlier condemned the Russian annexation. Some of them even tried to use their closeness with the Kremlin to ease the international situation. For instance, SALVINI expressed the wish to fly to Moscow to do so but had to abandon his project due to the strong and negative objections from the Italian people⁸¹. In December 2021, FPÖ decided not to renew the agreement signed with PUTIN’s party 5 years ago which aimed at sharing information on international relations⁸²”.

In contrast, political leaders who defended a hard-line against Russia in the past are collecting a renewed positive opinion. The Polish Prime Minister, MORAWIECKI (PiS) defends a firm and offensive stance against Russia and criticises the German and French heads of state for their more cautious positions or strategic mistakes in the past⁸³. Only ORBAN continues to defend Russian interests by paying lip service to the Russian invasion and refusing to believe in the usefulness of sanctions against Moscow⁸⁴.

What about the European Parliament?

On the 1st of March 2022, a debate took place within the EP about the war in Ukraine. ZANNI, (LEGA) president of the ID Group, took a strong stance against the Russian aggression justifying his position by using a nationalist rationale, the violation of territorial integrity and sovereignty: “Our support and extraordinary admiration go to the Ukrainian people, to these people who today, with tenacity, are defending their freedom and sovereignty in the face of unjustifiable aggression”. Jordan BARDELLA (RN) blamed the Russian aggression as well but engaged in relativisation: “I would like to say that it is dishonest for the European institutions to use this war to push forward a federalist agenda that the people reject. (...) I also want to say that sanctioning Russia must not, in any case, mean heavily sanctioning ourselves”. In contrast,

78 “Far-right Recruited as Crimea Poll Observers”, (Source: IWPR).

79 “D’où vient la fascination de l’extrême droite pour Poutine ?”, (Source: [L’express](#)).

80 “The Extreme Right in the Baltic States: Introduction”, (Source: [transform! Europe](#)).

81 “Italy’s Salvini under fire over failed Russia trip”, (Source: [Politico](#)).

82 “L’extrême droite autrichienne rompt ses liens avec Russie uni”, (Source: [RTL](#)).

83 “Ukraine war: Macron slams Morawiecki for ‘unfounded, scandalous’ criticism of Putin dialogue”, (Source: [Euronews](#)) and “Polish PM accuses Germany of being responsible for Russia’s strength”, (Source: [The First News](#)).

84 “Plus isolé que jamais, le premier ministre hongrois Viktor Orban joue la politique du veto à Bruxelles”, (Source: [Le Monde](#)).

the PiS MEP (ECR) declared: “We are honoured by your request to become a Member of the European Union. We will do our utmost to provide you candidacy status as soon as possible and immediately on unprecedented rules for membership, therefore. Because we need you and of course, you need us. In this I speak on behalf of all the ECR Group’s Polish delegation. All of them fully support the resolution as negotiated by me⁸⁵”.

In an article published with VoteWatch in June 2022, Euractiv measured the levels of “assertiveness towards Russia” on a sample of over 280 votes in the EP:

- **“Polish, Lithuanian, and Romanian parliamentarians had voted for the stiffest actions, while French, Greek and Cypriot MEPs had taken a softer approach towards Moscow.**
- **The Votewatch data also indicates that the parties that take a softer and more sympathetic stance towards Russia tend to come from the far-left and far-right of the political spectrum.**
- **Despite the reluctance of ORBAN to agree on sanctions, Fidesz MEPs have joined opposition Hungarian MEPs in voting critically of the Kremlin.**
- **The most critical of Russian policy tend to be conservative parties from the Eurosceptic ECR group, particularly the Sweden Democrats and Spanish VOX, as well as most parties in the centre right EPP⁸⁶”.**

The parties closest to or admiring of Putin have distanced themselves from Russia because of the unanimity of the public opinion (and in extenso of their electorate) against the Russian actions. MELONI decided to firmly condemn the Russian attack and is in favour of sending more weapons to the government in Kyiv. Her change in tone towards PUTIN was seen as a strategy to be more respectable and thus, more legitimate to govern Italy⁸⁷. LE PEN condemned the attack too but used a softer tone and preferred to point out the impact of the EU sanctions on the French economy⁸⁸ – another strategy with the same intent, a quest for respectability.

CONCLUSION

The ambitions for creating a united far-right front conflict with various divides either from diverging political strategies (“extremism of other” and leadership rivalries) or ideological cleavages (national histories, political traditions) as shown by these parties’ position towards PUTIN’s Russia. These divides are even more important as these forces do not share an ideology that goes beyond the nation-state, such as the S&D and their history of internationalism or the Green/EFA, whose ecological work and attachment to the EU go beyond the framework of the nation-state.

85 “Verbatim Report of Proceedings – 01/03/2022”, (Source: [European Parliament](#)).

86 “Far-right and left most pro-Kremlin in EU Parliament, data finds”, (Source: [Euractiv](#)).

87 “Giorgia Meloni’s Putin play”, (Source: [Politico](#)).

88 “Sanctions russes: Marine Le Pen prédit des «conséquences cataclysmiques» pour le pouvoir d’achat des Français”, (Source: [Le Figaro](#)).

III. How Far-Right Political Parties Use the EU?

Why far-right politicians who despise the EU still participate in the European system? When leaders of the European far-right must answer that question, they suggest that if the EU exists, a seat at the table is better than being left on the side-lines⁸⁹. In that respect, they promise their electorate that they will change the EU from the inside. Besides, far-right parties quickly understood that having seats in the EP would bring them many extra material and immaterial benefits.

1. MATERIAL AND IMMATERIAL BENEFITS OF INVESTING THE EUROPEAN ARENA

The EU: a Provider of Material Resource

The EP has set up rules to allocate and fund the EU's political life:

First, **funds allocated to MEPs**. EU Parliamentarians receive different allowances in addition to their salary (~€7,000 net of tax each month): general expenditure allowance, travel expenses, and daily subsistence allowance⁹⁰. There is also an allowance dedicated to staffing arrangements and mostly used to pay parliamentary assistants: "In 2022, the maximum monthly amount available for all the costs involved in recruiting personal assistants is €26,734 per MEP⁹¹".

Second, **funds allocated to EU parties for expenditures** such as: "meetings and representation costs, costs of publications, administrative, personnel and travel costs, and costs of campaign in European elections⁹²".

- The maximum funding awarded for 2022 will be:
 - €4,242,392 for ID.
 - €4,068,450 for ECR.

- As a comparison, EPP, the largest European group, will receive up to €12,288,571 while the smallest group, the LEFT €1,850,400⁹³.

Third, **funds allocated to political foundations**. These bodies are organisations affiliated with a European political party. "Such foundation observes, analyses and contributes to the debate on European public policy issues"⁹⁴. The money granted for these foundations is used for meetings and conferences, publications, and studies, and administrative, personnel and travel costs.

- The maximum funding awarded for 2022 will be:
 - €2,121,196 for ID's foundation – "Identité et Démocratie Fondation".
 - €2,052,425 for ECR's foundation – New Direction – Foundation for European Reform.
 - As a comparison, EPP's foundation – Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies – will receive up to €6,144,286 and the LEFT's foundation – transform! Europe – will receive €1,192,791.

Paradoxically, being part of the European life is beneficial to Eurosceptical forces since they receive funds from the EU to fight against it. Of course, this "cash-flow" can only finance their European activities. However, many examples show that parties (far-right or not) have a temptation to use that money for other purposes.

In 2014, the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF) opened an investigation against Morten MESSERSCHMIDT – one of the leaders of the Danish's DF and European MEP since 2009 – for misuse of EU contributions. The fund was intended to finance an information campaign about the EU and was instead used for promoting his party⁹⁵. In 2021, MESS-

89 "The Far Right Wants to Gut the EU, Not Kill It", (Source: [The Atlantic](#)).

90 "Summary of allowances", (Source: [European Parliament](#)).

91 "Staffing arrangements: parliamentary assistants", (Source: [European Parliament](#)).

92 "European Political parties", (Source: [European Parliament](#)).

93 "Funding from the European Parliament to European political parties per party and per year", (Source: [European Parliament](#)).

94 "European political foundations", (Source: [European Parliament](#)).

95 "Danish Eurosceptical lawmaker gets prison sentence for misusing EU funds", (Source: [Reuters](#)).

ERSCHMIDT was given a suspended sentence in prison, but the decision was then quashed and is to be retried⁹⁶.

In 2015, the FN was suspected to misuse EU allocations. The following year, the OLAF launched an investigation. The EU's watchdog established that one of LE PEN's assistants in Brussels never had a lease in Brussels in five years or that another assistant was also a bodyguard⁹⁷. OLAF and the French justice suspected LE PEN to set up an ingenious system in which EU funds were diverted to national headquarters to fund non-EU purposes. In reaction, Sophie MONTEL – a FN MEP – accused other French political parties such as the MODEM or MELENCHON's la France Insoumise of similar practices. For the moment, only the MODEM and the FN have been condemned by the French justice.

More recently, in 2020, OLAF declared that two parties – without disclosing the names of these organisations – had broken EP rules by sending EU contributions to national headquarters⁹⁸.

1.2. The EU: a Platform

As a provider of immaterial resources, the European arena also has a lot to offer to far-right parties. Included below are several examples:

[Prestige for outcasts] As explained above, EU funds enable far-right forces to organise themselves. They are a key provider for parties that are considered outcasts in their country. For instance, when Jean-Marie LE PEN led the FN, the EU was a life raft for the party that was then much more unruly and provocative than it is now. While the FN achieved good results in local or even presidential elections, it had difficulties in penetrating the French national assembly – except for the 1986 French legislative elections.

Brussels was then a way to give a mandate and the consequent prestige to the party's top staff⁹⁹. Bruno GOLLNISCH, Jean-Marie LE PEN's former right-hand man and MEP in Brussels from 1989 to 2019 explained: "We don't have a deputy, we don't have a senator. But it is certain that I carry more weight as a [European] deputy than my friend Christophe Boudeau, for example, who has not yet been elected but who is responsible for the Rhône federation. That gives us legitimacy, that gives us a certain prestige¹⁰⁰".

[Media attention] The EP works as an echo chamber. Plenary sittings offer media coverage; thus, making some politicians and their battles famous. A notorious example is FARAGE. He understood that he could change the rather conventional atmosphere of the plenary sitting into a showcase in which he used his oratorical talent to attack the EU or its representatives¹⁰¹. This attitude helped him to gain an audience and contributed to his political success.

[Moving out from isolation] As explained previously, far-right leaders have an interest to be seen working with other forces to show their electorate that foreign leaders can share their rationale. They could even benefit from the prestige of another force. A DF representative explained why his party chose ECR in 2014: "You're not trying to lift the ECR platform. We're just saying we are in the family of the Tories, of the British Conservatives (...) there are some very good brands there, primarily Thatcher and Churchill¹⁰²".

[Ideological resource]

- The EU constantly evolves and provides far-right parties with **opportunities to appear radical or rather the opposite, more "respectable"** depending on their strategic interests. Before the failure of the 2017 presidential election, Marine LE PEN used to have a virulent stance

96 "Danish politician to face retrial in EU fraud case", (Source: [The Local](#)).

97 "Comprendre l'affaire des assistants parlementaires du Rassemblement national", (Source: [Le Monde](#)).

98 "MEPs, staff broke rules by sending salary cash to party, watchdog finds", (Source: [Politico](#)).

99 Jean-Marie LE PEN was a European MEP from 2004 to 2019 and chaired the FN from 1972 to 2011.

100 REUNGOAT Emmanuelle, "Mobiliser l'Europe dans la compétition nationale. La fabrique de l'europanisation du Front national", *Politique européenne*, 2014/1 (n° 43), p. 120-162.

101 "Nigel Farage's biggest BUST-UPS in the EU Parliament", (Source: [The Sun](#)).

102 D. MCDONNELL and A. WERNER (2020): *International Populism*, p.184.

on the EU and was in favour of a “Frexit”¹⁰³. In the context of her strategy of “dédiabolisation”, there was a risk that she appeared too “soft” for a part of her electorate. She was firm on the topic of the EU to appear as a strong and incontestable leader¹⁰⁴. Several years later, she re-oriented her point of view on Europe to appear more legitimate and acceptable for the rest of the French opinion – SALVINI did the same in Italy. Anti-EU critics are still here but tend to put more focus on “aspects of the construction which are considered problematic even by mainstream actors”¹⁰⁵. This tendency to soften is shared by most Western-European far-right leaders. Or as Catherine FIESCHI, the executive director of Counterpoint, a London-based thinktank says: “They’ve all gone from deciding the best thing they could do is agitate and say outrageous stuff, to realizing ... their best bet is actually to use [the EU] to make sure that they graduate to the next step, of legitimate politician”¹⁰⁶.

- The EU topic also provides far-right leaders a chance to **move outside closed nationalism**. ID representatives love to use language elements such as “love Europe, hate the EU” or defending the “European civilisation”. By using these terms, ID MEPs push back the line between the “good” community to defend and the “evil” external forces. It is not the nation/people against the rest of the world anymore: it is now the European civilisation against the rest of the world (understand Muslims).

[Use for national politics] Finally, every political party can use its score in European elections as a proof of credibility or an argument for negotiations with other forces in the context of coalitions.

2. ID AND ECR IN EP TOP JOBS

The purpose of this section is to have a look at the organisation of the EP to assess the influence of each political group.

Focus on EU Political Bodies

[The President of the EP] “represents the European Parliament vis-à-vis the outside world and in its relations with other EU institutions. The President oversees the work of the Parliament and its constituent bodies as well as the debates in plenary and ensures that Parliament’s Rules of Procedure are adhered to”¹⁰⁷.

Since the first direct elections of the EP in 1979, there have been only presidents from the EPP, S&D, and ALDE groups (although group names may have varied over time). Presidents are elected for a two-and-a-half-year term. David SASSOLI (S&D) was President from 2019 to 2022. Roberta METSOLA (EPP) has been in charge since then.

[The 14 Vice-Presidents] “can replace the President when necessary, including to chair plenary sittings. They are also members of the European Parliament Bureau (See below)¹⁰⁸. Their mandate has the same term as that of the President.

- For the first term (2019-2022), there were 5 EPP vice-presidents, 3 S&D, 2 Renew Europe, 2 Greens/EFA, 1 The Left and 1 NA¹⁰⁹.
- For the second term (2022-2024), the distribution of the 14 vice-presidencies is as follows: 3 EPP, 5 S&D, 3 Renew Europe, 1 Greens/EFA, **1 ECR (Roberts ZĪLE from Latvia’s TB-LNKK)** and 1 The Left¹¹⁰.

[College of Quaestors] There are five quaestors. In the EP, this body is “responsible for administrative and financial mat-

103 “Marine Le Pen exulte et réclame un « Frexit » ”, (Source: [Le Monde](#)).

104 REUNGOAT Emmanuelle, “Mobiliser l’Europe dans la compétition nationale. La fabrique de l’eupéanisation du Front national”.

105 LORIMER, Marta (2020): Europe as ideological resource: the case of the Rassemblement National, *Journal of European Public Policy*.

106 See footnote ⁸⁹.

107 “The President of the European Parliament” (Source: [European Parliament](#)).

108 “The new European Parliament Vice-Presidents” (Source: [European Parliament](#)).

109 “Elections des nouveaux vice-présidents du Parlement”, (Source: [Fondation Robert Schuman](#)).

110 “Parliament’s new Vice-Presidents and Quaestors” (Source: [European Parliament](#)).

ters directly concerning Members and their working conditions¹¹¹. Their mandate is also two-and-a-half-year long.

- For the first term: 2 EPP, 1 S&D, 1 Renew Europe and 1 ECR (Karol KARSKI, PiS).
- For the second term: 2 EPP, 1 S&D, 1 Renew Europe and 1 Greens/EFA.

[The Bureau] lays down rules for Parliament: it draws up Parliament's preliminary draft budget and decides all administrative, staff and organisational matters. The Bureau consists of the President of the European Parliament, the 14 Vice-Presidents and the 5 Quaestors.

Therefore, ECR has always had a voice in this body with KARSKI for the first term and ZILE for the second.

[The Conference of Presidents] is the political body responsible for: "the organisation of Parliament's business and legislative planning, deciding the responsibilities and membership of committees and delegations, relations with other EU institutions, the national parliaments and non-EU countries"¹¹².

As mentioned previously in Section I, ZANNI is part of this body on the behalf of ID, FITTO and LEGUTKO for ECR.

Focus on Committees

In August 2022, there are 20 committees, 2 sub-committees and 2 special (temporary) committees. These bodies prepare the work for plenary sittings: "the committees draw up, amend, and adopt legislative proposals and own-initiative reports. They consider Commission and Council proposals and, where necessary, draw up reports to be presented to the plenary assembly"¹¹³. Each of them has a chair and 3 to 4 vice-chairs. The Conference of Committee Chairs makes recommendations to the Conference of Presidents on the committees' work and the agendas for plenary sittings [...]

The Bureau and Conference of Presidents may delegate certain tasks to the Conference of Committee Chairs¹¹⁴.

In the 24 existing committees¹¹⁵:

- [ECR] Johan VAN OVERTVELDT (Belgium's N-VA) chaired the Committee on Budgets. Among other committees, ECR has 10 vice-chairs.
- [ID] does not chair or vice-chair any committees.

3. ID, A VICTIM OF THE "CORDON SANITAIRE" VS. ECR, A RESPECTABLE GROUP

The list of EP's top jobs reveals two things.

- To start with, the allocation of the positions seems coherent to the weight of political groups except for ID. The two main forces, EPP and S&D, have the largest number of top jobs while other groups (Renew Europe, the Greens/EFA, ECR, and the LEFT) share the rest. The EP uses a mechanism, the d'Hondt method to guarantee proportionality. In short, "it is a formula for distributing the chairs of the parliamentary committees and delegations, as well as to distribute those posts among"¹¹⁶ in taking account namely the geographical origin and political view of the MEP.
- Then, ID has no top jobs despite its size that should allow it to chair one or two committees for instance. Why is that?

The answer lies in the French expression "**Cordon sanitaire**" (protective barrier). It was first used in the context of Belgian politics. In 1988, the VB, then called the Vlaams Block, made significant electoral gains. Other forces, from right to left, decided to sign a pledge in which the political parties refused any form of alliance with the VB¹¹⁷. It seems that ID suffered the same fate: **European political groups circumvented the d'Hondt method by acting in concertation**. Included below are two examples:

111 "The political bodies of the European Parliament" (Source: [European Parliament](#)).

112 See footnote ¹¹¹.

113 "The Committees of the European Parliament" (Source: [European Parliament](#)).

114 See footnote ¹¹¹.

115 See Appendix 2.

116 "Understanding the d'Hondt method", (Source: [EPRS](#)).

117 "Cordon sanitaire", (Source: [Vocabulaire politique](#)).

- First, EPP, S&D, and Greens/EFA agreed to boycott ECR and ID candidates for the vice-presidency in 2019¹¹⁸.
- Second, ID wanted to chair the committees on Agriculture and Legal Affairs and nominated two RN MEPs: Maxette PIRBAKAS and Gilles LEBRETON. However, as the RN ambioned to drastically reform the Common Agriculture Policy (CAP), such a chairing was seen as problematic. In the same perspective, the Committee on Legal Affairs deals with rule of law or parliamentary immunity¹¹⁹. It was considered equally problematic to leave this committee in the hands of a member of the RN that has faced various legal matters. That explains why the EPP won the Committee on Agriculture and Renew Europe, the Committee on Legal Affairs.

In contrast, the “cordon sanitaire” seemed much less severe towards the ECR. Except their candidate for vice-presidency that was boycotted in 2019 or the failed attempt of Beata Maria SZYDLO to chair the Committee on Employment¹²⁰,

IV. A Look on Three Votes

Having understood the forces at play, it is worth asking how ECR and ID representatives vote? Exhaustive metrics in this field are out of scope, but the intent here is to have a look on “characteristic” votes. In the context of this study, “characteristic” refers to matters for which ECR and ID are presumed to have clear-cut positions that differ from those defended by other political families, that is EU’s functioning and migration. Trade was added to the list because dissensions may arise between ECR and ID. The following topics will therefore be analysed: EU-Vietnam trade and Investment protection agreements (trade), Conditionality for the protection of the Union budget (EU functioning) and a report on legal migration called “New Avenues for Legal Labour Migration”.

Reminder:

the group managed to get one MEP as vice-president for the second term, one chair and many committee vice-chairs.

CONCLUSION

ID and ECR do not have the same influence in the EP. In 2019, ID’s will to get more influential was crashed by all the EP political groups except for ECR. Their EP colleagues still judge them politically unacceptable: ID’s quest for respectability is not over yet. In contrast, ECR has managed to get a fair share of the top jobs even if a few profiles were rejected.

- The European Commission is the only institution empowered to initiate legislation. Other forces (EP, Council of the EU, Member States) may be the “political” initiator of a legislation by adding a topic to the agenda. For instance, the EP can draft an “own-initiative legislative reports (INL)” which initiates a legislative process. With an INL, the EP requires the Commission to propose a legislation on a given topic. The Commission can refuse but must justify its refusal.
- When the Commission has a proposal for a legislative text, the draft is submitted to the EP and the European Council. In the EP, the dedicated committee¹²¹ appoints a rapporteur who is in charge of drawing a report on the proposal. “The parliamentary committee votes on this report and, possibly, amends it. When the text has been revised and adopted in plenary, Parliament has adopted its position”¹²². In plenary sitting, MEPs discuss

118 “Parliament groups vow to stop far-right MEPs chairing committees”, (Source: [Politico](#)).

119 Ripoll Servent, A. (2019), see endnote 1.

120 “How cordon sanitaire played out & Beata Szydło lost”, (Source: [Political Europe](#)).

121 In most cases, a proposal affects the competences of different committees. The committees concerned find an agreement on the sharing of the competences and each one appoints a rapporteur.

122 “About Parliament”, (Source: [European Parliament](#)).

both the Commission's proposal and the consequent EP motion for resolution. In contrast, MEPs only vote on the motion for resolution.

- The positions expressed by MEPs depend hugely on the national context of their country of origin: MEPs will generally address their electors.

Remark:

- The statements of the MEPs highlighted in the following lines are taken from the plenary debates, the references of which are given in endnotes ¹²⁷, ¹³⁸, and ¹⁴¹.

1. EU-VIETNAM TRADE AND INVESTMENT PROTECTION AGREEMENTS (2020)

1.1. Context

The European Commission negotiates trade agreements on behalf of the Member States. Three main kinds of agreements exist:

- "Economic Partnership Agreements: support development of trade partners from African, Caribbean and Pacific countries
- Association Agreements: bolster broader political agreements
- Free Trade Agreements: enable reciprocal market opening with developed countries and emerging economies by granting preferential access to markets"¹²³.

The EU-Vietnam agreements fall into the third category and are the latest trade cooperation accords negotiated by the EU, with the Japan and Singapore agreements, that both entered into force in 2019¹²⁴. The EP is not in charge of the negotiations in the writing of the text but must give its consent.

Remark: Geert BOURGEOIS (ECR – member of Belgium's N-VA) oversaw the EP report on the agreements after the

original rapporteur, Jan ZAHRADIL (ECR, CZ), was forced to step down due to an undisclosed conflict of interest¹²⁵.

1.2. The Intent of the Text

The agreements once in force should bolster trade between the EU and Vietnam by: "Eliminating 99% of all tariffs, reducing regulatory barriers and overlapping red tape, ensuring protection of geographical indications, opening up services and public procurement markets"¹²⁶.

1.3. ECR's and ID's Reactions to the Text

The debates held on February 11, 2020¹²⁷ showed a difference of opinion between ECR and ID. **~80% of ECR MEPs in attendance voted in favour** of the motion for resolution while only **~23% of ID MEPs supported the text**.

ECR's Positions

The majority supported the text for liberal and pro-business opinion:

- [**Free trade**] JAN ZAHRADIL (ODS), on behalf of the ECR Group congratulated the European Commission for the work done and stated: "the EU must send out a signal that it is on the side of free trade, that it is on the side of removing trade barriers at a time of growing protectionism". Adam BIELAN – a Polish MEP from a party associated with PiS, Partia Republikańska, was on the same page: "The agreements will remove almost all tariff restrictions on mutual trade. They are well balanced and will have a positive impact on the economies of both the EU and Vietnam".
- [**Trade as a democratising factor**] For the supporters of the agreements, the text was presented as a mean for more democracy in Vietnam. Eugen JURZYCA from Slovakia's SAS declared that "the EU still has the option of imposing sanctions or even withdrawing from the treaty if democracy in Vietnam does not improve. I believe that ten years after the signing of these treaties, Vietnam will

123 "EU trade agreements", (Source: [Concilium](#)).

124 "EU trade relations with Singapore" (Source: [European Commission](#)) and EU-Japan Economic Partnership Agreement (Source: [European Commission](#)).

125 "Zahradil 'conflict of interest' over EU-Vietnam trade deal", (Source: [euobserver](#)).

126 "EU-Vietnam Trade Agreement and Investment Protection Agreement", (Source: [European Commission](#)).

127 All the quotations below, some of which are translated, are issued from the debates held on 12/06/20 (Source: [European Parliament](#)).

be much more democratic". This position does not mean that improving democracy is a goal of the agreements in itself. It rather appears as a counter argument against democratic/human rights critics and acts as a safeguard in case the democratic/human rights case against the treaty overrules trade considerations.

However, Italian and Spanish voices did not share the same enthusiasm mostly because the Agreements would challenge the rice production in their countries. That is why Vox's AGUILAR was worried: "Vietnam has the lowest rice prices in Southeast Asia and competes directly with varieties produced in Spain and Italy. Spanish rice growers are outraged by this new concession and its impact on prices in a sector already in crisis". Carlo FIDANZA (Fdl) was equally alarmed: "the placing on the market of larger quotas of Vietnamese rice at a very low price is likely to bring an already tired sector to its knees. Our delegation therefore does not intend to be complicit in this design and will not support this agreement until Italian and European rice is safeguarded".

ID's Positions

Most ID MEPs did not support the text, while a pro-business minority composed by AfD and FPÖ was in favour of it.

- **[Unbalanced exigencies]** Danilo Oscar LANCINI from Lega thought that the Agreements were unfair because of the difference between EU regulations and Vietnamese ones: "On the environmental level, there is a contrast between the sacrifices imposed on EU Member States and those required in Vietnam". Marco CAMPOMENOSI went even further: "Hypocrisy! Hypocrisy because the Green New Deal that you want to impose on our companies, and which will cost them a great deal, obviously cannot be imposed on Vietnam, and Vietnam will be very careful not to go in that direction". Hervé JUVIN (RN) used the same rationale and linked to a theme that is dear to the RN, relocation: "That is why we will not sign this treaty, because we believe that the 21st century is turning the page on free trade and globalisation. We consider that the 21st century will be the century of relocation, of the pursuit of industrial autonomy by nations that are aware of the requirements to become independent. Above all, we believe that the 21st century will be the century of economic patriotism".

- **[Human Rights]** Many ID voices also pointed out the breaches on human rights in Vietnam: "We have a duty not to forget these considerations when voting, so that we do not betray those values that our Europe has always proclaimed and that it should also defend instead of only thinking in terms of economic gain", said LANCINI.

In contrast, several ID voices supported the text by using arguments closed to those defended by the pro-business ECR MEPs.

- **[Free trade]** Romain HAIDER from FPÖ stated: "I will vote in favour of this agreement. In principle, I am a supporter of free trade. Free trade has always proven to be profitable for both sides and an engine of growth".
- **[Economic perspectives]** Maximilian KRAH (AfD) thought about the next agreements to come: "I know how developing countries look to Vietnam because, for the first time, an emerging economy is provided with the opportunity to link up and develop with the European economy through an individual free trade agreement".

1.4. Results of the Vote

A resolution is adopted on February 12, 2020: 416 MEPs voted for (~64%), 187 against (~29%), and 44 (~6%) abstained.

- **[ECR] 43 MEPs voted for, 3 voted against, 8 abstained**
 - *Focus on Fdl:* On the 6 MEPs present for the vote 3 voted against and 3 abstained.
 - *Focus on Vox:* 1 voted for and 3 abstained¹²⁸.

It is worth noting that the two ECR political parties that were less in favour of this Agreements (Fdl and Vox) are from rice producing countries that are likely to be impacted by the treaty. These MEPs explained their vote by this wariness and did not mention ideological argument such as opposing free trade.

- **[ID] 16 MEPs voted for, 50 against, and 4 abstained**
 - *Focus on AfD, FPÖ, and DF:* All 15 MEPs from these three parties voted for. The other voice in favour was from a RN member (Thierry MARIANI).
 - *Focus on VB and EKRE:* The 3 MEPs from VB and the unique MEP from EKRE abstained.

¹²⁸ MEPs from Vox gained an extra MEP after the departure of British MEPs in 2020.

2. CONDITIONALITY FOR THE PROTECTION OF THE UNION BUDGET (2020)

2.1. Context

Several years ago, Poland and Hungary have started implementing a new political regime: “illiberal” democracies. ORBAN even made this term his own in a public speech in 2014¹²⁹. What does it mean? According to FAREED ZAKARIA, who first used the expression of “illiberal democracies”¹³⁰, this ideology consists of a regime where leaders are democratically elected, but deprive their citizens of fundamental rights: the independence of the judiciary power¹³¹ is called into question, the freedom of public broadcasting is limited, etc.

Although the EU has defined the fundamental values in the Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union (TEU) or in the Copenhagen criteria¹³², it has not provided effective procedures to ensure the protection of the rule of law overtime. Hence, European institutions can only rely on two tools:

- Infringement procedure: the European Commission may take legal action – an infringement procedure – against an EU country that fails to implement EU law. The Commission may address the issue to the Court of Justice, which in certain cases will impose financial penalties¹³³.
- Article 7 of the TEU: provides for special mechanisms with far-reaching sanctions in case an EU country does not respect the fundamental values referred to in Article 2 TEU, including the Rule of Law¹³⁴.

However, these two tools are not sufficient. The infringement procedure is long, cumbersome and occurs only after

the damage is done. The procedure of Article 7 is determined by unanimity in the Council (all the Member States must vote – except for the country that is suspected of not respecting the Rule of Law). Moreover, Budapest and Warsaw protect each other.

In May 2018, the Commission suggested to link the protection of the Rule of Law and the EU’s budget. The proposal included measures such as the suspension of payments in case of generalised deficiencies as regards the Rule of Law in the Member States¹³⁵.

However, Poland, Hungary and Slovenia opposed the agreement reached in the Council in November 2020 and blocked the future financial framework for the years 2021 to 2027 as well as the EU recovery package to support Member States hit by the COVID-19 pandemic (Next Generation EU recovery instrument). Things started to get moved again when the Council reached an agreement in December 2020.

2.2. The Intent of the Text

The final text¹³⁶ details the process in which a Member State can be financially penalised by the EU. Schematically, the process is as follows:

- When the European Commission has reasonable grounds to believe that there are breaches of the Rule of Law in a Member State, it sends a written notification to the Member State concerned, setting out the specific grounds on which it based its findings.
- The Member State concerned shall provide the required information within a time limit, specified by the

129 “Pologne, Hongrie... ces démocraties « illibérales » qui remettent en cause l’Etat de droit”, (Source: [Le Monde](#)).

130 See footnote ¹²⁷.

131 “Stories of unbreakable judges – Igor Tuleja, Paweł Juszczyszyn and Beata Morawiec”, (Source: [Amnesty International](#)).

132 The accession criteria, or Copenhagen criteria are the essential conditions all candidate countries must satisfy to become a Member State. There are political criteria such as: stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for and protection of minorities but also economic criteria and the administrative and institutional capacity to effectively implement the acquis (source: [European Commission](#)).

133 “Infringement procedure”, (Source: [European Commission](#)).

134 “Rule of law framework”, (Source: [European Commission](#)).

135 “Protection of the EU’s budget in case of “rule of law” deficiencies”, Source: [EPRS](#)).

136 “Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2020/2092 of the European parliament and of the council of 16 December 2020 on a general regime of conditionality for the protection of the union budget” ([EUR-lex](#)).

Commission, and may propose the adoption of remedial measures to address the findings.

- The European Commission shall consider the information received from the Member State. If the measures do not adequately address the Commission's findings, the Commission shall submit to the EU Council a proposal to implement appropriate measures.
- The Council, acting by a qualified majority, has the final word. It will decide whether to impose sanctions and may amend the Commission's proposal.

Qualified majority means that at least 15 of the 27 Member States, representing at least 65% of the European population, must approve the sanctions¹³⁷. Thus, by changing from unanimity to qualified majority the text intends to avoid the obstruction of some European countries.

2.3. ECR's and ID's Reactions to the Text

The debates held on December 16, 2020¹³⁸ reveal the strong opposition to the text of both ID and ECR representatives in attendance that day. For them, the EU went beyond the limits of European treaties. It is worth noting that the two political forces do not use the exact same arguments in their indictment of the mechanism.

ID's Positions

- **[Defence of unanimity]** For ZANNI, the mechanism bypasses the principle of unanimity which he considers "the only method [...] that is truly democratic, protects those who think differently and allows European democracies to defend themselves against the political and arbitrary use of certain rules".
- **[Refusal to deepen EU integration]** As MADISON from Estonia's EKRE stated: "[the EU] is an economic union, not a political, social federation, where we go and teach the Poles and the Hungarians what they have to do". Tom VANDENDRIESSCHE from Belgium's VB was tougher: "What once started as economic cooperation to achieve peace and prosperity is developing into a political superstate that wants more and more power and is thus leading us from one conflict to another. The European values on which this cooperation was once

based are being systematically transformed: centralism is replacing subsidiarity, uniformity is replacing diversity, bureaucracy is replacing democracy".

ECR's Positions

- **[Strict reading of treaties]** For Hermann TERTSCH (Vox), "no treaty says that this Parliament or the Commission is going to dictate the national policy of Hungary or Poland. Nowhere does it say that!" Jadwiga WIŚNIEWSKA (PiS) agrees: "Member States must have the sovereign right to act within their sphere of competence in accordance with their own constitutional order".
- **[Criticism of interference by outside forces]** Joachim Stanisław BRUDZIŃSKI (PiS) stated: "The left-wing groups in this House make unfounded accusations when saying that Poland violates the Rule of Law, while they themselves have no respect for the provisions of the Treaties [...] There can therefore be no place for the terror of left-wing correctness that is being attempted at all costs in Poland". For Patryk JAKI (Solidarna Polska, a Polish party associated with PiS), "the attempt to impose on Poland and Hungary, and in practice on all EU countries that are not superpowers, a system for assessing their 'rule of law' in the absence of specific criteria leads to the conclusion that these criteria will be discretionary, each time adapted to the interests of the EU core powers: Germany and France".

2.4. Results of the Vote

The motion for resolution was adopted on December 16, 2020: 496 MEPs voted for (~72%, 134 against (~19%), and 65 abstentions (~9%).

- **[ECR] 55 MEPs voted against, 6 abstained, and one MEP voted for.**
 - **Focus on the abstention:** *The 3 MEPs from N-VA all abstained just like two Slovakian MEPs and one Greek Solution MEP.*
- **[ID] 47 MEPs voted against and 28 abstained.**
 - **Focus on the abstention:** *The 28 MEPs who abstained were all from the Lega.*

¹³⁷ "Le Parlement et le Conseil européens lient le plan de relance au respect de l'Etat de droit", Source: [Le Monde](#).

¹³⁸ All the quotations below, some of which are translated, are issued from the debates held on 12/06/20 (Source: [European Parliament](#)).

3. NEW AVENUES FOR LEGAL LABOUR MIGRATION (2021)

3.1. Context

Sylvie GUILLAUME, a French S&D MEP, was appointed rapporteur of the “New Avenues for Legal Labour Migration” report. According to her, it is key to have an ambitious EU framework on that field to fight against human trafficking and smugglers, respond to shortages in certain sectors through legal immigration, extend the facilities for entry into member countries, currently reserved for skilled workers, to less skilled or unskilled workers, and build a more consistent framework in the EU¹³⁹.

3.2. The Intent of the Text

In short, the text addressed the following points:

- **[Present situation]** The current EU legal migration legislative framework is fragmented, only focuses on specific categories of workers, contributes to the competition of national legislative frameworks and does not fulfil EU’s goal to adopt a comprehensive approach to migration policy.
- **[Simplify and harmonise the legal approach]** Through legal and safe pathways, a comprehensive framework would provide new opportunities for migration, improve the EU labour market access for Third Country Nationals (TCN). For example, the current Single Permit Directive should be extended to reach a broader category of TCN.
- **[Improve intra-EU mobility]** Because the free movement of workers helps to match demand with supply in EU labour markets, the intra-EU mobility should be enhanced by the gathering and the sharing of data.
- **[Set up a talent pool]** The report supports the creation of an EU talent pool and matching platform to serve as a one-stop shop for TCN workers, EU employers and national administrations.
- **[Strengthen relations with third countries and enhance legal pathways]** The report promotes legal migration channels to reduce irregular migration, under-

mine the activity of criminal smugglers, reduce labour exploitation. It also calls for a wider dialogue with third countries to build balanced partnerships.

- **[Develop the EU’s legislative framework]** Finally, the report urges the EU to “move away from a sectoral approach and adopt an immigration code setting out broad rules governing entry and residence for all TCNs seeking employment in the Union and harmonising the rights enjoyed by such TCNs and their families¹⁴⁰”.

3.3. ECR’s and ID’s Reactions to the Text

Predictably, the debates held on May 19, 2021¹⁴¹ revealed the strong hostility of both ID and ECR groups to the text. The two groups all strongly disagree on the report suggestions and use many arguments to justify their point.

- **[EU’s legitimacy]** was the most recurring topic. ID and ECR MEPs thought that the EU should not have a word on this topic just like Joachim Stanisław BRUDZIŃSKI (PiS) from ECR said: “In the area of migration, the EU’s competence is severely limited. It is the Member States – I emphasise, it is the Member States – that decide how many and which immigrants they need” or Gilles LEBRETON (RN) from ID: “Please let the states manage their economic immigration. They will do it much better than you”.
- **[National preference]** Peter KOFOD (DF) on behalf of the ID group was straightforward: “The EU already has massive problems with social dumping, and this does not make it better, quite the opposite. We need to think about our own workers first. (...) I am happy to vote against the EU’s and, indeed, the Social Democrats’ vision of importing unskilled labour from all over the world. I would rather protect the work and security of Danish employees”. Jorge BUXADÉ VILLALBA (Vox) from ECR went by raising the spectre of population replacement: “they promise employment to millions of people who rush to our borders, while our European workers and businesses are stifled with taxes and absurd rules. (...) The priority is to create stable jobs, reindustrialise Europe, improve workers’ wages by reducing employers’ charges, apply the principle of Community prefer-

139 “Nouvelles voies de migration légale de travail: la Commission européenne doit s’engager pleinement ”, (Source: [Sylvie Guillaume’s personal website](#)).

140 “Report on new avenues for legal labour migration”, (Source: [European Parliament](#)).

141 All the quotations below are issued – and some for some of them translated – from the debates hold on 19/05/21 (Source: [European Parliament](#)).

ence and, above all, not spend Europe's money on promoting population replacement".

- **[Cost of immigration]** Gunnar BECK (AfD) gave many figures of the German situation to explain why he was against the report: "Each year, the 3 million migrants who have arrived since 2015 or those born after them cost Germany around 30 billion euros, but in fact they probably cost twice as much. Labour migration is a myth, and the need for more foreign labour a fairy tale".
- **[Impact on third countries]** Guido REIL (AfD) seemed worried about the impact of legal migration of skilled workers on the countries of departure: "the emigration of active, mostly still above-average qualified people is a disaster for poor countries, blocking any chance for economic and social development. (...) This emigration is in the interest of African rulers. In this way, critical voices are exported. The emigrants support their local economy and indirectly the corrupt regime by transferring money home".
- **[Alternative to labour migration]** Balázs HIDVÉGHI from Fidesz stated: "This report is completely flawed in its basic premises and assumptions. It assumes that migration is the only solution when a Member State is facing demographic or labour market problems, for example. This is a mistake because there are other solutions. Just think, for example, of Hungary's very successful family policy support system and its tax system. (...) The idea that multiculturalism is necessarily better than a homogeneous, traditional European culture is false".

3.4. Results of the Vote

The text was adopted on 20 May 2021: 495 MEPs voted for (~72%), 163 against (~24%), and 32 (~4%) abstained.

- **[ECR] 59 MEPs voted against and 2 abstained.**
- **[ID] All the 72 MEPs voted against.**

Conclusion on the Three Votes

What do these votes teach us?

- The Agreements with Vietnam showed deep divisions between ECR and ID. ECR MEPs appeared in favour of trade agreements unless such treaties constituted a di-

rect threat to the economic interests of their country. ID MEPs are generally opposed to such agreements except for FPÖ and AfD representatives. Regarding economics, FPÖ sticks to neoliberal positions¹⁴². AfD is generally considered to be more pro-business than other ID parties, although their position evolved over time. For instance, AfD was against the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership¹⁴³, abandoned in 2019.

- Unsurprisingly, both ECR and ID are against the Conditionality for the protection of the Union budget. The arguments of the parties differ slightly: ID defends the principle of unanimity and refuses any deepening of the EU. ECR's positions are contrasted: ECR MEPs used a more technical approach (i.e., strict reading of the EU treaties), but still, some of them sound defensive and accuse the French-German axis to plot against other countries such as Poland.
- Finally, ECR and ID representatives used similar arguments on immigration during the debates. Differences in arguments are found in the specific features of each political party. For instance, AfD insists on the cost of immigration while Fidesz promotes family policies to tackle Europe's demographic decline.

142 Diermeier, Matthias & Nau, Aljoscha & Frohwein, Hannah. (2021). One for one and none for all – The Radical Right in the European Parliament.

143 Rone, Julia. (2018). Contested international agreements, contested national politics: how the radical left and the radical right opposed TTIP in four European countries. *London Review of International Law*.

#2 Focus: Interview with Nathalie BRACK

Nathalie BRACK is Associate Professor at the Department of Political Science of the Université libre de Bruxelles (ULB) and Visiting Professor at the European Political and Governance Studies Department of the College of Europe (Bruges). She lectures on EU matters and parliamentary studies. Her research interests include Euroscepticism.

The interview was conducted on 2nd June 2022.

THE FORCES AT PLAY

What is your analysis of the 2019 European elections and the role they have played in the evolution of far-right parties so far?

I would rather speak of the “radical right”. I keep the use of “far-right” for anti-democratic parties that are opposed to the foundations of liberal democracy, such as the participation in elections.

As from 2019, the radical right strengthened its position in the European Parliament although the dynamics differ between ID and ECR groups. For the ID group, the novelty was not only its improved electoral performance, but also its capacity to form a stable and lasting political group; thus playing an increasing role in the institutional game of the EU.

Regarding the ECR group, it lost several MEPs after Brexit. The internal balance shifted: the Polish PiS is currently the largest party in the group by number of MEPs. It seems that the ECR chose to expand¹⁴⁴. However, the group still refused to include the most extreme parties to maintain a respectable image. Among the ECR group, many national delegations are or have been in power in Member States. This fact partly explains why some political parties prefer to unite with the ECR rather than with the ID, despite a closer ideological proximity with the latter.

In your opinion, what are the differences and similarities between ECR and ID groups?

In terms of differences, two main elements are to be considered: reputation and ideology. By reputation, I mean the position that a political party holds in its country: is the party in power or is it involved in the decision-mak-

ing process? It has more to do with institutional strategy than it has with prestige. A party in power can vote in the Council of the EU; hence it has a more influential voice in the European debate. It is probable that the dominant political groups in the EP (EPP and S&D) started to seek agreement with the ECR on certain matters to ease the review procedure in the Council of the EU, although recent scientific research did not yet prove it. On the contrary, EPP and S&D are unlikely to form an alliance with the ID group, whose members have less influence in the institution.

On ideology, the ID and ECR groups have different priorities. The ID group is sovereigntist, Eurosceptic, and focuses on migration topics. The ECR group is Eurosceptic too, but this characteristic is not central to its programme. On the moral side, ECR MEPs defend conservative values and are often liberal on the economic side, whereas the ID group is not aligned with the ECR group on economic issues.

Lately, I focused on the EP debates regarding the respect of the rule of law. We know that ID and ECR groups are both opposed to European provisions that define and uphold fundamental rights in the EU. However, ECR and ID groups reach the same conclusion following different paths. For example, when it comes to the respect of the rule of law in Poland or in Hungary, the ECR group stands up against the EU intervention on the topic in accordance with their conservative logic. These two countries refuse the fusion of values at the European level and argue that these issues should remain at the nation-state level. The ECR group explains its position stating that the EU competence on the topic of values is not clearly defined and calls for a strict interpretation of the European Commission's scope of action. The technical nature of the criticism allows the ECR group to preserve its image of respectability and credibility.

Similarly, the ID group defends the same position – the EU should not interfere on these issues –, arguing that there are no problems with the rule of law among State Members; thus making debates on the subject unnecessary. The EU should focus on real issues, i.e., the management of immigration.

ECR and ID groups have different views on immigration, not because one would be in favour of it and the

¹⁴⁴ For reminder, Fratelli d'Italia, Forum voor Democratie, and Vox joined the ECR group in 2019.

other against. It has more to do with the place given to the topic in their rhetoric: the ID group essentially focuses on migration issues, which the ECR group does not do as much. The latter does speak of immigration, but also points out other themes, namely the fight against European bureaucracy or the development of a European foreign policy – Poland supports a European defence co-operation, for instance. To put it simply, the ID group is for less EU. The group considers that the European Commission is too powerful, and that the EP should radically change, if not disappear since the ID is in favour of an increased power of national parliaments or governments. The ECR group's approach is more pragmatic as it considers that things can still be achieved within the current form of the EU.

In terms of similarities, ID and ECR groups are both critical of the functioning of the EU, advocate a certain form of nationalism and defend principles, such as nation state and subsidiarity. But once again, they have different approaches. For example, on the functioning of the EU, the ECR group tends to defend the principle of subsidiarity, while the ID group is more radical and is more likely to plead for the return of an intergovernmental logic.

In sum, we can draw a distinction of the two political groups from the reputation and ideological points of view. They share similar views on the current functioning of the EU and some conservative values, but front lines remain numerous, even if ID and ECR groups give a high degree of freedom to their members regarding their votes.

Do you think the two political groups made progress in terms of organisation and political congruence? Do they have a bigger impact in the EP?

After the 2019 elections, the fact that the ECR group remained stable in terms of organisation and congruence can be explained by its greater experience and coherence¹⁴⁵. Its staff is efficient and experimented. The group continues its institutionalisation while its members are not necessarily given voting instructions. Therefore, the ECR group does not need to assert its identity like the ID group does.

The ID group, Europe of Nations and Freedom at the time, suffered from its inability to form a stable group,

meeting the EP requirements¹⁴⁶. ID members aspire to the creation of a common platform and show that they belong to a shared political family. Although the project of a “Nationalist International” is, in principle, hard to achieve, the group is less and less reluctant to display its identity. The *supranationalisation* of radical rights is not looked upon as a fantasy anymore, and the group managed to reach a better internal cohesion.

The ID's will is to gather its forces, go beyond the stage of a loose union built only to benefit from the contributions to European political parties. The group also works on identifying areas of common grounds. However, I think it is unlikely that it will achieve the same cohesion as the EPP or the S&D for example.

Do national parties entering the ID group in 2019 (e.g., Vox, Fratelli d'Italia) embody something new within radical right Eurosceptics?

These new parties voice existing themes in a new way. It was nonetheless a surprise to witness the emergence of far-right and radical right voices in countries once thought to have been immunised by their history: Vox and AfD.

For a decade, Europe has faced ongoing crises, influencing the voting behaviour of European citizens. In Southern Europe, this first led to a consolidation of the radical left, followed by a consolidation of the radical right. Austerity, migration flows and other concerns have impacted the European peoples, who might have perceived their national identity and traditions to be under threat and therefore paving the way to the radical right in these countries.

In Italy, parliamentary instability is a particular element of the political system. And I think, the electoral success of Fratelli d'Italia can mostly be attributed to disillusioned voters of the Lega, Forza Italia or even of 5S Movement, rather than to a new Eurosceptical rhetoric.

145 The ECR has been sitting in the EP since 2009.

146 See “Insert 1”.

RADICAL RIGHT IN THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

In an article¹⁴⁷ published in 2013, you differentiate three types of Euroscepticisms: a Europhobe position, an ‘intergovernmentalist’ position and one that “perceives European integration as an undesirable constraint or even as a necessary evil.” Is this categorisation still relevant ten years later?

After the 2019 elections, and especially after the recent crises (the economic and financial crisis of 2008 and the 2015 migrant crisis) and the Brexit, the most Europhobic discourses are no longer relevant. With the departure of UKIP MEPs, who were the most virulent, came a moderation of the criticism of the EU. Therefore, the Europhobe position is not as widespread as it used to be and the intergovernmentalist position grows stronger in the present legislature.

In another article¹⁴⁸ published in 2015, you provide a typology of four roles played by Eurosceptic MEPs: the ‘absentee’, the ‘public orator’, the ‘pragmatist’, the ‘participant’. How would this typology apply to ECR and ID groups in 2022?

I have the feeling that new Eurosceptic MEPs are less in a logic of opposition and more in a logic of specialisation. This phenomenon is common among parliamentarians from other EP groups but was not among ID MEPs until now. We now see radical right Eurosceptic MEPs who want to work and get involved in the EP. One could argue that the first two roles are not commonly found and that the ‘pragmatist’ and the ‘participant’ are more common.

Still, since the departures of figures such as LE PEN, SALVINI and especially FARRAGE in 2019, there has been less Eurosceptic ‘public speakers’.

The typology does not apply on a group scale, but only on an individual scale since the role played by a MEP is partially determined by his or her own interpretation of his/her mandate.

In that same article, you pointed out that the presence of Eurosceptic forces was a factor of the politicisation of the EP since they voice criticisms of the EU usually silenced in Brussels. How do you see this in 2022? Is it a good thing that the EP tends to work as a more traditional chamber, i.e., one that makes room for greater political confrontation?

I think it is a good thing. On the one hand, the issues at stake must be legible to mobilise voters. However, in the EP, the logic of compromise currently prevails – S&D and EPP are forming alliances to reach a majority –, making the message unclear to European citizens. On the other hand, there is no clear proof that the declared “cordon sanitaire” on the ID group works and allows to stop the development of the radical right forces. I consider that these political forces will not disappear soon.

Eurosceptics – be they from the radical right or the radical left – have the advantage to bring greater legibility and greater politicisation in the EU. Admittedly, such a confrontational approach does not work at all levels of the decision-making process. But the EP, under the influence of political groups instilling a culture of compromise that lacks clear communication, has had a tendency to suffer from a disconnect from citizens.

Eurosceptics may not yet be able to change that whole dynamic, but they have a role to play in forcing other political families to reassess their vision of Europe and share it with citizens. Besides, it should be noted that parties that had a clear position on the EU made higher electoral gains in the 2019 elections (Greens, ALDE and radical right Eurosceptics).

How did other EP groups react towards the rise of the Eurosceptical discourse?

Reactions were fragmented and limited to the national level. The Conference on the Future of Europe¹⁴⁹ or Pulse of Europe¹⁵⁰ have subtly shifted the lines by showing that the EU is not such an abstract thing. In some countries, nothing happened. We still have to wait and see if other

147 Euroscepticism at the Supranational Level: The Case of the ‘Untidy Right’ in the European Parliament, JCMS 2013 Volume 51. Number 1. pp. 85–104.

148 The roles of Eurosceptic Members of the European Parliament and their implications for the EU, International Political Science Review 2015, Vol. 36(3) 337–350.

149 The Conference on the Future of Europe was a citizen-led series of debates and discussions that ran from April 2021 to May 2022 and enabled people from across Europe to share their ideas and help shape the common future of Europe (Source: [European Commission](#)).

150 Pulse of Europe is a European citizen movement whose aim is to demonstrate and promote the project of a strong and functioning European Union (Source: [Pulse of Europe](#)).

groups are becoming aware of it. Since the EPP and S&D axis lost its absolute majority, this may have sparked some changes, but we have to wait for the 2024 elections to see if these political families learned lessons from the previous legislature.

During the 2019 European elections, leading figures of the radical right (SALVINI, LE PEN, etc.) expressed the desire to form a large Eurosceptical bloc. Do you think they still have an interest in achieving this goal?

I think that radical right Eurosceptics and the EU are facing the same challenges: widening vs. deepening their positions. Either they enlarge to form a large group with a roadmap setting out priority actions. That could allow them to claim increased institutional and administrative roles. But I am not quite sure that it is their goal. Either ECR and ID groups remain divided or develop occasional cooperation on themes that can make them stronger and exclude themes where they have diverging opinions, such as foreign affairs, for example.

This raises the question of their medium-term objectives. ID members, especially the RN, want to complete their process of normalisation. An association with

governing conservative parties would reward their efforts to achieve their “dédiabolisation” (de-demonisation). That explains why actors such as the RN, have an interest in joining a union with other forces. Conversely, we could wonder what the interest of PiS would be to join a larger bloc with actors such as the RN or Lega.

What is the impact of the war in Ukraine and its consequences on a possible union of the radical right (Pro-Putin vs. Anti-Putin)?

The war in Ukraine brings out the differences in the geopolitical positions of radical right voices. Despite these differences, everything is negotiable. One could imagine a radical right bloc that gives the freedom to national delegations to choose how they position on international affairs. Nonetheless, such a union could have an impact on the voters of parties that are part of the bloc. Political parties could argue that they did not take part in a particular vote, but citizens could be hard to convince. For instance, in Belgium, the N-VA has already faced such consequences: the party was criticised for sitting with the Polish PiS that defends positions not shared by the N-VA.

Concluding Remarks

Since the 2019 European elections, far-right political parties have held numerous summits and international meetings to show their unity, at least during photo sessions. To estimate the extent of a union binding them, it is worth looking at the number of participants or the joint declarations signed in such circumstances.

In July 2021, LE PEN wrote a declaration¹⁵¹ in the context of the Conference on the Future of Europe. She reiterated her positions: the reject of a European superstate, an increased cooperation between nation-states, the defence of the family as a moral value, the promotion for strict immigration policies, the will to limit the competences of the EU, etc. In sum, all the topics dear to the European far-right. The docu-

ment was signed by 16 European parties¹⁵² which constitute a success: major parties from ID, ECR, as well as the Fidesz managed to agree on the text. Some even considered the document as “the first stone” of a “great alliance” in the EP.

In December 2021, PiS received 13¹⁵³ far-right leaders in Warsaw. If the summit strengthened the relationships between the PiS and the RN, it was not a success in terms of unity. The declaration¹⁵⁴ is limited to the criticism of the supremacy of EU law over national law, the defence of the Christian heritage, etc. Greater coordination within the EP was also put forward, but there was no mention of an eventual fusion of ECR and ID groups.

151 “Le rassemblement des patriotes européens est lancé”, (Source: [Rassemblement National](#)).

152 Lega, PiS, Fidesz, Vox, Fdl, BMRO, Ja21, FPÖ, VB, DF, EKRE, PS, LLRA, PNTCD, Greek Solution, and RN. AfD did not participate (Source: [Euractiv](#)).

153 Lega and Fdl did not attend the summit.

154 “PiS” (Source: [Twitter](#)).

Eventually, the number shrank once again in Madrid where Vox welcomed 11 political parties in January 2022. Only 9 of them signed the final document¹⁵⁵ in which parties repeated the topics mentioned above and the need for better coordination in the EP. The outcomes of all these meetings are limited to declarations of intent and reflect the paradox of the European far-right.

Yes, these leaders have become more European: they meet more often, learn to work together and even inspire each other¹⁵⁶. Major parties like Lega, RN, Fdl, FPÖ understood that the EU could contribute to their quest for respectability if they soften their positions compared to the 2010s. The Brexit and the attachment of Europeans to the EU have led them to moderate their statements. 65% of Europeans see EU membership as a good thing¹⁵⁷: it is no longer a question of leaving the EU, but of transforming it from within.

However, these parties cannot put their European project into practice. ID's ambition to restore a Europe of nations has a limited influence in the EP or the Council: the group cannot do much except participate in summits with their colleagues... Pragmatically, ECR – notably PiS – keeps on playing the current European game because the group believes that something can be gained, even if ECR remains highly critical of certain aspects. Finally, ORBAN continues his outrageous attacks¹⁵⁸ but never talks of leaving the Union.

The far-right in the current parliament is complex to analyse. The study was careful to analyse the divides (“extremism of others”, divergent ideologies, and leader competition) as well as the dynamics of unity (funds, prestige, media attention, and ideological resource). In this context of perpetual change, the reference points are blurred: parties that used to call for a withdrawal from the EU no longer do so without having formalised a clear and definitive update; some parties, previously considered outcasts, have become legitimate partners, etc.

To pursue the analytical work initiated with this study, it would be relevant to investigate the activity of far-right MEPs: Do they work as much as MEPs from other groups? What are the topics discussed in their reports? Do ID MEPs manage to bypass the ‘cordon sanitaire’ put in place at the beginning of the legislature? What kind of union exist within the groups? What is the influence of small parties within ID and ECR groups, which are dominated by the RN/Lega duo and PiS respectively? What is the socialisation within and between groups?

Also, it could be worthwhile to pursue further investigations on the communication strategies deployed by these groups, the political visions regarding the concepts of state, order, or authority, etc.

The recent victories of SD in Sweden and Fdl in Italy illustrate the success of the far-right in Europe. By forging alliances with traditional right-wing parties, SD and Fdl managed to take their strategy of respectability a step further. Even better, they achieved great electoral success: Fdl became the largest party in Italy and SD, with a score of 20.5%¹⁵⁹, became the second largest party in Sweden.

While this success is undeniable, it is far from being lasting. On the one hand, there are already immediate challenges to tackle: Fdl and SD still must succeed in the delicate task of negotiating with other political formations to form a government. On the other hand, the differences of opinion between these allies are likely to resurface quickly. How will Lega and Fdl, for example, overcome their divergent views on Russia in the upcoming decisions to make on the development of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict?

It is too early to predict the consequences of these victories on the far-right in the European Parliament. However, it is no exaggeration to see the current situation as a new dynamic that could change the forces at play with new alliances and new figures.

155 “La Cumbre de los «partidos patriotas europeos» concluye con nueve compromisos” (Source: [Euractiv](#)).

156 S. ÖNER (2020): ‘Europe’ of populist radical right and the case of Lega of Salvini: pioneer of a ‘Parochial Europe’?, *European Politics and Society*.

157 “Two-thirds of Europeans see EU membership as a good thing, survey says”, (Source: [Politico](#)).

158 In July 2022, he said that countries were “no longer nations” if different races blended together (Source: [About Hungary](#)).

159 “Swedish election: The astonishing rise of the right-wing Sweden Democrats”, (Source: [DW](#)).

Appendix

APPENDIX 1 – THE NEW ENTRANTS

1.1. Political Parties Sitting for the First Time in the EP and Members of the ID Group

Svoboda a přímá demokracie – SPD (Freedom and Direct Democracy)

[History] SPD is a Czech far-right party founded by Tomio OKAMURA and Radim FIALA. Two years earlier, they had founded the “Dawn of Direct Democracy” party. It was in 2015 that they decided to create SPD mostly because of the decline of “Dawn”.

[Political success] SPD won over 10% of vote in the 2017 Czech parliamentary elections.

[Ideology] SPD advocates a referendum about Czech Republic’s withdrawal from the EU, arguing that the regained independence of the Czech Republic would allow a better control on immigration. The party is characterised by a very violent anti-Islamic rhetoric while Muslims represent no more than 1% of the Czech population¹⁶⁰. SPD’s members also target other minorities (Jews, Roma people, and LGBT+).

Eesti Konservatiivne Rahvaerakond – EKRE (Conservative People’s Party of Estonia)¹⁶¹

[History] The party was created in 2012 when the People’s Union of Estonia and the Estonian Patriotic movements merged. Martin HELME took after his father Mart HELME as head of the party since 2020.

[Political success] In March 2019, the party won 17.8% of the vote in the national parliamentary elections. Despite political closeness with the “Centre” party, the centrist “Reform” Party, which arrived in first position, preferred to offer a coalition with EKKRE. Since then, EKKRE has been part of the government and has headed five major ministries.

[Ideology] EKKRE perpetuates a strong anti-immigration position even if Estonia is not located on any migration

route to Europe. The party fuels fears of massive immigration if the EU manages to establish a quota system for the distribution of immigrants within the Member States. Here too, there are many examples of anti-minorities positions or even nostalgic view of Nazism. Finally, the party distrusts Estonia’s Russian-speaking minority and does not consider them as true Estonian citizens.

1.2. Political Parties Sitting for the First Time in the EP and Members of the ECR Group

Fratelli d’Italia – FdI (Brothers of Italy)

[History] The party was formally established in 2012 but the history of the party goes back further: Fratelli d’Italia is the descendant of the post-WWII fascist party *Movimento Sociale Italiano* – created in 1946. The party was renamed *Alleanza Nazionale* (National Alliance) in 1995 and merged in BERLUSCONI’s *Il Popolo della Libertà* in 2009. However, some former members of National Alliance denounced this alliance when BERLUSCONI and MONTI¹⁶² allied and decided to create FdI in 2012.

[Political success] In 2013, the party managed to win 2% of the vote in the general elections, which allowed them to send nine MEPs to the Italian Chamber of Deputies. In 2014, FdI missed by few votes its entrance to the EP. For the 2018 general elections, FdI scored 4.4% of the vote, more than doubled its score compared to 2013, and had 32 deputies and 18 senators elected. FdI was not part of the LEGA-M5S coalition but supported the coalition led by DRAGHI in 2021¹⁶³. FdI is now very popular, especially among Lega voters who were disappointed with the Lega’s political moderation in governing.

[Ideology] The party has evolved on key issues related to the EU. In 2014, Giorgia MELONI used to show strong criticisms of the euro but was more cautious in her declarations than SALVINI. Now, she tends to focus on the supposed cost of the euro for Italian contributors. FdI has

¹⁶⁰ “Czech Republic’s tiny Muslim community subject to hate”, (Source: [Aljazeera](#)).

¹⁶¹ “Racism, sexism, Nazi economics: Estonia’s far right in power”, (Source: [The Guardian](#)).

¹⁶² The case of Fratelli d’Italia: how radical-right populists in Italy and beyond are building global networks (Source: [News Directory](#)).

¹⁶³ “Who is afraid of Giorgia Meloni?”, (Source: [Gzero](#)).

both protectionist¹⁶⁴ and liberal views for the economy. FdI upholds traditional and anti-LGBT+ values, supports natalist initiatives and drastic migration policies¹⁶⁵.

Forum voor Democratie – FvD (Forum for democracy)

[History] In 2016, Thierry BAUDET and Henk OTTEN created the think tank “Forum voor Democratie” to campaign against the Association Agreement between the European Union and Ukraine¹⁶⁶. The same year, it became a political party.

[Political Success] In 2017, FvD ended up with ~2% of the vote (2 seats) for the general Dutch elections. In just two years, FvD succeeded in becoming the first political force in the 2019 provincial elections with 86 seats out of 570¹⁶⁷. The same year, the party made its entrance in the EP with three 3 MEPs. However, in 2020, the party faced internal turmoil when a scandal erupted: media reported that xenophobic and homophobic comments were ongoing in the FvD youth wing’s WhatsApp group chats. Many FvD members decided to leave the party to contest BAUDET¹⁶⁸’s reaction or rather lack of reaction. In this context, the 3 FvD MEPs elected in 2019 joined *Juiste Antwoord 21* created in 2020.

Also, in 2020, the Netherlands got an extra seat – because of the Brexit – that was allocated to Marcel DE GRAFF, who was part of the PPV (ID). In 2022, he left the PPV for diverging views on COVID-19¹⁶⁹ and joined FvD and has been since the sole representative of the party in the EP.

[Ideology] The FvD is anti-immigration and has a very critical and even violent discourse about the place of Islam in the Dutch society. The party is one of the most vehement slashers of the EU and supporter of a NEXIT. FvD denies climate change and wants the Netherlands to withdraw from the Paris Climate Agreement.

Vox

[History] The party was established in 2013 by Santiago ABASCAL who has been the party’s president since then. Initial members of the party are mostly former representatives of the Partido Popular (PP) – the dominant right-wing force in Spain – and supporters of conservative, Francoist, or radical right-wing groups. Their initial motivation was to protest Mariano RAJOY’s supposedly hesitant attitude to the Catalan question.

[Political success] In 2014, Vox missed by few votes its entrance to the EP. It was not until December 2018 that Vox became a significant political force in Spain with 11% of votes cast for the Andalusian regional parliament elections. Then, Vox continued to be successful: 10% for the legislative Spanish elections in April 2019 (5th political group). Following the failure of the Congress to invest a president of the government, new elections were organized five months later. Vox consolidated its position with an increase of 4 points (15% of votes cast) and surpassed the left-union *Podemos* to become the 4th political force in Spain.

[Ideology] Vox’s ideology finds its roots in Franco’s heritage, fear of immigration, liberal-economical orthodoxy, defence of the traditional and catholic values, etc. The party also vehemently denounces the Catalonia’s wishes for independence. For the 2019 European elections, the party’s economic proposals revolved around tax reductions, land deregulation, and partial privatisation of the public pension system. It should be noted, however, that Vox has mixed views on the EU: although, as neoliberals, Vox leaders are attached to the single market, they continue to fervently defend the Member States’ sovereignty and deny any possibility for a newly independent community or nation to join the EU¹⁷⁰.

164 In the 2019 manifesto, FdI calls for the “introduction of ‘civilisation duties’ against products from third countries that do not respect our wage, work safety and environmental protection standards, to avoid dangerous social dumping in Europe”.

165 “Fratelli d’Italia, parti post-fasciste aux portes du pouvoir”, (Source: [France24](#)).

166 A nonbinding referendum was held in the Netherlands to know if the Dutch citizens were in favour of such an agreement: 64% of them said no (Source: [The Guardian](#)).

167 “Far-right populists score stunning win in Dutch provincial vote”, (Source: [Politico](#)).

168 “Netherlands: The Rise and Fall of Forum for Democracy”, (Source: [Europeelects](#)).

169 “Far-right Dutch MEP ditches Geert Wilders’ party over its vaccination stance”, (Source: [Politico](#)).

170 “Vox: a new far right in Spain?”, (Source: [Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung – NYC](#)).

1.3. Political Parties Sitting for the First Time in the EP and Non-Attached (NA)

Ľudová strana Naše Slovensko – ĽSNS (People’s Party Our Slovakia)

[History] ĽSNS comes from the xenophobic and patriotic Slovak nebula. Marian KOTLEBA created the party in 2010. He previously tried to transform the “Slovak Togetherness” into a political group, but the Supreme Court dissolved it for non-compliance with the Constitution. In 2019, the same Court turned down the proposal to dissolve the party because of its “fascist tendencies¹⁷¹”.

[Political Success] ĽSNS won ~9% of the vote in the 2020 Slovak parliamentary elections. KOTLEBA was a presidential candidate in the 2019 national election in which he finished fourth (~10% of the vote).

[Ideology] ĽSNS is a neo-Nazi political force. KOTLEBA openly admired Jozef TISO a xenophobic prelate who was the president of the Slovak Republic, a client state of the third Reich during WWII. In April 2022, Slovakia’s Supreme Court confirmed the conviction of KOTLEBA for distributing cheques that contained Nazi symbols¹⁷². The party is anti-immigration, anti-minorities, anti-abortion, anti-OTAN, and anti-Euro and is a fervent supporter of PUTIN’s Russia.

Mislav KOLAKUŠIĆ

Prior to his European career, Mislav KOLAKUŠIĆ was a lawyer and a judge in Croatia. In the 2019 European elections, he was elected as a non-partisan MEP. He recently made the headlines. First, when he virulently attacked Emmanuel MACRON for his management of the COVID crisis: as an anti-vax figure, KOLAKUŠIĆ stated that “tens of thousands of citizens have died due to side effects of vaccines. Mandatory vaccination means the death penalty and execution for many European citizens¹⁷³”. Second, he did quite the same with Justin TRUDEAU, Prime Minister of Canada, in March 2022 and condemned TRUDEAU for his measures vis-à-vis the “Freedom Convoy 2022”. Kolakušić said Canada once stood for civil rights but now seems more like a “dictatorship of the worst kind¹⁷⁴”.

171 “Court failed to dissolve far-right ĽSNS”, (Source: [The Slovak Spectator](#)).

172 “Un député slovaque d’extrême droite reconnu coupable d’avoir utilisé un symbole néonazi”, (Source: [Le Figaro](#)).

173 “Fact Check-Claim of tens of thousands of vaccine-related EU deaths is based on a misreading of data”, (Source: [Reuters](#)).

174 “Watch: Two EU Parliament members criticize Trudeau”, (Source: [CTV News](#)).

APPENDIX 2 – COMMITTEES

| Committees | Chair | Vice chair – Greens/EFA | Vice chair – ECR | Vice chair – ID |
|---|----------------|-------------------------|------------------|-----------------|
| Foreign Affairs | EPP | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| Subcommittee on Human Rights | S&D | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Subcommittee on Security and Defence | RENEW | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Development | EPP | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| International Trade | S&D | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| Budgets | ECR | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Budgetary controls | EPP | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Economic & Monetary Affairs | S&D | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| Subcommittee on Tax Matters | S&D | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Employment and Social Affairs | RENEW | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Environment, Public Health, and Food Safety | RENEW | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Industry, Research and Energy | EPP | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| Internal Market and Consumer Protection | Greens/ EFA | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Transport and Tourism | Greens/ EFA | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Regional Development | The LEFT | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Agriculture and Rural Development | EPP | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| Fisheries | RENEW | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Culture and Education | EPP | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| Legal Affairs | RENEW | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs | S&D | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Constitutional Affairs | EPP | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Women's Rights and Gender Equality | S&D | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| Petitions | EPP | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| COVID-19 pandemic: lessons learned and recommendations for the future* | S&D | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| Foreign interference in all democratic processes in the European Union, including disinformation (INGE 2) | S&D | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Total | | 12 | 10 | 0 |

Methodological Approach and Remarks on Data

Working on EU topics is paradoxical: there is a lot of documentation (academic articles, institutional information about the EU functioning, specialised press), but it is difficult to find data (metrics about the MEPs' activities), and when the data are available, they are challenging to access (results of vote, translation of national political manifestos). Access to information largely contributed to the content of this note in the sense that for some questions the working assumptions had to be reviewed. The explanations on the methodological approach below trace the biases and the decisions that were made.

I. Far-Right in the European Parliament: How Has It Evolved Since 2019?

The EP website provides election results since 1979¹⁷⁵. The various legislatures were easy to compare, but there were two challenges to overcome. First, some European political groups change overtime (for example, EFDD does not exist anymore). Second, the departure of British MEPs following Brexit was unique in the EP. In this context, the choice was to first consider the constitutive sessions of 2019 and 2014, and then to analyse the redistribution of seats that had occurred since.

II. What Are the Far-Right's Criticisms of the European Union and its Counter-Projects?

This section analyses the political manifestos of parties in the 2019 European elections. If the elections are indeed European, the organisation remains at the Member State level. Besides, the EP does not keep documents of political groups, which are considered private archives. No EU service keeps these resources nor translates them. So, it was necessary to search and translate autonomously. For some parties, it is not difficult to find their manifestos: RN, Vox, N-VA, FP, Fdi, ODS, FvD. For others, it was more challenging. Lega did not publish a single document for the 2019 European elections. Therefore, it was necessary to consult Lega's programme for the 2019 general elections. AfD did publish a programme, but it was too heavy and detailed compared to the other documentation. Thus, the main source of information was a sum-up written by a public organisation in political education.

Eventually, parliamentary assistants were consulted when no documentation was found. The ones from PiS advised to consult the ECR website and its Polish version. And for the Fidesz, the tip was to consider a speech of ORBAN in June 2021.

#1 Focus – The Absence of a Single Far-Right Group in the EP. Why?

There was a lot of data on this topic. The press specialised in EU affairs, especially Politico and Euractiv, offers the insight on the Brussels arena (nomination, outcome of vote in the Parliament, etc.) that is sometimes disregarded by general press.

III. How Far-Right Political Parties Use the EU?

Elements about EP organisation are easily accessible and well explained on the EP website. Anyone who wants to understand how the EP works will find plenty of resource the EP website. However, the same could not be said with regards to the "daily life" in the EP. It is difficult to understand what the activity of the MEPs is. They do groundwork in the committees, but no related statistics can be found. In contrast, various metrics are available, such as written questions, but it is not clear if they are written by MEPs themselves or by their assistants. Except for political scientists who measure MEPs' activities through investigation, surveys, and interviews; the MEPs' activity could be compared to a black box.

By analysing data on voting decisions, Votewatch used to shed a light on the political decisions and activities of the EP and the Council (participation rate per groups, coherence per groups, etc.). Unfortunately, the project ended.

In this context, this study did not analyse the activity of far-right MEPs but focused on the positions they held during votes. This analysis did not intend to summarise the positions of the two groups but rather to see at the level of MEPs the rationales used to assess the political ideology by party and the ideological proximity between the two groups.

¹⁷⁵ "European Elections Results", (Source: European Parliament).

IV. A Look on Three Votes

It is possible to access to the vote results on the EP website, but it is a cumbersome process:

1) On the EP website, consult the “[Legislative Observatory](#)” page that keeps track of key events (proposal, readings, vote in committee, etc.).

2) Jump to the page “[Plenary](#)”, type the date of a plenary session to get more details on a vote. It is necessary to note the date of the final vote before jumping to the page.

3) Download the details of the vote. The details are however in “rough” format: there is not an overall view per political groups (i.e., Number of MEP that voted for, against or abstained; number of MEPs present that day, etc.).

A new website [Howtheyvote](#) funded by the German Federal Ministry of Research and Education provides an easy access to the vote results of the EP. Unfortunately, this new resource only addresses EP votes and does not provide all the features Votewatch offered.

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