October, 2019

The 2019 EU Elections: Moving the Center

Cas Mudde

Europe Grapples with Populism

Patrick Chamorel on the Yellow Vests ▪ *Cas Mudde* on the EU Elections
Anna Grzymala-Busse on the Failure of Mainstream Parties

Modi Consolidates Power

Ashutosh Varshney ▪ *Yamini Aiyar*

Resisting State Capture in South Africa

Rod Alence and Anne Pitcher

Amr Hamzawy on Egypt
Sara Wallace Goodman on *Democracy and Dictatorship in Europe*
Mai Hassan & Ahmed Kodouda on Sudan

Southeast Asia's Troubling Elections

Edward Aspinall and Marcus Mietzner ▪ *Mark R. Thompson*
Duncan McCargo ▪ *Björn Dressel and Cristina Regina Bonoan*

THE 2019 EU ELECTIONS: MOVING THE CENTER

Cas Mudde

Cas Mudde *is the Stanley Wade Shelton UGAF Professor of International Affairs at the School of Public and International Affairs of the University of Georgia and Professor II at the Center for Research on Extremism of the University of Oslo. His most recent books include* Populism: A Very Short Introduction *(with Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017) and* The Far Right Today *(2019). He is also a columnist for the* GuardianUS.

In May 2019, voters across the European Union headed to the polls in the year's second-largest democratic elections (after the even more challenging Indian elections). More than four-hundred–million Europeans were eligible to vote in what are essentially twenty-eight separate national elections for representatives to the same supranational institution, the 751-seat European Parliament (EP). As with the previous two EU elections, in 2009 and 2014, media coverage in the run-up to the vote zoomed in on the rise of Euroskepticism, particularly as embodied by parties on the right. Serious estimates predicted that right-wing Euroskeptics would win between a quarter and a third of the seats in Brussels, but this did not stop many media outlets from speculating about a possible Euroskeptic majority.

In the end, the results of the May 23–26 voting were largely in line with the more measured estimates of the polls. Right-wing Euroskeptics (depending on how this category is defined) took between a quarter and a third of the EP's seats, with populist radical-right parties making the biggest gains. There were also gains by pro-EU parties, although the successful Europhiles hailed largely from outside the main center-left and center-right party groups that have traditionally been dominant. The upshot of these developments has been the increased political fragmentation of the European Parliament.

The strengthening of the populist radical right is only the most visible aspect of a more fundamental transformation of European politics—a transformation whose elements also include shifting voter priorities, a sea change in mainstream-party agendas, and the growing influence of Hungarian pre-

mier and "illiberal democracy" booster Viktor Orbán. Taken together, these changes are the political legacy of the "refugee crisis" of 2015–16.[1]

As by far the world's most powerful transnational organization, the EU occupies an awkward midpoint between confederation and federation. Its central institutions, with offices spread across Brussels, Strasbourg, and Luxembourg, constitute four rather than three branches of government. Like most states the EU has an executive (the European Commission), legislature (the European Parliament), and judiciary (the European Court of Justice), but above these three institutions hovers a fourth that is the most powerful: the European Council. It is this last organ, composed chiefly of the member countries' heads of government, that decides the EU's overall political and policy direction.[2]

Under this schema, the EU elections decide who will sit in the European legislature, but they have limited influence on the composition of the executive. Instead, the makeup of the European Council and the European Commission is determined first and foremost by national elections. National-level elections bring to power the government leaders seated on the European Council. The Council in turn nominates the Commission's president; per the 2007 Lisbon Treaty, it is merely directed to "take into account the elections to the European Parliament." National governments select one nominee apiece for the remaining spots on the 28-member European Commission. During the 2014 campaign season, many of the EP's political groups began proposing their own candidates for Commission president (the *Spitzenkandidaten*) and arguing that the Council should nominate the *Spitzenkandidat* of the group that emerged in the strongest position. Former Commission president Jean-Claude Juncker (2014–19) was chosen in accord with this system, but the 2019 elections appear to have marked its demise. Formally, the European Parliament is guaranteed only the right to an up-or-down vote on the Commission president and on the slate of commissioners as a collective.

The disconnect between the outcome of EU elections and the makeup of the EU executive means that European elections are what is called second-order elections.[3] Scholars have found that such elections are less important than first-order elections and that the public treats them accordingly. Second-order elections tend to yield lower scores for mainstream parties, particularly those in government; higher scores for protest parties; and lower voter turnout. Comparing the 2019 European elections to recent national elections in EU member states shows the results to be on the whole in line with this theory, though the pattern was less pronounced than in most previous EU elections.

Except for a few new, smaller parties, notably the antiestablishment progressive DiEM25 and the prointegration Volt, there are no real "Europarties" (that is, political parties that contest the European elections across the EU). National parties do, however, work together in ideologically more or less coherent political groups in the European Parlia-

ment. The traditional powerhouses have been the center-right European People's Party (EPP) and the center-left Socialists & Democrats (S&D), with roughly half a dozen other blocs representing tendencies from the Greens to the nationalist right. Commentators frequently sort these formal groupings into informal "pro-EU" and "anti-EU" blocs.

One report offering a first take on the 2019 European elections summarized them as "much ado about nothing."[4] Calculating the net changes in the vote shares of the various political groups, the authors concluded that the "pro-EU bloc" had lost just 3.9 percent. And while the "anti-EU bloc" picked up seats, most groups within that bloc actually lost seats. Only the populist radical-right Europe of Nations and Freedom (ENF) grouping—which was reformed and renamed Identity and Democracy (ID) after the elections—made significant gains (see Table 1 below).

A slightly more nuanced view is that the center held but became more fragmented. Fragmentation was the elections' defining feature, and it affected both the pro-EU and the anti-EU camps. On the pro-EU side, the long-dominant EPP and S&D lost their combined parliamentary majority for the first time in EU history. Yet pro-EU parties from the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats in Europe (ALDE) group, since renamed Renew Europe, and the Greens–European Free Alliance (Greens-EFA) made large-enough gains to significantly offset the bigger groups' losses. These smaller groups picked up seats mainly due to increased support for member parties in a few large states (France, Germany, and the United Kingdom). Unlike the EPP and S&D, however, Renew Europe and Greens-EFA have major gaps in their geographic coverage: Renew Europe is absent from much of Southern Europe, while Greens-EFA is an almost entirely West European group.

The right-wing Euroskeptics, meanwhile, did increase their shares of both votes and seats. Yet there remain important divisions among the different groups in this bloc—most notably the traditionally conservative European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) and ID (the former ENF), whose membership includes parties such as Italy's Lega, France's National Rally (the former National Front), and the Alternative for Germany. Almost all the growth in the number of seats held by Euroskeptics came from ENF-ID parties, which significantly increased their representation, especially in Germany and Italy. While the ECR made a decent showing in Southern Europe and did particularly well in Central and Eastern Europe, this could not compensate for its massive losses in Western Europe, particularly in the United Kingdom. Finally, the more diverse Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy (EFDD) group, a largely strategic alliance between Italy's Five Star Movement (M5S) and the U.K. Independence Party (UKIP), failed to qualify as an official group in the new Parliament due to losses at the polls and defections by member parties.

With the populist radical-right parties of the ENF-ID outperforming their fellow Euroskeptics and with Greens and liberals gaining back

**TABLE 1—POLITICAL GROUPS IN THE
EIGHTH AND NINTH EUROPEAN PARLIAMENTS**

Group	Seats in 8th Parliament	Seats in 9th Parliament	Change
EPP	216	182	▼34
S&D	185	154	▼31
ALDE ➜ RE	69	108	▲39
Greens-EFA	52	74	▲22
ENF ➜ ID	36	73	▲37
ECR	77	62	▼15
GUE/NGL	52	41	▼11
EFDD	42	–	–
Non-Attached Members	20	57	▲37
Total Seats	**749**	**751**	**–**

Source: The European Parliament, *https://election-results.eu/european-results/2019-2024.*

"Seats in 8th Parliament" reports seat totals for the outgoing parliament. For leading member parties of each group, see Table 2 on page 27.

EPP: European People's Party (Christian Democrats).

S&D: Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats.

ALDE ➜ RE: On 12 June 2019, the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE) incorporated French president Emmanuel Macron's La République En Marche and renamed itself Renew Europe (RE).

Greens-EFA: Greens–European Free Alliance.

ENF ➜ ID: On 12 June 2019, Europe of Nations and Freedom (ENF) renamed itself Identity and Democracy (ID).

ECR: European Conservatives and Reformists.

GUE/NGL: European United Left–Nordic Green Left.

EFDD: Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy (EFDD). The EFDD missed the deadline to form a group in the Ninth European Parliament.

Non-Attached: MEPs unaffiliated with a recognized political group within the European Parliament.

some of the ground lost by the two traditionally dominant groups, the 2019 vote produced a more fragmented rather than just a more Euroskeptic European Parliament. But beyond the shifting balance among the blocs and groups, more profound changes have been taking place.

The Rise of Populism

Populists, who appeared in postwar Western Europe largely as sporadic, short-lived movements and parties,[5] began to establish themselves as a more consistent presence in the early 1990s. In particular, populist radical-right parties such as the Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ) and French National Front (FN) secured a foothold in their national political systems with agendas and appeals that blended authoritarianism, nativism, and populism.[6] At the turn of the century, populist radical-right parties contested elections in almost all EU member states. While these parties took only about 4.5 percent of the national vote on average, sev-

eral were among the two or three biggest in their country and some (such as the FPÖ) even made it into the national government. The years following the 2008 financial crash that touched off the Great Recession saw the emergence of some new successful left-populist parties, such as Podemos in Spain and Syriza in Greece, while several old and new populist radical-right parties received an electoral boost.

The roots of the populist upsurge of the twenty-first century lie primarily in structural changes that occurred in the mid- and late-twentieth century.[7] In the wake of the economic and social transformation caused by the postindustrial revolution, mainstream parties converged on an "integration consensus" built around shared support for European integration, multiethnic societies, and neoliberal economics. They propagated a nonideological politics of pragmatism, an approach sometimes described as TINA (a reference to U.K. prime minister Margaret Thatcher's insistence that "there is no alternative"). This led to a backlash among parts of the population who felt, often with reason, that the mainstream parties had grown so similar as to offer voters little real choice. Mainstream parties also came under fire for failing to engage with key issues such as European integration and immigration.

As European publics grew more frustrated with their politicians, they were also gaining political self-confidence thanks to the "cognitive mobilization" brought on by the democratization of higher education. This self-confidence was further fed by a commercialized media environment in which outlets increasingly freed from regulation "chased eyeballs" by giving the masses what they wanted rather than what the elites thought was needed. In this context, populists—particularly those (such as Beppe Grillo in Italy and Geert Wilders in the Netherlands) who were adept at capturing attention from traditional as well as social media through provocative stunts and statements—provided the "news" that journalists, and apparently a large part of the population, so craved.

The Great Recession was a catalyst rather than a cause of populism's rise. More than anything, it dispelled the aura of inevitability as well as the optimism that had surrounded the integration consensus. It made more Europeans susceptible to a line of argument favored by both left and right populists: the illiberal-democratic critique of the mainstream's undemocratic liberalism. The urgency of the economic crisis had largely waned by mid-2015, in part because of several multibillion-euro bailouts of EU member states. But at that point the Great Recession was succeeded by a new "crisis," which boosted only one form of populism: the populism of the radical right.

The Impact of the "Refugee Crisis"

In the second half of 2015, Europe experienced a surge in arrivals of asylum seekers. The number of non-EU citizens applying for asylum

within the EU more than doubled between 2014 and 2015, from 626,960 to 1,322,845. Asylum applications stayed at that level the next year, then dropped off following the hardening of borders in the Balkans and an EU-Turkey deal on the return of refugees. The spike in asylum seekers coincided with a series of high-profile terrorist attacks, including deadly assaults on the offices of the French satirical paper *Charlie Hebdo* in January 2015, on Paris's Bataclan theater in November 2015, and on Brussels airport and a central Brussels metro station in March 2016.

Right-wing media and politicians across Europe were quick to speculate about links between refugees and terrorism. They increasingly shifted to the less sympathy-evoking term "migrant," implying that all or most asylum seekers were not real refugees, and adopted the rhetoric of "crisis" to describe the influx.[8] Appending this label to a political issue shapes public perceptions by suggesting that the situation is grave, urgent, and out of control. Consequently, the issue comes to dominate the political agenda until it is "solved" or, at the very least, has ceased to be described as a crisis.

The framing of a spike in asylum seekers as a "refugee crisis," together with rhetoric linking this "crisis" to terrorism, created a "perfect storm" for the populist radical right. It brought their key issues—immigration, security, and Euroskepticism—to the top of the agenda, and it made voters more receptive to nativist, authoritarian, and populist appeals. With mainstream journalists and politicians eagerly adopting the populist radical right's frames, populist radical-right parties and politicians merely had to remind voters that they were (to use the expression of FN founding leader Jean-Marie Le Pen) the original and not the copy.

As European politicians and pundits obsessed over the "refugee crisis" and the "terrorism threat," often implicitly or explicitly conflating the two, European politics was transformed in at least four ways: 1) The political salience of immigration grew; 2) far-right parties surged at the polls; 3) mainstream parties shifted to the right; and 4) Viktor Orbán emerged as a key player in European politics. Together, these related but separate changes explain why the 2019 European elections were much more about the far right than about rising populism per se.

The Immigration Issue. The "refugee crisis" lifted the issue of immigration (and the issue of security) higher on the list of political concerns throughout Europe. The salience of immigration peaked in late 2015: The percentage of Europeans considering this to be the most important political issue grew from 18 to 36 percent between 2014 and 2015, then dropped off to 26 percent in 2016 and 22 percent in 2017.[9] Similarly, the percentage of Europeans naming immigration as one of the two most important issues facing the EU peaked at almost 60 percent in 2015, dropping off to a relatively stable 40 percent in 2017. The share similarly prioritizing security peaked later and lower, at just over 40 percent in early 2017, then nosedived to around 20 percent by late 2018.

By the time of the run-up to the 2019 European elections, order was by and large restored. Voters across the continent once again named socioeconomic issues such as unemployment, healthcare, and inflation among their main national concerns. That said, immigration still polled slightly higher than it had before the "refugee crisis": The percentage of Europeans who mentioned immigration as "one of the two most important issues facing our country" was 21 percent in 2018, as opposed to 18 percent in 2014. Terrorism no longer polled among the *national* issues of greatest concern to voters in 2018, but a significant number of respondents still named it as one of the two most important issues facing the EU as a whole.

While immigration remains a much more salient topic in Western Europe, the "refugee crisis" has established it as a highly charged issue in Central and East European (CEE) political systems as well. The "crisis" led to only a marginal increase in the number of "migrants" in most CEE countries, which rejected almost all asylum claims. Yet while just 5.5 percent of Central and East Europeans considered immigration the most important issue facing their country in 2014, this figure had more than doubled in 2018. Given that attitudes toward immigrants are far less accepting on the whole in Central and Eastern Europe than in Western Europe,[10] this has created new electoral openings both for the far right and for opportunistic mainstream parties.

Far-Right Party Success. In a development directly related to European voters' growing focus on immigration and security, support for populist radical-right parties—and even some extreme-right parties, such as the neo-Nazi Golden Dawn in Greece or Kotleba–People's Party Our Slovakia (ĽSNS)—spiked in polls across Europe in late 2015. By May 2016, almost all established far-right parties were attracting support from record numbers of Europeans. The Dutch Party for Freedom (PVV) and the French FN polled around 25 and 35 percent, respectively. The "refugee crisis" rejuvenated even parties that had been left for dead by commentators after recent losses, such as Vlaams Belang (Flemish Interest) in Belgium and the Northern League (now Lega) in Italy.

With the British voting to leave the EU, the Americans electing Donald Trump president, and the Austrians supporting FPÖ candidate Norbert Hofer in large-enough numbers that he came within a hair's breadth of winning the presidency, it is no surprise that 2016 came to be called "the year of populism"—although it would have been more accurate to name it "the year of the populist radical right." Consequently, the dominant media frame of the key elections in Europe in 2017 was that of an epic battle between emboldened populist challengers and an embattled political establishment. Speculation was rife about populist radical right-parties and politicians winning upcoming elections in Austria, France, and the Netherlands, even though opinion polls showed that support for these actors had dropped off significantly since its mid-2016

TABLE 2—MAJOR PARTIES OR COALITIONS WITHIN EU PARLIAMENT POLITICAL GROUPS, BY SEATS HELD IN NINTH PARLIAMENT

Political Group	National Party or Coalition	Home Country of Party or Coalition	Seats	% Seats in Group
European People's Party (EPP)	CDU/CSU*	Germany	29	16%
	Fidesz-KDNP Party Alliance*	Hungary	13	7%
	People's Party (PP)	Spain	12	7%
	Civic Platform (PO)	Poland	12	7%
	National Liberal Party (PNL)	Romania	10	6%
Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (S&D)	Spanish Socialist Workers' Party/Socialist Party of Catalonia (PSOE/PSC)*	Spain	20	13%
	Democratic Party (PD)	Italy	19	12%
	Social Democratic Party (SPD)	Germany	16	10%
Renew Europe (RE)	Renaissance*	France	21	19%
	Liberal Democrats	United Kingdom	16	15%
	Alliance 2020 (USR/Plus)*	Romania	8	7%
Greens/European Free Alliance (Greens/EFA)	Greens	Germany	21	28%
	Europe Ecology (EELV)	France	12	16%
	Green Party	United Kingdom	7	9%
Identity and Democracy (ID)	Lega (LN)	Italy	28	38%
	National Rally (RN)	France	22	30%
	Alternative for Germany (AfD)	Germany	11	15%
European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR)	Law and Justice (PiS)	Poland	26	42%
	Brothers of Italy (FDI)	Italy	5	8%
	Conservative and Unionist Party	United Kingdom	4	6%
European United Left–Nordic Green Left (GUE/NGL)	France Unbowed (FI)	France	6	15%
	Syriza	Greece	6	15%
	United We Can Change Europe (Podemos IU)*	Spain	5	12%
	Die Linke	Germany	5	12%

*Indicates a national-level coalition of political parties.

Source: The European Parliament, *https://election-results.eu/european-results/2019-2024*.

Note: Table shows only parties and coalitions holding 5 percent or more of their political group's total seats in the European Parliament.

peak. In the end, the far right did not win these contests—but it did make a much stronger showing than it had in the previous round of elections, held before the "refugee crisis."

On the whole, the parties that have traditionally been considered far right increased their representation in the European Parliament in 2019, although to a lesser extent than they had in 2014. Moreover, far-right parties picked up seats to an extent that was disproportionate to their increase in votes, mainly because these parties for the first time scored relatively big in the larger EU countries, notably Germany and Italy, which have a higher number of MEPs (see Table 2).

Some established populist radical-right parties, notably Lega (+28.1

percentage points) and Vlaams Belang (+7.4 points) made massive gains, but other parties in this category—particularly the Danish People's Party (-15.8 points) and Jobbik in Hungary (-8.3 points)—suffered major losses. Several newer far-right parties did well too, including two neo-Nazi parties, ĽSNS (+10.4 points) and the Cypriot National Popular Front (+5.6 points). The two best-known far-right parties experienced only a slight drop in vote share relative to their high 2014 numbers. Haunted by a corruption scandal that broke just before the European elections, the Austrian FPÖ lost 2.5 points. The National Rally, the renamed FN, lost 1.6 points but nonetheless managed for the second time to seat the largest EP delegation of any party in France.

Finally, in some countries the overall seat share of the far right remained relatively constant, but the individual parties represented in the European Parliament changed. In the Netherlands, for example, Geert Wilders' PVV lost all four of its MEPs in an unexpectedly savage election defeat. At the same time, the relatively young Forum for Democracy (FvD) of Thierry Baudet, who had become the new favorite "bad boy" of the Dutch media upon entering the national parliament in 2017, picked up three seats in its first European election. In the United Kingdom, the party changed but the leader stayed the same. The recently formed Brexit Party of Nigel Farage won 30.7 percent of the vote and 29 seats, eclipsing Farage's former party UKIP, which lost all 24 of its seats.

The Right-Wing Turn of Mainstream Parties. The third and probably most fundamental transformation took place *within* established political parties, most notably those of the mainstream right. Many mainstream parties had already adopted what they cast as a more "critical" or "realistic" discourse on immigration and security in the 1990s and had sharpened this rhetoric in the wake of the 9/11 terrorist attacks. But the approach pioneered by Prime Minister Thatcher and French president Jacques Chirac in the late twentieth century became received wisdom in the early twenty-first century: "[Multiculturalism] has failed, completely failed," as long-serving German chancellor Angela Merkel summarized it in 2010.

Yet Merkel also stressed that Germany should remain "open to the world" and should not become a country "which gives the impression to the outside world that those who do not speak German immediately or who were not raised speaking German are not welcome here." Similarly, British prime minister David Cameron (2010–16) had blamed "state multiculturalism" for failed integration and jihadi terrorism, but had also proclaimed: "Instead of encouraging people to live apart, we need a clear sense of shared national identity that is open to everyone."[11] In the wake of the "refugee crisis," by contrast, mainstream parties increasingly defined immigration explicitly and unequivocally as a threat to national identity and security. Instead of calling for immigration to be regulated so as to ensure successful integration of past and future

immigrants, they urged that it be limited or even abolished in order to protect the nation.

This sentiment was strongest, and most bluntly expressed, in the states of Central and Eastern Europe. There virtually all political parties, on the left and right alike, rejected non-European immigrants and Islam. Czech president Miloš Zeman, who was once a nominal social democrat but has grown into a radical-right populist, likened the "refugee crisis" to an impending tsunami. In Latvia, right-wing anti-Russian and left-wing pro-Russian parties found rare common ground in opposing "immigrants," in practice meaning Muslim immigrants in particular. And right-wing MPs in Slovenia tried to impeach Prime Minister Miro Cerar (2014–18), one of the few prominent prorefugee politicians in the region, for allegedly abusing his power to help a Syrian refugee avoid deportation.

The right-wing turn of mainstream-right parties outlived the spike in asylum seekers, as many parties attempted to fight off far-right challengers with a misguided copying strategy. Mainstream right-wing parties, particularly in Central and Eastern Europe, took restrictive stances on immigration that were often as extreme as—or even more extreme than—those of traditional populist radical parties. The immigration issue also grew more salient for right-wing parties, again particularly in the new member states. While immigration was a minor issue for parties such as Poland's Law and Justice (PiS) and Slovakia's Freedom and Solidarity in 2010, it was the top priority in 2017.[12]

Across Europe, mainstream-right politicians emphasized their new harsher stands on immigration and immigrants. Pablo Casado of the Spanish Popular Party, opportunistically seeking to help his party bounce back from a massive corruption scandal as well as to fight off an electoral challenge from populist radical-right newcomer Vox, promised to "defend the borders" against "millions of Africans." The British Conservative Party adopted authoritarian, nativist, and populist rhetoric in the wake of the 2016 Brexit referendum; the party promised to "reduce and control immigration" by bringing net immigrant arrivals back below a hundred-thousand a year. In the Czech Republic, nominally liberal prime minister Andrej Babiš declared in June 2018: "I promise our government will fight mainly for the safety of our people. Not only here, but we will fight against illegal migration, we will fight for our interests in Europe."[13] Incidentally, the Czech Republic, like several other CEE countries, has hundreds of thousands of non-Muslim immigrants, most notably from Ukraine, whose presence is seldom if ever politicized.

The rightward shift was also evident in the election manifestos of the EU's main right-wing political groups. In 2014, the "center-right" EPP had made "controlling immigration into Europe to ensure internal security" just part of one out of twelve proposals in what was on the whole an optimistic manifesto. The 2019 manifesto, by contrast, de-

voted nearly half its space to two themes very much in line with the populist radical-right agenda: "A Europe that protects its citizens" and "A Europe that preserves our ways." Moreover, the document explicitly cast "illegal immigration" and "radical Islam" as fundamental threats to Europe.[14]

The conservative ECR has undergone even more profound changes, with several separate but interrelated processes transforming this group into a hybrid of the populist radical right and the mainstream right. First, the group's founding member, the British Conservative Party, veered sharply to the right following the 2016 Brexit referendum and the advent of an electoral threat from Nigel Farage's parties. Second, because a dismal performance in the 2019 elections cost the Tories 15 of their 19 seats, the Conservatives have been replaced by Poland's PiS as the dominant force in the ECR (PiS now holds 26 seats). Third, PiS, like several other formerly mainstream-right parties, has evolved into a populist radical-right party in the wake of the "refugee crisis." Fourth, to compensate for the loss of British MEPs, the ECR has accepted several new member parties, almost all of the far right—notably the Dutch FvD**,** the Greek Hellenic Solution, Brothers of Italy, the Sweden Democrats, and Vox.

Finally, it is important to note that opposition to immigration is not limited to the traditional right. Most CEE parties—from the nominally neoliberal ANO 2011 in the Czech Republic to the supposedly social-democratic Smer-SD in Slovakia—are vehemently opposed to (Muslim) immigration. While the trend is less pronounced in Western Europe, several left-wing groups are now taking a harder line on immigration there as well. From Jean-Luc Mélenchon's France Unbowed party to Sahra Wagenknecht's "Stand Up" movement in Germany, left populists have toughened their stands in a naïve attempt to win back or win over far-right voters. In the most extreme example, the Danish Social Democrats have openly adopted the discourse and policies of the populist radical-right Danish People's Party.[15]

The Orbánization of Europe. Viktor Orbán, busy with transforming Hungary from a liberal democracy into an illiberal kleptocracy, had been a relatively minor player in European politics before 2015. But after reshaping his country's domestic politics and consolidating his position within the EPP (the chosen political group of his party Fidesz), Orbán turned his attention to Brussels. His first attempt at projecting influence yielded only embarrassment. As politicians from around the world locked arms in Paris to commemorate the victims of the *Charlie Hebdo* attack, the Hungarian prime minister used the tragedy as a pretext to criticize EU immigration policy and demonize immigrants. Completely misreading the mood of solidarity encapsulated in the slogan "Je suis Charlie," Orbán drew condemnations from across Europe.

But half a year later, the mood had changed, and Europe was ready

for Orbán's Islamophobic message. Across national and international media outlets, Orbán declared that (Muslim) immigrants constitute a mortal threat to Europe's identity and security. He explicitly linked the "migrant crisis" to the recent terrorist attacks and argued that even Muslims who were third-generation French were still "immigrants." Adopting full-fledged populist radical-right language, Orbán proclaimed: "What is at stake today is Europe and the European way of life. . . . we would like Europe to remain the continent of Europeans."[16]

Within months, the prime minister of a relatively small EU member state had become the main challenger to the hugely influential Chancellor Merkel. Orbán successfully torpedoed an EU plan to redistribute the recently arrived refugees across member countries, and he did so with the open backing of most CEE political leaders and more tacit support from many in Western Europe. Challenging Merkel from within the EPP (of which Merkel's Christian Democratic Union is also a member), the Hungarian premier argued that real Christian democracy stands in opposition to immigration and "Islamization" and that it requires defending a "Christian Europe." At the 2015 EPP Conference in Madrid, he garnered significant applause from his fellow EPP members as he argued that there was no true "refugee crisis," only "a migratory movement composed of economic migrants, refugees and also foreign fighters."[17]

After his European breakthrough in mid-2015, the Hungarian prime minister quickly became the most outspoken opponent of Merkel's pro-refugee policies and of (West) European "multiculturalism." Most CEE politicians agreed with him, even if many did not echo his belligerent tone or share his growing hostility toward the EU establishment. Orbán also widened his circle of friends in Western Europe, most notably among far-right politicians (who celebrate him as an example of "real democratic leadership") but also within the mainstream right. He had always found loyal supporters in the powerful Bavarian Christian Social Union (CSU), among them Manfred Weber, leader of the EPP parliamentary faction in Brussels. But by early 2018, Orbán also had gained explicit backing in the European Council from prime ministers Sebastian Kurz of Austria and Mateusz Morawiecki of Poland.

Yet opposition had grown as well, and fellow members of the EPP were among Orbán's critics. On 12 September 2018 the European Parliament adopted a report on the rule of law in Hungary that warned of a "systemic threat" to the EU's fundamental principles.[18] With the support of more than two-thirds of all MEPs, the EP took the unprecedented step of censuring Hungary and triggering Article 7 of the Treaty on European Union. This move opened the door to penalties including, in the final instance, the suspension of Hungary's voting rights within the EU (a de facto expulsion). Of the EPP's 199 members, 114—including group leader Weber—voted for the censure. Orbán's main support came from far-right and right-wing Euroskeptics in marginal groups such as the EFDD and ENF.

The censure vote did not end the EPP's internal debate about Orbán, as its leaders had hoped. Instead, critics from primarily North and West European member parties seized on the opportunity to push for expelling Fidesz from the group. Weber tried to neutralize this internal division, but ultimately was forced to take a firmer stand against his former ally. In March 2019, the EPP suspended Orbán's party, stripping its members of their voting rights and the right to propose candidates for posts. The vote was nearly unanimous, with 190 EPP MEPs voting for suspension and only 3 against.

Yet in the wake of the 2019 European elections it became clear that Fidesz's position within the EPP was still strong. In fact, the elections had left Fidesz with the second-largest faction within the EPP group in Brussels (see Table 2). Despite Fidesz's official suspension within the EPP, its MEP Lívia Járóka was reelected as one of the European Parliament's fourteen vice-presidents. Even the selection of top officeholders was largely in line with the preferences of Orbán, who withdrew Fidesz support for his previous protector Weber's campaign for European Commission president. The Hungarian premier had also opposed the candidacy of Dutch Social Democrat Frans Timmermans, a vocal critic of Orbán's authoritarian policies. Fidesz has responded enthusiastically, on the other hand, to the election of German Christian Democrat Ursula von der Leyen. (The new Commission president has stated, if rather tepidly, her commitment to EU efforts to uphold the rule of law.)

The Center Moves Right

While a focus on EU-level trends can obscure important national and regional developments, EU elections are nonetheless a critical indicator of the broader European political climate. In 2009, the European elections were defined by the first wave of rising Euroskepticism, partly a (delayed) response to the 1992 Maastricht Treaty and the 2004 accession of CEE countries. The rise of populism, fueled by the Great Recession, was the story of 2014. While Euroskepticism and populism remain relevant, it was the rise of the populist radical right in particular that defined the 2019 European elections.

Populist radical-right *parties* have been gaining strength in a growing number of European countries since the 1990s, but it was the "refugee crisis" that brought populist radical-right *politics* into the heart of European political life.[19] The "crisis" has led to the mainstreaming and normalization of authoritarian, nativist, and populist discourses and policies across the continent. In many countries, it has done the same for populist radical-right parties, most notably for transformed conservative parties such as Fidesz and PiS. European politics has been moving to the right for decades, starting with the neoliberal turn of social-democratic parties in the 1990s and an increased emphasis on sociocultural issues in the wake of the 9/11 attacks. The "refugee crisis," however, introduced a qualitative shift: Mainstream

parties now openly discuss immigration and multiculturalism as threats to national identity and security. Moreover, these issues have become political flashpoints not only in Western Europe, which hosts the vast majority of asylum seekers, but in the CEE countries as well.

The 2019 European elections brought the transformation wrought by the "refugee crisis" deeper into the heart of EU institutions. Not only did populist radical-right parties—including both the usual suspects and some newcomer parties—increase their representation in the European Parliament, they are now also part of the more powerful European Council and even the European Commission. So far, populist radical-right representatives within these two institutions have come exclusively from Fidesz and PiS. But with Lega polling far ahead of any other party in Italy, traditional populist radical-right parties might soon have a voice in the Council as well.

And while both Fidesz and PiS have faced opposition to their candidates for committee-leadership positions in the European Parliament, they are far from isolated within that institution. Fidesz has largely survived its "suspension" within the EPP, while PiS now dominates the ECR. Populist radical-right parties remain divided across a plethora of EU political groups, but mainstream parties from almost all groups have adopted their frames and policies, particularly concerning immigration and integration. Mainstream right-wing parties in several West European countries are now proclaiming a "return to the center." Yet the "center" that they have in mind lies much closer to the populist radical-right program than it ever has before.

NOTES

1. While Europe was indeed confronted with an unprecedented number of asylum seekers in 2015 and 2016, the frame of "refugee crisis" (and even more that of "migrant crisis") was a conscious political choice, rather than an objective reality. For this reason, I use the term in between quotes.

2. See John Pinder and Simon Usherwood, *The European Union: A Very Short Introduction,* 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

3. See Karlheinz Reif and Hermann Schmitt, "Nine Second-Order National Elections—A Conceptual Framework for the Analysis of European Election Results," *European Journal of Political Research* 8 (March 1980): 3–44.

4. Davide Angelucci, Luca Carrieri, and Mark N. Franklin, "Much Ado About Nothing? The EP Elections in Comparative Perspective," in Lorenzo De Sio, Mark N. Franklin, and Luana Russo, eds., *The European Parliamentary Elections of 2019* (Rome: LUISS University Press, 2019). Another early take on the 2019 European elections is Niklas Bolin et al., eds., *Euroflections: Leading Academics on the European Elections 2019* (Sundsvall: Demicom, Mittuniversitetet, 2019), *https://euroflections.se/globalassets/ovrigt/euroflections/euroflections_v3.pdf.*

5. The main exception to this pattern was the Panhellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK) in Greece.

6. On the ideology of the populist radical right, see Cas Mudde, *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), particularly chapter 1.

7. I draw here particularly on chapter 6 of Cas Mudde and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser, *Populism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

8. See, for instance, Michał Krzyżanowski, Anna Triandafyllidou, and Ruth Wodak, eds., "Mediatization and Politicization of Refugee Crisis in Europe," special issue, *Journal of Immigrant and Refugee Studies* 16, nos. 1–2 (2018).

9. All public-opinion data are taken from the Eurobarometer, the EU-wide survey conducted under the auspices of the European Commission, unless noted differently. See *https://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/index.cfm*.

10. See Julie Ray, Anita Pugliese, and Neli Esipova, "EU Most Divided in World on Acceptance of Migrants," 6 September 2017, *https://news.gallup.com/poll/217841/divided-world-acceptance-migrants.aspx*.

11. "Deutschlandtag 2010: Rede Angela Merkel," *www.youtube.com watch?v=WaEg8aM4fcc*; "PM's Speech at Munich Security Conference," 5 February 2011, *www.gov.uk/government/speeches/pms-speech-at-munich-security-conference*.

12. This discussion is based on data from the Chapel Hill Expert Survey, freely available at *www.chesdata.eu*.

13. See Robert Muller and Jan Lopatka, "New Czech Government Has Shaky Support, Strong Anti-Migration Stance," Reuters, 27 June 2018, *www.reuters.com/article/us-czech-government/new-czech-government-has-shaky-support-strong-anti-migration-stance-idUSKBN1JN0R9*.

14. The EPP manifestos are available at *www.epp.eu*.

15. See also Cas Mudde, "Why Copying the Populist Right Isn't Going to Save the Left," *Guardian*, 14 May 2019.

16. "Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's Presentation at the 26th Bálványos Summer Open University and Student Camp," 25 July 2015, *www.kormany.hu/en/the-prime-minister/the-prime-minister-s-speeches/prime-minister-viktor-orban-s-presentation-at-the-26th-balvanyos-summer-open-university-and-student-camp*; Matthew Kaminski, "'All the Terrorists Are Migrants,'" *Politico,* 23 November 2015, *www.politico.eu/article/viktor-orban-interview-terrorists-migrants-eu-russia-putin-borders-schengen*.

17. "Speech of Viktor Orbán at the EPP Congress," 26 October 2015, *www.kormany.hu/en/the-prime-minister/the-prime-minister-s-speeches/speech-of-viktor-orban-at-the-epp-congress20151024*.

18. For the report (by Dutch Green MP Judith Sargentini), motion, and vote results, see *www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-8-2018-0250_EN.html?redirect*.

19. The mainstreaming and normalization of far-right parties and policies are not exclusively European phenomena. Three of the world's five largest democracies (Brazil, India, and the United States) had a far-right political leader as of July 2019. See Cas Mudde, *The Far Right Today* (Cambridge: Polity, 2019). On the "failure of the mainstream," see also the article by Anna Grzymala-Busse in this issue.