

# European Parliament's Complex Landscape: Can the Far-Right Block Enlargement?

“Europe with no balls, no blood, no faith, a fascistic, LGBTQ+ Europe, America’s sissy Europe, is losing! The true ones are coming!” - posted by one of the Georgian Dream’s leading TV propagandists, Shalva Ramishvili, in the aftermath of the EU Parliament June 2024 elections. It is not at all unlikely that GD leaders are not capable of capturing the nuances of European political processes, but what counts more to them is to exploit the good results of the European far-right parties for internal political propaganda: the GD is on the right track as the like-minded parties are winning a victory in Europe.

The reality of the balance of power expressed by the results of the European elections is much more complex than the propaganda messages of the GD, and its consequences for the candidate countries,

including Georgia, can be diverse and challenging to predict. What appears at first glance is that the pro-European majority, represented by the Center-Right (EPP), Center-Left (SD), the Liberals (Renew), and the Greens (Greens/EFA), has been maintained. The numbers show that while the Center-Right made slight progress, the Liberals and Greens suffered severe losses.

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The Far-Right has indeed progressed but remains mainly in the minority and divided above all. These divisions are illustrated by the fact that these parties are divided into three different parliamentary factions: ECR (European Conservatives and Reformists), ID (Identity and Democracy), and



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Non-Inscrits (which is not in itself a European political party but brings together within it the radical “orphan” parties, not accepted in the other groups). Additionally, as the political nomadism of the Far-Right parties between the three groups remains commonplace, a stable and comprehensive alliance between them is still a challenge. Recently, Viktor Orbán announced that he was laying the foundations for a new European parliamentary group by trying to attract the parties currently members of the ECR and the ID. While he managed to secure 24 possible MEPs from ultra-right parties in Austria and the Czech Republic (and his own Fidesz), he still needs MEPs from at least four more countries to form a parliamentary group.

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On 28 June, the European Council [approved](#) the representatives of the three mainstream political parties at the helms of EU institutions. Ursula von der Leyen from the EPP, a strong supporter of Ukraine and EU enlargement, was maintained as the President of the Commission. Kaja Kallas from the Liberals will take up the foreign policy portfolio. The socialists and António Costa (Portugal) will get the European Council’s presidency. Despite some progress of the Far-Right forces and Orbán’s insistence, Hungary and its Fidesz may lose the strategically important position of the Commissioner on Neighborhood and Enlargement, currently held by Olivér Várhelyi.

The Far-Right will not be able to block legislation in the EP aimed at further supporting Ukraine either, and Kyiv will probably keep the preferential trade regime and benefits granted by the EU. But can we nevertheless pretend that everything is go-

ing very well and that the celebrations of the supporters of the European illiberal forces from the GD or Edinaya Rossiya are entirely unfounded?

While the Far-Right has been unable to rock the European boat, several significant trends may worry all pro-Europeans from Lisbon to Tbilisi. The heavy defeats of the French and German ruling parties (Macron’s liberal “Ensemble” and the German Social Democrats and the Greens) and the progression of the Far-Right in these two key countries, the general decline in support for enlargement and for the Ukrainian war effort against the Russian invader, the erosion of the “cordon sanitaire” against the Far-Right and attempts to “normalize” it, all represent challenges that would be wrong to ignore. The Georgian government, now openly anti-European and illiberal, may have been too quick to celebrate victory in June. Still, if trends continue, this may suit its affairs in the medium and long term.

## Creeping Influence Instead of Victory

In the June European Parliament elections, Far-Right parties came first in five countries (France, Italy, Hungary, Belgium, Austria) and second or third in another five (Germany, Poland, Netherlands, Slovakia, and Portugal). However, all Far-Right factions of the EP reunited (ECR+ID+ Non-Inscrits) still have roughly the same number of MEPs (201 out of 720, total number of MEPs) as the EPP alone (189). At the same time, these political forces are deeply divided and do not always share the same views on the EU foreign policy and neighborhood and enlargement issues.

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First, most ECR parliamentary group members do not even consider themselves as positioned on the extreme right of the political spectrum. For many years, British Conservatives were members of this group, and despite their relative euro-skepticism, it would have been inaccurate to qualify them as a Far-Right political movement. Nowadays, the leading political force in this group, Giorgia Meloni's Fratelli d'Italia (FdI), is courted by the EPP and the EU Commission President Ursula Von der Leyen for her re-election, which means that the "cordon sanitaire" against the ECR has already significantly eroded. On the other hand, the attempts at rapprochement with a more radical ID group, namely, with Marine Le Pen's Rassemblement National (RN), were inconclusive, given that the divergences seemed more critical than the convergences. In addition, the ECR and its main political components are at odds with Viktor Orbán's Fidesz and other Non-Inscrits on several key issues, making their alignment impossible.

## A Far-Right is Not Always Tied to Russia's Interests

Their positioning about Russia sets a critical dividing line between the European extreme right parties. This logically translates into their attitude towards the war in Ukraine. Here, two relatively distinct groups emerge: the one with unambiguous support for Ukraine, wishing Kyiv victory, and the other, with past or present ties to Moscow, adopts a more unclear position, which de facto means an indulgent attitude towards Putin.

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The first category includes the Italian FdI and the Polish Prawo i Sprawiedliwość/Law and Justice (PiS), which clearly understand the danger Russia poses to the security of the entire European

continent. The Scandinavian parties of the same political family, Sweden's *Sverigedemokraterna*/Swedish Democrats (SD) and Finland's *Perussuomalaiset*/Finns Party (PS), also share this mistrust. They support their countries' NATO membership and see Russia as the main threat.

One could add to this group the Spanish Far-Right party Vox, which took a solid pro-Ukraine stance following the Russian full-scale aggression in February 2022. Its leader, Santiago Abascal, [supported](#) direct humanitarian and military aid to Ukraine and even said to accept Ukrainian refugees "instead of welcoming Muslim migrants" from the Middle East and North Africa. The Spanish Far-Right, taking roots from the Franco regime, has always been skeptical about Russia and the Soviet Union and has been accusing the Left of pro-Soviet and pro-Russian sympathies.

Despite the large-scale invasion of Ukraine and the subsequent transformation of the Russian regime into a toxic partner, the other group of European Far-Right parties continues to maintain an ambiguous attitude towards the Kremlin. While hardly anyone dares to openly support the invasion and the blatant violation of basic principles of international law, these parties try to find extenuating circumstances for Russia and, above all, seem unwilling to participate in the Ukrainian war effort. This camp includes France's Rassemblement National/National Rally (RN), Germany's Alternative für Deutschland (AfD), the Italian Lega of Matteo Salvini, Austria's Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs/Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ) and the most explicit Russia supporter of all, Viktor Orbán's Fidesz from Hungary.

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These divisions go together with the divergent positions over transatlantic relations. While all political Extreme Left parties are anti-American, not all Far-Right parties oppose the concept of “national sovereignty” to the idea of alliance with the US. Influenced by national histories and perceptions, the Polish PiS, the Dutch Freedom Party (PVV), and the Italian FdI are pro-NATO and favor the US presence in Europe. However, the German AfD and the French RN saw their national sovereignty diminished by Washington. In recent years, the rise of Trumpism in America has shuffled the cards. The same anti-liberal forces that despised America are now fascinated by the figure of Donald Trump. The question here is whether being pro-Trump is being Atlanticist or the opposite.

## Divisions Everywhere, Even in the pro-Russian Camp

There are tensions even within the group, which we refer to as pro-Russian. For example, France's RN party, which not only won the European elections in France but also has powerful aspirations to form the country's government following the early French parliamentary elections on 30 June and 7 July, seems to feel a particular embarrassment for being associated with the Russian regime, something of which the media and political adversaries never fail to remind it. [Marked](#) by a loan of EUR 9 million received in 2014 on amicable terms from a Russian bank, as well as by a [warm welcome](#) in Moscow in 2017 by Vladimir Putin on the eve of the second round of the French presidential elections, Le Pen now denies being pro-Russian. The party has paid lip service to condemning Russia's invasion of Ukraine and promises to continue providing military aid to Kyiv in case they form the government in France. But, at the same time, the RN, via its new star politician, Jordan Bardella, [made public](#) that the party is reluctant to send “equipment capable of striking Russian territory to avoid escalation.”

This type of statement obviously cannot inspire confidence in a “clean break” with the Kremlin.

Recently, the RN, in its strategy of acquiring respectability and toning down its extremist image, initiated the exclusion of the AfD from the ID group, echoing the scandals linked to revisionist statements about the Nazi past and the proven links of some of its leaders with Russian and Chinese intelligence services. The Dutch Far-Right PVV party also supported Le Pen's position, while Austria's FPÖ was content with condemnation but did not go so far as to vote for exclusion. Finally, the AfD was excluded from the ID while the FPÖ announced a merger with Orbán's Fidesz and former Czech Prime Minister Andrej Babiš's ANO (Akce nespokojených občanů/Angry Citizen's Action) to build a new political group of Far-Right parties called Patriots for Europe. The detoxification and rounding of angles in the rhetoric of these parties is manifested by the distance they take vis-à-vis Russia. Still, doubts persist about the sincerity of this rupture and lead one to believe it is an electoral strategy.

## Opposite Views Regarding Enlargement

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The other bone of contention between the European Far-Right parties is the subject of EU enlargement. If there is unanimity around hostility to immigration and the expansion of Islam on the European continent, the topic of enlargement is a dividing one. The majority is still vigorously against enlargement (RN, FPÖ, AfD), and this is also the case for the parties that remain relatively Atlanticist and are not particularly pro-Russian. For example, the Dutch PVV of Geert Wilders, the Belgian Vlaams Belang/Flemish Interest (VB), or

the Swedish SD do not want enlargement from the “classical rightist” perspective. This view is grounded in the desire not to share wealth and resources with new members who may be poorer and could compete with their national labor markets.

But there are Far-Right parties that are not against enlargement. First, there is Meloni’s FdI, which, in principle, is [not hostile](#) to enlargement to the countries of the Western Balkans and eastern neighbors if the latter meet certain conditions. The Spanish Vox could also fall into this category. These parties share a more global tendency that characterizes the Mediterranean member states, generally quite favorable to enlargement.

However, there are two additional specific cases of this trend: the Polish PiS and the Hungarian Fidesz. The PiS, as critical as it is of Europe, views Ukraine’s membership as crucial for its national security. More generally, this Polish Far-Right party is against re-emerging Russian revisionism and imperialism and builds its geopolitical agenda according to this factor. As for Fidesz, it is pro-enlargement based on the ambition of its leader, Viktor Orbán, to transform the EU from within by becoming its leader. In this context, Fidesz would like to open the doors of the EU to countries governed by political forces that share a similar worldview. This is the policy of “à la carte” enlargement. The candidates Fidesz would like to see as member states in the future are, therefore, Vučić’s Serbia, Ivanishvili’s Georgia, and Bosnia-Herzegovina, where the leader of the Republika Srpska Milorad Dodik would play a key role. For the same reason, Orbán is very hostile to the accession of Ukraine and Moldova as far as liberal forces govern these countries.

## What Does Georgia Want?

Here, we must clearly distinguish between the government and the society because the ob-

jectives and desires of the two do not coincide. Georgian society has shown that it wants to join the EU and is ready to mobilize for this cause. Maintaining the course of European policy towards enlargement is, therefore, vital in the eyes of the population.

The government sees the European elections as a means of maintaining power in Tbilisi. To this end, it is taking an increasingly apparent authoritarian turn, inevitably bringing it closer to Russia and further away from European integration. The forces of the European political mainstream strongly criticize the GD government and affirm that the integration process can only be frozen; worse, sanctions and backward steps are not excluded.

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The GD cannot be satisfied with this situation. Even if the government is increasingly anti-European, it needs to maintain the European integration process, or at least the illusion of it, because it must consider the opinion of the vast majority of its population. This process may be pure fiction, as with the accession negotiations between Serbia and the EU. For this, it is in the interest of the GD to see the main pro-European parties: the Liberals, the Centrists of the Right and the Left, and the Greens be replaced by the Eurosceptic, nationalist, ultraconservative forces for whom the rule of law is no longer the central component of conditionality.

If the GD considers the Far-Right’s victory to be

a good thing, it is because, in relations with their neighbors and the enlargement dossier, the Far-Right parties do not attach the same importance to the criteria of democracy, the rule of law, the protection of minorities and free and fair elections. They are motivated by more individual interests. Meloni's Italy, for example, has decided to support Albania's candidacy as the latter has [signed](#) an agreement on immigration control with the Italian government. Commissioner Várhelyi, representing the interests of the Fidesz government in Budapest, staunchly supported Serbia and Georgia despite the apparent democratic backsliding in these countries.

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More right-wing extremism in the European Parliament, the European Commission, and the member states' national governments means less democratic conditionality for the candidate countries. If Europe ceases to be and act as a force for democratization in its neighborhood, governments with authoritarian tendencies, such as the GD's, can only be strengthened.

In conclusion, the results of the 2024 European Parliamentary elections set the stage for a more

conservative and possibly fragmented approach to enlargement policy. The mainstream pro-enlargement, pro-EU, and pro-Ukraine forces still prevail, and it is unlikely that Far-Right MEPs could gather the majority on enlargement-related topics. But the current situation will increase sharp debates on these issues, maybe even slow down some decisions to come, especially those related to the institutional reform of the Union, which, for their part, are necessary to prepare the enlargement and the arrival of the new member states.

The creeping gains in votes and the mandates of the European Far-Right and their electoral success in two leading EU member states, France and Germany, do not give us a reason to be reassured. The upcoming snap parliamentary elections in France contain even more severe risks than the past European elections. The arrival to power of a radical right-wing force in one of the Union's key countries would also have consequences at the European level, notably in the composition of the Commission. The Far-Right government in France, if allied with Italy, Austria, and Netherlands, could also form the blocking minority in the Councils since the EU rules provide that the four states, where 65% of the EU's population resides, can block any decision. The future enlargement and the European future of countries such as Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine are therefore also decided at the national ballot boxes in France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, and Poland ■