

## **The question of the rise of far – right groups in Europe**

Over the past 15 years the radical right has tripled its support in Europe, causing centre-right orientated political parties to move towards radical right; consequently racially motivated violence and extreme right-wing terrorist attacks have considerably increased.

When talking about far – right groups we consider parties that express elements of nationalism, various forms of racism and xenophobia to varying degrees or have links with explicitly neo-Nazi or neo-fascist movements, and preach and practice violent and anti-democratic approaches.

The ideological aspects on which these movements are based sometimes lead to the rejection of democratic values (such as parliamentarianism) because they are considered corrupt and inadequate and often subject to the interference of extranational powers such as pressure groups, NATO, the European Union and the UN.

Furthermore, the majority of these movements ride on popular feelings of opposition to immigration, defining it as a consequence of an excess of solidarity advocated by left-wing ideologies or as an instrument of the liberalist classes to introduce new human capital into the territory. In the eyes of the followers of these movements, immigration would not only take away jobs but would also affect the average salary of the population in various forms, leading to social degradation and delinquency.

## **History of far – right groups in Europe**

Far - right movements, especially Fascism and Nazism, have been declared illegal only after World War II; for example in Italy there is a transitional provision which prohibits the reorganization of the National Fascist Party, but in general all the constitutions of European democratic states are based on the repudiation of fascism. Before WWII in almost every country of Continental Europe (Except from France and Great Britain), ruled a more right orientated government, most notably countries such as Italy or Germany were ruled by real dictators, such as Benito Mussolini or Adolf Hitler.

After Fascism and Nazism being declared illegal the rise of far – right groups became more difficult.

Among the ups and downs that the extreme right has experienced in the postwar period, we can identify three periods during which the extreme right in Europe has enjoyed particular fortunes.

### **1<sup>st</sup> Period**

The first period, was formed by the veterans of the old fascist regimes immediately after the end of the Second World War. The greatest example is the Italian Social Movement (MSI), founded in 1946 by a group of former fighters and fascist leaders of the Republic of Salò, including the historic leader of the party, Giorgio Almirante. This movement though did not gain a lot of success neither in Italy nor in Europe.

## 2<sup>nd</sup> Period

The second period developed from the end of the fifties and was characterized by populist, anti-political and anti-tax rhetoric that appealed mainly to traders and small farmers. The main movements of this second wave were the French UDTA, founded by the Frenchman Pierre Poujade, and the two "Progress Parties", founded in the 1970s in Denmark and Norway, to protest against the role of the Scandinavian Social Democratic State.

## 3<sup>rd</sup> Period

The third wave is the one closest to us and the one that is usually remembered most easily; it was also the one that gathered the greatest electoral successes (at least until today). Among the most important, those gathered in France in the 1980s by the Front National, the radical right-wing party led by former poujadist, denier and anti-Semite Jean-Marie Le Pen.

The political theory with which Le Pen obtained the consensus of many French people was a mix of the defence of French identity and neoliberal economic policies (reduction of the perimeter of the State and cutting taxes). When the party began to succeed in the 1990s, particularly among the weaker classes, Le Pen changed its economic programme to focus less on cutting spending and focusing on "chauvinist" subsidies, aimed at including only the French and explicitly excluding all the others. The Front National was born out of the alliance of many small far-right acronyms and one of the factors in its success was precisely cleaning up its image from the explicit nostalgia for fascism of those groups. Instead of the classical authoritarian tradition, the new party proposed the defence of the traditional French identity against immigration, multiculturalism and modernity more generally, as suggested by the school of the "New Right", the intellectual movement founded in the 1970s by the French philosopher Alain de Benoist.

With this approach, which will inspire the radical right across Europe, Le Pen allied itself with the main parties of the traditional centre-right and achieved some spectacular and unexpected victories during a series of by-elections in the middle of the decade, obtaining the necessary space to make a national leap forward. Having become one of the main actors in French public life, Le Pen continued to deny the Holocaust and maintain his ties with neo-fascist groups. After consolidating the party for a decade, in 2002 it reached the most important result in its history to date. In the first round of the presidential election he defeated the socialist candidate coming second behind Jacques Chirac and thus gaining access to the runoff, fifteen years before his daughter Marine did the same thing. In the second round Le Pen was largely defeated, as was his daughter, and in the following years he had to endure the approval of a series of electoral laws strongly penalizing his party (which in fact never managed to win a local election). The Front National thus entered a long phase of decline that lasted until 2014, when the party revitalized by Marine's leadership ranked first in the European elections with 24% of the vote.

The title of most successful leader during this 3<sup>rd</sup> period belongs to Austrian Jörg Haider, head of the Freedom Party (FPÖ), three-time governor of Carinthia and overall winner of the Austrian elections in 1999. Having become secretary in 1986, Haider moved the liberal, moderate, Pan-Germanist platform of the FPÖ to the right (when Haider took over the leadership, the party was an ally of the Social Democrats). While promising to reduce public spending, taxes and state

intervention in the economy, Haider introduced the fight against immigration and the defence of Austrian identity in anti-European and anti-Islamic terms into the party's programme.

Haider received the help of the centrists in achieving his first successes. In 1989, thanks to the votes of the Austrian Christian Democrats, he became governor of Carinthia and achieved European fame. In 1993, considered by all European governments as an extremist nostalgic for dictatorial regimes, Haider launched the campaign "Austria First!". with which he intended to introduce new and stricter anti-immigration laws. In the 1999 elections Haider achieved a historic result, making the FPÖ the second largest party in the country with 27% of the vote.

The centrists of the Austrian People's Party (ÖVP) agreed to form a government with him shocking everybody: it was the first time a radical right-wing party had obtained a seat of government in a European country.

His government declined quite quickly though, since UE members agreed to impose sanctions, rejecting any bilateral contact with the Austrian Government and threatening further repercussions if the democratic spirit of the European treaties were violated.

In the same years in which Haider was asserting himself, a little further north, another far-right party achieved an ephemeral but spectacular success in the country where there was least expected room for the far right. The Republicans were founded in West Germany in 1983 by a number of splitters from the Bavarian Centralist Party CSU and the journalist and leader Franz Schönhuber, a former member of the Nazi party and SS volunteer during the Second World War. Schönhuber, who took over the leadership of the party in 1985, wanted to create a populist right-wing party similar to Le Pen in France. In addition to fighting immigration and defending German culture and nationhood, his program proposed the typical mix of neoliberal policies and chauvinist welfare common to almost all far-right parties of the time: cutting public spending and waste, helping small and medium-sized businesses and supporting German workers and the traditional family. In the 1989 European elections, he obtained an unexpected 7.1% of the vote, which reached almost 15% in Bavaria, the richest and most populous land in the country. However, the party leadership split up almost immediately and after the reunification of the country failed to attract the votes of the poorest workers in East Germany. The party, while continuing to participate in the elections, was no longer able to cross the barrier.

During the 90's the wave also extended to Scandinavian countries, especially Denmark and Norway with strong anti-immigration and anti-Islamic positions.

### **At the last European elections**

In France "Rassemblement National" got 23,3%

In Germany, "Alternative für Deutschland (Afd)" got 10,5%

In Great Britain "Brexit Party" got 30,5 %

In Italy "La Lega" got 34,26%

In Austria "Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs (FPÖ)" got 17,20%

In Hungary "Fidesz and KDNP" got 52,56%

In Sweden "Sverigedemokraterna" got 15,34%

In Spain "Vox" got 6,21%

In Poland "Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (PiS)" got 45,38%

All these parties are right/far – right oriented and gained a relevant number of seat in the European parliament. Also most of them are the main rulers in their countries ( such as Vox, Lega, PiS....). All these data are to show that right and far – right parties keep gaining consent all over Europe.

## Rise of nationalism in Europe



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| ① <b>Hungary</b><br>Fidesz <b>49%</b> Jobbik <b>19%</b>      | ⑪ <b>France</b><br>National Rally <b>13%</b>                     |
| ② <b>Austria</b><br>Freedom Party <b>26%</b>                 | ⑫ <b>Netherlands</b><br>Freedom Party <b>13%</b>                 |
| ③ <b>Switzerland</b><br>Swiss People's Party <b>25.8%</b>    | ⑬ <b>Germany</b><br>Alternative for Germany <b>12.6%</b>         |
| ④ <b>Denmark</b><br>Danish People's Party <b>21%</b>         | ⑭ <b>Czech Republic</b><br>Freedom & Direct Democracy <b>11%</b> |
| ⑤ <b>Belgium</b><br>New Flemish Alliance <b>20.4%</b>        | ⑮ <b>Bulgaria</b><br>United Patriots <b>9%</b>                   |
| ⑥ <b>Estonia</b><br>Conservative People's Party <b>17.8%</b> | ⑯ <b>Slovakia</b><br>Our Slovakia <b>8%</b>                      |
| ⑦ <b>Finland</b><br>The Finns <b>17.7%</b>                   | ⑰ <b>Poland</b><br>Confederation <b>6.8%</b>                     |
| ⑧ <b>Sweden</b><br>Sweden Democrats <b>17.6%</b>             | ⑱ <b>Greece</b><br>Greek Solution <b>3.7%</b>                    |
| ⑨ <b>Italy</b><br>The League <b>17.4%</b>                    | ⑲ <b>Cyprus</b><br>ELAM <b>3.7%</b>                              |
| ⑩ <b>Spain</b><br>Vox <b>15%</b>                             |  |

The main concern about the rise of far – right movement is especially the souverainistic, nationalistic and anti-European politic which these parties preach, which is leading to a further desegregation of Europe and UE (especially after Brexit).

## **Today**

### **Italy**

Matteo Salvini's party "La Lega" formed a government with Luigi Di Maio's "Movimento 5 stelle" on the 1<sup>st</sup> of June 2018. "La Lega" is now the dominant party in Italy and it keeps gaining consent all over the country by proposing a strong nationalistic politic of opposition to immigration.

### **France**

Marie Le Pen's party "Rassemblement National" is now rising again, after being defeated in 2017 by the current president Emmanuel Macron, by being the 1<sup>st</sup> French party at the European elections.

### **Germany**

"Alternative für Deutschland" has gained a lot of relevance especially in the European Parliament.

The party shares neo-nazi, anti-immigration and anti-islamic positions.

### **Austria**

"The freedom party" did not just got a lot of votes at the last European elections but it also funded a coalition government with conservatives in 2017.

### **Spain**

In Spain "Vox" has tripled its consent in the last two years and it's getting more and more popular.

### **Northern-Europe**

Sweden, Estonia and Latvia all share a quite far-right oriented government gaining relevance also at a European level, opposing particularly to immigration.

### **Eastern-Europe**

Slovakia, Hungary, Bulgaria, Czech Republic and Slovenia are all represented in the European parliament mainly by right parties.

## **Useful links:**

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-36130006>

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-36150807>

<https://www.theguardian.com/global/commentisfree/2019/nov/12/nativism-is-driving-the-far-right-surge-in-europe-and-it-is-here-to-stay>

<https://time.com/5395444/europe-far-right-italy-salvini-sweden-france-germany/>

<https://www.democraticaudit.com/2019/10/17/is-the-resurgence-of-europes-far-right-a-cultural-or-an-economic-phenomenon/>