

Forum: Special Political and Decolonization Committee (GA4)

Issue: Evaluating the rise of far-right movements in Europe

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INTRODUCTION

In recent years there has been a rising concern over the emergence of far-right movements in Europe. Such groups frequently advocate for nationalistic, anti-migration and anti-EU ideologies that oppose broad democratic practices and European institutions. It is essential that we fully understand what has caused this rise, the traits of such movements and the effects they have had throughout Europe in order to be able to develop effective solutions.

Most nations within Europe have seen a sharp increase to the support of parties to the far-right of the political spectrum often due to them exploiting social discontent, political disillusionment and economic insecurity. Said economic insecurity and, in general, resentment toward major political parties were an immediate result of the 2008 financial crisis and the ensuing austerity measures forced on people across the world. Furthermore, the recent rise in migration across Europe has contributed to the rise of such movements due to them attributing most social issues to refugees and immigrants.

Politics within Europe and society in general have been impacted on a significant level by this rise of movements on the far-right. It has led to the normalization of extreme views which in turn increase polarization and societal tensions across Europe. Moreover, groups on the far-right have continuously jeopardized the rights of minorities and the rule of law throughout Europe. As a result, policy makers and civil society advocates are challenged in addressing issues that may lead to political extremism, especially to that on the far-right.

As a response to the growing influence that far-rights parties have, the European Union (EU) have taken actions, including the use of infringement procedures against member states that have gone against certain democratic values. Nevertheless, the major threat posed by far-right extremism still remains substantial as the effectiveness of such restrictions taken by the EU has been limited.

DEFINITION OF KEY-TERMS

Far-Right

The Far-Right is defined as “the more extreme supporters or advocates of social, political, or economic conservatism or reaction, based generally on a belief that things are better left unchanged”¹.

Far-Right Movements

Far-Right Movements are those that support or leverage the policies of the far-right. They often promote nationalistic ideologies with the belief that they better their nation. Movements like these often find scapegoats to blame for anything they see wrong with society.

Populism

Populism is defined as a “political program or movement that champions, or claims to champion, the common person, usually by favourable contrast with a real or perceived elite or establishment.”²

Nationalism

Nationalism can be described as “Advocacy of or support for the interests of one's own nation, esp. to the exclusion or detriment of the interests of other nations”³. It also often “supports national independence or self-determination”³

Authoritarianism

Authoritarianism is a term most commonly used to describe political regimes which hold significant power. Such regimes often discourage free speech and block democratic processes such as voting from taking place. Authoritarian governments also usually control the media as a way to repress their people.

Extremism

Extremism is a “Tendency to be extreme; esp. the holding of extreme political or religious views, or advocacy of illegal, violent, or other extreme measures.”⁴ As such political extremism is when people hold extreme political views often advocating for policies on the far ends of the political spectrum.

¹ "the far right." Collins English Dictionary, 2024, www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/the-far-right. Accessed 9 July 2024.

² Munro, André. "populism". Encyclopedia Britannica, 29 May. 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/populism>. Accessed 9 July 2024.

³ "Nationalism, N., Sense 1.a." Oxford English Dictionary, Oxford UP, July 2023, <https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/2348681590>.

⁴ "Extremism, N." Oxford English Dictionary, Oxford UP, July 2023, <https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/3598518929>.

Euroscepticism

Euroscepticism is defined as a “European political doctrine that advocates disengagement from the European Union (EU).”⁵ Parties that promote euroscepticism are usually populist and generally support tightening immigration and changing or completely abolishing the EU.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Background History

This recent rise of far-right groups across Europe is rooted in the aftermath of World War II. While the far-right was mostly discredited and depleted following the defeat of fascism and Nazism, several groups and parties were able to regroup and reorganize themselves in the new postwar era. One such party was the “Movimento Sociale Italiano” (MSI), which was founded in 1946, openly expressing fascist beliefs and ideologies in Italy. The MSI was founded by supporters of the former dictator, Benito Mussolini, with aims to succeed Mussolini’s party the Republican Fascist Party (PFR).

Later, in the 1970s, there was a significant increase in informal connections and meetings between far-right organizations with the purpose of establishing groups of candidates for the European elections. Projects like the European Social Movement (ESM) helped in the establishment of contacts and activist networks. The ESM was a far-right organization aimed at establishing a European federalist nation that sprung up with the support of other far-right organization such as the previously mentioned MSI.

The parties and organizations of the European far-right started to organize in the 1980s with many attempts made to form a group in the European Parliament. The National Front (FN) of Jean-Marie Le Pen, seeing its first electoral wins within France, along with the MSI and the Greek National Political Union (EPEN) created the Group of the European Right (ER). The ER was the first official far-right group within the European Parliament however it collapsed in the next European elections and was eventually replaced by the Technical Group of the European Right. Eventually, the following era which saw the dissolution of the Soviet bloc, the demise of industrial capitalism and economic challenges, a multitude of far-right groups gained subsequent spots in coalition governments throughout the EU.

⁵ Ray, Michael. "Euroskepticism". Encyclopedia Britannica, 10 Jun. 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Euroskepticism>.

Types of Right-Wing Extremism

Right-Wing Extremism as a term refers to a part of the political spectrum which includes multiple extreme ideologies such as extreme conservatism, ultra-nationalist and authoritarian approaches. Historically, the term has described fascism, Nazism and Falangism. Some modern groups that are described as right-wing extremist or far-right include neo-Nazism, neo-fascism, the alt-right and racial supremacists given that they encompass the ideologies above and more such as xenophobia, homophobia and chauvinism.

Far-right politics have resulted in oppression, political violence, forced assimilation, ethnic cleansing and genocide toward specific groups of people claiming superiority over them or due to them being seen as threatening to conservative institutions, national religion, or the native ethnic group.

Right-Wing Extremism vs Fascism and Nazism

However, it is very important for us to distinguish between modern right-wing extremism and the historical background of Nazism and fascism. Fascism and Nazism were completely totalitarian, authoritarian, and ultranationalist political ideologies, mainly characterized by militarism, suppression of any opposing political parties, and dictatorial leaders such as Hitler and Mussolini. In contrast, the right-wing extremism we observe today is significantly more varied and shows many levels of ultranationalism and authoritarianism.

Certain parties do not inherently show totalitarian or dictatorial characteristics even though they may have things in common with Nazism and fascism such as anti-immigration and racist policies.

Differences between Right and Far-Right

Distinguishing between the right and far-right is not always easy given that parties from both sides often have elements of the other in their policies. However, right wing and far-right parties have some significant differences. Firstly, parties on the right of the political spectrum often believe that any inequalities faced by society should either defend or ignore their existence.

On the other hand, the far-right is more ultra-nationalist and promotes the belief that superior people should rule society and anyone who is deemed inferior should be eliminated. Furthermore, far-right parties are often deemed extreme by the public while right wing parties are considered mainstream. In spite of this, mainstream right-wing parties have converted to radical right populist parties which has made it more difficult for people to distinguish between each other.

Case Studies

Hungary

A good example of the rise of the far-right in Europe is Hungary. Since its rise to power in 2010, the authoritarian far-right party Fidesz, led by Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, a number of measures have been implemented which have gotten criticized as extremist and far-right. The party have been huge advocates of anti-immigrant and nationalistic policies through their advocacy of preserving the Hungarian identity and culture. Orbán has also attacked the European Union by claiming that it interferes with Hungarian domestic affairs.

Hungary has witnessed a significant crackdown on the independence of courts, freedom of media, and civil society organizations. Lastly, the government under Orbán is alleged to have used antisemitic and anti-Roma sentiments to gain political advantage. Many Hungarians nevertheless support Fidesz because of its nationalist and anti-establishment message, despite these worries. The party's popularity has been attributed to a larger far-right populist trend that is spreading through Europe.

Netherlands

A growth in far-right politics has also been observed in the Netherlands, especially with the popularity of Geert Wilders' Party for Freedom (PVV). With an agenda of tough anti-Islamic and anti-immigration views, the PVV has garnered a lot of support across the nation. Mosques and Islamic schools should be closed, according to demands made by Wilders and the PVV, who are outspoken opponents of Islam.

They have also argued in favor of the Netherlands leaving the European Union and strict immigration laws. Other parties in the Netherlands have taken more conservative positions on immigration and integration as a result of the PVV's increasing popularity. This has given rise to worries about the nation's customarily liberal and accepting norms eroding.

Greece

Greece is another country that has recently faced the rise of far-right parties within its borders. The most significant example of this had been the far-right party Golden Dawn (Χρυσή Αυγή). Golden Dawn was a neo-Nazi party which openly promoted anti-immigrant sentiments and racism. The party at its peak had gained a 7% stake in the national elections of 2012, providing them with 18 seats in the Greek parliament. For years this was one of the biggest victories of an openly fascist party in a general election of an EU country.

The party and its local chapters often engaged in violent attacks against immigrants, political opponents and in general whoever opposed it. The culmination of such attacks was the murder of anti-fascist rapper Pavlos Fyssas in 2013 by an associate of the party. A subsequent criminal investigation deemed that the party operated like a criminal organization, with the parties' leaders and members frequently being involved in a number of violent crimes. In 2020 a Greek court officially ruled that the Golden Dawn was a criminal organization with the party being banned from running in elections and its senior members being given prison sentences.

However, the underlying issues that fueled the rise of the movement within the Greek political scene, such as the Greek economic crisis and high unemployment, still remain. Given that those factors persist there have been a number of parties that have sprung up to fill the void left by Golden Dawn, such as the Greek Solution and the Spartans.

MAJOR COUNTRIES AND ORGANIZATIONS INVOLVED

France

One of the biggest and most successful parties within Europe is France's National Rally (formerly National Front), which is led by Marine Le Pen. The party is characterized by anti-immigration, anti-EU and nationalistic policies. Such policies include stricter immigration controls, calls for the closure of mosques and the deportation of immigrants and sovereignty over the EU's decisions. In recent years Le Pen has actively tried to distance herself and her party from its extremist past by focusing on issues such as crime and unemployment.

The party however is still considered controversial and divisive across France with it often being accused of promoting xenophobia. Even though the party has gained significant ground most other political parties still refuse to form coalitions with it. For example, in the recent parliamentary elections in 2024, although the party gained the most seats in the French legislature, they were still not enough to form a government, as all other major parties declined to work with them to form a coalition.

Italy

There has also been a severe rise of far-right parties in recent years within Italy with parties such as the League and the "Brothers of Italy" gaining severe traction over the last few years. The League, which is led by Matteo Salvini, has continuously supported a tougher stance against immigration through positions it has gained serving within government coalitions. It has become a major party in Italian politics since it has gained significant support especially in the north of Italy. Furthermore, the League has been a critic of the European Union and its immigration policies while it has gotten accused of using migrants as scapegoats for social and economic problems in Italy.

The success the League has had, has led other parties to adopt more nationalistic and populist agendas. Salvini was appointed Minister of the Interior and Deputy Prime Minister in the League's coalition government with the anti-establishment Five Star Movement in 2018. Salvini took a tough stance on immigration when he was in office, blocking migrant rescue ships from entering Italy and stepping up the deportation of unlawful immigrants. But in 2019, the League and the Five Star Movement's partnership broke down, and the center-left Democratic Party and the Five Star Movement formed a new administration.

In 2022, Giorgia Meloni was appointed Prime Minister after her party, Brothers of Italy won the Italian elections. Her party which is often referred to as far-right is rooted in the Italian Social Movement. The far-right in Europe celebrated Meloni's triumph in the 2022 election, which

made her party the biggest in the Italian parliament. But the “Brothers of Italy” have tried to disassociate themselves from their neo-fascist history and position themselves as a more mainstream conservative organization.

Poland

Poland is another nation that has been heavily affected by the emergence of far-right parties such as the Law and Justice Party (PiS). The party has adopted a nationalistic stance with it implementing policies against immigration into the country and promoting the Polish cultural identity. The party is led by Jarosław Kaczyński and has been in power since 2015. Since it came in power the party has tried to limit migration from Muslim-majority countries and promoted catholic values as central to the Polish identity. Such rhetoric has contributed to the intolerance faced by refugees and migrants within the country. In addition, to the party’s emergence the country has seen the growth of far-right organizations such as the National Radical Camp (ONR) and the All-Polish Youth, both of which have organized nationalistic rallies that promote hate speech and the exclusion of migrants from society. This rise observed in the far-right within Poland has caused concern amongst many human rights organizations, often criticizing the government due to their inaction and promotion of nationalistic and xenophobic agendas. For example, the party disbanded an advisory body on xenophobia and racial discrimination signing the normalization of far-right policies in Poland. Lastly, there have been many concerns raised about the erosion of democratic norms within the country given its reforms to weaken judicial independence and media freedom leading to the EU launching infringement procedures against the country for violations of the rule of law.

European Union (EU)

The European Union is an international body established by the Maastricht Treaty in 1993 and is comprised of 27 member states. Its predecessors were the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) and the European Economic Community (EEC). Some of its aims include the establishment of a free trade area across its member states, a common currency and common points in the foreign policies of all member states.

As an organization, the EU has fought against far-right movements as it has filed infringement procedures on states that have been proven to violate democratic procedures. However, it has been proved hard for the EU to fight the far-right as it has been unable to create a comprehensive response to the issue due to the variety of political views across the bloc. Despite that the EU has continued promoting human rights and democratic values, while funding and supporting groups that promote inclusivity and diversity.

TIMELINE OF EVENTS

DATE	DESCRIPTION OF EVENT
1945	End of World War II which led to a significant decline of far-right parties across Europe
1946	Formation of the Movimento Sociale Italiano (MSI) as a neo-fascist party
1970s	Movements such as the National Front in France started gaining traction in national politics
1980s	Several attempts were made to create a group of far-right parties within the European Parliament
1990s	Rise of many populist far-right parties aiming to take advantage the instability caused by the fall of the Soviet Union
15 September 2008	The fall of Lehman Brothers which led to the global economic crisis which in turn led to increased supports for parties across the far-right
2010	The Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ) joined a coalition government marking a big step for far-right parties gaining political power
25 May 2014	Parties like the National Front in France and the UK Independence Party (UKIP) gained substantial representation within the European Parliament
2015	The significant influx of refugees across the EU led to rising anti-immigrant sentiment
23 June 2016	The UK votes to leave the EU due to the influence of far-right parties such as the United Kingdom Independence Party/Brexit Party (UKIP)

24 September 2017	The Alternative for Germany (AfD) becomes the third largest party in the German parliament making it the largest representation for any far-right party in the country.
04 March 2018	The League joins a coalition government with Matteo Salvini becoming Deputy Prime Minister
25 September 2022	The Brothers of Italy win the elections in Italy with Georgia Meloni becoming Prime Minister

RELEVANT UN RESOLUTIONS, TREATIES AND EVENTS

Report A/77/266

The Secretary General's Report A/77/266 titled "Terrorist attacks on the basis of xenophobia, racism and other forms of intolerance, or in the name of religion or belief" was published on the 3rd of August 2022. The report focuses on terrorism motivated by far-right ideologies such as nationalism, xenophobia and racism. It notes that while the threat from traditional terrorist groups remains significant, there has been a noteworthy rise in attacks by individuals associated with far-right organizations, specifically noting a 320% rise from 2014 to 2018. Furthermore, it also analyzes the structure and beliefs of such organizations, along with the spread of disinformation especially during the covid pandemic.

UN Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech

The United Nations Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech was launched by the Secretary General on the 18th of June 2019. It provides a framework for dealing with Hate Speech while recognizing the freedom of expression. Given that hate speech is used frequently by far-right groups to encourage violence and discrimination, the strategy is essential in the fight against such organization. Furthermore, it is called for member states to make specific laws that prohibit hate speech and advance inclusivity. As such, the main platform of far-right groups will collapse, and they will not be able to gain ground that easily.

PREVIOUS ATTEMPTS TO SOLVE THE ISSUE

Germany's Anti-Discrimination Law

The Anti-Discrimination Law or Allgemeines Gleichbehandlungsgesetz (AGG) aims to end discrimination on all aspects such as ethnicity, gender or religion within Germany. It was enacted in 2006 after concerns were raised about discrimination and xenophobia, especially due to the rise of far-right parties such as the Alternative for Germany. (Alternative für Deutschland – AfD) The AGG provides a legal framework for those discriminated against to get reparations for any such discrimination they may have faced. Though the law has been successfully used to prosecute cases of discrimination, its enforcement has been uneven and as such haven't been completely successful in eliminating the rise of far-right extremism and limiting hate crimes.

France's Law against Domestic Violence

In the end of July 2020, the law against domestic violence was signed in France. It aimed to combat domestic violence and hate crimes in general. More specifically, it included provisions to enhance the protections provided to victims of hate crimes, such as those discriminated against because of the rhetoric of far-right parties. The law reflects how the far-right has increased its power and the resulting rise in hate crimes committed. Nevertheless, more extensive safeguards are required even if the law is a step in the right direction given that hate crimes and prejudice against minorities are still major issues.

European Union's Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion (2021-2027)

According to the European Commission, “[t]he Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021-2027 proposes concrete actions to support Member States and other relevant stakeholders in overcoming integration-related challenges for migrants and EU citizens with a migrant background.”⁶ It aims to address any barriers immigrants may face in their integration to society such as: finding a house, getting a proper education, getting a job and being provided with healthcare. As such the plan provides ways for member states to provide all the above by providing funding and collaborating between all associated stakeholders. However, the plan's long-term effects are yet unknown as far-right movements continue to grow throughout Europe.

⁶ "Action Plan on the Integration and Inclusion." Migration and Home Affairs, European Commission, home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies/migration-and-asylum/legal-migration-and-integration/integration/action-plan-integration-and-inclusion_en.

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

Creation of Legislative Frameworks

Member states should create anti-discrimination laws which will prohibit hate speech, hate crimes and more generally discrimination-based crimes. Such legislation should ensure the equality of all in employment opportunities, education and any other services needed. Furthermore, any existing laws surrounding hate crimes should be enhanced to ensure the effective prosecution of individuals committing crimes based on race or xenophobia. Such laws should ensure the training given to police officers in responding and recognizing hate crimes. Lastly, countries should enforce existing laws more stringently to establish a more inclusive society.

Educational Programs

Another way to effectively reduce the spread of far-right parties is the implementation of educational programs. All local governments should ensure students are taught to think critically and process all information given to them be that from traditional media or social media. As such media literacy programs should be implemented aiming to teach students how to recognize biased information and for them to recognize whether a source is credible or not. Additionally, schools should promote democratic values, human rights and the dangers posed to society by extremism. Lastly, students should be taught to respect diversity and differences between people to foster a society inclusive to all.

Addressing the root causes of radicalization

The last and most significant way to reverse the rise of far-right parties is addressing the root causes of radicalization. As such governments should invest in the development of areas that face issues, such as unemployment and exclusion from society. This can be done by providing job training and initiatives that promote equal opportunities for everyone. Another way to reduce radicalization is by offering mental health services to those affected by discrimination or social isolation and help them be more resilient against extremist ideologies which they are very likely to be attracted by. Lastly, communities should be involved in the decision-making process across their country so they can feel included and that their problems and concerns are heard by the policy makers.

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