

The European far right

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ABSTRACT

The far right was depleted and discredited in the aftermath of the Second World War, and struggled to establish enduring networks of solidarity. It was only beginning with the 1960s that the nationalist struggle was envisioned on a European scale, in order to denounce the “Europe of Yalta” that was relegated behind the American and Soviet powers, as well as the Europe of the Single Market, which devalued the nationalist shield against Marxist subversion. Far-right groups and parties increased informal contacts and meetings, and joint slates of candidates for European elections were established in the 1970s. Attempts to create a group in the European Parliament ended in the early 1990s, as new actors emerged. These formations mobilized far-right voters around subjects such as immigration, multiculturalism, and from 2000 onward Islam in particular. The meeting of European far-right leaders in Milan in 2016 ran counter to the strategy of “normalization” to which the primary parties of the European far right had aspired.



Electoral leaflet for the Movimento Sociale Italiano, 1975. Source :



Austrian far-right activists during an anti-migrant demonstration in Vienna.

Source : wikipedia.org

The European far right was depleted and lastingly discredited after the Second World War. During the postwar period, it struggled to recover from the shock after the defeat in 1945. Italy was nevertheless an exception in this political landscape hostile to nationalist forces. Beginning in 1946, a party openly asserting fascism was created, the Movimento sociale italiano. It was politically isolated, and in the early 1950s turned toward the European far right in an attempt to create a “black International.” A number of projects—including Maurice Bardèche’s European Social Movement (ESM)—succeeded one another, although all of them stumbled, undermined by personal conflict, ideological and strategic divergences, and a lack of means. These meetings nevertheless helped establish contacts and activist networks of solidarity that were regularly reactivated in the ensuing decades.

The Europe of nationalists: refusal of the Yalta order, defense of the white man, and the struggle against Marxist subversion (1945-late 1970s)

During the 1960s, nationalism underwent a fundamental transformation in Europe, with the nationalist struggle henceforth being envisioned on a European scale. Maurice Bardèche defended the constitution of a nationalist Europe that would enable European nations to recover, as part of an “Empire of Europe,” the power they lost in 1945. The foil of a “Europe of Yalta” structured the worldview and determined the geopolitical analysis of groups close to revolutionary-nationalism. They called for a reawakening of Europe to defend the white man, who in the context of decolonization was threatened by a “new Poitiers.” They also denounced the technocratic character of Single Market Europe, and defended the creation of a Europe of nationalisms, the “political bastion of the West.”

The constant ideological exchange between the European far right was accompanied by regular meetings throughout the 1960s and 1970s between group and party leaders who had made Europe their political horizon. In 1969, the ESM and the Portuguese periodical *Vanguardia* brought together in Rome far-right activists from across Europe to coordinate the propagandist and activist efforts of nationalist youth, in order to defend Europe from Marxist subversion. In the early 1970s, the French movement Ordre nouveau adopted the slogan “*Europe libère-toi*” (Europe, free yourself), and called for the creation of a nationalist Europe. Far-right groups and parties increased informal contacts and meetings, while the ESM representing a political myth for the European far right. In 1978, the Movimento sociale italiano (MSI), Fuerza nueva, and the Parti des forces nouvelles presented a joint slate of candidates for the European elections. The Euroright, launched as a response to Eurocommunism, sought to create a third-way for a Europe free of “materialist ideologies,” “atheist communism,” as well as “North American financial hegemony and Soviet military imperialism.” While it did not achieve the hoped-for electoral success, this initial experience of alliance served as a precedent.

A national-populist Europe? (early 1980s to the present)

The 1980s were marked by the institutionalization of relations between the European far right, which in 1984 attempted to create a group in the European Parliament. The Front national (FN), which experienced its first electoral successes in France and thereby served as an example for its European counterparts, represented the Group of the European Right (GER), along with the Italians of the MSI and the Greeks of EPEN, the National Political Union founded by Georgios Papadopoulos. However, ideological and strategic divergences prevented this experience from enduring, as it ended in 1994 after numerous recompositions. While the FN saw Europe as a community of civilization, the period was marked by the radicalization of the far right's anti-system discourse, which was especially expressed in the 1992 French referendum regarding the Maastricht Treaty.

The late 1980s and early 1990s were a period of change, as they saw the emergence of new actors that partially renewed the political offer as well as mobilizing topics driven by the far right. In a new context marked by the shattering of the Communist bloc, crumbling of industrial capitalism, and the heightening of the economic crisis, a number of far-right parties—notably Jörg Haider's FPÖ in Austria and the MSI-Alleanza Nazionale in 1994—reached positions of the highest level in the state by taking part in governmental coalitions. The criticism of European construction present in far-right discourse since the signing of the treaties of Rome was now joined by a rejection of the effects of economic globalization, and a retreat into defending traditional values. National-populist formations thus professed a xenophobic, racist, and security-based discourse. They denounced immigration and multiculturalism, which were a supposed threat to national and/or European identity, and during the 2000s made the anti-Islam struggle a central topic. Directed by charismatic leaders, outspoken critics of the “establishment” and parliamentarism, and self-proclaimed defenders of the “small” against the “big,” their message resonated considerably, especially among the categories most affected by the transformations of post-industrial society.

Beyond their ideological diversity and national dynamics with different temporalities, these organizations succeeded during the 2000s to achieve the goal of a party of European societies as well as to attract a large electorate. The Lega Nord in Italy, FPÖ in Austria, Front national in France, Progress Party in Norway, Party for Freedom in Holland, and the Flemish Vlaams Blok-Belang established themselves as major actors in European political life. In 2002, the presence of Jean-Marie Le Pen in the second round of the presidential election in France was both a shock and a turning point. The meeting of European far-right leaders in February 2016 in Milan, which brought together the FN, Lega Nord, the Italians of Casa Pound, German representatives of Pegida, and Greek neo-Nazis from the Golden Dawn, ran counter to the strategy of “normalization” aspired to by the primary far-right parties of Europe. For Marine Le Pen “a new Europe was born in Milan.” In 2019, a number of far-right parties are in power throughout Europe, including the Lega in Italy with Matteo Salvini.

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