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# DIVIDE AND OBSTRUCT: POPULIST PARTIES AND EU FOREIGN POLICY



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# Executive Summary

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The rise of populism is beginning to shake the institutions that bring Europe together, but despite the promises of several populist figureheads and the fears of many, it is not taking over European politics. The far right has made significant gains, especially in Italy, where Lega picked up an unprecedented 23 seats. In France, the Rassemblement National came first with 23.5 percent of the vote, but it has lost two Members of the European Parliament. The governing populist parties in Hungary and Poland have also performed strongly. Other populist parties expected to fare well in Germany and the Netherlands have underperformed. The populist left is shrinking.

The mainstream political groups that have enjoyed a majority in the European Parliament up to now—the center-right European People’s Party and the center-left Socialists and Democrats— have lost votes while the liberal and green groups have gained much ground. This means the new legislature still has a clear pro-EU majority.

To date, populist parties have been a loud presence in the European Parliament, but one of limited practical consequence. Their direct influence has been marginal because they have been divided and disunited. However, many of them have committed to coming together in a large new political group that could influence political dynamics in the legislature. They also feel more emboldened by successes at home and at the EU level.

The populist parties could have close to 215 out of 751 seats, the majority on the right. They will have greater numbers and influence within the European Parliament to shape the composition of the next Commission; they could push for amendments in the next budget to make the EU spend less; and they could hamper international agreements. But they are still spread across all political groups. Alone they will not have the numbers to change policy. What they can do, however, is break up majorities on issues where consensus is fragile.

So far, the real influence of populist parties, especially the rising far-right ones, has been indirect by shaping mainstream politics, with many mainstream parties taking on a populist agenda and rhetoric. Rather than contain the populists, this tactic has strengthened them. What is more, they now seem committed to overcoming their differences and teaming up to turn back the clock of European integration and return powers to national capitals.

Driving wedges into mainstream parties has been one of the most successful goals of populist parties at national level and in the European Parliament. While on Russia and disinformation the mainstream center-right and center-left groups have remained united, on migration, trade, and human rights both have been undermined by defections, contradictory positions, party splits, and prioritizing national positions as a result of populist pressure.

The new European Parliament will have lower levels of consensus on issues ranging from climate change to human rights, trade, and defense and security. In these areas—especially where their vote is unlikely to change the majority—the populist parties can be opportunistic and try to sow divisions, thus stifling attempts to make progress on ongoing or planned policies that are already controversial. Wherever divisions exist already—among countries or parties—populists will find opportunities to put a spanner in the works, if only to demonstrate that the EU does not function. Migration policy will continue to be blocked, while security and defense could see obstruction in the name of nationalism or pacifism. Development policy, fighting climate change, and a whole range of other commitments by the EU and its member states that require financing will be challenged by the populist parties on the right.

The key cleavage in the new European Parliament is likely to be between “more” or “less” Europe. Except for the United Kingdom’s new Brexit Party, which won a few more than its predecessor, the UK Independence Party but will leave if the country leaves the EU, and a few others, anti-EU parties have shifted from wanting their country to leave the union to radically changing or dismantling it from within. European integration and cooperation at the EU level remain problematic for a majority of them. On the left, many want to see substantive reform on economic regulation. But the main challenge comes from the nationalist right, where many populist parties advocate the renationalization of policy competences and challenge the role of the EU and its institutions.

# Divide and Obstruct: Populist Parties and EU Foreign Policy

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## Populism in the EU

Until 2016 populist parties did not show much interest in international affairs. This meant that there was little analysis on how they influenced foreign policy choices and international politics.<sup>1</sup> This changed dramatically when populist politicians in the United States and the United Kingdom shook the international order to its core by pulling out of international agreements, showing contempt for multilateralism, or seeking to leave the most integrated regional organization in the world. These events reflected the failure of the established political elites to prevent the rise of a form of populism that is of great consequence to domestic politics and societies as well as to international politics.

In the EU, the election of the new European Parliament starts a new institutional phase, with the appointment of new members of the European Commission and European Council to follow by November. The nationalist and far-right populist parties performed well in the elections; for example, in Italy, France, Hungary, and Poland. Other populist parties expected to fare well in Germany and the Netherlands have underperformed, while the populist left is shrinking.

The results strengthen the presence of populist parties in the European Parliament—parties that claim to

represent “the people,” have a majoritarian view of democracy that disregards the interests of minorities, and share strong anti-establishment sentiments, often without offering detailed political proposals of how they would act differently from the established ways. Many of the parties in the new parliament are fundamentally Euroskeptic. Among these, the far-right parties made the greatest strides and are thus expected to play a more influential role in EU politics—in the European Parliament, the next Commission, and in the Council.

To be sure, national political dynamics will remain the critical factor in shaping the EU’s next five years. The European Council, in which member-state governments are represented, remains the key decision-making body, especially on external affairs. Still, the European Parliament is the main forum of debate, provides political direction for the EU, has powers over how the EU spends its resources, and ratifies international agreements.

How will the greater representation of anti-EU populist parties in the European Parliament—especially the far-right ones—shape the EU’s international policy preferences? Will they influence how the EU deals with Russia, trade, migration, climate change, or security? Could the anti-EU populists of the left and right come together to promote a protectionist trade agenda? Will they push for returning more powers to the member states? Will they influence which major powers the EU works with on the global challenges?

1. Among the few exceptions, see Rosa Balfour et al, *Europe’s Troublemakers*. The populist challenge to foreign policy, European Policy Center, 2016 upon which this paper is partially built.



Populists and non-populist parties portrayed these elections as a battle for Europe’s survival. Anti-EU populists depicted the contest as, in Italy’s Deputy Prime Minister Matteo Salvini’s words, “a referendum between the Europe of the elites, of banks, of finance, of immigration and precarious work; and the Europe of people and labor.”<sup>2</sup> At the same time, pro-EU leaders exhorted citizens to action, with France’s President Emmanuel Macron declaring: “Never, since the Second World War, has Europe been as essential. Yet never has Europe been in so much danger.”<sup>3</sup>

The reality in the coming years is likely to be less dramatic. The new European Parliament is more fragmented and no longer driven by the usual broad coalition of center-right and center-left parties. Its policy decision-making will be subject to variable coalitions, potentially including those of mainstream and even populist parties. Pro-EU majorities will likely be found but will vary according to the policy issue.<sup>4</sup>

So far, populist parties have had little impact on policy in the European Parliament due to their widely divergent interests, low levels of cohesion, and low presence at debates—as this paper confirms. They tend to disagree among themselves. It is to be expected that as soon as the debate touches key national interests—for example, when important decisions on the EU’s seven-year budget will need to be made, or when solidarity on migration policy will be called for—the nationalist populist parties will split on country lines, undermining their potential collective influence. Focusing on international issues, the greater number of populist MEPs may be even less consequential, given that the EU’s main decision-maker continues to be the European Council, where unanimity among governments is necessary on these issues.

This said, recent successes in national politics and the results of the European Parliament elections could change the tactical calculus of populist parties and embolden

2 James Politi, “Italy’s Matteo Salvini calls for a European populist alliance,” *Financial Times*, July 2018.

3 Emmanuel Macron, “For European Renewal,” French Presidency, March 2019.

4 Kevin Cunningham et al, *Kingmakers of the mainstream: Predictions for the European Parliamentary Elections*, European Council on Foreign Relations, April 2019.

them to become more ambitious in influencing the agenda by building pan-European networks. This includes some of those populist parties that until recently wanted their countries to leave the EU but now try to see how together they can undermine the EU without destroying it fully. After all, the EU has provided a great vehicle to amplify

“ *It is to be expected that as soon as the debate touches key national interests, the nationalist populist parties will split on country lines, undermining their potential collective influence.* ”

the populist parties’ Euroskeptical messages once they are elected to the European Parliament and become eligible for EU funding, so leaving the union is not necessarily in their interest. After decades of EU bashing, some parties such as France’s *Rassemblement National* or Italy’s *Lega* claim to have abandoned the goal of leaving the EU. Others are “Remain Euroskeptics”<sup>5</sup> that appreciate the benefits of the single market and EU structural funds but oppose any meaningful further integration, especially on issues such as migration or defense.

These groups now seem to be teaming up. An unprecedented transnational coordination among far right parties—including the *Rassemblement National*, *Lega*, Austria’s *Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs (FPÖ)*, Germany’s *Alternative für Deutschland (AfD)*, the Danish People’s Party, the Finns Party, the Netherlands Freedom Party, and the Czech Republic’s *Freedom and Direct Democracy*—has led to their commitment to create a new political group of their own to be called the *European Alliance of Peoples and Nations*. Hungary’s prime minister, Viktor Orbán, the leader of *Fidesz*, which is now suspended from the center-right European

5 Simon Kuper, “The EU’s enemy within: Eurosceptic Remainers,” *Financial Times*, March 21, 2019.

People's Party (EPP), is being courted to join forces with the far right.

Populist parties can influence EU foreign policy through direct and indirect means. Directly, they may be able to form larger political groups in the parliament and thus earn institutional positions of influence, such as in chairing committees. They will have a say in vetting candidates for the Commission. The parliament will have to approve the next seven-year budget for the EU and populist MEPs can continue advocating for “less Europe,” which could lead to a diminished budget for external relations and climate change, though not for strengthening external borders. The parliament can prevent one of the central EU external actions: ratifying international trade agreements.<sup>6</sup>

Yet the greatest impact of populist parties to date has been indirect, by framing the tone and agenda of the debate, and especially by influencing mainstream parties to adopt populist rhetoric, agendas, and policy preferences.<sup>7</sup> This should continue in the new parliament as a result of their greater representation. Since their rise in the 1990s, populist parties have been successful by constraining mainstream ones, driving the latter to mimic them and to adopt their politics, out of fear that their voters would otherwise drift toward the extremes. This has been particularly evident in migration policy, where the debate has shifted significantly to the right, and could become a key feature of the new parliament, depending on how other political actors respond.

This paper examines the positions of the populist parties on a range of foreign policy issues to see how they may influence debates and policy in the coming years. It also looks at the behavior of populist parties in the 2014–2019 European Parliament to examine what dynamics were at play and to identify the issues where they may manage to

6 The other direct line of influence on the EU as a whole is through national politics, with developments in each member state affecting decision-making in the Commission and European Council. Domestic calculations can also influence indirectly European Parliament dynamics. See Stefan Lehne and Hether Grabbe, *European Parliament Elections Will Change the EU's Political Dynamics*, Carnegie Europe, December 2018. See also Susi Dennison and Pawel Zerka, “The 2019 European Elections: How anti-Europeans plan to wreck Europe and what can be done to stop it,” *European Council on Foreign Relations*, February 2019.

7 Ruth Wodak, *The Politics of Fear: What Right-Wing Populist Discourses Mean*, Sage, 2015.

converge on common platforms to change or affect EU policy.

Mapping out the international policy positions of nearly 40 populist parties running for the European Parliament, it concludes that, even if they gain more seats, pro-EU majorities will support a degree of continuity in EU politics and policy. Hence the greater presence of populist parties in the parliament should prove less disruptive than the heated public debate around populism may suggest. Their impact will depend on their ability to stick together even when their interests diverge, and on the degree to which the rest of the political spectrum avoids being captured by their rhetoric. If the European Parliament were to introduce discontinuity in EU foreign policy, it will be not through the action of the populist parties alone—it will be because mainstream parties either embrace their agenda or cede ground in response to their pressure.

## Defining Populism

Populism has seen several incarnations in Latin America in the 1950s and 1960s, and again since the 1990s in Europe, and worldwide in the 2010s. Many political scientists converge around Cas Mudde's seminal definition of populism as a political stance that takes “society to be ultimately separated into two homogenous and antagonistic groups—the pure people' versus 'the corrupt' elite—and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people.”<sup>8</sup> Anti-elitist rhetoric tends to be one of the most important features of populism, regardless of whether a populist politician is part of the elite, as the success of Silvio Berlusconi and Donald Trump illustrate.

The distinction between “the people” and “the elites” makes populism moralistic. Populists simplify and radicalize values and views that already exist. Under the broad cloak of populism many and diverse parties that draw on national or even local roots and vernaculars are open to be influenced by very different ideologies

8 Cas Mudde, “The populist *Zeitgeist*,” *Government and Opposition*, 39:4, 2004 pp. 542–563, p. 543.

or to changing positions. They have an “ideologically portable” way of looking at politics.<sup>9</sup> The “thin” ideological content of populism<sup>10</sup> means that it can be closer to either or both traditional left or right positions. Some parties, such as Italy’s Movimento 5 Stelle (M5S), defy left-right classifications and have embraced both poles of the traditional spectrum.

Anti-elitism alone is not a sufficient condition to define a party or group as populist, though, or else anti-establishment movements such as Occupy would have been labeled as such. What follows from the claim to represent “the people” is a delegitimization of those seen not to belong to that group. Depending on the party, “the other” can vary from capitalist elites, as was the case in the early days of Greece’s Syriza, the “Eurocrats,” as in the cases of M5S, Lega, the Rassemblement National or the UK Independence Party (UKIP), to immigrants, according to all far-right populist parties. The claim to represent the people has moral content; it is, in the words of the academic Jan-Werner Müller, a “principled, moralized antipluralism [with a] reliance of a non-institutionalized notion of ‘the people.’ The slogan of the former leader of Austria’s FPÖ Heinz-Christian Strache was ‘HE wants what WE want,’ which is not the same as him being like us”.<sup>11</sup> In democracies, this makes populism majoritarian—the will of the majority equals the will of the people and is sovereign. For example, Hungary’s Fidesz and Poland’s Law and Justice Party (PiS) have conceptualized and put into practice the notion that the “will of the people” is higher than the constitutional courts that are designed to contain executive power.

It follows that populism is by definition anti-pluralist, does not acknowledge alternative and minority views, is reluctant to engage in debates with opponents, and is ill adaptable to coalition politics even where populist parties have joined coalition governments. This view also implies that populism has an inherent authoritarian streak.<sup>12</sup> The

9 Peter C. Baker, “‘We the people’: the battle to define populism,” *The Guardian*, January 10, 2019.

10 B. Stanley (2008), ‘The thin ideology of populism’, *Journal of Political Ideologies*, Vol. 13, No. 1, pp. 95-110.

11 Jan-Werner Müller (2017), *What is populism?* London: Penguin Books, pp. 31, 33.

12 Ronald Inglehart and Pippa Norris, “Trump and the Populist Authoritarian Parties: The Silent Revolution in Reverse,” *Perspectives on Politics*, 15:2, 2017.

latter can also be found in the way some populist parties are organized. For instance, the Netherlands’ Partij voor de vrijheid (PVV) does not have any members or democratic procedures to set its agenda. M5S is governed by a centralized technological system, called Rousseau, that uses market research masked as internal democratic debate to decide party preferences and positions.

After the rise of anti-austerity, left-wing movements in the early 2010s, such as Podemos in Spain and Syriza in Greece, the wind subsequently blew in favor of the right. At this end of the spectrum is such a broad variety of groups that there is a risk of conceptual overstretch of the term populism. Some of groups that have gained in prominence are far right without being populist, such

“ *The “thin” ideological content of populism means that it can be closer to either or both traditional left or right positions.* ”

as Greece’s Golden Dawn. Various populist parties, including ones in power such as Fidesz and PiS, have pursued authoritarian policies. Others have made explicit references to Nazism (Germany’s AfD, Austria’s FPÖ) or used fascist language and metaphors in their rhetoric (the Rassemblement National and, more recently, Lega). Others need not hark back to the past to find that Islamophobia and Euroskepticism guarantee their success (the Netherlands’ PVV, the Danish People’s Party). Overarching, anti-immigration has been a platform for far-right populist mobilization for the past two decades in most countries.

In short, populists make a moral claim to represent the people, which in turn entails exclusionary politics, the process of “othering” opponents, and a majoritarian view of democracy. It is important, however, to remember that the tactics, rhetorical postures, anger, and anti-

establishment sentiments that are features of populist parties can also sometimes be found in non-populist ones.

## Populists and Key EU Foreign Policy Issues

Populist parties are scattered across all political groups in the European Parliament and disagree on many vital issues—from trade to Russia and from climate change to security policy. Crucially, while most dislike the EU, they disagree on how to cooperate within it. Populists on the right all mobilize anger and votes to fend off immigration, but they are unlikely to find together a policy to govern migration. And they are likely to quarrel over how to spend the EU’s budget. Should the populist parties manage to work together and increase their influence, one likely cleavage to emerge in the European Parliament will be over whether policy solutions should be decided in Brussels or the national capitals.

In order to map out the range of the heterogeneous positions of Europe’s populist parties, a list of them was compiled based on PopuList, a list “of European parties that can be classified as populist, far right, far left and/or Euroskeptic, and obtained at least 2 percent of the vote in at least one national parliamentary election since 1998”.<sup>13</sup> Parties were included for consideration if they were classified as populist (rather than solely far right, far left, or Euroskeptic) and had at least one member in the outgoing European Parliament. This produced a list of 39 parties whose policy positions were then analyzed to produce individual party profiles (see Annex). The data used came primarily from their manifestos for the 2019 elections (if available at the time of writing), previous manifestos, and additional sources, such as newspaper articles and parties’ social media posts.

The positions of these parties on 11 key policy areas are summarized in Table 1. These positions were coded as favorable (green), unfavorable (red), or ambivalent (orange). For example, Austria’s FPÖ is favorable to

closer relations with Russia and is thus coded as green in that column, but is not favorable to greater EU-level cooperation and is thus coded red under that column. The FPÖ has a more ambivalent position when it comes to the role of the EU in security matters and it is therefore coded orange under that column. When the party does not have an identifiable position on an issue the cell is left blank.

The positions and, especially the behavior of populist parties are much more nuanced than can be described in this way, but these tables summarize where they generally stand on certain topics and highlight policies areas where they could have an impact.

The shock in Europe caused by the 2016 Brexit referendum and then by the conduct of the Brexit negotiations has led many populist parties to adjust their positions on EU membership. Parties such as the Rassemblement National, Lega, and M5S abandoned their anti-EU positions and commitments to hold a referendum on EU or eurozone membership in favor of positions ranging from “dismantling the EU from within” to “changing everything.” What they actually mean by “change” is unclear, but returning powers from Brussels to national capitals is a widely shared agenda. Some populist parties continue to advocate leaving the EU, such as the PVV and FvD in the Netherlands, and of course UKIP and the Brexit Party continue to campaign for the United Kingdom to leave the EU.

Populist left parties such as the Netherlands’ Socialist Party, Sinn Fein, Germany’s Die Linke, and Spain’s Podemos are especially critical of the eurozone and the Stability and Growth Pact, and thus advocate greater regulation to keep the EU in check, especially on trade, to avoid a repetition of the austerity that in their view benefits banks and large corporations on the back of ordinary people. But these parties are less critical of the European integration project in itself.

The heterogeneity of the populist parties remains their most striking feature, in particular on foreign policy issues. Aside from their positions on EU membership, issues pertinent to the current and imminent EU policy

<sup>13</sup> PopuList is peer-reviewed and the result of cooperation among academics and journalists, using a definition of a populist party is based on the work of Cas Mudde (2004), and is thus in line with the one utilized here. See Matthijs Rooduijn et al, “The PopuList: An Overview of Populist, Far Right, Far Left and Eurosceptic Parties in Europe,” The PopuList, 2019.



# Table 1: Policy Positions of European Populist Parties

Country	Party	EU Membership	EU-level Cooperation	Immigration	Free Trade	View of Russia	Development Aid	NATO Membership	View of U.S.	Combating Climate Change	EU Role in Security	EU Enlargement /Turkey
	FPÖ	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
	Vlaams Belang	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
	GERB*	●	●	●	●	●		●	●	●	●	●
	VMRO*	●	●	●	●	●		●	●			●
	Volya	●	●	●	●	●		●	●		●	
	Ano 2011	●	●	●	●	●		●	●	●	●	●
	SPD	●	●	●	●	●		●			●	●
	Dansk Folkeparti	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
	EKRE	●	●	●	●	●		●		●		
	Isamaa	●	●	●	●	●		●	●	●	●	●
	Finns Party	●	●	●			●	●	●	●		
	Rassemblement National	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
	AfD	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
	Die Linke	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	
	Syriza	●	●	●	●	●		●	●	●	●	●
	Fidesz	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
	Jobbik	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●		●
	Sinn Féin	●	●		●			●		●	●	
	M5S	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	
	Forza Italia	●	●	●	●	●			●		●	
	Fratelli d'Italia	●	●	●	●	●	●					
	Lega	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	
	Order and Justice	●	●	●		●		●	●		●	●
	FvD	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
	PVV	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
	SP	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
	Kukiz'15	●	●	●	●	●		●	●	●	●	
	PiS	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
	Smer-SD	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
	L'SNS	●	●	●		●	●	●	●	●	●	●
	Sme Rodina-Boris Kollar	●	●	●	●			●	●			
	OLANO	●	●	●		●		●	●	●	●	
	SNS	●	●	●	●	●		●	●	●	●	
	Unidas Podemos	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
	Vox	●	●	●		●	●	●	●		●	●
	SD	●	●	●	●	●	●		●	●	●	●
	UKIP	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●

\*GERB: Green for EU enlargement, Orange for Turkey. VMRO: Green for EU enlargement, Red for Turkey/Serbia. Syriza: Red for Turkey.

## Table 2: Populists and the European Parliament—Facts & Figures

Country	Party	Parliamentary Group*	Most recent national legislative or federal election	Experience in national government	% Vote 2019 (2014)	Seats 2019 (2014 seats)	Year of foundation
Austria	FPÖ	ENF	26% (2017)	2017-2019	17.2 (19.7)	3 (4)	1956
Belgium	Vlaams Belang	ENF	3.7% (2014)	None	11.5 (4.3)	3 (1)	2004
Bulgaria	GERB	EPP	32.7% (2017)	2009	30.9 (30.4)	6 (6)	2006
Bulgaria	VMRO	ECR	9.07% *	2017*	7.2 (10.6)**	2 (1)	1999
Bulgaria	Volya	ENF	4.15% (2017)	None	3.6 (N/A)	0 (0)	2007
Czech Republic	Ano 2011	ALDE	29.6% (2017)	2014-2017, 2018	21.1 (16.1)	6 (4)	2012
Czech Republic	SPD		10.6% (2017)	None	9.14 (N/A)	2 (0)	2015
Denmark	Dansk Folkeparti	ECR	21.1% (2015)	2001–2011, 2015	10.7 (26.6)	1 (4)	1995
Estonia	EKRE		17.8% (2019)	2019	12.7 (4)	1 (0)	2012
Estonia	Isamaa	EPP	11.4% (2019)	2015-2016, 2016-2019	10.3 (13.9)	0 (1)	2006
Finland	Finns Party	ECR	17.5% (2019)	2015-2019	13.8 (12.9)	2 (2)	1995
France	Front/Rassemblement National	ENF	8.9% (2017)	None	23.3 (24.9)	22 (24)	1972
Germany	AfD	EFDD	12.6% (2017)	None	11 (7.1)	11 (7)	2013
Germany	Die Linke	GUE/NGL	9.2% (2017)	None	5.5 (7.6)	5 (7)	2007
Greece	Syriza	GUE/NGL	35.5% (2015)	2015-now	23.8 (26.6)	6 (6)	2004
Hungary	Fidesz	EPP	48.5% (2018)	1998–2002 2010–now	52.3 (51.5)	13 (12)	1988
Hungary	Jobbik	NI	19.6% (2018)	None	6.4 (14.7)	1 (3)	2003
Ireland	Sinn Féin	GUE/NGL	13.8% (2016)	1918-22	11.7 (19.5)	1 (3)	1905
Italy	M5S	EFDD	32.2% (2018)	2018-now	17.1 (21.2)	14 (17)	2009
Italy	Forza Italia	EPP	14% (2018)	None	8.8 (16.8)	6 (13)	2013
Italy	Fratelli d'Italia	ECR	4.4% (2018)	None	6.5 (3.7)	5 (0)	2012
Italy	Lega	ENF	17.7% (2018)	2018- now	33.6 (6.1)	28 (5)	1991
Lithuania	Order and Justice	EFDD	5.3% (2016)	2012-2016	2.6 (14.3)	0 (2)	2002
Netherlands	FvD	ECR	1.8% (2017)	None	10.9 (N/A)	3 (N/A)	2016
Netherlands	PVV	ENF	13.1% (2017)	2010-2012	3.5 (13.3)	0 (4)	2006
Netherlands	SP	GUE/NL	9.1% (2017)	None	3.4 (9.6)	0 (2)	1971
Poland	Kukiz'15		8.9% (2015)	None	3.7 (N/A)	0 (N/A)	2015
Poland	PiS	ECR***	37.6% (2015)	2005-2007; 2015	45.4 (31.8)	26 (19)	2001
Slovakia	Smer-SD	S&D	28.3% (2016)	2006-2010, 2012	15.7 (24.1)	3 (4)	1999
Slovakia	L'SNS		8% (2016)	None	12 (1.7)	2 (0)	2015
Slovakia	Sme Rodina-Boris Kollar	ECR	6.6% (2016)	None	3.2 (N/A)	0 (0)	2015
Slovakia	OLANO	ECR	11% (2016)	None	5.3 (7.5)	1 (1)	2011
Slovakia	SNS		8.6 (2016)	2006-2010, 2012	4.1 (3.6)	0 (1)	1989
Spain	Unidas Podemos	GUE/NL****	21.2% (2016)	None	10.1 (8)	6 (5)	2014
Spain	Vox	OTHERS	10.3% (2019)	None	6.2 (1.6)	3 (0)	2013
Sweden	SD	ECR	17.5% (2018)	None	15.4 (9.7)	3 (2)	1988
United Kingdom	UKIP	EFDD	1.8% (2017)	None	3.2 (27.5)	0 (24)	1993
United Kingdom	Brexit Party	EFDD	N/A	None	30.8 (N/A)	29 (N/A)	2019

NB: Parties expected to be in EAPN: Vlaams Belang, FPÖ, Dansk Folkeparti, EKRE, Finns Party, Rassemblement National, Lega, Sme Rodina, SNS, SPD, AfD, VOX, and SD  
 \*As United Patriots, \*\*Coalition with Reload Bulgaria, ZNS, Gergiovdnen. \*\*\* 23 MEPs expected to join ECR, 1 others. \*\*\*\* 5 MEPs expected to join GUE/NL, 1 the Greens/EFA  
 Source: European Parliament, <https://www.election-results.eu/> [Accessed May 27, 2019, 11:00 am]

agenda have also been analyzed: migration policy, free trade, views of Russia and the United States, membership of NATO, development aid, fighting climate change, and the EU's role in security.

On migration the spectrum covers the extent to which the parties are in favor or against a regulated open policy along the lines of current EU official policy, which advocates a combination of regular migration channels, in need of reform, and stricter management of irregular migration. Here the left-right spectrum determines the position of populist parties. Populists on the right embrace various anti-foreigner positions combined with anti-Muslim or xenophobic attitudes, which rules out immigration altogether (most notably in the case of Fidesz), even though there are also more nuanced positions. For instance, populists more influenced by economic liberalism, such as Forza Italia and Lithuania's Order and Justice, may favor restricted immigration.

“ *Russia divides the far-right populist parties, including some of those now committing to joining the proposed European Alliance of Peoples and Nations group in the European Parliament.* ”

There is also much diversity of opinion with regard to trade. On the left there is skepticism toward free trade, an advocacy of more regulation, and protectionist instincts. M5S, which escapes the left-right definition, has been campaigning against the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership and the Canada-EU Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA). On the right the lines of distinction lie between economically liberal, pro-free trade parties and those with a more nationalist and protectionist stance. The Dutch and Scandinavian populist right parties are all in favor of free trade as are UKIP, the AfD, and the Central European parties. France's Rassemblement National and

Italy's Lega are far more critical of trade. Austria's FPÖ campaigned against CETA but then voted for it once in government. Some populist right parties are generally pro-free trade but voted against CETA because they do not accept the EU's role in trade.

Russia divides the far-right populist parties, including some of those now committing to joining the proposed European Alliance of Peoples and Nations group in the European Parliament. There is evidence of Russian financial support of Rassemblement National and other populist parties across Europe. Many meet regularly with United Russia, President Vladimir Putin's party. Most West European populist parties on the right have a positive view of Russia, because of their admiration for Putin and his form of authoritarianism, or as a function of their anti-Americanism. Some have openly advocated ending the EU sanctions policy against Russia, though in practice this has not been prioritized by any of them. Pro-Russia far-right populists are joined by some on the left who have favorable attitudes to Russia as a legacy of Communist-era links or out of nostalgia for the past, such as Germany's Die Linke.

But most populist parties in Central Europe, especially in Poland and the Baltic states, and in Scandinavia are very uncomfortable with the overt pro-Putin positions of leaders such as far-right populist leaders Marine Le Pen and Matteo Salvini. Russia's recent behavior, in particular its aggression in Eastern Europe, and Cold War history make it hard for them to accommodate the more pro-Russia views of their peers elsewhere in Europe. This appears to be one reason why PiS has not signed up to the proposed European Alliance of Peoples and Nations group.

Pro-Russia attitudes in the past were often a function of anti-Americanism. But since 2016 admiration for Donald Trump has made some of them more favorably disposed toward the United States, in contrast with the rise in anti-Americanism in Europe generally and particularly in mainstream discourse since his election. These different attitudes have been on display most recently with the crisis in Venezuela, with populist parties taking different positions toward the contested

regime of President Nicolas Maduro. Left populist parties favor Maduro while right ones have been torn between Russia's support for Venezuela's president and the United States' support for his opponents.

A classic left-right divide does emerge on development policy. The populist left is in favor of aid while on the right there is much ambiguity. Only a few populist parties openly advocate ending development aid budgets altogether. Most right ones argue for limiting aid or for using it as a tool to prevent immigration. This would mean substantial changes to the current EU aid commitments, a rejection of the Sustainable Development Goals, which are incompatible with a narrow focus on countering migration, and a likely rollback on the internationally agreed objective of spending 0.7 percent of national GDP on aid.

On climate change the populist parties in Europe appear less vocal and divided, with a few on the right and left in favor of measures to combat it. The only climate-change deniers among them are Germany's AfD and the Netherlands' PVV and FvD. Estonia's EKRE and the Finns Party are against the Paris Agreement but do not deny climate change. Pulling out of the Paris Agreement is not on the agenda for most of the populist parties. But when it comes to elaborating climate policies, some argue against international and European cooperation, seeing the local and national levels as the appropriate ones for action, whether through supporting local rural areas and agriculture (the Rassemblement National) or through investing on the environment to create jobs nationally (Austria's FPÖ).

For many populist parties the question in any policy area is less what needs to be done but at what level should policy be pursued. This is especially relevant with respect to European security. On the left and the most nationalist right, populist parties see NATO membership negatively, with some advocating a referendum on membership or NATO's abolition, or with caution. But these views will not affect EU policy toward NATO. Where there is less agreement among them is over strengthening the EU's role in security through initiatives such as PESCO or rhetorical references to a putative "European army." Left populism

is influenced by pacifism while on the right nationalism gets in the way of European initiatives. Hence, populist MEPs will not support policies toward strengthening the EU's capacity in security and defense.

There is a mix of views among populist parties on the question of EU enlargement. Turkey's accession is seen unfavorably, often colored by anti-Muslim language. The 2016 referendum campaign in the United Kingdom showed how easily the threat of Turkey's accession can mobilize sentiments. The accession of the Balkan states to the EU, however, plays out differently in populist discourse. The countries neighboring the Balkans support their membership aspirations, as do the populist parties there. There are strong links between Viktor Orbán, in particular, and authoritarian leaders in the Balkans, such as Serbia's President Aleksandar Vučić or the former prime minister of North Macedonia Nikola Gruevski, who fled to Hungary to escape trial for corruption.

A speedy accession of the remaining Balkan states is seen by populists in the region as a chance to dilute the EU and hinder its decision-making processes. Salvini has recently met Vučić and friendly relations seem to be blossoming between the two, and the Lega leader has expressed his support to Serbia's accession to the EU. This would consolidate a network of like-minded leaders who would challenge the Franco-German leadership in the policies toward the region and within the EU. Elsewhere, the positions of the populist parties on Balkans enlargement are influenced by their positions on migration and fears that opening the doors to these countries would mean offering their citizens the freedom to move across the EU. Indeed, the alliance of far-right leaders from France to Hungary could come under pressure when conflicting positions on migration come to the fore.

## Populists as Agenda Setters

Populism has had an immense impact on framing the terms of the political debate. From the left "the establishment" is lambasted; from the right political incorrectness has come out of the closet, opening the



door to hate speech, racism, Islamophobia, and anti-Semitism through a rhetoric of “victim-perpetrator reversal,” the construction of conspiracy theories, and scapegoating.<sup>14</sup>

In national politics, center-right parties have not hesitated to form coalition governments with far-right populist parties, thus agreeing to incorporate some of their priorities in the government agenda, with Italy, Austria, and now Estonia being the most exemplary cases.

When they have been in coalition governments, the influence of populist parties on the right can be considered one of the reasons why European immigration policy has consistently shifted toward increasingly restrictive policies, as the experiences from the 1990s onward in Denmark and Italy show. Today, external migration policies openly explore measures that a few years ago were unthinkable, such as the demand to process asylum applications outside the EU.<sup>15</sup>

Populist parties have been influential indirectly too. Right-wing populists have influenced the migration debate even when they were in the opposition—the examples of the AfD in Germany and of the Sweden Democrats show that raising the salience of a topic can influence or even change the commitments of governments of whatever color.

In other policy areas, changes due to populist influence have been more limited. Anti-trade mobilization on the left involving populists as well as more mainstream movements has not decidedly altered the economic and trade policies of any European government. Admiration for Russia and Putin, which is shared by many parties on the right and left of the populist spectrum, has not led to any change in the EU sanctions policy pursued since Russia’s annexation of Crimea in 2014.<sup>16</sup> The analysis in this paper corroborates this.

At the same time, some deviation from mainstream policies may not be caused by the influence of populists at all. For example, Italy’s recent signing of an agreement on

<sup>14</sup> Ruth Wodak, *The Politics of Fear*, p. 4.

<sup>15</sup> Rosa Balfour et al, *Europe’s Troublemakers*.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

cooperation with China on the Belt and Road Initiative is less the result of the country being led by a populist government than it lacking European and Western investments. It is also widely argued that the EU has recently been unable to agree to what used to be standard human rights statements on China as a consequence of the economic dependence of some member states on Chinese investments, regardless of whether or not these countries have strong populist parties.

The political dynamics of the past two decades also reveal that the impact of populist parties in Europe to date is not just direct through electoral success, but above all indirect as a result of how other parties and governments have chosen to respond to the phenomenon. Some mainstream parties have adopted populist policy agendas, notably on curbing migration, in the hope of containing the rise of populist parties. Many political leaders from the so-called mainstream have embraced populism’s rhetoric and mimicked its leadership style, such as Nicolas Sarkozy in France’s 2017 presidential

“ *The impact of populist parties in Europe to date is above all indirect as a result of how other parties and governments have chosen to respond to the phenomenon.* ”

election. In the recent elections in Spain the Popular Party deliberately shifted further right with the goal of curbing the rise of the far-right party Vox. Yet, voters tend to prefer the original version: in France Sarkozy disappeared in the shadow of Marine Le Pen (who then lost to Emmanuel Macron in the second round), and in Spain the Popular Party suffered its biggest electoral defeat ever.

In the European Parliament, the current divide in the European People's Party (EPP)—the political group of Christian Democratic parties—over the membership of Hungary's Fidesz is emblematic of the dilemma of whether to engage or isolate populist parties. In general, the EPP seemed to hold dear the notion that by shifting further right, it would be able to contain populism. The most evident case was Fidesz's membership of the group regardless of its increasingly illiberal, authoritarian rule.<sup>17</sup> Convinced that keeping Fidesz in the group's fold would contain the party's further drift toward the right, and fearful that isolating it would strengthen the far right, the EPP now find itself faced with a loss of credibility and a very strong Fidesz. This dynamic is likely to be a key feature in the new European Parliament.

## Populists in the Parliament, 2014–2019

So far, populist parties have not been very successful in directly shaping policy in the European Parliament. Their behavior in the previous legislative period confirms that it is unlikely that a greater number of seats alone will heighten their impact on European policymaking. This argument is supported by four case studies on EU external policy issues.

These case studies were selected on the basis of a list of the roll-call plenary draft legislative votes between 2014 and 2019 recorded by Votewatch, which was compiled for the policy areas deemed most relevant to EU external action: foreign and security policy, international trade and development,<sup>18</sup> and “civil liberties, justice, and home affairs,” which covers migration and terrorism. A list of 234 votes was compiled, mainly considering the voting result (for/against/abstention) and whether MEPs voted along party lines. We then compiled a list of those cases where majorities were below 70 percent, representing those votes that were more contested, considering that the average majority in each of these policy areas is over 80 percent. These are also the types of votes on which a drastically different seat distribution could have an impact. From

<sup>17</sup> Fidesz was suspended from the group in March 2019.

<sup>18</sup> There were no draft legislative votes on external development issues recorded on Votewatch.

these contested votes, we selected one case per policy area for in-depth analysis:

- in international trade, the EU-Canada Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement;
- in foreign and security policy, including the defense of academic freedom in the EU's external action;
- and in civil liberties, justice and home affairs, the Recast proposal to reform asylum policy.

Furthermore, a case study concerning Russia policy is also included. Russia is a divisive and complex topic on which populist parties have strong positions. Given that the outgoing European Parliament was not engaged in legislative proposals on policies toward Russia, the case of the renewal of the mandate of the European External Action Service to develop strategic communications to address disinformation is taken here as a proxy.

The focus of the case studies is on the voting behavior of populist parties and the rhetoric of their MEPs online and in the plenary, and their interaction with non-populist groups, parties, and MEPs. The data includes the Votewatch measures for how parties voted as well as the text, proceedings, and debates recorded on the European Parliament's website.<sup>19</sup> In addition, we considered statements by MEPs, parties and political groups, tweets, and media reports. Moreover, especially in the academic freedom and the Recast cases, surrounding debates and topics were taken into account, such as the case of the Central European University as well as the debate on migration and the “Dublin system” respectively.

### *The Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement*

One of the most politicized external policy issues in the European Parliament over the past few years was the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) with between the EU and Canada. This 30-chapter agreement included typical items such as the lowering or removal of tariffs for goods between the EU and

<sup>19</sup> For the Votewatch's methodology on “political line of a European party group” and “Cohesion.”

Canada and procurement, but also food safety, customs procedures, investment disputes, the establishment of a new investment court, and regulatory cooperation, which are not typically part of trade agreements.

On February 15, 2017, 59 percent of all MEPs voted in favor of CETA, while 37 percent voted against.<sup>20</sup> The majority of populist MEPs voted against. The vote saw an alignment of left and right populist parties and included Austria's FPÖ, Belgium's Vlaams Belang, Bulgaria's VMRO, the Finns Party, France's Rassemblement National, Germany's

“ The main argument that brought together most of the populist right and left against CETA was based on democracy and transparency.

AfD and die Linke, Greece's Syriza, Hungary's Jobbik, Ireland's Sinn Fein, Italy's Lega and M5S, Lithuania's Order and Justice, the Netherlands' Socialist Party, and Spain's Podemos. Some populist parties that are in favor of international trade also voted against; for example, UKIP and the Netherlands' PVV.

However, Central European populist parties voted in favor of CETA, as did those belonging to the mainstream political groups that supported the agreement—the EPP, the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (S&D), the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE) and the European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR). Slovakia's Smer-SD, the only populist party in the S&D group, was split, with two of its MEPs voting in favor of CETA and one against. While the populist parties did not form a single united bloc over the agreement, the Central European parties were strongly aligned behind it. Additionally, the CETA vote suggests that belonging to a mainstream political group plays a role in the way populist parties vote in the European Parliament.

20 The low number of abstentions also highlights the politicization and particularly polarization of the issue.

The main argument that brought together most of the populist right and left against CETA was based on democracy and transparency, with the agreement framed as “a technocratic, non-elected structure and construct” and even as a “silent coup d'état.”<sup>21</sup> The Confederal Group of the European United Left–Nordic Green Left (GUE/NGL), the populist-Euroskeptic Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy (EFDD) group, and the far-right Europe of Nations and Freedom (ENF) group all used a dichotomy between “us” (the common people) and “them” (the wealthy, undemocratic multinationals). For example, multinationals were said to be “undermining not only the rule of law but [also] putting our democracy at stake.”<sup>22</sup> The Rassemblement National's Marine le Pen accusing pro-CETA MEPs of “giving away our right to legislate and [...] robbing our citizens of the protection of their rights that they expect from their representatives.”<sup>23</sup>

Similar arguments were made by the S&D and the Greens/European Free Alliance (EFA) groups, which also used a dichotomy between “us” (the common people) and “them” (the immoral multinationals and those who negotiated the trade agreement and were, allegedly, in the pay of multinationals). However, while these two groups still supported the EU's role in trade, the populists used democratic concerns as a justification for increased national sovereignty.

The language populists used to make these arguments was emotional and relied on rhetorical questions and one-liners. Anne-Marie Mineur of the Netherlands' Socialist Party (GUE/NGL), for instance, called CETA “a threat to all,”<sup>24</sup> while Tiziana Beghin of Italy's M5S (EFDD) wrote on Twitter ““HERE ARE THE NAMES OF WHO HAVE BETRAYED THE CITIZENS !!!”<sup>25</sup> However, some MEPs from mainstream parties also used such rhetorical methods. For instance, Manfred Weber of Germany's Christian Social Union (EPP) used the us-them dichotomy: “the Greens must ask themselves a critical question if they are with Le Pen and with the

21 Tiziana Beghin (EFDD) during the debate on February 15, 2017

22 Anne-Marie Mineur (GUE/NGL), *ibid.*

23 Marine le Pen (ENF), *ibid.*

24 Anne-Marie Mineur (GUE/NGL), *ibid.*

25 Tiziana Beghin (EFDD), Twitter, June 27, 2017.

Communists.” Using effective one-liners may also explain the populists’ success in framing the CETA debate on social media platforms. Following the parliamentary debate on October 26, 2016, for instance, Marine le Pen had the most popular tweet on CETA that month.<sup>26</sup> However, while on Twitter the populists used emotionally loaded one-liners more often than the mainstream parties did, during the debate in the plenary the chairs of the EFDD and ENF groups chose more moderate language compared to their online activity, mostly referring to technical issues. Here, it was the mainstream groups that used more emotional language and dichotomies (for example, “us” vs. Trump) when referring to the political context and urgency of supporting CETA.

The CETA case was a clear instance of left and right populist parties in the European Parliament mostly converging, even if the left ones were less critical of the notion that the EU should be in charge of trade policy. Other factors too influenced voting behavior, such as whether a party was Western or Central European or which political group it belonged to. Where populists and mainstream parties showed similarities was in the tone of the debate, across the spectrum using emotionally loaded language and dichotomies in the debate, although the populists did so more prominently online.

### *Defending Academic Freedom in the EU’s external action*

On November 29, 2018 the European Parliament voted on a recommendation to the Commission, the Council, and the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy on the inclusion of defense of academic freedom in EU external actions. Academic freedom can be understood as a central EU value and a human right. The text of the recommendation was not controversial, stating that academic freedom should become a specific human rights concern to be acknowledged in public statements and policies relating to EU external actions. It called for extending support mechanisms for human rights defenders to academics, reviewing existing resources for

<sup>26</sup> Gianmaria Sisti, “#MEPTalks: CETA yes or no? Heated Twitter debate at last EP Plenary,” Cambre Associates, November 4, 2016.

academic mobility, and for EU financial assistance for third countries not to undermine academic freedom.

The vote passed with 66.9 percent support and 421 votes. By comparison, the average support for foreign affairs draft legislative resolutions between 2014 and 2018 was 82 percent. For this vote party cohesion was also lower than average.

“ *The recommendation was portrayed by Fidesz as an attack on Hungary’s government rather than a genuine attempt to promote academic freedom.* ”

What made the recommendation the subject of some opposition was the suggestion that the defense and protection of academic freedom and institutional autonomy should become part of the Copenhagen Criteria for EU accession, “with a view to preventing attacks of academic freedom in Member States, as seen in the case of the CEU [Central European University] in Hungary.” The CEU, a U.S. institution supported by the philanthropist George Soros and operating in Hungary, has for some years been the target of repeated systematic attacks by the Fidesz government, which introduced legislation that effectively closed down its programs in gender studies and relating to migration.<sup>27</sup> The recommendation was portrayed by Fidesz as an attack on Hungary’s government rather than a genuine attempt to promote academic freedom in EU external action. For instance, Andrea Bocskor, a Fidesz MEP and shadow rapporteur for the proposal, referred to it as a “campaign organized by socialists and liberals to politically defame Hungary.”<sup>28</sup>

The parliament’s rapporteur for this file, Wajid Khan (S&D), drew attention to cases in Turkey, China,

<sup>27</sup> In December 2018 the CEU moved its joint degree programmes to Vienna.

<sup>28</sup> European Parliament Sitting, November 28, 2018.



Nicaragua, the United States, and Russia, but there were omissions, such as the high-profile case in November 2018 of the imprisonment of the U.K. academic Matthew Hedges in the United Arab Emirates. Some MEPs stressed the importance of avoiding the accusation of double standards. For example, Khan argued that “The EU will have no credibility in its external relations if we cannot get our own house in order—this is directly linked to Fidesz’s attacks on freedoms, including academic freedom, in Hungary. We cannot say there is one rule for them and another rule for us.”<sup>29</sup> Two MEPs who participated in the debate, Clare Moody (S&D) and Judith Sargentini (Greens/EFA), focused solely on the Hungarian case. In the debate, wider questions concerning the limits of EU competencies and the tensions between internal and external policy also come into play. Education policy being a member-state competence allowed some MEPs to argue that the recommendation was being used to attack Hungary’s government.

The vote showed a clear division between liberal, left and right forces in the European Parliament. While no MEPs from the ALDE, S&D, GUE/NGL, and Greens/EFA groups voted against the recommendation and only nine of them abstained, the picture is different for the right side of the political spectrum. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the ENF group did not support the recommendation (0 for, 25 against, 6 abstentions) while the EFDD group (15 for, 19 against, 3 abstentions) and the ECR group (28 for, 22 against, 9 abstentions) were split.

This case is revealing when it comes to the behavior of the EPP and the influence that populist parties have on what are generally understood to be moderate parties. The EPP was divided on this issue, with a plurality of its members abstaining from the vote. The national parties within the EPP that are traditionally closer to Fidesz did not support the proposal. Four of the five MEPs of Austria’s FPÖ and all the MEPs from Bulgaria’s GERB abstained. Five German EPP members voted against and 17 abstained, including Weber, the EPP’s chair and candidate for the post of president of the Commission.

29 S&D – Socialists & Democrats in the European Parliament, “EPP weakens European Parliament’s recommendations on academic freedom due to pressure from Orbán,” Euractiv, November 21, 2018.

As Cas Mudde has commented, “the EPP is today much more the party of Viktor Orbán than of Angela Merkel.”<sup>30</sup> At the time, fears of pushing Fidesz out of the political group and into a Euroskeptic one guided the EPP’s appeasement of the party, as demonstrated in this vote. The EPP compromised its commitment to EU values and this case supports the argument that keeping populist parties in the fold of wider political groups moderates them is weak. Rather, the opposite can happen with populist parties, especially at the extremes, redefining and radicalizing the mainstream. This dynamic is likely to be a central feature of politics in the new European Parliament, especially if Fidesz remains in the EPP.

### *The Recast Proposal*

The Recast proposal concerns the effort to amend the “Dublin system” by which the EU handles applications for international protection by a third-country national or stateless person. The Dublin regulation entered into force in 2014 and determines which EU member state is responsible for examining an asylum application—usually the state where the asylum seeker first enters the EU. The regulation also aims to ensure a fair examination of the application. Since the rise in the number of asylum seekers during 2015, frontline countries such as Italy and Greece have called for a reform of the Dublin system to address their disproportionate responsibilities in hosting refugees.

The European Commission initiated a reform proposal (Recast) in May 2016, which included amendments regarding the sharing of responsibility proportionally to the wealth and size member states, as well as modifications to the system for allocating asylum seekers. Before the proposal moved to the plenary, the vote in the European Parliament’s Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs in October 2017 already highlighted a split in the EPP that was later repeated in the plenary.

30 Cas Mudde, “The Central European University is the latest victim of the Trump era,” *The Guardian*, December 4, 2018.

In the plenary vote<sup>31</sup> on November 16, 2017, on the right most members from the EFDD and ENF groups voted against the proposal, with the rest either abstaining or not voting (both of the latter options are available to MEPs). The only ENF abstentions came from Italy's Lega, which justified its decision by arguing that the regulation was going to pass regardless. Within the ECR group most populist parties voted against the proposal with Bulgaria's VMRO abstaining and Germany's AfD not voting. The EPP suffered the most from internal disunity with 30 of its members rejecting the proposal, 25 abstaining and 8 not voting. Fidesz members voted against the proposal, except for one who voted for it and two who were absent.

On the left, most populist parties either voted in favor of the Recast proposal or abstained. However, Slovakia's Smer-SD (S&D) and the Czech Republic's ANO2011 (ALDE) broke with their party groups and voted against the proposal.

In fact, MEPs from the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia voted very heavily against the Recast proposal. These countries are also primarily responsible for the proposal being blocked in the Council, confirming that national priorities can prevail over political group cohesion, especially on highly sensitive issues.<sup>32</sup> For example, the Danish People's Party (ECR) voted against the proposal while Denmark's Social Democrats (S&D) abstained. Only four of Poland's Civic Platform members (EPP), the political rival of the country's ruling PiS (ECR) voted along group lines, with two against the proposal and 13 abstentions—a striking result considering that Civic Platform is usually one of the parties displaying the most group cohesion in the European Parliament.

Populist parties on the far right have been sending a common and consistent message that they oppose immigration. This continues to act as a “siphoning” issue, causing defections from the center-right and center-left

31 Votewatch, “Establishing the criteria and mechanisms for determining the Member State responsible for examining an application for international protection lodged in one of the Member States by a third-country national or a stateless person (recast),” November 16, 2017.

32 David M. Farrel et al, “National or European Parliamentarians? Evidence from a New Survey of the Members of the European Parliament,” *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies*, 50:4, 2012.

political groups. The Recast case provides an example of this, revealing the many party cleavages in Europe, with national positions taking precedence over political group cohesion when it comes to certain highly salient issues. In this case the far right populists voted along similar lines to reject the mandate to reform the Dublin system. In the future, the unity of the far right could be challenged when national interests enter into conflict; for instance, in case of a refugee crisis over the distribution of responsibilities for hosting refugees, or in burden-sharing among member states.

“ *Migration policy is a field where populists have been successful at indirectly influencing politics even without having a significant numbers of MEPs.* ”

Migration policy is also a field of great vulnerability for mainstream political parties of both left and right. The Recast case shows how national concerns and sensitivities about migration played against the position of the political groups. This is a field where populists have been successful at indirectly influencing politics even without having a significant numbers of MEPs. The case, however circumscribed by the fact that the legislative process for the proposal is currently stalled, gives insights into dynamics among political parties that have also been playing out at national level and in the Council of the EU over one of the most manipulated and salient issues of the past few years.

### *Russia and Disinformation*

Russia has been a contentious European policy issues for years, especially since the war in Ukraine and Russian interference in the 2016 US presidential election. Many of the populist parties across the spectrum, for a variety of reasons, have a favorable attitude toward Russia and would be potentially in favor of reviewing the current

sanctions policy against targeted Russian individuals and entities. The contentious nature of Russia's influence in the European Union is amplified by the many well-documented links the country has to right-wing populist parties.<sup>33</sup> Many left-wing populist parties and some mainstream ones also have a history of friendly relations with Russia, which explains why the EU unity achieved over sanctioning Russia over its actions in Ukraine is seen as precarious despite the fact that it has lasted more than many expected.<sup>34</sup> Looking at a case involving Russia is vital when assessing potential dynamics in a European Parliament with a greater number of populist MEPs. The debate over disinformation and Russia's role in it is increasingly politicized, with many highlighting the risk of Russian election meddling.<sup>35</sup>

“ *The mainstream parties did not split over how to handle Russia and disinformation—here the populists did not drive a wedge in the other parties.* ”

The power to change Russia policy lies in the Foreign Affairs and European Councils, not in the European Parliament. Therefore, here disinformation is used as a proxy to gauge attitudes and arguments about Russia. The chosen case is the debate (which was of no legislative consequence) on the follow-up that the European External Action Service had pursued on the European Parliament's 2016 report on EU strategic communication to counteract propaganda by third parties. The report calls for increasing legal frameworks and bolstering existing legislation concerning disinformation threats, chiefly with regard to the General

33 Human Rights First, "Russian Influence in Europe," January 11, 2017; Luke Harding, "We Should beware Russia's links with Europe's right," *The Guardian*, December 8, 2014; Marius Laurinavicius, *A Guide to the Russian Tool Box of Election Meddling: a platform to Analyse the Long Term Comprehensive Kremlin Strategy of Malign Influence*, International Elections Study Center.

34 Euractiv, "EU unlikely to heed British call for more Russia sanctions," August 23, 2018.

35 Janosch Deckler, "Ex-NATO chief: Russia to launch 'major' effort to meddle in European Election," *Politico*, February 15, 2019.

Data Protection Regulation and the role of the European External Action Service Strategic Communication Task Force. The report stresses the need to further develop a European approach to tackling disinformation and to make combatting this a high priority for the European Parliament. It concludes with recommendations on how to safeguard the European elections and for new legislation in this regard.

On March 13, 2019, 73 percent of MEPs voted in favor of the report, while 22 percent voted against it.<sup>36</sup> The ALDE, EPP, and S&D groups voted overwhelmingly in favor and showed great cohesion. The conservative ECR group also voted for the report but was less unified with two of its members voting against and four abstaining. The parties further left and right on the ideological spectrum voted overwhelmingly against the report. On the left, 93.3 percent of GUE-NGL members voted against as did 73 percent of Greens/EFA members. The far-right parties also voted near-unanimously against the report—all 32 EFDD and 25 ENF members, with 7 ENF members abstaining.

This polarization can be seen in the plenary debate on March 12, 2019.<sup>37</sup> For example, Jean Luc Schaffhauser of France's Rassemblement National (ENF) accused his colleagues of "See[ing] the hand of the foreigner behind all dissidence with regard to the Europeanist project: Brexit? It's Putin! Yellow vests? It's Moscow! It's raining in Warsaw? It's the fault of the Russians!"<sup>38</sup> In the run-up to the debate the ENF group had also proposed an amendment that shortened the report significantly, eliminating any proposal to increase legislation or regulation, and removing any reference to Russia.<sup>39</sup> None of the populist parties on the left spoke during the debate.

36 VoteWatch, "Follow up taken by the EEAS two years after the EP Report on EU strategic communication to counteract propaganda against it by third parties," March 13, 2019.

37 European Parliament, "Follow up taken by the EEAS two years after the EP Report on EU strategic communication to counteract propaganda against it by third parties," March 12, 2019.

38 Ibid.

39 Ibid.

Favorable attitudes toward Russia can thus be found at both ends of the political spectrum, but in this case they were mixed up with the questions of protecting free speech and stopping the expansion of EU powers. As in the case of CETA, this one shows that left and right populists can align themselves with each other. It remains to be seen whether they would change the calculation if they had the chance of being in a majority. And, unlike in the Recast and academic freedom cases, the mainstream parties did not split over how to handle Russia and disinformation—here the populists did not drive a wedge in the other parties.

## Conclusion

Populists are most powerful when the mainstream parties are vulnerable to their rhetoric and unable to offer counter-arguments. This also means that, should mainstream parties retune their politics, populist influence can be contained and remain commensurate with what are still minority positions held by parties with contradictory and often conflicting agendas, and with a poor record of participation and cohesion in the European Parliament.

Past experience shows that populist parties so far have had a negligible direct impact on legislation in the European Parliament. There are cases, such as on CETA and disinformation, in which left and right ones have voted together, for different reasons, but they have never formed majorities. Their divisions, low levels of cohesion, and lack of interest in the European Parliament made them less influential than the number of their MEPs might have warranted.

But populists have played a critical role in influencing and splitting mainstream parties at the national level and in the European Parliament. Looking at the cases studied above, while on Russia and disinformation the mainstream center-right and center-left remained united, on migration policy, trade, and academic freedom both were undermined by defections, contradictory positions, party splits, and paramount national positions. Driving wedges into mainstream parties has been one of the most successful goals of populist parties.

If the far-right populist parties do manage to form a large political group in the European Parliament, this will show they are starting to take politics in the institution more seriously. And this will give them the opportunity to increase their influence by heading parliamentary committees and shaping the institutional debate. In the process, their views on the future of the EU might become clearer—but their divisions and inconsistencies will also become more evident.

The key dichotomy in the new European Parliament is likely to be between “more” or “less” Europe. While the populist demands for their countries to leave the EU have, for now, subsided, European integration and cooperation at the EU level remains problematic for a majority of them. On the left, many want to see substantive reform on economic regulation. But the

“ *Should mainstream parties retune their politics, populist influence can be contained and remain commensurate with what are still minority positions held by parties with contradictory and often conflicting agenda.* ”

main challenge comes from the nationalist right, where many populist parties advocate the renationalization of policy competences and challenge the role of the EU and its institutions.

This can open Pandora’s Box when it comes international policy fields, especially where the European Parliament will have lower levels of consensus on issues ranging from climate change to human rights, trade, and defense and security, as highlighted in this paper. In these areas, especially when their vote is unlikely to change the



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majority, the populist parties can be opportunistic and try to sow divisions.

On the surface, these dynamics will not change EU policy, but they can stifle attempts to make progress on ongoing or planned policies that are controversial. Wherever divisions exist already, among countries or parties, populist parties will find opportunities to put a spanner in the works, if only to demonstrate that the EU does not function. For example, migration policy has been blocked in the Council, largely due to the positions of countries led by populist governments. The new European Parliament is unlikely to change this. In the also contentious area of security and defense, the broad spectrum of populist parties opposed to the EU playing a stronger role in defense and security—for a variety of reasons from pacifism to nationalism and different views on international alignments—could obstruct progress.

Decisions on the EU budget will be affected by what happens in the European Parliament, with development

policy, fighting climate change, and a whole range of other commitments by the EU and its member states being challenged by the populist parties. Outcomes will depend on the strength of the other parties that have led on making those commitments and that care about the EU's global reputation.

Populism does not suit the EU, which is a long-term planner and a consensus-builder, and relies heavily on technocratic expertise—things that are anathema to populists. So the rise of populism, especially of the far-right and nationalist variety, does pose a fundamental challenge to the very nature of the EU.

Pro-EU parties and actors will have to do more, especially to push back the anti-EU and anti-democratic far-right. The populist challenge can be resisted, but this requires more than just defending the status quo. The new European Parliament could be one of the theaters in which pro-Europeans find a new sense of purpose and redefine the EU for the 21st century.

# Annex. Party Profiles

## Austria

*Anne Flotho-Liersch*

### **Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs (Freedom Party of Austria)**

*Slogan: Österreich zuerst (Austria first)*

The Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ) was founded in 1956 and initially advocated against both political Catholicism and socialism. The party's ties with Austria's Nazi legacy shaped its political outlook profoundly while its leadership was increasingly confronted with conflicting liberal and nationalist wings. Politically largely isolated until then, the party formed a coalition in 1983 with the Social Democratic Party (SPÖ), having abandoned its extremist roots in favor of a more centrist position. However, this alliance was fractured by the party's new leadership. Jörg Haider started a shift in FPÖ ideology toward right-wing populism, prompting the SPÖ to distance itself. EU member states initiated diplomatic sanctions when the party entered a coalition with the Christian Democratic Austrian People's Party (ÖVP) in 2000, arguing that the incoming centrist-right government would breach fundamental European values. The measures backfired, however, as the media as well as the ruling coalition succeeded in framing the sanctions as illegitimate foreign meddling in domestic affairs.

A period of international criticism and internal conflicts saw the FPÖ cede the chancellorship and increasingly lose popular support, culminating in Haider's defection in 2005. Following the split, Heinz-Christian Strache was elected as chairman and led the party on an increasingly radical, anti-immigration, anti-Islam, and Euroskeptic platform. With rising support in opinion polls, particularly among young people, the FPÖ achieved its greatest success in the 2016 presidential election, in which its candidate Norbert Hofer won the first round with 35.1 percent of the vote before losing in the second round. In the 2017 parliamentary elections, the FPÖ won 26 percent of the vote. Following talks with the ÖVP, a coalition was formed, with the FPÖ

gaining control over six ministries including finance, justice, defense, and foreign affairs.

The FPÖ does not consider foreign policy to be a priority. Of its ten "Liberal policy guidelines," only points nine and ten relate to foreign policy, and even in this context the emphasis is on the preservation of Austria's interests and autonomy rather than on international cohesion. As its party slogan "Österreich zuerst" suggests, FPÖ foreign policy centers upon "securing the sovereignty of Austria and protecting the freedom of its citizens." According to the party manifesto, openness to the world is predicated upon appreciation and respect for one's own culture and values, and the party identifies this self-interest as the determinant of whether to "sincerely respect" or "fend off" foreign cultures if they pose a threat. In the same vein, foreign aid is envisaged primarily as a means toward "self-help," and as a response to crisis situations and refugees (although FPÖ anti-immigration rhetoric would shape what form this response could conceivably take). With regards to trade, the FPÖ has been somewhat ambivalent; while it originally campaigned against the EU-Canada Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement in opposition, it approved the agreement once it assumed office.

Austria's relationship with the EU is perhaps the most clearly defined aspect of FPÖ foreign policy and reflects the preservation of national interests in calling for a Europe of "self-determined peoples and fatherlands." While commitment to Europe is certainly of importance to the party, this is conditional upon a rejection of "forced multiculturalism, globalization and mass immigration" and decentralization of power to national governments. Preservation of Austria's neutrality is required within the framework of a common European foreign and security policy, as is distance from non-European powers and military alliances dominated by non-European countries. In short, FPÖ foreign policy is dominated by a thinly veiled ethnocentric rhetoric that prioritizes domestic culture and security.

## Belgium

Laura Groenendaal

### Vlaams Belang (Flemish Interest)

*Slogan: Vlaanderen weer van ons (Flanders back to us)*

The history of Vlaams Belang started in the 1970s. Among tensions of the different language communities in Belgium, the government introduced in 1977 the Egmont Pact as part of the *Gemeenschapsact* (Community Pact), which aimed to change Belgium from a unitary to a federal state. The “registration rights” allowed the French-speaking community in the Flemish municipalities surrounding Brussels to register in the capital and consequently receive language facilities and voting rights in Brussels. This was unacceptable to part of the Flemish community and there was strong opposition to both pacts. While the *Gemeenschapsact* was never implemented due to strong opposition, it caused political unrest and the Volksunie (People’s Union) party broke into two radical parties: the Vlaams Nationale Partij (Flemish National Party) led by Karel Dillen and the Vlaamse Volkspartij (Flemish People’s Party) led by Lode Claes.

After having participated in the 1978 elections jointly, the two parties decided to merge into the Vlaams Blok led by Karel Dillen. Over the years the focus of the party shifted from community-related issues to migration and it started to gain popularity, especially in Antwerp. When it won its first seat in the European Parliament in 1989, other Flemish parties declared that none of them would ever be in a ruling coalition with Vlaams Blok. Meanwhile, the party continued to win significantly, increasing its number of seats in the 1991 parliamentary elections threefold compared to 1987. As a consequence of their “cordon sanitaire,” it became very difficult for the mainstream parties to form a ruling coalition after elections. In 2000 the party was charged and convicted of racism and in the aftermath changed its name into Vlaams Belang in 2004. From 2007 it started losing seats and suffered from internal disputes. In the 2014 federal elections, Vlaams Belang lost 9 seats and it currently holds 3 out of 150 in the Chamber.

Vlaams Belang argues for European cooperation as before the Maastricht Treaty, focusing on the European Economic Community and the European Free Trade Association with prominently on the agenda Flemish independence, freedom, cooperation on a voluntary basis, subsidiarity, and sovereignty. It also supports the replacement of the euro with a new monetary union consisting of European states with similar economies. Immigration, the party’s most pressing issue, should be regulated more strictly, especially regarding family reunification and assimilation, with eviction of those immigrants with criminal records. The party strongly favors reintroduction of national borders.

European migration policy should focus on taking care of refugees in their own region and development aid should be tied to the willingness of receiving countries to cooperate regarding identification and repatriation of their subjects. While Vlaams Belang opposed the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership and the EU-Canada Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement, it recognizes the importance of Europe’s competitive edge on the global market and warns about overregulation by the EU.

Russia is regarded as an important ally against multiculturalism, Islamization, and the fight against Islamic State, and Vlaams Belang is also pro-Trump. The party strongly opposes the accession of Turkey to the EU, arguing for stopping negotiations and financial support, while disapproving of visa-free entry of Turkish nationals. In the field of defense, the party opposes initiatives for a European army but supports cooperation with like-minded countries such as the Netherlands and Germany. Vlaams Belang wants to reduce the influence of the French-speaking and southern European states in this field. Regarding climate and environmental matters, it has a very skeptical attitude toward climate policy, stressing the costs for businesses and “the common man.”

## Bulgaria

*Marta Matrakova*

### GERB

*Slogan: Europe hears us*

GERB has been the main governmental force in Bulgaria during the last 10 years. Its leader, Boyko Borisov, has led three center-right governments since 2009. The resignations of two GERB cabinets in 2014 (due to social protests) and in 2017 (due to reduced electoral support in the presidential election) were followed by the re-election of GERB. The 2016 presidential election, which the Socialist Party won, prompted the GERB cabinet to resign, leading to snap parliamentary elections. Since May 2017, GERB governs with the coalition United Patriots, which includes three far-right nationalist parties—Macedonian Revolutionary Organization-Bulgarian National Movement (VMRO-BND), National Front to Rescue Bulgaria (NFSB), and Ataka. The governmental program for 2017–2021 shows certain concessions on the side of the United Patriots. For instance, the perspective for deeper integration of Bulgaria in the EU and a more gradual increase of pensions represent concessions from its pre-electoral promises.

Since its creation in 2006 GERB has adopted a populist rhetoric, which initially attacked corrupt elites, and claimed to establish a close relationship with the people. However, GERB focuses on the center-right political space, without adopting a radical position as other populist parties in Bulgaria. In the first period of its existence, the party was built on the social grouping “Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria” (from which the acronym GERB originates). The party focused on the figure of its leader Borisov. In 2019 a corruption scandal known as “Apartment Gate” led to the resignation of key GERB members and undermined support for the party.

Borisov has been defined as an opportunistic when it comes to values. He adopts a security-based perspective towards migration. In the EU integration process, Borisov follows the line defined by the European People’s Party, in

spite of what might be seen as a strategic agreement with Hungary’s Prime Minister Victor Orban on the need to secure the borders of the EU. In the last years, Borisov’s cabinet has taken important steps in order to advance Bulgaria toward the introduction of the euro. On the other hand, certain conservative trends are reflected in the refusal to sign the Istanbul Convention on violence against women.

Regarding Russia, the position of GERB and Borisov has changed since the 2000s. In the last two years, important steps on the side of the Bulgarian and Russian governments have been taken in order to develop common energy projects in the Balkans. GERB also advocates a unitary EU position on Russia. With regard to the situation in Ukraine, it also supports full compliance with international law and the territorial integrity of all countries. Concerning security issues, GERB supports the strengthening of EU and NATO defense capacities.

### **Macedonian Revolutionary Organization-Bulgarian National Movement (VMRO-BND)**

*Slogan: We protect Bulgaria*

The Macedonian Revolutionary Organization-Bulgarian National Movement (VMRO-BND) was formed in 1999. The use of VMRO in the name of the party is reminiscent of the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization, a national revolutionary movement that sought the liberation of Macedonia from the Ottoman Empire at the end of the 19th and beginning of 20th century. After the First World War, this movement supported the re-unification of territories that had been part of Bulgaria in previous historical periods. Currently, VMRO-BND defines itself as a patriotic movement and a successor of the historical movement of liberation VMRO.

The party seeks national prosperity and defends nationalism as a sense of community belonging. It advocates raising awareness on topics as such demography, family, social services, and security. It is for the protection of Bulgarian national identity at the domestic and international level. The nationalistic



discourse of affirmation of Bulgarian identity has been accompanied by hate speech against Muslim refugees, adopting terms such as “invaders.” In addition, dominant topics among the main political proposals of VMRO-BND are the need to destroy or control the ghettos of Roma communities and opposition to the introduction of radical Islam and Islamization. The party opposes the use of religious symbols such as covering the face, the use of other languages than Bulgarian in religious services, and loudspeakers outside mosques.

Concerning foreign policy, VMRO-BND is against the involvement of Turkey in domestic issues. In the European Parliament it has focused on the defense of the Bulgarian national interest, which has led the party to oppose the Mobility Package introduced last year. The party supports the idea of a “Europe of Nations” and opposes the value-based discourse of the EU as a source of discrimination against those who are considered as second-class citizens. The EU bureaucracy needs to be reformed in order to respect national sovereignty.

Regarding North Macedonia, the leaders of VMRO-BND condition support of its membership in NATO and the EU on the non-recognition of the Macedonian as a language. The party opposes the integration of Turkey in the EU and supports the reconsideration of the agreement with the United States on the military base in Bulgaria, as well as the participation of the military in foreign interventions. It also supports positive relations with other forces beyond the EU, such as Japan, China, and Russia.

### **Volya (Will)**

*Slogan: We all have the right to fair prices. Together we stop the pillage*

Will was established by the Veselin Mareshki, a billionaire who owns petrol stations and pharmacies. It is a nationalist party that opposes immigration and supports friendly relations with Russia. In 2018 it joined the Movement for a Europe of Nations and Freedom. In 2018 Volya led a campaign for a referendum on exiting NATO. Mareshki also attacked the EU, which, as he believes has prevented important energy and investment projects in Bulgaria

and in this way had negative effects on Bulgaria’s development. He also expressed critical positions towards the EU, arguing, like some far-right parties, that the “EU looks like the Soviet Union” and does not represent the interests of ordinary people.

## **Czech Republic**

*Jan Rempala*

### **Ano 2011**

*Slogan: Bude Lip (Yes it can get better)*

Ano 2011 is a populist party established by Prime Minister Andrej Babis, who claims that it is “a right-wing party with social empathy.” Most observers, however, place the party either on the left or the center. ANO 2011 is the successor to the Action of Dissatisfied Citizens movement ANO (YES). ANO 2011 began as an association as Babis, the second-richest man in the Czech Republic, found positive reactions to his talks about fighting corruption. ANO 2011’s slogan “Yes it can get better” fits this kind of rhetoric. In 2012 it became an official political party.

Babis is a figure of controversy, having been embroiled in allegations of EU funding fraud, collaboration with the communist secret police, and conflicts of interest. As of April 2019, the police recommended he be indicted for fraud. Despite these controversies, he is still a highly popular figure.

ANO 2011’s progression from Euroskeptic to a more pro-EU stance also mimics the development of Babis’s views. As a result of his leadership, ANO 2011 is seen as a liberal/centrist party in Europe, being a member of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe, and one of its members, Vera Jourova, is the EU commissioner of justice, consumers, and gender equality. ANO 2011 could be viewed in its approach to the EU as “euro-opportunist,” as Czech reporter Daniel Kaiser stated.

With regard to foreign and security policy, the party emphasizes the need for a strong and proactive Czech position in the EU and NATO. The protection of the EU's external border as well as fighting illegal migration are seen as key points. The party has also expressed a favorable position on EU enlargement, should candidate states truly fulfill the accession conditions and if enlargement will not have a direct negative impact on Czech interests in the EU. However, since the EU crisis following the refugee influx in 2015-2016, the Czech Republic has fallen out of line with the EU mainstream, alongside other Visegrad 4 countries. Babis, then deputy prime minister, flatly rejected the EU refugee quota, stating "We must guarantee the security of Czech Citizens. Even if we are punished with sanctions." As prime minister he has also offered solidarity to Poland in the wake of the Article 7 proceedings by the EU against the country's government.

### **Svoboda a prima demokracie (Freedom and Direct Democracy)**

*Slogan: Ceska Republika na 1 miste, spolecne proti diktatu EU (Czech Republic in first place, together against the EU dictates)*

Svoboda a prima demokracie (SPD) was founded by Tomio Okamura, a Czech-Japanese politician, and Radim Fiala in 2015, when they split from Okamura's previous parliamentary group, Dawn of Direct Democracy. The SPD was soon billed an anti-immigrant, hard Euroskeptic party. It takes its name from the Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy political group in the European Parliament. It also has close ties with France's Rassemblement National and Marine Le Pen endorsed the SPD in the runup to the 2017 elections.

Okamura currently serves as the deputy speaker for the Chamber of Deputies. He has advocated direct democracy more than anything else. Okamura helped create the Dawn of Direct Democracy group, which took a populist, anti-immigrant, Euroskeptic, and nationalist stance. Okamura left to create the SPD after half of the group enacted what he saw as a "putsch" against his leadership. The SPD can be seen as an evolution of Okamura's political views from his start as an independent candidate.

Despite having not won seats in the European Parliament in 2014, the SPD shows a clear ideological preference for stances of the Europe of Nations and Freedom (ENF) political group, even hosting a conference in 2017 for it in Prague. The SPD sees the EU as a clear threat to liberty and democracy in Europe as well as to Czech sovereignty. A core program point is to "fight against the Islamization of Europe," in line with the far-right groups in the ENF.

The SPD promotes the idea of a referendum on withdrawing from the EU and NATO, proclaiming that the army should be used to defend the country instead of participating in international military operations. The SPD promotes strengthened cooperation by the Visegrad 4, seeing it as a group of "sovereign states looking for a common strategy against the EU."

The SPD has said it will join the proposed European Alliance of People and Nations group. In April it hosted a 'public meeting' in Prague with Matteo Salvini, Geert Wilders, and Marine Le Pen.

## **Denmark**

*Laura Groenendaal & Jan Rempala*

### **Dansk Folkeparti (Danish People's Party)**

*Slogan: Mere Danmark mindre EU (More Denmark less EU)*

The Danish People's Party (DPP) is considered to be right-wing populist with a nativist ideology. It is regularly described in the media as anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim. It was founded in 1995 by Pia Kjaersgaard who handed the leadership over to Kristian Thulesen Dahl in 2012.

The DPP played an important role during the Liberal-Conservative government's tenure from 2001 to 2011. It supported the ruling coalition in exchange for support in some of its major policy stances. As a result, the DPP was able to start enacting stricter immigration laws and

played a major role in drafting the 2002 immigration law that for the time was billed as Europe's strictest. During this period, the DPP continued to focus on immigration and social issues and saw a steady growth in voter support. In the 2015 elections, the party came second with 21.1 percent of the vote and it currently provides parliamentary support to the governing coalition. The DPP's effect on Danish politics is that many of the other parties also adopted tougher stances on immigration, as seen with the Social Democrats.

The DPP strongly focuses on "Danish sovereignty" and the idea of "Danishness", and it refuses to accept multiculturalism, Islamization, or anything it sees as threatening "Danish cultural heritage." Dahl stated that "on many stretches we are anti-Muslim" but he denied being a "fanatical anti-Muslim." The DPP spearheaded the initiative to create a Ministry for Refugees, Immigrants, and Integration to stem the flow of migrants (which was abolished after 2011 when the right-wing coalition lost the elections). Perhaps the most famous statement from the DPP was from Kjaersgaard in 2005, when in response to Nordic and EU criticism of the party's immigration policy she stated "[i]f they want to turn Stockholm, Gothenburg or Malmö into a Scandinavian Beirut, with clan wars, honor killings, and gang rapes, let them do it. We can always put a barrier on the Oresund Bridge."

The DPP has had at least one member in the European Parliament since 1999. It is firmly against Denmark adopting the euro and its hard stance on immigration comes into conflict with the EU's freedom of movement. The DPP's main website features many articles warning about how Eastern Europeans are taking advantage of EU membership as well as of open borders.

The DPP is pro-NATO and pro-UN while being opposed to initiatives leading to a European army. It is a strong believer in transatlantic relations, with Europe and the United States being tied together by "Western Christian civilization and by two world wars." The party is also against the accession of Bosnia and Turkey to the EU for being Muslim nations. The DPP defense spokeswoman and MP Marie Krarup in 2016 was quoted as saying she would welcome Russia's President Vladimir Putin's help

in dismantling the current EU system, even though he represents a system that Denmark does not want. She also has said Russia should be viewed as a "future ally" and that Putin has been demonized by the West.

While not opposed to development aid, the DPP argues for stricter controls and clearer goals. It also had a positive stance toward green and sustainable initiatives but rejected a highly popular petition calling for action on climate change in 2019.

## Estonia

*Tobias Kutschka*

**Eesti Konservatiivne Rahvaerakond (Conservative People's Party of Estonia)**

*Slogan: Eesti Eest! (For Estonia!)*

The populist radical right Conservative People's Party of Estonia (EKRE) made international headlines when it managed to secure 17.8 percent of the votes in the parliamentary elections earlier this year, more than doubling its previous share. Following this, EKRE entered into a coalition with the Center Party and Isamaa that pledges to adopt some of its strict immigration policies and to hold binding referenda, and that awarded EKRE the Ministries of Finance, Interior, Foreign Trade and IT, Environment, and Rural Affairs. The party leadership made white supremacy gestures at the swearing-in ceremony of the new government in the parliament.

EKRE announced it plans to join the far-right bloc that is expected to be formed after the elections and is being supported by Italy's Lega, Germany's Alternative für Deutschland, France's Rassemblement National, and Finland's Finns Party.

EKRE was formed in 2012 and is headed by Mart Helme and his son Martin Helme. It receives strong support in rural areas, mobilizing voters around issues like fear of migration and promoting "traditional" values. Together with those, EKRE's even more radical youth

organization, Blue Awakening, party members promote nativist positions, participate in torchlight marches on Independence Day, and meet with former Estonian Second World War SS members. Due to its nationalist positions, Blue Awakening was excluded from the European Conservatives and Reformists group's youth wing.

Nativism and concern for sovereignty feature prominently in EKRE's positions on EU policy issues. The party advocates prioritizing Estonian sovereignty over EU integration. EKRE wishes to amend the Lisbon Treaty, calls for equal treatment of member states (for instance, by each country having equal representation in the European Parliament), and demands that member states can leave the EU without obstacles. EKRE heavily opposes immigration, arguing Muslims are threatening Europe's values as well as its identity, and calls on the Estonian diaspora to return to the country. In line with this nativism, EKRE is vehemently anti-Russia and anti-Russian speakers residing in Estonia, demands compensation for the Soviet occupation of Estonia, and would like to restrict rights of ethnic Russians living in Estonia.

Simultaneously, the party seeks to strengthen NATO in general, but also with regard to cyber threats, and aims to establish an additional regional security alliance in order to secure Estonia's independence. The party appears to be skeptical of the existence of climate change, but favors environmental protection and renewable energy, provided the costs are low.

### **Isamaa (Fatherland)**

*Slogan: Isamaa kaitseb Eesti huve (Fatherland protects Estonian interests)*

Isamaa is a right-wing conservative party that increasingly adopted more populist and nationalist positions in an attempt to mobilize against EKRE, which overtook it in polls and votes. The party was founded in 2006 when the Pro Patria Union and Res Publica Party merged. Both predecessor parties had won elections and provided prime ministers in the past. Isamaa since 2006 has been a junior partner of coalition governments, most recently until the parliamentary elections in 2019, following which

Isamaa entered another government coalition with the Center Party and EKRE, holding among other posts the Ministries of Defense, Justice, and Foreign Affairs.

Isamaa supports a European Union of sovereign nation-states that accounts for Estonia's interests and influence and where national parliaments are able to initiate EU legislation. The party, however, advocates a stronger EU, such as with regard to the area of freedom, security, and justice, or to enforce member states' fiscal discipline. Moreover, the party is committed to the four freedoms of the single market, promotes free trade, and advocates improved conditions for e-trade. Additionally, the party welcomes EU enlargement, provided the Copenhagen Criteria are being fulfilled. The EU, however, should not interfere with member states concerning migration and should not introduce mandatory quotas. Isamaa calls for a Marshall Plan for Africa to promote education and free trade, and to reduce migration.

The party calls for stronger military capabilities for the EU, supports PESCO, demands that EU members join NATO and that Estonia spend 2.5 percent of its GDP on the military. Linked to this position concerning security cooperation is Isamaa's wish of closer economic and security cooperation with the United States and a tough stance against Russia. Isamaa argues for a values-based approach of the EU toward Russia to focus on human rights, rule of law, and the sovereignty of Russia's neighbors. The party calls for crimes committed by communists and Nazis to be considered equal supports the sanctions against Russia and stronger integration of the Baltic states into the Central European electricity system while opposing Nord Stream 2. Isamaa also wishes for the EU to take a lead in global climate policy.

## Finland

*Tobias Kutschka*

### **Perussuomalaiset (Finns Party)**

*Slogan: Return to Finland's Future*

The Finns Party is a populist radical-right party, formerly called the True Finns party. It came to the forefront of Finnish politics due to the EU financial crisis, heavily campaigning on an opposition to bailouts for southern European countries. The party was part of the government coalition following the 2015 parliamentary election but left in 2017 when the far-right MEP Jussi Halla-aho became party leader. The Finns Party became more radical-right and entered the opposition, while its less radical wing remained part of the coalition.

In the 2019 elections, the Finns Party came second with 17.5 percent of the votes, close to its score in the previous election before the party split. Coalition talks are expected to prove difficult as before the elections all major parties vowed to not cooperate with the Finns Party.

The party has announced its plans to join the far-right bloc that is expected to be formed afterwards, with Italy's Lega, Germany's Alternative für Deutschland, France's Rassemblement National and Estonia's EKRE.

The party runs on a nativist platform, campaigning against migrants and the rights of Finland's Swedish-speaking minority. It argues Finland should renegotiate its EU membership and transfer more power to Helsinki. The party strongly opposes immigration, mostly based on a mix of economic and nativists argument that foreigners coming to Finland impose costs on the country, are a security threat, and endanger the ethnic Finnish population and "Finnishness". Migration also is seen as an issue affecting most other policy areas, such as economic and social policy, security, development aid, and the EU. Aid should be allocated to prevent migration. While the party advocates protecting the environment, it does not want to do so at the cost of economic growth. On many foreign policy issues, the party does not have a

pronounced profile. It seems to prefer a neutral position instead of joining NATO. Its positions concerning the United States or Russia are vague, although some party members have expressed a liking for Presidents Donald Trump and Vladimir Putin.

## France

*Paola Fusaro*

### **Rassemblement National (National Rally)**

*Slogans: Donnons le pouvoir au peuple (Give power to the people); On arrive (We're coming)*

The Rassemblement National (RN) (formerly the Front National) is a far-right French political party. In 2014, it had 24 MEPs in the European Parliament. As a result of multiple splits, the RN has now 16 MEPs, 15 MEPs in the Europe of Nations and Freedom (ENF) political group and one non-attached.

The RN was created in 1972 by members of a neo-fascist movement named Ordre Nouveau. Until the mid-1980s, the party, headed by Jean-Marie Le Pen, mostly remained on the fringes of the French political spectrum. Although Le Pen remained outside the traditional political establishment, he garnered almost 15 percent of the votes in the 1988 presidential election and even reached the second round of the 2002 presidential election. In 2011, his daughter, Marine Le Pen, assumed the leadership of the party. Since then, she has been pursuing a "un-demonization" strategy by ousting her father from the party in 2015 to distance herself from his many racist and anti-Semitic declarations. This proved to be successful as the RN elected 24 MEPs to the European Parliament in 2014 and she reached the second round of the 2017 presidential election, with an anti-euro, protectionist and anti-immigration platform. Nonetheless, the party lost the 2017 presidential runoff against Emmanuel Macron, following Marine Le Pen's poor performance in the final TV debate, which highlighted her lack of expertise on economic issues. The party also fared poorly in the legislative elections that



followed. These defeats unveiled deep internal conflicts on the party's ideological stance. For instance, Marine Le Pen's former political adviser, Florian Philippot, left the party. He had attracted a lot of criticism from the party's leaders as his EU-exit strategy proved to be unpopular with voters."

Marine Le Pen renamed the party Rassemblement National in 2018. Even though she still has a strong anti-immigration and anti-globalization agenda, she has visibly softened her initial anti-EU discourse by giving up the "eurozone exit."

First and foremost, the party campaigns to change the name of the EU to the "European Alliance of the Nations." This new structure would allow its members to cooperate selectively. Consequently, the RN has chosen slogans meant to oppose the people and the European elite. Second, the RN's mistrust of globalization has been a steady ideological stance. The RN decries a so-called "migratory submersion" and an "exuberant immigration policy, which turns some areas into no-go zones." It campaigns for the abolition of the Schengen Area. The RN is also opposed to a compulsory European quota system and wants to curb illegal immigration. On the economic front, the RN rejects free-trade agreements. Instead, it endorses "fair exchange" and promotes localism.

Regarding the party's foreign policy, the RN usually sees General Charles De Gaulle's realpolitik as an example to follow. It also considers France as being an ethno-racial nation that must be able to shape its policy in a multipolar world. Hence, Marine Le Pen considers that strengthened "European sovereignty" is essentially "impossible" or "unnatural" and that Macron's so-called "European Army" is nothing more than a "pipe dream" and "treason" against the France's constitution and the country's allies. Regarding the United States, the RN has repeatedly criticized the U.S.-led liberal order, its institutions (the dollar system), its companies, and the extraterritoriality of its law. The RN backs either France's withdrawal from NATO's integrated military command or a reshaped NATO focusing on terrorism. However, Marine Le Pen has praised Donald Trump's protectionist policies and the renewed diplomatic talks with North Korea. Since the end of the Cold War,

the RN has been in favor of good relations with Russia. The RN and Vladimir Putin advocate conservative societies stemming from traditional Christian values. Furthermore, the party sees Putin as a crucial bulwark against the United States' imperialism and unilateralist tendencies. As such, Le Pen has called for the cancelation of sanctions against Russia and suggested to integrate Russia into NATO.

### **Gilets Jaunes (Yellow Vests)**

The Gilets Jaunes movement is a protest movement aimed at denouncing the rising cost of living in France. It is unclear whether it will become a movement or party that falls into the populist definition. It is included here given its impact on French and European politics and the interest in collaboration it initially sparked (for instance the leader of Italy's 5 Stars Movement, Luigi Di Maio, met with some of its leaders in December 2018).

The protests began in November 2018, following President Macron's decision to increase fuel taxes. Since then, the Gilets Jaunes have been demonstrating each Saturday. However, some ultraviolent activists and anarchists have hijacked the movement, leading to outbreaks of extreme violence against the police, private property, and national monuments. Several confrontations between the police and demonstrators also left many defenseless Gilets Jaunes protesters seriously injured. The weekly mobilization and the ever-increasing violence caused the President Macron to launch a three-month-long "Grand Débat" until mid-March 2019, a national consultation meant to spur dialogue with the people and, ultimately, to solve the crisis. Macron also participated in many hours of meetings with local officials. Despite a decrease in mobilization, the tax cuts announced by Macron in mid-April have overall failed to satisfy the Gilets Jaunes.

The Gilets Jaunes failed to create one unified list, with two official lists, "Alliance Jaune" and "Evolution Citoyenne" competing. Most of the first Gilets Jaunes lists did not garner enough candidates and funding to be submitted. Indeed, these lists prompted unfriendly reactions within the movement. Many protesters believe that they are counterproductive and inconsistent with

the spirit of the movement, namely the advancement of the common interest and the hostility towards the political establishment. For instance, the “Rassemblement d’initiative citoyenne” list, headed by one of the leading figures of the movement, Ingrid Levavasseur, was quickly disbanded due to both internal divisions and tough criticisms of this “traditional” political initiative. Moreover, during a national meeting in Saint-Nazaire on April 6 and 7 the Gilets Jaunes formally announced their opposition to the formation of a list.

## Germany

*Henrik von Homeyer (Alternative für Deutschland)  
& Laura Gelhaus (Die Linke)*

### **Alternative für Deutschland (Alternative for Germany)**

*Slogan: Trau dich, Deutschland (Have courage, Germany)*

The Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) came into existence in 2012 as a breakaway political group named Electoral Alternative 2013 (Wahlalternative 2013). In protest against Germany’s eurozone policy and the handling of the Greek financial crisis, mostly fiscal and social conservatives left the Christian Democratic Union and formally established the party in April 2013. While the AfD narrowly missed entering the Bundestag in the 2013 elections, it had considerably more success in the 2014 European Parliament elections, when it received 7.1 percent of the vote and elected seven members of the European Parliament.

In response to the 2015 refugee crisis, there was a marked shift in AfD ideology away from economic skepticism about the eurozone and toward the openly anti-immigration and anti-Islam stance it is notorious for today. The party’s rhetoric became notably more nationalistic, prompting the departures of its leader Bernd Lucke in 2015. Frauke Petry was elected principal speaker and became the figurehead of the growing anti-immigration rhetoric of the party. The 2017 federal elections saw the AfD’s biggest success to date: the party won nearly 6 million votes, 12.6 percent of the national vote, qualifying it for the first time

for a total of 94 seats in the Bundestag, and making it the third-largest party in government. However, at this point that Petry stepped away from the AfD, citing the increasing radicalization of the party. Petry was replaced by the current party leadership: former CDU politician Alexander Gauland and Alice Weidel. After the Bavarian state legislature elections in the autumn of 2018, the AfD is now present in all 16 state legislatures.

After briefly floating the idea of “Dexit” (Germany’s exit from the EU) in early 2019, the AfD has markedly changed its rhetoric in support of the EU. Yet, the AfD remains largely critical of the current institutional arrangement of the EU and closer integration in general. It wants to fundamentally reform the EU to bring back powers to the nation-state and ultimately create a “Europe of Nations.” Its reform program for the EU entails abolishing the European Parliament, ending the single currency, taking away the European Court of Justice’s power to override national law, and restricting the free movement of people. It is against further EU enlargement and wants to end accession negotiations with Turkey.

The AfD considers the United States as Germany’s most important ally and as an indispensable anchor for the Western security architecture. The European pillar within NATO should be strengthened and Germany’s defensive capabilities should be restored. The AfD is opposed to the EU’s Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) and any attempts to build a European army. Germany should formulate and pursue its national interest independent from the United States and other European allies.

Relations with the Russian Federation should be friendly, regardless of Russia’s sometimes aggressive behavior. The AfD largely shares Russia’s socially conservative values, its defense of national sovereignty and its rejection of liberal internationalism and interventionism. In the AfD’s view, a peaceful and stable Europe can only be achieved together with Russia. Therefore, sanctions should be immediately lifted and economic cooperation increased. Similarly, the AfD supports Nord Stream 2 and seeks closer cooperation with the Eurasian Economic Union.

The AfD is largely supportive of free trade. Nevertheless, it rejected the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership and other free-trade agreements, mostly because of the lack of transparency during their negotiations. As part of its development policy, it wants to improve the integration of developing countries into the international trading system, since free trade would be the best development aid. Furthermore, Germany's development aid should be brought back to the national level and focus on migration management and reducing the flow of refugees.

## Die Linke

*Slogan: For a solidarity Europe for the millions, against a European Union for millionaires*

Die Linke is a left-wing German political party that, in part, follows from the German Democratic Republic's (GDR) Socialist Unity Party. The party has in the past been criticized for its insufficient distance from the crimes committed by the government of the GDR. While mainly achieving election results under 10 percent in western Germany, the party is much stronger in the east of the country, where it is represented in all state parliaments and leads the governing coalition in Thuringia. From this east-west dichotomy also stems the dual-leadership structure of Katja Kipping and Bernd Riexinger since mid-2012.

Currently, a central issue the party addresses is quality of life, particularly for elderly people. For example, it calls for higher pensions and a better care system in general, including better pay and working conditions for care and nursing professions. Other topics are affordable rents, better working conditions and unemployment protection, a more open migration policy, as well as higher taxation of wealth and multinational companies.

The party describes itself as pacifist and strictly opposes the deployment of the German military abroad (as well as within Germany). Moreover, it advocates the dissolution of NATO and replacing it with an international system that includes Russia. Although the party distances itself from anti-Americanism, it calls for a more critical partnership, opposes U.S. interventions, U.S. military bases in the EU, and U.S. nuclear weapons in Germany. While die Linke

defends Israel's right to exist, Israel's politics vis-à-vis Palestine is heavily criticized. Especially in the 2000s and early 2010s, there have been accusations of anti-Semitism both from external commentators as well as internally. Most recently, the party has been attacked for backing the Gilets Jaunes movement as well as Venezuela's disputed President Nicolas Maduro. It argues that current developments in Venezuela are a result of an attempted coup by the United States, aiming to destabilize the country in order to gain access to its oil reserves.

Finally, while the current European Parliament election manifesto is not necessarily Euroskeptic per se, the party demands a comprehensive EU reform. Additionally, die Linke strongly disapproves of the EU's alleged militarization through the Common Foreign and Security Policy as well as the Union's supposed neoliberal foundations. At the same time, it criticized some member states (especially Germany) for lack of solidarity during the eurozone crisis and in turn supports the creation of eurobonds.

## Greece

*Klaudia Tani*

### Syriza

*Slogan: New challenges and potential for the EU*

Syriza originated as a faction of the Communist Party, specifically a coalition of the left-wing and radical left parties that believed that Greece's massive debt was the result of an international conspiracy. Syriza rose from 4 percent in 2009 to win in January 2015 with 36 percent of the vote. Syriza's ostensible opposition to the financial bailouts conditions led it into conflict with the institutional troika responsible for those and with the other EU member states. While an overwhelming majority voted against it in 2015, Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras accepted the bailout and called snap elections, which he won, and cemented his power by forming another government with the "Independent Greeks."

Tsipras has transformed from an anti-austerity populist into the most adept enforcer of EU financial discipline the country has seen since the crisis broke out in 2008.

Although Tsipras had stoked up his followers with angry, anti-EU rhetoric and promised to enrich “the people” at the expense of the elites, the banks, and the Germans, he ended up following the rules set by the international institutions that had taken charge of Greece’s finances. Greece remained inside the euro and the international financial and legal systems its leaders claimed to abhor.

Recently Tsipras’ reputation has been far from the radical left image he built for himself before 2015; convincing the Greek left to support him once more might prove difficult, if not impossible in the national elections scheduled to take place in October 2019. Tsipras realized that he could not bring Greece back into the fold without following “mainstream” diplomacy. For that reason, he has slowly shifted Syriza’s radical ideology to an acceptable middle ground.

For the European Parliament elections, Syriza and specifically Tsipras have focused on bringing ideologically similar parties together on to defeat nationalist sentiment and radicalization. The main objective is to bring leftist and progressive political forces closer before and after the elections. Syriza also aims to create a broad alliance, “from Tsipras to Macron,” especially when it comes to the protection of EU values. Cooperation with progressive forces is envisaged to a greater degree after the elections than before.

Solving the dispute with North Macedonia over the country’s name, despite deep divisions within Greece, has led Tsipras to believe that he stands to win the Nobel Peace Prize, thus improving his chances in the October national elections. This legacy-defining achievement is another indication that he has moved away from his early populism toward the center, even though his party still follows a left-wing ideology.

## Hungary

*Daniel Hegedus*

### Fidesz

*Slogan: Magyarország Jobban Teljesít (Hungary is performing better)*

The Fidesz–Hungarian Civic Alliance is a Hungarian former right-wing conservative party that is currently a populist radical-right party. It elected 12 members in the European Parliament in 2014 and together with its Christian Democratic satellite party, the KDNP it has 133 out of 199 seats in the National Assembly. The party was established in 1988 as an anti-communist youth party in Hungary’s early transition period. The initial liberal positions of Fidesz were abandoned and the party turned to right-wing conservatism after Viktor Orbán was elected as its first president in 1993 and following its disappointing electoral results at the 1994 parliamentary elections. Serving as a senior partner in governing coalitions from 1998 to 2002, and since 2010, Fidesz gradually developed to a populist radical-right party parallel to Hungary’s ongoing autocratization since 2010.

Fidesz is a key proponent of the “Europe of Nations” concept. The party’s key messages embrace the primacy of national sovereignty and the integrity of national cultures in Europe. Against this background, it rejects EU intervention in domestic affairs even to safeguard the rule of law and democracy, just as it opposes the relocation of asylum seekers within the EU. Relocation is frequently presented as a “deliberate attempt to change the ethnic composition of European nations by Brussels” in the arguments used in Fidesz campaigns. The party is in favor of the restrictive regulation of irregular migration and asylum and opposes the extension of the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex) mandate into the field of border protection.

Since proclaiming the country’s Eastern Opening in 2011, Fidesz has striven to diversify Hungary’s foreign relations and realize a multivectoral foreign policy by separating foreign and defense policy priorities. In

the field of defense, Fidesz is committed to NATO and prefers U.S. and European partners in the ongoing large-scale defense modernization programs launched to fulfill NATO defense spending goals. Regarding foreign policy, the government pursues strategic partnerships not only with the United States and its European partners like Germany, but also with Russia, China and Turkey.

Although Orbán expressed his admiration of President Trump and the Trump administration for following a more pragmatic approach toward Hungary than their predecessors, U.S.-Hungarian ties remain strained over Russian and Chinese influence in Hungary.

Russia continues to serve as Hungary's strategic energy supplier and, due to ongoing common infrastructure development projects like the building of new blocks for the Paks nuclear power plant, its role is unlikely to decrease in the near future. Due to the lax approach of the Fidesz-led government, Hungary serves as an important hub for Russian intelligence efforts within the EU and NATO. In harmony with the party's pro-Russia stance, its relations toward Ukraine are strained over the situation of the Hungarian minority there. Against this backdrop, Hungary repeatedly hampered Ukraine's Euro-Atlantic ambitions. With regard to EU enlargement, Fidesz supports the accession of the Western Balkan countries and Turkey.

Fidesz follows a pragmatic pro-trade approach. It supported all large regional free-trade initiatives of the EU and also protects the freedom of investments. Due to its China-friendly position, it can be hardly expected that Fidesz would embrace the idea of investment screening or the exclusion of Chinese companies from critical infrastructure related projects.

## **Jobbik**

*Slogan: Biztonságos Európát, Szabad Magyarországot!  
(For a safe Europe and free Hungary!)*

The Jobbik-Movement for a Better Hungary is a former populist radical-right party that since 2014 has tried to occupy a new position in the political center and

define itself as a right-conservative party. Before 2014, Jobbik was infamous due to the xenophobic, openly anti-Semitic and anti-Roma statements of the party's representatives and its paramilitary wing Magyar Gárda (Hungarian Guard) that was dissolved in 2009 due to anti-constitutional activities. Jobbik was established in 2003 and has remained in opposition until the present day. Following the opposition's electoral debacle in 2018, the radical-right wing left Jobbik and founded a new party called Mi Hazánk Mozgalom (Our Homeland Movement). Jobbik has had three non-affiliated MEPs in the European Parliament and 26 out of 199 seats in the Hungarian National Assembly in this parliamentary cycle.

The positions represented by the party at domestic and European level have altered significantly over the years. Whether these program changes reflect a genuine shift in the party's values or are the result of an opportunistic political strategy is subject to debate.

Jobbik used to be a radical Euroskeptic party that campaigned for a leave referendum. However, in its recent electoral manifesto, the party recognizes the historical merits of European integration and only strives for the reform of the European Union. Jobbik can be still considered as sovereigntist political force close to the "Europe of Nations" camp. Regarding migration, the party's rhetoric underwent significant moderation, but in practice, Jobbik still represents firm anti-migration positions and refuses the relocation of asylum seekers among member states.

Jobbik has traditionally preached in favor of a reorientation of Hungary's foreign policy toward the east and a strategic partnership with Russia and Turkey. The party has also maintained good contacts with Iran. Jobbik actively supported Russian efforts to undermine Ukrainian sovereignty and sent observers to the Crimean referendum and to the elections in the eastern Ukrainian separatist provinces. Accordingly, several high-ranking Jobbik politicians were hit with a travel ban to Ukraine.

Jobbik traditionally viewed the global role of the United States with outspoken criticism and argued



that instead of a firm integration into the Euro-Atlantic structures Hungarian foreign policy should choose its partners according to an ethnically defined concept of national interest that emphasizes the protection of ethnic Hungarian diasporas in its neighboring countries. However, due to recent developments in the party, Jobbik now embraces Hungary's NATO membership, even if still clearly prioritizes territorial defense over the deployment of Hungarian troops on NATO missions. The party's support for Serbia's EU accession is also conditional upon the protection of the Hungarian minority in the Western Balkan country.

## Ireland

*Laura Gelhaus*

### **Sinn Féin (We Ourselves)**

*Slogan: Building an Ireland of equals*

Sinn Féin is a left-wing political party active in the Republic of Ireland and in Northern Ireland, currently led by Mary Lou MacDonal who served as an MEP between 2004 and 2009. In the Republic of Ireland, it is the third-largest parliamentary party; in Northern Ireland it holds about one-third of the seats, tied with the Democratic Unionist Party. Although it holds seats in the U.K. House of Commons, Sinn Féin's MPs do not take them up. In the 2014 European Parliament elections, Sinn Féin won 25.5 percent of Northern Irish votes and 19.5 percent of votes in the Republic of Ireland. Historically, the party has been linked to the Irish Republican Army (IRA) and the Provisional Irish Republican Army. As recently as the mid-2000s, various prominent Sinn Féin politicians were accused of being part of the central decision-making body of the IRA.

The defining characteristic of the party's politics is the call for a united Ireland, manifesting itself in the design of policies for the whole of Ireland. Its slogan for the 2016 elections was "For a Fair Recovery" that did not only benefit the Fine Gael and Labour government "and their friends at the top" but rather "the majority of hard-working

Irish people." Priorities were to increase employment as well as the improvement of the healthcare system by increasing public spending and abolishing the public-private system in favor of universal healthcare.

Sinn Féin's 2016 foreign policy program prioritizes "neutrality, human rights, mutually beneficial trade, development, international law, and equality." Its recognition of the state of Palestine, as well as its criticism of Israeli policies, have triggered allegations of anti-Semitism, especially by right-wing forces in Northern Ireland. The party opposed Ireland's accession to the European Economic Community as well as the Lisbon Treaty. Yet, recently the party has diverged from its strict Euroskeptic position even if in general it continues to seek renationalization of EU policies and a strengthening of member-state parliaments. Europeanization in foreign and security policy is heavily opposed. Sinn Féin's 2016 manifesto stated: "While working with other EU countries on international issues of mutual concern is to be welcomed, Irish foreign and defense policy should be formulated in Dublin, not Brussels."

Sinn Féin campaigned against Brexit. The party advocates a special status for Northern Ireland within the EU, meaning that Northern Ireland should retain its position in the single market as well as maintain such provisions as EU labor and environmental standards. Thus, EU funding should continue to be accessible to Northern Ireland and three additional Irish MEPs should represent the six Northern Irish counties.

## Italy

*Laura Basagni*

### **Movimento 5 Stelle (5 Stars Movement)**

*Slogans: Continuare per cambiare, anche in Europa (Carry on to change, also in Europe.)*

Movimento 5 Stelle (M5S) was created in 2009 by stand-up comedian Beppe Grillo and technology entrepreneur Gianroberto Casaleggio as a post-ideological, anti-establishment political force advocating a profound renewal of political institutions rooted in transparency and a stronger involvement of citizens in political and decision-making processes through technology—integrating the tools of representative democracy with mechanisms of direct democracy, like its online platform for citizen consultations. The five stars refer to the movement’s five priorities: water, environment, transport, development, and connectivity.

In 2013, M5S received the most votes for the Chamber of Deputies. However, it refused to form a coalition with mainstream parties and entered the opposition. Since then, members of M5S have been elected mayor in 49 Italian cities (including Rome.) In the 2018 elections, M5S was again the most popular party and entered government after forming a coalition with Lega.

M5S wants to transform the EU, increasing its democratic accountability by giving more power to the European Parliament and less to the European Council. Despite advocating deeper integration in welfare and migration policies, it believes that renationalization is necessary in several other fields, such as trade, monetary, and security and defense policy. It advocates drastic changes in the EU’s economic governance, expanding EU competencies in fiscal and welfare policies, but also giving the possibility to members of the eurozone to opt out of it if their citizens want to. M5S wants a revision of the current EU monetary policy, particularly of the limits imposed for national debts and deficits.

M5S is critical of globalization and was against the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership and the the EU-Canada Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement. It deems necessary a revision of current relationships between Europe and the United States, as well as of the global mechanisms and institutions of the “Washington consensus.” Russia is considered a strategic partner for Italy and Europe in economic and security terms; M5S wants to stop sanctions against the country, which are seen as damaging the economy, and to cut funding for “EU propaganda” against Russia. It is against the creation of an EU army that can intervene beyond peacekeeping missions. It also wants to open up a discussion around the terms of Italy’s participation in NATO, taking into account the country’s needs and budget capabilities, and it argues that Italy should only back NATO missions if they are defensive and not in any way offensive.

M5S wants the immediate cessation of pre-accession negotiations with Turkey and an end to pre-accession funds, and for the EU to end the EU-Turkey agreement on migration. It wants to encourage legal migration by entrusting embassies, consulates, and EU delegations—with the support of the UN system—to gather and evaluate requests for asylum and visas in countries of origin or transit. Moreover, M5S wants to reform the Dublin system to ensure equal sharing of responsibility for migration among member states, making redistribution of migrants within the EU’s territory automatic and mandatory. It also advocates the full application of the Arms Trade Treaty, which forbids the trade, transit, and transfer of weapons in and through countries involved in any conflict. Development aid is considered an integral part of curbing migration flows, and the current government, of which M5S is part, has committed to reaching 0.3 percent of GDP spent on aid by 2020.

## Forza Italia

*Slogan: Apri gli occhi! Vota Berlusconi per cambiare l'Europa (Open your eyes: vote Berlusconi to change Europe)*

Forza Italia is a center-right, socially conservative party led by Silvio Berlusconi, the media tycoon and politician who served as prime minister four times since the start of his political career in 1994. Forza Italia was created from a split of Berlusconi's previous party, Popolo della Libertà, in 2013 and aims to provide a more centrist alternative to Lega for the right-wing electorate.

In the 2018 elections, Forza Italia obtained 14 percent of the votes, making it the second most popular party in the center-right alliance formed with Lega, Fratelli d'Italia, and Noi con l'Italia, leaving it outranked by Lega for the first time. It is currently part of the opposition. The party joined the European People's Party in 2014 and has 13 seats in the European Parliament. The outgoing president of the European Parliament, Antonio Tajani, is one of Forza Italia's MEPs. Alongside Berlusconi, he is one of the most outspoken figures of the party, particularly on matters related to the EU.

Although Forza Italia's approach to European integration is less aggressive and radically more positive than its coalition partners Lega and Fratelli d'Italia, the party has adopted a rhetoric critical of the EU: its reformist agenda carefully keeps the malfunctioning of EU institutions as its starting point. Nevertheless, the EU is considered the only way to protect European countries' economies against competition and from being "colonized" by bigger economic powers. The party also backs a common migration policy: the EU should be the one actor signing agreements with countries of transit and countries of origin to manage migration flows. Moreover, Forza Italia supports a system of mandatory redistribution of asylum seekers among member states.

The party is against economic austerity and suggests reforming the European Central Bank on the model of the U.S. Federal Reserve Bank while harmonizing national fiscal policies at the European level. It advocates more

integration in European security and defense policy, and the creation of a European army to turn the EU into a military superpower. It has been critical of the recent decision of the government to join China's Belt and Road initiative, and advocates a united European strategy toward the country, including on trade and investments.

## Fratelli d'Italia (Italian Brothers)

*Slogan: In Europa per cambiare tutto: #votaitaliano (In Europe to change everything, #voteitalian)*

Fratelli d'Italia is a right-wing, nationalist, conservative, and Euroskeptic party, created following a split from the Popolo della libertà party in 2012, and led by Giorgia Meloni, who has been a member of the Chamber of Deputies since 2006 and served as youth minister during Silvio Berlusconi's last government. The party's roots lie within the post-fascist Italian Social Movement.

In the 2018 elections, Fratelli d'Italia ran in the center-right coalition, together with Forza Italia, Lega, and Noi con l'Italia. It obtained 4.4 percent of the votes and more than tripled the number of seats it had won in 2013. The party did not have elected representatives in the outgoing European Parliament, but it decided to join the European Conservatives and Reformists group. Since the campaign of 2018, Meloni has been pursuing an alliance with Hungary's Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, whose opposition to EU migration policy has been outspokenly endorsed by Fratelli d'Italia.

Fratelli d'Italia is openly critical of the EU, claiming to be against "European elites made of bankers, technocrats, and carpetbaggers." It advocates including in the Italian constitution a clause that limits the authority of the government to enter into international treaties that limit national sovereignty, and it supports Italy's exit from the eurozone. It has adopted a protectionist trade posture, and campaigns against globalization, delocalization, and opening the market to cheap imports. It pursues industrial and commercial policies that favor Italian goods against competition from external markets.

Curbing migration flows toward Europe is one of the party's primary goals. In its own words "migration is not a right, but an opportunity." States should retain the power to offer such opportunity only if they want to do so. The party wants to tighten border controls, stop the arrival of illegal migrants on Italian shores through a European naval blockade in Libyan waters, and establish a mechanism of automatic return of migrants to Africa where identification centers should be opened following the model of the EU-Turkey migration agreement. Finally, an international plan of aid for Africa to fight hunger and poverty should also be implemented.

Fratelli d'Italia uses identity politics and Islamophobia as leverage in its electoral campaigns: particular space is given to measures aimed at "protecting Italy's identity against the process of Islamification" and Islamic terrorism. Its approach to integration policies pits Christian and Islamic identities against each other.

## **Lega**

*Slogans: Prima gli Italiani! Il buonsenso in Europa (Italians first! Bringing commonsense to Europe)*

Lega Nord was founded in 1991 by the merging of several small parties in north and north-central Italy that shared a federalist and at times secessionist agenda. Since its creation, the party has advocated stronger decentralization and devolution of power to regional governments. In its first period, Lega Nord heavily emphasized the divide between the north and south Italy; renamed Lega, under the leadership of Matteo Salvini—who was elected party secretary in 2013—it has embraced nationalism and radicalized its Euroskeptic and anti-foreigner agenda, placing the fight to defend the country from terrorist attacks and mass migration at the core of its electoral campaigns.

This shift allowed Lega to expand its traditional constituency, concentrated in northern Italy, and widen its electoral base, becoming the third-most popular party in the last elections, and entering government in coalition with the Movimento 5 Stelle in 2018.

The party now affirms that Italy should remain in the EU only if deep structural reforms are undertaken, ensuring full sovereignty of the state and limiting the power of EU institutions, which are seen as undemocratic and unfit to put the prosperity and security of European citizens at the core of their policymaking. Lega wants to rebuild the EU along the lines of what it was before the Maastricht Treaty. It describes the euro as a currency designed "for Germany and multinational companies, not for Italy and its SMEs." It supports a rollback from monetary union, the Schengen system, and the Dublin system.

Migration policy has a central role in Lega's political program, framed as a security issue. It claims "Africa cannot fit in Italy," therefore a series of policies should be adopted to curb migration. Salvini, currently the interior minister, has tightened border controls and repeatedly denied access to Italian ports to NGOs patrolling the Libyan coast, which have been accused of encouraging trafficking and illegal migration. This is also a way to criticize the EU for its insufficient support for its southern members.

Lega suggestions for reducing migration flows include signing economic agreements with countries of origin, as well as creating welcome centers in safe countries on the southern shore of the Mediterranean—including Libya. When it comes to the reception and integration of refugees and migrants, Lega is committed to introducing a budget limitation that prevents spending more to welcome migrants than to fight poverty among Italian citizens (including a spending cap per refugee equal to the amount of a 100 percent disability pension.)

Security is identified as a primary national interest, second only to the will to defend national sovereignty. Italy should guard against terrorism, Islamic extremism, and uncontrolled migration flows, as well as decisions of other countries, including allies, that can have a destabilizing effect on the country. The south, rather than the east, is defined as Italy's security priority: Lega identifies Israel and Egypt as potential security partners in the region, especially as the United States is seen as retreating from it. The party does not see Russia as a threat, but a potential security ally of Italy and NATO,

and it has repeatedly condemned EU sanctions against Russia as “socially, culturally and economically absurd.” In February 2019, L’Espresso published a story exposing a Russian offer to finance Lega’s campaign in the European Parliament elections.

## Lithuania

*Jan Rempala*

### **Tvarka ir Teisingumas (Order and Justice)**

*Slogan: Ateina Metas (The time comes)*

Tvarka ir Teisingumas (TT) is a national conservative, soft-Euroskeptic, right-wing populist group highly influenced by former leader Rolandas Paksas. Prior to establishing the precursor to TT, the Liberal Democratic Party, Paksas was prime minister as well as mayor of Vilnius. Paksas became president representing the Liberal Democratic Party in 2002, mobilizing his supporters under the slogan “vote for change.” Although his election was likened to other populist campaigns at the time, Paksas did not adopt Euroskeptic stances in office—seeking to dispel concerns of him being a “radical” he announced his support for accession into the EU and NATO.

Paksas became embroiled in a political scandal when it was alleged he awarded citizenship to a Russian businessman as reward for donations to his political campaign. It was also alleged that high-ranking officials of the cabinet had ties to Russian criminal elements. This led to Paksas being impeached and barred from ever holding a high-ranking political office. In the end, Paksas was acquitted of all charges.

The rebranding of the Liberal Democratic party as Order and Justice occurred in 2006. It became a key component in increasing the center-right performance overall. Its current chairman and leader is Remigijus Žemaitaitis.

TT contains a mixture of ideologies, combining conservative and populist tones alongside liberal ideas. The rebranding of TT started the party’s conversion to

a more conservative platform. TT is one of Lithuania’s most Euroskeptic parties even though it has a relatively pro-European position compared to other populist groups across the EU. It approves of Lithuania’s EU membership and is pro-NATO, but it also advocates new bilateral talks with Russia and Ukraine as well.

TT would prefer to see more decision-making power given to EU member states and to the local/regional levels. Paksas envisioned a “strong Lithuania in a strong Europe” in 2013. However, in 2014, with the date for Lithuania adopting the euro looming, TT called for a referendum on the matter mainly because at the time only 10 percent of Lithuanians were pro-euro.

TT has expressed a desire to cooperate further with the Visegrád 4 countries, especially Poland, as well as enhancing regional cooperation in the Balkans. Its current main point of tension with the EU appears in the area of migration. TT takes a hard stance on migration, saying Lithuania should only accept migrants who “are truly persecuted” and that they must learn the Lithuanian language and culture. It is in favor of renegotiating EU migrant quotas.

TT is also in favor of integrating Lithuania’s energy systems into the EU as well as promoting renewable energy sources. This ideological contrast is reflected in its voting record in the European Parliament, with the party only aligning with its political group, Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy, less than 50 percent of the time.

Paksas announced his retirement from the party in 2018 to form a new movement called “I am calling the Nation.”



## Netherlands

*Laura Groenendaal*

### **Forum voor Democratie (Forum for Democracy)**

*Slogan: Macht terug van Brussel naar Den Haag! (The power back from Brussels to The Hague!)*

Forum voor Democratie (FvD) started out as a think tank founded in 2015 and led by Thierry Baudet. Baudet gained attention when he teamed up with the website *GeenStijl* and *Burgercomité EU* (Citizens Committee EU) to start the initiative *GeenPeil* to lobby for a national referendum on the EU's Association Agreement with Ukraine. The referendum took place in 2016 and, following the negative outcome, the government agreed with other European governments to add an explanatory declaration to the Association Agreement. After this, it was passed in the Senate and entered into force in 2017.

Baudet decided to establish the FvD party in 2016. The focus of the party is on direct democracy, and it strongly supports direct referendums and traditional right-wing-conservative issues such as national sovereignty, tough punishment for crimes, and stricter asylum and migration policies. The party is against what it alleges is a “party cartel,” a small group of politicians from a limited number of parties that control power in the Netherlands and show more loyalty to party leaderships than to voters. The party is controversial due to remarks of its two frontmen on women, multicultural society, and race. For example, Baudet said in an interview: “Women excel generally less in many professions [than men], they have less ambition and are more interested in family-related matters”

In the 2017 elections, the FvD won two seats out of 150 in House of Representatives. Following the provincial elections on March 20, 2019, the FvD became the largest party in the Senate with 13 of the 75 seats. While the FvD has signed a declaration of intent to join the European Conservatives and Reformists, one of the current Dutch parties in the group, the *Christenunie*, has objected to this based on the FvD's support for leaving the EU.

The FvD supports national referendums on membership of the EU, the euro, border controls, and international trade agreements. It has expressed its strong support for leaving the EU, the eurozone, and the Schengen system. It favors a national asylum policy based on the Australian model with the strict selection of immigrants, and also the introduction of a Green Card system as in the United States. The party supports minimum tariffs and potentially employment tariffs in the transport sector to restrict economic migration from the EU by eliminating the competitive edge (lower salaries) of Eastern European workers. The FvD favors international trade through the European Free Trade Association, the European Economic Area, and international treaties. It also proposes to reduce development aid to introduce lower national taxes.

The FvD is against boycotting Russia, using the protection of the Dutch agricultural sector as its main argument, and it promotes good relations with this country. In October 2017 it was leaked that Baudet had a private meeting with Jared Taylor, an American white supremacist and one of the leaders of the Alt-Right movement in the United States. The FvD is against EU enlargement and opposes a visa-free regime between Turkey and the EU. The FvD denies any human causation for climate change and therefore does not believe in national or European climate policy.

### **Partij voor de Vrijheid (Party for Freedom)**

*Slogan: Nederland weer van ons! (The Netherlands back to us again!)*

In 2006 Geert Wilders, then a member of the House of Representatives, founded the *Partij voor de Vrijheid* (PVV). He had left the liberal *Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie*, (VVD) in 2004 after a disagreement with its leadership about the party's direction. According to Wilders, the party was too oriented to the left. While the PVV's statutes stated that the aim of the party was to stand up for a free, prosperous, and independent Netherlands, Wilders later admitted that Islam was the reason behind its founding. The PVV focused on the identity and independence of the Netherlands, which

was, according to Wilders, threatened by the increasing influence of the EU and Islamization. He argued that the political elite had allowed these developments to happen for which the common man had to pay the price. Over the years the party moved from a conservative liberal ideology to nationalist populism. Organizationally, the PVV party has a very small number of professional staff, no members, no party conferences, and no departments. Wilders is the only official party member and he decides the program and direction of the party.

In the 2006 elections, Wilders strongly focused on Islam and warned against a “tsunami of Islamization” if the Netherlands did not change its asylum policy. The PVV won nine of the 150 seats in the House of Representatives. In the following years, it grew significantly and it won 24 seats in the 2010 elections. The party decided to support the minority government coalition of the VVD and the Christian party CDA through a *gedoogconstructie* in the fields of asylum, security, healthcare, and finance—this meant that the PVV was not an official government party, but a close ally of the coalition. In 2012, when the PVV refused to support measures of the VVD and the CDA to reduce government spending as agreed among European leaders, the “gedoogconstructie” fell apart and new elections were initiated. Since then, the PVV has been a strong opponent of the ruling coalitions led by Prime Minister Mark Rutte.

Using discourses that stress the importance of “national sovereignty” and “full autonomy” over policies that affect the Netherlands, the PVV supports leaving the EU and the eurozone, and reintroducing border controls. Migration is still the most pressing issue for the party and is seen as part of its strategy to “de-Islamize the Netherlands” by banning all migration from Muslim states. The party also opposes economic migration from Eastern Europe and supports the reintroduction of employment permits to limit this.

Meanwhile, the party supports trade within the European internal market and internationally but it opposes development aid initiatives. It is strongly against further EU enlargement and proposes to end Turkey’s status as a candidate member state. The PVV is in favor of better relations with Russia, which is regarded as an ally in the

fields of counterterrorism and migration. In February 2018 Wilders visited the Russian parliament, a visit that was controversial as Russia and President Vladimir Putin have been very unpopular in the Netherlands since the downing of the MH17 plane above eastern Ukraine in 2014. At the same time, Wilders is openly pro-Trump and supported his initial attempt to ban migration from Muslim states. The party has also received financial contributions estimated to have amounted to €175,000 from the David Horowitz Freedom Center, a right-wing U.S. foundation. While arguing for reducing military contributions to international peace operations, the PVV supports NATO. It is against initiatives for a European army. Finally, climate policy, or “climate hysteria” as it is dubbed by the party, is framed as an expensive and leftist hoax, and human actions as the cause for climate change are systematically denied.

### **Socialistische Partij (Socialist Party)**

*Slogan: Laat Brussel niet the baas zijn! (Don’t let Brussels be the boss!)*

The Socialistische Partij (SP) was founded in 1971 under the name Kommunistiese Partij Nederland (Dutch Communist Party), grounded in Maoist ideology. In 1972 the party changed its name to broaden its ideological appeal. Over the years the party’s ideology moved from Maoism to social democracy.

The SP has traditionally been anti-elite and it promotes direct interaction with the electorate. Many SP members provide services directly to citizens and elected representatives need to contribute part of their salary to the party. The SP became the first Dutch party to focus on the integration of economic immigrants (guest workers) from Turkey and Morocco in the 1980s. As the SP anticipated problems regarding the integration especially of Muslim workers, it proposed to either integrate these migrants fast or to return them to their country of origin.

Jan Marijnissen, a former welder from a small city in the south of the country, led the party between 1986 and 2008. In 1994 the party won seats in the House of

Representatives (2 out of 150) for the first time. By 2002 the party it held 25 seats. In the following years, its popularity declined and it currently holds 14 seats in the House. In the latest provincial elections on March 20, 2019, the party went from 9 to 4 seats (out of 75) in the Senate.

According to the SP, the EU needs to be reformed and the party proposes a new “social” EU treaty that includes removing the European Commission’s right to propose new legislation. The party argues that policy proposals should come from member states only, and that the European Commission should be “a purely executive organ.” It also supports reforms of the Stability and Growth Pact to give more flexibility regarding the 3 percent budget deficit rule. It advocates national referendums when it comes to increasing the competences of the EU. The SP supports the EU’s distribution scheme of refugees across all member states and it is supportive of development aid with a particular focus on Africa. When it comes to economic migration from Eastern Europe it is, however, in favor of stronger regulation through, for instance, work permits and language requirements.

Among the Dutch populist parties, the SP is the most skeptical of international trade, regarding the internal market (it proposes to enable member states to restrict the internal market and to provide stricter regulation of the financial market) and internationally (the party strongly opposed the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership and the EU-Canada Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement.)

The SP supports only UN-mandated security missions and it opposes NATO missions and initiatives for a European army. Instead, the party argues for more diplomatic efforts. Focused more closely on Russia, the party stresses the importance of de-escalating tensions and increasing dialogue. It is against EU enlargement and in favor of stopping accession negotiations with Turkey and its pre-accession support from the EU. The SP supports the Paris Climate Agreement and proposes a carbon-dioxide-neutral society by 2050.

## Poland

*Anne Flotho-Liersch (PiS) & Jan Rempala (PiS & Kukiz’ 15)*

### **Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (Law and Justice)**

*Slogan: Damy radę (We can do it)*

Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (PiS) was founded in 2001 by twin brothers Lech and Jarosław Kaczyński. In the early 2000s, PiS and Platforma Obywatelska (Civic Platform) were the two major parties that focused on anti-communism and national conservatism and gained increasing popularity. This was due to the center-left becoming tarnished by corruption scandals and failing to provide convincing policy alternatives to the electorate.

After campaigning for a “moral revolution” during the 2005 general elections, PiS won office by forming a coalition with two other smaller parties. However, due to a crisis within the coalition, the parliament was dissolved, triggering new elections in 2007. Civic Platform’s Donald Tusk from the PO became prime minister and was then the first to be re-elected since 1989. The plane crash near Smolensk in Russia on April 10, 2010 that resulted in the death of all 96 people on board, including President Lech Kaczyński, led to conspiracy theories that fueled support for the PiS. Since then, Polish politics have been dominated by the right highlighting the values of community, the family and the Polish nation, social solidarity, the role of Catholicism, and the importance of law and order. PiS’s Andrzej Duda won the presidential election in 2015. The party succeeded in creating a narrative of “Poland in ruins” by focusing on identity politics and socio-economic issues.

While EU crises had hardly affected Poland, the influx of migrants in 2015 led to rising concerns about migration and security that PiS picked up on. PiS is not anti-EU since the party also recognizes the major benefits Poland has received from the union, mostly through cohesion funds. However, given Poland’s history of foreign domination, the party harbors suspicions about the real motivations behind the European project.

Instead of nominating party leader Jarosław Kaczyński for prime minister in the general elections in 2015, PiS opted for Beata Szydło who portrayed the vision of a modern woman while also embracing conservative values. During the electoral campaign, PiS focused on issues that Civic Platform had neglected. It proposed to establish a general child benefit program, free prescription drugs for seniors, and higher tax credits for those on low incomes. PiS won 38 percent of the vote. It did not need to form a coalition government, because it had merged its electoral lists with candidates from two other parties and thus formed an electoral alliance. By the end of 2015, PiS dominated the main political institutions of the state, with Duda in the presidency, a majority in the lower house, and winning 61 out of the 100 seats in the Senate. During the local elections in 2018 however, the PiS was not as successful as anticipated.

In foreign policy, Poland under the Civic Platform in 2007-2013 built a reputation as a “responsible ally” and a “valued European member”—PiS changed its image to that of a “tough player” defending national interests. Since 2015 it has showed signs of deviating from the steady precedent of post-communist foreign policy traditions that are pro-Western and pro-integration in NATO and the EU. PiS seeks to build strong relations with the United States and Germany, and with Ukraine and other states threatened by Russia.

## **Kukiz’ 15**

*Slogan: Potrafisz Polsko! (You can do it Poland!)*

Kukiz’ 15 is the result of a foray into established politics by former punk-rock singer Pawel Kukiz. Much of the party’s initial momentum was attributed to his appeal and his early attempts to bring about electoral reform in the shape of single-member constituencies using a first-past-the-post voting system. Kukiz first started campaigning for this reform in 2010, branding himself as an everyman politician and political outsider calling for increased direct representation of citizens.

Kukiz’ 15 surprised everyone by coming third in the 2015 elections. This was attributed to it being extremely

effective at capturing the frustrations of younger people, especially new graduates and workers. This momentum, however, was squandered. Apart from electoral reform, Kukiz refused to create a “political program” for his party as he believed they are “the biggest lie.” Kukiz’ 15 is not actually a political party but a loose “association”; as such the lists for Kukiz’ 15 have featured a wide variety of individuals ranging from the far-right to libertarians to trade unionists. It even featured the far-right, anti-EU, Ruch Narodowy (National Movement) in its ranks.

The refusal to commit to a party manifesto caused Kukiz’ 15 to be prone to in-fighting, as various members discovered they were not aligned on certain policies. This has led to the party fracturing and giving rise to the renewed Endecja (National Democracy) and Wolni I solidarni (Free and Solidarity) parties. The former split from Kukiz’ 15 in 2016 and Pawel Kukiz in 2018 apologized for introducing nationalists into the parliament.

Much of what Kukiz’ 15 advocates must be read from the statements of individual members on a case-by-case basis. However, there are some consistent themes. In 2018, partnered with the Right Wing of the Republic, Kukiz’ 15 was against Poland adopting the euro and it de facto opposed the European Central Bank. It also wished to build a member-state coalition to deregulate European law and abolish the EU climate and energy package.

Kukiz’ 15 uses much of the same populist rhetoric seen in other member states. It lacks a clear political ideology beyond electoral reform and a few domestic issues, and has been generally reluctant to put out a detailed policy program. Pawel Kukiz is more known for his campaign tirades and rants to the media, and he sees parallels between his and the Trump campaign.

## Slovakia

*Jan Rempala*

### **Kotleba-Ludova strana Nase Slovensko (People's Party Our Slovakia)**

*Slogan: Odvahou proti system (Courage against the system)*

Kotleba-Ludova strana Nase Slovensko (ĽSNS) is a neo-Nazi nationalist populist group, led by Marian Kotleba. The origins of ĽSNS lie in the Slovak Brotherhood, a far-right group with ties to the neo-fascist International Third Position. The Slovak Brotherhood party, also known as Slovak Togetherness, was banned from participating in elections. However, it was still active in civil society. From the onset, Kotleba and the organizations he has been associated with have espoused anti-Roma views, Holocaust denial, and overt fascist views as well as anti-EU, anti-United States, and anti-NATO sentiments. ĽSNS denies the accusations of being a fascist party even though its members have been repeatedly charged with Holocaust denial. The election of Kotleba to the position of governor in Banská Bystrica in 2013 was a shock to many, with political analysts attributing his victory to his exploitation of anti-Roma sentiment.

ĽSNS is an openly racist, nationalist party that claims to want to protect Slovakia against foreign influence. It has called for a referendum on withdrawing from the EU saying the EU has been “destroying the country’s sovereignty.” ĽSNS wants to pivot Slovakia away from its predominantly Western orientation. It considers NATO a symbol of U.S. interests and wants the country to leave the alliance, to be replaced with a neutral military bloc consisting of Switzerland, Austria, and Slovakia. ĽSNS also wants to restore the Slovakian arms industry and to bolster national defense.

### **Obyčajni ľudia a nezávislé osobnosti (Ordinary People and Independent Personalities)**

*Slogan: Na strane Obyčajných ľudí (On the Ordinary People's Side)*

Obyčajni ľudia a nezávislé osobnosti (OLANO) is a conservative populist party that is pro-EU. It is oriented around Christian Democratic ideals and is led by Igor Matovič. OLANO presents a program of social-conservatism. Its core issues are family values, combatting unemployment, and providing increased state assistance to the Roma minority. OLANO initially consisted of four MPs that helped to form the center-right coalition in the National Council. In 2016 it formed a coalition with the social-conservative NOVA party, established in 2012. Both have aligned themselves with the European Conservatives and Reformists group.

For OLANO, it is vital that Slovakia maintain NATO and EU membership, seeing this as a “common basic value.” It seems to favor a joint EU-NATO approach to European defense and acknowledges the United States accounts for most of NATO’s defense spending. OLANO sees the construction of Nord Stream 2 as against its national interests as well as Ukraine’s and Poland’s. It promotes Visegrád 4 cooperation and was in favor of sending Slovakian troops to participate in the “V4” EU battleground that is led by Poland. OLANO also pushes for locating an EU agency in Slovakia as well as for greater involvement of national parliaments in EU decision-making, including the heavier usage of the yellow and orange card process that they currently have.

The coalition of OLANO and NOVA aims at strengthening and further developing Slovakia’s position in the EU and NATO. It advocates tackling migration issues in coordination with other EU countries. With regard to the Western Balkans, the coalition promotes further cooperation in promoting political reform. It relies on cooperation within the EU Strategy for the Danube Region and insists on not recognizing Kosovo as an independent state, preferring to keep strong relations with Serbia.



## **Smer-Socialna Demokracia (Direction-Social Democracy)**

*Slogan: Socialne k ľudom, zodpovedene k statu (Socially for the People, Responsible to the State)*

Smer-Socialna Demokracia (Smer-SD) was formerly known as “Direction” and was a breakaway group from the Party of the Democratic Left in 1999. It is led by Robert Fico who was prime minister from 2012 until he resigned in 2018 following the political crisis after the murder of journalist Jan Kuciak. Smer-SD is seen as a left-wing populist party that promotes social conservatism and pro-EU values. It currently belongs to the Socialists and Democrats group.

Fico led Smer-SD to success in 2006 due to his criticism of the previous right-wing government’s reforms ranging from pensions to legislative issues. These reforms, while applauded by international observers, had a disproportionately negative effect on low-wage earners. Smer-SD was able to utilize this backlash to achieve victory in 2006. The same year Smer-SD was suspended from the Party of European Socialists after entering into a governing coalition with the right-wing, nationalist Slovak National Party and the Peoples Party-Movement for a Democratic Slovakia—parties that “stir up racial or ethnic prejudices and racial hatred,” according to the Socialists and Democrats group. Smer-SD was readmitted in 2008, but it still formed another coalition in 2018 with more conservative groups, including the Slovak National Party.

Fico and Smer-SD vehemently opposed the EU’s refugee resettlement plans, with the prime minister stating that “mandatory quotas will not be implemented on Slovak territory.” Weeks before Slovakia’s 2016 presidency of the EU, Fico was quoted as saying that Islam had no place in Slovakia and politicians had to talk about this openly as he did not want thousands of Muslims in his country.

Smer-SD promotes a strong and proactive position for Slovakia in the EU and the eurozone. At the same time, it stresses regional cooperation within the Visegrád 4 group and bilateral cooperation with other EU member states. Smer-SD recognizes NATO as a guarantor of

Slovakia’s security and prosperity. The party prioritizes EU enlargement and support for candidate countries in addition to facilitating dialogue with Eastern Partnership countries over internal reforms.

## **Sme Rodina-Boris Kollar (We are Family)**

*Slogan: Menj Bruselu, Viac Zdraveho Rozumu (Less Brussels, More Reason)*

Sme Rodina is a right-wing, Euroskeptical, populist, anti-immigrant party led by Boris Kollar. It was formed in 2015 when Kollar repurposed and renamed the minor party Nas Kraj (Our Land). Kollar does not define himself as a leftist or a rightist; he says his aim is to “protect families in Slovakia from threats outside and inside.” He expresses conservative values and strong anti-immigrant sentiments.

Sme Rodina identifies itself as a right-wing group, although political analysts liken it more to an anti-establishment or protest party. It mainly focused on an anti-immigrant stance during the 2016 elections. Kollar and Sme Rodina position themselves as the guardians of Slovakia against domestic and foreign threats. The party platform is designed to appeal to this sense of protection, linking domestic reforms like tax reform to the protection of “good neighborly cohabitation,” which entails a crackdown on “non-conforming citizens” alongside the modernization of the army. Sme Rodina sees “the threat from outside” as the ongoing Muslim “invasion of immigrants” into Europe. Sme Rodina left the Europe of Nations and Freedom group to join the proposed European Alliance of People and Nations group.

## **Slovenska Narodna Strana (Slovak National Party)**

Slovenska Narodna Strana (SNS) is a right-wing populist party that espouses nationalism. It is led by Andrej Danko and was founded in 1989. The party identifies its core values as being Christian, national and social.

Its previous leader Jan Slota is a controversial figure as he is seen as an extremist and nationalist. The SNS under

Slota was occasionally portrayed as ultranationalist and right-wing extremist, with its rhetoric against Hungarians and Roma seen as racist. Having figures like him in the SNS gave rise to allegations of the party being fascist.

The SNS was involved in the ruling coalition with Smer-SD after the 2006 elections. It was also in Prime Minister Robert Fico's third government.

The SNS stresses the positive aspects of the EU but also professes a need for "strict EU reform" allowing for more sovereignty among the member states. It respects the basic idea of the EU and the euro. However, the party is frustrated with what it perceives as the EU moving in an undesirable way. The SNS calls for a halting of "the implementation of multicultural ideology" and expresses a desire to tighten asylum and migration controls.

The SNS has announced it will join the proposed European Alliance of People and Nations group.

## Spain

*Kristina Kausch*

### **Unidas Podemos (United We Can)**

*Slogan: United we can*

Podemos was founded in 2014 by left-wing academics and intellectuals in the context of the 15M/Indignados popular protests (2011–2015), which demanded social justice and an end to austerity and corruption. Pablo Iglesias, a journalist and political science professor from Madrid, has headed the party since its inception. In 2016, it formed an electoral alliance with the United Left and Equo parties, changing its name to Unidos Podemos (United We Can), and in 2019 to Unidas Podemos (using the female verb conjugation).

Podemos ran in the 2014 European Parliament elections, winning five seats. It eventually obtained between 8 percent and 21 percent of votes in different regional elections. While Podemos did not run in the 2015 local

elections, it supported local grassroots candidates that succeeded in taking the mayor's offices in Madrid and Barcelona. In the 2015 general elections, it obtained 20.7 percent of the vote, becoming the third-largest force in the parliament. In the 2016 general elections, the newly founded electoral alliance Unidos Podemos won 21.2 percent. In 2018, it supported the no-confidence vote against Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy of the People's Party, helping to install Pedro Sanchez of the Socialist Workers' Party as the new prime minister.

Having its program's roots in the anti-capitalist left, the party was pacifist and opposed to NATO and U.S. militarism. However, it gradually moderated some of its positions, such as its founding position that Spain should leave NATO, which was modified to increasing the country's say in the alliance. Unidas Podemos is in favor of Spain unilaterally recognizing the state of Palestine.

Unidas Podemos's main focus in the EU has been on macroeconomic regulation, ending austerity measures in fiscal policies, and employment. It has been a staunch opponent of the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership. Its approach to migration is liberal and stresses the right to asylum and an open society. The party also advocates a mandatory, rapid structural transition toward full reliance on green/renewable energies. At the European level, Podemos is affiliated with the new left-wing *Maintenant le Peuple* movement.

Unidas Podemos has been sympathetic to Venezuela's "Bolivarian" governments and its current social and economic model. Pablo Iglesias and other leaders served as advisors to Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez prior to the founding of the party. Investigations of 2014 payments from the Venezuelan government to Iglesias were ongoing at the time of writing. As the party's connections to Caracas became increasingly problematic, most notably since the start of the current Venezuelan crisis, it has maintained a low profile on the matter and its MEPs did not take part in the relevant European Parliament debates.

With the crisis over Catalanian independence becoming a major driver for Spanish populism in 2017–18, Unidas

Podemos defended Catalan self-determination. The party's stance in favor of holding a referendum on Catalan independence has been significant, positioning it at one extreme of an increasingly polarized political spectrum, opposite the upcoming right-wing nationalists of VOX.

## VOX

*Slogan: España viva (Spain alive)*

VOX is an extreme-right nationalist party founded in 2013 by former members of the conservative People's Party. It is headed by Santiago Abascal. The split from the PP was initially motivated by a perception at the right end of the party that it was too soft on separatist movements in the Basque country and Catalonia. Eventually, the party adopted increasingly xenophobic, anti-migration stances. VOX takes hardline social-conservative and anti-feminist stances such as banning abortion and demanding the derogation of legislation against gender-based violence. The party also calls for revocation of legislation for the historical memory of Spanish fascism.

VOX ran for the first time in the 2014 European Parliament elections but did not win a seat with a 1.56 percent of the vote. In the general elections of 2015 and 2016 (in which it ran under the slogan "Make Spain great again"), VOX was even less successful, gaining 0.2 percent. In the 2018 regional elections in Andalusia, however, the party won 11 percent and entered a regional parliament for the first time with 12 seats. In last month's general elections, it won 10.3 percent of the vote and 24 seats.

The sudden rise of VOX is largely credited to the 2017–2018 crisis over Catalan independence, during which many conservative and pro-unity Spaniards saw the established centrist parties as too weak on the Catalan nationalist movement, spawning an upsurge in an anti-separatist unity nationalism on which VOX has been able to thrive. Among VOX's most marked features is its decidedly anti-separatist stance which puts Catalan separatists in the same category as jihadi terrorists. The Catalonia crisis has coincided with Spain becoming the main entry point for irregular migration into the EU following the closure of the eastern and central Mediterranean migration routes,

and VOX has capitalized on the polemic around anti-migrant measures in the autonomous Spanish cities of Ceuta and Melilla on the North African coast with anti-immigrant and xenophobic stances.

VOX is not anti-EU but it is highly critical of EU institutions and their impact on Spanish sovereignty. The European way of dealing with the Catalanian crisis, in particular former Catalan president Carles Puigdemont's seeking refuge in Brussels, has been strongly resented by nationalists and has been a major trigger for VOX's EU-critical stances, including notions of suspending the Schengen system and regaining control from the EU.

According to unconfirmed Spanish press reports, VOX's 2014 European Parliament campaign was 80 percent financed by Iranian exiled opposition groups.

## Sweden

*Tobias Kutschka*

### Sverigedemokraterna (Sweden Democrats)

*Slogan: Safety and tradition*

Sverigedemokraterna (SD) is a populist radical-right party lead by Jimmie Akesson that has managed to continuously attract more voters over the last elections. The party was founded in 1988 but to date has never been part of a government coalition. Since becoming party leader in 2005, Akesson has attempted to deradicalize the party, punishing members for overtly racist remarks and succeeding in attracting more voters. However, questions about the party's links to radicals remain. SD came third in the 2018 general elections, playing a role in causing the formation of a minority government because no party was willing to enter a coalition with it. The party receives strong support in southern Sweden, taking strong stances against immigration and advocating a strong welfare state for Swedes and excluding "foreigners."

Until a few months ago, the party championed Sweden leaving the EU, a position that has now been

abandoned. Its program demands a new treaty with reduced competences for the EU, and advocates the EU having a role limited to free and common trade and the common market. The party also calls for increased Nordic cooperation. EU member states should have increased veto powers in the European Council in order to reduce their being subjected to decisions they object to. The notions of increased veto powers and opt-outs can be found regarding various policy areas throughout SD's program: Sweden should be permanently exempt from the monetary union; the EU should not have the competences to decide upon social policy, defense, tax, criminal law, and labor-market issues. SD demands strict limits to the freedom of movement within the EU, the option for Sweden to leave the Schengen system, and EU internal and external border controls "to be enhanced by all imaginable legal, technical and practical means." The party also calls for extraterritorial centers for migrants and refugees, similar to those run by Australia.

SD champions free trade agreements; for instance, with the United States. Its program supports sanctions against Russia, but the party appears to reject a common European army and calls for an end to accession negotiations with Turkey, as well as an end to the refugee deal with the country. On climate policy, the party sees the necessity for EU policies; for example, it even calls for EU animal welfare legislation. SD also calls for an end to the immunity of elected and appointed officials, and considers free speech to be threatened by the EU.

## United Kingdom

*Rosa Balfour and Laura Gelhaus*

### UK Independence Party

*Slogan: For the nation*

The UK Independence Party (UKIP) is a right-wing, Euroskeptic populist party. After Nigel Farage stepped down from leading the party in 2016, its MEPs joined different political groups. Three, including current leader Gerard Batten, joined the the Europe of Nations and

Freedom group, while three remained part of the Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy (EFDD) group and one is unaligned. While the party's presence and activities in the European Parliament have been underwhelming, UKIP has used it as a platform and resource to influence politics in the United Kingdom. From February, eight previous UKIP MEPs, including former leader Nigel Farage, represented the newly created Brexit Party, within the EFDD group.

The Brexit Party split from UKIP over Batten's increasing orientation of the party to the far-right. Batten's rhetoric and policy propositions include radical to extreme anti-Muslim sentiments such as characterizing Islam as a "death cult," advocating Muslim-only prisons and the requirement for Muslims to sign a document renouncing parts of the Qur'an. Batten is currently advised by Tommy Robinson, who founded and led the extreme-right English Defense League.

Currently, UKIP's stances on foreign policy issues, as exemplified by their manifesto, are centered around the complete withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the EU as well as redirecting efforts to its "national interest." The party strongly opposes various forms of migration, aiming to vastly restrict permanent and time-limited immigration, in contrast with its views on free and deregulated trade. Furthermore, the party takes a radical stance against what it sees as the "extreme left-wing 'politically correct' viewpoint," advocating the repeal of hate speech guidelines and of the 2010 Equality Act as well as shutting down the Human Rights Commission and the Government Equalities Office.

Despite failing to ever have more than two representatives in the House of Commons, UKIP has nonetheless had a significant influence on U.K. politics. It was the fear to lose further Conservative votes to UKIP that triggered Prime Minister David Cameron's decision to hold a referendum on the country's EU membership. UKIP politicians, in particular Nigel Farage, were prominent supporters of the Leave.EU campaign.

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## **Brexit Party**

The Brexit Party started when a group split from UKIP, criticizing the party's ongoing radicalization in late 2018 and early 2019. While initially headed by former UKIP spokesperson Catherine Blaiklock, the Brexit Party was from its early days de facto led by Nigel Farage, who formally took over party leadership when Blaiklock resigned in March 2019 due to Islamophobic tweets. In the outgoing European Parliament, 14 former UKIP sat as Brexit Party MEPs, as part of the Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy group. With the party refusing to publish a manifesto before the elections, much is unclear about their positions apart from their campaign to leave the EU, and the desire to "send a clear message to the establishment". At the time of writing, its website did not include a policy section, focusing heavily instead on candidates and their background, for example, a "business person," "entrepreneur," or in the "fishing industry."



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