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Central Europe's Radical Right and EU Foreign Policy

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Summary

Radical right parties have become a stable feature of party systems in Central Europe over the past decade. The transformation of Fidesz in Hungary and Law and Justice (PiS) in Poland from mainstream parties into radical right ones have also had a significant influence on the region's politics. Following their relative success in the 2019 elections for the European Parliament and given that some of them are in government, the members of this typically Eurosceptic party family have the potential to influence policymaking at the EU level and have a say in how the union acts on the international scene.

This paper focuses on eight Central European radical right parties—Freedom and Direct Democracy (SPD) in the Czech Republic; Jobbik—Movement for a Better Hungary and Fidesz—Hungarian Civic Alliance in Hungary; PiS, the National Movement (RN), and the Coalition for the Renewal of the Republic—Liberty and Hope (KORWiN) in Poland; and We Are Family (SR) and the Kotlebists—People's Party Our Slovakia (ĽSNS) in Slovakia – to study how they see their country's place in the world, what foreign policy goals they pursue, and what channels and chances they have to further their nationalist and sovereigntist positions in the EU and its foreign policy.

The foreign policy positions of the Central European radical right parties show differences regarding their approach to European integration, their threat perception, and relations with the United States, Russia, or China. These differences set limits to the extent to which they can pull together in the same direction at the EU level. However, there are also similarities that bring especially the more influential, soft Eurosceptics among them on the same page.

Soft Eurosceptic radical right parties do not want to undermine the European Commission's foreign policy

agenda in its entirety, but rather seek to shift policies to the right by pushing their priorities and in turn radicalizing the positions of mainstream parties. They also pursue their securitizing agenda on all issues that can be connected to migration, such as development policy or relations with Africa or the Middle East. Additionally, the disregard of these parties for certain democratic principles undermines the EU's ability to speak with one voice and credibility in pursuing a value-based global order.

While the direct influence of radical right parties on EU foreign policy is only significant if they are in government, those in opposition can also have an impact on the discourses and positions of mainstream parties if the latter consider them serious competitors. Therefore, keeping an eye on their positions is important because of their potential indirect influence on policymaking, too.

Since the most influential Central European radical right parties today do not seek to withdraw their country from the EU but rather to channel their positions into its policymaking bodies and processes, and change the union from within, countering their influence depends above all on the strategic reactions of the pro-EU mainstream parties. Limiting the impact of the radical right necessitates the commitment of mainstream forces to resist the temptation of shifting their own stance and co-opting the positions of radical right competitors. Such strategies undermine the trust of moderate voters in mainstream parties while legitimizing illiberal positions and thus eroding the democratic values and principles as the cornerstones of the EU's political system. Instead, mainstream parties as well as EU institutions need to develop and effectively communicate rational and well-substantiated policy solutions that have basic democratic values and principles at their core.

Introduction

With the United States' pivot away from Europe during the presidency of Donald Trump, the rise of China on the global scene, and continued conflicts in the Middle East and Eastern Europe, the European Union is facing important challenges in its foreign policy. President Ursula von der Leyen pledged in 2019 that her "geopolitical" European Commission would strengthen the role of the EU in the world based on multilateralism and by upholding and updating a rules-based global order. This foresees an EU that is more strategic, assertive, and united—one able to act autonomously and in line with its values and interests.¹ Though the agenda of the European Commission in place since 2019 makes recurrent references to the values of the EU, its own launch was not devoid of challenges to these very ideals. By floating the title "protecting our European way of life" for the migration portfolio,² von der Leyen demonstrated how the xenophobic rhetoric of the radical right has infiltrated mainstream politics over the years, undermining the very values the EU is based on. Changing the word "protecting" to "promoting" in response to criticism did little to resolve the substance of the matter.

Von der Leyen's move came in the aftermath of rather successful elections to the European Parliament for Europe's radical right in May 2019. Though it fell short of expectations, the radical right still managed to strengthen its representation. In the 2014–2019 parliament, for the first time a radical right political group, Europe of Nations and Freedom, had lasted the whole term after its formation. In the new parliament, its constituent parties attracted further allies from the disintegrating Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy group and from the European Conservatives and Reformists group—which was about to lose its largest delegation, the United Kingdom's Conservative Party, due to Brexit. They established the new Identity and Democracy group as the fourth-largest

in the parliament. Radical right delegations also took up seats in the groups of the European Conservatives and Reformists and the European People's Party, and among the non-affiliated members.

Radical right parties have risen in prominence unprecedentedly over the past decade across the EU. In more and more countries, they have become acceptable coalition partners for mainstream parties that have also increasingly co-opted their discourse and agenda. With immigration, one of their core topics, taking center stage in the aftermath of the 2015 peak of the refugee and migration crisis, radical right positions infiltrated discussions and policymaking at the EU level, as illustrated by the ever-pending reform of the Dublin system. The potential influence of these parties reaches further, however: their authoritarian views conflict with EU values and principles, and their nationalist, sovereigntist ideals are at odds with furthering European integration in domestic and foreign policy areas. If their views infiltrate policymaking, directly or indirectly, they have the potential to weaken the EU and its role on the international stage. Furthermore, radical right parties' connections and attitudes to authoritarian powers, especially Russia, raise further concerns about their potential influence on EU foreign policy.

While the radical right has been on the rise across the continent, the party scene has undergone a significant development in Central Europe in the past decade. Though radical right parties in the region were considered more volatile than their Western European counterparts, several of them have stabilized their positions in their respective national party systems. They have filled governing positions not only as junior partners in coalitions, but with Fidesz in Hungary and Law and Justice (PiS) in Poland they also lead coalition governments. In fact, in an unprecedented move, Fidesz and PiS transformed from mainstream into radical right parties while in government.

Several recently established radical right parties in the region—like Freedom and Direct Democracy (SPD) in the Czech Republic, We Are Family (SR) in Slovakia, or the Conservative People's Party of Estonia

1 European Commission, [Mission Letter to Josep Borrel](#), 2019.

2 Deutsche Welle, "[Von der Leyen defends 'European Way of Life' title](#)," September 16, 2019.

(EKRE)—have exploited the political opportunity of the refugee and migration crisis to mobilize support and enter national parliaments and even governments—although immigration and asylum were previously non-issues in these countries. Thanks to the high salience of immigration in their programs and adopting positions similar to those of the Western European radical right parties, these newcomers have gone on to institutionalize cooperation at the EU level with their more established counterparts under the Identity and Democracy umbrella.

In this light, it is important to study how radical right parties in Central Europe see their country's place in the world, what foreign policy goals they pursue, and what channels, chances, and potential partners they may have to further their nationalist and sovereigntist positions in the EU. Electorally successful radical right parties are to be found in almost all EU member states in the region, but this paper limits its focus to those of the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia. These include two—Fidesz and PiS—that lead governments and are the most influential radical right parties at the EU level, as well as some of the newcomers that have been warmly welcomed by their Western European counterparts.

In discussing these radical right parties' positions, the analysis relies first on their party manifestos—whenever available—that were published ahead of the last national and European elections, on communication from leading party figures, and on official strategic documents.³ When assessing their possible allies and potential for influence, the paper takes into account their position in different European party families and political groups, the activity of their representatives in the European Parliament after the 2019 elections, and, where applicable, their governmental track record.

3 The following party manifestos were consulted: Jobbik (2018 national elections, 2019 European Parliament elections), Konfederacja (2019 national elections), KORWiN (2015 national elections), ŁSNS (2016 national elections, Ten Commandment), PiS (2019 national elections), RN (2016 manifesto), SPD (manifesto online as of April 2021), and SR (2020 national elections). Fidesz did not publish a manifesto ahead of the last national and European elections; therefore, other sources were consulted.

Radical Right Parties in Central Europe

Despite the vast scholarly and policy attention to what is here referred to as the radical right, no consensus exists on what defines this party family or even what it should be called. Here, the term is used to describe parties that are characterized by a nativist core ideology and are authoritarian. Nativism is understood as the ideology that holds that states should be inhabited exclusively by the native group and that non-native elements (people, cultures, ideas) are threatening to the homogenous nation-state propagated by the radical right. Authoritarianism here refers to a belief in a strictly ordered society, in which infringements of authority are to be severely punished. In this sense, authoritarianism can but does not necessarily result in anti-democratic attitudes.⁴

The radical right party scene in Central Europe has undergone significant changes.

Since its emergence in the 1990s, the radical right party scene in Central Europe has undergone significant changes.⁵ Some parties that were prominent before the countries' EU accession faded, new ones emerged and, in some cases, mainstream right parties gradually transformed into radical right ones. This paper looks at eight prominent radical right parties in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia, and includes those that have institutional access to influence policy-making due to their representation in national parliaments and/or the European parliament at the time of writing.⁶ They are Freedom and Direct Democracy in the Czech Republic; Jobbik—Movement for a Better Hungary and Fidesz—Hungarian Civic Alliance in Hungary; Law and Justice (PiS), the National Move-

4 This follows Cas Mudde's widely accepted definition. Cas Mudde, *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe*, Cambridge University Press, 2007. PP.18-23.

5 For an extensive overview about the radical right in the region, see Michael Minkenberg, *The Radical Right in Eastern Europe. Democracy under Siege?*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2017.

6 The selection is based on the second edition of [The PopuList](#).

ment (RN), and the Coalition for the Renewal of the Republic—Liberty and Hope (KORWiN) in Poland; and We Are Family and the Kotlebists—People’s Party Our Slovakia (ĽSNS) in Slovakia.⁷

Although the developmental trajectories and ideological positions of these parties differ, all of them can be characterized by nativism and authoritarianism. The list includes former conservative parties PiS and Fidesz, which have by now transformed into radical right parties⁸ through a process of co-optation of the programmatic and ideological stance of their radical right competitors.

In Poland, following the disappearance of PiS’ former competitor, the League of Polish Families (LPR), from the political scene, the far-right end of the political spectrum was eventually occupied by RN in the early 2010s. RN, however, did not manage to replicate LPR’s former success and entered parliament only as part of electoral coalitions, first alongside Kukiz’15 in 2015, and then as part of Konfederacja in 2019, along with among others KORWiN.

In Hungary, the radical right competitor of Fidesz, the formerly extreme-right⁹ Jobbik, followed a unique path by moderating after Fidesz had co-opted its positions. Its moderation course eventually led to splits within the party and to its extremist members establishing the Our Homeland Movement in 2018.¹⁰

In Slovakia, on the other hand, the extremist ĽSNS has shown no moderation and yet managed to increase its popularity over the past decade. Due to its

extremist stance, however, it has remained relatively uninfluential and, as other parties ruled out cooperation with it, it was kept behind a *cordon sanitaire* at the national level.

Finally, the other two, newer, parties—SPD in the Czech Republic and SR in Slovakia—gained popularity on the wave of the refugee and migration crisis. The latter joined the government coalition as a junior partner following the parliamentary elections of 2020.

Radical Right Views on Foreign Policy

The central importance of national sovereignty for radical right parties directly influences their positions on foreign policy. They are often critical of their country’s membership in international organizations, especially if that entails transferring sovereignty to these. This results in critical attitudes toward the EU and, in some cases, toward NATO as well. The eight parties analyzed nonetheless differ in how they see their country on the international scene, what goals they wish to pursue, and what role they attribute to the EU, if any. This section discusses the parties’ overall views on foreign policy, including their general attitude toward the EU and NATO, and on positions on foreign policy issues that are on the current European agenda.

International Alliances and Regional Cooperation

To create the foundations of what they consider a sovereign and independent foreign policy, some of the radical right parties wish to see their country break with its current alliances, while others seek reforms within the existing frameworks. In this vein, they are varyingly Eurosceptic.

The SPD, RN, and ĽSNS adopt hard Eurosceptic¹¹ positions, consider EU membership as impeding on national sovereignty, and want to leave the EU following national referenda. At the same time, RN acknowledges that Poland’s population does not share this position today. In partnership with KORWiN,

7 Diverging from the PopuList’s categorization, this paper excludes the Polish Kukiz’15 party as it gained its radical right classification due to its cooperation with the RN in the 2015 elections. This eventually broke down and at the 2019 parliamentary elections nativism was not its core ideology. Hungary’s Christian Democratic People’s Party is also excluded as it has not stood for parliamentary elections on its own since 1998 and, as a Fidesz satellite since 2002, it has no distinguishable profile, especially on foreign affairs.

8 Cas Mudde, *The Far Right Today*, Polity Press, 2019. P.21; PP.126-128.

9 In keeping with Mudde, extreme right is understood here as being nativist, authoritarian, and antidemocratic. Mudde, *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe*. p.23.

10 Our Homeland Movement is represented in parliament but only because the split from Jobbik happened after the latest parliamentary elections in 2018. Therefore, it is not included in the analysis here.

11 Paul Taggart and Aleks Szczerbiak, “Contemporary Euroscepticism in the party systems of the European Union candidate states of Central and Eastern Europe,” *European Journal of Political Research*, 2004, 43(1).

Table 1. Electorally Relevant Radical Right Parties in Central Europe

Country	Party	Result in last national election	Experience in national government
Czech Republic	Freedom and Direct Democracy (SPD)	10.6% (2017)	No
		22/200 seats	
Hungary	Fidesz—Hungarian Civic Alliance	49.27% (2018)	Leading government 1998-2002 2010-present
		133/199 seats	
	Jobbik—Movement for a Better Hungary	19.06% (2018)	No
		26/199 seats	
Poland	Law and Justice (PiS)	43.59% (2019)	Leading government 2005-2007 2015-present
		235/460 seats	
		Run on joint list of Konfederacja	
	National Movement (RN)	6.81% (2019)	No
	Coalition for the Renewal of the Republic—Liberty and Hope (KORWiN)	7/460 seats	No
Slovakia	We Are Family (SR)	8.2% (2020)	Junior partner in government 2020-present
		17/150 seats	
	Kotlebists—People's Party Our Slovakia (ĽSNS)	7.97% (2020)	No
		17/150 seats	

which though opposes the deepening of the European integration still approaches the EU more pragmatically than RN, they have formulated a less radical position under the Konfederacja alliance that does not explicitly call for Poland's exit from the EU.

Jobbik has gone through a clear shift from opposing Hungary's EU membership in the 2000s to becoming a soft Eurosceptic party, advocating a "Europe of Nations" and for the EU to rediscover its humanist and Christian heritage. Today Jobbik declares that the EU is necessary since individual nation states would not be able to tackle global crises or compete alone with rising powers like China or Russia.

PiS, which considers itself a "Eurorealist" party, calls for the EU to return to its traditional role of fostering political compromise among member states. While the party is against expanding the EU's competences further, it supports especially those EU poli-

cies—cohesion and agriculture—that have clearly benefitted Poland and would even support bigger EU budgets to serve these fields. PiS makes references to Europe's Christian traditions and culture, and it calls on the EU to return to these values.

Over the past years, especially since the refugee and migration crisis, references to Europe's Christian roots have also increased in Fidesz's rhetoric, which calls for a Europe of nation states, and is against delegating more competences to the EU. Although the overall tone of Fidesz is hostile and confrontational, the party does not want to lead Hungary out of the EU, partly because it draws financial benefits from the country's EU membership.

SR is also in the soft Eurosceptic camp. It calls for an audit of Slovakia's EU membership, formulates critical positions toward the EU, and calls for its reform.

Table 2. Radical Right Parties' Attitudes toward the EU and NATO

		Attitudes toward the EU	
		Soft Eurosceptic	Hard Eurosceptic
Attitudes toward NATO	Pro-NATO	Fidesz—Hungarian Civic Alliance Law and Justice (PiS) We Are Family (SR)	
	Soft NATO-sceptic	Jobbik—Movement for a Better Hungary Coalition for the Renewal of the Republic—Liberty and Hope (KORWIN)	
	Hard NATO-sceptic		Freedom and Direct Democrac (SPD) National Movement (RN) Kotlebists—People's Party Our Slovakia (L'SNS)

Guaranteeing their country's security and defense is also a matter of national sovereignty for the radical right parties. All eight emphasize improving their country's own abilities to defend itself and support the modernization of the military. Their positions regarding to what extent to build on existing alliances and about their country's membership of NATO encompass an even broader spectrum than their positions on EU membership.

At one end of the spectrum, the L'SNS explicitly calls for Slovakia to leave NATO, which it considers a terrorist pact, while at the other end PiS is the biggest advocate of strengthening NATO's eastern flank, increasing the alliance's presence in Poland, and further enlarging it to the east. In between, the SPD wants the Czech Republic to leave NATO subject to a referendum, while the RN sees NATO as an alliance that was forced on Poland and sees the solution to the country's security rather in the development of its own credible—potentially nuclear—deterrence capabilities. Its political ally, KORWiN, on the other hand, is more accepting of NATO and even supports its enlargement, but it also wants to significantly reduce the defense spending required by the alliance. The SR supports Slovakia's NATO membership and active participation in joint missions. Jobbik does not question Hungary's NATO membership anymore, while

Fidesz continues to regard it as the cornerstone of the country's security.

With the United States' pivot away from Europe under the Trump administration, the question of what kind of role the EU should play in defense has received increasing attention. In light of their general approaches to the EU, not all of the parties have concrete preferences on this issue, but in some cases they have formed positions on the future of European defense cooperation. At the critical end, the SPD opposes any collective defense system in the EU, considering defense integration as dysfunctional and thus unreliable. Other parties are more supportive. The SR, which is also in favor of NATO, supports the deepening of European cooperation on defense and is in favor of Slovakia's participation in the Permanent Structured Cooperation as well as developing joint capabilities on the European level. Fidesz is also supportive of developing European defense capabilities and of a European defense industry but it wants to avoid duplications with NATO. PiS puts even more emphasis on NATO and, while it finds military cooperation in the EU valuable, it wants this to be coordinated at the transatlantic level to prevent the undermining of NATO.

Though all the parties are critical of their countries' EU membership and several of them also of their

NATO membership, this does not mean that they are against all forms of international cooperation. Almost all of them advocate some form of cooperation among the countries of Central Europe—only KORWiN and the L'SNS make no mention of it in their programs. The Visegrad Cooperation (V4) between the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia is widely seen as a format able to amplify the voices of the four countries in the EU. Even the SPD, which would like the Czech Republic to leave the EU, mentions this as an added value of the V4. The RN sees relations with the V4 and Western Balkan countries as free of conflict and would like to intensify these ties through concrete projects and by strengthening the infrastructural connections in the region. The latter has been a key goal for PiS as well, which has been promoting the Three Seas Initiative put on the agenda by President Andrzej Duda in 2015 in order to strengthen Poland's regional role.

This also shows that PiS thinks in terms of a wider region than most of the other parties, and sees Poland in a central, leading role of regional cooperation across a wide range of organizational setups, such as the V4, the Three Seas Initiative, the Bucharest Format, the Nordic-Baltic Cooperation, the Carpathian Strategy, or the Eastern Partnership. Since Fidesz came to power, Hungary has also been focusing on regional cooperation, especially on the V4, as a platform to amplify its voice in the EU. Fidesz talks of Central Europe as a new engine of the continent. More recently, however, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán has talked of Poland as the flagship of a sovereign Central Europe to which Hungary should “adjust its boats,”¹² thus relegating regional leadership to Warsaw, at least rhetorically.

Some of the parties explicitly support the idea of regional cooperation in security and defense. The SPD suggests strengthening V4 cooperation on security and border control. KORWiN wants Poland to cooperate with neighboring countries to expand its defense capabilities, and its army to develop

permanent cooperation with the armies of Germany, the Czech Republic, and Belarus. Additionally, it advocates for special military ties with the wider region, including the V4, Bulgaria, Sweden, and even Turkey. The PiS and Fidesz-led governments have supported regional military and defense cooperation within the V4, too, and maintained Hungary's and Poland's activities in other existing formats, while the SR can also foresee cooperation among the V4 militaries.¹³

Though all the parties are critical of their countries' EU membership and several of them also of their NATO membership, this does not mean that they are against all forms of international cooperation.

The radical right parties see relations with neighboring countries also through the prism of ethnic nationalism, which challenges cooperation. Several mention the protection of the rights of their ethnic kin as a priority in their relations with neighboring countries—The RN and PiS regarding the Polish minorities especially in Lithuania, Belarus, and Ukraine; Jobbik and Fidesz concerning Hungarians in the Carpathian basin and beyond; or the SR concerning Slovaks abroad, including even in the United Kingdom, which moves the focus away from historic grievances and reflects current emigration from the region. Overwhelmingly the parties take a stance for the cultural and language rights, and potentially the autonomy, of their ethnic kin in neighboring countries. They even use EU instruments to advocate for those rights, as in the case of Jobbik and Fidesz supporting and advertising the Minority SafePack, a European citizens' initiative for minority rights.

12 The Government of Hungary, “[A járvány miatt szükség lesz újabb tiltó intézkedésekre](#)” [“Due to the pandemic, new restrictions will become necessary”], August 21, 2020.

13 Lucia Yar, “[Slovak parties want to develop the army only after the approval of national strategies. Analysis of the defense plans of the Slovak political parties.](#)” EuroPolicy, 2020.

Bilateral Ties with Great Powers

Outside the immediate region, the radical right parties devote particular attention to their country's existing and preferred relations with great powers, like the United States, Russia, or China. Positions toward the United States are not independent from their views on NATO. Thus, the L'SNS and SPD are the most critical, with the latter depicting Czech-U.S. relations rather pejoratively with the Czech Republic being called the United States' "cheapest ally." In a similar vein, the RN criticizes Poland's government for being too subservient to Washington and reliant on U.S. troops for security, while expecting a special relationship that that party considers one-sided. Jobbik used to be in the anti-United States camp but over time it has developed a pragmatic attitude, acknowledging the need for good ties. The position of Fidesz, after ten years in government is maybe the most complex. It prioritizes the least conflictual and most structured issue with the United States, security and defense cooperation, while seeking to exclude matters related to governance and democracy. Fidesz also regards the United States as a potential investor and seeks to deepen economic ties. Apart from regarding the United States as the security guarantor and the most important partner of Poland, PiS also emphasizes economic ties. It seeks to make the country more economically attractive through the Three Seas Initiative and would like to develop strategic relations with Washington.

The commitment of PiS to the United States is to be understood in light of the party's threat perception, which sees Russia as an aggressor that has significantly contributed to the increasing security challenges to the EU since 2014. PiS would like to see Russia contained also by the EU,¹⁴ supports the EU's sanctions on the country, and makes any improvement in relations with the EU conditional upon Russia's conduct. In this position, PiS is alone among the Central European radical right parties—even in Poland. The RN sees Russia as an aspiring power, but not one that is a threat

to Poland, and it wishes to develop economic ties with it that could counterbalance relations with Germany. Good relations with Russia are thus a key component of the RN's multivectoral foreign policy vision, which seek good relations with all countries instead of Poland's current alliances.

Other parties, like the SPD and Jobbik, also emphasize the economic potential of relations with Russia, while Fidesz has made it a key element of the "Eastern Opening" of Hungary's foreign policy since 2012.¹⁵ Consequently, Fidesz is opposed to the sanctions against Russia. As a result, relations with Russia have been a sticking point between Fidesz and PiS. In Slovakia, the SR considers Russia—along with China—a country against which counterintelligence may be needed, but it considers the sanctions imposed on Russia ineffective and nonsensical.¹⁶ The L'SNS, on the other hand, is widely seen as a Russophile party pushing pro-Kremlin narratives.

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Attitudes toward China are more—though not entirely—uniform, as the parties tend to view the country as a potential market and source of investment. They have been overall in favor of engagement with China in its new projects to connect with Central and Eastern Europe. The RN and Jobbik highlight their countries' central location as a potential benefit in relations with China, while the RN also calls for staying out of rivalries and dropping "demoliberal" universalism (that is, demanding respect for human

14 European Council on Foreign Relations, "[EU Coalition Explorer, Policy Intention Mapping](#)," 2020.

15 Zsuzsanna Végh, "Hungary's 'Eastern Opening' policy toward Russia: ties that bind?," *International Issues and Slovak Foreign Policy Affairs*, 2014, 24(1-2).

16 Euractiv.sk, "[Dialóg s Ruskom aj Čínou podporujú všetky veľké politické strany](#)," ["The dialogue with Russia and China is supported by all major political parties"], February 14, 2020.

rights and democratic values). SR politicians also voice similar positions, prioritizing economic gains over human rights.¹⁷ Fidesz also sets aside human rights, as well as security concerns regarding China and focuses on intensifying economic diplomacy with it.

Key Issues

Economic diplomacy and economic sovereignty are central themes for the radical right in Central Europe. As noted above, several of the parties prioritize it in the face of great powers and wish to counterbalance their countries' current embeddedness in the EU trade network by developing their economic relations with China and/or Russia to find new markets for their export and attract new investments. Export promotion has taken a central role in the program of PiS and is a main driver of Fidesz's foreign policy under Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade Péter Szijjártó. As members of the EU, however, the competences of these countries' government are limited when it comes to trade. Several parties see that as particularly problematic. The ĽSNS and RN—which also oppose the single market—argue for protectionist policies to favor Slovak and Polish companies respectively and oppose free trade agreements negotiated by the EU. By contrast, the PiS and Fidesz governments, with export promotion among their main goals, have been open to free trade agreements as long as they do not result in, for example, lowering EU standards, as was extensively discussed in the case of the eventually derailed negotiations for a Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership.

Economic diplomacy and economic sovereignty are central themes for the radical right in Central Europe.

Migration is another key issue for all the region's radical right parties, which show a united approach. Migration is seen invariably as a security threat as well as a threat to the European and Christian culture and identity of their countries. The extent to which party

programs explicitly problematize Islam and its alleged cultural threat varies, but it is nonetheless implied. Since 2015, when the issue started to gain attention in the Central European countries, migration has been discussed also in the context of potential responses by the EU. All the parties refuse any form of EU quota or relocation mechanism for refugees, and they advocate the right to a sovereign decision about who can be allowed into their country. Border protection is central in all their programs: the parties want their own country to protect its borders, and some (the SPD, PiS, Fidesz, and Jobbik) also emphasize the importance of the protection of the EU's external borders. The SPD is opposed to the involvement of the European Border and Coast Guard Agency, Frontex, in border protection, while Jobbik would find its role acceptable if a member state is unable to defend its borders. PiS, the SR, and Fidesz further argue that help should be taken to the regions where migration originates to tackle its root causes, like poverty, and that humanitarian assistance should also be provided there in refugee camps. In this context, a unique characteristic of the approach of Fidesz over the past years has been its advocacy for the protection of Christian religious minorities in the Middle East and Africa, whose communities are in turn supported by the Hungarian government's Hungary Helps program. None of the parties discuss the issue, however, in terms of asylum.

Finally, among the soft Eurosceptics, PiS and Fidesz support the EU's enlargement, while the SR supports the EU accession of the Western Balkan countries, but not that of Turkey.¹⁸ Jobbik makes its support to Serbia's EU membership conditional upon respect for minority rights and guaranteeing self-governance for Hungarians in the country. As mentioned above, minority questions are also on the agenda for the parties in Poland and Hungary in relations to Eastern European neighbors. PiS and Fidesz are generally also supportive of the EU's Eastern Partnership program and of the partner countries' associations with the EU.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Euractiv.sk, "Dialóg s Ruskom aj Čínou podporujú všetky veľké politické strany."

Nevertheless, conflicts between Ukraine and Hungary over the Hungarian minority in the former have led to the Fidesz government blocking Ukraine's rapprochement with NATO. The SR has expressed support for Ukraine's reform process under its Association Agreement with the EU, partly in hopes that it would provide market opportunities for Slovakia. Hard Eurosceptics typically do not formulate positions on EU enlargement and neighborhood policy.

Channels of Influence on EU Foreign Policy

To assess the influence of Central Europe's radical right parties on the EU's foreign policy, the complexity of the union's multi-level governance, with various institutions playing a role in decision-making in different areas, must be taken into account. Though the Common Foreign and Security Policy, including the Common Security and Defense Policy, are intergovernmental domains and are thus decided upon unanimously in the ministerial-level Council of the EU, several areas of the EU's foreign policy—like development cooperation, humanitarian aid, or relations with international organizations—are influenced by both the Council of the EU and the European Parliament as they fall under the ordinary legislative procedure.¹⁹ In the former, radical right parties in government matter the most as they have the possibility to directly channel their positions into the relevant configuration, the Foreign Affairs Council. In the European Parliament, radical right politicians in committees with foreign policy relevance, as well as the overall coherence of political groups (whether purely radical right ones or those having radical right members) in plenary can be considered, as well.

Beyond these direct channels of influence at the level of these institutions, radical right parties often influence EU policymaking indirectly. In particular, in responding to their challenge, mainstream parties

sometimes shift their own policy positions,²⁰ especially in areas most actively highlighted by the radical right, like immigration.²¹ Where they are not in government, radical right parties may have an impact on the positions of governing parties, which then feeds into EU-level decision-making through the Council of the EU or the European Council. They can also influence mainstream parties of the different political groups in the European Parliament, even those they do not belong to, which can then impact these groups' rhetoric and their policy preferences. All these dynamics run in parallel, making tracing the process and deciphering its elements particularly challenging.

Beyond these direct channels of influence at the level of these institutions, radical right parties often influence EU policymaking indirectly.

Like the radical right party family as a whole, those parties in Central Europe performed relatively well in the 2019 European Parliament elections. The number of such parties represented increased from three to five, with the SPD and L'SNS joining Jobbik, Fidesz, and PiS. The SR, RN, and KORWiN (the latter two running together under the Konfederacja alliance) did not make it into the European Parliament. Only Jobbik lost seats compared to the 2014 elections, whereas PiS and Fidesz managed to increase the number of theirs. These five parties remain scattered across political groups, with Jobbik and the L'SNS remaining non-affiliated to date. Their opportunities and potential influence differ depending on the absolute and relative size of their party factions, as well as on their membership in political groups.

After the loss of the British MEPs resulted in a significant drop in the size of the ECR political group

¹⁹ The ordinary legislative procedure is the EU's most common decision-making process in which both the Council of the EU and the European Parliament play an important role.

²⁰ Michael Minkenberg, "The Radical Right in Public Office: Agenda-Setting and Policy Effects," *West European Politics*, 2001, 24(4).

²¹ Martin A. Schain, "The Extreme Right and Immigration Policy-Making: Measuring Direct and Indirect Effects," *West European Politics*, 2006, 29(2).

Table 3. Central European Radical Right Parties in the European Parliament

Country	Party	Result in last European election*	Political group in the European Parliament	Number and distribution of MEPs in committees and subcommittees of foreign policy relevance
Czech Republic	Freedom and Direct Democracy (SPD)	9.14% 2/21	Identity and Democracy	1/2 MEPs Security and Defense (1) Substitute: Foreign Affairs (1)
Hungary	Fidesz—Hungarian Civic Alliance	52.56% 12/21	N/I Previously: European People's Party (EPP)**	None Previously: 6/12 MEPs (3 substitutes) Security and Defense (1, vice-chair); Foreign Affairs (1), International Trade (1), Human Rights (2), Development (1) Substitute: Foreign Affairs (3)
	Jobbik—Movement for a Better Hungary	6.34% 1/21	N/I	1/1 MEP Foreign Affairs (1) Substitute: International Trade (1)
Poland	Law and Justice (PiS)	45.38% 25/51	European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR)	8/25 MEPs (2 substitutes) Foreign Affairs (4, vice-chair), Security and Defense (2), Human Rights (2), International Trade (1), Development (1) Foreign Affairs (2), Security and Defense (1), International Trade (1)
Slovakia	Kotlebists—People's Party Our Slovakia (LSNS)	12.07% 2/14	N/I	2/2 MEPs (both substitutes) Substitute: Foreign Affairs (2)

* Percentage of the vote, and the number of seats won out of those allocated to the given country in the European Parliament.

** Fidesz MEPs left the EPP party family and political group in March 2021 and lost their committee positions.

in the European Parliament, PiS became its biggest constituent party with 25 MEPs. Its members make up almost half of the ECR group, which contains several—but not only—radical right parties from across the EU, including the Brothers of Italy, VMRO from Bulgaria, the Swedish Democrats, or the newcomers Forum for Democracy from the Netherlands and VOX from Spain. This enables PiS to be represented in a broad selection of parliamentary committees. It has eight representatives nominated across the five that are directly relevant for foreign policy (see Table 3). Witold Waszczykowski, Poland's former foreign minister, is one of the four vice-chairs

of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, which gives PiS weight in the committee.

Following the 2019 elections, the 12 Fidesz MEPs joined the EPP group, even though the party had been suspended from the party family in March 2019 due to concerns about breaches of the rule of law in Hungary.²² After two years of stalemate, Fidesz eventually left the parliamentary group and the party family in March in a move to preempt having its delegation

²² European People's Party, "[FIDESZ membership suspended after EPP Political Assembly](#)," March 20, 2019.

also suspended from the parliamentary group.²³ With this decision, Fidesz representatives joined the ranks of the non-affiliated MEPs and consequently lost all their previous positions in committees and subcommittees (see Table 3).

PiS clearly has the most potential among the five parties represented in the European Parliament to influence legislation in foreign policy matters.

Shortly after Fidesz's departure from the EPP, Orbán hosted a meeting in Budapest with Poland's Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki from PiS and the Italy's Lega party leader, Matteo Salvini—representatives respectively of the biggest parties in the ECR and the Identity and Democracy groups in the European Parliament. The goal was to discuss cooperation on the European scene and they announced the formation of an alliance for a “European renaissance” of traditional values.²⁴ While further consultations are on the agenda between the three parties and issue-based coordination on the EU level—for example, on issues related to questions of sovereignty—may have potential, a more formal arrangement at the moment faces difficulties. Beyond their overlapping views on socio-cultural issues, the three parties hold diverging positions on other ones. This is most notable on Russia, with PiS in direct opposition to Fidesz and Lega. More formal cooperation reaching beyond the three parties to the political groups, such as a partial or full merger between ECR and Identity and Democracy, is highly unlikely for now. Most importantly, it is not in the interest of PiS to lose its leading position in the ECR group and the financial perks that come with it. Meanwhile, Fidesz would be interested in having its MEPs join a political group to regain some influence on EU

legislation. In light of its existing close cooperation with PiS, it is most likely that Fidesz's MEPs will eventually join the ECR group, especially in light of Fidesz maintaining that its partner in Germany remains the Christian Democrats,²⁵ thus consciously delineating itself from Alternative for Germany, which is part of Identity and Democracy.

Jobbik's single MEP is a member of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, while the two LSNS MEPs are substitutes in the same committee. The newcomer SPD with two MEPs joined the Identity and Democracy group, which is dominated by France's National Rally and Italy's Lega. One of the two MEPs was nominated to the Subcommittee on Security and Defense and is a substitute in the Committee on Foreign Affairs.

In this light, PiS clearly has the most potential among the five parties represented in the European Parliament to influence legislation in foreign policy matters. Thanks to the relative size of its delegation, it has the possibility to steer the political direction of the ECR group in the in the parliament. Conversely, Fidesz's influence on the EPP group until its exit earlier this year can be described as disruptive. The division in the EPP regarding the actions of the Fidesz government created a stalemate. Not only was the EPP not able to influence the increasingly authoritarian practices of Fidesz, the prolonged conflict empowered Fidesz to continue exerting a political—rather than policy—impact on the party family, undermining its unity. As for the SPD, its two MEPs have no significant influence in the Identity and Democracy group.

Access to positions and channels does not equal influence, however. A review of how the MEPs of the various parties in the relevant parliamentary positions have used their opportunities since the formation of the current European Parliament nonetheless shows how they seek to exert influence and what topics they primarily engage with. For this reason, the parliamentary activities of the MEPs from the five

23 Fidesz.hu, “[A Fidesz kilép az Európai Néppártból](#),” [“Fidesz leaves the European People's Party”], March 18, 2021.

24 Sándor Zsíros, “[Orbán, Salvini and Morawiecki form new right-wing European alliance](#),” Euronews, April 1, 2021.

25 Ildikó Csuha, “[Meggérdeztük Novák Katalint, miért ülnek közös frakcióba az AfD-vel? – ezt válaszolta](#)” [“We asked Katalin Novák why they sit in one faction with AfD? – this is what she answered”], ATV, April 20, 2021.

parties who between July 2019 and November 2020²⁶ were members or substitutes in the five committees and subcommittees directly connected to EU foreign policy have been reviewed. These are the committees on foreign affairs, international trade, and development and the subcommittees on security and defense, and human rights.

As of November 2020, PiS MEPs handled 16 dossiers in the five committees and subcommittees covering topics like the Association Agreements with Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine, trade questions between the EU and Ukraine, the Eastern Partnership, the implementation of the Common Foreign and Security Policy, the Permanent Structured Cooperation, security cooperation in Africa, the EU-Africa strategy, negotiations over the EU-UK partnership, artificial intelligence, the budget, human rights in the world, and sustainable corporate governance. So far three PiS MEPs have acted as shadow rapporteurs, and one, Anna Fotyga, as both rapporteur and shadow rapporteur.²⁷ Fotyga's engagement has been the most extensive, handling ten out of the 16 dossiers (one as rapporteur, the rest as shadow rapporteur), and additionally often speaking in the plenary on behalf of the ECR on matters concerning foreign policy. She is followed by Witold Waszczykowski, who managed four dossiers as shadow rapporteur in addition to his position as vice-chair of the Committee on Foreign Affairs. As the topics listed above show, PiS MEPs have been especially engaged with the EU's eastern neighborhood, but they are also active on relations with Africa and the United Kingdom as well as in defense policy.

In the analyzed period before they lost their positions, Fidesz MEPs handled merely three dossiers as rapporteurs or shadow rapporteurs, including on the

Western Balkans, trade questions between the EU and Ukraine, and the Association Agreements with Georgia. Enikő Győri acted as rapporteur and two other MEPs as shadow rapporteurs, each handling one topic. The focus of the Fidesz members was on the immediate neighborhood of the EU, and their involvement in the committees and subcommittees is thus significantly more limited than that of PiS members. The difference cannot be explained solely by the number of MEPs participating in the five relevant committees as the difference there was minor. SPD members have not acted as rapporteur or shadow rapporteur in committees yet, while the parliament's rule precludes the non-affiliated Jobbik and L'SNS members from acting as such. Following its exit from the EPP, as long Fidesz remains non-affiliated, its members' activities will also be significantly limited.

The PiS and Fidesz governments have the highest potential among the radical right parties of the Visegrad countries to directly influence EU foreign policy in the Council of the EU.

The PiS and Fidesz governments have the highest potential among the radical right parties of the Visegrad countries to directly influence EU foreign policy in the Council of the EU. Even though the SR does not hold any portfolios in Slovakia's government that has direct relevance to EU foreign policy, as junior coalition partner it may still be able to influence governmental positions on issues that are central to its ideology. In the field of foreign policy, however, it would likely focus rather on issues, like migration, that are central for the party. The remaining five parties—SPD, RN and KORWiN (or jointly Konfederacja), Jobbik and the L'SNS—can only have indirect impact primarily by influencing through the domestic debate the positions of the governing parties represented in the Council of the EU and the European Council. This should not be disregarded, especially as various elections in the region are nearing—later this year in

²⁶ It should be noted that due to the coronavirus pandemic 2020 has been an atypical year for the European Parliament.

²⁷ A rapporteur is an MEP appointed to handle a legislative proposal procedurally and substantially. A shadow rapporteur is nominated by another political group than that of the rapporteur and cooperates with the rapporteur in the legislative process and channels in its political groups' views on the issue.

the Czech Republic, in 2022 in Hungary, in 2023 in Poland, and in 2024 in Slovakia.

Positions on European Commission Goals

The European Commission that took office in 2019 has set itself the goals of developing the EU's external trade relations by concluding ongoing negotiations on free trade agreements and by advancing the reform of the World Trade Organization, strengthening the EU's partnership with the United States, developing a comprehensive strategy for Africa, and updating the EU's development policy. Regarding enlargement policy, it has sought to reaffirm the prospects of the Western Balkans countries that are candidates for membership. In reaction to fears about the United States' defense disengagement from Europe, it also set the goal of moving toward a genuine European Defense Union. Finally, it also aims to move from unanimity toward qualified majority in foreign policy decision-making.²⁸

To see in what directions the radical right parties are likely to pull on key issues on the EU agenda, their positions are briefly contrasted below, building on the earlier discussion of party manifestos, the review of the activities of their members in the European Parliament, and where necessary, further sources. Given the conclusion that PiS and Fidesz currently have the most ability to influence the EU's foreign policy, particular attention is paid here to them.

Following from the radical right parties' hard or soft Euroscepticism and their calls for national sovereignty or a Europe of nations, their opposition to introducing qualified majority voting in foreign policy decision-making is to be expected. Though the parties do not go into such details in their programs, some MEPs of PiS (for example, Anna Fotyga) and Fidesz (for example, Kinga Gál) have taken a stance against it already. The Fidesz and PiS governments stand for keeping foreign policy as member state competence,

but they are not alone in their opposition to moving toward unanimity. Their position is shared not only on the radical right but by all governments of the "new" member states (including the Czech Republic and Slovakia) and beyond.²⁹ On this issue, therefore, PiS and Fidesz—along with a wide coalition of partners—are like to jointly obstruct the Commission's proposal.

Following from the radical right parties' hard or soft Euroscepticism and their calls for national sovereignty or a Europe of nations, their opposition to introducing qualified majority voting in foreign policy decision-making is to be expected.

The intention to strengthen trade partnerships and conclude ongoing free trade negotiations is met with mixed attitudes among the radical right parties of Central Europe—as in the EU more broadly.³⁰ The PiS and Fidesz governments earlier adopted cautious and critical, but ultimately supportive, attitudes toward the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership.³¹ They are in principle supportive of free trade, and through their MEPs have expressed their support also to the EU-Vietnam free trade agreement adopted by the European Parliament in 2020. This issue, however, showed the ambivalent position of the SPD, which in principle is not opposed to free trade, but whose MEPs were divided on the agreement. PiS considers export promotion, which benefits from the removal of barriers through free trade agreements, to be of central importance for Poland. RN's protectionist position and the L'SNS's opposition is of no real influence on the issue either in their national contexts or at the EU level. Thus, all in all, the European Commission should not expect opposition on free trade agreements

28 European Commission, "A Union that strives for more. My agenda for Europe by candidate for President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen. Political guidelines for the next European Commission 2019-2024," 2019.

29 European Council on Foreign Relations, EU Coalition Explorer.

30 See in Rosa Balfour et al., *Divide and Obstruct: Populist Parties and EU Foreign Policy*, The German Marshall Fund of the United States, 2019.

31 Csaba Molnár and Edit Zgut, *Public and Governmental Approaches towards TTIP in the V4 Countries*, Political Capital, 2016. PP. 28-31.

with international partners from the more influential radical right parties in Central Europe.

The radical right parties of the region typically have no elaborate positions—if they have any—on relations with Africa or on development policy—though, following from their nativism, they could be expected to be opposed to the latter unless it is conducted in a way that serves their country’s direct interests. Being in government, PiS and Fidesz needed to develop positions toward Africa and development policy. These positions are now clearly shaped by their opposition to migration: they see Africa as a potential source of migration that threatens the EU’s security and development policy as a tool to address the root causes of migration. They thus approach the EU’s intention to develop a comprehensive strategy toward Africa through the lens of security and seek to put development policy to its service, too. Such arguments have been advanced by PiS and Fidesz MEPs such as Ryszard Czarnecki, Karol Karski, or Kinga Gál. In principle, therefore radical right governments from the V4 will not oppose an Africa strategy and development policy for the EU, but they can be expected to work on narrowing it down to migration management—an approach not alien from the current European mainstream, which shifted to the right on the issue in recent years.

The soft Eurosceptic radical right parties are generally supportive of EU membership for the Western Balkan countries. Jobbik and some Fidesz MEPs, however, also highlight the importance of guaranteeing minority rights in these countries as a precondition. The SR supports enlargement in the Western Balkans but is opposed to Turkey’s accession. Hard Eurosceptics parties, which themselves would prefer for their country to leave the EU, typically do not express a position on enlargement but consider relations with the Western Balkans as part of regional cooperation. In calling for progress on the accession process, the Fidesz and PiS governments are more likely to continue to clash on the issue with certain Western member states, like France, who are reluctant to accept new member states than with the European

Commission, where the enlargement and neighborhood portfolio is under a former Hungarian diplomat who previously represented the Orbán government in Brussels toward the EU and who is expected to be supportive of the enlargement agenda.³² Given the lack of commitment to democratic standards by Fidesz and PiS domestically, they can also be expected to be laxer on candidate countries meeting the EU’s democratic requirements for membership.

The soft Eurosceptic radical right parties are generally supportive of EU membership for the Western Balkan countries.

The radical right parties raise objections about the plan to move toward a European Defense Union, although PiS and Fidesz—which do not question their countries’ membership in current alliances—show openness to strengthening defense and military cooperation in the EU. This is not because they are keen on ceding sovereignty in this domain to the EU, but because it fits into their securitizing discourse. PiS is the most cautious regarding the EU’s plans as it clearly prioritizes NATO and wants to avoid any European attempts to question or undermine the alliance’s primacy for transatlantic defense. Fidesz also continues to consider NATO as the cornerstone of Hungary’s security, but over the past few years, it has started to strengthen the country’s cooperation with European partners—especially with Germany, which plays an important role in the modernization in the Hungarian army.³³

32 Lili Bayer, “[Hungary names EU ambassador as new Commission nominee](#),” Politico, October 1, 2019.

33 Marcin Terlikowski and Veronika Józwiak, [The Next Evolution of Hungary’s Defence Policy](#), The Polish Institute of International Affairs, 2020.

Ties with Russia and China under Radical Right Governments

Relations with Russia and China have been contentious elements of the EU agenda, with member states divided on how to approach their various aspects. Such a division can be observed also between the radical right governments of Poland and Hungary, with Fidesz showing significantly more openness and engagement toward both countries than PiS.

Though European radical right parties generally hold favorable views of, and may even cultivate close ties with, Russia, those in Central Europe are not united in their preferred approach to the country. Among them, PiS stands alone in considering Russia a security threat, especially in light of its aggression in Ukraine. The party already supported the EU sanctions introduced against Moscow before it came to power and it has lobbied for an increased NATO presence at the eastern flank of the alliance.

All other parties discussed here have favorable or even friendly attitudes toward Russia, but Fidesz' sympathies toward Moscow stand out. In 2014, the Fidesz government signed a deal with Russia's state nuclear company Rosatom on the expansion of the Paks nuclear power plant, which is to be funded by a €10 billion Russian loan that will leave Hungary in debt for decades. This long-term commitment also has consequences at the EU level: it contributes to the Hungarian government's insistence on nuclear energy being considered clean as part of its green transition under the goals set by the European Green Deal.¹

The Fidesz government has repeatedly criticized—like many other radical right parties—the sanctions introduced against Russia after the annexation of Crimea and the invasion of eastern Ukraine, but to date it has never vetoed their prolongation in the Council of the EU. Fidesz has continued to deepen Hungary's ties with Russia even after the events in Ukraine. In a step that raises serious security concerns, it welcomed the headquarters of Russia's International Investment Bank that moved to Budapest in 2019, granting its staff diplomatic immunity.² More recently, in January, Hungary abstained from signing a joint letter by EU members that condemned the violence of Russia's police against protesters in the aftermath of the incarceration of opposition leader Alexei Navalny. The joint statement would have allowed the EU to raise the issue at the OSCE Permanent Assembly, but Fidesz prevented the EU from speaking with one voice on a human rights matter. Though the Fidesz government endorsed the declaration by the high representative of the union for foreign affairs and security policy condemning the detention of Navalny shortly before, it did not speak out on the matter on its own, in stark contrast to other governments in the region, including the PiS one in Poland.³

This was not the first time that the Fidesz government prevented the EU from taking a united stance on human rights in relation to a global power. In March 2017, Hungary refused to sign

1 Sam Morgan, "[Hungary backs 2050 climate neutrality goal, bringing EU total to 22.](#)" Euractiv, June 18, 2019.

2 V4Square, "[Budapest. A welcoming gateway to Europe for a Russian bank.](#)" July 18, 2019.

3 Justin Spike, "[Hungary the only country not to sign EU statement condemning violence against Russian protesters.](#)" Insight Hungary, January 28, 2021.

an EU joint letter that would have condemned the torture of detained human rights lawyers in China, thus preventing it from becoming a joint EU position.⁴ It also took China's side in 2016 by blocking—together with Greece and Croatia—a joint declaration regarding territorial disputes in the South China Sea that would have supported the decision of the Permanent Court of Arbitration in the Hague that criticized China.⁵ In April, Hungary blocked an EU statement that would have criticized China over its actions curtailing Hong Kong's autonomy.⁶ These steps are to be understood in the context of Fidesz' attempts to deepen ties with China as part of its Eastern Opening policy since 2012, and to attract investment from and increase trade with the country. Under Fidesz, Hungary was the first EU member state to join president China's Belt and Road Initiative, and in this framework the two countries rolled out a €2 billion project for the reconstruction of the Budapest-Belgrade railway financed largely from a loan by a Chinese-Hungarian consortium linked, on the Hungarian side, to government circles.⁷ Fidesz has also been open to Chinese involvement in the telecommunication sector, where other EU member states have come to show more caution. In 2019, Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó expressed support for Huawei's participation in developing the Hungarian 5G network.⁸ The company opened a new regional research and development center in Budapest in 2020.⁹

While Hungary under Fidesz became increasingly welcoming toward Chinese interests, Poland under PiS has gradually moved in the opposing direction over the past five years. Although PiS was initially similarly open to China's engagement in Central Europe—so much so that in 2016 Poland and China signed a comprehensive strategic partnership, its enthusiasm faded as the economic results and Chinese investments the government hoped for failed to materialize.¹⁰ To date, PiS has not secured development projects with China as significant as the Budapest-Belgrade railway. Its attitude toward Chinese involvement in the telecommunication sector also took a different trajectory. From 2019 on, the PiS government—influenced by the United States' lobbying—has gradually distanced itself from Huawei and its potential involvement in developing Poland's 5G network. It has committed itself in a joint declaration with the United States that only trusted suppliers can participate in the network.¹¹

4 Simon Denyer, "[Europe divided, China gratified as Greece blocks E.U. statement over human rights](#)," The Washington Post, June 19, 2017.

5 Robin Emmott, "[EU's statement on South China Sea reflects division](#)," Reuters, July 15, 2016.

6 James Chalmers and Robin Emmott, "[Hungary blocks EU statement criticizing China over Hong Kong, diplomats say](#)," April 16, 2021.

7 Zoltán Kovács, "[Hungary classifies \\$2 billion railroad deal with China for ten years](#)," Index, May 19, 2020.

8 Szabolcs Panyi, "[Huawei is slowly pushed out from European 5G networks but the Orbán government still supports them](#)," Direkt36, July 3, 2020.

9 Szabolcs Panyi, "[How Orbán's Eastern Opening brought Chinese spy games to Budapest](#)," Direkt36, March 14, 2021.

10 Łukasz Sarek, "[Poland and the EU: Seeking a Two-way Street with China](#)," Warsaw Institute, March 18, 2018.

11 Alicja Bachulska, "Poland: hardening stance," in Ivana Karásková et al. (ed.), [Huawei in Central and Eastern Europe: Trends and Forecast](#), Association for International Affairs, 2020. Bruno Surdel, "[Polish alt-right: A friend of China](#)," Central European Institute of Asian Studies, September 7, 2019.

Conclusion

The radical right party scene in Central Europe has gone through a significant transformation since the region's countries joined the EU in 2004. Radical right parties have become stable features of the political scene, and the transformation of Fidesz in Hungary and PiS in Poland from mainstream right parties into radical right ones have also shaped the region's politics over the past decade. With such parties' greater representation in the European Parliament following the 2019 elections and the presence of governing ones in the European Council as well as the Council of the EU, the members of this typically Eurosceptic party family have the possibility to influence policymaking at the EU level. With migration and its external dimensions increasingly on the EU agenda, their attention is turning toward foreign policy, as well.

The Visegrad countries have experienced the rise of a variety of radical right parties over the past decade. The diversity of the eight parties considered here, illustrate that operating in the same region is no guarantee for uniform policy positions. They hold hard as well as soft Eurosceptic positions. While some still want their countries to leave the EU, others—like most of their western European counterparts recently—wish to put breaks on integration and seek to reform the EU from within in order to create a Europe of nations. Nevertheless, all eight parties believe that some form of regional cooperation would be beneficial for their countries. They typically prioritize economic diplomacy in foreign policy, but they differ on their threat perceptions, especially when it comes to Russia, where even the Polish radical right parties are divided. Consequently, they also differ on how they wish to guarantee their country's security and how they weigh the importance of participation in military alliances.

The divisions among Central Europe's radical right parties suggest that they are not likely to be pulling into the same direction at the EU level. Their opportunities to influence EU policymaking are also highly unequal, depending on their representation in the EU institutions and their membership in European party

families. While five of the eight parties have some level of direct access to EU policymaking in the European Parliament, as governing parties Fidesz and PiS have the most, and the most straightforward, potential to influence EU foreign policy, which is also reinforced by the size of their representation in the parliament. The experience of the European Parliament since the 2019 elections showed that PiS is more active in the committees that have direct relevance for EU foreign policy and engages there with a broader range of issues, while Fidesz representatives were engaged with a more limited set of issues that concerned Hungary's direct neighborhood. The departure of Fidesz from the EPP is a significant hit to its influence as it has lost all the benefits that come with membership in a political group as well as the positions it held in the various committees. Reversing this loss may be a motivation for Fidesz to join a political group, most likely ECR, in the near future.

Central Europe's soft Eurosceptic radical right parties do not want to undermine the European Commission's foreign policy agenda in its entirety.

Central Europe's soft Eurosceptic radical right parties do not want to undermine the European Commission's foreign policy agenda in its entirety. The exception is their opposition to the proposed transition to qualified majority voting in foreign affairs, in which they are not alone. Instead, they seek to shift policies to the right by pushing their priorities on given issues, which in turn may radicalize the positions of mainstream parties. The resulting rightward shift can be observed in the discourse and policymaking on migration. The radical right is also pursuing its securitizing agenda on all issues that can be in any way connected to migration, such as development policy or relations with Africa or the Middle East. Additionally, the disregard of these parties for certain democratic principles undermines the EU's

ability to speak with one voice and credibility in pursuing a value-based global order. They are likely to disregard values and principles in the EU's enlargement policy, and several of them also dismiss such issues in relations with China or Russia. This is especially true for those that find themselves in government, as Fidesz has been able to effectively undermine joint EU positions already.

While the influence of Central Europe's radical right parties on the making of EU foreign policy may not be significant unless they are in government, in opposition they can also influence the discourses and positions of mainstream parties if the latter consider them competition. This, in turn, can lead to a shift of mainstream parties to the right—or as the example of PiS and Fidesz shows even to their transformation. This is especially the case when the radical right can—or the mainstream fears that, given the chance, it could—politicize the issues it cares about and thus set the agenda. For this reason, keeping an eye on radical right forces and their positions is important as their relative power can be indicative of their potential indirect influence on policymaking.

Following from the above, attempts at preventing and countering the impact of radical right parties on EU foreign policy should also take into account their channels of indirect as well as of direct influence. This suggests tasks for mainstream political actors at the national and the EU levels as well as for EU institutions. Since the most influential radical right parties today do not seek to withdraw their country from the EU but rather to channel in their positions and reform it from within, countering their influence first and foremost depends on the reactions of the pro-EU mainstream.

Limiting the impact of the radical right necessitates the commitment of mainstream parties—primarily right-wing, but also left-wing, ones—to resist the temptation of shifting their own stance and co-opting the positions of radical right competitors. As the results of the 2019 European Parliament elections show, rightward shifts in the positions of main-

stream parties and in the overall political discourse in the EU did not prevent the rise of radical right forces. Instead, such developments undermine the trust of moderate voters in mainstream parties. Moreover, the infiltration of radical right rhetoric into mainstream politics persists beyond elections. Mainstream actors legitimizing such exclusionary and illiberal positions slowly erode democratic values and principles as the cornerstones of their country's and the EU's political system.

Attempts at preventing and countering the impact of radical right parties on EU foreign policy should also take into account their channels of indirect as well as of direct influence.

Rather than adapting to the radical right and adopting their often simplistic frames, mainstream parties need to develop rational and well-substantiated policy solutions that have basic democratic values and principles at their core. They also need to effectively communicate these solutions to the electorate, while addressing concerns raised by the radical right. This would be facilitated also by raising awareness about issues on the EU's foreign policy agenda and the general level of knowledge about those in EU member states.

The above also applies to the EU institutions, especially to the European Commission, which cannot allow themselves to be driven or sidetracked by radical right frames that conflict with the very core ideals of the EU. Such an approach is equally important when speaking out for democratic values and principles, human rights, and a rules-based global order around the world, even if those radical right parties that are in government may prevent the adoption of joint EU positions. While their veto may risk undermining unity, even such occasions provide an opportunity for EU institutions and member states to stand up for the union's normative identity.

This work represents solely the opinion of the author and any opinion expressed herein should not be taken to represent an official position of the institution to which the author is affiliated.

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