

## PAPER DETAILS

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## Reshaping the European Union Landscape: The Rise of Far-Right Movements and Their Potential Impact on Middle East Policy

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### ABSTRACT

The rise of far-right parties within the European Union has raised significant concerns about potential shifts in EU foreign policy, particularly with regard to the Middle East. This development challenges the core values of the EU and has the potential to markedly reshape its diplomatic strategies, aid distribution, and regional engagement. This analysis examines key areas of Middle East policy likely to be influenced by the growing presence of far-right parties in EU institutions, including immigration and refugee policies, the EU's stance on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, relations with Iran, and involvement in peace processes in the region. Additionally, the study emphasizes potential shifts in power dynamics within EU decision-making bodies concerning Middle East policy, underscoring the urgency of the issue. The hypotheses suggest that the increased influence of far-right parties may result in more restrictive immigration policies, stronger pro-Israel positions, a more confrontational approach towards Iran, diminished EU involvement in Middle East peace initiatives, and a reduction in regional financial aid. The research also explores the likelihood of greater bilateral engagement between individual EU member states and Middle Eastern countries, which could weaken the EU's common foreign policy and lead to a more fragmented regional strategy. This study highlights the critical importance of understanding the complexities of this phenomenon, as the mainstreaming of far-right ideologies has profound implications for European politics and the EU's role in the Middle East. Addressing these challenges is essential for safeguarding the EU's foundational values and maintaining its ability to navigate intricate geopolitical landscapes.

**Keywords:** EU, Far-Right parties, Potential Effects, Middle East Policy.

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**Avrupa Birliği Manzarasını Yeniden Şekillendirmek: Aşırı Sağ Hareketlerin Yükselişi ve Orta Doğu Politikası Üzerindeki Potansiyel Etkileri**

### ÖZ

Avrupa Birliği'nde aşırı sağ partilerin yükselişi, AB dış politikasında, özellikle Orta Doğu'ya yönelik olası değişimler konusunda endişelere yol açmıştır. Bu artış, AB'nin temel değerlerini zorlamakta ve diplomatik stratejilerini, yardım politikalarını ve bölgesel katılımını önemli ölçüde değiştirebilir. Analiz, AB kurumlarında aşırı sağ partilerin artan varlığından etkilenmesi muhtemel Orta Doğu politika alanlarına odaklanmaktadır. Bunlar arasında göç ve mülteci politikaları, AB'nin İsrail-Filistin çatışmasına yönelik tutumu, İran ile ilişkiler ve Orta Doğu barış süreçlerine katılım yer almaktadır. Çalışma ayrıca, Orta Doğu politikası oluşturulmasında AB karar alma organları içindeki potansiyel güç değişimlerini vurgulayarak durumun aciliyetini ortaya koymaktadır. Hipotezler, aşırı sağın artan etkisinin daha kısıtlayıcı göç politikalarına, İsrail yanlısı pozisyonlara, İran'a karşı çatışmacı bir yaklaşıma, Orta Doğu barış çabalarında AB'nin katılımının azalmasına ve bölgeye yönelik mali yardımın azalmasına yol açabileceğini öne sürmektedir. Araştırma ayrıca, AB üyesi ülkeler ile Orta Doğu ülkeleri arasında ikili ilişkilerin artma olasılığını da değerlendirmekte, bu durumun AB'nin ortak dış politikasını zayıflatabileceğini ve daha parçalı bir yaklaşıma yol açabileceğini belirtmektedir. Çalışma, aşırı sağın ana akımlaşmasının Avrupa siyaseti ve AB'nin Orta Doğu'daki rolü üzerindeki önemli etkisi nedeniyle bu olgunun

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inceliklerini anlamının önemini vurgulamaktadır. Bu zorlukların ele alınması, AB'nin temel değerlerini ve karmaşık jeopolitik ortamlarda yön bulma yeteneğini korumak için çok önemlidir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** AB, Aşırı Sağ Partiler, Potansiyel Etkiler, Orta Doğu Politikası.

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## INTRODUCTION

The recent political landscape of the European Union has undergone a dramatic transformation, marked most significantly by the ascendance of far-right parties as a potent and increasingly influential political force. The 2024 European Parliament elections starkly demonstrated this shift, with far-right parties making substantial gains across numerous member states. This surge in support has prompted urgent and crucial questions about this development's profound and multifaceted implications, extending far beyond the EU's external relations and profoundly impacting its internal workings, particularly concerning its complex and often fraught relationship with the Middle East.

The implications for the EU's internal dynamics are multifaceted. The rise of the far-right challenges the established political consensus, potentially leading to increased political fragmentation and instability within the EU system. The internal divisions within the far-right itself, with varying degrees of Euroscepticism and differing approaches to national sovereignty, further complicate the picture. The ability of these parties to form effective coalitions with other political groups and the potential for shifting alliances within the European Parliament will significantly impact the legislative agenda and the EU's ability to formulate coherent policies.

The consequences for EU-Middle East relations are equally significant. Far-right parties often advocate for a more nationalistic and protectionist approach to foreign policy, potentially leading to a reduction in development aid, a more restrictive approach to refugee resettlement, and a diminished commitment to conflict resolution initiatives in the region. Their rhetoric frequently frames issues through a lens of cultural anxieties and security concerns, sometimes employing anti-immigrant and Islamophobic narratives that could significantly damage the EU's relationships with Middle Eastern countries. The potential for reduced trade, strained diplomatic ties, and a weakening of the EU's soft power in the region are all serious considerations. Understanding the complex interplay between the rise of the far-right, the EU's internal political dynamics and its foreign policy towards the Middle East is, therefore, crucial for analyzing the future trajectory of the EU and its role in global affairs.

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These political transformations raise immediate concerns about the future of the European Union and its ability to uphold the values on which it was founded, especially in light of the growth of populist rhetoric and the rise of nationalist tendencies. Equally pressing are the questions surrounding the impact of the far-right's ascendancy on the EU's foreign policies, particularly towards the Middle East.

The rise of far-right parties in the EU represents a significant shift in the European political landscape, with potentially far-reaching and serious consequences:

- **Impact on EU foreign policy:** The increasing influence of far-right parties may lead to substantial changes in the EU's approach to international relations. These changes could manifest in various ways, from shifts in diplomatic strategies to alterations in aid and trade policies, particularly in the Middle East.
- **Regional stability implications :** Changes in EU policy towards the Middle East could affect regional stability and the balance of power. These shifts may alter alliances, influence power dynamics, and impact conflict resolution efforts in this strategically critical area.
- **The challenge to EU values :** The rise of far-right parties poses a potential challenge to the core values and principles upon which the EU was founded.
- **Global geopolitical implications :** Shifts in EU policy could have profound effects on global alliances and international efforts aimed at addressing Middle East issues.

### **Study Problem:**

The problem of this study can be formulated as follows:

**The urgency of understanding how the rise of far-right parties in the European Union affects the EU's policies and approaches towards the Middle East cannot be overstated**

To address this issue, the following sub-questions have been formulated:

- What specific Middle East policy areas are most likely to be influenced by the increased presence of far-right parties in EU institutions ?
- How might the balance of power within EU decision-making bodies shift in relation to Middle East policy formulation ?

- What are the potential consequences for EU-Middle East relations, particularly regarding key issues such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, relations with Iran, and migration policies?
- Considering the challenges inherent in formulating a common EU foreign policy and the presence of far-right parties within the European Parliament and Council, how significant is their influence on the EU's external actions ?
- How do the ideologies and policy preferences of far-right parties regarding the Middle East differ from mainstream EU approaches?

### **Study Hypotheses:**

The discourse surrounding this research topic necessitates the formulation of the following scientific hypotheses:

- The rise of far-right parties in the EU will lead to more restrictive immigration policies, particularly concerning migrants and refugees from Middle Eastern countries.
- The impact of increased far-right influence on EU policy regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is unpredictable and multifaceted. While some far-right groups may express pro-Israel sentiments, others may criticize Israeli actions or express antisemitic views, leading to varied and potentially conflicting effects on EU policy.
- Increased influence of far-right parties within the EU will likely lead to a more protectionist and realpolitik-oriented approach to foreign policy, potentially resulting in more confrontational stances towards Iran, particularly regarding nuclear issues and sanctions. However, this outcome is not guaranteed and may be influenced by factors such as energy dependence and the specific policy preferences of individual far-right parties.
- Increased influence of far-right parties within the EU could lead to greater bilateral engagement between individual member states and Middle Eastern countries, potentially weakening the EU's common foreign policy.

### **Literature Review**

The increasing influence of far-right parties in the European Union (EU) represents a significant shift in the political landscape. This shift could potentially have far-reaching consequences for EU governance, policy-making, and international relations. Recent studies have provided valuable insights into this complex and multifaceted phenomenon, underscoring the need for a thorough analysis.

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The concept of "creeping normalization", introduced by Manuel Müller in a report by the Finnish Institute of International Affairs (FIIA), suggests that the far right's influence in the EU is growing gradually and insidiously. This makes it a challenging issue to identify and address (Müller 2024). The process involves normalizing far-right ideas and policies within mainstream political discourse, making them more acceptable to the public. The report highlights how centrist parties are increasingly open to cooperating with far-right parties, thereby contributing to normalising far-right positions in political dialogue. However, not all segments of conservatives and right-wingers agree on this.

While the EU's consensus-based system provides some protection against a sudden takeover by far-right parties, it also complicates the formation of majorities without their involvement. This allows them to influence policy even as a minority. This dynamic is particularly evident in the European Parliament, where far-right parties are projected to gain a larger share of the vote in the 2024 elections. Although they are unlikely to secure a majority, their growing presence in national governments and the Council of the European Union could provide them with a platform to influence EU policies on immigration, trade, and human rights.

An analysis by Chatham House examines the potential long-term influence of far-right ideologies on EU policies, particularly in areas such as migration and environmental issues. Even if far-right parties do not achieve significant electoral victories, their ideologies may still shape EU policy over time, potentially undermining EU consensus and cohesion (Rij & Tim 2024). The study emphasizes the need to understand the dynamics of coalition formation within the European Parliament, as these coalitions play a crucial role in shaping legislative and budgetary decisions. However, the article is also generally concerned with the foreign policy approach. The European Commission and Council also play essential roles; the Commission proposes legislation, while the Council (representing member states) adopts it. The rise of far-right parties could impact these organs in several ways: it could influence the appointment of Commissioners sympathetic to far-right views, shift the balance of power within the Council, and make it harder to reach consensus on policy, particularly in areas where far-right parties hold strong opinions. The extent of this impact will depend on the level of far-right electoral success, their ability to form effective coalitions, and the willingness of other political actors to compromise or resist their influence.

James F. Downes' analysis for the European Consortium for Political Research (ECPR) highlights the ideological divisions within the far-right spectrum, which limit their ability to

wield significant influence despite increased representation. While these parties are unified in their support for stricter border controls, they are divided on other policy areas, such as EU membership (Downes 2024). The Indian Council of World Affairs (ICWA) further explores this fragmentation in an issue brief, critiquing the far right's lack of ideological cohesion and inability to drive decision-making in the EU due to their minority status. This fragmentation has resulted in a disjointed policy landscape, with far-right parties often unable to push through their preferred policies or initiatives.

Research also explores far-right parties' strategies to gain political traction, notably through mainstreaming their views. This process often involves moderating extreme migration and environmental policy stances to appeal to a broader audience. However, this shift toward moderation is not uniform across all far-right groups, adding a layer of complexity to the analysis (Kumar 2024). For example, the Identity and Democracy (ID) group was succeeded by Patriots for Europe and Europe of Sovereign Nations in 2024 in the European Parliament, known for maintaining hardline positions, particularly on illegal migration and EU policies.

Despite their growing influence, encompassing 15.2% of the European Parliament, far-right parties face internal divisions that limit their overall impact on EU policy. These divisions are most evident in their conflicting views on relations with Russia, EU expansion, and foreign policy. This lack of internal cohesion, combined with the reluctance of mainstream parties to collaborate with far-right groups, significantly hampers their ability to unilaterally shape EU policies. However, their collective 15.2% representation allows them to exert influence through several mechanisms: they can leverage their voting power to influence legislative outcomes, particularly on issues where mainstream parties are divided; they can form strategic alliances with other groups to advance their agendas; and they can use their platform to shape public discourse and influence public opinion, thereby pressuring mainstream parties to adopt some of their positions. The extent to which they succeed in shaping EU policies depends on the specific issue at hand, the composition of the European Parliament, and the willingness of other political actors to negotiate or compromise.

Understanding the nuances of this phenomenon is crucial for both policymakers and citizens, as it provides insights into the potential future trajectories and obstacles in European politics. The far-right's progression from the fringes to the mainstream highlights the adaptability of political movements in shifting landscapes. However, it also underscores the enduring importance of ideological coherence in shaping effective policy outcomes.

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In conclusion, these studies collectively provide a comprehensive perspective on the influence, criticisms, and limitations of far-right parties in shaping EU policies. They highlight the fragmentation and ideological divisions within the far-right, the normalization of far-right policies through cooperation with centrist parties, and the potential long-term implications for EU governance and policy areas. As the EU navigates this complex political landscape, it must address pressing issues such as financial stability, migration, and climate change while safeguarding its core values and democratic principles.

### **Anticipating the Rise of the Far Right : What Changes Can We Expect After the 2024 European Parliament Elections?**

The surge of far-right parties in Europe can be ascribed to a multitude of factors, with the global economic crisis of 2008 playing a pivotal role. This crisis, which significantly exacerbated public discontent and resentment in numerous European nations, was a major catalyst in fueling the rise of far-right sentiments. Furthermore, the escalating influx of migrants into Europe has instilled heightened apprehension and dread among specific segments of European society, a situation that the far right has capitalized on to propagate anti-immigrant rhetoric.

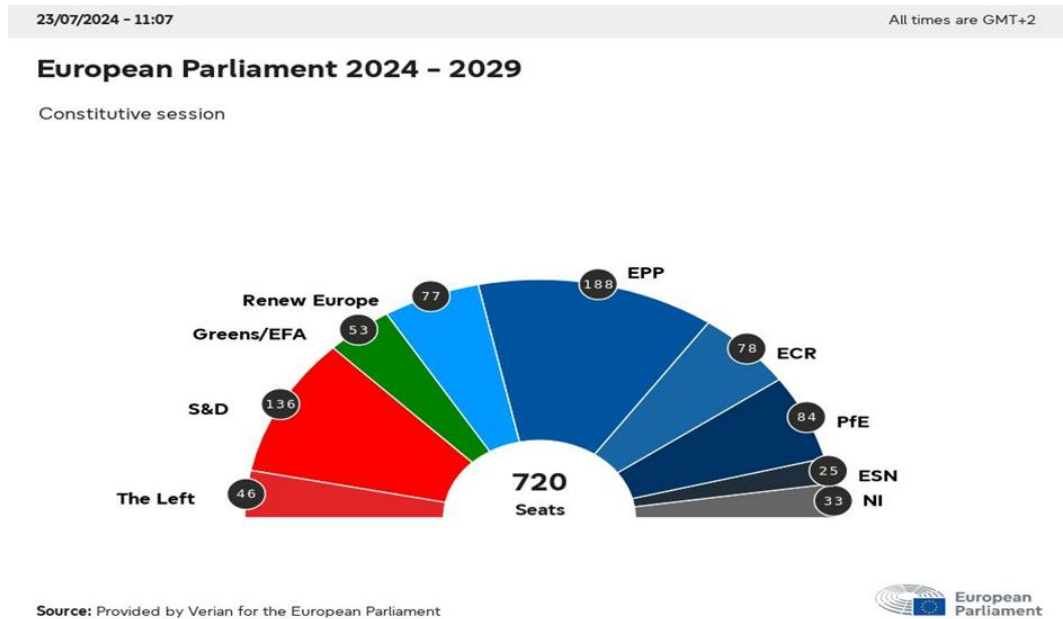
The European Parliament elections, held from June 6th to 9th, 2024, saw nearly 400 million EU citizens elect 720 Members of the European Parliament (MEPs). This legislative body, in conjunction with the European Council, is responsible for passing laws based on proposals from the European Commission and holds the power to approve or reject the EU budget. The elections confirmed the continued rise of far-right parties, although the precise extent of their gains varied across member states. While the European People's Party (EPP) secured a projected 189 seats, and the Socialists and Democrats (S&D) and left-wing groups obtained 135 and 39 seats respectively, the results demonstrated a significant shift in the political landscape. The Greens and Renew Europe groups experienced notable losses, exceeding 40 seats combined. This outcome underscores a complex realignment of political power within the European Parliament, with the far-right's increased influence representing a significant challenge to the established political order and raising important questions about the future direction of EU policy.

Right-wing populist blocs, such as the European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) and the far-right Identity and Democracy (ID), made significant gains in the 2024 European Parliament elections. The ECR secured a projected 76 seats, and the ID group obtained 58 seats.



While these figures represent increases of 7 and 9 seats respectively compared to the previous election, the actual impact of these gains will depend on the broader shifts in the political landscape and the ability of these groups to form effective coalitions. The overall results highlight a continued trend towards the consolidation of right-wing populist influence within the European Parliament. These gains raise significant questions about the future direction of EU policy, underscoring the potential impact of these results (Quaritsch 2024).

**Figure: 1.** Results of the 2024 European Parliament elections (URL-1)



The figure above illustrates the distribution of the 720 seats according to the winning parties. When examining the results by country, it becomes evident that Austria's far-right (*Freedom Party*) emerged as the leading contender, securing a significant 25.4% of the vote, a result of considerable importance in this election (Maaten Martin & Lisa 2024). In Italy, the far-right (*Brothers of Italy*) garnered 28.76%, significantly bolstering Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni's influence in the European Parliament (Rosana, 2024). Although the (*Civil Union*) led by Viktor Orbán won in Hungary, it achieved its worst result in decades, at 44.9%, marking a notable decline. Conversely, in Spain, the conservative (*Popular Party*) advanced, obtaining 34% of the vote, while the far-right (*Vox*) also made substantial gains, providing a balanced view of the election outcomes (Skujins & Zoltán 2024). The situation in Poland reflects a closely contested race, where the centrist (*Civic Coalition*) narrowly outperformed the nationalist, populist (*Law and Justice Party*). In the Netherlands, the far-right (*Party for Freedom*) secured 17.7% of the vote (Mudde 2024).

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In Germany, the (*Christian Democratic Union*) topped the list, with the far-right (*Alternative for Germany*) following closely at 15.9%. In France, the far-right (*National Rally*) led with a striking 31.37%, prompting President Macron to call for a resolution and the necessity for new elections. The *AfD* is dominant in the Identity and Democracy (ID) group (formerly known as ENF), while the *RN* is a member of the Identity and Democracy group (ID). These distinct groupings highlight the internal divisions and differing priorities within the broader far-right political spectrum in Europe. The presence of these two distinct far-right groups within the European Parliament underscores the complexity of analyzing their collective influence on EU policy.

While the 2024 European Parliament elections did not result in a radical, overnight transformation of the Parliament's composition, they undeniably shifted the balance of power, pushing the institution towards a more pronounced right-wing orientation. This shift, though incremental in terms of raw seat numbers for individual groups, represents a significant alteration in the political dynamics within the Parliament and will undoubtedly impact both the EU's internal decision-making processes and its foreign policy approach. The expectation of a more right-leaning Parliament is not solely based on the gains made by explicitly far-right groups, but also reflects the strategic shifts and realignments within the broader political spectrum. Centrist parties, facing pressure from the rise of the far-right, may have adapted their platforms to appeal to a more conservative electorate.

The major fault lines of parliamentary conflict are likely to run between a centrist coalition, broadly encompassing the European People's Party (EPP), the Socialists and Democrats (S&D), and Renew Europe, and a right-wing bloc comprised of the European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) and the far-right Identity and Democracy (ID) group. This polarization will not only intensify existing debates over EU policies, but also create new areas of conflict. For example, disagreements over immigration policy, the EU budget, and the bloc's response to global challenges are likely to be significantly exacerbated. The increased influence of the right-wing bloc will likely lead to heightened scrutiny of EU-level initiatives, potentially resulting in increased demands for national sovereignty and a more fragmented approach to policy-making. The next five years will be characterized by a struggle for influence between these opposing blocs, with the potential for significant policy shifts and a substantial re-evaluation of the EU's role on the world stage (Atlantic experts council 2024).

The centrist coalition is expected to form the ruling majority, while the far-right, with its potential to remain in an obstructive opposition role, will continue to exert significant influence. Other political forces, such as environmentalists, the far-left, and independents, are likely to remain on the fringes of power, though they will play a crucial role in tipping the balance on key issue. Despite the rise of the far right and its unity on identity, immigration, and sovereignty, it remains fragmented across various components (Balfour & Stefan 2024).

### **The Repercussions and Risks of the Rise of Far-Right Parties on the European Union's Agenda**

The centrist coalition will form the ruling majority, while the far-right, with its potential to remain in the position of obstructive opposition, will continue to be a significant force. Other political actors, such as the environmentalists, the far-left, and independents, are likely to remain on the periphery of power. However, their potential to play a pivotal role in tipping the balance on specific policy issues should not be underestimated. Despite the rise of far-right parties and their shared positions on issues like identity, immigration, and sovereignty, they still lack ideological cohesion among their components.

Opposition to immigration, particularly EU immigration policies, is the one issue that unites all far-right parties. Some, such as the *SPI*, the (*Republican Party*), and the (*AfD*), even warn against "ethnic replacement" (Burchard 2023). These parties express particular concern regarding Muslim immigrants, with groups like the (*Freedom Party*) adopting Islamophobia as a core ideology. Additionally, some far-right parties oppose intra-European immigration and harbor hostility toward Ukrainian refugees, citing concerns about the economic costs of asylum seekers and the impact of immigration on law and order and labor markets.

Far-right parties also seek to restrict freedom of expression and peaceful assembly. These parties threaten judicial independence and media freedom while attempting to undermine the role of European institutions in favor of bolstering national sovereignty (Bychawska-Siniarska 2017). In this context, they promote narrow nationalism and stand in opposition to further European integration. Such radical stances could potentially diminish the EU's role on the global stage. Additionally, far-right parties advocate for strict immigration controls, demanding severe restrictions on migrant entry and the return of refugees to their countries of origin.

Far-right parties also promote economic protectionism, opposing free trade and advocating for restrictions on foreign investment. The need for immediate action to address

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these trends is apparent (Pandya & Dyuti February 2024). Furthermore, many of these parties oppose European climate policies, calling for the reduction or elimination of measures aimed at combating climate change (Dirkx & Julian 2024). On the foreign policy front, they often push for more aggressive stances, advocating for increased military spending while simultaneously calling for a reduction in European security cooperation.

### **Will the Rise of the Far Right Affect the European Union's Foreign Policy?**

An examination of the orientations of far-right parties in Europe reveals that, while they influence foreign policy through media channels, their tangible impact on decision-making remains limited. Current studies suggest that far-right parties rarely hold direct authority over foreign policy decisions and often show little interest in engaging with such issues. Instead, their strength lies in using critical discourse domestically, a strategy that fosters a critical mindset within their constituents. Paradoxically, despite their domestic rhetoric, far-right parties tend to conform to the policies of the European Parliament (Wilson & Paul 2012). However, these parties are adept at framing debates through a polarizing and security-centric lens, particularly on immigration. By doing so, far-right parties exert indirect influence on liberal democratic parties, which may adopt positions once central to far-right ideologies. Far-right parties, with their adaptability, are adept at framing debates through a polarizing and security-centric lens, particularly on immigration. This adaptable framing strategy allows them to exert indirect influence on liberal and democratic parties, even when those parties don't explicitly embrace far-right ideologies. For example, in France, *the National Rally's (RN)* focus on border security and immigration control has pushed even centrist parties like President Macron's *La République En Marche! (LREM)* to adopt stricter immigration policies to counter the RN's narrative and retain voters.

Similarly, in Germany, the *Alternative für Deutschland (AfD)*'s emphasis on national identity and its critique of immigration has influenced the CDU/CSU's stance on asylum seekers, leading to a more restrictive approach. In Italy, *the Brothers of Italy's (FdiI)* success in framing immigration as a security threat has led to the adoption of increasingly stringent immigration controls by the current government, even by parties that previously held more moderate positions. This pattern of indirect influence, where mainstream parties adopt positions once central to far-right ideologies to counter their electoral appeal, demonstrates the significant impact far-right parties can have on the broader political landscape, even without achieving

outright electoral dominance. This dynamic is not limited to immigration; similar effects can be seen in EU integration and foreign policy debates.

The dynamics through which the far right influences foreign policy can be both indirect—through pressure on key actors—and direct, by obstructing consensus-building, forming alliances with external powers, resisting the development of the EU's foreign policy framework, or leveraging institutional positions (Balfour & Stefan 2024).

Understanding the far-right's deviations from mainstream EU policy and its alliances with like-minded non-state actors outside the EU is crucial for comprehending its broader impact. These deviations often involve rejecting liberal democratic values and international norms championed by the EU. The far-right's alliances extend beyond national borders, forging connections with groups sharing similar ideologies and goals. One particularly noteworthy area of convergence involves issues related to women's and LGBTQ+ rights. Here, the European far-right clearly diverges from the EU's generally progressive stance. Instead of aligning with EU-supported human rights organizations, the far-right frequently finds common cause with global conservative and religious groups, including particular evangelical churches. This divergence and alliance have significant implications for EU policy and its international relations, as it challenges the EU's commitment to progressive values and may lead to friction with other international actors who uphold these values.

For instance, several far-right parties in Europe have actively collaborated with or received support from US-based evangelical organizations that hold socially conservative views on gender and sexuality. These collaborations often involve exchanging information, strategic advice, and financial support. The convergence is not merely ideological but manifests in practical collaborations on campaigns and legislative initiatives. For example, some European far-right parties have actively promoted anti-abortion legislation and policies restricting LGBTQ+ rights. What's alarming is that they draw on arguments and strategies similar to those employed by their evangelical allies. This transatlantic collaboration highlights the far-right's ability to build international networks to advance its agenda, bypassing or undermining the EU's established human rights and social policy framework. The convergence warrants critical attention as it demonstrates the potential for global networks to amplify and reinforce far-right narratives and policies, challenging the EU's commitment to progressive values (Indelicato & Maíra Magalhães 2024). Although accommodation with external powers is often more rhetorical than practical, it has profound implications for the cohesion of the European Union. Suspicions that some member states' loyalties might align more closely with external powers

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undermine trust within the EU. This eroded trust, particularly in foreign policy, weakens cooperation among EU actors and complicates efforts to promote unity (KARÁSKOVÁ Una Aleksandra & Kara 2023). These practices are likely to hinder politicians' and decision-makers' willingness to share intelligence and confidential information, thereby complicating crucial tasks such as enhancing economic security and enforcing sanctions.

### **The Far Right and the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict: Continuity and Change**

One of the most significant areas where the European Union faces global accusations of double standards and reputational damage is its response to the "Israeli aggression against the Gaza Strip," where EU positions have been divided (International 2024). However, it's crucial to emphasize that the divisions within the European far-right extend beyond the simple dichotomy of pro- and anti-Israel stances. While a broadly pro-Israel sentiment is prevalent, the nuances of their positions are significant. Among the most prominent far-right parties, their approaches to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict reveal a range of perspectives, though often united by a common thread, creating a sense of connection to a larger narrative.

For instance, *the National Rally (RN)* in France, led by Marine Le Pen, has historically expressed strong support for Israel, viewing it as an ally against terrorism and Islamic extremism. This aligns with their broader domestic policies emphasizing national security and rejecting multiculturalism. Similarly, *the Alternative für Deutschland (AfD)* in Germany, while internally divided on some foreign policy issues, generally holds a pro-Israel position, often framing the conflict through the lens of a civilizational struggle against Islam. In Italy, *the Brothers of Italy (FdI)*, while not always explicitly detailing their position on the conflict, generally shares the pro-Israel sentiment prevalent within the broader European far-right. Their focus on national sovereignty and security often leads them to align with Israel's security concerns (Paris 2024). Ironically, anti-Semitic sentiment often coexists with this pro-Israel position, and in fact, adopting such a stance has enabled some parties to distance themselves from their anti-Semitic origins. Furthermore, the recent shift in Israeli politics towards the right and the engagement between like-minded parties in Israel and Europe have strengthened the pro-Israel positions of far-right parties.

While radical changes to European foreign policy in the Middle East and North Africa are unlikely in the short term, a shift in priorities is possible. The Palestinian-Israeli conflict is likely to regain prominence on the EU's external agenda, particularly in the context of Iran's

nuclear ambitions and regional influence (Borrell 2023). The stronger right-wing orientation of the new European Parliament could significantly affect EU relations with Turkey and the Maghreb, particularly given the far right's hardline stance on immigration.

There is also near consensus between the ruling center-right and the far-right opposition in the European Parliament regarding their stance on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Both sides call for a two-state solution and oppose the continued presence of Hamas (Akgül-Açıkmeşe & Soli 2024). The Social Democrats, a key component of the coalition, have proposed an 'international peace conference' aimed at achieving a just two-state solution between Israel and Palestine. Both parties also support the Abraham Accords and advocate for further normalization of relations between Israel and other countries. Meanwhile, the far right urges EU institutions to fully include Hamas leadership on the European Union's terrorist list.

In the near term, European support for the Palestinian Authority is expected to remain steadfast. This continued support, coupled with pressure on the Palestinian leadership to implement reforms and hold elections, could contribute to greater stability and security in the region. Additionally, it may increase pressure on Israel to address settlement expansion in the West Bank, a critical issue in Middle Eastern affairs (Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations 2024). Sanctions on Palestinian individuals and entities linked to Iran through financing or arms deals are expected to expand. Simultaneously, countries that have recently recognized the Palestinian state are likely to press the EU to consider official recognition of Palestine, while continuing to support the Palestinian Authority and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA).

### **Is There a Shift in the European Union's Foreign Policy Towards the Arab Gulf Region?**

European foreign policy towards the Arab Gulf region is poised for a transformative review, particularly in light of recent developments such as the Gaza war. Politically, Josep Borrell, the High Representative of the European Union, has underscored the Union's potential to strengthen its influence in this region and contribute significantly to peace efforts. The Israeli war in Gaza revealed the limitations of the EU's current influence and its ineffective role in the conflict. However, this also presents an opportunity for positive change through the integration of future policies (EEAS Press Team 2024). As part of efforts to enhance the EU's geopolitical presence, the Union is expected to play a more tangible role in addressing major regional issues, including the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and the Iranian nuclear file.

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The new composition of the European Parliament could also play a pivotal role in shaping foreign policy towards the Gulf. The right-wing trend that dominates the new Parliament may bolster the Union's position, potentially shifting away from traditional leftist priorities such as human rights and democracy (Krastev & Mark 2024). However, liberal elements within the centrist coalition could still influence political settlements on certain issues.

The increased presence of the right-wing in Parliament may also create an imbalance in the EU's foreign policy, particularly concerning the Gulf states. As a result, future European policies are likely to focus on two main areas. The first concerns political matters, with a strong emphasis on the Union's role in the Middle East. The European Parliament is expected to prioritize strengthening relationships with influential Gulf states, such as Saudi Arabia, to counter Iranian policies and enhance security cooperation against sectarian militias (Baabood 2024). The second area pertains to economic and strategic influence, where Europe will seek to deepen economic collaboration with Gulf countries. This will include a focus on defense, technology exports, and scientific research, offering a promising future for all involved (The EU-GCC Dialogue 2024).

The results of the recent European Parliament elections reflect a significant shift in the geopolitical landscape. There is near-unanimous agreement among major parties on adopting a stricter stance towards Iran, particularly in light of escalating regional tensions related to the Gaza war. The European People's Party, a leading force that also heads the European Commission, is advocating for a radical change—specifically, abandoning the principle of unanimity in the area of EU sanctions against totalitarian regimes, with a clear focus on Russia and Iran. Their leadership role in this matter is undeniable (Baccini 2024).

The far-right camp, meanwhile, advocates for an even more assertive policy towards Iran, focusing on its nuclear and ballistic missile programs, its sponsorship of terrorism, and its use of "hostage diplomacy." This group is calling on the European Commission to fully include the Iranian Revolutionary Guard, the Houthis, and Hezbollah on the EU's terrorist list (Jones & Aida Sanchez 2024). Consequently, it is expected that the European Union will tighten its policies towards Iran in the future, expanding sanctions on Iranian individuals and entities, as well as those linked to Iran in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Yemen.



## **Immigration and Asylum Issues in European Foreign Policy: The Influence of the Right Extremist?**

Far-right parties have capitalized on immigration and asylum issues, making these topics particularly sensitive among (EU) member states. This heightened sensitivity is not solely linked to a specific year (such as 2016), but rather reflects a longer-term trend influenced by various factors, including fluctuating migration flows, economic anxieties, and security concerns. The year 2016 might be referenced due to significant migration events around that time, such as the Syrian refugee crisis, which exacerbated existing anxieties and provided fertile ground for far-right narratives. In response to the electoral success of far-right parties exploiting these anxieties, centrist parties have strategically adopted elements of far-right rhetoric on immigration, both at the national and EU levels. This strategic shift reflects a complex political calculation aimed at retaining voters who might otherwise be drawn to far-right parties while attempting to maintain a centrist image.

The far right's influence on immigration and asylum policies manifests primarily along two key axes. The first is the externalization of immigration management, leading to a series of agreements with countries neighboring the EU to prevent migrants from reaching EU territory. This policy shift has raised concerns about the future direction of immigration and asylum in the Union (The European Council on Refugees and Exiles 2024). The second axis is the securitization of migration, which involves framing immigration as a security issue (Aslan 2022). This has resulted in policies focused on border control and deterrence, including the adoption of the new Charter on Migration and Asylum by the Council of the European Union—the most comprehensive reform of EU migration policy in over a decade. As the new migration pact progresses toward implementation, far-right parties are likely to argue that the reforms do not go far enough.

In response to the increasing electoral competition from the far right, many centrist and conservative parties in Europe have shifted significantly to the right on immigration and asylum issues. This rightward shift is evident in several countries. For example, in France, President Macron's centrist government has implemented increasingly restrictive immigration policies in response to the electoral success of Marine Le Pen's National Rally. Similarly, while maintaining a centre-right position in Germany, the CDU/CSU has adopted a stricter stance on immigration than in previous years to counter the AfD's influence. In Italy, the current right-wing government has implemented highly restrictive immigration policies. These parties are now advocating for more stringent immigration policies, with some even opposing EU-level

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solutions and favouring more vital national approaches. This trend of prioritizing national control over EU-level cooperation on migration is exemplified by the Visegrád Group (Hungary, Poland, Czech Republic, and Slovakia), which consistently advocated stricter migration policies and more robust border controls from 2015 to 2023. This stance has influenced other EU member states, leading to a situation where, as ECRE (2024) noted, the widespread adoption of more restrictive immigration policies is now the norm across the EU. The examples of France, Germany, and Italy, coupled with the long-standing influence of the Visegrád Group, illustrate the scale and impact of the policy shift in response to the far-right's electoral success.

### **CONCLUSION**

The surge of far-right parties in the European Union is poised to trigger significant changes in immigration policies, particularly those concerning migrants and refugees from Middle Eastern countries. This projection, backed by the analysis in this document, links the rise of these parties with a nationalistic and protectionist stance on immigration. The far-right factions advocate for stringent controls and often interpret immigration issues through security and cultural perspectives. This interpretation could lead to policies that specifically target migrants from the Middle East, marking a broader shift towards exclusionary immigration practice.

Aside from immigration, the influence of far-right parties is expected to introduce an element of unpredictability to EU policy on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. While these parties often express pro-Israel sentiments, viewing Israel as a strategic ally against terrorism, internal divisions could muddy their overall stance. Some factions within the far-right criticize Israeli actions, leading to diverse and potentially conflicting approaches to EU policy. This complexity underscores the multifaceted nature of far-right influence, making it challenging to predict the precise effects on the EU's position in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Moreover, the increasing presence of far-right parties is likely to significantly alter EU foreign policy, steering it towards a more protectionist and realpolitik-oriented approach, particularly regarding Iran. The document suggests that these parties may advocate for a more aggressive stance on nuclear issues and sanctions against Iran. However, the outcomes of such shifts are not guaranteed; they may be influenced by external factors like energy dependence and the differing policy preferences among far-right factions. This variability underscores the uncertain trajectory of EU foreign policy as it grapples with the implications of far-right influence.

The consequences of the far-right's influence on EU foreign policy highlight the urgent need for a unified and coherent approach. The EU's current inability to reach consensus on key foreign policy issues, combined with a perceived weakening of its policy substance, is undermining trust among international partners and diminishing the EU's overall influence and credibility on the global stage. This erosion of trust stems from a lack of clear and consistent messaging, making it difficult for other countries to understand and rely on the EU's positions and commitments.

Finally, the rise of far-right parties could foster greater bilateral engagement between individual EU member states and Middle Eastern countries, potentially undermining the EU's standard foreign policy. The document indicates that such dynamics may lead to a fragmented approach to regional relations as member states pursue their interests in bilateral dealings. This trend poses a significant threat to the coherence of the EU's collective foreign policy framework and complicates efforts to present a unified stance in the Middle East. Collectively, these developments signify a profound transformation in EU policies that challenges its foundational values and strategic objectives.

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