

## Europe on the Ballot: Who Will Rule the EU?

Article by Filipe Henriques  
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The chances of a conservative majority after the European elections are slim, but the normalisation of radical-right forces is a wake-up call for progressives.

Between 6 and 9 June, 720 citizens of Europe will be elected to the world's only continental democratic assembly. As the vote is set to result in a fragmented European Parliament, many in Brussels and around the continent are already thinking about the day after, speculating on which forces will build a governing majority.

The European Union is, like most decentralised democracies, a two-chamber system: one chamber represents the member states and one the citizens – the European Council and the European Parliament, respectively. To win a second term as European Commission President, Ursula Von der Leyen – or anyone who aims to succeed her – will need a double majority: in the European Council, which nominates the candidate for the EU's top job, and in the European Parliament, which needs to elect the nominee.

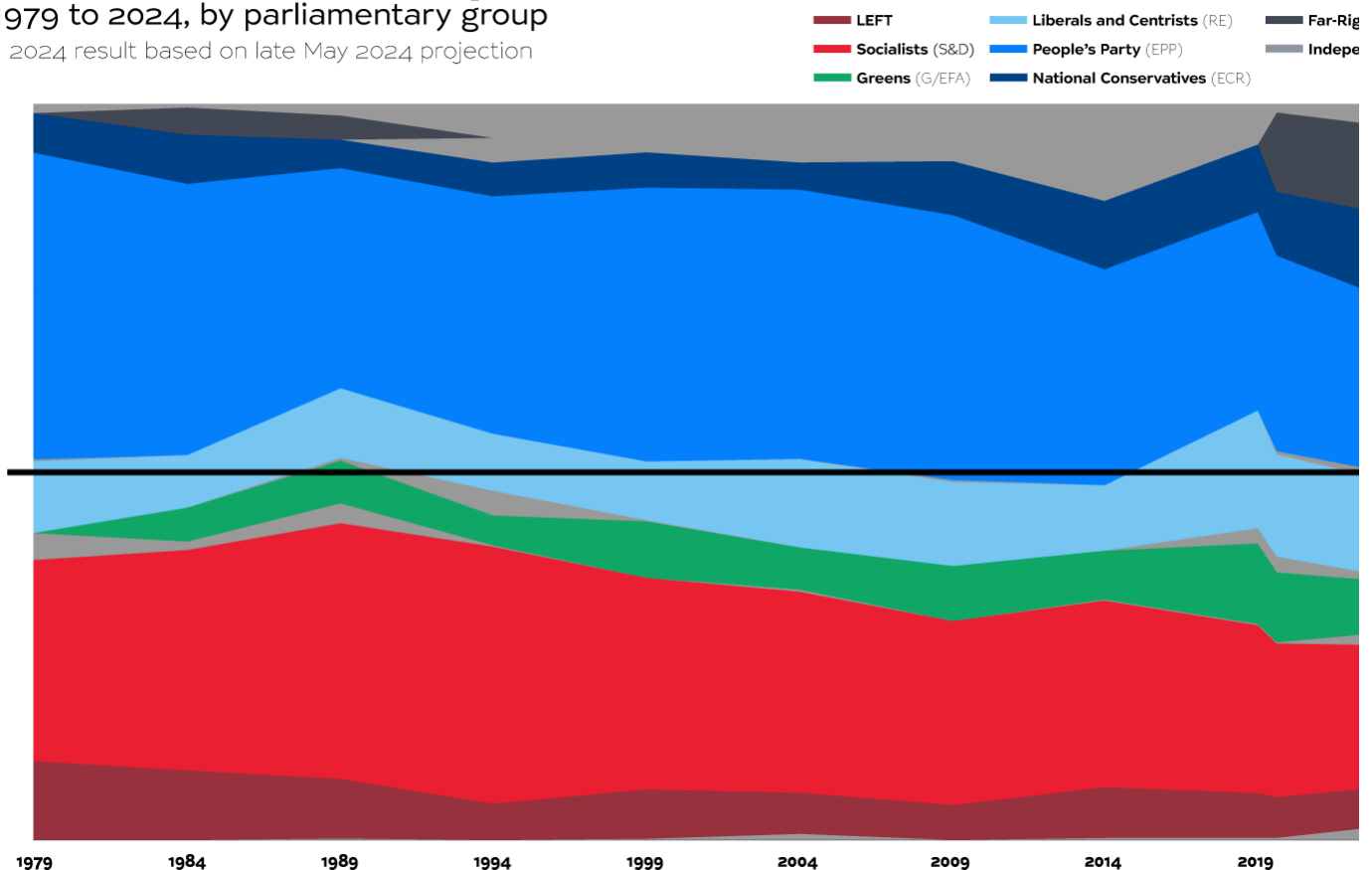
Over the past decades, all Commission presidents have been elected and supported by a grand coalition of the centre-right European People's Party (EPP), the European Socialists, and the Liberals (now called Renew Europe). This political formula has historically granted a majority in both chambers. But there is talk that this will no longer be the case after the June elections.

The big story of the election is expected to be the rise of the radical right, which seems set to obtain its best result ever. The growth of the far right in the European Parliament would be a consequence of two elements that have fuelled each other in the last years: the social unrest and dissatisfaction linked to multiple crises (the climate emergency, the pandemic, Russia's war in Ukraine) and the normalisation of far-right rhetoric by both the mainstream Right and the media.

## Evolution of the European Parliament 1979 to 2024, by parliamentary group

fhenrique

\* 2024 result based on late May 2024 projection



According to polls, far-right forces could win 28 per cent of the seats, up from 22 per cent in the current Parliament. They also hold three seats in the European Council: Giorgia Meloni in Italy, Petr Fiala in the Czech Republic, and Viktor Orbán in Hungary.

While the rise of the radical right is a worrying sign for European democracy 79 years after the defeat of Nazi-fascism, these forces have grown into an actor that cannot be ignored in EU policymaking. However, based on the numbers, chances that the far right will be part of the new EU majority after the European elections are slim.

### Far-right normalisation

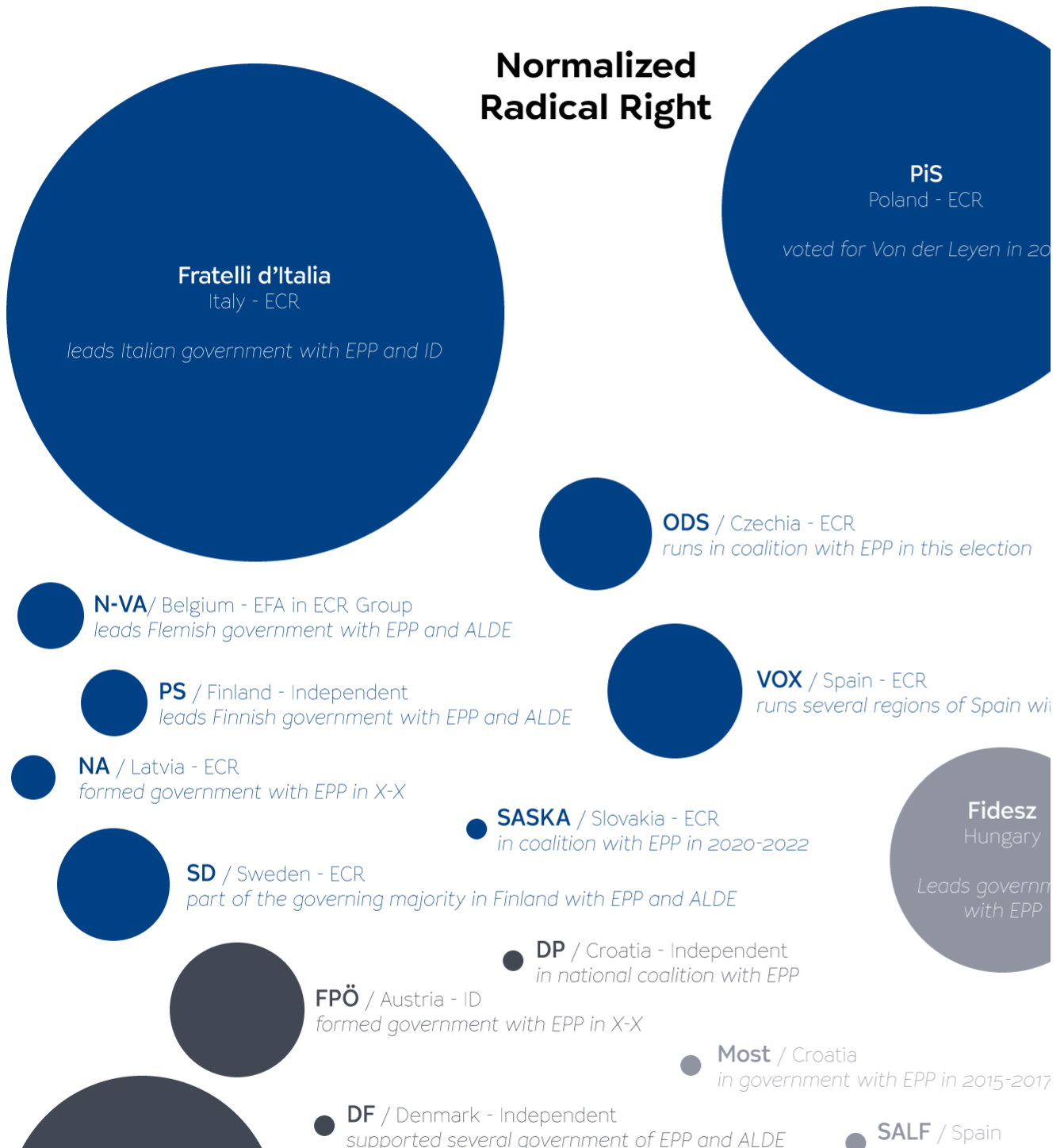
Of Europe's radical-right parties, around half have been normalised as mainstream political forces. Fratelli d'Italia in Italy, Fidesz in Hungary and the ODS in Czechia run

their respective countries in coalition with the EPP.

The other half are still behind a "cordon sanitaire", or are regarded as not democratically acceptable. The largest party in this group is Marine Le Pen's Rassemblement National (RN) in France. Even though the RN's normalisation seems underway, it is very unlikely that Emmanuel Macron will support a European Commission that opens its doors to his main political rival.

# Radical Right in the 2024 European 1952 to 2024, by broad political family

## Normalized Radical Right





Alternative für Deutschland (AfD), which is polling around 20 per cent in Germany, is more isolated. Not only Von der Leyen's German party, the CDU, has repeatedly ruled out cooperating with the AfD, but even radical-right leaders such as Marine Le Pen and Matteo Salvini have distanced themselves from it. Last week, their group in the European Parliament, Identity and Democracy, expelled the AfD following a series of scandals involving its top candidate, Maximilian Krah. By distancing themselves from the AfD, Salvini and Le Pen aim to draw a demarcation line within the radical right between "cordoned off" and "acceptables", and present themselves as ready for government.

This means that while the radical right might win almost one-third of the seats in the EU Parliament, only half of these can be counted on for a right-wing governing majority.

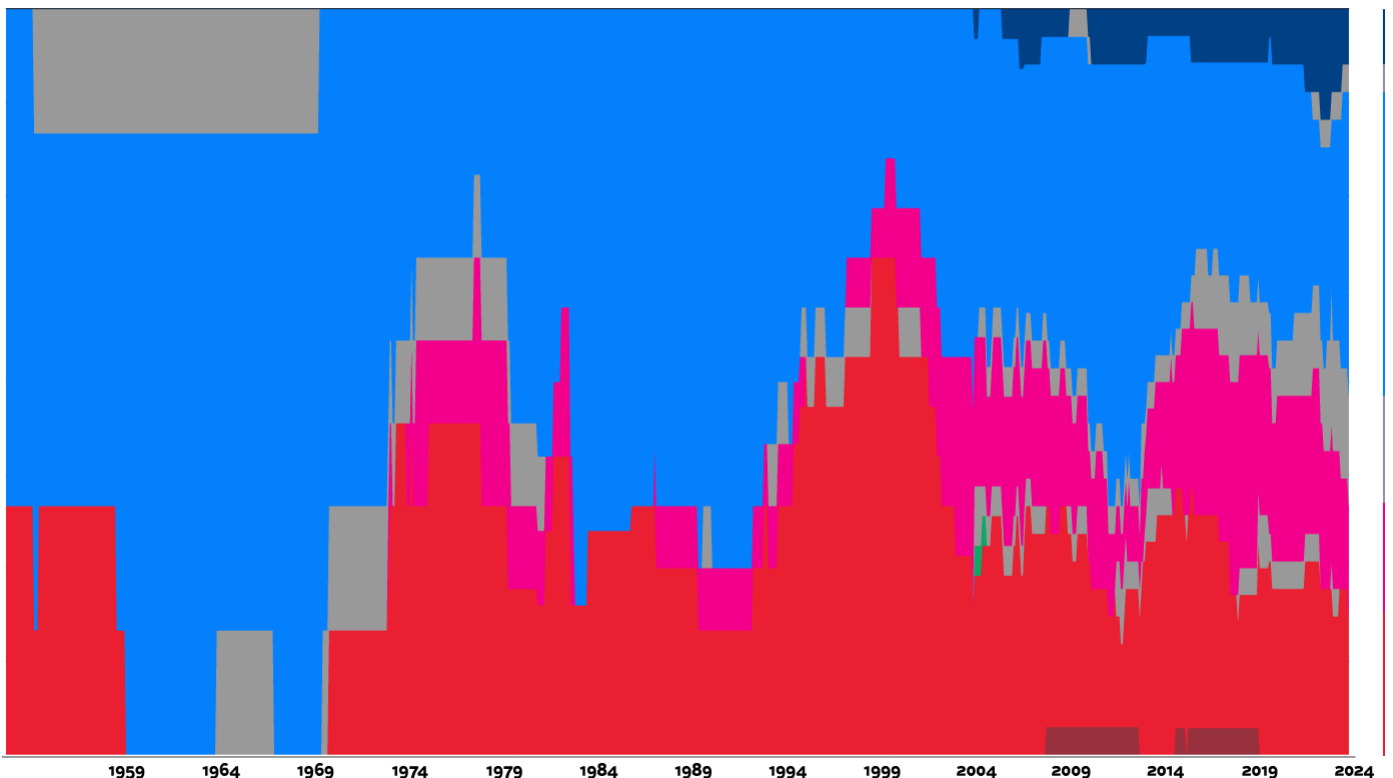
Building a majority that includes the far right is difficult for other reasons too. A minority of EPP and Renew member parties, such as the Social Democratic Party in Portugal, the Centerpartiet in Sweden, and Gibanje Svoboda in Slovenia, have stood against alliances with radical right forces at the national level, and are opposed to collaboration at the European level.

*If progressives want to remain relevant, cooperation and coordination between them, which has been rarely seen since the eurozone crisis, should become the norm.*

The most realistic scenario is thus another grand coalition of EPP, Socialists, and Liberals. This formula should guarantee a majority in the European Parliament. As for the European Council, a majority that includes Meloni, Fiala, and potentially even Orbán would likely cause limited backlash. Such an arrangement would be nothing new: in 2019, Poland's PiS and Hungary's Fidesz were needed to build a majority in the European Council.

## Evolution of the European Council 1952 to 2024, by political party

\* 2024 result based on late May 2024 projection



Since the Socialists have been clear in their refusal to participate in any parliamentary coalition with the right-wing ECR, the only mathematical alternative would be for the Greens to join the grand coalition. This would deliver a stable majority in the Parliament, but not in the European Council. Plus, to bring the Greens on board, Von der Leyen or her successor would need to backtrack on the anti-green narratives the EPP has embraced in the last year.

**The progressive side**

Once upon a time, the Socialists led Europe. This year, they are expected to win less than 20 per cent of seats in the new European Parliament. Together with the Greens, the Left, and the more social-liberal side of Renew, they could make up close to 40 per cent of the assembly – a new historic low.

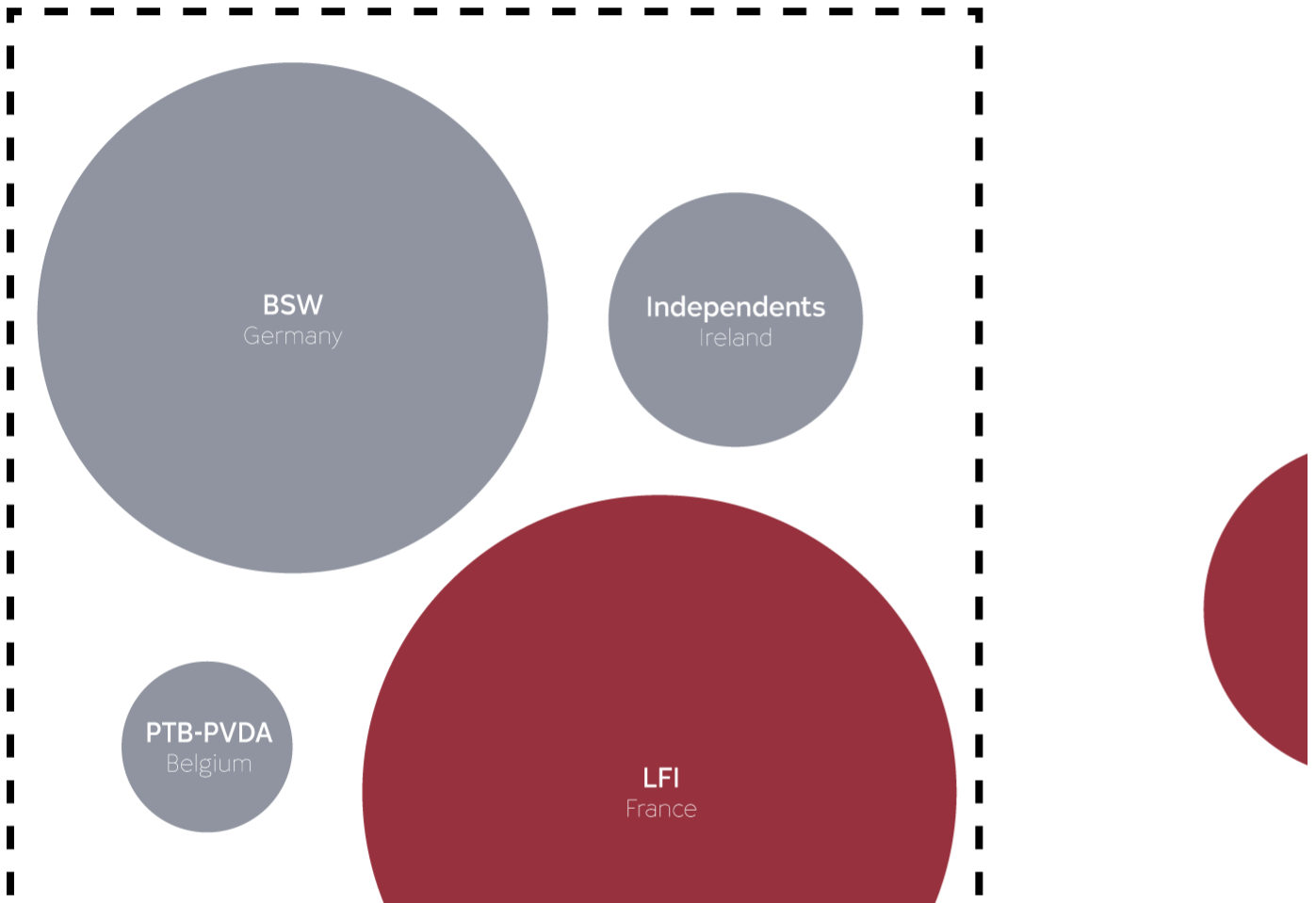
These projections are a wake-up call to the progressives of Europe. If they want to remain relevant, cooperation and coordination between them, which has been rarely seen since the eurozone crisis, should become the norm.

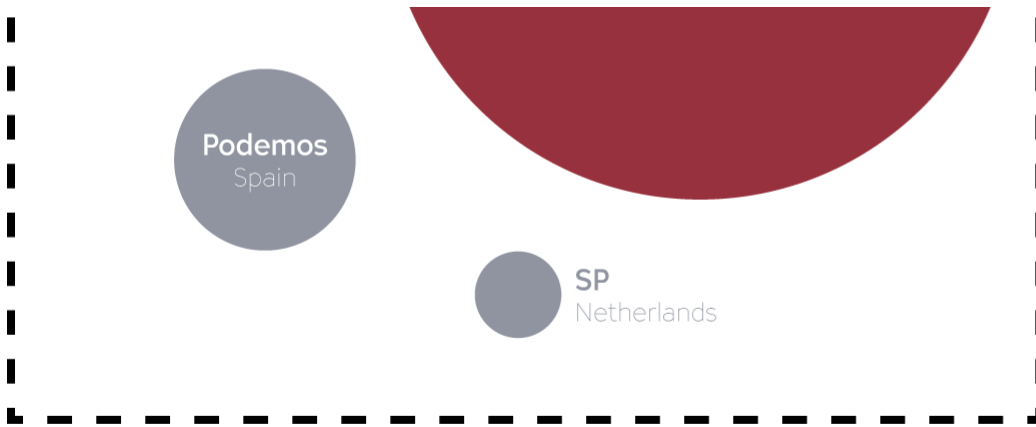
The Left Group in particular is faced with the biggest historical challenge since the split in 1989 between pro-Soviets and Eurocommunists. After Brexit, a part of the European Left gave up its Euroscepticism and moved into the pro-European reformist camp. Some leftist forces entered ruling majorities in various EU member states: Syriza led the Greek government between 2015 and 2019, Portugal's Bloco and Spain's Sumar and Izquierda Unida have been part of progressive government alliances. Meanwhile, Ireland's Sinn Fein and the Basque Country's EH Bildu have moderated their stances and established themselves as real political alternatives. Others, namely the Nordic Left, have kept their Euroscepticism but acted constructively.

# European Left in the 2024 Eu

internal division within Left family pre-2024

**Radical Opposition Left**





At the same time, other sectors of the Left have further radicalised, especially on migration issues and in defence of Putin's imperialist war in Ukraine. Sahra Wagenknecht, a veteran of German left-wing politics, has broken away from Die Linke to launch her own socially conservative, anti-immigration, Kremlin-sympathetic party. In Belgium, the Marxist and socialist PTB still refuses to take part in any governing majority. Spain's Podemos, after leaving government in December 2023, reinvented itself as a loud anti-Ukraine voice.

To counter the mainstreaming of the far right and the radicalisation of parts of the Left, progressive forces that share commitments to democracy and human rights need to find unity in fragmentation and form alliances at national and European level.

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