

The 'Euro-sceptic Internationale' at the gates of Brussels?

Populist
alliance-building
across the EU
and Hungary's
role in it



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Executive Summary

Populist radical parties rose in popularity and gained ground in national elections during 2023. They could successfully profit from rising inflation, social and cultural tensions, and political instability in some countries. As a result, more of these parties are now in or near government or have increased their support. Still, a breakthrough for these parties seems far away, and in some cases, they even lost power, like in Poland. The main beneficiaries of this trend seem to be Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni's Brothers of Italy (Fdi), Slovakian Prime Minister Robert Fico's Smer-SD party, Alternative for Germany (AfD), the Dutch Party for Freedom (PVV), Austria's Freedom Party (FPÖ) and the relatively new Enough! (Chega!) party in Portugal.

The most consequential events in 2023 were the elections in Spain, Slovakia, Poland, and the Netherlands. In Spain, despite successes in the regional elections, the VOX party lost seats in the parliament and failed to form a government with the center-right. In Slovakia, Robert Fico returned to power after a year-long negative campaign and formed a coalition government with his former deputy and the nationalist Slovak National Party (SNS). In Poland, after a close election campaign, the eight-year-long reign of the Law and Justice party has ended, as it could not form a government despite winning the most votes, handing the power to the Donald Tusk-led opposition alliance. In the Netherlands, Geert Wilder's Party for Freedom (PVV) gained the most votes, but it is unsure whether it can form a governing coalition.

Populist radical right parties in the EU focus on similar themes centered around nativism, authoritarianism, and populism and follow similar strategies and tactics. There are even non-right-wing anti-establishment populist parties, such as the Smer, that learn from their populist radical right fellows, using similar anti-gender, anti-migration, Eurosceptic, and anti-liberal messages. In some cases, they tone down extremist narratives and focus on bread-and-butter issues to profit from people's concerns in times of crisis. Despite the common topics, these parties are far from united ideologically and continue to have significant differences. Nevertheless, their cooperation strictly focuses on mutual issues, and they try to conceal their differences.

The main dividing line between them is their relationship with Russia, especially after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. While the Hungarian governing Fidesz party and the members of the Identity and Democracy (ID) group in the European Parliament (especially FPÖ, AfD, the French National Rally (RN), and Matteo Salvini's League) pursue a pro-Kremlin policy, members of the European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) group have a clear anti-Kremlin stance (e.g., Fdi and PiS). Moreover, populist radical right parties can also easily find themselves on different platforms on other policy issues due to their diverging national contexts and interests. Also, the power interests of these parties and their leaders often collide. Hence, as of December 2023, the alliance between ECR and ID seems unlikely in the short run. Even though Fidesz had worked hard in recent years to bring the two groups closer to each other, when it realized by September 2023 that these efforts had failed, it signaled its desire to join the ECR.

There are signs that the EPP and ECR are moving closer together in the run-up to the 2024 elections. On the national level, there is already cooperation between EPP and ECR parties in Italy, Czechia, and Latvia. The leadership of the EPP and ECR are contemplating a closer relationship, as the political views of the EPP leadership seem to align with the ECR's on immigration and climate change. Still, there are significant differences between the two groups, and the EPP leadership receives internal and external pushback as other groups try to maintain a cordon sanitaire against populist radical parties.

The Orbán regime wants to bring about a ‘regime change’ in Europe to create a favorable external environment for its long-term domestic survival. Therefore, the Orbán regime’s influence-building in the EU has aimed to establish cooperation with populist radical (right) ‘sovereignist’ forces by supporting them, convincing them to accept Fidesz’s leading role, and facilitating their collaboration, preferably forming a broad alliance. The main tools for building influence and partnerships among populist radical (right) forces in the EU have been (1) the export of illiberal ideas, policies, and narratives, for instance, through meetings, events, and publications; and (2) providing practical support to these actors. The regime has established cooperation with like-minded parties and leaders in almost every EU member state. As of December 2023, Fidesz’s most essential partners in the EU are Fdl in Italy, PIS in Poland, Vox in Spain, RN in France, PVV in the Netherlands, and Smer in Slovakia.

Despite the rising popularity of some populist radical parties, they are not expected to gain significant influence over the European Parliament or the European Council (EUCO) in 2024. This means they will have limited influence when the EUCO proposes the new European Commission (EC) president. Apart from Italy, Hungary, and Slovakia, whose governments are led by populist radical leaders, these parties can only influence the decision-making process in Finland, where they are part of the governing coalition, and indirectly in Sweden, where the Sweden Democrats (SD) support the government externally. Otherwise, ad-hoc cooperation with the EPP group on specific issues remains the only way for these parties to have a say on the EU level.

Suppose the current composition of political groups in the EP stays the same. In that case, the biggest winner of the 2024 EP elections will be the Eurosceptic right-wing ECR group. ECR’s gains will be mainly driven by Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni’s Fdl, which will essentially poach voters and seats from its coalition partner League, a member of the pro-Kremlin far-right ID group. Consequently, ECR’s rise is mainly happening at the expense of ID, which will only be able to stabilize and improve its position due to the growth of the German AfD and the Dutch PVV. **Should Fidesz succeed in joining ECR, which it has announced to aim for, this group could become the third biggest in the next EP.** Nevertheless, it may require further concessions from Fidesz towards the Polish PiS and Fdl, especially regarding its pro-Kremlin and anti-Ukraine stance. Should Fidesz fail to join ECR and go for the ID group instead, the latter would come in third.

Despite having ‘sovereignist’ partners across the EU, it is unlikely that the Orbán regime’s international alienation will ease without a significant and long-lasting change on the European political stage or in the Hungarian government’s domestic and foreign policy. Hungary will continue to be a pariah state inside the EU, without major strategic allies and with a population increasingly turned against the West and the European Union especially. In case of a failed populist radical-right turn in European politics, the Orbán regime might hope to regain some goodwill during Hungary’s presidency of the Council of the European Union (Council) in the second half of 2024.

“This paper aims to give a snapshot of the state of populist radical parties and their cooperation before the start of the 2024 European election campaign.”

Introduction

European populist radical right and far-right parties have worked for years to establish closer cooperation and a joint parliamentary group in the European Parliament. Since migration emerged as the number one political issue in 2015, especially before the 2019 European Parliament (EP) elections, there have been constant meetings, joint events, and support for each other's campaigns. In preparation for the 2024 EP elections, they again have strengthened their cooperation to increase their weight and influence at the EU level through the EP and the European Commission (EC). This paper aims to give a snapshot of the state of populist radical parties and their cooperation and evaluate their outlook just before the campaign starts. Political circumstances and election predictions will obviously change during the more than six months until the elections. Nevertheless, we intended to give the reader a glimpse into the current state of play of the populist radical right eagerly preparing at the starting line.

But first, who are we talking about at all?

The far right is a heterogeneous space with many tendencies (e.g., radical right, extreme far right, populist right, right-wing authoritarian, populist radical right, new right). One of the main problems in differentiating between the various movements is the blurring of the boundaries (common characteristics, themes) between extreme right parties in the classical sense and populist radical right parties. The fact that parties falling into these categories often do not claim to be extreme right or populist makes it very difficult to distinguish between them. Many also reject the left-right distinction, which they consider outdated, arguing that they are "neither left nor right."

In this paper, we use Cas Mudde's concept of the populist radical right¹ because we believe that anti-establishment populism, which, among the many similarities, is the main difference between the (extreme) far right and the populist radical right, plays a crucial role in the success of the broader far-right parties. According to Mudde, the populist radical right combines (at least) three characteristics: nativism, authoritarianism, and populism. Nativism is a combination of nationalism and xenophobia. It advocates for states to be exclusively inhabited by members of the 'indigenous' group ('the nation', defined arbitrarily), while 'non-native', 'foreign' (meaning undesired) elements, like immigrants or even indigenous minorities, are a fundamental threat to the homogeneous nation-state. Authoritarianism implies a belief in a strict hierarchical society in which norm violations are to be severely punished. The last element of the ideological trinity is the anti-elite and anti-establishment populism, which divides society into two antagonistic groups, 'the pure people/na-

tion' and 'the corrupt elite'. It claims that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (the people's general will). At the same time, populist actors are, in many cases, a long-standing part and beneficiary of the political system. An essential element of the populist strategy is the arbitrary and exclusionary construction of the people, the nation, as a homogenous image based on the current political interests. Hence, populists exclude their opponents and certain minority groups from their (flexibly) defined nation and portray them as enemies.

In our study, we examine not only populist radical parties from the right but also from the left that embrace the concepts of nativism, authoritarianism, and populism. The latest example is the Slovak PM Robert Fico's Smer-SD, which is originally a left-wing party but has co-opted the narratives and worldview of the populist radical right.

"Populist radical parties gained popularity in 2023. Still, their breakthrough seems still further away."

1. The state of the populist radical right across the EU in 2023

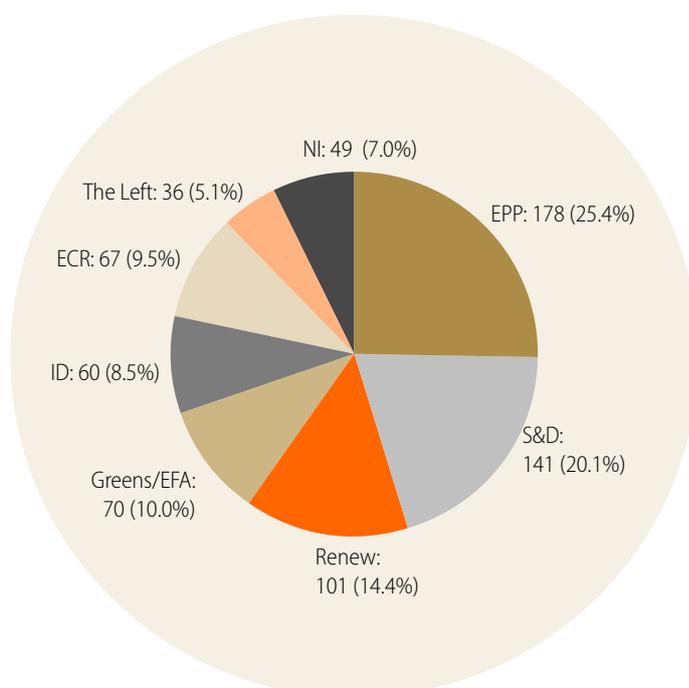
Populist radical parties played a crucial role in several national elections (Finland, Spain, Slovakia², Poland, The Netherlands) in 2023, and several commentators deemed the increasing popularity of such parties as a right-wing surge or even a “spring-time for Europe’s fascists”.³ Anti-establishment politics surged across the continent, as according to a recent study, a third of Europeans voted for anti-establishment, populist left, or populist right parties across 31 countries in 2022.⁴ Half of them supported populist radical right parties, as these could successfully profit from rising inflation, social and cultural tensions, and political instability in some countries. As a result, more of these parties are now in or near government (Finland, Hungary, Italy, The Netherlands, Poland, Slovakia, Sweden) or have seen their popularity rise, like in Austria, France, Germany, Portugal, and Spain. In this section, we examine how the recent political processes and elections in these countries affected the position of these parties. The analysis shows that elections and political processes favored the populist radical right parties in 2023. Still, in key instances, they have suffered significant losses (in Spain and Poland) or poached voters from similar parties (in Italy).

1.1. Populist radical right parties in the European Parliament

The populist and far-right parties in the current EP are divided mainly between two groups: the European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) and Identity & Democracy (ID), which together account for 18% of MEPs. The main difference between the two groups is twofold. ID members tend to be more extreme far-right, while ECR members tend to be more populist, radical right-wing parties, but it is difficult to draw a sharp line. In any case, they seem more moderate, with less rejection from the mainstream. More important, however, is the difference in the perception of Russia and Russian aggression against Ukraine: the ID is typically dominated by pro-Kremlin far-right parties, which have had close, often partner-like, relations with the Kremlin and Putin’s party for many years.⁵ These two differences are why some parties have moved from ID to the ECR group (Swedish Democrats, Finns Party).

Figure 1: Composition of the European Parliament by political group

(abbreviation of the name of the political group, number of MEPs, proportion of the total number of MEPs in the EP; as of 30 November 2023, source: European Parliament)





However, not all members of the ECR group can be considered populist right-wing parties, and not all members are populist radical parties. For example, the Czech Civic Democratic Party (ODS) and the Slovak Freedom and Solidarity (SaS) party in the ECR can be defined as more bourgeois liberal parties. At the same time, the KDNP, the twin party of Fidesz, is a member of the EPP group, while Fidesz and the French nationalist far-right party Reconquest, founded by Éric Zemmour, are not members of either group. At the same time, Robert Fico’s Smer party, which, despite its left-wing leanings, has adopted the themes, messages, and tactics of populist radical right-wing parties, sits in the S&D group, albeit suspended.

1.2. Key populist radical right parties across the EU

Austria

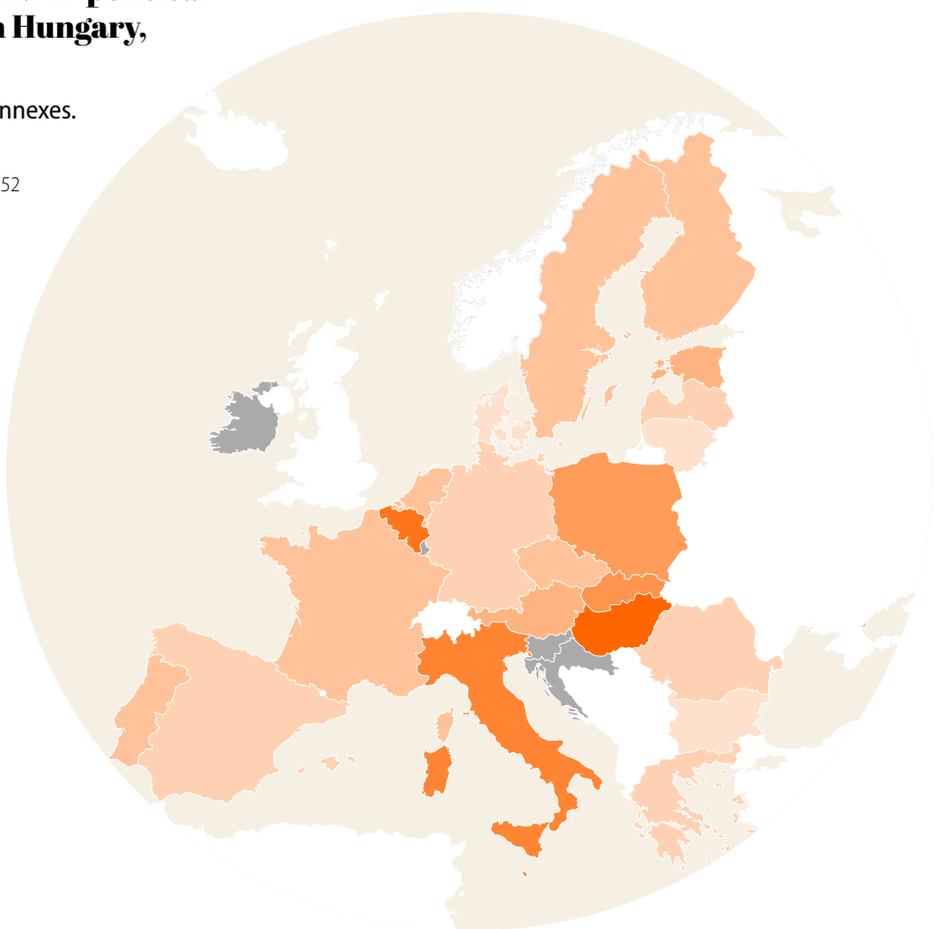
The populist radical right, pro-Kremlin Freedom Party (FPÖ, member of the ID group in the EP), has led the polls in Austria with 27-29% for a year after both mainstream parties discredited themselves via scandals and infightings. The governing center-right Austrian People’s Party (ÖVP) and the Greens have taken heavy losses since the 2019 general elections due to several scandals and high inflation.⁶ ÖVP is now down from 38% to 21, while the Greens are at 9%, compared to 15% in 2019. Despite the governing parties’ dwindling support, the opposition center-left Social Democratic Party could not capitalize on it long-term and was overtaken by the FPÖ in the autumn of 2022.⁷

Now, the FPÖ leads the polls with 30%, followed by the SPÖ (24%) and the ÖVP (21%).⁸ If these numbers hold, the 2024 EP elections will significantly weaken the ÖVP and the Greens, losing 2 and 1 seats, respectively, while the FPÖ will gain three additional seats to its current three. Hence, the FPÖ is expected to have 6 MEPs, overtaking the ÖVP and SPÖ (5-5 seats) and the Greens and the liberal NEOS (2-2 seats).⁹

The stakes are even higher for the 2024 general elections in autumn. If the FPÖ wins, it will try to form a government with the ÖVP, as they were coalition partners multiple times before. However, this is uncertain at this stage as the ÖVP leadership is unwilling to give the Chancellorship to the FPÖ.¹⁰ However, this can change next year, especially if the ÖVP’s support further declines.

Figure 2: The combined popularity of populist radical parties in November 2023, including parties in the ECR and ID political groups and relevant parties in Hungary, Slovakia, and Portugal.

You can find the detailed party list in the Annexes.





Finland

In the general election in April 2023, Finland chose its most right-wing government in the last 80 years. The election ended with a close three-way race between the center-right National Coalition Party (member of the EPP) led by Petteri Orpo (20.8%), the populist radical right Finns Party (member of the ECR since April 2023) led by Riikka Purra (20.1%) and the previously governing center-left SDP led by Marin (19.9%).¹¹ The Finns Party has recouped its loss in popularity since the Russian invasion, while the National Coalition Party's popularity has moderated simultaneously. The latter needed the support of the Finns Party and two smaller parties to form a parliamentary majority. The main issue in the campaign was the economy, with inflation increasing and mild recession looming. The right-wing parties argued for fiscal austerity and public debt reduction.¹² At the same time, Finland's accession to NATO enjoyed broad support from every party, even the Eurosceptic Finns Party.¹³ The Finns Party's switch from the pro-Kremlin ID group to the anti-Kremlin ECR group in the European Parliament just days after the election showcased the party's softening stance towards the EU and NATO.¹⁴ The Finns Party will likely have three instead of its two current MEPs after 2024.¹⁵

France

France remains divided in three ways among a radical left NUPES coalition (25%), President Macron's reformist pro-EU center Together party (22%), and Marine Le Pen's populist-radical right National Rally (RN, a member of the ID group in the EP) (24%). Based on current data, RN is expected to have 27 seats in the EP instead of the current 19. In contrast, its other far-right rival, Eric Zemmour's Reconquest party, will have six MEPs instead of the current three.¹⁶ However, the ambiguity is high, as opinion polls are periodic in France¹⁷, and the exact shares will highly depend on the electoral coalition to be formed ahead of the elections.¹⁸

Germany

Alternative for Germany (AfD) doubled its support between the summer of 2022 and 2023, from 10 to 20%, and became the second in opinion polls after the center-right Christian democratic political alliance (CDU/CSU) and ahead of the main governing Social-Democratic Party. Thus, the 2024 EP elections will likely significantly increase the number of German far-right MEPs compared to the 2019 elections, when they received 11%. Based on their support in November 2023, they can have 21 MEPs instead of the current 9.^{19,20} The party follows a clear anti-immigration, anti-EU, anti-gender, anti-climate-change, anti-Ukraine and pro-Russia policy line.^{21,22} These anti-establishment messages reflecting the cost-of-living crisis sit well with frustrated voters feeling left behind.²³ This is supported by the fact that according to a survey, only 32% of AfD supporters would vote for the party due to ideological conviction. In comparison, 67% would do so due to their disappointment with other parties.²⁴

While it is far from sure that the AfD will be able to hold its edge until the 2025 federal elections, it will most probably gain ground in next year's EP election and the local and regional elections in Germany over the next two years. This will make it increasingly more challenging for mainstream parties (especially the CDU/CSU) to maintain the so-called cordon sanitaire, keeping the far right out of power at every level of government. The firewall has already started crumbling over the last year due to AfD's increasing support in Eastern German states.²⁵ If this trend continues, it could fundamentally change the political consensus of the previous 70 years in Germany. Nevertheless, the trend is far from irreversible, as CDU/CSU is under immense pressure not to cooperate with the far right.

Italy

A year after its electoral victory, PM Giorgia Meloni's populist radical right Brothers of Italy (Fdi) has become even more popular among Italians, with 29% support, while her similarly far-right coalition partner League is stagnating at 9%. The two parties have a common voter base, and Fdi has been more successful in credibly presenting itself as anti-establishment over the last few years. Based on the current projections, Fdi and League will "switch their number of seats" in the European Parliament in 2024: while the number of League MEPs will decrease from the current 24 to 9, Fdi will have 26 MEPs compared to the current 8. This also means that the League's share and position in ID will significantly weaken while Fdi's role in ECR will strengthen. In the likely case of a change in government in Poland after the elections, Meloni's government will remain the single most important asset of the populist radical right in the EU (even though Geert Wilders can join her in this position if he succeeds in becoming prime minister in the Netherlands). PM Meloni's main achievement has been that she showed herself as a moderate, pragmatic leader, winning the cooperation and legitimization of Italy's partners, especially among the EPP, while successfully hiding Fdi's radical positions on migration and sexual minorities. This goodwill is crucial for her government, as Italy's economy is highly dependent on the EU. Another objective and potential opportunity for her government and like-minded radical right actors is to use her political credit during the assembly of the next European Commission next year. This is why maintaining a good relationship with EPP's leadership is crucial.

The Netherlands

On 22 November 2023, anti-EU far-right populist Geert Wilders and his Freedom Party (PVV, member of the ID group in the EP) came in first in the Dutch elections, winning 37 seats in the 150-seat parliament. In second place is the joint Labour-Green alliance led by Frans Timmermans with 25 seats, followed by the conservative People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD) of outgoing Prime Minister Mark Rutte with 24 seats, and the Pieter Omtzigt's center-right New Social Contract (NSC) party with 20 seats. Coalition negotiations are expected to last months, as the VVD and NSC are cautious about joining a government with the PVV. While the VVD ruled out a coalition with the PVV, it is open to supporting a right-wing government externally as a "tolerat-



ing partner”.²⁶ Thus, it remains to be seen whether a Wilders government – the “EU’s worst nightmare”²⁷ – could emerge before the European Council proposes a new president of the next European Commission. Nevertheless, Viktor Orbán and other Eurosceptic leaders cheered the results, seeing it as a win for them ahead of the 2024 EP elections.²⁸ If the PVV manages to hold its support at its current 23%, it could have 10 MEPs in the next EP instead of none.²⁹

Poland

In October 2023, the ruling Law and Justice (PiS), co-leader of the ECR group in the EP, was defeated in the elections. Despite using disinformation narratives about the opposition being foreign agents of Germany that would allow for migrants, increase the retirement age, and destroy traditional families, the PiS lost 400,000 voters and 8% in the polls.³⁰ While gaining the most votes (35.38%) and seats (194) in the 460-seat Polish parliament, Sejm, the PiS-led alliance, could not remain in power due to a lack of a coalition partner. Hence, the coalition of three opposition alliances, led by former PM and President of the European Council Donald Tusk, formed a government in December 2023.³¹ The change of power in Warsaw is a serious blow to Eurosceptic, populist radical right parties across Europe, but especially to Fidesz and the ECR group. The loss of popularity of PiS and its allies in Poland since 2019 means they will likely lose eight seats in the next EP and have only 19 MEPs instead of the current 27.³²

Nevertheless, with the EP election being seven months away, PiS might recoup some of its losses as the new government will find it difficult to operate in the remnants of the political-institutional power structure dominated by PiS-affiliated actors (e.g., President, Constitutional Court, media). Right on the first sitting of the newly elected Sejm, PiS started its next electoral campaign for the 2024 regional and EP elections, continuing its ultra-conservative, anti-EU rhetoric, which will likely dominate the following year. Additionally, as support for Ukraine among the PiS electorate is slowly fading away, hostile messages targeting Ukrainian refugees and the Ukrainian government have slowly emerged in the Polish public debate.³³ However, a complete pro-Kremlin turn among Polish nationalist voters remains inconceivable.

Portugal

The relatively new, populist radical right ‘Enough!’ (Chega!) party, established in 2019, received 7% in the 2022 elections and is now polling at 15%, ahead of the snap elections in March 2024. Chega! is now the third-largest party in the parliament.³⁴ After the downfall of the socialist government³⁵, the party is gaining on the left-wing Socialist Party (member of the S&D group in the EP) and the center-right Social Democratic Party (member of the EPP group in the EP), both at 25%. Since the 2022 elections, the Socialist Party’s sup-

port almost halved (from 41% to 25%) due to corruption scandals.³⁶ The main recipient of disenfranchised socialist voters seems to be Chega!, which doubled its support over the same period.³⁷ The party is relatively new, so it does not have a deputy in the EP. However, as a member of the Identity and Democracy (ID) Party, its projected four MEPs will almost certainly join the ID group in the next EP.³⁸

Slovakia

Traditionally, the Slovak National Party (SNS) and the party ‘Republic’ can be considered far right in Slovakia.³⁹ However, former PM Robert Fico and his populist left-wing Smer party have long used narratives identical to the radical right (e.g., nationalism, anti-gender, anti-LGBTQI, anti-immigration). These topics also played an essential role in their campaign ahead of the latest election in September 2023, in addition to Eurosceptic, pro-Kremlin, and anti-Ukraine messages. Along with far-right parties, Fico and his Smer spread disinformation and conspiracy theories about Ukraine, the West, and sanctions against Russia, copying the Kremlin’s and Fidesz’s playbook.⁴⁰ Fico’s Smer won the elections and formed a coalition with the center-left Hlas, led by Fico’s former deputy, and with the far-right SNS. For this, the S&D faction has recently suspended Smer’s membership and will likely expel the party. In 2024, Smer will likely send two more MEPs to the European Parliament, doubling its size to four, while SNS and Republika could have one seat each. However, where these MEPs will sit in the next EP is unknown.

Spain

Although the center-right People’s Party (PP) won the elections, its potential far-right partner Vox weakened; thus, the PP failed to form a government. Nonetheless, these right-wing parties won the local and regional elections, reversing some of the policies of previous left-wing local and regional governments. Additionally, the Vox will likely have 7 MEPs instead of its current 4 in 2024, as the party’s popularity has increased since 2019. The right successfully thematized gender equality issues over the last few years and imported several culture-war narratives to the previously progressive Spanish public discourse.⁴¹ It is possible that campaigning with more far-right messages and the possibility of a government involving Vox scared and mobilized left-wing and center voters against the center-right PP.⁴² After months of negotiations, the incumbent Socialist Party formed a government. Still, the amnesty law, part of the coalition deal with pro-independence Catalans to allow the socialist PM to stay in power, provoked massive protests organized by right-wing leaders.⁴³



Sweden

After years of strengthening and moderate deradicalization, the radical right Sweden Democrats (SD) dismantled the cordon sanitaire in 2021 when the opposition center-right alliance submitted a budget plan with SD's support. Moreover, after the 2022 general election, the same center-right coalition could only form a minority government with the external support of the SD.⁴⁴ Since their surge in the polls in 2015, the SD has maintained 20% support at the expense of the center-right parties. SD's anti-immigration and law-and-order messages resonated well with voters' frustration over Sweden's previous open-door refugee policy and the subsequent rise in violent crime.⁴⁵ The main fault line between the center-right minority government and the SD is their vision for Europe, as the SD is highly Eurosceptic,

wants to take back powers from "bureaucrats in Brussels", and even contemplates a possible Swexit. The minority government's dependency on the SD's support is thus a significant burden on their ability to govern.⁴⁶ As a result, since the election, the now-opposition Social Democrats have regained popularity, while the governing right-wing's support has moderated somewhat. If this trend continues, the Social Democrats are expected to gain significant ground in the European Parliament, with 8 MEPs instead of their current 5. At the same time, the SD could have 5, while the Moderate Party will receive four seats. This means the SD will gain one seat at the expense of center-right parties, mainly the Christian Democrats and Liberals.⁴⁷

“The cooperation of populist radical right parties aims to transform the EU into a “Europe of nations”, giving them a free hand to take anti-democratic measures.”

2. Cooperation efforts and prospects of a ‘Euro-sceptic Internationale’

Populist radical right parties’ cooperation aims at 1) spreading illiberal ideas and mutually reinforcing each other in national political arenas by standing beside each other and showing force, 2) sharing and adopting “practices” and innovations on populist, illiberal governance and policies by meeting on events such as CPAC Hungary, where Viktor Orbán shared the “recipe for his success” in 12 points⁴⁸, and 3) achieving a change of policy and power in Europe. The latter would allow them to reform the EU and transform it into a “Europe of nations”. Also, it would give them free rein to take anti-democratic measures in their own countries to entrench their power. As Orbán put it regarding their Warsaw summit, they aim to influence the politics in Brussels, shaped by an elite that undermines national sovereignty.^{49,50}

2.1. Common topics among the populist radical right parties

Populist radical right parties in the EU focus on similar themes⁵¹ centered around Cas Mudde’s ideological trinity - nativism, authoritarianism, and populism - and follow similar strategies and tactics. For instance, once popular, they tone down extremist narratives and focus on bread-and-butter issues to profit from people’s concerns in times of crisis.⁵² Additionally, several previously hardline positions became mainstream as traditional right-wing parties strategically radicalized their positions by adopting far-right narratives on migration and other issues. This legitimized radical positions and made them more acceptable and popular (mainstreaming). There are even non-right-wing self-proclaimed left anti-establishment populist parties, such as the Slovak Smer, that learn from their populist radical right fellows, using similar anti-gender, anti-migration, and anti-liberal messages. The main topics and ideological positions that connect these actors are as follows:

Anti-immigration: They all reject immigration, which, in their interpretation, is a threat to the ‘native’ (white) population, the Western culture and civilization, and Christianity.

Anti-gender and anti-LGBTQI: They object to gender and LGBTQI, especially trans, rights under the pretext of opposing modernity, protecting ‘normality’, traditional values, especially the “traditional family”, and, increasingly, children. In addition, the topic is part of the struggle against the “decadent and declining” liberal and left-wing ideology and the alleged oppression. Moreover, the topic is also linked to nativism and migration and fighting demographic decline (“the reproduction of the indigenous white Christian population” in contrast to immigration).

Ultra-conservative ‘pro-family’: The anti-immigration and anti-gender/LGBTQI topics are often disguised as “family policy” initiatives, as an antidote to the policy that wants to tackle demographic decline and ageing populations through immigration. “Family friendly” policies and cam-

paigns (“protecting our children”) are used to soften the outlook of the populist radical right’s repressive and discriminatory attitude towards women’s rights, sexual minorities, and immigrants. ‘Pro-family’ messaging is a key means to open cooperation channels towards the center-right, mainstreaming radical positions. Their ‘family-friendly’ policy does not include nor support family forms other than heterosexual traditional families.

Rejection of deeper European integration, based on sovereignty, a ‘nation/country first’ approach. However, criticism or rejection is typically less expressed against the influence of authoritarian states (e.g., Russia or China) but primarily against closer cooperation with democratic countries and international institutions (e.g., the EU). Some parties even advocate for exiting the EU. In contrast, others, partly due to the United Kingdom’s harsh experience with Brexit, have moderated their approach and only want to “reform” (read: weaken) the EU and “strengthen the nation-states against an overreaching Brussels” (‘Europe of nations’ model).



Anti-liberalism: Opposing liberalism and liberal elites that allegedly oppress nations (“Brussels”), restrict freedom of expression (e.g., via political correctness or social media regulations), and threaten “normality” (e.g., immigration, gender) is a common feature of the populist radical right and far-right parties. Anti-liberalism also forms the ideological framework of anti-establishment and anti-elitism.

Cost-of-living: Since most of these parties are not in government, they can use rising inflation, economic difficulties, and cost-of-living problems to undermine trust in the ‘establishment’, i.e., governments, mainstream parties, institutions, and the EU. Portraying themselves as the “defender of the everyday, pure people” against local and global elites is a common populist trope. Even culturally right-wing parties can campaign with left-wing welfare messages.

Obstructing climate actions⁵³: The populist radical right has co-opted climate change into its ideological, anti-liberal, and nationalist messages. Besides a small minority of them rejecting the science behind climate change, most are not climate change deniers. Instead, they criticize international emission reduction efforts as the global elites tearing down national borders, stripping away individual freedoms, and condemning working people to a life of poverty.⁵⁴ “Protecting local businesses and industries” is a crucial campaign point that also resonates with moderate conservatives, providing a common topic for potential collaboration.⁵⁵

“The cooperation of populist radical right parties aims to transform the EU into a “Europe of nations”, giving them a free hand to take anti-democratic measures.”

2.2. Divisive topics

Despite the common topics, these parties are far from united ideologically and continue to have significant differences. Nevertheless, their cooperation strictly focuses on mutual issues, and they try to conceal their differences. The main one is the relationship with Russia, especially after Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. A distinction can be made between Fidesz⁵⁶ and ID’s pro-Kremlin (FPÖ⁵⁷, AfD⁵⁸, RN⁵⁹, League⁶⁰) and ECR’s mainly anti-Kremlin (Fdl⁶¹, PiS⁶²) far-right and populist radical right parties. Pro-Kremlin parties sometimes copy Fidesz’s “pro-peace slogans” regarding the Russian invasion of Ukraine, aiming to use the growing Ukraine fatigue to their advantage. These pro-Kremlin and often anti-Ukrainian messages seek to undermine support for weapon transfers to Ukraine and advocate for immediate peace negotiations, even if it means territorial concession for Ukraine.

Beyond their symbolic, identity-related common “flagship” themes (e.g., anti-immigration, anti-gender, anti-liberalism, traditional family), populist radical right parties can easily find themselves on different platforms on practical issues if their national contexts or interests dictate otherwise. For instance, while PM Meloni and PM Orbán agree on the deterrence of migrants from entering the EU, their views differ entirely on how to solve the question of those who have already arrived in the EU. Also, the parties differ on the details of cooperation with the EU. Some of these parties (i.e., Fdl, SD, Finns Party) have successfully used ‘strategic refinement’ to package previous hardline positions on European integration and immigration to broaden their electoral base.⁶³

Moreover, personal differences and opposing power interests also hinder the cooperation among the European populist radical right parties. For instance, ECR’s and ID’s leading parties, the Polish PiS, the Italian Fdl, and the French RN, would not easily give up their role in their respective group for the sake of a joint formation. A prime example of this occurred in November 2022, when the representatives of FPÖ, League, RN, and one of the smaller Polish nationalist parties, all members of the ID group, signed a joint memorandum with Vox (ECR) and Fidesz (non-attached) on closer cooperation in five topics in the EP.⁶⁴ As a reaction, the ECR group issued a statement denying allying with ID, describing themselves as the home of “conservatives” and welcoming all who accept “center-right, conservative values”. Another barrier to broad and close cooperation is that most parties consider the German AfD “toxic” and oppose closer collaboration with them.⁶⁵



2.3. The (failed) making of a ‘Eurosceptic Internationale’ – wanted but prevented by the Kremlin

Aiming for a “Eurosceptic” supergroup annulled by the Russian invasion

For a long time, populist radical right parties across Europe focused on the national political arena, viewing European politics primarily as a source of money and a stage that can help them raise their profile and gain support at home. In recent years, however, there has been an increasing tendency to build links among actors and seek cooperation or even alliances. The Kremlin, interested in weakening the European Union, has been working on this⁶⁶, and even Donald Trump’s former adviser, Steve Bannon,⁶⁷ has been trying to help them join forces ahead of the 2019 EP elections. Since then, there have been constant meetings, joint events, and support for each other’s campaigns.⁶⁸ By the time of Fidesz’s exit from the European People’s Party in March 2021, the populist radical right had already started establishing closer cooperation on the European level.

In July 2021, 16 radical right parties, including Fidesz, PiS, RN, FPÖ, Vox, League, and Fdl, signed a joint declaration criticizing further EU integration. The fact that these parties could establish some common ground was seen as a step toward closer cooperation and, potentially, forming a single group. However, PiS signaled it would not change the configuration of groups, despite National Rally’s comments about the goal of creating a broader group in the coming months.⁶⁹

In December 2021, leaders of PiS, National Rally, Fidesz, and Vox met again in Warsaw to discuss potential avenues for future cooperation. The meeting was also a show of solidarity for the Polish and Hungarian governments from like-minded parties amid the standoff with the European Commission over the planned rule-of-law conditionality mechanism. Again, the meeting’s final statement fell short of a declaration to create a new alliance. Still, the party leaders agreed to meet at least every two months. The fact that the meeting could even happen signaled an evolving détente between the Polish governing party and Le Pen’s National Rally.^{70,71}

The first regularly planned meeting occurred in Madrid in January 2022, where nine European populist radical right leaders met.⁷² They focused on Russia’s military build-up on the Ukrainian border, pledging to “ensure that the nations of Europe act in solidarity in the face of the threat of external aggression.” They also condemned “Brussels’ politically motivated attacks on Poland and Hungary”, advocating for the primacy of national laws over European law. The Madrid summit communique had nine commitments for the future, outlining the common topics where joint positions seemed viable among the parties, including fighting illegal immigration, promoting the birth rate, and defending the sovereignty of member states.^{73, 74}

All this suggested that a closer, more formalized cooperation could emerge. However, Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 surfaced pre-existing differences concerning NATO, transatlantic relations, and Russia. Suddenly, **the détente between the anti-Kremlin populist radical right parties of the ECR group and the pro-Kremlin far-right parties of the ID group⁷⁵ disappeared.** After the Russian tanks rolled into Ukraine, cozy relations towards the Kremlin, relativizing the Russian aggression, and opposing sanctions became unacceptable positions for the Polish and later the Italian governing party, driving a wedge between them and ID group members National Rally, AfD, and League, and the non-attached Fidesz. Larger meetings between the two groups have disappeared. Moreover, when Vox (ECR) signed a joint declaration on cooperation with non-attached Fidesz and major ID member parties in November 2022, as presented above, the ECR group was in a hurry to release a statement denying the cooperation and emphasizing their competition with the ID group. The severe and divisive nature of the stance towards Russia was also showcased by the Finns Party’s decision after the Finnish elections in April 2023 to leave the ID group and join the ECR, which “*uncompromisingly defends Western civilization and the European security architecture*”.⁷⁶

Hence, an alliance between ECR and ID will unlikely materialize any time soon as long as the war looms large in the political discourse in the EU. Also, unlike the ECR, ID members are still isolated in the European institutions⁷⁷. So, by creating an alliance, the ECR would risk being in the same position.

“Populist radical parties are far from united, even if they try to conceal their differences.”



Paving the way to cooperation with the mainstream

At the same time, there are increasing signs of an alignment between the ECR and (at least some fractions of) the EPP **in the run-up to the 2024 elections**. On the national level, there is already cooperation between EPP and ECR parties in Italy, Czechia, and Latvia. The opening from the EPP leadership towards the ECR was evident after the election of Italian PM Giorgia Meloni (Fdl) when she met with three of the EPP's most influential European politicians, President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen, European Parliament President Roberta Metsola, and EPP leader Manfred Weber.^{78,79} Additionally, PM Meloni joined Ursula von der Leyen and the Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte on their trip to Tunisia on 11 June 2023, only after the EU passed a decision on immigration in Italy's favor, making it easier to send asylum seekers back.⁸⁰ During these negotiations, maintaining some distance from the Polish and Hungarian governing parties in favor of mainstream conservative actors certainly helped give PM Meloni influence.⁸¹ Italian Foreign Minister and Deputy Prime Minister Antonio Tajani (EPP) even floated the idea of an EPP-ECR-RE coordination in the European Parliament. At the same time, he deemed it impossible for EPP and ID to work together.⁸²

Some other ECR parties also clearly intend to work with the EPP. Czech Prime Minister Petr Fiala, whose party is a member of the ECR but whose two coalition partners are EPP members, maintains a close relationship with Giorgia Meloni and Manfred Weber.⁸³ PM Fiala said on 5 June 2023 that the EPP and ECR were moving closer to prevent a left-wing majority in the EP.⁸⁴ ECR Vice-President Rob Roos (independent MEP from the Netherlands) also considers a coalition between the EPP, ECR, and liberals possible.⁸⁵ From the EPP's side, Group Leader Manfred Weber is the leading supporter of cooperation between the EPP and the ECR in the member states and on the European level.⁸⁶ Weber's critics believe that he wants to be president of the European Commission, and the rapprochement with the ECR is part of this move.⁸⁷

The EPP leadership's political views seem to align with the ECR's on immigration and climate change. In April 2023, three-quarters of EPP MEPs backed the ECR's proposal for the EU to pay for border fences. In June, the EPP and ECR jointly blocked the passage of a package of proposals to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050.⁸⁸ In July, they tried to block the nature restoration legislation together. These votes seem to be tactical moves by the EPP aimed both at exploring options for cooperation and watering down environmental legislation.⁸⁹

Nevertheless, there are still significant political differences between the two groups. For example, the ECR's so-called "Euro-realism" differs substantially from the EPP's position on integration. While the EPP supports majority decision-making in foreign policy issues, the ECR wants to maintain the veto power of Member States. **Also, there has been harsh pushback against the cooperation inside the EPP.** In early February, several EPP members reacted negatively to the Weber-Meloni "rapprochement", mainly complaining about the lack of prior consultation.⁹⁰ The German and Polish EPP members do not want to poach Meloni's Fdl from the ECR or formally ally with the group. For Polish EPP members, especially Donald Tusk's Civic Coalition (PO), joining forces with the ECR would mean teaming up with their main domestic opponents, PiS.⁹¹ Additionally, according to Zdzisław Krasnodębski, an EP vice-president from the Polish PiS party, which co-chairs the ECR group, Fdl MEPs have not signaled to their ECR colleagues that they might be willing to switch to the EPP.⁹²

The EPP leadership does not only receive internal but also external pushback. The Socialists and Democrats (S&D) have ruled out the possibility of cooperation with Eurosceptic parties and claimed that the EPP's movements towards collaboration with the far right oversteps S&D's "pro-EU red line" and risks upsetting the delicate balance of cooperation that exists today.⁹³ Renew Europe (RE) also ruled out cooperation with any political group that shows extremist tendencies, referring to ID and ECR.⁹⁴ MEP Sandro Gozi (RE) said on 13 June that they would be open to forming a majority with the EPP, S&D, Greens, and part of the New Left after the elections.⁹⁵

Another obstacle to ECR-EPP cooperation could be Fidesz's intention to join the ECR, which Balázs Orbán, political director of PM Viktor Orbán, suggested in a POLITICO interview in September 2023. Fidesz's projected 11 (or even more⁹⁶) MEPs would be a significant addition to the ECR, with Fidesz having the third-largest delegation in the group after Fdl and PiS. Nevertheless, Fidesz joining the ECR would likely hinder cooperation with EPP moderates, who oppose Hungary's ruling party.

3. The Orbán regime's influence-building among the populist radical right in the EU

3.1. The basics of the Orbán regime's influence-building

The Orbán regime's foreign policy is based on the theory of realism, with interests and "national sovereignty" at its core. It interprets the global power shift as the West losing its dominance and eroding its foundations through liberal policies. In the allegedly changing world order, the regime seeks to develop good relations with the rising powers of the 'East' (especially China, Russia, Turkey, and Azerbaijan) to expand its economy and energy connections. In addition, it wants to elevate its role in the EU and vis-à-vis the US to challenge and change mainstream politics in the 'West'.

International influence-building is a natural and legitimate foreign policy goal pursued by all nations to expand their room for maneuvering and enforcing their political, security, and economic interests. However, as we pointed out in our 2022 study on the Orbán regime's political influence-building⁹⁷, it has several specific features that differ from democratic countries' practices. Most importantly, its strategic aim is to **ensure the regime's long-term survival domestically** by creating a favorable international environment. This is also necessary to counter and prevent criticism and prosecutions for dismantling the rule of law and systemic corruption. To achieve this, the Orbán regime wants to overthrow the political mainstream in the Euro-Atlantic region and bring about a change of political, societal, and cultural hegemony by populist radical 'sovereignist' forces.

Another specificity is that the influence-building is not linked to institutions but to parties and politicians based on mutual interests and ideology. Thus, although the Orbán regime jus-

tifies its foreign policy with national slogans, it does not yet seem to serve national interests beyond the regime's own.

Concerning the EU, Orbán aims at a 'regime change' in Brussels and MS capitals to create favorable external circumstances for his regime. In his vision, populist radical 'sovereignist' forces have momentum. So, if they cooperate, their domestic successes can aggregate, ignite a chain reaction, and bring about change on a European scale. This would end Hungary's pariah status in the West and lead to a reform of the EU, transforming it into a "Europe of nations" that focuses on economic cooperation, does not aim at deeper political integration, nor "interferes" with "domestic affairs" of the MSs like the rule of law. Therefore, the Orbán regime's influence-building in the EU has aimed to establish cooperation with populist radical (right) 'sovereignist' forces, support them, make them accept Fidesz's leading role, and facilitate their collaboration, preferably forming a broad alliance.

3.2. Main tools and actors of the Orbán regime's influence-building among the European populist radical right

Tools

The main tools for building influence and alliances among the populist radical (right) in the EU have been (1) the export of illiberal ideas, policies, and narratives, for instance, through meetings, events, and publications; and (2) providing practical support.



Exporting illiberal ideas, policies, narratives, and tactics

The Orbán regime has acquired a leading and exemplary role and has become a point of reference for populist radical (right) forces, mainly for two reasons. First, it was the only such player in a governing position for a long time and, hence, could implement policies. Yet, PM Orbán is still in a unique situation among its fellow populist radical leaders, as his rule in Hungary is, in practice, unlimited mainly due to the elimination of checks and balances and his grip on the information sphere and the public discourse. Second, the Orbán regime consciously uses unconventional tools in foreign policy, like sharpening differences, creating divisions, provoking conflicts, applying taboo-busting rhetoric, trolling, blackmailing, and obstructing international decisions through vetoes and veto threats. Thus, PM Orbán has elevated his image internationally and become a star for the (far) right.⁹⁸

Based on his leverage, PM Orbán wants to transfer his practices, including narratives, policies, and tactics, which proved successful in Hungary, to other countries, hoping that these could boost the parties' performance and help them win elections and enter governments. A prime example of this effort was Orbán's opening speech at the 2022 CPAC Hungary when he shared his 12-point recipe for success.⁹⁹ However, these considerations do not take into account that the Orbán regime's political success is primarily based on the abolishment of checks and balances and the pluralistic information sphere. The Orbán regime's main export items are measures to dismantle the rule of law, media freedom, anti-immigration and anti-gender narratives and policies, anti-woke and anti-liberal narratives, 'pro-family' policies, and populist tactics hijacking participative tools like government-initiated referenda and push-poll-like consultations.

Meetings, events, and publications

Facilitated by Fidesz party officials, Hungarian embassies, and government officials, **the Orbán regime's most prominent politicians regularly meet with their populist radical counterparts, even when it is considered diplomatically inappropriate**, i.e., during an election campaign. The meetings serve to deepen personal relations, overcome differences, and discuss common goals, strategies, and proceedings. In 2023, most meetings took place with Italian, Polish, and Slovak partners.

Also, the Orbán regime has utilized high-profile events to demonstrate its leading role in the scene and create opportunities for itself and other populist radical right leaders to show force and unity, amplify their voices, disseminate their messages, and gain media attention. In 2023, the two key events were the **Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC) Hungary**, organized by the Center for Fundamental Rights, a government-organized non-governmental organization (GONGO)¹⁰⁰ in May, and the fifth **Budapest Demographic Summit**, organized by the government in September.

The **CPAC Hungary** event brought together leading policymakers and ideologues of the populist radical right from Europe, the US, South America, Japan, and South Africa.¹⁰¹ Participants from the EU included former Czech PM Andrej Babis and former Slovenian PM Janez Janša, President of the French National Rally Jordan Bardella, President of the Spanish Vox Santiago Abascal, Austria's FPÖ Chairman Herbert Kickl, President of the Belgian party Flemish Interest Tom Van Grieken, President of the Estonian party EKRE (member of the ID group in the EP) Martin Helme, President of the Portuguese Chega! party, André Ventura, Vox's Vice President Jorge Buxadé, President of the ID party family Gerolf Annemans, ECR Vice Chair MEP Herman Tertsch from the Spanish party Vox, MEP Harald Vilimsky from the FPÖ, MEP Anders Vistisen from the Danish People's Party (member of the ID group in the EP), MEP Rob Roos from the Dutch party Ja21 (member of the ECR group in the EP), MEP Vincenzo Sofio from the Italian FdI, Slovakia's then-Minister of Labor, Social Affairs and Family Milan Krajniak from the party We Are Family (member of the ID group in the EP), Polish Secretary of State at the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development Janusz Kowalski, Member of the Italian Parliament Simone Billi from Lega, Member of the Croatian Parliament Stephen Bartulica from the Homeland Movement, and many more activists, ideologues, influencers, and advisers.¹⁰²

The **Budapest Demographic Summit** provided a diplomatic framework for Fidesz to promote its "pro-family policies" and bring together key ultra-conservative and far-right actors, providing a platform for their messages, partly disguised as a professional discourse. Speakers from the EU included Italian PM Giorgia Meloni, Bulgaria's President Rumen Radev, Slovenia's former Minister of Labor, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities Kralj Cigler Janez, and many more academics, civil society representatives, activists and ideologues.¹⁰³

In addition to events, **publications** issued by Hungarian government-organized organizations aimed at international, predominantly European audiences are essential tools for building and exerting ideological influence at the EU level. A prime example is the **European Conservative**, a magazine printed in Budapest and funded by Hungarian public money through the government-organized Batthyány Lajos Foundation (BLA). BLA also supports the **Hungarian Conservative** and co-funds **ReMixNews**, a website featuring news and commentary from the V4 countries, published by a Budapest-based company. In its publications, ReMixNews echoes the Orbán regime's narratives on migration, the "liberal elite," and "oligarch George Soros", which make up the bulk of the topics. Another publication with the same intentions and similar content is the **V4 News Agency (V4NA)**, registered in London by Kristóf Szalay-Bobrovniczky, Hungary's current defense minister, when he was Hungary's ambassador to the UK. Shareholders include Árpád Habony, a long-time unofficial adviser to Viktor Orbán.¹⁰⁴



Providing practical support

Besides exporting ideas and tactics, the Orbán regime provides practical support to like-minded parties and politicians to boost their performance and increase their election chances. In addition to the mutual benefits of multiplying populist radical 'sovereignist' governments and spreading such policies, the Orbán regime also hopes to gain more leverage by creating dependencies and making fellow leaders obliged in return for the support they receive. This support can materialize in political, media, financial, and campaign know-how support. Some examples of the various forms of support:

- **Political support:** PM Orbán likes to promote his anti-immigration policies by presenting the border fence to like-minded politicians, providing an excellent photo opportunity and legitimization for the guests, among many others, for League Chair Matteo Salvini in 2019.¹⁰⁵ In the 2023 Slovakian election campaign, the Orbán regime stood beside Robert Fico (Smer) politically¹⁰⁶ and provided him supportive messages and airtime in the Hungarian state media during the campaign silence.¹⁰⁷ The Hungarian government has also provided an agenda for the Slovak election campaign indirectly, with large numbers of asylum seekers arriving in Slovakia from Hungary during the last months of the campaign due to the inefficient handling of migration.¹⁰⁸
- **Media support:** In Slovenia and North Macedonia, private companies of Fidesz-affiliated business people started to buy up local media in 2017 to support Orbán's allies, Janez Janša and Nikola Gruevski, in the upcoming campaigns.¹⁰⁹
- **Financial support:** Upon the personal request of Viktor Orbán, a government-close Hungarian bank loaned EUR 10.6 million to Marine Le Pen for her campaign ahead of the 2022 French presidential elections.¹¹⁰
- **Campaign know-how support:** According to media reports, Fidesz campaign consultants supported PiS during the 2023 Polish elections.¹¹¹

Actors

A specificity of the Orbán regime's influence-building is that it serves party interests. Hence, it is linked to allied parties and political actors and is conducted via party and government-related Hungarian actors instead of institutions and traditional diplomatic channels. Due to the isolation of the Orbán regime, there are hardly any meetings with Western leaders, as most appearances focus on populist radical actors and authoritarian leaders from the East.

The Orbán regime's most active actors in influence-building have been PM Viktor Orbán, President of the Republic Katalin Novák, former Justice Minister Judit Varga, Political Director of the Prime Minister Balázs Orbán and Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade Péter Szijjártó. Besides the Orbán regime's key politicians, party and semi-party officials (e.g., Fidesz's Vice Chair Kinga Gál, Fidesz MEP Balázs Hidvéghi, Head of the Brussels representation of Fidesz's Foundation for a Civic Hungary Dániel Horogszegi Szilágyi-Landeck), and Hungarian embassies and lower-level government officials help facilitate the establishment and maintenance of relations.

In addition, government-organized non-governmental organizations (GONGOs) and "think tanks" play a crucial role in building the Orbán regime's international influence and alliances. These organizations 1) build and maintain relationships with ultraconservative, radical right parties, NGOs, and experts; 2) influence the public discourse at home and abroad by providing ideological explanations of the ruling party's decisions, policies, and political standpoints; and 3) organize events and issue publications to support the aforementioned functions.

A crucial actor is the **Mathias Corvinus Collegium (MCC)**, a private college mentoring students and a government-organized think tank pushing the government's narrative in key policy areas. Besides being active domestically, the MCC has expanded its activities abroad, among others, by es-

tablishing an office in Brussels in November 2022, buying the private Modul University in Vienna, Austria, in May 2023, and planning further representations in other locations, like London¹¹². To push the Orbán regime's policies and narratives at the EU level, **MCC Brussels** has organized several events and published papers concerning the Hungarian government's favorite topics, such as immigration¹¹³, wokeism in schools and museums¹¹⁴, the LGBTQ lobby taking over the EU¹¹⁵, the failures of the EU¹¹⁶, and how Brussels is using political weapons against the Hungarian government to erode its sovereignty¹¹⁷. They also touched upon 'mainstream' topics, like digitalization¹¹⁸ and environmental policy,¹¹⁹ but mainly in a Eurosceptic tone.

Another important actor in building and maintaining relationships with ultraconservative and radical right parties, NGOs, and experts, is the **Center for Fundamental Rights (CFR)**. Besides, the CFR is also a centerpiece of the Orbán regime's narrative hegemony over the public discourse by providing ideological explanations of the ruling party's decisions, policies, and political standpoints, mainly related to anti-gender and anti-LGBTQ narratives. The CFR is primarily active in establishing and maintaining relations with US actors, which is why it organizes the CPAC Hungary event.

Other relevant government-affiliated actors in international influence-building include the **Danube Institute**, founded from public money¹²⁰ in 2013 to mediate between thinkers, academics, experts, political leaders, and cultural actors in Central Europe and the Anglo-Saxon world. The Institute co-organizes international events such as the National Conservatism conference. The **Political Network for Values (PNfV)**¹²¹, founded in 2014, is an umbrella organization focusing on gender and LGBTQI issues. The organization brings together mainly anti-abortion organizations and politicians from 30 countries, including several (ultra)conservative European politicians. The PNfV's flagship event is the biennial Transatlantic Summit. Until 2022, the chair of PNfV was Hungary's current President, Katalin Novák.



3.3. Main recent developments of the influence-building process among the European populist radical right

In 2015, Viktor Orbán decided to take the lead in the anti-immigration movement to catch the wind out of the sails of the far right and not hand over the initiative to them. Later, he tried to convince the EPP to use this strategy but failed as the German right-wing Merkel government welcomed the asylum-seekers. After that, Fidesz started to drift away from EPP and build links with populist radical right and far-right parties across the EU.

Since suspending Fidesz's membership in the European People's Party group in 2019, **the Orbán regime has established partnerships with like-minded parties in almost every EU member state** based on the parties' support for Fidesz and ideological similarities or sympathy for Orbán's policies. Through Hungary's diplomatic representation in EU MSs, international activities of Fidesz's foundation and GONGOs like the CFR, and the EU-wide opinion polls conducted by government-close think tanks¹²², the Orbán regime has closely followed the political developments across the EU, especially concerning populist radical right actors.

With a very pragmatic approach, the regime has aimed to establish connections with all like-minded parties, even if there had been more of them in a country. It has regularly adapted its strategy to the changing circumstances. For instance, despite the deepening relationship with Marine Le Pen and her party and the loan provided to her by a Hungarian bank, PM Orbán met with her rival Eric Zemmour in Budapest in September 2021.¹²³ Another example is Fidesz's continuous connection with the small Dutch party JA21 despite PM Orbán's friendly relationship with Geert Wilders. Also, in Italy, Fidesz has had close relations with all three governing coalition parties, FdI, League, and FI. However, the intensity of the ties has been volatile, depending on the changing support of these parties. Traditionally, PM Orbán had a close, personal relationship with long-time FI leader and Italian PM Silvio Berlusconi. Yet, when the League skyrocketed in the polls, PM Orbán sought closer connections to Matteo Salvini. Nevertheless, as the League's support fell FdI's increased, and Giorgia Meloni won the elections, PM Orbán focused on building a partnership with her and ultimately decided to aim to join the ECR group in the EP.

During 2023, Fidesz tried to improve its relationship with the FdI and the Italian government to gain an essential ally in the EU and possibly join the ECR group in the next EP. President Novák met with Italian President **Sergio Mattarella** in January to discuss the Russian-Ukrainian war¹²⁴, a contentious issue between the two countries. President Novák met with Italian PM **Meloni** (FdI) four times in 2023, speaking about their "old friendship", traditional family values, and migration¹²⁵. Orbán also met with PM **Meloni** in September during her visit to Budapest for the Demographic Forum to discuss the Russian-Ukrainian war and Hungary's upcoming EU presidency focusing on family policy.¹²⁶ These meetings signaled the importance of the relationship from Fidesz's perspective, and Meloni's visit to Budapest showed that the Italian government is less cautious about high-profile meetings with Orbán than the Polish government. Other than a show of support, these meetings could have served as a platform to address policy differences on Russia and migration, discuss avenues for future cooperation in the Council of the European Union (Council), and possibly pave the way for Fidesz joining the ECR, as Meloni is the party's president.

As of November 2023, Fidesz's most essential partners in the EU are the Brothers of Italy (FdI), the Polish Law and Justice (PiS), the Spanish Vox, the French National Rally (RN), and the Slovak Smer. Fidesz also has connections to mainstream conservative parties, such as the French Republicans (LR) and Forward Italy (FI). Political Capital's online infographic on Fidesz's EU-wide partner network is [accessible here](#).



Every election seen as a new chance for a radical right breakthrough

Fidesz hoped that the elections across Europe would bring more like-minded and allied parties to the government, improving its positions ahead of the 2024 EP elections. Before the elections in Spain, Slovakia, Poland, and the Netherlands, the Hungarian government showed political support for its favored parties and sometimes tried to aid them in other ways. Betting on these parties' victory, Fidesz advertised these elections as stages of bringing about hegemonic change in the EU. However, Orbán's hopes have often not materialized. The result is that Fidesz burned the bridge towards other parties that could form a government, possibly limiting Hungary's bilateral relations with these countries.

In 2023, Fidesz hoped to improve its damaged relations with the Polish governing party PiS ahead of the Polish elections in October. President Katalin Novák used her role to soften the relations, always highlighting what Hungary does for Ukraine while condemning Russia's aggression. She met with Polish Prime Minister **Mateusz Morawiecki** (PiS) in February, highlighting the importance of the two countries' friendship and quietly admitting the difficulties that the Russia-Ukraine war caused in their relationship.¹²⁷ President Novák also met with Polish President **Andrzej Duda** (PiS) three times in multilateral settings, always highlighting Polish-Hungarian friendship.¹²⁸ However, the lack of high-level bilateral meetings between the governments or heads of state clearly indicates that the relations were not openly repaired. For PiS, the Orbán government was so politically toxic ahead of the elections that even opening a Scruton café in Warsaw, which would have served as a common meeting point for Polish-Hungarian politicians, was undesirable.

Nevertheless, Fidesz hoped the elections could be a turning point in the relationship. The Orbán regime even provided campaign consultants to help PiS's campaign by implementing Fidesz's successful tactics in designing messages and political activities, like a referendum parallel to the elections. The acceptance of such a gesture from Orbán could be seen as a signal from PiS that relations could be more cordial after the elections. However, the change of government in Warsaw is a significant loss to Budapest, even if it might be able to repair its relationship with an opposition PiS. Nevertheless, the Hungarian government's close contact and meetings with the Kremlin make such reproachment difficult, even if the support for Ukraine is decreasing among PiS's voters.

Fidesz put significant effort into supporting its ally, Robert Fico (Smer), during the elections in Slovakia. The Orbán regime provided political support and media coverage and helped Smer's anti-immigrant agenda during the campaign. Orbán congratulated Fico for winning the elections when meeting him during the European Council summit in October.¹²⁹ Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó had several meetings in Slovakia with the new Fico government in November, hoping they would be a new ally for the Hungarian government. He met with leaders of every governing party of the coalition, PM **Robert Fico** (Smer), Speaker **Peter Pellegrini** (Hlas), FM **Juraj Blanár** (Smer), **Andrej Danko** (SNS), and with the ethnic Hungarian Alliance (Szövetség), which did not make into the Slovak parliament.¹³⁰ The speedy organization of this meeting shortly after the formation of the new government showed the friendly relations between the Fico and Orbán governments. The two governments will need each other in the EU, especially if they want to sidetrack support for Ukraine, which seems to be the major unifying issue for them, besides anti-migration and anti-LGBTQ narratives.

The Orbán government has high hopes after the Dutch elections in November and showed support for the winning PVV party during the campaign when Szijjártó met with **Geert Wilders**, leader of PVV, in March.¹³¹ Orbán was among the first to congratulate Wilders after the PVV won the elections.¹³² The envisioned friendly relations and close cooperation with a potential Wilders government were also visible through the nomination of Dániel Szilágyi-Landeck Horogszegi, the leader of the Brussels office of Fidesz's party foundation and a pivotal bridge-builder to populist radical right forces, as the new Hungarian ambassador to the Netherlands soon before the elections.¹³³

Fidesz does not let go of illiberal leaders' hands, even if they lose power. An example of this was the 20 August national celebration in Hungary, where the government invited leaders from Turkey, Azerbaijan, Qatar, and Middle Asian republics, as well as Orbán-ally former prime ministers from Central Europe, including **Andrej Babiš** (ANO)¹³⁴, **Sebastian Kurz** (ÖVP)¹³⁵, and **Janez Janša** (SDS)¹³⁶. Orbán described the leaders, many of whom have overseen a democratic decline in their countries, as Hungary's "political friends."¹³⁷ The regime hopes to recall favors by investing in these relationships if these leaders return to power.

The hope for a populist radical supergroup

After Fidesz's exit from the EPP in March 2021, the Orbán regime tried to use its leverage and influence to pull together an alliance between ECR and ID. It fostered and participated in meetings between parties belonging to these groups in the hope of creating and joining a supergroup of populist radical right parties. After Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, which exacerbated the differences between the mainly pro-Kremlin ID and the anti-Kremlin ECR, Fidesz still tried to build bridges between the two groups and maintained relations with ID parties, especially the FPÖ, League and RN, as the joint November 2022 memorandum, presented above, showcased.

In 2023, it was mainly former justice minister Judit Varga who tried to reconnect the ECR and ID groups, at least on two separate occasions, by meeting the high-level representatives of the groups and possibly liaising between them. She held bilateral meetings with leading members of the ECR and ID groups: **Marco Zanni** (League), Chair of the ID group, and Members of the Bureau of the ECR, **Jorge Buxadé** (Vox) and **Carlo Fidanza** (Fdl) in Brussels in January 2023.¹³⁸ Then, in May 2023, Varga met **Jean-Paul Garraud**, Chair of the National Rally's Delegation to the European Parliament, **Ryszard Legutko** (PiS) and **Nicola Procaccini** (Fdl), Co-Chairs of the ECR group separately to discuss the European elections, possibly trying to pursue them about a broad radical right alliance on the sidelines of CPAC Hungary.¹³⁹ Additionally, the prime minister's political director, Balázs Orbán, met with National Rally's representatives, possibly for the same reason.¹⁴⁰ Varga also met with **Santiago Abascal**, the leader of Vox, on two occasions in 2023 to congratulate him on the election results in Spain.¹⁴¹

However, by September 2023, Fidesz realized that ECR-ID cooperation had become unfeasible and signaled their desire to join the ECR. Nevertheless, the regime still maintains a partnership with ID, as showcased by the list of CPAC Hungary speakers and the EPP, mainly through their remaining connections to CDU/CSU in Germany and the membership of Fidesz's satellite sister party, KDNP, in the group.

“The biggest winner of the EP elections may be the ECR, which is growing at the expense of the ID.”



3.4. Outlook

While the Orbán government has invested significant efforts into building new alliances to change the existing power structures in the Euro-Atlantic area, Hungary is becoming increasingly alienated within its alliance system due to the abolishment of the rule of law, the anti-EU, pro-Kremlin, and anti-Ukraine policy stance, and the confrontative and obstructive tactics vis á vis joint decision-making. As most of the regime's international allies and partners are not in government, Hungary's ability to assert its interests has weakened.¹⁴²

Nevertheless, the regime continues to bet on populist radical right parties, hoping for a major breakthrough in the 2024 European and national elections. However, **these relationships will likely not reverse Hungary's marginalization as most of these parties are not in government, and even if some may be later, common interests will remain limited.** An important example of this is the Italian-Hungarian relations. Even though the Orbán regime has a cordial or even close relationship with all three governing parties, with high-level meetings and aligning narratives on several topics, in practice, the two governments find themselves on the opposite end regarding important EU-level decisions. For instance, even though the narrative on migration is essentially the same, Rome's and Budapest's direct interests collided as Italy pushed through its version of the new EU migration package, and Hungary and Poland even voted against the deal.

In the last year, Fidesz could not count on PiS to protect EU procedures, as the decisions regarding the rule-of-law conditionality mechanism are approved by a qualified majority in the Council instead of unanimity.¹⁴³ The change of government in Warsaw will likely further weaken the Hungarian government's position in the EU. Due to the above reasons, Fico's government in Bratislava will not fully replace Poland in protecting Hungary.

In case of a failed populist radical-right turn in European politics, the Orbán regime might hope to regain some goodwill in Europe during Hungary's presidency of the Council in the second half of 2024. The low level of trust in the government to credibly hold the Council presidency in 2024 while violating the EU's core values has already been raised by the European Parliament and Germany. The government expects 250-300 open legislative dossiers to be moved forward. However, the EP elections in June 2024 and the following summer break are expected to disrupt this work, with only 2-3 months remaining available for the government to prove itself. Nevertheless, the Hungarian Presidency should also manage the formation of the new Commission until 31 October 2024, allowing some limited influence for PM Orbán in the process. In the meantime, Budapest wants to use the institutional interregnum to bring its topics to the European stage by organizing workshops, meetings, and conferences.

One such flagship project is to elevate policies countering the "demographic decline" to the European level.

The government's objective is to promote the "Hungarian family policy model" and, most importantly, lobby for a new common EU policy area with a directorate, commissioner, and dedicated EU budget. Thus, besides the ideological benefits, the government seems to want EU funds to relieve the pressure from its financially constrained, ineffective family policy initiatives to keep its voters happy. However, Fidesz's controversial anti-gender/LGBTQI rhetoric¹⁴⁴ and the legal debate around its so-called "child protection", in reality, anti-LGBTQI law, will hinder the credibility of such initiatives. Moreover, the so-called "Defense of National Sovereignty", in reality, a regime defense law¹⁴⁵ passed by Fidesz and the far-right Mi Hazánk (Our Homeland) party in the National Assembly on 12 December, will likely cause new conflicts between Hungary and the EU and several MSs.

Overall, without a significant and long-lasting change on the European political stage or in the Hungarian government's domestic and foreign policy, it is unlikely that the international alienation of the government will ease. Hungary will continue to be a pariah state inside the EU, without major strategic allies, with a population increasingly turning against the West and the European Union. However, Hungary leaving the European Union is not a realistic possibility, as keeping multinational companies here and ensuring access to the European market and EU subsidies are crucial for the country. While a hard Huxit is unlikely, Hungary drifting to and remaining on the margins of the EU is an increasingly realistic scenario.

4. Projected outcome of the EP elections

Over the last election cycle, the populist radical right parties advanced in the polls and even got into power in Italy, Sweden (as external supporters), Finland, and Hungary. Suppose the current party group composition in the EP stays the same. According to Europe Elect’s calculation based on November 2023 polls, in this case, the biggest winner will be the ECR, gaining up to 26 additional seats compared to 2019.¹⁴⁶ However, they would still only be the fourth biggest group. Their growth is mainly driven by the Italian FdI essentially poaching voters and seats from its coalition partner League (member of the ID group in the EP).

Consequently, ECR’s rise is mainly happening at the expense of ID, which can only stabilize its position and grow somewhat due to the German AfD’s growth and the Dutch PVV’s popularity. However, it is essential to note that the projection considers that the EP will shrink in the next term. Compared to the 751 MEPs elected in 2019, ‘only’ 720 will sit in the newly elected EP after the 2024 elections due to population changes.

Figure 3: Seat projection for the new 720-member European Parliament, with Fidesz counted as non-inscrit, compared to the 2019 results when the EP was had 751 members.

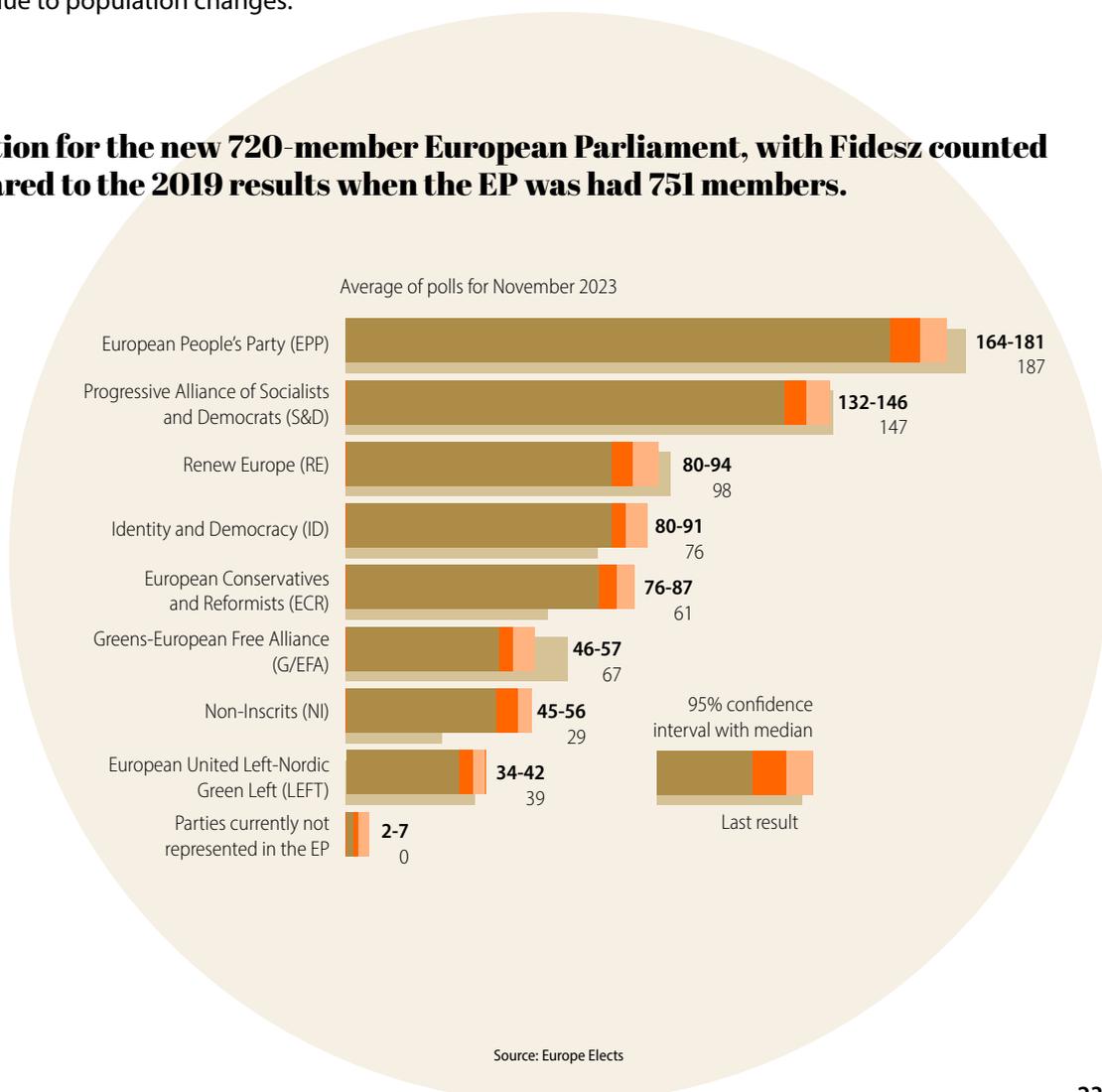




Figure 4: Seat projection for the new 720-member European Parliament, with Fidesz counted as a member of the ECR group, compared to the 2019 results when the EP was had 751 members.

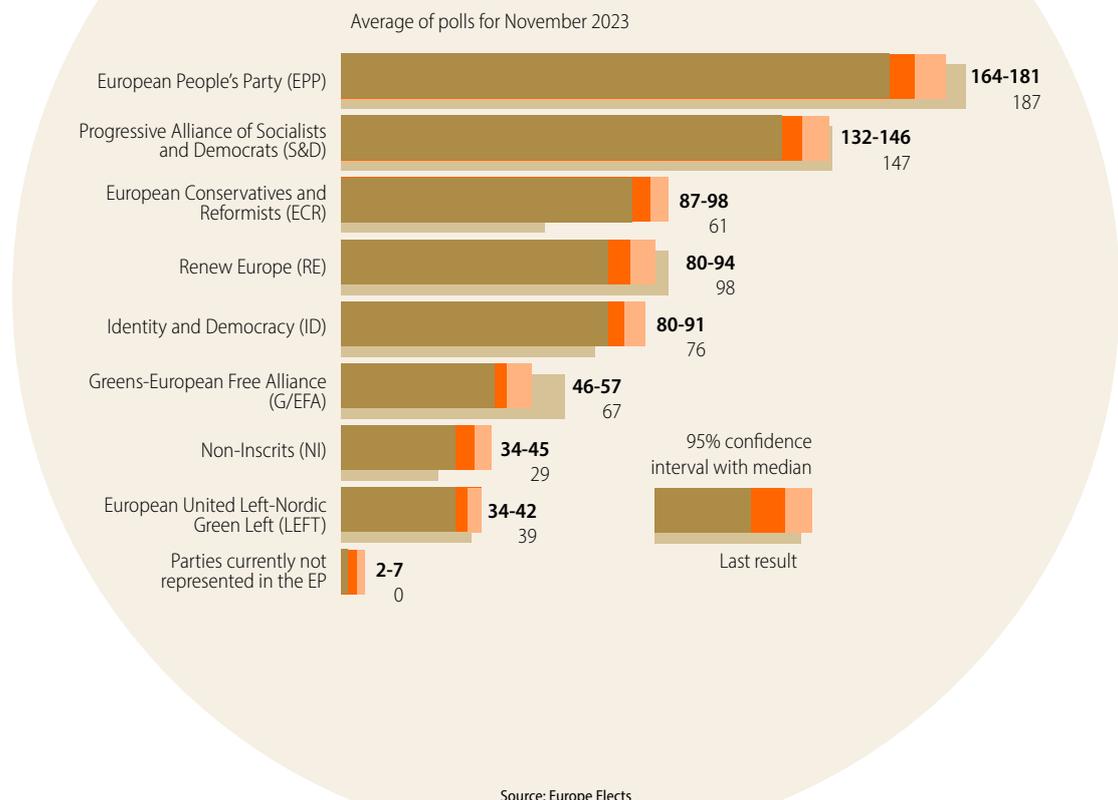
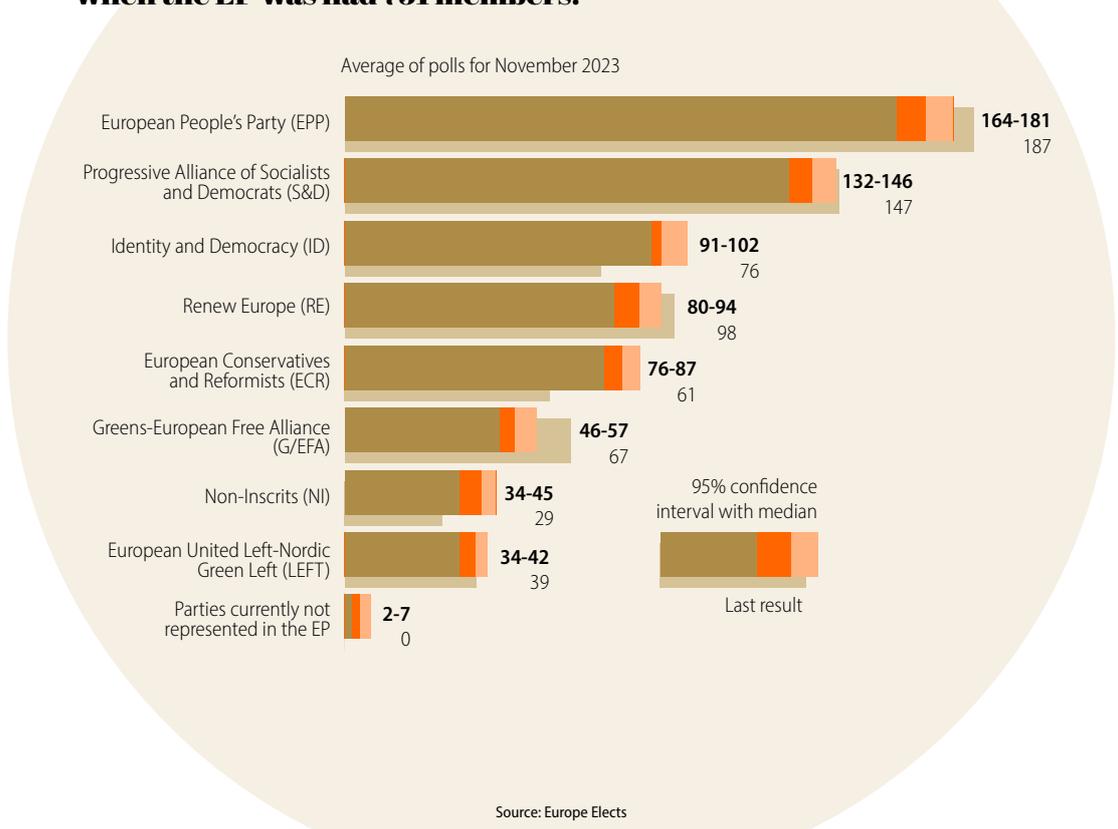


Figure 5: Seat projection for the new 720-member European Parliament, with Fidesz counted as a member of the ID group, compared to the 2019 results when the EP was had 751 members.





Based on Europe Elect’s calculation from November 2023, if the current group composition continues, the center-right **European People’s Party (EPP)** is expected to remain the largest party in 2024 with 175 seats, followed by the center-left Progressive Alliance of **Socialists and Democrats (S&D)**, with 141 seats. The third group is expected to be the liberal **Renew Europe (RE)**, with 89 MEPs.¹⁴⁷ The **Identity and Democracy (ID)** is expected to have 87 seats, and the **European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR)** 82. The **Greens/European Free Alliance (G/EFA)** are projected to win 52 seats, while the **Left Group in the European Parliament – GUE/NGL (LEFT)** 38. There would be 56 **non-attached (NI) members** if none of them decides to join a political group. This includes Fidesz’s projected 11 MEPs. If Fidesz joined the ECR group, it could become the third largest group, overtaking Renew Europe and ID, with a projected 87-98 MEPs.

An essential caveat concerning the projection is that the election is six months away, making such predictions inherently inaccurate. Changes in opinion polls can vary in the following months, and the composition of party groups may change after the election. However, the fundamentals are unlikely to change significantly. As of November 2023 polling, the current four-group informal “Grand coalition” is expected to continue having a majority in the EP.

The EP elections are not just important because of the co-legislative status of the Parliament. It will also mean the beginning of a new term for the European Commission, the executive branch of the EU. After the EP elections, the Euro-

pean Council (EUCO), composed of the 27 member states’ (MS) heads of state or government, will propose the European Commission’s new president with a qualified majority. The presidential candidate will gather their commissioners, whom the EP will vet individually. The EP will accept or refuse the nomination with an absolute majority of MEPs. Thus, the EP will have the power to formulate the new leadership of the EU for the next five years, together with EUCO.

Due to this co-play between the EP and the EUCO, the latter’s composition is also essential. As of November 2023, 10 heads of state or government are part of the EPP group, 6 are part of Renew Europe, 5 are part of S&D, 2 are part of ECR, and 4 are non-attached.

“Whether Fidesz joins the ECR or the ID group, and if so, which one, could have a big impact on the order of the groups.”

Figure 6: The composition of the European Council based on their EP political groups, as of 14 December 2023



- Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (S&D)
- Renew Europe (RE)
- European People’s Party (EPP)
- European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR)
- Non-attached

Source: Europe Elects

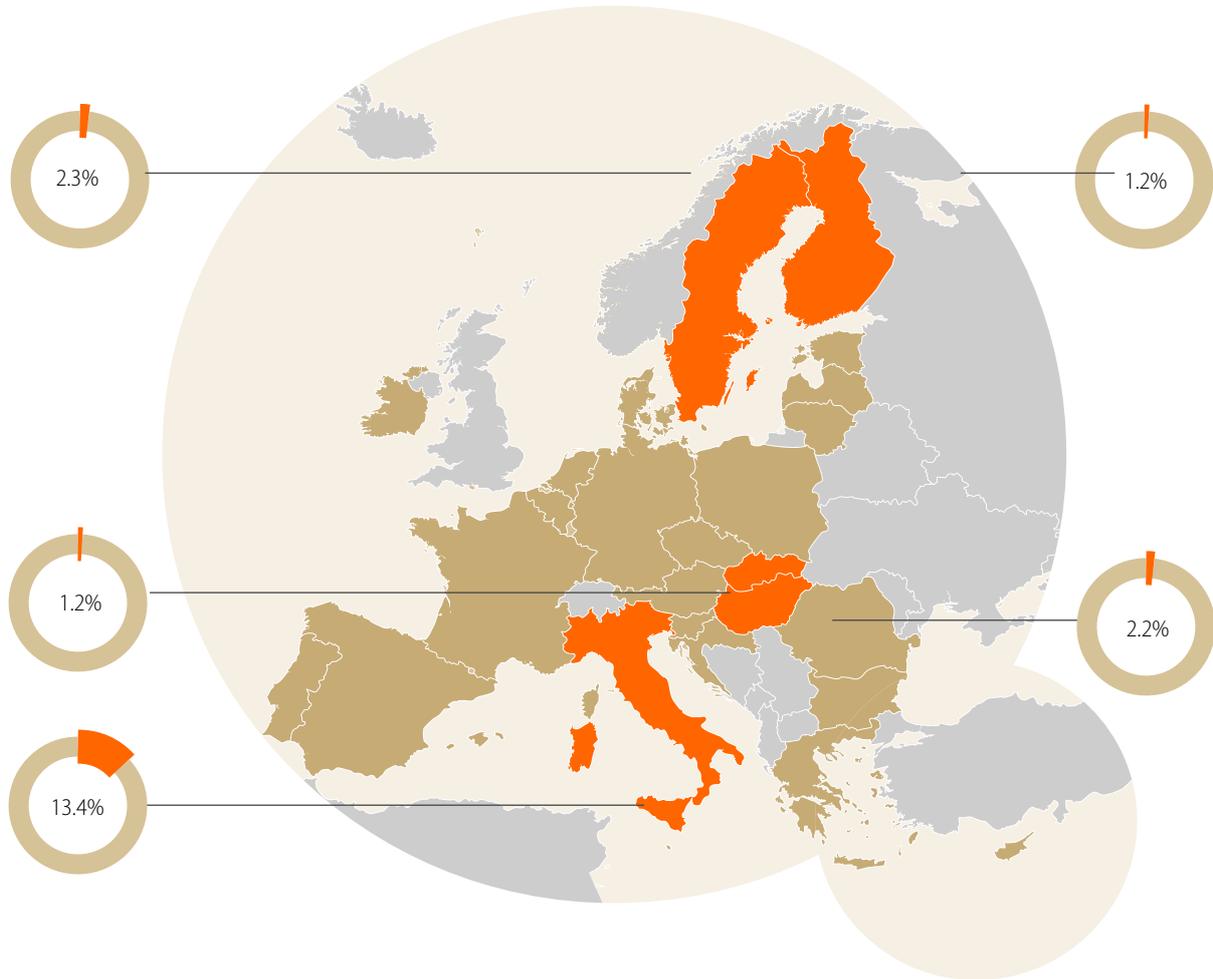
The EUCO’s current composition can change in 2024 due to the following factors. In **Slovakia**, PM Robert Fico’s Smer party’s membership in the S&D group has been suspended. **Hungary’s** Fidesz has not joined any EP group since it departed from the EPP in 2021. They hope to join the ECR, but the details of the negotiations are unknown. Moreover, there will be presidential elections in two countries represented in the EUCO by their presidents besides Cyprus and France: **Lithuania** (May 2024) and **Romania** (November 2024). Parliamentary elections will take place in **Portugal** (March 2024), **Belgium** (June 2024), **Croatia** (July 2024), **Austria** (September 2024), and **Romania** (December 2024). **Hence, populist radical parties are not expected to gain significant influence over the European Council** until the new European Commission is assembled by 31 October 2024.

Similarly, populist radical parties do not significantly impact European-level policymaking through the Council of the European Union either. As they constitute the major force in government only in three countries, Italy, Hungary, and Slovakia, and they are a minor partner in Finland and support the government externally in Sweden, they cannot hinder any decision alone. While these five countries account for only 20.3% of the EU’s total population, forming a blocking minority would require covering 35% of the EU population. Hence, these parties can only influence the EU decision-making process in the EUCO and the Council through cooperation with other governments (or hijacking the process by vetoes, as the Hungarian government does) or in the EP through ad-hoc coalition with the EPP group on specific issues.



Figure 7: The five EU countries where populist radical parties are in government or externally support the government.

The figure also shows the proportion of the countries' population compared to the total EU population.



	Prime Minister - Governing Party	Coalition Partner	External supporter
Sweden			Swedish Democrats 
Finland		Finn's Party 	
Slovakia	Robert Fico - Smer 	SNS 	
Hungary	Viktor Orbán - Fidesz 		
Italy	Giorgia Meloni Brothers of Italy 	League 	

ECR and ID political groups in the EP as of 30 November 2023

Party name	Party name in original language	Country	Number of MEPs	Proportion of party in political group	Proportion of party in EP
European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR)					
New Flemish Alliance	Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie	BE	3	4.5%	0.4%
Bulgarian National Movement	VMRO-Bulgarian National Movement	BG	2	3.0%	0.3%
Civic Democratic Party	Občanská demokratická strana	CZ	4	6.0%	0.6%
Alliance Germany	Bündnis Deutschland	DE	1	1.5%	0.1%
Greek Solution	Elliniki Lysi	EL	1	1.5%	0.1%
Finns Party	Perussuomalaiset	FI	2	3.0%	0.3%
VOX	VOX	ES	4	6.0%	0.6%
Croatian Sovereignists	Hrvatski suverenisti	HR	1	1.5%	0.1%
Brothers of Italy	Fratelli d'Italia	IT	9	13.4%	1.3%
Electoral Action of Poles in Lithuania – Christian Families Alliance	Lietuvos lenku rinkimu akcija – Krikščionišku šeimų sąjunga	LT	1	1.5%	0.1%
National Alliance	Nacionālā apvienība „Visu Latvijai!”- “Tevzemei un Brīvībai/LNNK”	LV	1	1.5%	0.1%
JA21	JA21	NL	1	1.5%	0.1%
More direct democracy	Meer Directe Democratie	NL	1	1.5%	0.1%
Reformed Political Party	Staatkundig Gereformeerde Partij	NL	1	1.5%	0.1%
The Republicans	Partia Republikańska	PL	1	1.5%	0.1%
Law and Justice	Prawo i Sprawiedliwość	PL	24	35.8%	3.4%
Sovereign Poland	Solidarna Polska	PL	2	3.0%	0.3%
Christian Democratic National Peasants' Party	Partidul Național Țărănesc Creștin Democrat	RO	1	1.5%	0.1%
Sweden Democrats	Sverigedemokraterna	SE	3	4.5%	0.4%
Freedom and Solidarity	Sloboda a Solidarita	SK	1	1.5%	0.1%
Independent			3	4.5%	0.4%
ECR in total			67	100%	9.5%
Identity and Democracy (ID)					
Freedom Party of Austria	Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs	AT	3	5.0%	0.4%
Flemish Interest	Vlaams Belang	BE	3	5.0%	0.4%
Freedom and Direct Democracy	Svoboda a přímá demokracie	CZ	2	3.3%	0.3%
Alternative for Germany	Alternative für Deutschland	DE	9	15.0%	1.3%
Danish People's Party	Dansk Folkeparti	DK	1	1.7%	0.1%
Conservative People's Party of Estonia	Eesti Konservatiivne Rahvaerakond	EE	1	1.7%	0.1%
National Rally	Rassemblement national	FR	18	30.0%	2.6%
League	Lega	IT	23	38.3%	3.3%
ID in total			60	100.0%	8.5%



List of populist radical parties in Europe

Party name	Party name in original language	Country	Number of MEPs	Popularity
European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR)				
New Flemish Alliance	Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie	BE	3	20,0%
Bulgarian National Movement	VMRO-Bulgarian National Movement	BG	2	1,0%
Civic Democratic Party	Občanská demokratická strana	CZ	4	15,0%
Alliance Germany	Bündnis Deutschland	DE	1	
Greek Solution	Elliniki Lysi	EL	1	4,0%
Finns Party	Perussuomalaiset	FI	2	17,0%
VOX	VOX	ES	4	11,0%
Croatian Sovereignists	Hrvatski suverenisti	HR	1	0,0%
Brothers of Italy	Fratelli d'Italia	IT	9	29,0%
Electoral Action of Poles in Lithuania – Christian Families Alliance	Lietuvos lenku rinkimu akcija – Krikščionišku šeimu sąjunga	LT	1	2,0%
National Alliance	Nacionāla apvienība „Visu Latvijai!”- "Tevzemei un Brīvībai/LNNK"	LV	1	12,0%
JA21	JA21	NL	1	0,7%
More direct democracy	Meer Directe Democratie	NL	1	0,0%
Reformed Political Party	Staatkundig Gereformeerde Partij	NL	1	2,1%
The Republicans	Partia Republikańska	PL	1	
Law and Justice	Prawo i Sprawiedliwość	PL	24	34,0%
Sovereign Poland	Solidarna Polska	PL	2	
Alliance for the Unity of Romanians	Alianța pentru Unirea Românilor	RO		20,0%
Christian Democratic National Peasants' Party	Partidul Național Țărănesc Creștin Democrat	RO	1	0,0%
Sweden Democrats	Sverigedemokraterna	SE	3	21,0%
Freedom and Solidarity	Sloboda a Solidarita	SK	1	6,2%
Independent			3	
ECR in total			67	
Identity and Democracy (ID)				
Freedom Party of Austria	Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs	AT	3	30,0%
Flemish Interest	Vlaams Belang	BE	3	23,0%
Freedom and Direct Democracy	Svoboda a přímá demokracie	CZ	2	10,0%
Alternative for Germany	Alternative für Deutschland	DE	9	21,0%
Danish People's Party	Dansk Folkeparti	DK	1	4,0%
Conservative People's Party of Estonia	Eesti Konservatiivne Rahvaerakond	EE	1	21,0%
National Rally	Rassemblement national	FR	18	24,0%
League	Lega	IT	23	9,0%
Freedom Party		NL	0	23,6%
ID in total			60	
Non-inscrits, other group affiliation or currently not represented in the EP				
Enough!	Chega	PT	0	15%
Direction	Smer-SD	SK	2	24%
Fidesz	Fidesz	HU	12	44%
Our Homeland	Mi Hazánk	HU	0	8%
Slovak National Party	Slovenská národná strana	SK	0	6%



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