

# STATE OF HATE

## FAR-RIGHT EXTREMISM IN EUROPE

2021

Editors: Joe Mulhall and Safya Khan-Ruf

**HATE**  
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### HOPE NOT HATE CHARITABLE TRUST

Established in 1992, HOPE not hate Charitable Trust uses research, education and public engagement to challenge mistrust and racism, and helps to build communities that are inclusive, celebrate shared identities and are resilient to hate. The charity monitors far-right extremism and produces in-depth analysis of the threat of the politics of hate in the UK and abroad. We also specialise in related policy work, which draws on our research and our extensive data mapping, community engagement and training as well as a national Education Unit.



### AMADEU ANTONIO STIFTUNG

The Amadeu Antonio Foundation is one of Germany's foremost independent non-governmental organizations working to strengthen democratic civic society and eliminate neo-Nazism, right-wing extremism, anti-Semitism, racism and other forms of bigotry and hate in Germany. Since its founding in 1998, the Foundation has funded more than 1.400 projects and campaigns in pursuit of this goal. It brings direct support to victims of hate-based violence, and promotes alternative youth cultures and community networks to weaken the social structures that intolerance and racism need to survive. Furthermore the Foundation engages with hate and other forms of group-focused enmity online while promoting the development of a democratic digital civil society.



### EXPO FOUNDATION

Expo Foundation is an anti-racist organisation based in Sweden working towards a vision of a society where racist ideas lack influence. The foundation works for an open, democratic society by counteracting racist organisations and ideas. The work consists of monitoring, journalistic investigation and education aiming to raise peoples ability to challenge racist ideas, myths and conspiracy theories.

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## MAIN FAR-RIGHT EVENTS IN 2020

### ■ **Terror Attack in Germany**

In February there was a mass shooting by a far-right terrorist in Hanau, Germany, taking the life of 10 people in an attack on two shisha bars frequented mainly by people with an immigrant background. It was the second deadly far-right terror attack in Germany in less than half-a-year, following the attack against a synagogue and kebab shop in Halle in October 2019. Also, in June 2020, Germany's defence minister ordered the partial dissolution of the elite KSK commando force amidst growing criticism of right-wing extremism in its ranks.

### ■ **Far-right Victory in Polish Presidential Election**

In July Andrzej Duda of the far-right Law and Justice party narrowly beat challenger Rafal Trzaskowski in the Polish presidential elections. The result came after an ugly anti-lgbt campaign and is likely to mean further controversial reforms to the judiciary and more opposition to gay rights and abortion rights.

### ■ **Christchurch Shooters Extensive Links to European Far Right Revealed**

In August the Christchurch killer Brenton Tarrant was sentenced to life in prison without the possibility of parole after pleading guilty to 92 counts of terrorism, murder and attempted murder. A Royal Commission into the attack was released in December found that the killer had made at least 16 donations to international far-right groups and people since 2017, including a total of £2,500 to numerous European branches of the Identitarian network Generation Identity.

### ■ **Golden Dawn Trial in Greece**

In October, after a trial lasting more than five years, the leadership of the Greek neo-Nazi party Golden Dawn were found guilty of running a criminal organisation. Golden Dawn's leader Nikos Michaloliakos and six senior colleagues were convicted of heading a criminal organisation, Giorgos Roupakias was found guilty of murder and fifteen others were convicted of conspiracy. The trial has decimated one of the most dangerous neo-Nazi organisations on the continent, though the threat of extreme right violence in Greece remains.

### ■ **Legal Troubles for Matteo Salvini in Italy**

In October, ex-interior minister Matteo Salvini of the far right Lega party went on trial on kidnapping charges over an incident in 2019 when he prevented 116 migrants from disembarking in Sicily. If found guilty he could face up to 15 years for aggravated kidnapping.

## KEY 2020 TRENDS

### **The Rise of Conspiracy Theories and QAnon in Europe**

- 2020 saw a dramatic increase in the number of people engaging with conspiracy theories during the Covid-19 Pandemic.
- Across Europe we've witnessed the birth of a number of conspiracy theory-driven protest groups that have taken to the streets, driven by a strongly anti-elite, anti-lockdown and anti-vaccine agenda.
- Responsibility for the spread of conspiracy theories partially lies with digital platforms and social media, which has helped false information of all kinds spread faster and more aggressively.
- Covid-19 related conspiracy theories have provided a worrying new route towards antisemitic politics. Online spaces used to push anti-lockdown and conspiratorial explanations for the pandemic are providing a different pathway, one by which the incremental steps that build towards antisemitism, Holocaust denial and admiration for Hitler are in fact a progression through different conspiracy theories, which may contain antisemitic undertones but do necessarily require them.
- While starting in America in 2017, 2020 saw the arrival and growth of the QAnon Conspiracy Theory across Europe, especially in the UK and Germany. The theory has developed beyond its roots in the intensely hyperpartisan and US-centric right into a broader, less uniform type phenomenon with distinctly European inflections. As it stands today it is a decentralised, grand and multifaceted phenomenon, at once a conspiracy theory, a political movement and a quasi-religion, with variants tailored to chime with different subcultures and national contexts.

## RACIAL NATIONALISM ON THE RISE

- 2020 saw the European far-right become extremely animated in response to the Black Lives Matter demonstrations that took place across the continent.
- Existing racial nationalist activists and organisations, already preoccupied with the concept of race, have used the Black Lives Matter protests to push their existing political platform to a wider audience.



- Some elements of the far-right that have traditionally distanced themselves from open racial politics, promoting instead ‘cultural nationalism’, have become more willing and open to explicitly racial politics in response to Black Lives Matter protests. Whether this shift is permanent will remain to be seen but in the short-to-medium term we have seen cultural nationalism cede ground to racial nationalism within parts of the European far-right.

## **FAR RIGHT TERRORISM - CONTINUES TO POSE A THREAT**

- Far-right terrorism in 2020 largely continued the worrying trend of 2019 with a large number of arrests and an active online scene propagating for terrorism and violence.
- The current far-right terror threat constitutes of a network of loosely organised groups which connects individuals internationally. These groups main purpose is to encourage individuals to perpetuate acts of violence, to network them and share knowledge rather than formally plan attacks. The groups are often modelled after previous groups and are often short-lived.
- Activists often engage with multiple groups simultaneously and often find new networks to engage in if one is dismantled. This means that the threat is difficult to counter as shattering individual groups has little lasting effects.
- Terrorism partially motivated by conspiracy theory beliefs as well as environmentalism, often termed eco-fascism, are relatively new trends and attacks related to these themes remain a serious possibility.

## **CONTINUED INTERNATIONALISATION**

- While it remains important to explore trends in traditional far right organisations such as political parties, the modern far-right is currently undergoing a broader and more fundamental shift; namely the emergence of a transnational and post-organisational threat.
- While activists will generally be primarily preoccupied with local or national issues, they invariably contextualise them continentally or even globally. Often activists from all over the world come together for short periods to collaborate on certain issues and these loose networks act as synapses passing information around the globe.
- If we want to understand the dangers posed by the politics of hatred and division we can no longer just look at our street, our community or even our country, we must think beyond political parties, formal organisations and even national borders.

## **POLLING: KEY HEADLINES:**

- The far right has had mixed fortunes politically during 2020, with those in Government having a sharp drop in support, while others benefiting from unpopular Government responses to Covid-19 benefiting or non-covid related issues being strongly felt by the people. In Italy, the fascist Brothers of Italy is now at 12% in the polls, double the vote it obtained in the 2018 General Election. In Sweden, where crime is above health in voters concerns, and immigration third, the far right Swedish Democrats are now on 21%, compared to the 16% it polled in the 2018 election.
- Far right parties that are in Government however have suffered badly during the pandemic. The ruling Law and Justice Party in Poland is now polling 18.4%, compared to the 32% it achieved in the 2019 General Election, while Five Star Movement, which is more populist than traditional far right, has seen support slip from 28% in 2018 to just 12% now.
- Most people have been supportive of the lockdown measures implemented in their respective countries, with 64% backing Government measures in Germany and just 13% opposing them.
- There is a deep sense of unease in many countries about the state of their political system and the direction of their country was going in. Two-thirds of people in France think that their political system is broken, while only 6% of Britons think it is working “very well”. However, there are more positive feelings in other countries with the state of their democracy, with 60% of Germans thinking it works well.
- Attitudes towards minorities are poor across all eight countries surveyed, though some are quite appalling. Two-thirds of Italians (67%) have negative views on Roma, while 60% of Hungarians have negative views on immigrants. The most positive attitudes towards minorities are amongst the British, but the 29% positive attitudes towards Muslims is still depressingly low.
- While attitudes towards minorities are poor, more people felt that the Black Lives Matter protests highlighted racism and discrimination experienced by minority communities. However, only in Germany (52%) and the UK (51%) was this sentiment shared by a majority of people. In Hungary, the figure was just 23%.
- Attitudes to conspiracy theories vary greatly from country to country, and often depend on whether the issue taps into existing concerns and prejudices. In Hungary, where President Orban has riled against EU interference and the dangers immigration pose to European identity, 45% agree that elites are encouraging immigration to weaken Europe. Likewise in Italy, where there has been political anger at the refusal of the EU to provide

greater support for immigration issues, 39% agree.

- The vast majority of respondents in all eight countries dismiss notions that the Covid-19 vaccine will be maliciously used to infect people with poison. However, 22% of Poles, 20% of Hungarians and 16% of Italians do believe this to be the case. Only 48% of Poles believe this claim to be “probably” or “definitely” false. In the UK, only 7% believe poison will be infected via the Covid-19 vaccine, while 79% disagreeing.
- There is much larger support for the claim that ‘Hollywood’s elite, governments, media and other high officials are covertly involved in large-scale child smuggling and exploitation’, one of the key claims of QAnon followers. A third of respondents in Poland believe this claim to be definitely or probably true, while only 27% think it is false. In Germany, 21% believe this statement to be true, compared to 48% who think it is false.

# INTRODUCTION

**Joe Mulhall**

The year 2020 will forever be marred by the global pandemic which spread around the world, locking us in our homes, hiding our faces behind masks and tragically taking hundreds of thousands of lives. As we enter 2021 the death toll continues to rise though the arrival of numerous vaccines has provided a much needed glimmer of hope. However, while a thin shard of light has begun to lift the seemingly unending darkness of last year, the ramifications of the pandemic will continue to be felt for years to come; not least the impending economic crisis set to grip the world economy. Yet, it has by no means been all bad news. In the face of such tragedy we have seen communities come together, neighbours and strangers helping one another and examples of heart-breaking sacrifice, love and hope.

2020 was also a year of anger with millions of people around the world hitting the streets to chant “I can’t breathe” in protest against the murder of George Floyd. Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests in over 60 countries across all seven continents, including Antarctica, raised the issue of racism and systemic inequality up the political agenda. Statues fell, street names changed and national conversations about racism, imperial and colonial legacies filled column inches and TV screens. In Europe BLM protests have often taken on a domestic inflection, reflecting local issues such as the death of Adama Traoré which became a central element of protests in Paris. What started on the streets of Minneapolis in May birthed a global moment of protest.

Unsurprisingly, for the European far right both the global pandemic and the Black Lives Matter protests were seen as opportunities. Though much of the European far-right has failed to exploit the pandemic as much as they hoped, it has ushered in a new age of conspiracy theories as people seek comfort in simple and monocausal explanations for a world seemingly out of control. Huge anti-lockdown and conspiracy theory demonstrations have been seen across Europe with especially large events in London and Berlin. The long-term effects of this are hard to quantify but there is certainly a danger that conspiracy theory communities online are providing new trajectories of radicalization, especially towards more overtly antisemitic conspiracy theories. When it comes to BLM, the European far-right has erupted in conniptions, rejecting any discussion of racist societies and in some cases, pivoting towards increasingly overt racial politics, a tactic that is unlikely to pay dividends for them in the long term.

Amongst the chaos and tragedy however, there have been moments of genuinely good news. In October, after a trial lasting more than five years, the leadership of the Greek neo-Nazi party Golden Dawn were found guilty of running a criminal organisation. In 2012 shockwaves were felt across the continent as the party secured 18 MPs amidst the turmoil of the financial crisis. However, following the murder of an anti-fascist in 2013 a criminal enquiry began, though many held little hope it would have the huge ramifications it has. Golden Dawn’s leader Nikos Michaloliakos and six senior colleagues were convicted of heading a criminal organisation, Giorgos Roupakias was found guilty of murder and fifteen others were convicted of conspiracy. The trial has decimated one of the most dangerous neo-Nazi organisations on the continent, though the threat of extreme right violence in Greece remains.

November saw more good news as Donald Trump lost the Presidential election to Joe Biden and Kamala Harris, the highest-ranking female elected official in American history. The result was a major setback for the European far-right, much of which had closely aligned themselves to him, especially the far-right regimes in Poland and Hungary. However, now is not the time for complacency. Over seventy-four million American’s still voted for him in 2020. They voted for him after he called the neo-nazis and fascists at Charlottesville “very fine people”; after he imposed a Muslim travel ban; after he withdrew from the Paris Agreement on climate change; after he retweeted anti-Muslim videos from the deputy leader of Britain First and after he separated migrant children from their parents. Trump may have lost but there are millions of people in America and around the world that still agree with him. His defeat is a welcome setback and further proof that the rise of the right is not inevitable or undefeatable but across large parts of the globe societies are still moving away from liberal, progressive and democratic norms and towards fragmented, divided and anti-egalitarian societies. The pillars of liberal democracy continue to wobble.

The year came to an end with the United Kingdom finally fulfilling the promise of Brexit by leaving the Customs Union and the Single Market on 31 December 2020. The causes of Brexit were complex and by no means all far-right but anti-immigrant sentiment played a key role and it no doubt buoyed much of the European far-right. In the UK the far-right has already shifted its attention towards

anti-migrant and anti-Chinese politics but for much of Europe the far-right will continue to wrestle with their own changing attitudes towards the European Union in the coming years.

## AN INTERNATIONAL FAR-RIGHT

It is important to state from the outset that any overview of the European far right will necessarily talk in broad terms. This is especially important to understand when talking about the contemporary online far right. While it remains important to explore trends in traditional far right organisations such as political parties, the modern far-right is currently undergoing a broader and more fundamental shift; namely the emergence of a transnational and post-organisational threat. The European far-right scene today is a mixture of formalised far-right political parties, such as the Sweden Democrats, Vox in Spain, Lega in Italy and the AfD in Germany, and a series of looser, transnational far-right movements comprised of a disparate array of individuals collectively but not formally collaborating.

In the age of the internet we have seen the emergence of disparate movements such as the anti-Muslim ‘counter-jihad’ movement and the international alt-right. While all these groupings have formal organisations within them, they are often post-organisational. Thousands of individuals, all over the world, offer micro-donations of time and sometimes money to collaborate towards common political goals, completely outside traditional organisational structures. These movements lack formal leaders but rather have figureheads, often drawn from an increasing selection of far-right social media ‘influencers’. For most of the post-war period, ‘getting active’ required finding a party, joining, canvassing, knocking on doors, distributing leaflets and attending meetings. Now, from the comfort and safety of their own homes, far-right activists can engage in politics by watching YouTube videos, visiting far right websites, networking on forums, speaking on voice chat services like Discord and trying to convert ‘normies’ on mainstream social media platforms like Twitter and Facebook. The fact that this can all be done anonymously greatly lowers the social cost of activism.

These new movements are best understood as a many-headed hydra. If one prominent activist or leader falls from grace, it is no longer a fatal hammer blow; others will simply emerge and the besmirched are discarded. Of fundamental importance is that these movements are genuinely transnational. While activists will generally be primarily preoccupied with local or national issues, they invariably contextualise them continentally or even globally. Often activists from all over the world come together for short periods to collaborate on certain issues and these loose networks act as synapses passing information around the globe. An Islamophobe in one country outraged by the serving of halal chicken in their



The London Black Lives Matter peaceful protest starting in Hyde Park on 3.6.20, in support of the USA's protests for BLM, sparked by the death of George Floyd, and to fight for the eradication of racism in UK police and society. Photo: Katie Crampton (WMUK)

local fast-food restaurant can post on social media and the story will spread through the network. If picked up by a ‘supersharer’ (an especially influential activist with a large social media following) that local story will be picked up by likeminded Islamophobes all over the world and act as more ‘evidence’ and further convince them of the threat of ‘Islamification’.

If we are to truly understand the contemporary far right, we must therefore change our thinking. We live in a shrinking world: be it in our own community, our own country, continent or globe, we are interconnected like never before. Our ability to travel, communicate and cooperate across borders would have been inconceivable just a generation ago and while these opportunities are by no means distributed evenly, they have opened up previously impossible chances for progress and development. Yet greater interconnectivity has also produced new challenges. The tools at our disposal to build a better, fairer, more united and collaborative world are also in the hands of those who are using them to sow division and hatred around the world. If we want to understand the dangers posed by the politics of hatred and division we can no longer just look at our street, our community or even our country, we must think beyond political parties, formal organisations and even national borders. As such, all of the phenomenon discussed in this report should be understood as occurring to different extents in different parts of the European far-right, meaning both formal far-right organisations and post-organisational movements.



# SECTION 1: POLLING





# POLLING: ATTITUDES ACROSS EUROPE

**Nick Lowles**

**In a year dominated by the Covid-19 pandemic, Europeans are generally supportive of tight lockdown rules, even if they have little trust in their political systems and deep suspicion towards minorities.**

These are the findings of an eight-country poll carried out for HOPE not hate by YouGov and DataPraxis at the end of 2020. Over 12,000 people were polled in France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Netherlands, Poland, Sweden and the UK.

## THE FORTUNES OF THE FAR RIGHT DURING THE PANDEMIC

The far right has had mixed fortunes politically during 2020, with those in Government having a sharp drop in support, while others have benefited from unpopular Government responses to Covid-19 or exploited non-Covid related issues.

In Italy, the far right Brothers of Italy is now at 12% in the polls, double the vote it obtained in the 2018 General Election, while in Sweden, where crime is above health in voters' concerns, and immigration is the third most salient issue, the far right Swedish Democrats are now on 21%, compared to the 16% it polled in the 2018 election.

In France, our polling shows Marine Le Pen leading President Macron by 2.2% (17.4% v 15.2%), a reversal

of the 2018 Presidential vote, when Macron took 18.2% in the first round to Le Pen's 16.1%. Le Pen is doing especially well amongst those aged between 30 and 50 amongst whom she is polling above 20%, whilst Macron trails in this age at 11.8%.

Clearly Le Pen is benefiting from the current unpopularity of Macron, both in his handling of the pandemic but also wider economic and political issues. Three out of six French adults think the country is going in the wrong direction, with just 14% believing it is going in the right direction. Two thirds of respondents think the political system is broken, compared to the 25% who think it is working "somewhat well" and just 2% who consider it working "very well".

It is perhaps unsurprising to see the far right topping the polls in France, given that the first four issues of concern for voters are Terrorism, Health, Economy and Immigration.

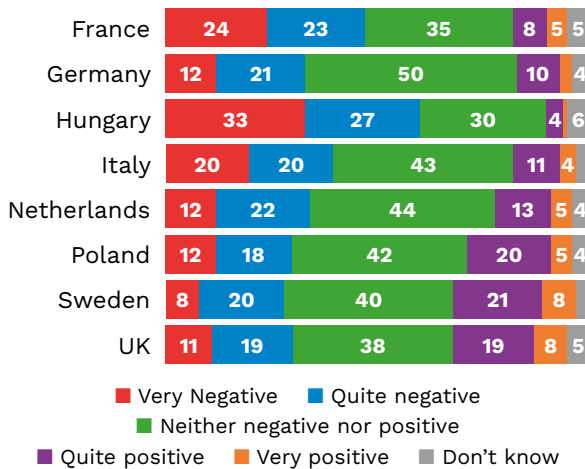
The polling also suggests that Macron's tough response to the recent Islamist attacks have returned little political benefit, and if anything is pushing some of his more liberal voters away.

Far right parties that are in Government however have suffered badly during the pandemic. The ruling Law and Justice Party in Poland is now polling

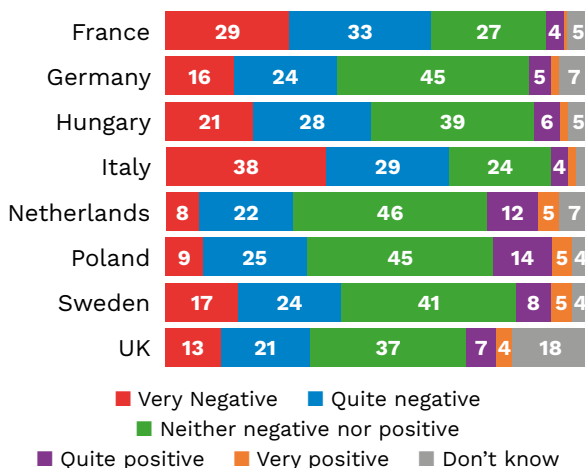
## Key issues

	1ST ISSUE	2ND ISSUE	3RD ISSUE	4TH ISSUE
France	Health	Terrorism	Economy	Immigration
Germany	Health	Immigration	Pensions	Climate
Hungary	Health	Corruption	Cost of living	Unemployment
Italy	Health	Unemployment	Economy	Immigration
Netherlands	Health	Economy	Environment	Immigration / social security
Poland	Health	Economy	National debt	Taxes
Sweden	Crime	Health	Immigration	Social Security
UK	Health	Economy	Unemployment	National debt

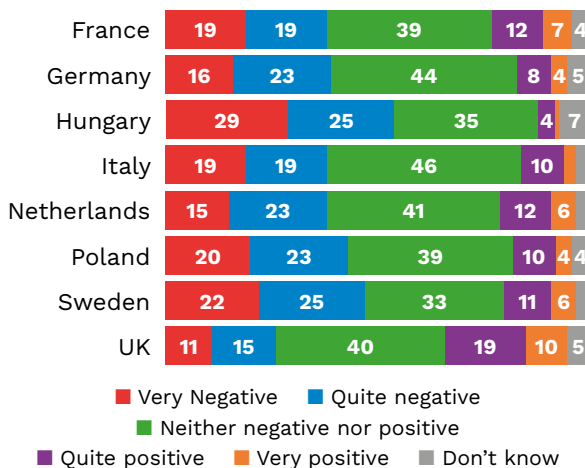
**Do you have a positive or negative view of immigrants?**



**Do you have a positive or negative view of Roma?**



**Do you have a positive or negative view of Muslims?**



18.4%, compared to the 32% it achieved in the 2019 General Election, though Andrzej Duda retained the presidency in July's election.

Similarly, the Five Star Movement, which is more populist than traditional far right, has seen support slip from 28% in 2018 to just 12% now as a consequence of joining the Government and anger at the Government's initial handling of the pandemic.

The more hard right Lega Nord has seen its support slip slightly from 19.3% in 2017 to 16% now, but clearly it remains a significant threat and, as an opposition party, could well gain from a post-Covid economic crisis and frustration at the Government. Interestingly, in contrast to Le Pen, support for the Lega is stronger amongst older people. It is polling 22% amongst 60-69 year olds and 20% for over 70s. Conversely, it has just a 7.8% share of support amongst 18-29 year olds.

Support for the Alternative for Germany (AfD) in Germany is at 10.6%, the same share of the vote it received in the last national elections in 2017. Interestingly though, only 61% of those who voted for the AfD in 2017 say that they plan to vote for the party in a new national election, with slightly more voters deserting to parties on the left than parties on the right. However, the new voters it is attracting are more likely to come from parties on the political right. The AfD receives 14% of the male vote, but just 7% of the female vote.

## COVID REACTION

Most voters in our eight polled European countries have rallied around their Governments during the Covid-19 pandemic, which is perhaps understandable given the severity of the virus, the fear it has spread and the general political consensus the lockdowns have created. The one exception is probably with the AfD in Germany, which has aligned itself closer to the anti-lockdown movement than many other far right groups across the continent.

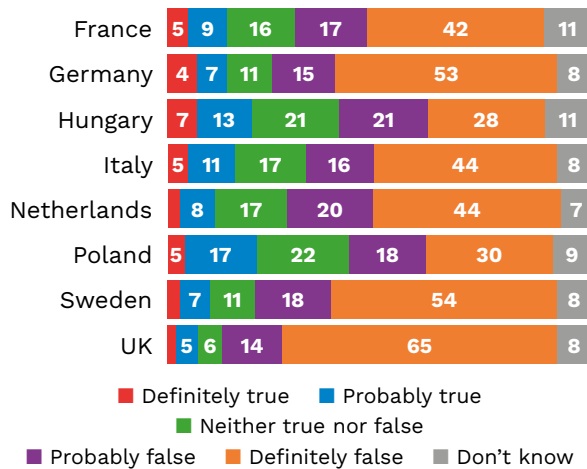
Most people have been supportive of the lockdown measures implemented in their respective countries, with 64% backing Government measures in Germany and just 13% opposing them.

Even in Italy, where the Government was widely criticised for its handling of the pandemic in the initial stages, 59% of people support the latest lockdown policies introduced by the Government and just 20% oppose them. The gap is even bigger in Sweden, where 72% approve of the Government's lockdown measures, compared to just 12% who are in opposition.

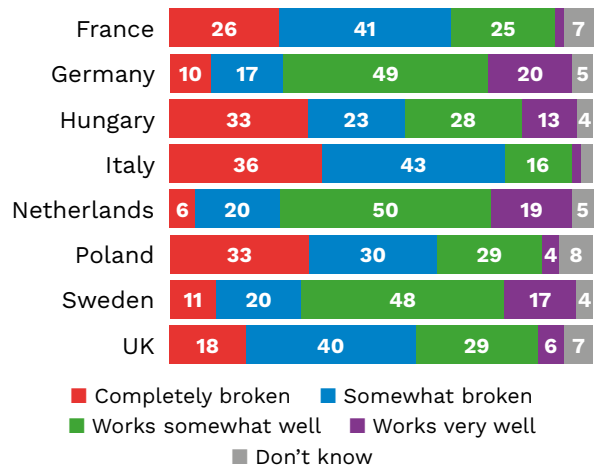
Two thirds of Britons back the lockdown measures, though we know from other polling that almost the same number think the British Government has not handled the pandemic well.

The question though is, how long will this support continue and whether any decline corresponds with an upsurge in anti-Government sentiment.

### A covid-19 vaccine will be used maliciously to infect people with poison



### Does the political system works well or is it broken?



## POLITICAL SYSTEM

While there might be support for lockdown measures, there is a deep sense of unease in many countries about the state of their political system and the direction of their country is going in. This could point to trouble ahead, especially once the pandemic has been bought under control.

Two-thirds of people in France think that their political system is broken, whilst 59% think the country is going in the wrong direction, with just 14% thinking it is going in a good direction.

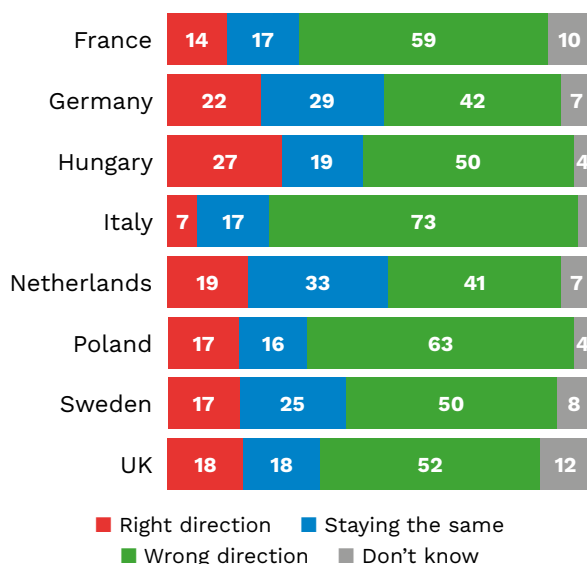
The Italians are even more pessimistic about the state of their country, with 79% believing that their political system is broken and only 2.2% thinking it works “very well” and a further 16% who

think it works “somewhat well”. Three quarters of respondents in our Italian poll believe things are getting worse in their country, with just 7% thinking they are getting better. Young people are marginally more optimistic than those over 70.

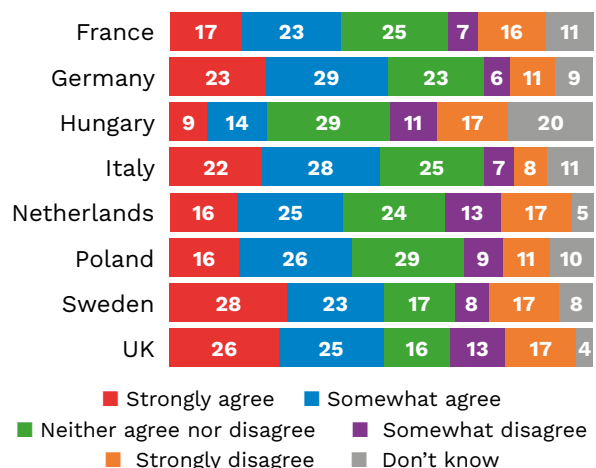
By contrast, at the other end of the spectrum, only 6% of Dutch respondents believed that their political system was completely broken, with a further 20% believing it is “somewhat broken”. Two thirds of Dutch people think the political system works well, with 19% saying it works “very well” and 50% believing it works “fairly well”.

Germany is another country which appears to have a robust and resilient democracy. Seven out of ten voters think the political system works well, with only 26% thinking it is either “completely” or

### Direction of country



### I sympathise with the Black Lives Matter protests in highlighting racism and discrimination experienced by minority communities



“somewhat” broken. Perhaps unsurprisingly, 60% of those who voted AfD in the last national elections believe that the political system is broken.

With key national elections due this Autumn in Germany, the strength of the country’s democracy means that the far right appears to have little room to really grow.

Attitudes in Poland follow political lines. While 42% of Law and Justice voters think the country is going in the right direction, two and a half times the national average, few who voted for opposition parties think likewise. Only 2% of those who voted for the Civil Coalition, 3% who voted for the Left and 4% who backed Coalition Poland, think the country is going in the right direction.

## ATTITUDE TO MINORITIES

Attitudes towards minorities are poor across all eight countries surveyed. We asked respondents whether they had positive or negative attitudes towards immigrants, Roma and Muslims and the results were overwhelmingly negative.

Two-thirds of Italians (67%) and 62% of French respondents have negative views towards Roma people, followed by Hungary (49%) and Sweden (41%). Only 6% of French and Italian people have a positive attitude.

Respondents in Poland have the least hostile attitudes, with 19% having a positive view of Roma, but that is still some way behind the 33% who have negative views. Likewise, 17% of Dutch respondents have a positive attitude, while 30% have a negative attitude.

There are strongly negative attitudes towards Roma in Germany, with 40% having a negative attitude and just 7% having a positive attitude.

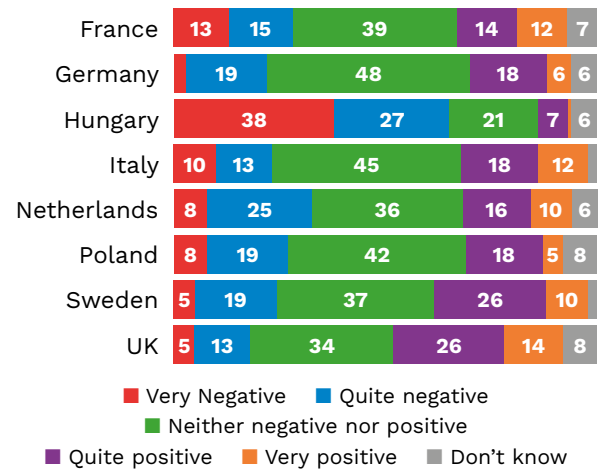
Almost one in five British respondents did not have a view, which probably reflects the relatively small Roma community in the country. However, of those who did elicit an opinion, 35% had negative views and only 10% positive.

When it comes to attitudes towards immigrants, Hungarians have the least positive views, with 61% having a negative view and only 4% holding positive attitudes. Only 13% of respondents in both France and Germany had positive attitudes to immigrants, with negative views at 47% and 33% respectively.

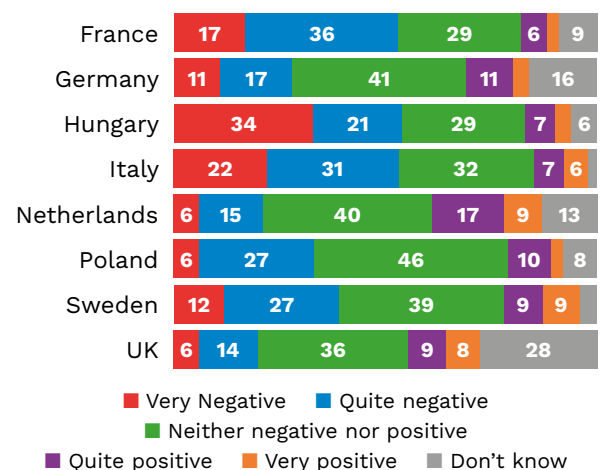
Sweden has the least hostile attitude to immigrants, with 29% having a negative view and 28% a positive view. Poland, with its relatively low levels of immigration, is also quite balanced, with 30% having negative views and 25% positive views.

When it comes to attitudes towards Muslims, the UK has the most positive and the least negative. Thirty per cent of Britons have a positive attitude compared to 26% who have a negative attitude. A further 40% have neither negative or positive attitudes.

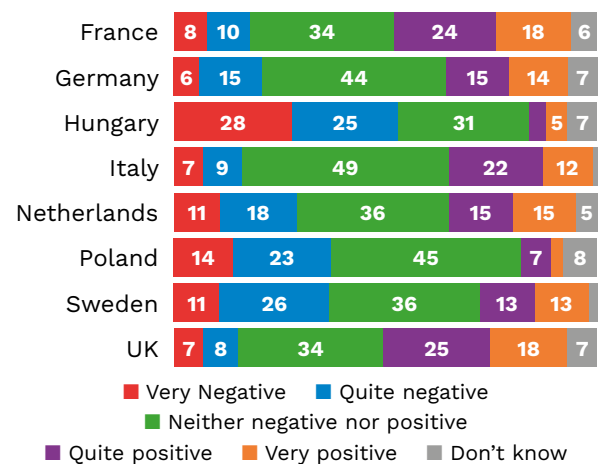
### Do you have a positive or negative attitude towards immigrants (18-29 yr olds)



### Do you have a positive or negative attitude towards Roma (18-29 yr olds)



### Do you have a positive or negative attitude towards Muslims (18-29 yr olds)



Hungarians (52%) once again have the most negative attitudes, followed by Sweden (47%) and Poland (43%).

In Germany, 39% of people have a negative attitude, compared to just 12% who have a positive view. In Italy the attitudes are 38% and 14% respectively, while in France they are 34% and 19%. Over twice as many Dutch people have negative attitudes to positive attitudes.

## BLACK LIVES MATTER

While attitudes towards minorities are poor, many people across our eight polled countries have sympathy with the Black Lives Matter protests in highlighting racism and discrimination experienced by minority communities. In Germany (52%), Sweden (51%) and the UK (51%), this sentiment shared by a majority of people, with just 17%, 25% and 30% having little or no sympathy respectively.

The country polled with the least sympathy was Hungary, where just 23% sympathised with the protests. However, 50% of people either did not have an opinion one way or another or didn't know.

More voters in France, the Netherlands, Poland and Italy sympathised with the BLM protests than did not, but in none of them this went above 50%. It should be noted though that in all countries there were high levels of people who did not have a firm view or said they did not know.

There are some interesting age and gender differences between countries. In Poland, where 42% of people have some degree of sympathy, young people and men are more sympathetic than older people and women. In Germany, there is little difference between age groups or gender, while in Italy, it is younger people and women who are more sympathetic.

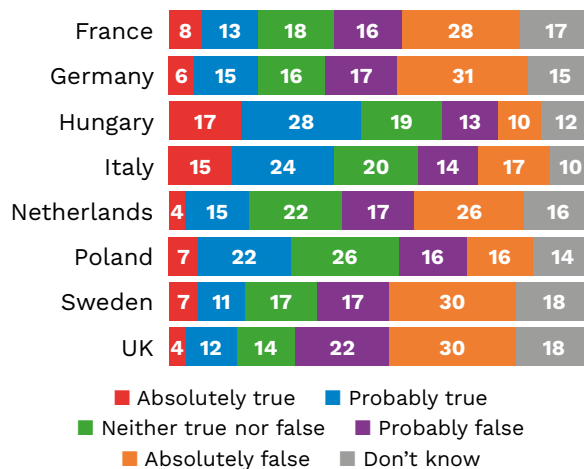
## GENDER AND FEMINISM

We also asked respondents whether they agreed or disagreed with the statement: "It is feminism's fault that some men feel at the margins of society and demonized." The results varied dramatically across the eight countries. Italy was the country where fewest people agreed with this statement, with only 4% definitely agreeing and a further 9% tending to agree. By contrast, 45% of people strongly disagreeing and a further 20% somewhat disagreeing.

Surprisingly, the country where more people agreed with this statement was Sweden, where 15% of respondents definitely agreed and a further 26% somewhat agreed. Only 22% of people disagreed with the statement.

What's even more remarkable with the Swedish results are the attitudes of young people. Fifteen percent of 18-29 year olds definitely agreed with the statement, whilst 14% of the same age group definitely did not. By contrast, only 6.2% of 18-

### Elites are encouraging immigration as part of a plot to weaken Europe



29 year olds in the UK definitely agreed with the statement, while 38% definitely did not.

Once again, a large number of people in the polls neither agreed or disagreed, or did not know. In France 39% of people did not have a firm view one way or the other, while in Hungary this figure was 52%.

As a general rule, people who vote for far right and centre right parties are more likely to agree with this statement than those who vote for left wing or centre left parties. In Germany, 19% of AfD voters strongly agreed, while fewer than 2% of Green voters agreed. Conversely, only 14% of AfD strongly disagree, compared to 46% of Green voters.

## CONSPIRACY THEORIES

Attitudes to conspiracy theories vary greatly from country to country, and often depend on whether the issue taps into existing concerns and prejudices. In Hungary, where President Orban has riled against EU interference and the dangers immigration pose to European identity, 45% agree that elites are encouraging immigration to weaken Europe. Likewise in Italy, where there has been political anger at the refusal of the EU to provide greater support for immigration issues, 39% agreed to the same statement.

Age is a key determiner. Half of Italian voters over 70 believe this (compared to 23% of 18-29 year olds), as do 38% of elderly Poles (as opposed to 22% amongst younger Poles). However, in Hungary views are fairly consistent across age groups, with 40% of those over 70 and 38% of 18-29 years believing this. In France, almost twice as many older people believe this compared to younger people, but in Sweden, the situation is reversed, with slightly more young people believing elites are encouraging immigration to weaken Europe than older people.



The vast majority of respondents in all eight countries dismiss the notion that the Covid-19 vaccine will be maliciously used to infect people with poison. However, 22% of Poles, 20% of Hungarians and 16% of Italians do believe this to be the case. Only 48% of Poles believe this claim to be “probably” or “definitely” false. In the UK, by contrast, only 7% believe poison will be infected via the Covid-19 vaccine.

The UK also has the highest proportion of people (79%) who do not believe that the vaccine will be maliciously infected with poison, followed by Sweden (71%) and Germany (68%). Fewer than 50% of people dismiss the notion of poison in both Hungary and Poland.

In most countries there is a clear age difference, with young people more likely to believe in the Covid-vaccine conspiracy theory compared to older people. Of course this is not really a surprise, given that older people are both more likely to be at serious risk from Covid-19 and engage with social media – where these conspiracies are spread – less than younger people.

There is also a clear political slant, with those who voted for far right parties much more likely to believe in the Covid-vaccine conspiracy. One in five AfD voters in Germany believe in the conspiracy, compared to 2% of Greens and 4% of Left voters.

In Sweden, 14% of Sweden Democrats buy into the conspiracy, compared to just 7% of Swedish Democrats. In Italy, where middle-aged people are more likely to believe in to the poison conspiracy than the young or old, the figure is 20% amongst Lega voters, compared to 7% amongst Democratic Party voters.

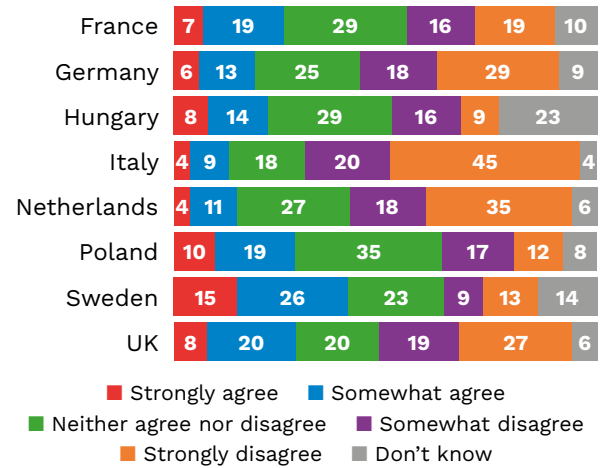
There is much larger support for the claim that ‘Hollywood’s elite, governments, media and other high officials are covertly involved in large-scale child smuggling and exploitation’, one of the key claims of QAnon followers. A third of respondents in Poland believe this claim to be definitely or probably true, while only 27% think it is false. In Germany, 21% believe this statement to be true, compared to 48% who think it is false.

## CONCLUSION

The Covid-19 pandemic has pushed much of the normal political debate to the side-lines across Europe and as a result many far right parties are struggling to cut through on their traditionally strong issues such as immigration, multiculturalism and national identity. However, the negative attitudes towards minorities, coupled with the widespread pessimism and distrust at their political systems, shows that there remains strong potential for far right support once political normality returns.

With the economic consequences from the pandemic likely to see rises in unemployment and reduction in state spending in most European

### Feminism is responsible for the feeling of marginalization and demonization experienced by some men in society



countries, opposition far right parties – with their populist, nationalist and anti-minority message – could well benefit.

If 2020 was dominated by the pandemic, 2021 could be the year of the economic fallout. And that could pose problems and challenges for us all.

## METHODOLOGY

A set of questions were asked for Hope Not Hate by Datapraxis and YouGov within a large public opinion poll within 8 European countries in late November and early December 2020.

The poll was conducted online in the following countries: Great Britain (n = 2,031), France (n = 1,013), Germany (n = 2,060), Hungary (n=1,001), Italy (n=2,017), Netherlands (n = 1,005), Poland (n = 1,002), and Sweden (n = 1,010).

The samples were constructed to be politically and nationally representative samples. Polling occurred between the 20th of November and the 7th of December. The exact dates for each country are: Great Britain (24-25 Nov), France (25-26 Nov), Germany (25-27 Nov), Hungary (24 Nov – 2 Dec), Italy (24 Nov – 3 Dec), Netherlands (24 Nov – 2 Dec), Poland (24 Nov – 7 Dec), and Sweden (24-27 Nov).

For Great Britain, the politically and nationally representative sample is representative of the countries of England, Scotland, and Wales. Northern Ireland was not surveyed as a part of the study.

## SECTION 2: COVID-19 AND THE EUROPEAN FAR-RIGHT

A QAnon flag alongside Reichsbürger flags, Berlin, 29 August 2020.  
Photo: Amadeu Antonio Stiftung



# THE EUROPEAN FAR RIGHT AND THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

**A Special Report by Safya Khan-Ruf**

When the Black Death rolled over the continent in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, it eradicated 30 to 50 per cent of Europe's population. The social consequence of that plague was blaming certain ethnic groups for creating, spreading or surviving the disease. Since Jews appeared to be dying in fewer numbers, it resulted in them being tortured and killed across Europe for "spreading the disease".<sup>1</sup> The COVID-19 pandemic has dominated the news since the start of 2020, exposing cracks in government policies, causing divisions between politicians and re-establishing national borders within Europe. There have been over a 1.5 million covid-related deaths worldwide in 2020, and more than 70 million cases. Europe alone accounts for around 400,000 deaths since the first one was recorded in France on 15 February 2020, with the United Kingdom accounting for one of the highest number of deaths in Europe.

Citizens across the world have grown increasingly worried about the consequences of the coronavirus. The impact of the on-going pandemic is only beginning to show itself, with the full economic devastation predicted ensuring fertile grounds for the far right. Researchers have pointed to a host of catalysts at individual and societal level that contribute to radicalisation<sup>2</sup>. Factors such as personal loss, the psychological burden and the economic instability created by the pandemic provide ideal grounds for far right recruitment.<sup>3</sup> In a similar but much more widespread fashion than the 14<sup>th</sup> century plague, different minorities are being blamed and conspiracy theories about the pandemic abound across both the online and offline world.

The first wave of coronavirus proved deadly, catching European leaders unaware after the majority had ignored expert advice that drastic measures had to be taken. In fact, after the WHO declared a public health emergency, only four countries reported they might lack the protective equipment needed.<sup>4</sup> European nations failed to act in a coordinated manner, hoarding essential equipment, chaotically closing borders leaving stranded citizens abroad

and failing to expand their medical capacities in the initial weeks and months after the virus emerged in China. The urgency only appeared in most European countries in March, and by that time several European Health ministers had already resigned or been replaced, adding to the confusion. Croatian health minister Kujundžić was sacked by the end of January<sup>5</sup>, France's Buzyn quit at the start of <sup>6</sup>, Dutch Medical Care Minister Bruins resigned in March<sup>7</sup> while Romanian Costache resigned at the end of March.<sup>8</sup>

The declining international collaboration, the challenge countries faced in providing services, perceived differences in the quality of the government response as well as the deepening inequalities made evident, all added to the tension caused by the pandemic and impacted the receptiveness of individuals to radical ideology.<sup>9</sup>

There has also been a sharp increase in anti-Asian, anti-Muslim and anti-Semitic hate crimes across the world<sup>10</sup>, emboldened by mainstream and far right rhetoric over the last few months. Online, this has been evident through misinformation campaigns, stigmatising memes and conspiracy theories around COVID-19 and minority groups. The far right have successfully repackaged hateful ideas within new COVID-19 conspiracy theories such as Jews being responsible for creating the pandemic or Muslims spreading the virus intentionally. They have also attempted to insert themselves within growing movements such as the anti-mask and anti-lockdown protests. The last few months has also seen rhetoric against open European borders, the global elite and the danger of immigrants surge in the context of COVID-19.

## THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON THE FAR RIGHT IN EUROPE

The global pandemic has had a seismic effect across the continent. It is of course too soon to definitively say what the effect on the far right will be as things are still in flux. There are also large differences across the continent and the far right has been





Children with signs at an anti-lockdown demonstration, Trafalgar Square, London, 26 September 2020. Photo: HOPE not hate

impacted differently across Europe, depending on the politics of the country, the government's reaction to the pandemic and the power the far right group had established before COVID-19. In the short term there have been both positives and negatives but the far right generally failed to capitalise on the pandemic. Most European governments enjoyed a surge in popularity as the public initially rallied in solidarity and unity in the face of the virus. However, this faded in several countries as a second lockdown was instated. The long-term effects of the pandemic have also made some communities more susceptible to the far right.

Unlike previous European flash points such as the refugee crisis of 2015/2016 or the financial crisis of 2008, the far right did not enjoy an immediate rise in popularity over the course of the year 2020 and across the continent. Despite the political squabbling over masks and the every-country-for-itself approach to COVID-19 in the first months, the populist and Eurosceptic elements of the far right were often unsuccessful in dominating the narrative. Many of the far right parties failed to respond coherently, or with internal unity and took time to

develop a new message. Attempts at rallying support against immigration for example, did not succeed in capturing the public mood.

The pandemic has shifted migration rhetoric to include the risk to individual health, but the virus has not spread across Europe through the typical refugee and migratory routes. Instead, while far right politicians were calling for closing ports in Italy, COVID-19 had already created clusters throughout the country. This has weakened the far right's message associating safety with refusing immigrants. The fact that European countries did exactly what the far right has been calling for and shut down borders in March 2020 also removed an important rallying point for far right politicians. Their flailing strategies became more focused as the months went by however, and researchers have seen a dangerous merging of far right activity with more mainstream protests against lockdowns, masks and safety measures. The growing discontent as many governments decided on a second lockdown before Christmas also gave greater ammunition to far right groups, who positioned themselves with discontented citizens.

## **ELECTORAL THREAT AND BEYOND**

The following case studies examine the various similarities and differences in how different far right groups were impacted by the pandemic over the last year. The cases of Germany, Italy, France and Spain are used to illustrate the impact of COVID-19 on far right parties that were not in power when the pandemic began. The far right parties all had slightly different ways of tackling the coronavirus based on regional and political differences, as well as how each government addressed and managed the crisis. This led to non-ruling far right groups standing up for unusual political positions because their nature meant they had to remain anti-ruling-elite and in opposition to the governing party. The far right in Sweden for example, had a government that opted to keep schools and restaurants open. The Sweden democrats therefore could target the high mortality rate that resulted but also urged the government to follow international guidelines instead of trusting the advice of Swedish experts – an about-turn from the usual rhetoric around Swedish exceptionalism. Another outlier was the radical right-wing Swiss People's Party (SVP) in Switzerland, where from the start the SVP acknowledged the threat of COVID-19. In fact, SVP politician Magdalena Martullo-Blocher was the first and only MP to wear a face mask at the start of March and was asked to leave by the president of the national assembly so as to “not disturb” the debates.<sup>11</sup>

## **GERMANY**

When 9 people were shot and killed in shisha lounges in Hanau by an alleged far right attacker, it was only another act of violence in a long list of far right plots recently carried out in Germany. The early 2020 German political scene was dominated by the role of the AfD – the Alternative for Germany – and its influence within the country. Their success in the polls worried the political establishment and the young party – it was launched in 2013 – enjoyed rising popularity using an anti-immigrant, anti-Islam and Eurosceptic platform. A regional election in October 2019 showed they were the second most popular party in Thuringia, beating Merkel's party and receiving more than double the share of votes than what it received five years ago.<sup>12</sup>

While the German government began to mobilise seriously against the pandemic in March, the German far right party downplayed warnings. Following the lead of America's President, Donald Trump, the AfD politicians spoke of the COVID-19 being mild, that it was Chinese hoax and that the government was needlessly agitating the public for its own ends.<sup>13</sup> AfD politician Axel Gehrke, who was the party's spokesperson for health policy until he left the position in October, wrote in late March that the coronavirus was “demonstrably milder than influenza viruses,” and spoke of the “gigantic FAKE of the year.”<sup>14</sup> However, this strategy failed to resonate as the crisis exponentially worsened and the German

public took the government's guidelines seriously. While AfD politicians were tweeting anti-refugee rhetoric, the public seemed to have already switched gears, with COVID-19 being the ultimate focus. Speeches about the outside invader refugee were no longer on the political agenda when the virus was within Germany already.

The AfD did a U-turn in April and published a policy paper,<sup>15</sup> switching to criticising the government for reacting too slowly to the pandemic. They claimed a shutdown could have been avoided with earlier reactions from the authorities and that the measures taken breached human rights. However, Angela Merkel's scientific, evidence-based and no-nonsense approach proved popular with the German people while the AfD's lack of coherent messaging began losing them points in the polls. The AfD's messaging around the elite not serving the voters did not ring true as the German government was lauded for its strong decisive actions against the virus, both nationally and internationally. From op-eds, social media posts and TV pundits, Merkel's approach to the crisis was seen to be that of a great leader. A Spanish commentator even went so far as coin a word “Merkelina”, to define a leadership that solves problems without attempting to derive political gain from it.<sup>16</sup> German voters also appeared to prefer expert sources for guidance during the crisis. A survey in April showed 80 per cent of the German public approved of the government's actions and Merkel gained significant support in national polls.<sup>17</sup> Even internationally, confidence in the German chancellor was higher than in any other leader, according to a Pew Research Center survey of 14 countries.<sup>18</sup>

The AfD was also experiencing a bitter intra-party fight between moderate and more far right wing elements of it, contributing to the confusion in messaging. The anti-vaccination groups, conspiracy theorists and neo-fascist elements exposed a cleavage within the AfD during the pandemic, and AfD leaders were conscious these elements could alienate more moderate members.

The AfD then decided to focus on positioning themselves, with greater success, as the voice of the people in a time of great economic uncertainty. The International Monetary Fund predicted a global contraction on par with the Great Depression and since May, the AfD have called for the opening of shops and public places.<sup>19</sup> This has since gained significant traction with the general public and evidence of its success was seen internationally on 29 August when far right protesters participated in the storming of the parliament building in Berlin. Hundreds of protesters, some waving the flag of the Third Reich breached security barriers. This was part of a larger protest of 38,000 people demonstrating against the COVID-19 safety policies.<sup>20</sup> Michael Ballweg, the organiser of the protest distanced himself from the storming of the Reichstag. However, the Identitarian movement and two neo-Nazi groups, the National Democratic Party and The Third Way



had called for their members to attend the protest.<sup>21</sup>

The popularity of the protests and the joining of the far right within indicates waning government support as Covid-restriction fatigue settles in. As polls began to show a waning of public approval for the government's restrictions across Europe, the far right have identified an opportunity amidst mounting economic stress. However, the AfD has not regained its public support, with one poll carried by Kantar research institute in October showing that over the year, the AfD dropped from first to third position in eastern Germany – the party's stronghold.<sup>22</sup> Another study shows populism is in decline in Germany,<sup>23</sup> but this only takes into account the opinion of registered voters, not the online world where Germany has for example, the highest number of QAnon believers outside of the United States.<sup>24</sup> There is also no uniform decline in AfD support: In October, Reinhard Etzrodt, an AfD member, was elected chairman of the city council in the third largest city in the state of Thuringia – the first time a far right candidate filled this post since the war.

## ITALY

Italy's outbreak is believed to have started on 25 or 26 January – a German businessman travelling in the country was named "patient zero". The first corona-related death was on 21 February 2020 with Lombardy going into near quarantine two days later.<sup>25</sup> Italy was the first European country to instil a lockdown, shocking neighbouring countries that were still underestimating the threat of the pandemic and were reluctant to shut down. Following the pattern across Europe, Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte enjoyed an initial surge in approval ratings while the far right Lega party lost some support. Part of their failure could be attributed to the fact that the live rallies Lega thrived on were banned due to the social distancing rules.

Italy's far right fell under similar trouble as Germany's, with mixed messaging and an inability to read the public's mood. Lega began the pandemic as Italy's strongest party, focused on nativist, anti-immigration and anti-EU rhetoric. Lega's leader, Matteo Salvini, first called for Lombardy to be re-opened in late February but then changed his mind and called for a full lockdown a few days later. An Ipsos poll in Italy showed a 9 per cent decrease in the party's popularity compared to 2019.<sup>26</sup> The results of the regional elections showed voters were focused on the efficiency of the regional government in managing the crisis, so results were not the same across Lega-dominated regions. The Lega-dominated Lombardy region was criticised for its poor handling of the crisis, as the messaging was divided between pushing for a total lockdown to stop the virus and opening up businesses to please the local voters. On the other hand, the Lega governor in Veneto, Luca Zaia, was praised during the crisis for his management that kept hospital admissions down.

When Italians headed to the polls on 20 September, it was the first Italian regional election in the

pandemic-changed political landscape. Lega failed to unseat the ruling coalition in Emilia-Romagna, seen as a key election target. The Italian coalition government consists of the centre-left Democratic Party (DP) and the populist Five Star Movement since the Lega party broke away in the hope of triggering another election.

There was however a landslide victory by a right-wing extremist candidate in Marche, a region previously governed by centre-left parties. Francesco Acquaroli represented an alliance between Lega, Forza Italia and the Fratelli d'Italia (FDI). The FDI party, which includes neo-Nazis, fascists and members of the Identitarian movement, is emerging as a strong contender to Lega, after Salvini was weakened by leaving the ruling coalition party. The leader of the FDI, Georgia Meloni aims to create a state in the image of Hungary, with a strong authoritarian government prioritising security over freedom. According to one poll, she is the fourth most popular politician in Italy and appears to have gained some of the support Lega has lost.<sup>27</sup> Another poll in late November showed the FDI overtaking the Five Star Movement and reaching 15.5 per cent approval.<sup>28</sup> Already standing out in the male-dominated political scene, Meloni is seen as straight talking by many of her supporters. She follows the example of many on the far right of being very critical of the government's COVID-19 response, positioning herself as the voice of the people and for family-values.<sup>29</sup>

Lega has suffered politically during the pandemic, losing support in the polls as regions they managed suffered from COVID-19, rallies continued to be banned and their flip-flopping messaging failing to instil confidence in uncertain times. However, this has not prevented other far right threats from growing: the Five Star Movement remained relatively stable across the year before dipping towards the end of the year while the FDI has made gains,<sup>30</sup> with Meloni emerging as a challenger to Salvini's previously unquestioned leadership over the far right. The far right has benefitted from the failure of the EU to support Italy and to present themselves as the ultimate defenders of the country. Meloni has repeatedly used strong language to criticise the political establishment, which she accused of getting down on its knees "to lick the feet of the French and Germans".<sup>31</sup>

Conte's government faced increased disapproval towards the end of the year, as Italians criticised his COVID-19 strategies. Perhaps surprisingly, the far right backed the Italian government's request to raise more money to cover additional measures aimed at protecting the economy from the ravages of the coronavirus. The support at the end of November meant the authorisation needed to borrow a further 8 billion euros went through both houses of parliament easily. The opposition was organised by former prime minister Silvio Berlusconi, head of Forza Italia, who forced Lega and FDI in line and prevent any public disputes in the alliance.

## FRANCE

For the far right, being seen to be anti-government and on the “people’s side” is an essential part of the playbook. A far right party often defines itself in its opposition to the government – doing otherwise would not induce much support – and the pandemic produced mostly predictable actions across Europe. The case of France particularly illustrates far right criticism of government. While initially applauding the closing of borders in March and suggesting the president had understood his errors, June saw Marine Le Pen, leader of France’s far right National Rally party publish a “black book” about COVID-19, a scathing review of the government’s mishandling of the pandemic and how President Emmanuel Macron had lied to the public. This echoes the public’s anger with how the government has handled the crisis. French families who have lost loved ones to COVID-19 have already filed complaints against officials for failing to protect the public.<sup>32</sup>

Le Pen’s actions could be explained by unfavourable polling data: at the start of April, only a bit more than a fifth of the French public had a positive impression of her.<sup>33</sup> Macron’s lack of popularity was also proven with the April municipal elections, which were not cancelled despite the pandemic. The elections had record levels of abstentions – 55.36 per cent – due to the number of coronavirus cases, which was then doubling every four days.<sup>34</sup> The results of the first round were inconclusive but showed Macron’s party was performing poorly,



Marine Le Pen Photo: Jérémy-Günther-Heinz Jähnck

finishing third or fourth in major cities such as Paris. Meanwhile, the National Rally’s Steeve Briois won by a landslide in Hénin-Beaumont. Le Pen touted this region as a model of COVID-19 management.

A day later, Macron announced a full lockdown and the postponement of the second round of the municipal elections. His actions were precipitated by the entire political class, unanimously calling for focus on the pandemic. Le Pen was amongst those calling for a strict lockdown and has described Macron as a king-like figure using smokes and mirrors to rule.<sup>35</sup> Macron’s reputation had critics nickname him “emperor” or “Napoleon” even before the pandemic started, describing his imperial style of governing from the top. Polls also showed a loss of confidence in the government, and a growing sense of anger. There are dozens of legal complaints against public officials for failure to protect the public.<sup>36</sup> A poll at the end of March 2020 showed 65 per cent believed the government was not doing enough while 47 per cent reported feeling anger over the management of the crisis. The uptick in government popularity seen across the continent and expected in France was relatively minor.<sup>37</sup> Interestingly, the loss of faith in the government was not accompanied by an upswing for opposition parties, with only 27 per cent of the respondents seeing them as up to the task. More local leaders such as mayors fared better in the polling, with 69 per cent of the respondents feeling confident in their approach.<sup>38</sup>

COVID-19 emergency measures also forced the government to reduce the population of French prisons.<sup>39</sup> However, Marine Le Pen’s criticism over the last few months about the release of prisoners – many of them of foreign origin – and the government’s response to acts of terrorism in Toulouse and Colombes was less successful as immigration and discussions around crime had fallen off the political agenda. When she visited the island of Sein in June, she was booed and the islanders turned their backs on her. Despite this, an Ifop poll published in October showed Macron and Le Pen as neck and neck with other politicians trailing behind, and Le Pen could top the first round of the 2022 French elections.<sup>40</sup>

The beheading of the middle-school teacher Samuel Paty on 16 October by a young man enraged by Paty showing his class caricatures of the Prophet Muhammad as well as the attack in Nice on 29 October by an alleged migrant, switched the national conversation to radicalisation and immigration for a few weeks. Le Pen and her associates pushed hard with the usual rhetoric on immigration and Islam, calling for example for the banning of headscarves. However this was less successful due to the French government’s increasingly right-wing bills on security, Muslims and protests. According to critics, Macron’s strategy for the next elections appears to be to co-opt enough of the language and policies suggested by the far right in order to defeat it at the polls.<sup>41</sup> Despite the attacks, COVID-19 remains

fixed at the top of the agenda as France reluctantly entered another lockdown in November. However the mounting unemployment, frustration with shutdowns and risk of further terrorist attacks can only strengthening the far right in the long term.

## SPAIN

Spain's long history of right-wing dictatorship has slowed the growth of far right and populist political groups. However, more recently, the radical right wing party Vox emerged and within a short period of time acquired a significant presence in parliament. Vox has positioned itself over the last few years as the defender of the poorer regions in Spain such as Andalusia. The party leader, Santiago Abascal, using the 'make Spain great again' slogan, often writes about the political elite and separatist politicians that 'hate the idea of Spain'. His self-declared aim is to restore national pride and stand firmly against the EU, which he sees as a threat to Spain's sovereignty.

However, Vox's political rhetoric has not fared well under COVID-19. Rich regions such as Catalonia have had significantly more deaths than poorer southern regions such as Andalusia. With the closing of international borders and Muslims forced to halt religious rituals associated to Ramadan and Eid, two of Vox's primary rhetorical targets were missing their mark in the early stages of the pandemic.

Spain was hit particularly hard by COVID-19, but its government has not shared Merkel's level of success in Germany in handling the crisis. By mid April, nearly 23,000 fatalities had occurred, focused on Madrid and Catalonia, the economic heartlands of the country.<sup>42</sup> A poll in early April showed more than two thirds of the Spanish population had the impression that the government was not up to the challenge.<sup>43</sup> Even more thought that the country's main opposition party, the Partido Popular, was worse. By mid-April, public confidence in the way the government handled the crisis had somewhat improved. By the end of April, polls made it clear that while Spaniards did not have great confidence in their government, they were looking for political unity and this helped solidify the mainstream centrist parties.<sup>44</sup> When Vox held a no-confidence motion against Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez in October, it was overwhelmingly rejected, with opposition leader Pablo Casado from the conservative Popular Party (PP) lambasting VOX for "wasting everybody's time".<sup>45</sup>

While the Spanish media and the public have been vocal in its criticism of the government and the European Union, it has not helped Vox according to the polls. One poll published in Publico in late April showed Vox fell noticeably, reversing the steady climb it had experienced with the November 2019 general elections.<sup>46</sup> This is perhaps due to their early actions to COVID-19. Vox held a mass meeting in early March, and the party's Secretary General, Javier Ortega Smith, tested positive for the virus. Actions such as blaming China for propagating a secret

lab-grown virus also backfired as a poll showed two thirds of the respondents agreed that hoaxes on social media should be prohibited.<sup>47</sup>

## EU SOLIDARITY AND BORDERS

The European Union's reputation has not fared well during the course of the pandemic. Governments failed to band together to produce a coherent response, while politicians ignored expert warnings that the virus was unlikely to be contained. EU leaders were also overly focused on the deteriorating situation with Turkey at the start of 2020, missing the severity of the impending pandemic. The 2016 EU-Turkey deal, which promised a 6-billion euros aid-package for Turkey in exchange for keeping refugees within its territory, collapsed in February and tens of thousands of migrants and refugees had coalesced at the Turkish-Greek border.

Italy closing down its borders was the first real sign that leaders understood the radical measures that needed to be taken. One of the errors seen across Europe was politicians underestimating the deadliness and rapidity with which the virus was spreading – perhaps because China had managed to suppress the huge epidemic in Wuhan in over just seven weeks.<sup>48</sup> In fact, when the WHO declared a public health emergency, only four countries reported they might be short of the protective equipment needed.<sup>49</sup> While governments were slowly grappling with the enormity of the impact of the pandemic, there was little cooperation and solidarity across borders. When Italy asked neighbouring countries for aid at the end of February 2020, no other EU member stepped up, seeing Italy's overburdened hospitals and focussed on their own dire circumstances. On 10 **March**, the Italian ambassador, Maurizio Massari, published an op-ed criticising the lack of solidarity being shown.<sup>50</sup>

In fact, COVID-19 at the start of March was still discussed at EU-level as an external threat, instead of one that had crossed the borders months ago. European citizens then watched with increasing panic as EU member states publicly argued about protective equipment, with Germany applying a ban on exporting any equipment to other countries for example. The disorganised actions taken across March would only get worse as ministers complained about becoming aware of policy news in the press. At international level, the US and European countries were also competing to acquire the medical equipment, with poorer countries losing out to wealthier ones in the bidding wars and accusations of "modern piracy" being thrown around. Despite this, by the start of March, governments were still reluctant to impose a lockdown and ban cultural events so the Women's Day march on 8 March still took place in Spain. The slow reaction time to the pandemic's seriousness was then coupled with anxiety and divisions over financial policies, and whether countries will be able to bounce back from the economical devastation of 2020.



While the far right was also taken by surprise, and in several cases, criticised their governments for even initiating lockdown, the unfolding chaos at EU level was grasped at eagerly, a convenient target for public frustration and fear. It is important to note that despite the slow response at EU level, public health is not under its purview.

Mateusz Marzoch, leader of the ‘Młodzież Wszechpolska’ or All-Polish Youth, a self-described ‘nationalist’ youth organisation and descendant of ultranationalist groups active in Poland the 1930s, said the EU had been unmasked by the pandemic, a ‘union’ undone by the hoarding of medical supplies. “After COVID-19, disappointment with the European Union and globalisation will increase,” he told BIRN. “I think people will realise that they don’t need the European Union,” said Marzoch. “What they need is a strong national government, a strong country that can protect them when danger comes, when something threatens them.”<sup>51</sup>

Another far right target was the deep division created around the economic impact. Spain, Italy and France supported the issuing of “coronabonds”, or a common debt instrument to fight the effects of the outbreak. This was rejected by Germany, the Netherlands, Finland and Austria – northern states more wary of joining liabilities with the southern states. This renewed tensions and soured support for the EU within the South. A Spanish poll in April showed half of the respondents felt “less European” than before the crisis and 90 per cent agreed the EU was doing little or nothing to help countries hit by COVID-19.<sup>52</sup>

Spain’s Vox party pushed for “climate emergency” funds at EU-level to be used to deal with COVID-19 and accused the EU of being subservient to a “globalist ideology”.<sup>53</sup> During the “coronabond” peak, a Vox party representative even accused the EU of being subservient to China.<sup>54</sup> FDI leader Georgia Meloni in Italy, also called out the EU: “When the coronavirus was just an Italian problem it didn’t interest anyone in the European Union. When we had the first red zones in Lombardy, Ursula von der Leyen was with Greta Thunberg. They only did things when the virus arrived in Germany.”<sup>55</sup> In France, the National Rally said they had warned against globalisation and the lack of protective medical equipment was linked to outsourcing industry. The head of the National Rally delegation to the European parliament, Nicolas Bay, called the EU “powerless”, that it had not “anticipated” the crisis and failed to do anything about it once it was informed.<sup>56</sup> Italy’s Lega and Spain’s Vox party condemned the EU for failing to respond appropriately, but also for the lack of solidarity with the two countries who were initially strongly impacted and ignored. Footage of EU flag burning can be found on social media from that time period. The blame has also turned around on the two countries, with an April poll in Germany showing half of Germans blame Italy and Spain’s pandemic on “poor governance”.<sup>57</sup> These criticisms of the EU hit

their mark more accurately because the far right was reflecting what the public had seen develop on the EU political stage. European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen apologised to Italy in April on behalf of Europe for its failure to do more to help at the start of the pandemic. “It is true that no one was really ready for this. It is also true that too many were not there on time when Italy needed a helping hand at the very beginning,” von der Leyen said.<sup>58</sup>

The rapid closing of borders starved the far right of some oxygen but several far right discussion boards link the outbreak to the “open border” policies. Authoritarian governments in Hungary and Poland were quick to close their borders and return foreign nationals to their countries of origin under COVID-19. Meanwhile, Le Pen praised the French governments decision to bar entry through their land borders while Salvini spoke of maintaining emergency measures to prevent migrants coming in after the pandemic. The erosion of EU norms such as the open Schengen area has also weakened the EU’s reputation.

## **MASKS, LOCKDOWNS AND PROTESTS**

The far right in Europe has scrambled to stay relevant amidst the pandemic with mixed results as priorities turned away from popular far right talking points to pandemic-related issues. However, in the second half of the year, anti-mask, anti-lockdown and anti-safety-restriction protests have sprung up across the globe. The protests centre around how compulsory rules – even ones on health and safety – infringe on individual freedoms. The anti-mask momentum is not atypical of a pandemic – when doctors in the US urged the wearing of masks during the 1918 influenza pandemic, it was also seen as politically divisive, and called ‘dirt traps’ and ‘germ shields’.<sup>59</sup>

One of the first protests was in Michigan, USA, on 15 April, organised by conservative groups and demanding for the lockdown to end. By 1 May, there had been protests in half the US states. Several European states also had protests in April but the frequency and size of the protests were still small. But by late August, thousands of anti-lockdown protestors filled London’s Trafalgar square. On the same day, Berlin drew 38,000 participants. This was followed by other protests throughout the end of 2020, ranging from hundred to thousands of protesters, from Melbourne to Madrid to Montreal. Germany especially had had a particularly emboldened anti-lockdown movement: many anti-lockdown mobilisations had over 20,000 protesters attending.<sup>60</sup>

There is increased worry amongst security forces and far right researchers about the influence of far right extremists within these protests. On 22 August a far right segment of the protest in Dublin armed themselves with iron bars and batons and clashed with counter protestors. Police believe some of the masked men were part of Generation



QAnon sign at the “We Do Not Consent” anti-lockdown rally in Trafalgar Square, London, 26 September 2020.  
Photo: HOPE not hate

Identity.<sup>61</sup> Meanwhile, in a Berlin protest, hundreds of far right activists waved the black, white and red flag of the pre-1918 German Empire and stormed through a police barrier to force their way into the German parliament. The fact that the far right shows distrust in government measures is not surprising and fits well with anti-establishment narratives. This includes the sinister theory of the police state and that governments are using COVID-19 to take freedoms away. It has also positioned far right groups at the centre of these protests.

However, these are not far right only, or even far right led protests – the blurred lines between their demands and the mainstream have enlarged their pool of potential recruits. The French left-wing think tank Fondation Jean Jaurès interviewed 1,000 anti maskers on Facebook and found 50 was the average age and 63 per cent were women in France. “The epidemic has been gone for months,” one respondent said. “We are just collectively trained to submission,” she maintained.<sup>62</sup> While France’s anti-mask protests have not matched Germany or the United Kingdom in numbers, people expressed four reasons for not respecting the law. The mask was judged inefficient in stopping COVID-19 transmission, there was a lack of confidence in the institutions that are pushing these protective measures, a rejection of the elite, and a rejection of

the impingement on personal freedom. The protests have also allowed narratives peddled by the far right to enter the mainstream and for extreme anti-state messaging to be popularised. One alt-right figure for example painted the lockdown as a state power grab to ‘enslave’ men to society and the government – this has now become much more mainstream.<sup>63</sup>

The protests also suggest a mounting concern over governments’ responses to the pandemic, coupled with the realisation that the second wave of COVID-19 may not be the last: Scientists have warned a third wave might follow in 2021.<sup>64</sup> Business owners and independent workers have also increasingly joined protests as the economic safety nets in European countries struggle to cope with the consequences of the pandemic.

In Italy for example, the number of clashes between police and protesters across cities have multiplied towards the end of 2020, despite polls showing a majority of Italians agreed with the tough measures instated.<sup>65</sup> Meanwhile, in Spain, protests against the lockdown include both Vox and far left groups. In Germany, anti-lockdown protesters have been sharply criticised for alluding to the Second World War. One student protester took to the stage at a protest in Hanover on 21 November and likened herself to Sophie Scholl, the German student executed by the Nazis in 1943 for her role in the resistance. In another incident, an 11 years old girl at an anti-mask demo in Karlsruhe compared herself to Anne Frank because she had to celebrate her birthday quietly to avoid the neighbours hearing she had invited her friends over.<sup>66</sup>

Anti-mask groups remain very active on social media, with Facebook groups across the continent attracting thousands of followers. All the reasons used for protesting have been echoed by far right politicians and online, aiding the positioning of the far right as the voice of the people. The physical protests have also brought the online movement onto the streets.

## HOW THE FAR RIGHT IN EUROPE IS EXPLOITING COVID-19

Traditional far right parties across Europe failed to make significant gains in the polls by exploiting COVID-19 fears. However, this does not take into account their success in pushing out hate, spreading disinformation and exploiting the fear and uncertainty that the pandemic produced. In fact, researchers have warned against the far right exploiting fears and radicalising the public since the start of the pandemic.<sup>67</sup> The 2020 Global Terrorism Index (GTI) found that in North America, Western Europe, and Oceania, the threat of far right political terrorism has been rising over the past five years. This trend is likely to continue as the extended economic crisis could increase political instability and violence.<sup>68</sup> A study commissioned by the German foreign ministry in late November also showed far right individuals in Europe and the US are increasingly forming global links and using



the pandemic to attract anti-vaccine activists and conspiracy theorists to their cause.<sup>69</sup>

The spread of conspiracy theories was aided by the fact that as lockdowns were instated across Europe, more people spent time online. On 8 May, United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said, “The pandemic continues to unleash a tsunami of hate and xenophobia, scapegoating and scare-mongering” and urged governments to “act now to strengthen the immunity of our societies against the virus of hate.”<sup>70</sup> Politicians and even country leaders have also been guilty of encouraging hate crimes, racism and xenophobia through their rhetoric. Groups across Europe, including France, Germany, the UK, Spain, Greece and Italy have seized COVID-19 as an opportunity to further nationalistic or anti-immigrant agendas as well as to demonise refugees and opposition groups.

The far right attempts to rally around and gain supporters during COVID-19 differ greatly depending on whether they were opposition groups or in power. Authoritarian governments such as Hungary, have exploited COVID-19 to give themselves greater powers and push through non-pandemic related legislation. In Serbia, there are allegations that the right-wing populist government manipulated the number of COVID-19 deaths prior to the June elections.<sup>71</sup>

As the economic and social strain began to be felt across Europe, it also offered an opportunity for far right local movements, to showcase their links to the communities and gain support from locals. In Italy, far right group CasaPound posted photos of activists delivering groceries to the elderly while the extreme far right group Hogar Social has done the same in Madrid. In Ukraine, the far right Azov Regiment and its political party, the National Corps, have been documenting their efforts such as driving health-care professionals to work and delivering food and supplies – all while providing emails to anyone who wants to join their volunteer corps.<sup>72</sup> In Germany, neo-Nazi group The Third Way has been providing food to low-income households, and in the UK, Britain First and For Britain claimed to feed the homeless and volunteer at the NHS.

One unifying theme for far right opposition parties was the hit and miss approach of blaming the government and the European Union for mismanaging the crisis. Online conspiracy theories around COVID-19 flourished while narratives around China’s role, refugees spreading the virus and minorities ignoring safety precautions entered the mainstream. Blaming minorities was tried to varying levels of success by several groups as lockdowns spread across European states.

Believers in accelerationism – the concept that Western governments are too corrupt to save and one should speed up their collapse by sowing chaos – have also welcomed the opportunities COVID-19 has created – and even outright celebrated it. The death tolls and confusion have entrenched these

views and discussions around how the virus will bring on civil war and the collapse of society was a popular topic on far right groups online. A man attempting to bomb a hospital in Missouri in March 2020 was found to be a believer in the concept.<sup>73</sup>

## **HUNGARY**

Hungary’s leader, Victor Orban is the most successful example of a far right leader in power exploiting the pandemic. Orban, capitalised on the pandemic to give himself further powers, and the COVID-19 crisis does not seem to have negatively impacted his popularity in Hungary. Results from Hungary’s European Parliament elections in 2019 showed Fidesz as the dominant political force, achieving 52 per cent of the votes and winning 12 of the 21 seats. Orban’s focus on family is very much in line with the politics of the moment. In a June poll, 44 per cent of Hungarian respondents listed more family time as a positive to the COVID-19 outbreak.<sup>74</sup> The new regulations passed this year show Orban leading an increasingly authoritarian state, with little constitutional checks and balances left in place.

Even though the pandemic did not initially hit Hungary hard, on 30 March, the parliament passed a law that allowed Orban to rule by decree. The emergency powers were granted by parliament due to the pandemic and allowed Orban to place important state companies under partial military supervision and withdraw financial resources from local administrations.

The ruling party also used it to pass a slate of other laws unrelated to COVID-19 measures such as prohibiting transgender people from legally changing their sex and gaining tighter control of the arts and education sectors. While the government withdrew



Viktor Orbán, PM of Hungary  
Photo: European People’s Party

the emergency law on 16 June, most of its provisions were carried over into new regulations. State-controlled media have also attacked critics as being for the virus and against the people.<sup>75</sup>

Another development has been to make the spreading of ‘misleading information’ about the government’s response punishable by jail and several people were taken into custody after criticising the government on social media. When asked in a virtual press conference about two cases, Orbán’s chief of staff Gergely Gulyás said the fact that some individuals were released after a few hours “shows the strength of the rule of law.”<sup>76</sup> One Fidesz mayor denounced a rival who criticised the government’s management of the crisis. The opposition member was arrested and released soon after the justice minister declared it “a mistake.”<sup>77</sup> The press conferences are also tightly controlled with questions preselected.

The Freedom House think tank downgraded its assessment of the country to “partly free” due to the governing party’s attacks on democratic institutions in 2019.<sup>78</sup>

In 2020, Orbán slashed the funding for political parties and reduced the financial autonomy of local governments, which disproportionately impacts opposition groups. His party also increased its criticisms of the European Union.<sup>79</sup>

The government’s control is not absolute however. When Orbán threatened teachers with unpaid leave in March and spoke against the closure of schools, the opposition on social media was so severe that he backtracked and announced the suspension of all Hungarian schools. September also saw a spike in the number of COVID-19 cases in Eastern Europe and Orbán announced he was drafting a “war plan” against the second wave of the pandemic. The plan’s aim was “not for everyone to stay at home and bring the country to a halt ... but to defend Hungary’s functionality,” Orbán said.<sup>80</sup> Once the second wave of COVID-19 cases hit, and Orbán faced criticism for holding back on tougher measures, he blamed the rise of cases on foreigners. Orbán declared a second state of emergency in November and his party once again proposed bills that had little to do with protecting the public from the pandemic. This included making it harder for opposition parties to join forces and to change the constitution to defend so-called “Christian values” – the amendment would ensure only heterosexual couples could adopt children.<sup>81</sup>

## IMMIGRATION

Blaming immigrants for society’s ills has been popular across the world for centuries, whether it was Haitian refugees in the 1980s blamed for the AIDS epidemic, or Chinese immigrants accused of spreading the plague in the 1900s in the US. In fact, a San Francisco’s city health officer at the time of the smallpox epidemic wrote with no evidence whatsoever: “I unhesitatingly declare my belief that

this cause is the presence in our midst of 30,000... unscrupulous, lying and treacherous Chinamen, who have disregarded our sanitary laws, concealed and are concealing their cases of small-pox.”<sup>82</sup>

This trope is easily distinguished in some of the rhetoric heard during COVID-19. Since the refugee crisis, a very popular far right narrative in Europe is blaming illegal immigrants for whatever problem is dominating the country’s media. This scapegoating method was automatically applied to the pandemic and March saw much focus on blaming refugees and immigrants for the spread of the virus amongst the far right and even within governments.

The German branch of the Identitarian movement held a banner in Berlin stating ‘Defend our borders’ and their online Facebook conversations combined the message of defending against COVID-19 with defending against immigrants. Where the far right is in power, such as in Victor Orbán’s Hungarian Fidesz party, a cluster of COVID-19 cases in a group of foreign students was seized as a reason to block transit zones where migrants could apply for asylum. “Coronavirus lessons so far: The virus is spreading faster in immigrant countries; this justifies the Hungarian government’s migration policy; this shows George Soros’s theory of open society has failed completely,” Zoltán Lomnici, a spokesman for the government-backed Civil Alliance Forum posted on Facebook.<sup>83</sup> In Italy, Salvini tried to convince the public that immigrant flows from Africa were a major source of infection and called for the closing of the ports. This type of response was not only used by authoritarian governments and far right figures: In Greece, the registered COVID-19 cases in refugee camps had the media calling them a “ticking time-bomb”. The New Democracy government cited COVID-19 in February 2020 as a reason to build “closed” camps for asylum seekers. These pseudo-detention centres house those stuck between European policies on Lesbos and Chios. A *Washington Post* report showed that meals for inhabitants did not meet the minimum calorie requirement.<sup>84</sup>

Blaming immigrants has not gained as much traction as the far right enjoyed during the refugee crisis in 2014 or the spate of terrorist attacks in 2016. At the start of the year, before the pandemic became the priority, Salvini was calling for Italy’s prime minister to resign for allowing a boat carrying 276 people from Africa who were rescued in the Mediterranean to dock in Sicily. But the fact that NGO rescue boats had already ceased to operate diluted Salvini’s message, as did the fact that COVID-19 erupted in the North of the country first. The gravity of the emergency and the rallying around government safety policies overtook these narratives.

While far right messaging has not been on point, the reality is that COVID-19 has exacerbated the immigration situation in Europe, with several EU states using COVID-19 to refuse asylum seekers at their borders. The number of sea arrivals through the Central Mediterranean route in January to July

was up from the previous year<sup>85</sup> as countries like Tunisia and Libya grapple with the serious economic consequences of the pandemic. The main drivers of migration such as utter inequality remain very present. Britain also recorded a surge in boat crossings in the English Channel. The reduction of trucks making the journey increased the number of asylum seekers braving the journey on small dinghies with shovels and paddles.<sup>86</sup> The death of a Sudanese migrant, Abdulfatah Hamdallah, in late August caused a media storm within the UK. It also resulted in sporadic visits to the south coast by far right activists “patrolling” against arrivals.<sup>87</sup> Meanwhile, tensions have risen in places like the Canary Islands, where thousands of migrants have arrived seeking new routes to Europe, and the refugee camps are overflowing.<sup>88</sup>

On 7 April, when Italy, for the first time in its history, announced that due to COVID-19, Italian harbours were no longer safe places for migrant landings, it resulted in hundreds of deaths on the Mediterranean. The severe response from European countries included: an increase in pushbacks where law enforcement officers work with unidentified proxies to push back boats towards Turkish or Libyan waters; a reduced number of sea rescues; and more difficult movement as travel restrictions hindered movement across the continent. A group of 63 people stranded at sea when their engine failed in the Maltese Search and Rescue zone drifted for days as the EU border agency Frontex observed them from the sky.<sup>89</sup> Several starved while others drowned before the Maltese authorities used private fishing boats to push them back to Libya.<sup>90</sup>

The fact that many health and other essential workers who have risked their lives on the frontlines are immigrants have however boosted the popularity of immigrants within several European countries. In France, asylum seekers and refugees with medical expertise volunteered to help within the crisis. These are often people who have medical qualifications that are not recognised within France and have not gone through the exams to get an equivalent French degree. Despite this, the government waved its infamous bureaucracy to the side and welcomed the help in April as the COVID-19 peaked – provided it was under correct supervision. The severity of the pandemic was evident in that the government extended this acceptance beyond refugees, to any foreigners within the territory.<sup>91</sup>

In the UK, the national conversation changed drastically, with newspapers showing the faces of immigrant NHS workers who had lost their lives to the virus and the Prime Minister thanking migrant nurses for his care. A HOPE not Hate poll at the start of the lockdown showed 77 per cent agreed that EU nationals working as doctors and nurses should be offered automatic citizenship, with half feeling this should be extended to supermarket and agricultural workers as well as delivery drivers. Even amongst Leave voters, more likely to be sceptical about the benefits of immigration, a huge 72 per

cent supported offering automatic British citizenship to NHS doctors and nurses. More than half (53 per cent) supported offering automatic British citizenship to care workers, and a large proportion felt that supermarket and agricultural workers (40 per cent agreed) and delivery drivers (38 per cent agreed) should also get automatic citizenship.<sup>92</sup>

## CONSPIRACY THEORIES

Mapping the scale and nature of disinformation that spread during the pandemic is complicated by the staggeringly high levels of it on both mainstream platforms like Facebook and more obscure messaging apps like Telegram. These are often disseminated from the US, but have quickly spread within European networks. A study showed that between January and April, websites hosting disinformation received 80 million interactions on Facebook.<sup>93</sup> The conspiracy theories around the pandemic often focus either on it being a hoax, or that the virus is real, but was created or released intentionally by a host of different actors. Jews, Muslims, George Soros, Jeff Bezos, Bill Gates... all have been accused of designing and spreading COVID-19. A host of other theories surrounding the nature of the virus have also found popularity, such as the virus being caused by snakes, that washing hands is a propaganda by soap companies or that COVID-19 is being spread by Coca-Cola.<sup>94</sup> It is not surprising that inaccurate stories have spread about the virus during the uncertainty surrounding the pandemic, and many of the false or inaccurate theories have a very short half-life. However, the threat and danger of the misinformation caused by other theories cannot be underestimated. Some encourage violence and hate against public figures or minority groups, while others increase mistrust of safety procedures put in place to protect the general public against COVID-19.

The theories often “work” and spread using a few plausible facts that paper over the lies – this has made spreading these theories into the mainstream easier. For example, the conspiracy theory that Bill Gates was involved in creating the virus or knew there was going to be a COVID-19 pandemic focuses on a Ted talk he gave in 2015 about the Ebola virus, where he warned the world was not ready for another pandemic.<sup>95</sup> Another variation claims this is part of his plot to vaccinate the world and install microchips that will control people. Anti-vaxxers online have been vocal about the theory of a global vaccine program designed to kill a part of the population prior to COVID-19 and the pandemic has allowed them to repackage this within the current circumstances. The mainstreaming of anti-vaccination theories is especially dangerous as a COVID-19 vaccine becomes a reality. The public health campaign around a vaccination programme will also have to battle the fears these theories have raised within the general public. A survey conducted in early November by European National Panels found that only 36 per cent of Czech respondents





Philanthropist George Soros is a frequent target of conspiracy theory online

would like to be vaccinated against COVID-19, a decrease compared to a similar poll in October. Many of those opposed to the vaccination were supporters of the far right Freedom and Direct Democracy party.<sup>96</sup>

Far right commentators with large platforms have actively pushed these theories out – often several simultaneous and clashing stories – but traditional far right parties have also spread these outside online platforms. Marine Le Pen in France said that it made sense to ask if COVID-19 was made in a lab<sup>97</sup> – 40 per cent of her party believe that virus was intentionally designed in a lab.<sup>98</sup> The conspiracy theories have also spread dangerously within the public discourse. In Spain, a poll in April shows nearly half of the respondents believed the virus had been created intentionally.<sup>99</sup> Meanwhile, a HOPE not hate poll showed two-thirds of people in the UK think it is important to seek alternative opinions about the coronavirus.<sup>100</sup> This is not surprising considering mainstream newspapers have given platforms for certain conspiracy theories.

One of the most popular conspiracy theories alleges that China designed the virus in a secret lab in Wuhan. This held a certain level of plausibility for

readers since the city of Wuhan also contains a virology institute where bat coronaviruses were being studied. A prominent virologist working at the lab said she was concerned enough by the theory to check that the COVID-19 genetic sequencing did not match any of the viruses studied at the institute – it did not. However, the theory, pushed online in part by a documentary produced by Epoch Times has slipped widely into the mainstream media.<sup>101</sup>

Another popular theory asserts that China (or Russia or Israel or another country) created COVID-19 as a bioweapon. The US political far right and even mainstream right are particularly taken with this theory, with even US senators propagating it.<sup>102</sup> This has also been thoroughly been proved incorrect through the genetic sequencing of the virus showing it is of natural origin. The theories are also aided by the derogatory language used by politicians. The decision by then US President Donald Trump to call the coronavirus the “Chinese virus” on 16 March 2020 seems an obvious attempt to stoke outrage and his supporters such as conspiracy theorist Paul Joseph Watson were quick to adopt his language. While Trump no doubt decided to do so in an attempt to deflect criticism around his handling of the outbreak and placing blame elsewhere, it has also stoked anti-Chinese sentiments.

Known far right conspiracy theorists such as Alex Jones of Infowars have also been busy pushing several theories simultaneously, such as one claiming COVID-19 does not exist but is a fiction spouted by the “global elite” to remove freedoms. Anti-maskers, and far right political parties have in various forms, taken up this theory across Europe. Trump’s assertions that the virus is “no worse than the flu” has also been combined within that theory and taken up by protesters. There is also a direct marketing element to this – Alex Jones for example, sells pills that supposedly cures all diseases – making it in his interest to push other theories such as the virus being a plot by big pharmaceutical companies. Another far right anti-vaccination and anti-abortion activist is Dr Annie Bukacek who warns viewers on youtube that COVID death rates are inflated.<sup>103</sup> This theory has been widely taken up by the far right – and elements of the mainstream – as a reason to ignore social distancing and lockdown measures.

The far right are not the only source of the coronavirus conspiracies. Anti-GMO activists for example, pushed out that genetically modified crops (GMOs) were responsible for the virus, with Francisco Billota publishing an article in a non-politically affiliated Italian newspaper, asserting the virus was propagating faster due to GMO crops.<sup>104</sup> But even non-far right conspiracy theories are being adopted by them and remain a source danger as they widen their pool of potential radicalisation recruits. A popular adopted theory centres around 5G communications being the source or an accelerator of COVID-19. This has led to telecommunications apparatus being vandalised in Europe and elsewhere.



In a similar method to TV networks crossing over two popular series to widen the viewership for each individual series, the crossing over of conspiracy theories and their mainstreaming have exposed a larger segment of the population to ideas that had remained within far right circles prior to 2020.

## **MUSLIMS AND JEWS, AND OTHER MINORITIES**

The intensity and widespread nature of the theories online make it difficult to always ascertain the source of a particular theory, but once far right figures with large platforms have pushed out this bad information, they are added to the large body of theories discussed in far right online forums. The pandemic also allowed the repackaging of older far right ideas into COVID-19 related narratives. The idea that immigrants are arriving with the virus to kill whites for example can be easily traced to established far right Great Replacement theories. Comments about a certain minority group's aim of annihilating white populations by passing on the virus can be found across Facebook groups and on Twitter. One Facebook post read, "What if [they] are trying to kill off as many people as possible". Another comments, "Eventually, these scum will release something truly nasty to wipe us all out, but first they have to train us to be obedient slaves" reads another. A third: "Coronavirus is the newest Islamist weapon."<sup>105</sup> A popular far right Twitter account, BasedPoland, for example claimed that more ethnically uniform countries such as Poland could better confront the virus and accused Muslim migrants and Roma communities of failing to socially distance.

States have also been responsible for escalating racist voices. The EU Commissioner for Equality, Helena Dalli, called on states to implement measures for the Romani communities because the pandemic exposed structural inequalities and the number of Roma deaths due to COVID-19 were overrepresented in Romania. Instead, the Slovakian, Romanian and Bulgarian government all enacted disproportionate or militarised measures targeting Romani neighbourhoods. This includes road blocks and police checkpoints.<sup>106</sup> At local level, police abuses included preventing any Roma from entering certain cities – in North Macedonia; nine Romani musicians were singled out of 200 and forced into quarantine.<sup>107</sup> Anti-Roma propaganda linked to COVID-19 can also be found within local and national newspapers, in sync with fake and dehumanising posts on Facebook.

Echoes of the idea that minority communities pose a greater threat and don't follow guidelines can be found across European states and mainstream media headlines. When the British government announced local lockdowns in northern England just hours before Eid al-Adha, a Muslim festival, local politicians criticised the timing of the announcement as cementing an association between the spread of COVID-19 and Muslims. There is also a constant sharing of online photos depicting Muslims

congregating and disobeying social distancing rules in mosques – mosques that have in reality been closed for months. These are shared by prominent far right figures such as Tommy Robinson: He shared a false video showing British Muslims breaking the rules to pray at a secret mosque although this was dismissed by West Midlands police<sup>108</sup>. These types of fake stories have caused a slew of complaints from the public calling for the closing of mosques or even their demolition to "cure" COVID-19.<sup>109</sup> The blame on Muslims could also be linked to how COVID-19 has hit BAME communities hard. This is attributed to a complex range of factors such as the communities living in closer contact with each other in overcrowded areas and working in jobs putting them at greater risk.<sup>110</sup> The rhetoric has also entered the mainstream with several articles in the media in the UK and France inferring that Ramadan would cause a huge spike in COVID-19.

The Jewish community is also a common target for COVID-19 conspiracy theories, following a long tradition of blaming Jews for viruses such as the Black Death. Messages across social media discuss the pandemic as a Jewish plot to manipulate the stock market, or that George Soros and the Rothschild play a role in its creation. French far right conspiracy theorist Alain Soral listed in a now removed YouTube video, the state workers he classified as Jewish and involved in the management of the pandemic.<sup>111</sup> He accused them of using the virus to create profit.

Memes and images amongst conspiracy theorists also often feature Jews and the virus together. This is packaged with other antisemitic memes such as Jews being greedy and valuing profit above all.<sup>112</sup> Memes often exist as a template to be edited by others and the variations of the original meme bind users through the dynamics of co-consumption and co-production, creating a culture of in-jokes and can "enhance a sense of in-group cohesion".<sup>113</sup> The pandemic has also been renamed the "Jew-flu" in social media groups.<sup>114</sup> Jewish plots were also overlapped to other COVID-19 conspiracies such as the 5G telecommunications ones, where social media users alleged cell towers for 5G technologies was only built in non-Jewish areas.<sup>115</sup> Traditional far right parties also propagated anti-Semitic tropes, with the head of a party list for far right party National Rally liking a video claiming that Jews were behind the pandemic and that they were trying to "assert their supremacy"<sup>116</sup> as did the far right Swiss National party.<sup>117</sup>

## **ASIANS AND CHINESE UNDER FIRE**

Since the pandemic has started there have been increased accounts of anti-Asian assaults, harassment and hate crimes across the globe. This includes verbal aggressions of "go back to China" and "bringing in the virus" to more physical assaults on victims assumed to be Chinese, or even just Asian. In the UK, which has a significant population of Asian origin, figures show that attacks against "orientals"

recorded by the Met rose steeply as the pandemic spread, fell during the lockdown and then, after the easing in May of restrictions, started to steadily rise again.<sup>118</sup> In Italy, the NGO Lunaria collected over 50 reports of assaults, discrimination and bullying by people perceived to be Chinese during the first wave of the pandemic.<sup>119</sup>

The European Union's Agency for Fundamental Rights has noted a general spike in hate against people of Chinese or Asian descent across the states. The hate has also impacted their access to health services.<sup>120</sup> The barrage of hateful rhetoric can also be traced to politicians and even parties in power. The governor of the Veneto region of Italy, an early epicenter of the pandemic, told journalists in February that the country would be better than China in handling the virus due to Italians' "culturally strong attention to hygiene, washing hands, taking showers, whereas we have all seen the Chinese eating mice alive."<sup>121</sup>

The hate experienced by Asians due to COVID-19 does not exist in a political vacuum. For some time we have seen the 'decoupling' of the US and Chinese economies and a shift towards what some are calling a 'cold war chill' between the two countries. The pandemic has only exacerbated relations, with Beijing and Washington blaming each other for their failings.

In the UK a number of Tory MPs, led by Tom Tugendhat and Neil O'Brien launched the China Research Group which calls for 'fresh thinking' on China. The Chinese Ambassador to the UK responded by saying the increasingly vocal criticism could risk 'poisoning' UK-China relations.

Much of the criticism China faces is well deserved. It is an authoritarian state with an abysmal human rights track record, especially in relation to its appalling treatment of the Uyghurs. Many have also rightly complained about the widespread theft of intellectual property that makes international trade 'unfair'. When it comes to the coronavirus outbreak there are also many questions still to be answered concerning China's early obfuscation and intimidation of those speaking out. No doubt this will be investigated more thoroughly in time.

However, while criticism of the Chinese government is warranted, the continuing development of a new 'cold war' is having serious consequences for Chinese and Asians living in Europe and will only be exacerbated as political tensions increase. It also allows them to be blamed for anything and everything. This can already be seen with articles like Douglas Murray's in *The Sun* where he suggests China released COVID-19 on purpose to attack the US economy.<sup>122</sup> Meanwhile, also in the UK, Tommy Robinson began selling anti-China merchandise.<sup>123</sup> The rumours and theories during the pandemic can allude to historical stereotypes about Asians in the West and often present information in "a causal structure that makes them easy to remember, repeat and share with others."<sup>124</sup>

The far right industry focused on Islam and Muslims

could also be repurposed towards Chinese people. Since 9/11, sections of the far right have framed their politics as defence of national security and these groups have already begun targeting China instead.<sup>125</sup> One of the major dangers arising is that because anti-Chinese politics is more acceptable than anti-Muslim politics, it could allow the far right further into the mainstream. The fact that China is ostensibly 'left-wing' could allow them to lump China and 'the left' together.

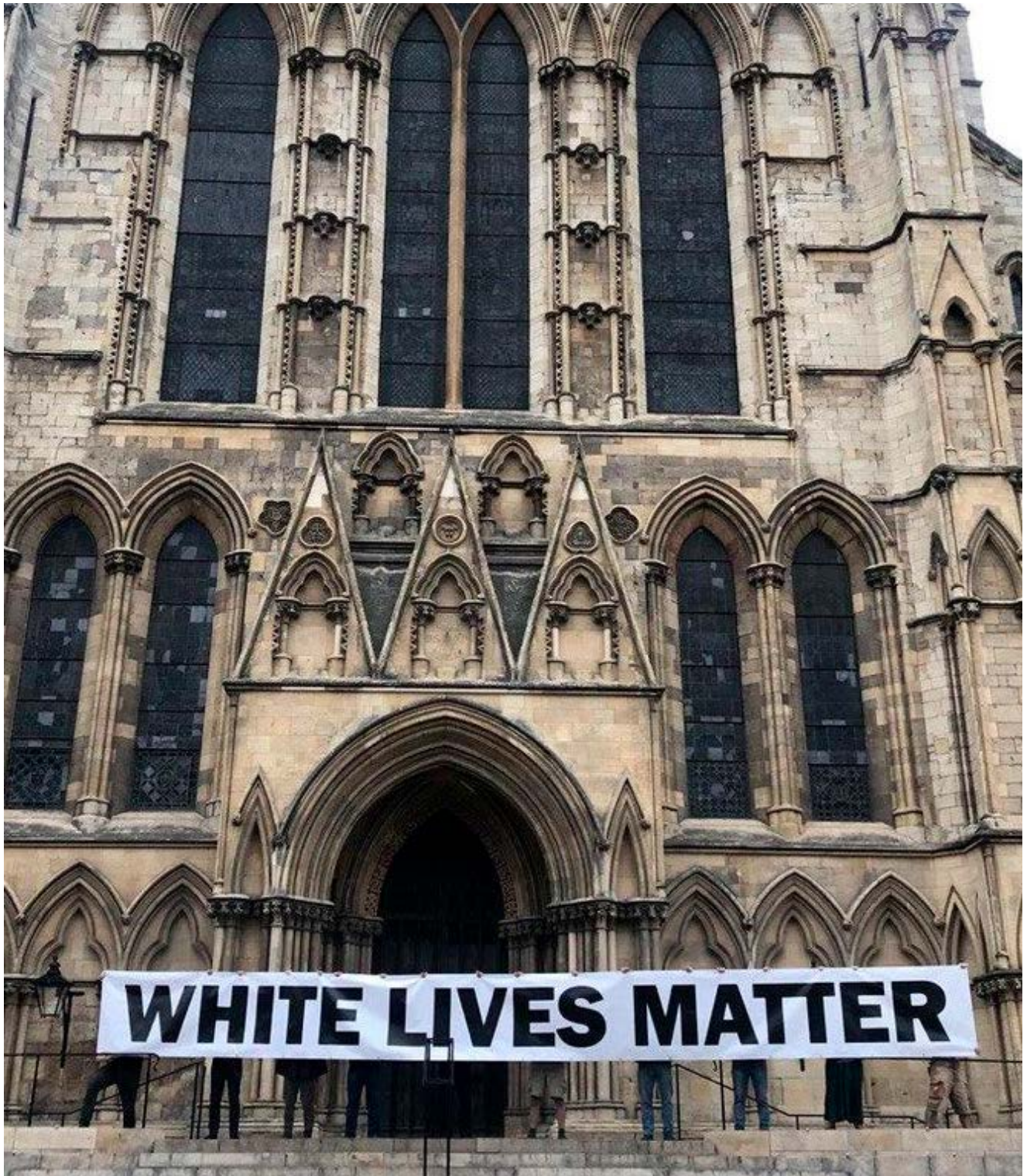
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## SECTION 3: ESSAYS



# CONSPIRACY IDEOLOGIES DURING THE PANDEMIC: THE RISE OF QANON IN EUROPE

**Simone Rafael**

It is one of the most remarkable triumphs of the COVID-19 pandemic: The conspiracy narrative\* “QAnon”, which began in the US in 2017, achieved surprising popularity in Europe in 2020, while at the same time spreading ideas totally undocked from reality and rationality. How did this happen?

In 2020 we have all become painfully aware that a pandemic is a perfect biotope for conspiracy narratives; a global and potentially fatal threat, with an unclear origin and with no proven means to fight and overcome it, is obviously a challenge for many people. If you throw lockdown measures and social stagnation into the mix, threatening the professional and private existence of many people and giving them a lot of free time with few possibilities of distraction, you're left with a volatile situation.

Quite a few people who have struggled with boredom, who couldn't stand the uncertainty of the pandemic, and wanted more personal attention and meaning in their lives, have found a way out of their misery on the internet, through reading, interacting with and spreading conspiracy ideologies. It is easy to see why: such ideologies have the advantage of simplifying the inexplicable because they offer easy explanations. In a conspiracy world, nothing happens by chance anymore, everything is ascribed a reason. There are clearly defined notions of good and evil, and every believer can choose and fight for what he or she considers to be good and brave. Furthermore, these narratives allow believers to see themselves as people in possession of “the truth”, giving them a perceived mission and urge to spread the narrative by “waking up” their fellow citizens.

Sounds like a sect? There certainly are similarities in their strategies. But within conspiracy ideologies, “evil” is not merely an abstract idea. Instead, real-life “culprits” get the blame, which leads to threats and attacks against very real humans. For centuries, conspiracy ideologies – whether explicitly or implicitly – have repeatedly named Jews as the source of evil in the world. Usually, they are described as greedy “elites” who want to enslave the

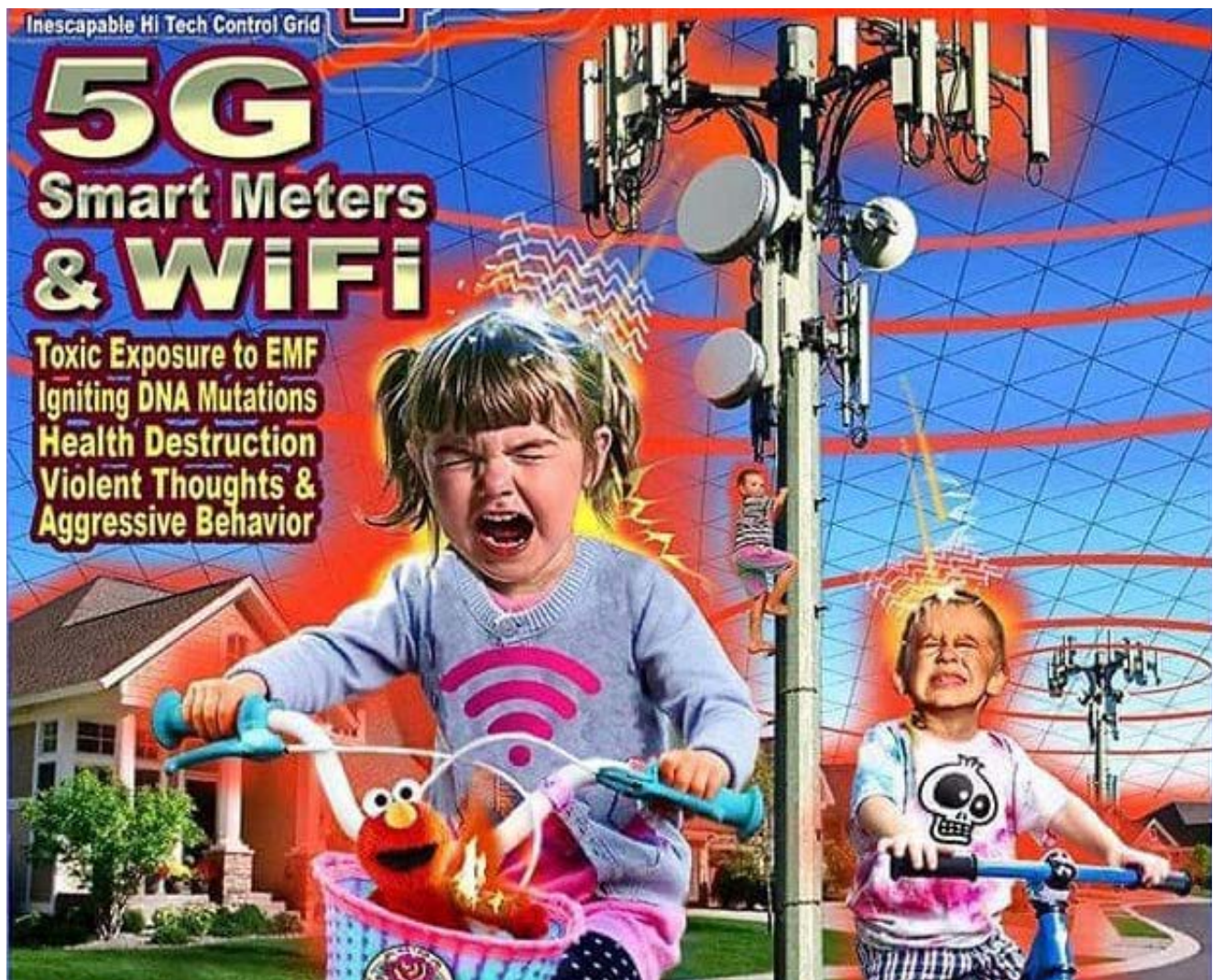
globe. These antisemitic narratives also function as an operating system for all conspiracy narratives and were the same ones that led to the Holocaust.

In the 2020 pandemic, we are witnessing a new wave of the mass dissemination of these antisemitic narratives. However, not only Jews are victims of these myths. The conspiracy narratives of 2020, for example, have also increasingly directed their attention towards governments, science and the media. These bodies are ascribed an open or hidden “Jewishness” – also meant as the embodiment of modernity, freedom, equality, liberality, rationality. In 2020, the conspiracy narratives on the COVID-19 pandemic began with racism against people perceived to be Asian (as the virus originated in China, Donald Trump fuelled this sentiment by repeatedly speaking of the “China virus”), the denial of the existence of the virus or false stories about alleged cures.

However, it was not long before strategically motivated reinterpretations of these narratives emerged. Anti-democratic groups recognised an opportunity to use conspiracy narratives not only to spread uncertainty within their societies (“Does the government really want the best for us or are we just test subjects?”), but also to spread antisemitism (“Who is behind 5G masts and global vaccination campaigns, and which new world order will be introduced along the way?”). These groups also saw an opportunity to compel people to act and legitimise violence (“Nobody is doing anything, we have to act now before it's too late for our children – if necessary armed with guns”), to stir up nationalism (“Our values and traditions are destroyed when everyone is made equal”) and to rally against the credibility of science, medicine and the press (“Who pays them? What plans are they pursuing?”).

In order to stir up this mood, numerous “alternative media” platforms were formed. YouTube and Telegram channels in particular also experienced rapid growth in both number and reach. In addition to newly established online presences – also from celebrities who hoped for a new role and meaning





in their lives within the pandemic – existing channels also discovered COVID-19 conspiracy myths for themselves and reinforced them. For example, right-wing populists and far-right channels, believers of alternative medicine and esotericists. The common denominator of all these various groups is antisemitism and the fight against parliamentary democracy.

The fact that social networks are the main engine of these debates not only led to a rapid radicalisation of these discourses and their supporters, but also to an internationalisation. Various elements of conspiracy narratives emerged around the world – and a particularly inventive American conspiracy tale made its way to Europe: QAnon. This conspiracy narrative, originally centred on Donald Trump as a saviour in the fight against evil, AKA “the elites”, with explicit antisemitic elements (including paedophile elites who drink children’s blood), was created in the USA in 2017. An anonymous 4chan account, “Q”, claimed to be an informant from the innermost circles of the White House and provided his followers with mysteriously incomprehensible, but very meaningful short statements – known to

the fans as “Q-Drops” – which could almost be described as clickbait for the conspiracy industry (“Do you feel a plot twist coming?”). Again and again, Q urged followers to wake up, think for themselves and participate. This technique brought believers to common exegesis, to a collective interpretation, welding them together to form a community – which is also reflected in the slogan “WWG1WGA” (“Where we go one, we go all”).

Through this, QAnon developed into a super-conspiracy of sorts that could easily absorb existing conspiracy narratives and integrate local conditions and situations. There was even an in-built solution within the Q-ideology for the development that its narratives became increasingly bizarre and contradictory. “Trust the Plan” is a key motto of QAnon: what you don’t understand now is still correct because there is a plan. Even months after the election, Trump fans who are believers of QAnon think that Joe Biden’s victory is either not real or part of “the plan”. These are distinctly sect-like features and demonstrate that QAnon fans have consciously shunned reality to live in a delusional world that can hardly be corrected from the outside.



The sense of community, the participative character and the integration of local players and existing conspiracy narratives make QAnon attractive to non-American anti-democratic movements in the pandemic as well. The spread of QAnon narratives began in anti-EU, Islamophobic, populist-right and far-right groups in Europe. They have enriched the antisemitic and anti-establishment narratives of the ideology with their own anti-government and anti-lockdown narratives. They mix a rebellious attitude with the certainty of victory that, as one of “the initiated”, you are doing something good for society if you behave in a self-centred, unmotivated and anti-rational manner.

### QANON SPREADS ACROSS EUROPE

Initially, QAnon spread to other English-speaking countries such as the United Kingdom, Canada and Australia. In the UK, it has mostly been Brexit fans who have adopted the conspiracy tale. Many groups use QAnon elements, such as the stories of global elites or paedophile rings, to discredit the government and ostensibly to criticise its anti-corona measures. However, for some British Q fans

Prime Minister Boris Johnson is exempt from such criticism, alleged to have been “installed” to save the world together with Trump.

Soon after, however, the “Q-Drops” were translated into various European languages. The largest QAnon community among the non-English speaking countries currently exists in Germany. Due to the size of Telegram groups, experts assume at least 150,000 followers in Germany. The majority of the far-right and conspiracist Reichsbürger movement has put its own conspiracy stories under the Q banner; they claim that the Federal Republic of Germany is an illegal state and not sovereign, has never signed a peace treaty after the Second World War and has never given itself a constitution, which is why the “German Reich” from pre-Nazi times allegedly still exists. Reichsbürger proudly combine Q flags with “Reich” flags in black, white and red at large demonstrations in Germany and ask Donald Trump – as well as Vladimir Putin – to sign the allegedly missing peace treaty and assist with the expulsion of Chancellor Angela Merkel, who is an archenemy figure for far-right groups.



“Stand Up For The Children” march on Oxford Street, London, 5 September 2020. Copyright: HOPE not hate



The alleged child protection of Q (“Save the Children”) has also resonated strongly within the German conspiracy world. Many “Q” supporters style themselves as “concerned parents”. For decades, the alleged commitment to protecting children from paedophilia has been an issue with which the far-right scene has tried, not unsuccessfully, to impact society as a whole with, in order to spread racism (because they argue, in the face of overwhelming empirical evidence to the contrary, that the perpetrators are always migrants). Celebrities have also played their part: the well-known pop singer Xavier Naidoo cried in a YouTube video in May 2020 for the children who were supposedly being held captive by elites for blood production – thus making QAnon known to the broadest possible mainstream audience in Germany.

In France, the populist Yellow Vest movement, which is critical of the government, is interested in the rhetoric and narratives of QAnon – especially the conspiracy narratives of the “Deep State”, which supposedly holds the true reins of political power. “Yellow Vests against Pedocriminality” groups are also being founded, as well as groups that want to combat the “New World Order”, an antisemitic trope revolving around secret plans for a (often Jewish) world domination. Members of the French anti-vaccination scene are also vocal participants within the movement. Telegram groups have up to 20,000 fans, in which the doctor Didier Raoult, for example, who recommends hydroxychloroquine as a COVID-19 drug, is celebrated as an anti-lockdown fighter against President Emmanuel Macron. The French church is also suspected of being “evil”. French Q groups describe themselves for example as “a group of French, anti-globalization patriots, who campaign for the waking up of Nations”. Their stated goal is to “inform French people, and more generally, all Francophones that are manipulated by traditional media, about today’s worldly stakes”. Some Q groups use references to French royalty (e.g. the Fleur-de-Lys, a symbol of the French monarchy, or references to Joan of Arc and Charles Martel).

In Italy, it is anti-vaxxers in particular who want to use Q to rebel against the plans of the government. Here too, Telegram groups have up to 20,000 members. Q fans attack Italian Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte, who allegedly wants to establish a dictatorship, and praise the far-right politician Matteo Salvini (League Party). Nationalism is also a topic under the guise of “liberating Italy from the EU”.

In the Netherlands, Islamophobic accounts that sympathise with Geert Wilders use elements of the QAnon narrative and compel their followers to act: “Doing nothing is no longer an option”. In addition, one of the most important European QAnon influencers, Janet Ossebaard, comes from the Netherlands. In her film “Fall of the Cabal”, which went viral in March 2020, QAnon motifs and European conspiracy stories were combined for the first time.

The Q-reception in countries of the former Republic of Yugoslavia – Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Serbia – is also interesting. Here, there are nationalist Q groups, but the largest is called “QAnon Balkan” and wants to use QAnon to unite the people in the region: “We do not divide people by religion and nation, because we are all hostages of a handful of globalists, dangerous psychopaths, who have placed their puppets at the head of our states and institutions.”

In Greece, there are not many active QAnon followers. If, however, posts use the relevant hashtags, they blend Q-narratives with anti-Roma prejudices and racism against black migrants. In Hungary, there is a strong connection to antisemitism: Q is of interest to followers of conspiracies revolving around Adrenochrome, the Illuminati, Satanism, the “Deep State” and a hatred of George Soros. In Lithuania, there is a QAnon Facebook group with 7,300 members – in a country with just 2.7 million inhabitants. In August 2020, the Canadian researcher Marc-André Argentino investigated European Q-groups in social networks. Only in Estonia, Montenegro and Albania did he find none.

The danger with QAnon and other conspiracy worlds lies, on the one hand, in the constant radicalisation, as well as the dramatisation of a compulsion or urgency to act, which can end in a readiness to use violence. Then, “Trust the Plan” suddenly becomes “Be the plan”. Even if this does not happen, however, another danger remains: once people have become accustomed to the anti-rational and anti-democratic mechanisms of conspiracy ideologies, there is a good chance that they will retain them, even if they abandon QAnon. Instead of qualified and experienced scientists, they believe in self-proclaimed video bloggers, instead of media platforms that conduct thorough research, they tend to believe in blogs that spout lies, and instead of trying to work on building a better world, they believe in “guilty people” who just need to be tried, imprisoned or defeated – and thus conveniently hand over any and all responsibility for their own lives. Many people are currently experiencing the consequences of this radicalisation in their families or within their social surroundings. They have to deal with these people on their own, because in most countries, there are no counselling services for dealing with believers of conspiracy ideologies.

*\* In Germany, there has been a shift in terminology when talking about conspiracy movements: The term “conspiracy theory” is being increasingly replaced by “conspiracy ideology” for a closed conspiracy dominated worldview and “conspiracy narratives” or “conspiracy myths” for single stories with conspiracist elements. This terminology is considered to be more exact, as the word “theory” contains the idea that something can be proven right or wrong by facts or empirical evidence. This is not the case when people cling to conspiracy ideologies.*

# THE FAR-RIGHT BACKLASH AGAINST THE BLACK LIVES MATTER MOVEMENT

**Joe Mulhall**

The brutal murder of George Floyd by a Minnesota police officer sparked a global response, galvanising a long-brewing resentment and anger at deep-rooted and systemic racism, as well as broader societal anti-Blackness and white supremacy. Inspired by the demonstrations across America, people have taken to the streets across Europe to show solidarity and raise awareness about racial injustice closer to home. Thousands gathered in Paris, London, Berlin and Amsterdam, amongst others, to join in the chants of 'I can't breathe'.

Like everyone else, the European far right have followed events in the US closely, seeking to exploit them for their own domestic gain and provide international support to Donald Trump and the US far right more generally. While the proliferation of continent-wide discussions about race, colonialism and imperial legacies has been a welcome one, it has also been seized upon by elements of the European far right as an opportunity to talk about race in a more exclusionary and supremacist manner.

This has happened in two ways. Firstly, existing racial nationalist activists and organisations, already preoccupied with the concept of race, have used the BLM protests to push their existing political platform to a wider audience.

Secondly, some elements of the far-right that had traditionally distanced themselves from open racial politics, promoting instead 'cultural nationalism', have become more willing and open to explicitly racial politics. Whether this shift is permanent will remain to be seen but in the short-to-medium term we are likely to continue to see cultural nationalism cede ground to racial nationalism within the far-right.

The most obvious manifestation of this phenomenon has been the emergence and spread of the 'White Lives Matter' slogan in response to BLM. First emerging in the US in 2015, it is only really this year that it has been popularised amongst the European far-right.<sup>126</sup> Decontextualized, the slogan is inoffensive and comparable with 'Black Lives Matter'.

In context it represents a negation of the structural and systemic racism implicit in the need to highlight the value of non-white lives. It allows the far right to push a racist agenda via the use of an indisputably true statement, namely that white lives do indeed matter. The requirement of explanation and context when opposing the use of 'White Lives Matter' is its major advantage for the far right. For people who understand racism as something that only occurs when there is direct intent, they are more likely to personalise the issue and get defensive. Where there is cognitive dissonance on people's understanding of historical racism's bearing on systemic discrimination today, it is also easier for people to distance themselves from the problems at hand and thus make them more likely to see nothing wrong with the use of the slogan White Lives Matter. However, while some people genuinely but mistakenly believe that BLM movement is being dismissive of white lives, many on the far-right are willfully misunderstanding the issue for political gain.

In the UK, the slogan has been adopted widely by the domestic far-right. The anti-Muslim organisation Britain First, for example, released numerous images of Lee Rigby, Emily Jones and Charlene Downes - all white murder victims - with text overlaid reading 'White Lives Matter'. The hashtag #WhiteLivesMatter has also trended in the UK, though admittedly much of the traffic is in condemnation of its use. Similarly, the name of Lee Rigby, the British soldier murdered by al-Muhajiroun activists on the streets of London, also began to trend on Twitter. Many on the far-right have sought to draw false equivalency between the two tragedies. Katie Hopkins for example tweeted, 'Outrage. Available in any colour, As long as it is black #leerigby'. For some, this more open discussion of race was something of a departure. Prominent figures and groups such as Stephen Yaxley-Lennon (AKA Tommy Robinson) and Britain First, known primarily for their Islamophobia, switched their focus to race as part of broader plans to 'defend' various statues and memorials, in response to protests



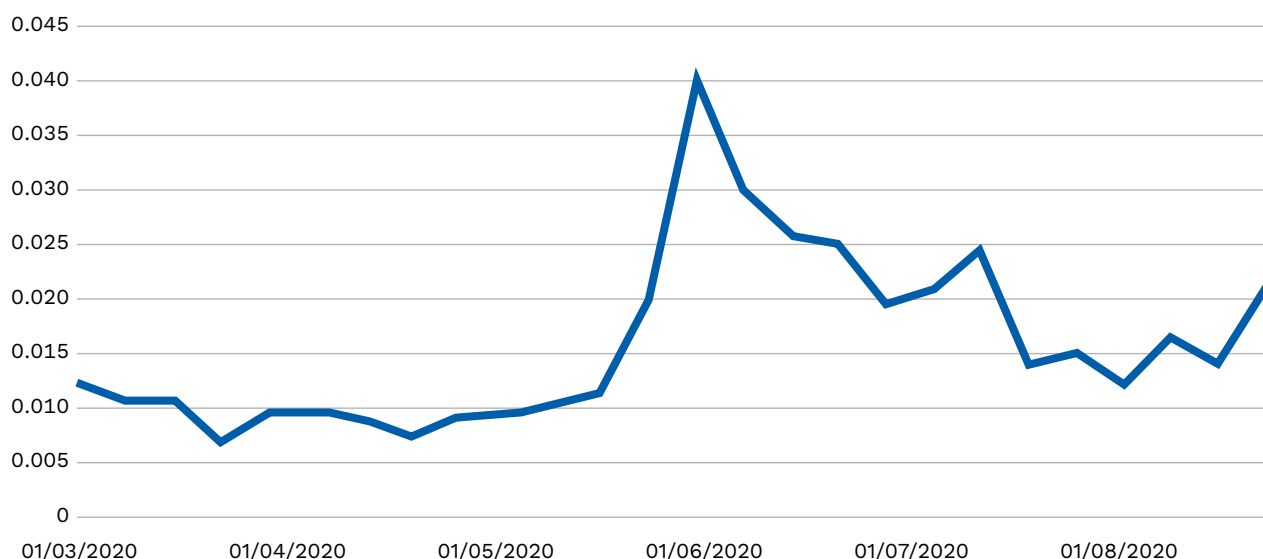
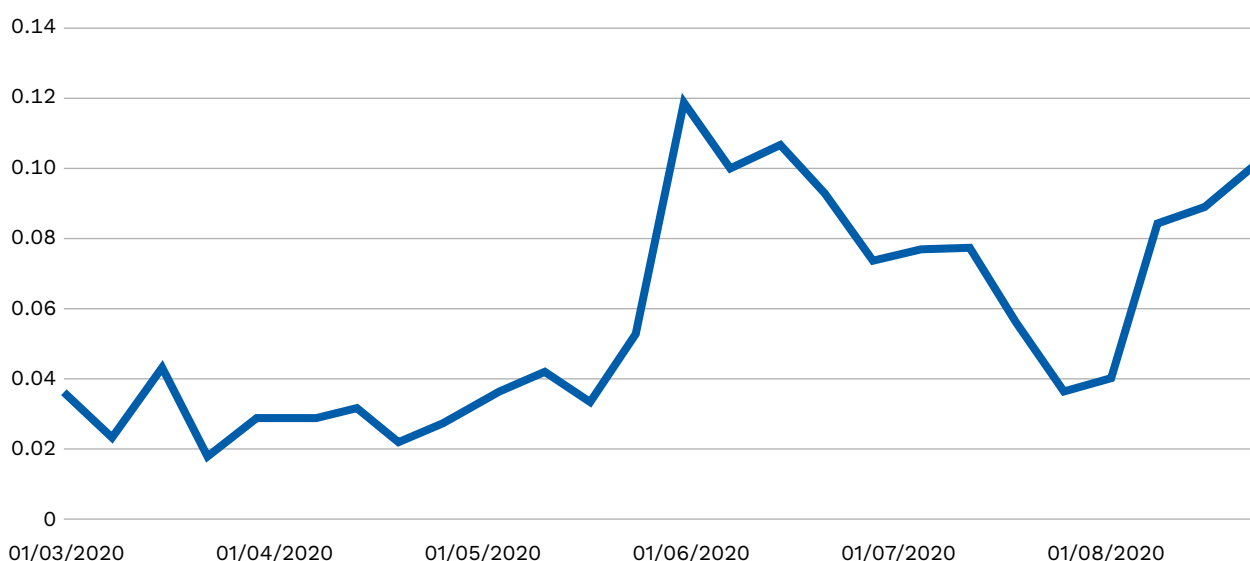
about their links to slavery and colonialism. When a Burnley FC supporter was condemned for organising a plane to fly the 'White Lives Matter' slogan over Manchester City stadium, Lennon likewise lent his support. While the likes of Lennon and Britain First were far from moderate in their view prior to this, such a move is clearly worrying to the extent it can normalise more extreme far-right ideas in such a socially divided time.

The most sustained use of the slogan White Lives Matter in the UK has come from a new racial nationalist organisation called Patriotic Alternative.<sup>127</sup> Formed in 2019 by Mark Collett, former Head of Publicity for the British National Party, the group has quickly grown to a following of nearly 18,000 on Facebook.<sup>128</sup> PA is a racist far-right organisation with antisemitism at its very core. They aim to combat the "replacement and displacement" of white Britons by people who "have no right to these lands". In this regard PA follows the broader trend in recent years amongst many in the far right of rebranding white nationalist ideology as a defense of 'indigenous' Europeans against their 'Great Replacement' from non Europeans. On 9 August Patriotic Alternative (PA) held a day of action across the UK to coincide with International Indigenous People's Day (IPD). The event involved repeating, at a national scale, a strategy the group employed on 4 July when they displayed a 'White Lives Matter' banner on the top of Mam Tor, a hill in Derbyshire. The image of the banner atop Mam Tor was intended

to stir up controversy and in so doing bait the media and concerned members of the public into giving the marginal group free publicity. Though press coverage was only local, the event attracted attention on social media and was successful in bringing in new supporters to PA. Due to this success they decided to hold the much larger event on IPD. The result was images of roughly 80 locations displaying the slogan, alongside related phrases, from just over 100 activists. There were also a handful of pictures submitted from abroad, including by the fascist groups Nordic Resistance Movement in Denmark and Action Zealandia in New Zealand.

Similar stunts using the White Lives Matter slogan have been seen across the continent in 2020 with reports of banners being unfurled at football games in The Czech Republic, Ukraine, Hungary and the Netherlands. One report by *DW* showed how "Monkey chants, a Confederate flag, 'White Lives Matter' banners and even a call for the release of the policeman charged with the death of George Floyd have all been seen at football grounds in Europe over the past month."<sup>129</sup>

However, one of the most concerted and high profile campaigns in reaction to the BLM movement this year has come from the Identitarian movement across the continent. The international Identitarian movement started in France with the launch of *Génération Identitaire* (Generation Identity, or GI), the youth wing of the far-right *Bloc Identitaire*. It

**Use of keyword “white” among far-right Twitter accounts****Use of “white”, “blanc” and “Weiß” among 289 Identitarian Twitter accounts**

has since spread across the continent with affiliated groups, the most prominent of which, in addition to France, are based in Germany, Italy and Austria. At the core of identitarianism is the racist idea of ethnic-separatism which they call ‘ethnopluralism’. Similarly, they also call for ‘remigration’, a coded term for the idea of repatriation of non-white people. Part of the movement’s success has been their ability to take extreme ideas and present them in a way that sounds moderate. They affect public attitudes by promoting a lexicon which, for those unfamiliar with the contemporary far right, may have less obvious links to extreme, prejudicial and dangerous political ideas and policies. It is for this reason that they have pounced on the White Lives

Matter slogan so enthusiastically this year. In June for example, GI activists in France held an anti-BLM counter protest and unfurled a huge banner reading “Justice for the victims of anti-white racism: #WhiteLivesMatters”.<sup>130</sup> Similarly, in Germany, GI activists sought to capitalise on a series of large BLM demonstrations across the country by launching a campaign titled #NiemalsaufKnien (Never on our knees) in response to protestors and politicians kneeling in solidarity with the victims of racial violence.<sup>131</sup>

The increased prevalence of more explicit racial politics and rhetoric is not merely anecdotal. Based on keyword matching in the tweets posted by far-right accounts monitored by HOPE not hate, we



observed a notable increase in tweets discussing race during the week of George Floyd's death a period that also became a flashpoint in the BLM movement. His death took place on the 25th of May, a Monday. That week and the following week, adjusted for total weekly tweet volume, tweets mentioning the keyword "white" increased fourfold compared to the previous two months. Specifically looking at a set of 289 accounts being part of the European Identitarian movement in mainly the UK, France, Germany and Austria, the same pattern was observed. Although the movement more frequently used the keyword "white" (and its French and German counterpart) than the average far-right account overall, the week of Floyd's death saw the amount of discussion increase by approximately 370%. In both the case of identitarian accounts as well as the whole sample of far-right accounts the relative amount of tweets matching the keywords remained elevated until August 31st, the end of the period measured.

The re-racialisation of the far-right has been notably evident within the UK, though similar tactics have been observed across the European far right. By using the international discussion of racial injustice that has been spawned by the events in America, the European far-right has worked to deny or downplay the scale and uniqueness of anti-black oppression across Europe and promote their longstanding belief that the true victims of societal racism are actually white people at the hands of multicultural and politically correct elites. Egregiously, many have increasingly sought to co-opt the language of human rights and oppression, with some even publicly identifying with figures such as Martin Luther King, Gandhi or Mandela. More generally though the European far-right has seized the BLM moment this summer and sought to mirror its success and co-opt the claim of being a persecuted minority. Here we see a rhetorical gymnastics that frames far-right activism as a struggle for human rights and equality, shorn of overtly racist or crude epithets. This tactic provides a serious challenge to those opposing the far-right or seeking to moderate their activity on social media as the lexicon ostensibly appears progressive thereby requiring increased levels of context to reveal the reality of the prejudiced politics on display.

#### ENDNOTES

- 126 <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/group/white-lives-matter>
- 127 [https://www.hopenothate.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/HnH\\_Patriotic-Alternative-report\\_2020-08-v3.pdf](https://www.hopenothate.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/HnH_Patriotic-Alternative-report_2020-08-v3.pdf)
- 128 <https://www.facebook.com/PatrioticAlternative>
- 129 <https://www.dw.com/en/white-lives-matter-banners-take-racism-to-a-new-level-after-burnley-plane-stunt/a-53916597>
- 130 <https://www.ruptly.tv/en/videos/20200613-028-France--Counter-protesters-unfurl--White-Lives-Matter--banner-at-Paris-anti-racism-demo>
- 131 <https://gnet-research.org/2020/06/29/niemalsaufknien-how-the-identitarian-movement-in-germany-reacted-to-the-black-lives-matter-protests/>

# SPOTLIGHT ON THE WESTERN BALKANS: FAR-RIGHT TRENDS IN THE REGION

Fabio Bego



Activists of Serbian Action honoring with torchlight 70 years since the death of Serbian ideologist Dimitrije Ljotić.  
Photo: Dalekovod

**Far-right ideas and politics are deeply embedded in the Western Balkans and pose a serious threat to the stability of the region. They accentuate ethnic and religious divisions, undermine civic movements, and delegitimise local democratic institutions and their international sponsors.**

This article investigates the programmatic and ideological analogies between different far-right organisations in the region and the way in which they reflect the politics of mainstream parties. Ideas and ambitions that are considered prerogatives of the far-right in Western Europe, have been a dominant factor in the Balkans during the last four decades. Far-right politics are ubiquitous and mobilise several layers of society. The phenomenon should therefore be analysed within a broader political scope. This research does not aim at providing an exhaustive classification of the groups that may be classified

as far-right. I will rather focus on the illustration of some peculiar trends through a transnational approach.

## FROM PUNKS TO THIRD POSITIONISTS

The spread of the far-right in the Western Balkans (WB) coincided with the end of the Cold War, but has followed different paths. Fascist ideas permeated the former Yugoslav space in the 1980s through punk, New-Wave and skinhead subcultures. Unlike in Western Europe where such movements mostly expressed anti-capitalist ideas, in Yugoslavia they revolted against the conformism of socialist ideology that had ruled the country since the end of World War II.<sup>132</sup> In the mid-eighties, there were few Nazi-skinheads in some Yugoslav cities. Their ranks grew in the following decade and a branch of *Blood and Honour* was founded in Serbia.<sup>133</sup>

The end of the Tito era was marked by the resurgence of strong nationalist feelings which led to civil wars that lasted from 1991 to 2001. The map drawn after the conflicts engendered irredentist

claims and revanchist sentiments that determined the “normalisation” of nationalism in the regional political framework.<sup>134</sup> Far-right leanings have also been propelled by diaspora communities which gave support to the parties in conflict.<sup>135</sup> The experience of migration contributed to enhance the sense of national belonging<sup>136</sup> and in some cases to emphasise the racist content of the national narratives. One of the earliest Albanian affiliation to neo-fascist ideology seems to have occurred in the context of the Italian National-Socialist Black Metal (NSBM) scene.<sup>137</sup>

In order to understand the pervasiveness of far-right ideas in the WB, I will analyse far-right leanings by proceeding from its “periphery”, that is underground movements, toward its “core”, that is mainstream parties. Some of the most radical expressions of the far-right have been endorsed by *Srbska Akcija*/ Serbian Action (SA), *Posizioni i Tretë Shqiptar*/ Albanian Third Position (ATP) and *Bosanski Pokret Nacionalnog Ponosa*/ Bosnian National Pride Movement (BPNP). SA was founded in 2010, but its origins date back to the late 1990s when an homonymous fanzine was published in Belgrade. The original idea of *Srbska Akcija* was to combine Serbian orthodox nationalism with the skinhead subculture.<sup>138</sup> BPNP exists since 2009 whereas ATP was founded in May 2019.<sup>139</sup>

In analogy to populist parties, these Balkan far-right groups refuse to be identified as either right or left-wing. They relate to “third way” doctrines that were conceived in the 1920s as a response to bolshevism and liberal capitalism.<sup>140</sup> These groups draw inspiration from historical characters of the interwar and World War II periods who sympathised or collaborated with fascist governments. Evoking the thought of Julius Evola, Oswald Spengler and Carl Schmitt, third way activists advocate the return to tradition as the only possible means to restore authentic national and European values.

Far-right groups do not disclose the names of their members and it is difficult to know their quantitative figures. Judging by the pictures that they have published, they should not be very numerous. SA is most likely the larger organization, whereas ATP and BPNP probably have a small number of active members that is dedicated to the propaganda. Their objective is not to become parties that run for elections and therefore they are not interested in gaining the support of the masses. Third way activists aim at mobilising individuals disposed and prepared to undertake specific tasks. They try to captivate young people by deploying contemporary far-right imagery and sounds.

Beside keeping the law at bay, secrecy can be a strategy that aims at increasing the appeal of the groups. The organizational structure of BPNP is inspired by secret societies and obliges all members to keep silence about the activities.<sup>141</sup> ATP draws its name and political ideology from the former Italian neo-fascist group *Terza Posizione*<sup>142</sup> whose members

were associated with terrorist groups such as *Nuclei Armati Rivoluzionari* (NAR). In analogy to the other far-right groups, SA does not openly advocate the use of violence, unless it is for “self-defence” purposes. However, videos that glorify street riots are posted on a YouTube account affiliated to SA.<sup>143</sup> According to a 2015 interview, at least one member of the organisation has joined the *Novorossiia* forces to fight against the Kiev government in Ukraine.<sup>144</sup>

## THE POLITICS OF CARE

Preservation and protection of the national group and traditions are the core politics of third way movements. The nation is a community determined by common spirit and blood<sup>145</sup> which was born from race.<sup>146</sup> The far-right acknowledges that each race has its own values and worldviews.<sup>147</sup> Racial relativism is advocated as the only way to preserve social harmony against the dangers of mixing.<sup>148</sup> When George Floyd was killed, SA stated that it was a brutal crime that needed to be punished. However, it also pointed out that the “global left” and Soros exploited the case to create chaos. According to SA, racial hatred is evil, but racial mixing inevitably leads to hatred. Each race has its organic laws and its living space in which it can prosper. The group’s motto is: “0% hate, 100% identity”.<sup>149</sup>

The third way ethics imply care for fellow nation and race members, as well as for the environment and other living beings. Such ethics assert that Nature should be loved because it is God’s creation,<sup>150</sup> and that national-socialism is the only authentic green ideology because it preserves biodiversity, even among people.<sup>151</sup> Albanian far-right activists point out the damage caused to the environment by capitalist exploitation.<sup>152</sup> They expose “pseudo-ecologists” like Greta Thunberg and suggest reading authors such as Linkola and controversial NSBM musician Varg Vikernes in order to know about true ecology.<sup>153</sup>

The care for nature also implies the care of one’s own body that has the function to protect and regenerate the race. Far-right activists complain about the loss of virility that affects contemporary men who have become chubby and fat.<sup>154</sup> In order to recover the muscular tone, they encourage people to practice sports,<sup>155</sup> but some activists think that supposedly ‘Zionist practices’ such as body-building must be avoided.<sup>156</sup> BPNP warns to stay away from drugs and alcohol and claims that Israeli mafia sells ecstasy with the deliberate purpose of destroying the European youth.<sup>157</sup>

When dealing with health issues, the far-right leans toward conspiracy perhaps more than it does when it engages with historical issues. There are actually several groups that spread QAnon-like stories in Serbia, and SA is one of them. In an article published in May 2020, the activists explained that “Pizzagate” was a circle of child trafficking, paedophilia and satanic rituals that involved Jeffrey Epstein, Donald Trump, the Clintons and Marina Abramović.<sup>158</sup>

Children's health has a strong affective appeal that is also used by mainstream politics in order to reach the masses. The coalition that won the last Serbian elections was called *Za našu decu/* for our children. No-vax campaigns are almost exclusively based on people's concerns for children's health. Conspiracy theorists and no-vax advocates with far-right leanings such as Jovana Stojković in Serbia and Alfred Cako in Albania have thousands of social media followers. The current Covid-19 crisis has contributed to increase their popularity. The attitude of third way activists toward the pandemic is not univocal. They acknowledge the danger of the virus, but have also criticised governments for limiting freedoms.

Care is often articulated as humanitarian aid. Right-wing football ultras in Montenegro, Albania and North Macedonia donate blood and support fund raising for people in need. Similar initiatives are carried out in Bosnian Facebook pages such as *Ljiljani Bosanski* that combine Islamic and nationalist propaganda. Pictures of persons who suffer because of the lack of vital needs counterbalance the propagandistic images spread by local politicians such as Tirana mayor Erjon Veliaj who has recently been posting pictures of nice, trendy and seemingly wealthy people that represent a small portion of society. *BPNP* provides a list of humanitarian actions that are supported by the organisation. This includes food sharing, neighbourhood patrolling and blood donation.<sup>159</sup> Some far-right groups have made of the humanitarian cause their main *raison d'être*. The *Pokret Levijatan/* Leviathan Movement, was founded in 2015 to protect animal rights before turning into a political party.<sup>160</sup> One of their main humanitarian actions consist in patrolling Belgrade at night to harass migrants and other marginalised persons.

The emphasis on protecting traditional values turns into hatred toward those who are considered a threat to them. Marxism, feminism and homosexuality are considered against the laws of nature.<sup>161</sup> Feminism is defined as a mental disease,<sup>162</sup> whereas homosexuality is associated to paedophilia<sup>163</sup> and perversion.<sup>164</sup> One of SA's most frequent activities involves disturbing LGBTQ manifestations. The passage of African and Middle Eastern migrants in the Balkans has accentuated local far-right trends almost everywhere in the region. In analogy to Western European groups, WB far-right activists corroborate the myth of ethnic and racial replacement. SA invokes the closure of borders because migrants endanger public security.<sup>165</sup> A blog and Facebook page named *brerore* were opened in late 2018, by Albanian right-wing activists in order to propagandise radical nationalist ideas. The group uses the same symbol of the Italian right-wing party *Lega*. Some of the authors of the blog have progressively embraced aggressive attitudes toward migrants and they blame "sorosians", communists and religious fanatics for carrying out population exchange between continents.<sup>166</sup>

## THE REJECTION OF DEMOCRACY AND NEOLIBERAL POLITICS

The passage from socialism to democracy has freed people from dictatorships, but has failed to produce uniform wealth in the region. It has instead created profound social inequalities that have a strong and clearly visible impact on the everyday life of individuals and families. According to the far-right, democracy is a "lie"<sup>167</sup>, an "illusion"<sup>168</sup> and a "cruel joke [*maskarallëk*]"<sup>169</sup> because it tells people that they enjoy equal rights when they don't. Fascism stands for the rejection of materialist values and strives to make man understand that money, social Darwinism, and communist utopias are fake gods that must be destroyed.<sup>170</sup> The third way aims at abolishing conventional democracy in order to establish a corporatist welfare state. The latter will free people from plutocracy<sup>171</sup> and neo/liberal policies.<sup>172</sup>

Mainstream parties advocate democratic values, but they share similar conceptions about the effects of neoliberal politics. The *Savez Nezavisnih Socijaldemokrata (SNSD)* which is the main party of Bosnia-Herzegovina's autonomous unit, the Republika Srpska, stresses that globalisation and liberal capitalism have failed.<sup>173</sup> Lëvizja Vetëvendosje (LV) that won the Kosovo elections in 2019, and SA activists might have diametrically opposed views on Kosovo's status, but they both believe that "neoliberalism" is an agent of political and economic chaos.<sup>174</sup> In analogy to third way movements, LV advocates the formation of a "social" state that will redistribute wealth. The party agenda envisions the nationalization of resources that have irregularly been privatised during the transition years.<sup>175</sup>

Far-right activists refuse to adopt political models that they believe were imposed by foreign powers. They oppose both "multiculturalism", which in their view is the expression of a moral corruption,<sup>176</sup> and "civic nationalism" which they see as an attempt to create nations with members that are not biologically related to each other.<sup>177</sup> Regional mainstream parties share similar views. According to *SNSD*, national identity is neither useless nor obsolete whereas multiculturalism was a big lie. The party program stresses that Republika Srpska should be founded on a clearly defined sense of belonging.<sup>178</sup>

The debate concerning the founding principles of citizenship is particularly relevant in Bosnia-Herzegovina and in Kosovo where international actors have played a major role in the post-conflict state-building process. In Bosnia, the main party of the Bosniak community, the *Stranka Demokratske Akcije (SDA)*, calls for the constitution of a supranational Bosnian-Herzegovinian identity based on civic interests.<sup>179</sup> The main Croat party of the Bosnian autonomous unit Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the *Hrvatska Demokratska Zajednica (HDZ)* is against the concept of "civic universalism"



and stands for “ethnic federalism”.<sup>180</sup> In a similar way, LV in Kosovo rejects Athisaari’s plan because it imposes a multi-ethnic society that, in their opinion, treats Serbs as a privileged minority.<sup>181</sup> In analogy to SNSD, LV refuses the idea that national identity is obsolete and asks that if the concept of nation-state is so outdated why only Kosovo has to be a multi-ethnic state. The party has criticized the former chief of the European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo (EULEX) Yves de Kermabon, stating that if he liked multi-ethnic states, he could turn (his homeland) France into one.<sup>182</sup>

## THE THIRD WAY AND RELIGION

Religious radicalism is usually associated to Balkan Muslims because researchers tend to look at the phenomenon mostly from a global perspective.<sup>183</sup> A local gaze suggests that the rise of radicalism might as well be the outcome of far-right ideologies, which consider religion as an essential tool to restore traditional values.

Most Serbian far-right organisations place Christian Orthodoxy as the basis of their political projects. SA activists describe themselves as an army devoted to Orthodox faith.<sup>184</sup> Religion has recently been at the centre of attention in Montenegro as in the end of 2019, the government passed a law on religious freedoms that threatened to dispossess the Serbian Orthodox Church of its properties. The event accentuated the conflict between the two main nationalist trends in Montenegro: one that advocates the belonging of Montenegrins to the Serbian national identity, and the other that promotes Montenegrin identity as a distinct national entity.

Separatist drifts are also stimulated by the existence of two churches. The Serbian Orthodox Church is entitled to administer the eparchy of Montenegro, but in 1993 a schism occurred which led to the restoration of the Montenegrin Orthodox Church that has not been recognised by the Patriarchate.<sup>185</sup> The last elections in August 2020, were won by the coalition *Demokratski Front (DF)* which is led by the pro-Serbian Party *Nova Srpska Demokratija (NOVA)*. The party program emphasises that the Serbian Orthodox Church has a special role in the national and spiritual upbringing of “our people”.<sup>186</sup> The vision of NOVA coincides at least in part with the ideas of underground far-right groups such as *Bunt Crna Gora* that runs the homonymous Instagram and Facebook pages, and a blog.<sup>187</sup> According to an interview, *Bunt (revolt)* was founded as a reaction to the abovementioned law on religious freedoms. The members preserve anonymity and declare that they do not belong to any party.<sup>188</sup> Serbian nationalism is opposed by far-right Montenegrin groups, such as the one that runs the Facebook page *Komiti-Zelenaski Pokret (KZP)*. The latter rejects any affiliation to Serbs and professes loyalty to the Montenegrin Orthodox Church.<sup>189</sup> In response to the Serbian appeals for brotherhood, KZP publishes crude old pictures of Montenegrin independence fighters killed by Belgrade forces accompanied by



Serbian Action volunteers in Ukraine.  
Photo: Dalekovod

the words “we have never been brothers (...)”<sup>190</sup> Recent events have also produced repercussions for Muslim-Christian relations. Soon after the Montenegrin elections, Serbian nationalists attacked exponents of the Muslim (Bosniak) community in Pljevlja.<sup>191</sup> In response, a car parade was organised in Sarajevo with the call “brothers you are not alone”.<sup>192</sup>

Unlike Serbs, Albanians and Bosnians practice different religions and the far-right has proposed alternative ways of spiritual transcendence. In order to generate a sense of common belonging, *BNP* professes naturalism. In their view, national socialism is founded on the laws of nature and has therefore a clear concept of right and wrong.<sup>193</sup>

*ATP* calls for the rejection of all “Abrahamic” faiths because they are responsible for the European decay.<sup>194</sup> The far-right in Albania is averse to Islamic faith since, in their opinion, it does not allow believers to be part of a nation.<sup>195</sup> Albanians feel that Islam draws antipathies upon them from Western Europe. These anxieties are based on the fact that radical trends have lately become more visible. Many Albanians in different WB states supported the recent anti-French campaign advocated by Erdogan.<sup>196</sup> Others cynically grinned to the Vienna attack of November 2020, which was carried out by a terrorist with an Albanian background. In order to extinguish religious divisions, the *ATP* promotes paganism, which is portrayed as the true faith of Albanians and of their Illyrian ancestors.<sup>197</sup> Far-right activists have criticized the government for hosting Iranian *MEK* dissidents in Albania. They

fear that the presence of Iranian dissidents will accentuate Islamic radicalism<sup>198</sup> and jeopardise the overall security of the country since it creates the preconditions for a proxy war with Teheran.<sup>199</sup>

## SPATIAL RECONFIGURATIONS

Most WB countries have territorial issues with their neighbours and far-right groups are strong advocates of irredentist programs. *BPNP* declares that the national-socialist state should annex territories that were detached from Bosnia such as the *Sandžak* that is part of Serbia.<sup>200</sup> *ATP* claims the Albanianess of Kosovo and insists on referring to the region as Dardania, as it was called in antiquity instead of Kosovo which is a Slavic word that was adopted later.<sup>201</sup> Serbian far-right activists employ the term “*Kosovo i Metohija*” to define Kosovo which they see as part of Serbia, notwithstanding the declaration of independence of 2008. Beside Kosovo, *SA* claims Montenegro, Krajina, Slavonia and Dalmatia which are parts of Croatia, Bosnia, Herzegovina, and “South Serbia”,<sup>202</sup> that is North Macedonia.

Semantics are important in the region because language is a tool of appropriation of space through ethnocentric historical narratives. This is particularly the case of the Greek-Macedonian controversy concerning the name of Macedonia and the one between the latter and Bulgaria concerning Macedonian identity and language. The first question was resolved with the change of name of the Republic of Macedonia into Republic of North Macedonia. The second is still pending and has led to a stop of North Macedonian talks for EU accession after Sofia’s veto in November 2020.<sup>203</sup>

The Macedonian case shows that national issues of mainstream politics have a relevant impact on the region. Sometimes territorial ambitions advanced by mainstream parties are even bigger than those of underground movements. Whereas *ATP* is mostly concerned with Kosovo, the Albanian party with parliamentary representatives *Partia Drejtësi, Integritet, Unitet (PDIU)*, advocates the constitution of an “Economic Commonwealth” between Albania and the Albanian-speaking regions of the other Balkan states (Montenegro, Kosovo, North Macedonia and Greece). The purpose of the project is to gradually achieve the full integration the Albanian people.<sup>204</sup>

The programs of other regional mainstream parties point at the same goal. *SDA* states that it aims at defending the rights and national interests of Bosniaks that live in other countries of the region.<sup>205</sup> *Vnatrešna Makedonska Revolucionerna Organizacija - Demokratska Partija za Makedonsko Nacionalno Edinstvo (VMRO - DPMNE)* in North Macedonia wants to reach a border agreement in order to facilitate connections between “Macedonians” in Macedonia and in *Golo Brdo* without even mentioning that the latter region is in Albania.<sup>206</sup> A similar agenda is established for the Kosovo and Bulgarian sides of the borders.<sup>207</sup>

Analogous trends characterise Serbian politics. The

main Serbian party in Serbia, the *Srpska Napredna Stranka (SNS)*, considers Kosovo as part of the national territory and advocates closer political and economic relations with Republika Srpska.<sup>208</sup> *SNSD leader* Milorad Dodik has been advocating the independence of Republika Srpska from Bosnia and its union to Serbia for years.<sup>209</sup> Building tighter relations with Serbia is also one of the key objectives of *NOVA* in Montenegro, which aims to enhance the natural, historical and business connections between the countries. The party pursues a similar policy with Republika Srpska.<sup>210</sup> Rumours have started to circulate about the endeavours of Republika Srpska, suggesting its ambition of annexing the coastal Montenegrin town of Sutorina to Bosnia. Serbian politician Aleksander Djurdjev believes that Belgrade should support the initiative.<sup>211</sup> The news worried the *KZP*.<sup>212</sup> Novak Adžić, a member of the Montenegrin opposition, claimed that country risks turning into a Republika Srpska on the sea, that is a state dominated by Serbian nationalism.<sup>213</sup>

## THE THIRD WAY AND REGIONAL CONFLICTS

Balkan regional rivalries that are normally contained within the limits of cyber space, tend to invest the physical space in contexts where nationalists of different nations live side by side. Currently, this especially concerns Bosnia-Herzegovina, North Macedonia and Montenegro. Graffiti, parades, monuments, pyro shows, ostentation of national and religious symbols, and intimidations of real or fabricated opponents are some of the actions undertaken by nationalist and far-right groups to demarcate the belonging of contended spaces.

FK Shkupi ultras *Shvercerat* write on walls and banners: “Skopje is Albania too”. At the end of 2019, North Macedonian supporters attacked Kosovo fans with knives after a football match. FK Vardar ultras *Komiti* expressed their disappointment toward Albanians in the country stating that the Macedonian people is living in a regime of apartheid because they are dominated by the (Albanian) minority.<sup>214</sup>

In Bosnia-Herzegovina several roads and public buildings bear the names of war criminals.<sup>215</sup> A monument dedicated to Croat war victims in Bosača was vandalized by someone who depicted the symbol of the Bosnian army on it.<sup>216</sup> National resentments are deliberately exacerbated in Facebook pages such as *Hrvatsko Vijeće Obrane, Vojska Republike Srpske* and *Armija Republike Bosne i Hercegovine* that glorify and vilify the factions that confronted each other in the 1992-1995 civil war. There are no fancy photoshopped pictures with neon light effects in these Facebook profiles, but raw images portraying young man and woman who have perished in battle, the faces of their parents who have to live with the pain, and figures and information about killing, defending and betrayal.

Following the results of Montenegrin elections in August 2020, the former Bishop of Serbian Orthodox Church Amfilohije, who recently passed

away, declared that he intended to undertake construction works of sacred sites in Lovćen and Cetinje. Part of the Montenegrin press saw this project as the implementation of the old Serbian nationalist agenda known as *Načertanije*.<sup>217</sup> Montenegrin nationalists held up a banner as a warning that they will not allow such an enterprise.<sup>218</sup> The current political situation is stimulating national animosities also in other fronts. Albanian nationalism has never been particularly extreme in Montenegro although there have been manifestations of revisionist trends. In analogy to Albanians in North Macedonia, the Albanian minority in Montenegro celebrates the national festivities with national symbols, manifestations and noisy car parades. The Facebook page “Albanians in Montenegro” glorifies historical characters who fought against the annexation of allegedly “Albanian” territories by Montenegro when they still belonged to the Ottoman Empire.<sup>219</sup> Far-right Serbian nationalist groups such as *Bunt Crna Gora* stigmatize these forms of nationalist externalisations in order to present the Albanian minority as a threat.<sup>220</sup>

Local politicians have carried out some endeavours to enhance regional economy and overcome tensions due to border disputes through the so-called “Mini-Schengen” initiative. The latter envisages the free mobility of people and goods in all WB states.<sup>221</sup> The project has been mainly promoted by the Prime Ministers of Serbia, Albania and North Macedonia, and has drawn criticism from both right-wing and centrists. The former consider it to be a betrayal of national interests, and the latter see it as a bland alternative to the EU accession. Far-right activists position themselves against any inter-Balkan cooperation that does not imply the recognition of their maximalist claims. When Serbia and Kosovo signed an agreement in Washington in September 2020, both ATP and SA declared it was “scandalous”. They thought that Trump used Vučić and Hoti for the benefit of America, Zionism and pederasty<sup>222</sup>/moral degeneration.<sup>223</sup>

Notwithstanding regional rivalries, third way activists have several programmatic points in common. Firstly, they distrust regional and international actors such as local governments, the USA, the EU, Putin and/or Russia, and Turkey. Moreover, they are equally engaged in fighting against alleged enemies of tradition such as LGBTQ movements, “sorosians”, migrants, Muslims, Marxists and Zionism. Finally, they believe that the long-term purpose of their political projections should be devised on the principle of racial solidarity. Unlike conventional nationalist parties who are mainly focused on territorial claims and minority rights disputes, contingent challenges and race ideology are factors that allow third way activists to overcome divergences and seek for each other’s collaboration.

## CONCLUSIONS

Far-right trends in the Balkans are currently in ferment. A generation of people born during the end of the socialist/communist regimes or in the transition period is growing tired of waiting for a social development that never comes or that does not satisfy their expectations. This generation, which was projected toward emigration to Western Europe to study and work, now perceives the arrival of other migrants as competition, since in their view, they would further limit their chances for individual affirmation.

Third way ideology redefines regional and continental hierarchies according to a biological/racist concept. Moreover, by emphasising anti-capitalist ethics, it promises to free people from the frustrations of consumerism. Since local governments and international institutions find it difficult to curb criminal networks and corruption, far-right activists feel legitimated to present themselves as champions of morality.

The analogies between third way ideology and parliamentary parties has shown that underground politics have a relevant influence on mainstream parties. Social networks, blogs, underground circles (in the Balkans or abroad), religious institutions, stadiums, streets and public squares are the places where far-right activists come in contact with larger parts of the population. The comparison between mainstream parties and far-right groups suggests that the main political conflict does not concern relations between neighbours as much as it concerns relations between local agents and what they perceive to be the main causes of their problems such as “neoliberalism”, “globalism” and their cultural facets. The far-right groups push people to believe that the societies in which they live need radical structural changes and portray themselves as agents of a new anti-colonial struggle.

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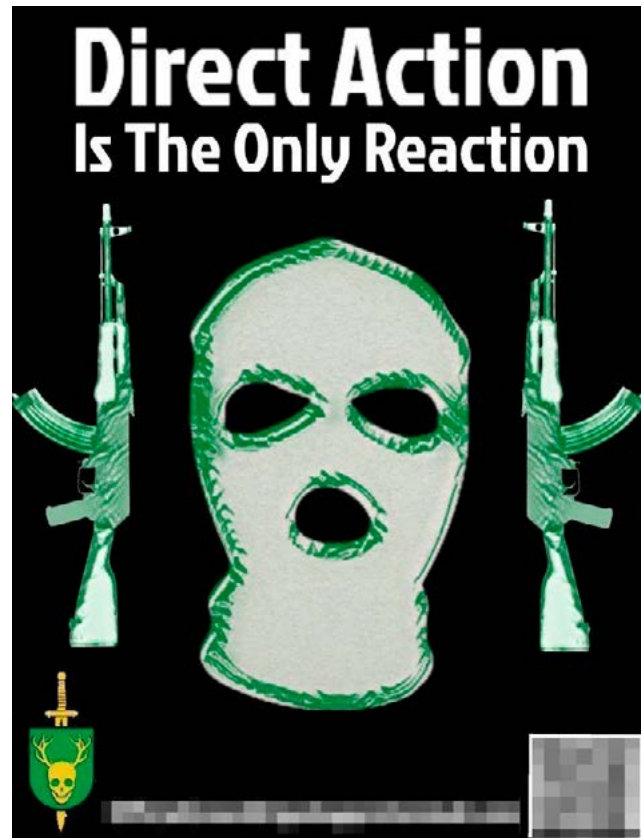
# THE STATE OF EXTREME FAR-RIGHT TERRORISM AND VIOLENCE

**Patrik Hermansson**

2020 got off to a tragic start with a mass shooting by a far-right terrorist in Hanau, Germany, taking the life of 10 people in an attack on two shisha bars frequented mainly by people with an immigrant background. The attack encapsulated what would later become one of the key features of far-right activism in 2020, namely the way it was motivated in-part by conspiracy theory beliefs. However, it also appeared to be a continuation of the far-right terror trend from 2018 and 2019. It was the second deadly far-right terror attack in Germany in less than half-a-year, following the attack against a synagogue and kebab shop in Halle in October 2019. The Halle attack was inspired by the Christchurch mass shooting which claimed the lives of 51 people in two mosques in New Zealand in March 2019 which inspired a series of attacks in Europe and the US during the year.

The 2020 Global Terrorism Index published by the Institute of Economics & Peace highlights that we are experiencing a peak of far-right terrorism in the West with 49 registered attacks in 2019, an upwards going trend for five consecutive years. While complete data is not available for 2020 at the time of writing, this trend does not appear to be sustained for this year. However, there remains a large and active terror advocating far-right community. There have been many terror related arrests and multiple new groups have been formed during the year, indicating that the threat of far-right terror should not be seen as diminished.

The multiple attacks and attempts in Germany, Norway and the UK directly inspired by Christchurch demonstrated the international mindset and decentralised structure of the current far-right threat. In a recent report by HOPE not hate, Joe Mulhall wrote about how we appeared to be shifting into an increasingly 'post-organisational' far-right landscape, where a "decentralised collective of anonymous people" were working in "broadly the same direction and towards similar goals", making it more difficult to monitor and undermine their activities. This has been the case for some time



online, but the attacks and terror related charges brought in 2019 and 2020 has underlined that this is also a feature of the most extreme parts of the far-right. Many attacks during this period had a distinct online dimension and aimed to encouraged others to commit similar acts of terrorism (albeit without strict direction from a leadership) and were committed by perpetrators whose familiarity with online spaces where far-right terrorism was encouraged.

From the publication of documents online to specific sites outlining the details and motivations ahead of their attacks and the use of live streamed video as well as the peppering of both with vocabulary common to these spaces, the intention in many cases (made explicit in documents released ahead of the attacks) where to further cultivate online pro-terror subcultures online and encourage others to carry out such acts.

The ensuing media coverage and virally replicated memes are also often part of the perpetrators plan to sow division and hatred. Therefore, it is important



to understand that far-right terror doesn't end when the last bullet has been fired but form a part of a larger wave designed to stoke up violence and sow fear in primarily minority communities. The tactic exploits existing organisations and terror promoting networks online to maximise the reach of the attack.

Part of this network has come to be termed 'the terrorgram' when specifically referring to channels on chat app Telegram, one of the most active platforms for far-right terror advocating groups today. It has over time grown a specific aesthetic and language that glorifies images of war and violence. Related groups can be found across other chat apps, Instagram and fascist forums. While few of the activists taking part in these will take action, the collective serve to instill the feeling that violence is both necessary and justified while at the same time allowing people to connect, share advice and motivate each other. Creating a network of individuals with similar ideas and aspirations but without direct leadership.

## ARRESTS AND PRESCRIPTIONS

That online terror advocating groups are increasingly important to the terroristic far-right is made evident in a spate of terror related arrests and charges brought in 2020 against far-right activists, as well as exposures of specific terror advocating networks.

In January 2020 an Estonian nazi made headlines as the leader of Feuerkrieg Division (FKD). The group gained notoriety on the messaging app Telegram because of its extreme content and

calls for terrorism by a leader who called himself "Commander". Commander posted pictures of himself in what looked like combat gear, bragged about his extensive collection of far-right literature and urged other users to bomb federal buildings. FKD soon had members in several European countries and North America, the fact that most members had not met each other offline did not stop them from producing propaganda in the form of stickers, posters and digital content. Police also made arrests in Croatia and Lithuania related to the FKD.

This mode of organising also allows very young people to take a central role in the most extreme segments of the far-right as long as they can produce sufficiently extreme and interesting content and are articulate enough. Unknown to the group's members, Commander was just 13 years old and two British members of 16 and 17 years old faced charges for terror related offenses in November 2020. Another 23 year-old member of the group was convicted in Germany in December. The United Kingdom also proscribed the FKD in July 2020, making association with the group illegal.

Worryingly, FKD is not an anomaly. Similar terror advocating groups have also been formed elsewhere, following the style of FKD with decentralised, mainly online organising. One was the so-called "Moonkrieg Division" run by a 16 year old Swedish boy although the group had members in the US and Eastern Europe.

Similarly, in the UK 2020 saw the emergence of "The British Hand" which was founded by a 15 year-old





boy who said he was planning to attack asylum centres alongside his fellow group members. Another member from the group is currently facing charges for planning terrorism and manufacturing weapons through 3D printing.

Groups organising primarily offline are however still a feature of the terror scene in Europe. Several members of British National Action, which was proscribed in 2018, and its splinter groups were convicted during the year in the UK. Primarily offline groups like National Action, the Scandinavian Nordic Resistance Movement (NRM) and American AtomWaffen Division also provide a blueprint and inspiration for newer online groups. FKD for example made explicit references to AtomWaffen Division and its members engaged in the NRM's public chats on Telegram.

## ECO-FASCISM

Another trend in 2020 was the continued increase in activists using the label "eco-fascist". The murderers in Christchurch as well as the one in El Paso, USA in March and August 2019 explained their activism in-part through concern for the environment. "Kill the invaders, kill the overpopulation and by doing so save the environment", wrote the Christchurch shooter in his manifesto.

On 30 October 2019 two men burnt down a mink farm in the south of Sweden, with an eco-fascist nazi terror group called "The Green Bridgade" taking responsibility for the arson. The group, which is similar to aforementioned terror advocating groups

on social media encourage violence as necessary and has close ties to mainly US based nazi terror group The Base but adds its focus on the environment. It had members in the UK and notably put up propaganda posters there as well. It disbanded in March 2020 but similar, though often short-lived, groups have appeared throughout 2020.

Alongside the attack in Hanau, in which conspiracy theory seemed to have formed part of the perpetrators motivations. Attacks by proponents of the QAnon conspiracy theory have also taken place in the US and Canada. In Germany, another conspiracy theory of a coming "Day X" where supposedly corrupt political leaders, migrants and Jews were to be killed has found support within the police and military. Multiple individuals have been arrested after acquiring material and assembling lists of targets. These show how trends in far-right terrorism clearly follow broader trends in the far-right and in society at large. Currently conspiracy theories plays an important role and eco-fascism fits well with the anti-globalism already found in the far-right.

As public concern with legitimate environmental issues continues to grow, the far-right has also sought to capitalise on this shift in awareness, with far-right populist parties such as France's National Rally attempting to rebrand themselves with a green tinge. At the most extreme it has become combined with violence, strong veins of anti-humanism, racism cloaked in nature mysticism and notions of "natural order". While the movement remains small, as the topic continues to be salient, it carries with it a potential for further violence.



## FAR-RIGHT VIOLENCE AND FAR-RIGHT TERRORISM

To understand the threat of far-right violence, merely tracking attacks designated as acts of terrorism or terror related criminal charges is insufficient. This is especially true in international comparisons where legal frameworks differ. The form violence takes might also differ depending on context.

Across Europe there are a range of organisations, events and individuals that are part of the most extreme part of the far right that views violence as justified or necessary. For these groups, almost all kinds of violence is seen as self-defence against some kind of outside invader or internal corrupt element. Simultaneously violence can also be glorified because it is seen as part of other ideals, such as that of a masculine warrior or fighter especially evident in far-right martial arts groups. While most actors in this milieu do not actually engage in what is commonly labelled terrorism, they do engage in in other forms of direct violence.

Examples of this include attacks and arson on refugee housing and street violence, including attacks on ideological opponents and minorities. While criminal, these actions often do not reach the threshold to be described legally as terrorism but still spread fear in affected communities. For example, in July a black NHS employee in Bristol, UK was hit deliberately by a car in what Police deemed a racially-aggravated attack because of the language used by the perpetrator. In far-right chat groups the victim was described as a gangster and criminal and the attack was quickly justified through the idea that black men in Britain sexually abused white women.

Other relatively common forms of violence with potential deadly outcome that are not identified as acts of terrorism are arson attacks against asylum centres and refugee accommodation. In 2015 and 2016, during the increase in migration because of the war in Syria, attacks were common on refugee centres. Finland is a particularly bad example with 40 arson attacks against refugee centres in 2015 and 2016.

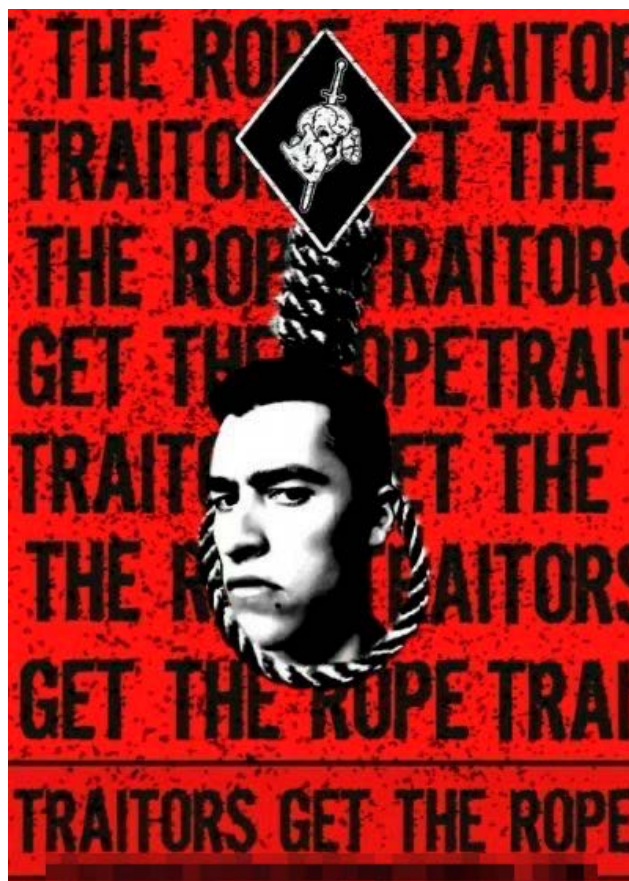
In addition to new and online far-right terror networks we have also seen more traditional far-right organisations encouraged violence, implicitly and explicitly. Related to attacks against refugee centres it is notable how the Sweden Democrats in 2016 published lists marking out the location of them, similar to what took place in the UK in 2020 where lists of hotels housing migrants were spread on far-right social media channels and several were visited by the leader Paul Golding and activists from Britain First.

This is a useful reminder that while the internet has become a central space for extreme far-right networks to organise, there continues to be threat from more traditional offline networks and groups. These include concerts, martial arts tournaments and conferences that serve to connect activists, disseminate propaganda, recruit and radicalise for



violence. Such events include the concert organised by the French branch of Blood and Honour named “Call of Terror” in February 2020 and the yearly nazi martial arts festival “Kampf der Nibelungen” in Germany.

These examples highlight how the far-right terror threat is complex and cannot be seen as completely distinct from adjacent parts of the far right. While it is only a small fraction of the movement that is willing to engage in outright terrorism, several parts of the movement serve to justify violence or serve to make the threshold to perpetrating violence smaller. These include clearly definable organisations with a leadership structure and name, offline events and meetups but also networks of chat rooms and live streams that all function differently but play a role in justifying violence.



# SPOTLIGHT ON POLAND: THE RISE OF KONFEDERACJA

**Agnieszka Mikulska-Jolles**

In the last parliamentary election in October 2019, the far-right coalition party *Konfederacja Wolność i Niepodległość* gained 6.8% of the vote, gaining them 11 seats in Parliament. In October 2020, Konfederacja put forward its candidate for presidential elections – Krzysztof Bosak. He achieved a similar result as the parliamentary election, but importantly was chosen by 20% of voters under the age of 30.

After these election results, the politicians of Konfederacja started became more visible on the political scene and media, including both public media (TVP Info) and liberal private media rather than just alternative, non-mainstream media as previously. This has allowed them to promote their ideas to a broader audience. At the same time, they have modified their rhetoric to be less overtly radical.

In addition, Konfederacja is increasingly active on social media, with its follower counts and engagement steadily increasing. According to the research done by journalists of OKO.Press, Konfederacja's Facebook page was the only one to increase in reach and activity in what would otherwise have been a post-election lull. It gained 2.8 million reactions between July and September, far higher than that of other political parties such as Civic Platforms or Law and Justice, which received much higher vote shares

The most strong and most visible far-right narratives in Poland are those that concern the issue of LGBT rights and gender equality. One can say that, in general, all right wing politicians are against giving equal rights to the LGBT community and against women rights and gender equality. We can see, however, a kind of diversity among them. In the political program of Konfederacja, the issues of gender and LGBT rights were linked with the issue of reform of educational system and the rights of the parents to educate their children in their own way, such as suggesting that schools should be private and the parents should decide to which kind of schools they want to send children – these promoting “gender ideology” or “traditional values”. There is also a very strong narrative based on religious argumentation – LGBT and gender equality

is against a so-called “natural world order”, and thus cannot be accepted by Catholics. There are also some ideas to introduce a constitutional ban on civil partnerships. There are also some, like Konfederacja parliamentarian Grzegorz Braun who have expressed support for making homosexuality illegal.

The refugees/migration issue is much less visible in comparison to the situation five years ago, but it still occurs and contains very strong anti-Islamic traits, with Islam portrayed as a threat to Polish culture, religion, public order and as source of terrorism. Far-right media frequently publish articles about crimes committed by migrants or other social problems as being the results of liberal migration policy. Along those lines, the theme of this year's Polish Independence March, the largest far-right gathering in Europe which counts numerous Konfederacja activists among its organisers, was “Our civilization, our principles”.

Konfederacja has attempted to capitalise on the pandemic by criticising the measures taken by the government, mainly the restrictions on businesses and movement, as well as lack of sufficient support for small businesses. Some of them, including one of the leader of Konfederacja Grzegorz Braun, have publicly questioned the existence of the pandemic and took part in the demonstrations against Covid-related restrictions both in Poland and Berlin. This agenda has recently included anti-vaccine rhetoric

Having become a parliamentary party, Konfederacja Wolność i Niepodległość will attempt to strengthen its position in the political mainstream and build their regional structures such as local branches and social clubs. They will also try to attract more middle class voters that are disappointed by the current government, and the worsening economic situation of many people will likely result in a greater interest in radical movements.

## SECTION 4: COUNTRY BY COUNTRY

**This section includes short overviews of most countries in Europe which have been provided by experts. The opinions and positions in each country report are those of the author and not HOPE not hate, EXPO or Amadeu Antonio Stiftung. They are intended to provide a useful introductory overview of the state of hate in each European country.**





# COUNTRY ALBANIA

Author Fabio Bego



The far right is now pervasive in the Albanian political discourse in different forms. Several parties which formally embrace pro-EU and pro-democracy positions also promote either irredentist and/or opposing identitarian and autonomist claims. Political organizations such as “Balli Kombëtar”, “Partia per Legalitetin” and “Aleanca Kuq e Zi” support the unification of Albania with “Albanian”-inhabited territories in Kosovo, Northern Macedonia, Montenegro and Greece. “Partia Drejtesi, Integrim Unitet”, is the party for the recognition of national and property rights of Albanians Muslims (the Çams) who were expelled from Greece at the end of World War II. They equally support the unification of the “Albanian” lands in the Balkans. Parties such as “Partia Bashkimi për të Drejtat e Njeriut” (and other smaller organizations) advocate the recognition of the national rights and the right of self-administration of the Greek minority in Albania. All of the abovementioned parties have little weight (if any)

in the Parliament, but they are at times effective in inflaming public debate.

An openly fascist group named “Albanian Third Position/ Pozicioni i Tretë Shqiptar” (ATP) was founded on 5 May, 2019. The group, whose members remain anonymous, name Julius Evola as a main philosophical inspiration and follow the tradition of “Third Position” movements. ATP advocates racism, the abolition of democracy, the rejection of “Abrahamic” religions and a return to paganism and other presumably old Albanian traditions. They make use of various symbols taken from fascist and nationalist imagery by combining between a DIY style and fashwave. Most of the content is published in Albanian and in English, showing their ambition to reach an international audience. To date, their activities seem to have gone rather unnoticed. Beside an interview that they have made with Patrick Siegemann on the podcast Surviving Weimerika in March 2020, and an article published on the Polish



far-right portal nacionalista.pl on 21 September, 2020, there is little information about them in other sources, not even in Albanian.

Investigation of social media shows that in Albania there are many individuals, who are not necessarily linked to a political organisation, who openly support fascist ideologies. Some of them, such as those who run the Instagram account *Lëvizja Pan-Shqiptare* (Pan-Albanian Movement), might have tried to form political groups. Nazi-fascist symbols and discourses are often deployed in subcultures such as Football supporter circles, but not only by them. In recent years, fascist ideology in Albania has been spreading thanks to endemic racism (against all «blackies» [zezak] or “gypsies” [jevgj] - definitions that embrace everyone who has a darker skin), extreme anti-communism and historical revisionism. It is important to make clear that racism might characterise individuals who would vote for right-wing and left-wing parties.

The diaspora also has a leading role in making far-right ideas acceptable in the mainstream political discourse. The leader of “Aleanca Kuq e Zi” Kreshnik Spahiu, endorsed the candidacy of an Italian-Albanian who represented Lega at Italian local elections in August 2020. Lega is known for its strong anti-refugee propaganda and the xenophobic and racist leanings of several party members. The Albanian-American supporters of president Trump have shared racist, anti-Muslim, anti-BLM and other xenophobic content on their social media. The latter are not only viewed by Albanians who live in the USA (who in many cases can also vote in Albania), but also by Albanians who live in Albania and in other Balkan countries.

The presence of refugees in Albania has engendered intolerance and hate-speech against them. In the beginning of the summer 2020, tensions grew between the migrants living in the hosting facility of Babrru in the outskirts of Tirana and the local population, which accused the former of stealing from their homes. The media reported the events with contrasting tones. The generally pro-Democratic Party (now the main opposition party) news channel ABC overemphasized the dangers that migrants allegedly pose to the local population. Whereas traditionally pro-Socialist Party (the party that governs the country) channel Top Channel used more sympathetic tones toward migrants. Comments on news websites contain very strong racist and xenophobic language against migrants.

## MAIN FAR-RIGHT ORGANISATIONS

Please take notice: With the exception of ATP which consists of a small group of people, the parties listed below are not openly far-right in a Western European conventional sense, that is, they do not endorse either Nazi or fascist elements in their programs. They are rather strongly nationalistic and might at times show far-right leanings especially in the context of the relations between Albanians and their neighbours and in their positioning towards the communist past.

Name	Ideology
Balli Kombëtar	Radical right/ Identitarian/ Irredentism/ Nationalism/ Anti-Communism
Partia Levizja per Legalitetin	Radical right/ Monarchism/ Identitarian/ Anti-Communism
Partia Drejtësi, Integrim Unitet (PDIU)	Identitarian/ Nationalism/ Irredentism/ Autonomism/ Struggle for the recognition of the rights of the Muslim Albanians in Greece.
Aleanca Kuq e Zi	Identitarian/ Irredentism/ Far-right nationalism
Partia Bashkimi Për të Drejtat e Njeriut (PBDNJ)	Identitarian/ Greek irredentism/ Autonomism/ Defence of the rights of the Greek nationals in Albania/ Orthodoxism
Albanian Third Position (ATP)	Fascism/ Racism/ Paganism/ Extreme nationalism

## ELECTED FAR-RIGHT REPRESENTATIVES

Legislature	Party	Number of elected representatives
National	Balli Kombëtar	2
	Partia Drejtësi, Integrim, Unitet	3
	Partia Bashkimi per te Drejtat e Njeriut	1 (resigned)

## MOST INFLUENTIAL ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Note: Here the same applies as above. With the exception of ATP, which is run anonymously, the persons listed below do not openly embrace Nazi or fascist ideologies. However, they display strong nationalist feeling that are fuelled by (in some cases) strong anti-communist feelings and conspiracy theories leaning toward racism, xenophobia and antisemitism.

Name	Platform	Followers/ Likes
Kreshnik Spahiu	Facebook	Over 72000
Mesila Doda	Facebook	Over 36000
Alfred Cako - Komente Analiza	Facebook	Over 13000
Ekrem Spahiu	Facebook	Over 4800
Albanian Third Position	Facebook, Instagram, WordPress	Over 1000
Xhafer Sadiku	Facebook	Over 800

## KEY NARRATIVES

Far-right narratives vary according to the political, social and religious background of each person. Since the EU has indicated the politics for the recognition and the promotion of the Roma and LGBTQ communities as a condition for the integration of Albania in the EU, public figures have started to adopt a more politically correct language and,

unlike in the past, they restrain from externalizing homophobic sentiments. However, verbal attacks on the LGBTQ community, values and ways of life still continue to be carried out by individuals on the social media, and the Roma people are still seen by most of Albanians as being separated from the national cultural and political body.

In the context of the nationalist/irredentist trends, xenophobic and racist speeches are very often used to describe Serbs, Montenegrins and Slavs in general, as well as Greeks. Albanian irredentism is based on the myth of Albanian autochthony in opposition to Greeks and Slavs who are considered as barbarians, invaders and as a vital threat for the Albanian people. These narratives date back to the 19th century, but they have started to be more recently re-elaborated by Albanian and Kosovo intellectuals since the outbreak of the wars in former Yugoslavia. There are currently several Facebook, YouTube, Instagram and Tik Tok accounts that promote Albanian irredentism and far-right ideas by claiming Albanian racial and national superiority in comparison to Greeks and Slavs.

The Albanian Third Position has endorsed all the above-mentioned arguments according to racial-conspiracy theories. Their propaganda has so far targeted the “internal” more than the external others. In particular, they harshly criticize the followers of the Islamic faith in all Albanian-speaking territories. In analogy to other “Abrahamic” religions, the Muslim faith is considered to be the expression of the globalist (guelfist) trends that are promoted by Soros, the Left, and the Arabic/Turkish Islamic influence.

The emergence of the “Albanian Third Position” is partly the consequence of a distorted historical revisionism that has started to characterise Albania in the last decade. Whereas this process was necessary since Albanian historiography was (and to a certain extent still is) marked by national-communist ideological constraints, it has now been pushed in the extreme opposite direction. Albanians have started to appreciate the consequences of the Nazi-fascist occupation of Albania and Yugoslavia during World War II, because this occupation led to the union between Albania and the majority of the Albanian-speaking territories in Kosovo, (present day) Northern Macedonia and Montenegro. Established intellectuals (among whom University professors and members of the Parliament) from Albania (and Kosovo) have underscored the positive effects that the occupation brought to the Albanian people. A Facebook page that praises the Albanian Nazi-fascist occupation regime has been active since May 2018 (*Shqipëria në vitet 1939-1944*). The administrator has more recently opened a WordPress by the same name. The contact info leads to an email address that bears the number “88”. Between 2019 and 2020, the TV channel ABC news aired at least three documentaries that

described the Fascist and Nazi presence in Albania with rather ambiguous tones. This historiographical trend also existed in the past, but tended to remain hidden.

Far-right leanings also tend to emerge in the context of the relationship between Albanians on the one hand, and the abovementioned Greek Minority Party (PBDNJ) and the Greek political domain on the other. Albanians are generally diffident of PBDNJ, which they consider as an agent of Athen’s expansionist plans in Albania. These sentiments were exacerbated by the events that followed the killing of an Albanian citizen of Greek nationality, Kostantinos Kacifas in October 2018. Kacifas allegedly attacked Albanian police with a gun for the sake of the Greek irredentist cause in Southern Albania. Fervent anti-Albanian speeches were pronounced at his funeral, which took place on Albanian territory and was attended by many Greek politicians, and during the ceremony for the anniversary of his death in October 2019. Earlier in 2020, the leader of PBDNJ, Vangjel Dule still refused to take a clear position on Kacifa’s act and demanded to have more precise information on the circumstances of his death. Anti-Greek sentiments are currently being exacerbated by the Greek-Turkish crises in the Eastern Mediterranean, in the context of which Albania was compelled by Athens to fix the sea border between the two countries. In both cases, Greece is portrayed as a threat to the territorial sovereignty of the Albanian state.

The tense situation that has been affecting Greek-Turkish relations in the last years has accentuated the tendency of some Albanians, most of whom are of Muslim religion, to look at Erdogan’s Turkey as a model for state-building and international politics. Some Albanians of Christian religion and a few Muslims, think instead that being Muslim and/or being associated to Turkey and before that to the Ottoman Empire, has been and still is a major obstacle for the European emancipation of Albanian people. In the context of the debate between these two opposing trends, anti-Semite discourses are being made by Muslim Albanians who support Erdogan and his agenda in the Middle East. Other Albanians (of mainly Christian but also Muslim background) invoke the mass conversion of Muslims into Christianity since they consider Islam as incompatible with the ideal of Western civilization. Digging deeper into the texture of the Albanian radical right conundrum, it is possible to find intellectuals (and various acolytes) who now promote anti-EU, anti-USA, pro-Trump and pro-Russian (including pro-Lukashenko) arguments that are typically endorsed by the continental radical-to-far-right. Some Albanians believe that Russia poses no threat to the stability of the Balkans and Albania. In their opinion, it is rather the EU and Soros who are harming the country by legitimating and supporting the current allegedly Mafia-run Albanian government.



## RESPONSE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Following the Covid-19 crisis and the consequent closure of the borders between Albania and the neighbour states, a few hundred migrants from North Africa and the Middle East were forced to stay in Albania instead of going North toward the richer Western European countries. Their permanence in Albania seems to be at the root of the recent tensions in Babrru.

The Covid-19 pandemic has contributed to increased 'anti-politics' attitudes that, in Albania like elsewhere, tend to flow into populism and conspiracy theories. Many Albanians believe that hospitals made a selection of the people who were to be saved or not and that the government is not reporting the correct statistics of the pandemic. Some Albanians believe that Covid-19 does not exist. Some of the latter advise people not to go in the hospital if they feel sick because Covid-19 is really just a normal flu. If people seek medical assistance at the hospital they will not come out alive.

The ATP has maintained a cautious attitude toward the pandemic, hoping that it will bring people to understand that strict border control is the only way to guarantee the safety of the national community and abandon the EU project. The outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic has contributed to increased antipathy toward migrants who, according to blogs with far-right content such as [brerore.al](http://brerore.al), represent a threat for the health of Albanians and their racial purity. Other conspiracy-theorist attention-seekers with far-right inclinations such as Alfred Cako have promoted anti-vax campaigns through their social media.

Many individuals with far-right leanings have joined the ranks of those who claim that the current Albanian government has not appropriately managed the situation and that it has used the pandemic to impose authoritarian measures. But there are also several Albanians who would usually vote for the opposition but who now agree that the reduction of some personal freedoms is necessary to avoid the worst effects of the pandemics. If on the one hand, this proves that the Covid-19 crisis has made Albanians more prone to accept the deprivation of their freedoms (whether from formally "leftist" or "rightist" governments), on the other I think that it is too early to measure the effects of the pandemic on the Albanian political situation.

## THE FAR-RIGHT THREAT IN 2021

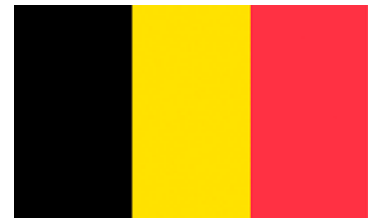
■ The economic crisis, the scepticism toward the EU and the disillusion with the government can further reduce Albanians' hope that the country could build truly transparent democratic institutions. This trend might lead more people to look at Russia and Turkey as models of government since many might feel a need for a "strong" leader, able to deal firmly with the pandemic, the economy and organized crime.

- The Turkish-Greek tensions in the Eastern Mediterranean as well as the recurrent minor political crises that characterize Kosovo-Serbian relations, might contribute to enhanced xenophobic sentiments towards neighbours and galvanise Muslim religious sentiments in all the Albanian-speaking areas of the Balkans. After the outbreak of COVID-19, radicalisation and terrorist activities seem to be less of a concern to the public and within the political debate in Albania (and Kosovo). However, this needs to be monitored given the economic and political crisis in the region.
- The attack in Vienna by an Islamist terrorist with an Albanian background has sparked a public debate concerning intra-religious relations in Albania. Antipathy for Erdogan and excessive appearances of "Muslimness" in social and political discourse could lead more radical pro-West Albanians to look at fellow Muslim citizens as backwards and dangerous, therefore strengthening Islamophobia.
- Intolerance and verbal violence against refugees is likely to grow if strict border control regimes are enforced again and if the demands of both refugees and of the local population remain unheard by the national and international authorities. Partisan media could exploit and enhance public sentiments against migrants for political purposes as it is done in other European countries.
- If the economic crisis worsens, it will probably lead to an increase in criminal activity (at all levels), which may generate more street violence. Crime and violence often take a political colour when the interests of politicians and criminals collide and coincide. Rumours have circulated on social media about the eventuality of a new "1997" (a revolt that brought the country on the brink of civil war) if the economic crisis and the huge-profit making criminal networks that run drug-trafficking in the country continue to expand.
- Considering the distorted historical revisionism that affects the public debate, the spread of various conspiracy theories and the growth of pro-fascist tendencies that many Albanians now openly display on their social media, more openly far-right organisations will likely appear and will sooner or later try to feed their anti-democratic vision to the electoral masses.

# COUNTRY BELGIUM

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In the Flemish part of the country the radical right-wing party Vlaams Belang (Flemish Interest) won 18.5% of the votes in the 2019 elections. In the polls it now amounts to 27% of the votes, making it the largest party in Flanders. The question is whether it can maintain that position until the elections in 2024 and then, together with the nationalist right-wing party N-VA, form a governing majority in Flanders. The chance of joining the Belgian government is nil. The extreme right is hardly represented in Brussels and the French-speaking part of the country.

## MAIN FAR-RIGHT ORGANISATIONS

Name	Ideology
Vlaams Belang (Flemish Interest)	Radical right-wing party
Voorpost (Outpost)	Radical right-wing action group
Schild & Vrienden (Shield & Friends)	Identitarian youth group
Nation	French-speaking extreme right-wing activist group
	Several Flemish nationalist and extreme right-wing action groups on Facebook, sometimes with an extension in physical activities.

## ELECTED FAR-RIGHT REPRESENTATIVES

Legislature	Party	Number of elected representatives
Local	Vlaams Belang	340 municipal councilors, 24 provincial councilors
Regional	Vlaams Belang	23 Flemish MPs, 1 Brussels MP
National	Vlaams Belang	18 federal MPs
European	Vlaams Belang	3 European MPs

## MOST INFLUENTIAL ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Name	Platform	Followers/Likes
Tom Van Grieken, president Vlaams Belang	Twitter Facebook And others	30,400 511,500
Filip Dewinter, MP Vlaams Belang	Twitter Facebook And others	33,300 35,600
Dries Van Langen-hove, MP Vlaams Belang and leader of Schild & Vrienden	Twitter Facebook And others	24,500 104,400
Sam Van Rooy, MP Vlaams Belang and most retweeted radical right-wing	Twitter Facebook	17,300 5,500
Gerolf Annemans, MP Vlaams Belang	Twitter Facebook	16,000 6,600

## KEY NARRATIVES

Vlaams Belang criticises (1) the federal government, because it does not have a parliamentary majority in the Flemish part of the country, and everything else that government does, (2) the Flemish government in everything it does, (3) foreigners (Islam, refugees ...) remain a favorite topic. Vlaams Belang spends a record amount on advertisements on Facebook, much more than other political parties.

## RESPONSE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Vlaams Belang is always critical: either it is not obliged to wear mouth masks quickly enough, or that the cafes and restaurants have to close, and so on. Vlaams Belang also criticises virologists for adjusting their position through advancing insights, and in particular virologist Marc Van Ranst because he is a fierce opponent of the extreme right and nationalist parties. A car protest equipped by the Vlaams Belang brought together 14,000 people in Brussels, an unprecedented success.

The extra-parliamentary activities of extreme right-wing activist groups have largely come to a standstill because of COVID-19, although there have been demonstrations on extreme right-wing themes at the initiative of individuals, despite the Covid measures.

Manifestations against the corona measures are



Summer University of the Vlaams Belang youth league. Photo: Zwijger13

not as successful as in other countries such as Germany.

## THE FAR-RIGHT THREAT IN 2021

- Further success for Vlaams Belang supported by large Facebook ad spending and a new generation of leaders compared to five years ago.
- The largest Flemish party (no longer in the polls but as a result of the elections in 2019), the right-wing nationalist party N-VA (New Flemish Alliance), leads the Flemish government but is in opposition to the federal government. The party must now look for a new path: realistic right or radical right in search of the votes it lost to Vlaams Belang in 2019.
- Extra-parliamentary groups: more and more individuals, supported by Facebook groups, are starting initiatives apart from the well-known, old extra-parliamentary action groups. New initiatives are supported by old acquaintances such as the condemned neo-Nazi leader Tomas Boutens. State Security has warned about the use of weapons.



# COUNTRY BOSNIA & HERZEGOVINA



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There are at least three far right groups developed that have spread across several cities, that have been active for at least 10 years.

They are actively hidden from society, and they are not active in traditional politics, but their development and growth are visible on social networks.

## MAIN FAR-RIGHT ORGANISATIONS

Name	Ideology
Blood and Honour	Neo – Nazi
Combat 18	Neo – Nazi
SH-MO (Skinheads Mostar)	Neo – Nazi
BPNP (Bosnian Movement of National Pride)	Neo – Nazi/ Radical Right

## ELECTED FAR-RIGHT REPRESENTATIVES

They are not politically active.

## MOST INFLUENTIAL ON SOCIAL MEDIA

They mostly have only private profiles where they share their activities. After investigations of BIRN BiH about groups in which there are members, many profiles got deleted.

Name	Handle/Channel Name (@)	Platform	Followers/ Likes
Davor Škobić	Davor Skobic	FB and Instagram	Private profile
Marko Vidovic	Marko Vidovic and Markov	Facebook, Instagram and Youtube	Private profile

## FAR-RIGHT TERROR ARRESTS AND CONVICTIONS

There haven't been arrests for far-right terrorism in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Actually, they are not even recognized in society, even though security agencies have told BIRN BiH they are familiar with far-right groups and watch their development.

## KEY NARRATIVES

Key narratives the far-right are focusing on are homophobia, anti-Semitism and islamophobia. Within Blood and Honour and Combat 18 online groups, members are seen holding banners against

the LGBTI community in Prijedor, as well as banners showing "Islam out of Europe".

Members of these groups also attacked someone working for an NGO that is fighting for the rights of the LGBTI population.

In other groups there were many anti-refugee narratives, but the areas in which these groups are active are not areas where a lot of migrants and refugees have accommodation, so there were no physical acts recorded against them. There has only been action on social media against refugees.

In these groups there is also rhetoric against abortion and women's rights.

## RESPONSE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Since these groups are acting online, there have not been impacted much. One assumes it gave them difficulties to have regional meetings due to the lockdowns.

One of the three far-right groups identified stuck posters in public, mostly at night.



Symbols of "Combat 18" and "Blood and Honor" groups are written in the center of Prijedor. Photo: BIRN

# COUNTRY BULGARIA

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Since 2017, Bulgaria has been ruled by a coalition of the centre-right populist party GERB (Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria) and The United Patriots – a coalition of three nationalist parties IMRO – Bulgarian National Movement, Attack and the National Front for the Salvation of Bulgaria (NFSB). The three nationalist parties increasingly drifted apart and in 2019 Attack was excluded from the United Patriots but kept supporting the government. In general, IMRO and NFSB have been the pro-US Bulgarian nationalist parties, while Attack has been more pro-Russian. A fourth radical right populist party – the businessman Veselin Mareshki's Volya has also been part of the Parliament, but not of the government.

The summer of 2020 saw mass anti-governmental protests that shook Bulgaria with right-wing liberal, left-wing and disillusioned right-wing and nationalist citizens protesting against the capture of the state by the mafia, the increasing entanglement of political, media and business power, and the use of the State Prosecutor's office to deal with political and business opponents. While protesters demanded the resignation of Borisov throughout the summer of 2020, the three nationalist parties kept their support for the government. The parties, and especially NFSB's leader Valeri Simeonov have been known for introducing laws that favour business interests.

In 2020, a fifth nationalist party – Vuzrazhdane [Revival] that has had some success at the previous local elections – gained public attention. Vuzrazhdane declared themselves strongly against any COVID-19 government measures and organized protests against the government in May 2020. Subsequently, Vuzrazhdane joined the mass anti-governmental protests organized by mainly right-wing liberal and left-wing citizens. In late July, more than 10 days after the beginning of the mass anti-governmental protests, the Chief Prosecutor's Office sought a ban of the party due to irregularities with the documents used in the registration process.

A key development with regard to the far right movement and subcultural scene in Bulgaria in 2020 has been the first ban of the neo-nazi Lukov March in Sofia. The March had taken place every year since 2003 to commemorate the Bulgarian general Hristo Lukov, who led the nationalistic Union of Bulgarian National Legions and was a strong supporter of the German Third Reich. Lukov March had traditionally

attracted far right activists from across Europe with more than 2000 of them marching the streets of Sofia in 2019. The March was finally banned in 2020. The March had been organised by the neo-nazi movement Bulgarian National Union, which also attracted the attention of the Prosecutor's Office in 2020. In January, 2020 a member of the movement committed suicide at the entrance of the State Agency for National Security, where he was called as a part of on-going investigation. After his death, a weapons arsenal was found in his home.

All in all, the far right in Bulgaria has kept its popularity. Regardless of the on-going battles and competition between different far right parties, what is most important for understanding the Bulgarian context is the mainstreaming of conservative and far-right ideas, with even the Bulgarian Socialist Party taking a strong stance against immigration and LGBT rights, for example.

After years of official de-communisation of the country, far right "patriotic" discourses have become common sense in multiple spheres of life – from school education to the naming of city streets. (One should acknowledge here as well the strongly conservative and increasingly nationalist character of Bulgarian communism in the 1980s). By 2020, far right ideas have become accepted by a wide spectrum of Bulgarian society. Thus, even though measures have been finally taken against extremists, it is the mainstreaming of far right ideas that is much more dangerous and notable in the Bulgarian context.

## MAIN FAR-RIGHT ORGANISATIONS

Name	Ideology
IMRO – Bulgarian National Movement (ВМРО – Българско национално движение)	Radical Right
Attack (Атака)	Radical Right
National Front for the Salvation of Bulgaria	Radical Right
Volya (Воля)	Radical right populist
Revival (Възраждане)	Radical Right
Bulgarian National Union (Български Национален Съюз)	Neo-Nazi
Blood and Honour (Кръв и Чест)	Neo-Nazi
National Resistance (Национална Съпротива)	Neo-Nazi

## ELECTED FAR-RIGHT REPRESENTATIVES

Legislature	Party	Number of elected representatives
Local	Parties tend to not report in detail about their local mayors so the data is unreliable.	
Regional	No far right mayor of big cities that serve as centres for one of the 28 provinces in the country Far right members of the municipal councils of cities – centres of one of the 28 provinces in the country Volya National Front for the Salvation of Bulgaria IMRO Attack Revival NFSB-IMRO coalition]	75 11 4 40 4 11 5
National	Far right MPs United Patriots (coalition of IMRO, Attack and the National Front for the Salvation of Bulgaria) Volya	39 27 12
European	IMRO	2

Meeting of political party АТАКА at Alexander Nevsky Square in Sofia, Bulgaria. Photo: Иван



## MOST INFLUENTIAL ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Note: Twitter in Bulgaria is used predominantly by liberal right-wing politicians, copywriters and tech industry people. Facebook is the much more widely used platform.

Name	Platform	Followers/Likes
Veselin Mareshki	Facebook	115 531
Kostadin Kostadinov	Facebook	64 621
Krasimir Karakachanov	Facebook	29 305
Volen Siderov	Facebook	27, 262
Angel Djambazki	Facebook	18 368

## KEY NARRATIVES

The far right in Bulgaria has traditionally been strongly anti-Roma and anti-Turkish citizens. The discourse against Roma has focused on the high levels of Roma criminality, accusations of “welfare cheating”, and on the higher birth rates among the ethnic Roma Bulgarian population as compared to ethnic Bulgarians (what these types of far-right discourse have tended to neglect is also the much higher mortality rate among Roma Bulgarians).

In general, discourse around Roma has been motivated by fear of the replacement of the ethnic Bulgarian population – this also played a key part in the opposition to immigration from the Middle East. While the peak of the anti-immigration discourse was reached in 2015–2016, the general public consensus in the country remains very much against migration. This position though has also been taken by the Bulgarian Socialist Party showing that far right ideas do not necessarily remain the domain of far right parties only.

Anti-Turkish discourse has both historical and modern roots. Historically, Bulgaria was subjugated by the Ottoman Empire for almost five centuries and the fight against the Ottoman empire for liberation and independence is the cornerstone of Bulgarian national education. Considering that the nominally liberal but de facto Turkish ethnic party DPS (Movement for Rights and Freedoms) has been the traditional king-maker in Bulgarian politics and has been involved in numerous corruption scandals, the far right has taken Turkish political elites as a clear target. Still, many years of peaceful coexistence mean also that “playing the ethnic card” is not as easy as it seems, and the far right most often targets the “Turks” as an abstract image, as well as Turkish political elites, and to a smaller extent individual Turkish citizens as such. This is very different from the situation with refugees which have been identified by the far right almost exclusively as “criminals”.

Unlike the Western European far-right which is becoming increasingly Islamophobic but has tended to, at least nominally, move away from anti-Semitism, the Bulgarian far-right is still anti-Semitic.



In January, 2020, The Ministry of Defence led by IMRO-leader Krasimir Karakachanov sponsored a conference that discussed whether obligatory labour by Bulgarian Jewish citizens during the Second World War was “a plan for salvation or a repressive measure”. Needless to say, the conference provoked strong reactions among Bulgarian Jewish organizations that protested against the interpretation of obligatory labour as a clever plan to save lives.

Finally, the far right in Bulgaria in 2020 has also strongly opposed LGBT events and rights. There have been numerous cases of intimidation of LGBT members throughout the year. In February 2020, far right activists entered a critical event on the rise of fascism at Sofia University and threatened the organisers. In October 2020, IMRO condemned a book encouraging the sexual education of young children and demanded a halt to its distribution. Far right politicians were also extremely active online in condemning the Black Lives Matter movement in the US and Europe.

Again, as with other cases, there was wide societal support for far right discourse and actions. One of the most disturbing aspects of the incident in Sofia University, for example, was that the University’s own security guards agreed with the arguments of the extremists threatening the organisers of the event. What is more, especially when it comes to Black Lives Matter and LGBT rights, far right actors have been increasingly supported by newly appearing Conservative organisations such as the youth movement Conservator (Консерваторъ), close to the ruling GERB. Thus, rather than being radical or extreme, far right ideas in Bulgaria have become the norm with any other ideas or discourses struggling to gain visibility.

## RESPONSE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The mass anti-governmental protests in summer 2020 led to (a moderate) soul-searching among the ruling coalition as autumn came. After the ruling coalition managed to avoid early elections by initiating a lengthy discussion on a new constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria, the nationalist formations engaged in active discussion of reforms - all of them on topics far removed from the actual complaints of the protestors such as state capture and the lack of separation of powers. One of the ideas of IMRO proposed in September was to organize a referendum to bring back military service.

In general, the fact that the biggest far right parties in Bulgaria have been in government at the height of the pandemic, means that they could take much less oppositional stances in comparison to far right parties in Western Europe that were in opposition and could extract electoral dividends from opposing government measures. What the governing far right parties in Bulgaria did was to avoid the topic as much as possible and introduce other talking points.

COVID-19 was a main topic for the oppositional far right party Vuzrazhdane (Revival) that did organise protests against the lack of economic and social measures by the government in May 2020. Some of the protesters also subscribed to 5G theories of conspiracy. In general, however, the May protests were much smaller than the subsequent anti-governmental protests that started in July 2020. Vuzrazhdane also joined these bigger protests and, as mentioned above, the Prosecutor’s Office demanded a ban on the party in late July due to irregularities with their documentation at the time of registration.

Finally, members of far right subcultural and social movements did oppose the measures against COVID-19 mainly in comments on their social media profiles, but at least, up to 27 October they did not organize massive protests against governmentally imposed health measures. Neither did they demand more socio-economic measures to help the population. The main way organisations such as the Bulgarian branch “Blood and Honour” were affected by COVID19 has to do with the cancelling of concerts and events in the autumn of 2020.

## THE FAR-RIGHT THREAT IN 2021

The mainstreaming of far right ideas.

Scene from the annual procession, called "Bulgarian March", organised by the National Youth Committee of IMRO – Bulgarian National Movement. Photo: Милен Сарафимов



# COUNTRY CROATIA

**Affiliation** Youth Initiative for Human Rights



In 2019, there was a spike in nationalist violence and hate crimes in Croatia. A year earlier, a European Commission report warned that “racist and intolerant hate speech in public discourse is escalating” in the country, with the main targets being “Serbs, LGBT persons and Roma”. The report added that the response of the Croatian authorities to this worrying trend has been weak.

Overall data for 2020 has not yet been released but not much has changed in the scope of the target groups the far-right is focused on. Furthermore, since the COVID-19 pandemic created new regulations e.g. level of freedom of movement and other relevant measures for public health, it is possible to find relation between far right politics and COVID-19 conspiracy theories.

## MAIN FAR-RIGHT ORGANISATIONS

Name	Ideology
U ime obitelji (In the name of family) / CSO	Radical right
Domovinski pokret / Homeland movement	Radical right
Hrvatski suverenisti / Croatian sovereignists	Radical right
Generacija obnove / Generation of renewal	Alt right

## ELECTED FAR-RIGHT REPRESENTATIVES

Legislature	Party	Number of elected representatives
Local (Zagreb)	Independent for Croatia, Bloc for Croatia	3
National	Miroslav Škoro Homeland Movement Independent for Croatia	16
European	European Conservatives and Reformists	1

## MOST INFLUENTIAL ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Name	Platform	Followers/ Likes
Velimir Bujanec	Youtube	39700
Marijana Petir	Facebook	36454 / 36466
Hrvoje Zekanović	Facebook	45723 / 53505
Ruža Tomašić	Facebook	69000
Miroslav Škoro	Facebook	124000

## KEY NARRATIVES

- Anti-ethnic minority rights
- Anti-Refugee
- Anti-LGBT
- Anti-women's reproductive rights (Annual March for Life in a few Croatian cities)
- There was a campaign “40 days for life” - anti-abortion campaign

## RESPONSE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Fake news - conspiracy theories of COVID-19 not being real

## THE FAR-RIGHT THREAT IN 2021

Hate speech and hate crime towards minorities (national, sexual), women's right, migrants.

The situation in society caused by the pandemic and the measures that will follow it could cause an increase in hatred and intolerance.



# COUNTRY CZECH REPUBLIC

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The far right in the Czech Republic has long developed in a slightly different way than in Western Europe. The first reason was the elimination of far right parties and groups after 1945 and after the communist coup in 1948; the second was the rapid and uneven reconstruction at the turn of the 1980s and 1990s. The far-right was represented in parliament from 1992-1998 and from 2013 until the present.

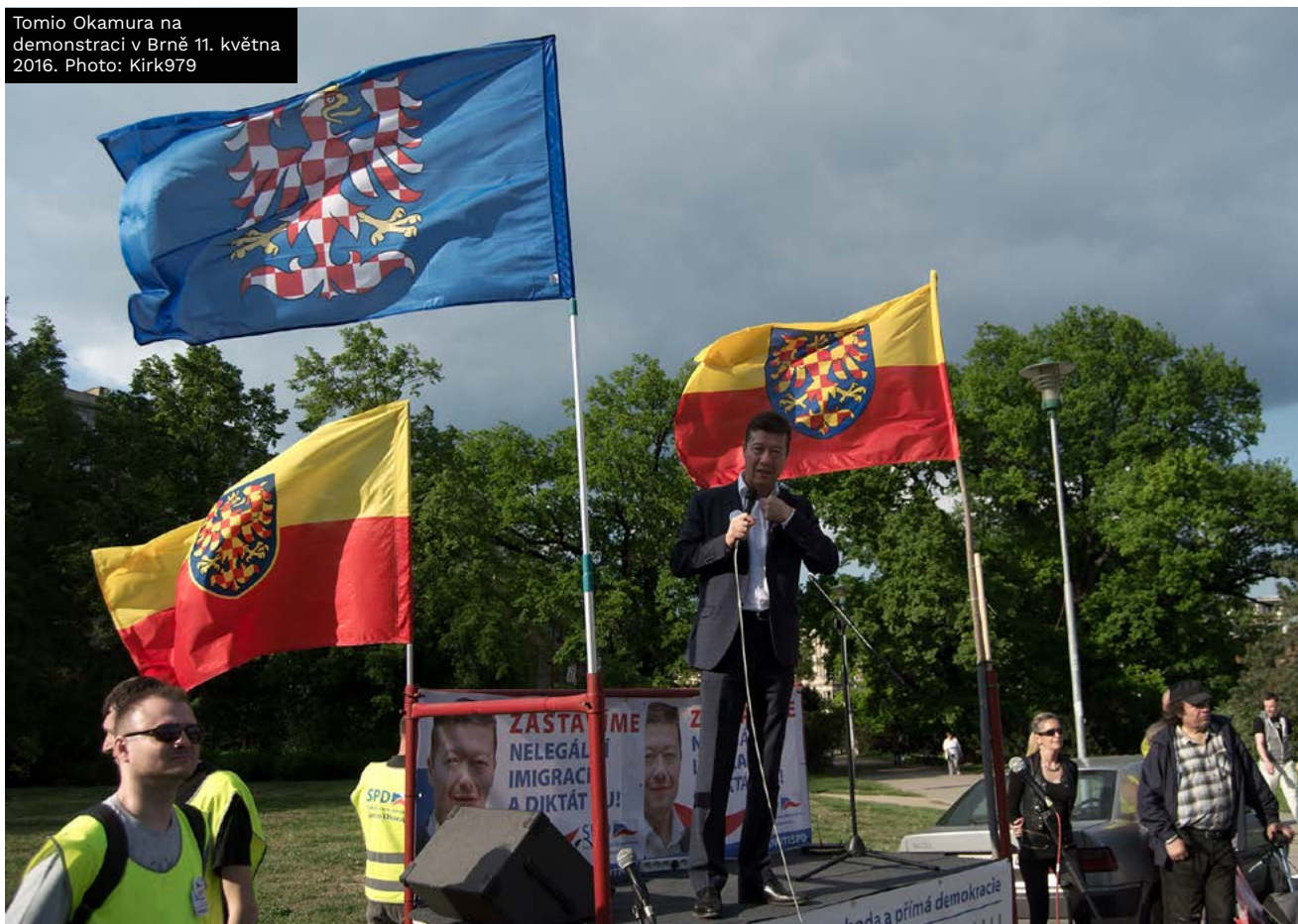
For a long time, the subcultural far right was influential in the Czech Republic, often connected to neo-Nazi ideology. This dominated the far right until approximately 2012. After this date, the neo-Nazi structures started to break up and have not as yet been renewed. A particular significance is retained by the subculture of football hooligans, often connected with the far right or with some of

its themes, but the degree to which they can be mobilised is highly variable.

Instead, the extra-parliamentary anti-Islam scene has been on the rise since 2009, and at the same time since 2013, the populist and anti-immigrant party Dawn – National Coalition, which in 2015 changed its name to Freedom and Direct Democracy (SPD). Businessman Tomio Okamura heads it. The party is part of the opposition, but ANO's ruling populist movement relies on its support in some votes. Okamura, its chairman, is the deputy chair of the lower house of parliament.

Some of the themes (anti-Islam) are shared with some mainstream political actors, including the current Czech president Miloš Zeman. Today, former president Václav Klaus supports Germany's AfD in its election campaigns and works with

Tomio Okamura na demonstraci v Brně 11. května 2016. Photo: Kírk979



various far-right representatives. *Parlamentní listy*, a significant online tabloid-style publication, has employees connected with the far-right among its editors and authors, and in several cases, spreads far-right themes and world views. A high degree of mainstreaming of far right attitudes means the parliamentary far right is gaining acceptability and recruiting voters and politicians from mainstream parties. One of the SPD's MEPs is the former Social Democrat health minister Ivan David. In parliament, the SPD forms successful voting coalitions that, among other things, approve tax changes and changes to the councils that oversee the public service media. Simultaneously, the mainstreaming of these attitudes seems to be a brake on higher support levels for the nonparliamentary far right because voters can find similar attitudes among mainstream parties.

According to the Interior Ministry's report on extremism and prejudicial hate for the first half of 2020, right-wing "extremist and xenophobic groups" focused on criticism of the alleged inability of the democratic state to deal with problems connected to the pandemic and demanded that the Czech Republic leave international organizations, above all the EU and NATO.

Simultaneously, according to the report, conspiracy theories were being spread (regarding the origin of COVID-19) and disinformation. This included the incitement of hatred towards Muslims and migrants who were labelled carriers of the viral disease.

Far right representatives also kept attacking various minority groups. Tomio Okamura shared a video on social media allegedly depicting an assault on a young woman by migrants in Lisbon, Portugal. Okamura's YouTube profile was blocked for a while for the spreading of hate. He appealed against the decision and had his profile reinstated, but two unspecified videos spreading hate were deleted. The chairman of the SPD deputies' club Radim Fiala likewise published a video that allegedly showed migrants destroying a police car in Italy. According to the available information, however, it was footage from the shooting of a film.

Finally, in 2020, there were verbal attacks on people and institutions who stood up for the Black Lives Matter movement. President Miloš Zeman labelled the slogan "Black Lives Matter" racist. There were also some incidents against Roma and people with disabilities.

The far right also focused on the fight against "anti-state" or "political" non-profit organisations, by which they targeted human rights and aid organisations that provided social services. In this, they gained the support of other politicians, including the chairman of the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia Vojtěch Filip. Significant criticism was also shared about public service media, especially Czech television.

## MAIN FAR-RIGHT ORGANISATIONS

Name	Ideology
SPD	Populism, anti-immigration, anti-Islam, parliamentary party
Dělnická strana sociální spravedlnosti, DSSS (Workers' Party of Social Justice)	Radical right (sometimes labelled neo-Nazi mostly because of its member base from neo-Nazi subcultures in previous decades), antiziganism
Národní demokracie, ND (National Democracy)	The radical right small party, connecting hard Euroscepticism and islamophobia with conspiracy theories and antisemitism
Akce DOST.	Conservatism, populism, euroscepticism, anti-immigration, worked with former president Václav Klaus, active in the media
Generace identity, GI (Generation Identity)	Identitarian, remains of "traditional" neo-Nazi far-right
Národní a sociální fronta, NSF (National and Social Front)	Neo-Nazism, a group of young activists who split from the DSSS, currently not very active

## ELECTED FAR-RIGHT REPRESENTATIVES

Legislature	Party	Number of elected representatives
Local	SPD, DSSS	155, 2
Regional	SPD	34
National	SPD	22
European	SPD	2

## MOST INFLUENTIAL ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Name	Platform	Followers/Likes
Tomio Okamura (SPD)	Facebook Twitter Instagram	264,000 (FB)
Radim Fiala (SPD)	Facebook	43,000 (FB)
Ivan David (SPD)	Facebook	38,000 (FB)
Martin Konvička (Anti-islam)	Facebook Twitter	20,000 (FB)
Lubomír Volný (ex-SPD)	Facebook Twitter	17,000 (FB)
Petr Hampl	Facebook Twitter	11,000 (FB) 3,418 (TW)
František Kubásek	Facebook Twitter Youtube	3,500 (FB) 533 (TW) 13,3000 (YT)
Filip Vávra	Facebook Twitter Youtube	5,000 (FB) 2000 (YT) (TW 766)

## KEY NARRATIVES

The key themes across the far right (also shared by part of the conservative right and parts of the left): Euroscepticism, anti-Islam and anti-immigration, antipathy to nongovernment organizations, antipathy to “neo-Marxism”.

A further significant long-term theme that resonates with the majority of society is anti-zionism. The far right treats these topics differently compared to the mainstream, being more open in their ethnic nationalism, biological racism and sometimes also antisemitism.” (Str. 73, druhý odstavec pasáže “Key narratives”). However, antisemitism is otherwise relatively weak in Czech society.

Euroscepticism is also relatively accepted by established right-wing parties.

The main contemporary narrative: *“People want a return to a normal world, in which there is a ban on Islam, migration and all its helpers, above all neo-Marxist NGOs and Brussels.”*

Flag of the NSF (National and Social Front). Photo: Twitter



## HOW HAS THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC AFFECTED THE FAR RIGHT IN YOUR COUNTRY?

The extreme right is divided into a larger part (more conservative) which makes use of the situation surrounding COVID-19 to support the closure of borders and the suppression of a liberal lifestyle (traveling, parties, etc.) and a smaller group (more libertarians) which see face masks as the rise of new totalitarianism and COVID-19 either as an inexistent or overrated danger. This approach is also shared by part of the public, growing insecurity during the second wave of COVID-19 (partly because of the economic impact and partly because of the Czech government's haphazard approach to the second wave). Anti-COVID-19 parts of the far-right, also connected to the hooligan's scene, participated in a demonstration on 28 October in Prague (the demonstration was called by an organisation opposed to the COVID-19 measures but not connected to the far right). It clashed with the police, which caused public condemnation and evinced support from part of the libertarian and anti-COVID-19 right.

The current situation has not been too favourable to far-right political subjects – only in the case of the SPD did it lead to an openly pro-Czexit stance (with the argument that the EU had not coped with the pandemic, above all in the context of events in Italy – Matteo Salvini from Lega Nord is perceived by the SPD as a notable ally).



# COUNTRY DENMARK

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The Danish far right can be divided into a) the parliamentary (populist) radical right, b) the extra-parliamentary xeno- and Islamophobic far right, including an array of sub-cultural groups and organisations.

The (populist) radical right is represented by the Danish People's Party (DF, *Dansk Folkeparti*); the party was launched in 1995 and gained parliamentary representation in 1997. In the 2000s, the DF managed to consolidate its position, largely also as a result of the legitimisation of its role by the Liberal and Conservative minority cabinets (2001-2011, 2015-2019). In those years, the right-wing minority governments turned to the DF to obtain the necessary political support to form a government. Over the years, and until 2019, the DF has increased its electoral support; at the 2015 parliamentary elections it became the second largest party in terms of vote-share (21 pct. of the votes). Yet, at the last 2019 elections the party experienced a significant electoral defeat in the ballot box, plummeting from 21.1 percent to 8.7 per cent of the support.

Significantly, the 2019 elections saw the emergence of two new far-right parties, the *Nye Borgerlige* (NB – New Right) and the extremist, anti-immigrant, and fiercely Islamophobic *Stram Kurs* (SK – Hard Line). Only the former passed the electoral threshold of 2 percent, gaining 2.3 per cent of the vote and four parliamentary seats. The latter (SK) had reached notoriety on the internet in the course of 2018, when front figure Rasmus Paludan started organising protests in urban neighborhoods with high densities of migrant populations. Paludan's racist action repertoire includes defamatory speeches and performances, typically the public burning of the Quran.

The rise and electoral campaigning of NB and SK in 2019 are noteworthy events in Danish politics, since they both have more radical positions than the DF on immigration and integration matters and against Islam.

Among the far right sub-cultural milieus and movements, there are several associations that mobilise at the street-level against Islam and on issues such as 'freedom of speech'. This includes groups such as For Freedom (*For Frihed*), which is the Copenhagen-based PEGIDA offshoot (earlier called Pegida-DK). Within the far right street-level mobilisations we also find Generation Identitær/

Generation Identity, which is the Danish chapter of the transnational Generation Identity network. The group was mostly protest-active in 2018, and in recent years, the group gradually decreased its level of protest actions, moving predominantly to social media. Within the extreme-right anti-democratic and proto-fascist milieu we find the Danish branch of the neo-Nazi Nordic Resistance Movement, *Nordfront* (with nests in several Danish cities). In November 2019, two activists associated to the movement were convicted for the vandalization of Jewish graves in the city of Randers. Neo-Nazi groupuscules also include remnants of the National Socialist Movement of Denmark (*Danmarks Nationalsocialistiske Bevægelse*, DNSB) and Denmark's National Front (*Danmarks Nationale Front* (DNF)).

Far-right sub-cultural groups have also been active in the past decades. Worth mentioning is The Free Press Association (*Trykkefrihedsselskabet* – TFS), which was founded in 2004. The association members (in both Denmark and Sweden) held several public meetings and claim to be championing free speech in Denmark, which they say is threatened by Islam. The role of the association was amplified by the publication of the infamous Mohammed cartoons in 2005. A Danish member of the TFS was among the organisers of the 2015 public debate "Arts, Blasphemy and Free Speech" (with Swedish cartoonist Lars Vilks as special guest) at the cultural house Krudttønden. The event was dramatically brought to an end by an Islamist terrorist shooting, who killed one and injured three. The TFS blog posts are mainly characterised by Islamophobic positions.

## MAIN FAR-RIGHT ORGANISATIONS

Name	Ideology
Danish People's Party	Radical Right
New Right	Far-right
Hard Line	Far-right
Generation Identitær	Far-right / Identitarian

## ELECTED FAR-RIGHT REPRESENTATIVES (2020)

Legislature	Party	Number of elected representatives
Local	Danish People's Party	223
	New Right	1
Regional	Danish People's Party	21
	New Right	0
National	Danish People's Party	16
	New Right	4
	Hard Line	0 (but ran in 2019 elections)
European	Danish People's Party	1

## MOST INFLUENTIAL ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Name	Platform	Followers/ Likes
Morten Messerschmidt	Twitter	25,400
	Facebook	64,200
	YouTube	94
Pia Kjærsgaard	Twitter	10,200
	Facebook	138,000
Pernille Vermund	Twitter	11,300
	Facebook	67,000
Rasmus Paludan (leader of Stam Kurs)	Twitter	25 million views on YouTube as for 2019, before being banned
	Facebook	

*NB: Paludan accounts on Twitter and Facebook have recently been suspended/closed*

## KEY NARRATIVES

Islamophobia, anti-immigration, anti-refugee, welfare chauvinism, freedom of speech, Euroscepticism

## RESPONSE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The pandemic pushed radical right anti-immigration and anti-Islam narratives in the background, making the global health crisis the main and most urgent issue in the country. Yet, the radical right exploits any available opportunity to bring its agenda back and gain political and public visibility and attention. For instance, the rising number of COVID-19 positive cases in the Danish neighborhood of Gellerup, Aarhus, with a higher rate of residents having immigrant background, was used by the radical and populist right to promote narratives targeting the Somali community as responsible for the contagion, attributed to the gathering-together habits considered to be disrespectful of the 'civic responsibility' and of the social distancing required under the COVID-19 pandemic. This position allowed the DF and the NB to mobilise against Islam within the framing of the COVID-19 pandemic.

## THE FAR-RIGHT THREAT IN 2021

Anti-immigration and nativist politics triggered and reinforced by the aftermaths of the pandemic (e.g. the effects of the economic crisis on the labour market), online hate campaigns, mobilisations, and trolling.



# COUNTRY ESTONIA

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Since April 2019, the Estonian Conservative People's Party/EKRE has been participating in Estonia's coalition government together with the (nominally centrist/center-left) *Eesti Keskerakond*/Centre Party and the (conservative right-wing) *Isamaa*/Fatherland party. EKRE steadily remains Estonia's third most popular party in all opinion polls conducted since the beginning of 2020. *Sinine Äratust*/Blue Dawn, EKRE's youth-wing, functions on a semi-autonomous basis and projects a more identitarian profile.

The *Eesti Iseseisvuspartei*/Estonian Independence Party is a very marginal political actor, without any representatives at the *Riigikogu*/national parliament. This is mainly result of the party's non-realistic conceptualisation of Estonia as a self-sufficient state that must remain non-aligned to the east (Russia) and west (EU and NATO).

Soldiers of Odin-Estonia are the local branch of the anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim, grass-roots organisation that commenced their engagement in Finland. This group mainly becomes active in semi-structured patrolling operations and other public manifestations (e.g. small gatherings) with the alleged objective to protect Estonians from 'immigrant/refugee crime'. There has been a series of speculations over the maintenance of informal communication channels between Soldiers of Odin-Estonia and *Sinine Äratust*.

One more of the dominant far right narratives in Estonia revolves around the necessity to preserve the 'Estonian' ethno-cultural character of the state. That is the institutional predominance of the Estonian language and culture.

As of 13 January 2021, EKRE no longer participates in the Estonian government following the dissolution of the previous governing coalition (consisting of the Centre Party/*Eesti Keskerakond*, EKRE, and the *Isamaa*/Fatherland party).

## MAIN FAR-RIGHT ORGANISATIONS

Name	Ideology
EKRE	Populist and radical right-wing (PRR)
<i>Sinine Äratust</i>	An amalgamation of alt-right and identitarian standpoints
Soldiers of Odin-Estonia	An amalgamation of identitarian, alt-right and Neo-Nazi standpoints
Estonian Independence Party	Populist and radical right-wing (PRR)

## ELECTED FAR-RIGHT REPRESENTATIVES

Legislature	Party	Number of elected representatives
National	EKRE	19 seats at the <i>Riigikogu</i> /national parliament
European	EKRE	One representative at the European Parliament

## MOST INFLUENTIAL ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Name	Platform	Followers/Likes
Ruuben Kaalep	Twitter	1,390 followers
Jaak Madison	Twitter	2,047 followers
Martin Helme	Twitter	1,114 followers
Mart Helme	Twitter	885 followers

## FAR-RIGHT TERROR ARRESTS AND CONVICTIONS

On April 10<sup>th</sup>, 2020, Estonia's Internal Security Service/KAPO captured a ringleader of the extremist *Feuerkrieg Division* ('Fire-war Division' in German; FKD for short) – a 13-year-old schoolboy, known online as 'Commander FKD'

## KEY NARRATIVES

- The necessity to maintain bilateral relations between Estonia and Russia securitised.
- Restriction of immigration to Estonia from 'third countries' (mainly MENA and, to a secondary extent, the post-Soviet space).
- Opposition to the EU's quota arrangement for the redistribution of refugees and the impending 'Islamisation of Europe'.
- Opposition to the 'external imposition' of LGBTQI rights (e.g. Estonia's 'Cohabitation Act' of 2016 and its provisions for same-sex couples).
- Combatting institutional corruption and the Estonian 'deep state'.



## RESPONSE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The state of emergency imposed in light of the global spread of COVID-19 provided EKRE's policymakers with another opportunity to reiterate the party's nativist principles. In April 2020, EKRE spearheaded and achieved the introduction of amendments to the 'Aliens Act' and the 'Obligation to Leave and Prohibition on Entry Act', via the Ministry of Interior. The main objective was to ensure that foreign citizens from 'third' (non-EU) countries who have lost their jobs, after the outbreak of the COVID-19 crisis and the ensuing state of emergency, would leave Estonia as soon as possible. One month later, in May 2020, the Ministry of Interior announced the preparation of a new bill which would, amongst others, disallow university students from 'third' countries to study in Estonia, during autumn term 2020, even if they have the necessary visa or residence permit, due to fears of a resurgence of the COVID-19 coronavirus.

On 16 September, 2020, Martin Helme reiterated the Ministry of Interior's intention to revise the terms of entry and stay for citizens of 'third countries'

who study and work in Estonia. In Helme's words, 'our goal is to prevent the constant growth of communities from high-risk countries, and this is mainly due to learning mobility...the problem is the growing communities of nations in Estonia, which have a significantly different historical, cultural and religious background from us'. The COVID-19 crisis has granted EKRE the opportunity not solely to promote its nativist standpoints but also to impact, to varying degrees, on the governmental policies from within the halls of power.

## THE FAR-RIGHT THREAT IN 2021

It is not easy to identify any potential 'threats' per se. However, it is very likely that EKRE's policymakers, in particular, will keep on promoting their nativist standpoints from within the halls of power as part of their alleged endeavor to 'combat the spread of COVID-19' via interlinking the global pandemic with external immigration.



Estonian nationalists on the annual march through the Old Town of Tallinn. Photo: DJ Sturm

# COUNTRY FINLAND

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**Affiliation** University of Helsinki



The far-right scene in Finland is dominated by Perussuomalaiset (The Finns Party), a country-wide parliamentary party which under its new leadership since 2017 has evolved into a radical right outfit after a general European model. Lacking competition, the party has so far been able to gobble up almost all of the potential support for the far right, and is in terms of MPs currently the second-largest group in the Finnish parliament. The ability of the party to enter, let alone head, any future government of Finland has to be regarded as uncertain, however.

The rest of the far right scene is left to several small and often fleeting marginal organisations (e.g. The Finnish Defence League, which currently seems to be defunct). Continued attempts at unity only highlight the fractiousness of the fringe. Part of the attraction of the Finns Party is its relative stability, and activists of the fringe groupings are often in some kind of connection to the party and/or members both in the party and other far-right groupings. For instance, Finns Party MPs have appeared as speakers in activities meant to bring the far right together, like the “612”-march of independence day, in which party members, neo-nazis, skinheads and miscellaneous far-right-sympathisers march together.

A notable recent development has been the decision of the supreme court to uphold the ban on the Pohjoismaiden Vastarintaliike (Nordic Resistance Movement), an openly national socialist Neo-Nazi group active in other Nordic countries as well (by far strongest in Sweden). The effects of the ban remain so far untested, however, but the decision will allow the police in the future to break up the public activities of the group.

## MAIN FAR-RIGHT ORGANISATIONS

Name	Ideology
Perussuomalaiset (Finns Party)	Radical Right. A parliamentary party as well as an umbrella organisation and a channel to political influence for the extreme right-wing
<i>Pohjoismaiden Vastarintaliike (Nordic Resistance Movement)</i>	Neo-Nazi. Banned in Finland since September 2020. Continues activities currently either under new names (Kansallinen Vastarinta, National Resistance and Herää Suomi, Finland Awake) and symbols, or without clearly identifiable symbols (e.g. plain green flags).
Suomen Sisu	Generic fascist/Radical Right. An organization that works within the Finns Party and counts several MPs as members
Soldiers of Odin	Neo-Nazi/Radical Right. A street vigilante group which originated in Finland. Chapters abroad only loosely connected to the Finnish organisation, overall activity in Finland on the wane
Kansallismielisten Liittouma (Nationalist Union)	Radical Right/Neo-Nazi. Close contacts to Neo-Nazi Nordic Resistance Movement, the Soldiers of Odin and the Finns Party

## ELECTED FAR-RIGHT REPRESENTATIVES

Legislature	Party	Number of elected representatives
Local	Perussuomalaiset Aito Suomalainen Yhteislista	770 (as per municipal elections 2017) 1
National	Perussuomalaiset	38 (39) One MP temporarily suspended from membership of the parliamentary group
European	Perussuomalaiset (ID)	2



## MOST INFLUENTIAL ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Name	Platform	Followers/ Likes
Jussi Halla-aho	Twitter/ Facebook/ YouTube	57 k (Twitter) 9000 (FB)
Sebastian Tynkkynen	Twitter/ Facebook/ YouTube/ TikTok	50,5 k (FB) 19,2 k (Twitter)
Laura Huhtasaari	Twitter/FB	27,2 k (Twitter) 19 k (FB)
Mauri Peltokangas	Facebook/ Twitter/ YouTube	20,3 k (FB) 5,9 k (Twitter)
Tiina Wiik/Junes Lokka	Twitter/ VKontakte/ DLive	15,4 k (Twitter) 6,3 k (Twitter)

## KEY NARRATIVES

In descending order of salience:

- A combination of anti-refugee attitudes, islamophobia and welfare chauvinism remains the staple core of the far right message.
- Doubt towards or blanket denial of climate change, as well as belittling Finland's capacity to act in a meaningful way ("We're such a small nation compared to China and the US", "we've done our part already").
- Anti-European Union attitudes from mainstream Euroscepticism to calls for a "Finexit" or "Fixit".
- Antifeminism, homo- and transphobia, all gender & equality issues, anti-equal marriage - anti-abortion themes, however, relatively rare and usually pushed by those with also a religious background.
- Antisemitism is present, but usually not flaunted, open antisemitism more common among the far right fringe outside the Finns Party
- Hostility towards the Roma, Swedish-speakers and the Sámi (particularly in Lapland)

## RESPONSE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

After the last parliamentary elections in 2019 a center-left government took power and displayed solid leadership during the onset of the COVID-19-crisis. This left the opposition in general and the far right in particular largely without lines of attack, and the parliamentary far right has so far not been able to capitalise on the crisis. The Finns Party is only now showing signs of recovering their support to the level enjoyed in the last parliamentary elections.

## THE FAR-RIGHT THREAT IN 2021

The main threat is posed by the Finns Party, whose electoral success in the upcoming municipal and parliamentary elections could allow them to again intensify their influence within the municipalities (now rather low following their poor performance in 2017 municipal elections), or enter the government after the next parliamentary elections in 2023. Such a development would allow the Finns Party to influence policy-making much more than what they are now capable of, and place their own people into important civil service posts in a scale hitherto not experienced.

The other far right organisations remain fringe groupings with small active memberships, and they pose a threat mainly in the form of physical and verbal violence directed against individuals and groups.

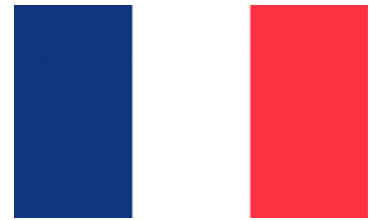
An example is the attempted murder of a local Finns Party activist in July 2020, of which a former member of the party as well as the chairman of the fringe group Kansallismielisten Liittouma (Nationalist Union) are currently under police investigation. The motive seems to be connected to internal disputes within both the Finns Party and the wider far right fringe in general, but the incident nevertheless is another indicator of the readiness of the extreme right wing to resort to violence both towards outsiders and their own.



# COUNTRY FRANCE

**Author Samuel Bouron**

**Affiliation Paris Sciences and Lettres University**



The year 2020 was marked in my opinion by two things: first, the increasing visibility of a reactionary discourse on the 24 hours channels and, in particular, on the CNews channel in two programs, *L'Heure des pros* hosted by Pascal Praud and *Face à l'info*, with Eric Zemmour as a polemicist. With CNews, the far-right is now equipped in France with a resonance box of its speeches, a sort of French Fox News, which adds to the intense activity of the far-right on the social media. So 2020 sees the advance of the extreme right in the public space.

Then, in line with Black live matters, demonstrations were organized against police violence. The far-right tried to polarize public opinion on this issue by supporting police unions, whose political positioning is close to the far-right. There is a strong closeness more generally between the speech of the Minister of the Interior Gérald Darmanin and the far-right. The situation worries public opinion. That's why a series of demonstrations were organized against the "global security law" which prohibits the publication of police videos without blurring faces

In the political arena, Marine Le Pen, who is favorite for the next first round of the presidential election in 2021, does not take any risks and avoids a too sulphurous criticism of the government.

## MAIN FAR-RIGHT ORGANISATIONS

Name	Ideology
Rassemblement national (ex FN)	Nationalist
Génération identitaire	Identitarians
Action française	Royalists
Egalité et Réconciliation	Anti-semitic
Les Patriotes	Nationalist

## ELECTED FAR-RIGHT REPRESENTATIVES

Legislature	Party	Number of elected representatives
Local	Rassemblement national	60
Regional	Rassemblement national	306
National	Rassemblement national	7
European	Rassemblement national	21

## MOST INFLUENTIAL ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Name	Platform	Followers/Likes
Marine Le Pen	Twitter	2,5M
Le Raptor	Youtube	694K
Marion Maréchal	Twitter	373,2K
Valek	Youtube	328K
Gilbert Collard	Twitter	240,2K
Florian Philippot	Twitter	212k

## FAR-RIGHT TERROR ARRESTS AND CONVICTIONS

According to the Europresse database :

- 1) In May, in Limoges, the anti-terrorist police arrested a man suspected of being close to the extreme-right movement and potentially carrying a terrorist project.
- 2) in June, a dozen of far-right activists from the Generation identitaires group displayed a banner on the sidelines of the demonstration against police violence in Paris. They were arrested before being released quickly, without being placed in police custody.
- 3) In July, Alain Soral has been placed in police custody for "provocation to commit a crime or offense prejudicial to the fundamental interests of the Nation".

This year, the number of arrests is therefore relatively low.

## KEY NARRATIVES

In France, the main narrative is Islamophobia, particularly from the Rassemblement National and from the Identitarians. It can also be associated with migration policy and anti-refugee discourse.

Antisemitism is present especially around Alain Soral but it is rather marginal and confined to some extreme-right sites. Even Twitter has closed many accounts.

On the social media, narratives against feminists and masculinism were also deployed, especially on Youtube. Recently, this narrative may have included a speech against the social sciences, suspected of being "Islamogauchists".

Antiroma and homophobia are narratives that seem to be more discreet in the public space.

## HOW HAS THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC EFFECTED THE FAR-RIGHT IN YOUR COUNTRY?

The far right rallied around Covid mainly in the conspiracy thesis that the government is hiding the effectiveness of chloroquine proposed by Professor Raoult.

She then helped peddle conspiracy theories about the ineffectiveness of masks, anti-covid tests, and even in the most extreme cases, on a government invention of the disease.

So the far-right progressed mainly in the construction of a community from these « alternative facts ». In France, extreme right-wing speeches seem to be moving more and more along the path of conspiracy, in line with Trump's supporters.



Photo: Pulek1

# COUNTRY GERMANY

**Author Simone Rafael**

**Affiliation Amadeu Antonio Stiftung / Belltower.News**



At the beginning of 2020, there was a rise in far right digital disinformation through social media and a lack of media literacy in detecting it in German Society. Debate also continued on the anti-semitic and far right terrorist attack in Halle (Oct 2019) by a person who was radicalised online and streamed his murdering of two people for an international terror-interested audience. In February 2020 there was a second terrorist attack within a few months in Germany: In Hanau an attacker killed 11 people motivated by racism, islamophobia and conspiracy theories. Since March there has been a constant rise in racism, anti-semitism and conspiracy ideology, fueled by the coronavirus-pandemic, on social media and through demonstrations in the offline world.

The conspiracy scene in Germany includes some long-known ideologists like Eva Hermann or Ken Jebsen (both former journalists), but also includes many new prominent actors on the propaganda scene, like Attila Hildmann (a former vegan chef), Xavier Naidoo (former soul singer) or Bodo Schiffmann (former doctor). The main movement claims they protest against anti-Corona-measures of the government, asking for freedom of speech or freedom of action such as not wearing masks and protecting other people. Many protestors deny the existence of the virus. The biggest demonstrations are called “Querdenken” (“think outside the box”), which fits quite well with “Q” from “QAnon”, the anti-semitic conspiracy narrative coming from the US.

In 2020, “QAnon” found a lot of new believers in Germany – it’s the biggest “Q”-Community outside of English-speaking countries. “Querdenken” demonstrations gather up to 40.000 people (the biggest demonstration so far was in Berlin on 29 August). With the anti-Corona-demonstrations, a lot of former fringe groups within German far right extremism entered the stage, like esoteric nationalism, eco-fascism, Reichsbürger (far right extremist denying the existence of the state of Germany, not paying taxes and claiming that there should still be the “III. Reich” in Germany).

Former influential far right actors like the “Identitarian movement”, Neo-Nazi-Parties like “Der III. Weg” or “Die Rechte” or far right martial artists or “alternative media” embrace the anti-Corona-Maßnahmen-Movement and try to gain influence there to spread their far-right ideology. They enjoy going to demonstrations without any pushback or distancing from the other protestors.

Meanwhile, a lot of people seek help because the conspiracy ideologies reach their families and friends, making it impossible to argue with them because they decided to develop a delusional reality beyond facts. The biggest loser on the far right side is the AfD, the biggest far right party in Germany. They didn’t find their position within the pandemic.

Parts of the AfD asked for stronger measures from the government, while parts of the AfD tried to embrace the “Corona is a lie”-movement, but they have the lowest support in years (polls talk about 6 per cent of votes for the AfD at the moment. At the beginning of 2020 they were at 12 per cent on average and at 20 per cent in some parts of Germany). But that is not necessarily a positive development as many people could be radicalised and not looking for a political solution – instead, they may turn to violence.

## MAIN FAR-RIGHT ORGANISATIONS

Name	Ideology
AfD	Party, radical right
NPD	Party, extreme right
Der III. Weg,	Parties, Neo-Nazi
Die Rechte	Party, Neo-Nazi
Identitarian Movement	Identitarian
Comradships / fight clubs / Völkische Siedler (settlers) / far-right preppers/ alternative media / Reichsbürger	Most far-right activists in Germany are not organized in structured groups anymore, but build large, unstructured networks, mainly held together by internet groups and channels.
Querdenken / Anti-Corona-Movement	Anti-semitic, anti-democratic, conspiracy ideologies (not in general far-right, but in parts)

## ELECTED FAR-RIGHT REPRESENTATIVES

Legislature	Party	Number of elected representatives
Local	AfD, NPD, Die Rechte, Der III. Weg	1.275 (AfD), 375 (NPD), 10 (Die Rechte), 2 (Der III. Weg)
Regional	AfD	251 (AfD)
National	AfD	89
European	AfD	11



## MOST INFLUENTIAL ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Name	Platform	Followers/Likes
Martin Sellner	Twitter: Deplatformed 2020 Facebook: Deplatformed 2018 Instagram: Deplatformed 2019 YouTube: Deplatformed in 2020 Telegram Bitchute Dlive	Twitter: Deplatformed 2020, before 34.000 F&I: Deplatformed in 2019, before (Insta): 10.000 Youtube: Deplatformed in 2020, before 142.000 + 25.000 english Telegram: 57.000 Bitchute: 16.000 Dlive: 6.000
Der Volkslehrer / Nikolai Nehrling	Twitter YouTube: permanently opening new channels, permanently deplatformed as a holocaust denier, but featured in lots of other disinformation channels Telegram Bitchute VK Instagram	Twitter: 1.750 YouTube: had 70.000 before deplatforming Telegram: 27.000 Bitchute: 8021 VK: 1850 Instagram: 6.100
Jürgen Elsässer / Compact Magazin	Twitter: Facebook: deplatformed 2020 YouTube Telegram Bitchute	Twitter: 29.600 Youtube 138.000 Telegram: 22.600 Bitchute: 135 (haha)
Björn Höcke	Twitter Facebook YouTube Telegram Bitchute Instagram: Deplatformed May 2020 Deplatformed May 2020 Instagram	Twitter: 6.600 Facebook: 20.600 Abos YouTube: 72.800 Telegram: 101.000 Bitchute: 1.800 Instagram: Deplatformed May 2020, before 68.000
Atilla Hildmann	Twitter/Vkontakte/ DLive	15,4 k (Twitter) 6,3 k (Twitter)

## FAR-RIGHT TERROR ARRESTS AND CONVICTIONS

No convictions; 2 trials ongoing

## KEY NARRATIVES

In 2020, the main topics were all Corona-related, which explains why racism isn't leading here (as in the last years):

- Anti-semitism, often "hid" in conspiracy theories about Coronavirus or spreading of the virus or a "New World Order" or through "QAnon"-narrations.
- Anti-democratic argumentations, against liberal and parliamentary democracy and against the government.

- Anti-facts-argumentations – against Media, journalism, research and against science and medicine.

- Anti-Asian racism (because of the start of Coronavirus in China).

## RESPONSE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Almost all actions of the far right in Germany at the moment focus on the anti-Corona-measures-movement and the spreading of disinformation with the aim to damage democracy, so the impact of the pandemic on the far right is really big. We saw a similar situation in 2014/2015 when almost all parts of the far right scene focused on anti-refugee movements because all far right actors hoped to gain influence through anti-refugee-racism in general society. And it worked. That is why they are now trying to use the irrational anti-Corona-measures-movement to shatter the democratic system. A new method is the excessive use of the messenger Telegram by the far right disinformation scene. As other networks start to deplatform anti-democratic content, Telegram is said to be the harbour of freedom of speech. Channels of the far right or conspiracy activists easily gain tens of thousands of followers there.

## THE FAR-RIGHT THREAT IN 2021

At the moment there are no solutions for how to deal with the hundreds of thousands of people who turned to deeply anti-Semitic conspiracy beliefs and who have ceased to rely on science and facts. It's like they all joined a conspiracy sect. Do we get them back? And how? Can we at least prevent anti-Semitic and racist violence through this group? A lot of AfD-voters are disaffected: Voting for the AfD didn't change a thing, the party is as corrupt and lying as other parties (or, to be honest, even more). Demonstrations on the streets in 2020 also didn't change much. There is a lot of disinformation on "alternative media" claiming that now is the time to act – they create a compulsion to act. So there could be a radicalisation to violence as the ultimate solution. There were cases of online radicalisation, far right activists starting networks to plan violent acts or to commit violent acts or acts of terrorism. There was a member of "Feuerkrieg Division" arrested in Germany in February 2020. There were networks within police and military who were racist, anti-democratic preppers with lots of weapons, waiting for "Day X" to kill all political opponents, migrants and Jews. And on the other hand there is a law enforcement system not prepared for any of this, especially not for detecting radicalisation online (or even believing people who detect terrorist activities).

The national election for the Bundestag will be in September 2021. It will prove if the AfD has still a chance to be an influential political arm of the far right movement – or if it radicalised itself too much.

# COUNTRY GREECE

**Author Dr. Alexandros Sakellariou**

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There have been two important developments with regards to the far right in Greece during 2020. The first one was the continuation of the dissolution of Golden Dawn after the 2019 electoral failure to enter the Greek Parliament and also in the light of the court decision on Golden Dawn as a criminal organisation. In June, Ilias Kassidiaris, one of the most prominent Golden Dawn members, former MP and second in command of the party founded his own political party called 'Greeks for the fatherland'. This initiative was clearly stimulated by the trial since most of the former MPs wanted to differentiate themselves from their violent and National-Socialist past (the same occurred with Ioannis Lagos, currently a MEP, in 2019 - he created his own party and many GD members followed him).

The second is the court decision on Golden Dawn announced on the 7 October 2020. According to this court decision GD as a group/political party and many of the party's former MPs and the leadership (the general secretary included) were convicted as a criminal organisation, while other former MPs and lower rank members were convicted of taking part in the criminal organisation and in violent attacks – including two murders in 2013 of a Pakistani immigrant and a Greek musician).

A final point that should be mentioned is that in many parts of the country local far right groups have stood against the relocation of Muslim immigrants from the Greek islands in the Aegean Sea to various other places (camps and houses) in the Greek mainland. A series of violent attacks have been recorded for example against Muslim immigrants in Crete and against their local prayer house or with anti-Semitic slogans outside of the Jewish Cemetery in Athens, just a couple of days before the court decision about Golden Dawn. Of course, Islamophobic rhetoric and hate speech is very regularly recorded either in the public sphere, especially via social media, by far right groups and individuals or on an everyday level against Muslim immigrants.

## MAIN FAR-RIGHT ORGANISATIONS

Name	Ideology
Golden Dawn (Chrissi Avgi)	Neo-Nazi
Greek Solution (Elliniki Lissi)	Far Right
New Right (Nea Dexia)	Far Right
Greeks for the fatherland (Ellines gia tin patrida)	Far Right (founded by one of the leading figures of Golden Dawn and former MP, Ilias Kassidiaris)
National Popular Consciousness (Ethniki Laiki Sinidisi)	Far Right (founded by one of the leading figures of Golden Dawn, former MP and currently MEP, Ioannis Lagos)

## ELECTED FAR-RIGHT REPRESENTATIVES

Legislature	Party	Number of elected representatives
Local1	Golden Dawn	5
Regional	Golden Dawn	21
National	National Solution	10
European	National Solution Golden Dawn	1 2 (1 has left from GD and founded another political party, i.e. 'National Popular Consciousness' and the second after he was elected he was self-declared independent).

## MOST INFLUENTIAL ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Name	Platform	Followers/ Likes
Kyriakos Velopoulos (Leader of National Solution)	Facebook	48,199/ 38,634
Thanos Tzimeros (Leader of Creation Again!) <sup>2</sup>	Facebook	27,790 /2,387
Failos Kranidiotis (Leader of New Right)	Twitter	25,7 thousand followers
Ilias Kassidiaris (Leader of Greeks for the fatherland)	Twitter	25,3 thousand followers
Ilias Panagiotaras (former MP of Golden Dawn)	Twitter	8,125 followers

## FAR-RIGHT TERROR ARRESTS AND CONVICTIONS

None, but on October 7, 2020 Golden Dawn was convicted by a Greek court after 5.5 years of trial as a criminal organisation. Apart from the life sentence for the murderer of Pavlos Fyssas, the founder and Golden Dawn Leader, Nikos Michaloliakos, was sentenced to 13 years of incarceration, while other ex-MPs were sentenced from 6 to 13 years.

## KEY NARRATIVES

The main narratives of the far right are first and foremost anti-immigrant/anti-refugee and Islamophobic. Due to the conflictual situation which erupted on the borders with Turkey during March 2020, when thousands of immigrants tried to enter Greece, there has been a huge reaction from the whole spectrum of the far right, while in some cases many locals started to organise themselves in groups in order to protect the borders and go after migrants as they openly stated in the social media. Apart from that anti-Semitic and anti-Roma narratives are also central in the far-right milieu as well as homophobia. However, the main narrative is the one targeting migrants, refugees and Islam. There is also an interesting connection of Islamophobia and Antisemitism since according the 'Great Replacement' theory, which is reproduced by large-parts of the far right, the Jews are those who are responsible for the waves of Muslim immigrants that will alienate the Greek civilization and lead to the extinction of the Greek nation.

## RESPONSE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

As far as COVID-19 is concerned, there have been many groups and individuals in the far right that are reproducing conspiracy theories and refuse to believe COVID-19's existence or its severity. One of them is the leader of National Solution, who in the Parliament has expressed his serious doubts about COVID-19 and if its more fatal compared to the flu; he has argued that children under 12 should not use masks; and that the citizens of South Italy managed to escape the pandemic because of their Greek DNA (from the ancient Greek colonies!), among other statements.

In some other cases there have been demonstrations in Athens and elsewhere in Greece of COVID - and mask-deniers. In Thessaloniki for example, a former member and candidate of Golden Dawn has been one of the organisers getting media attention.

In addition, during the March-May lockdown many far right parties and individuals reacted against the Greek government's decision to close down the Orthodox Churches together with all the other religious places arguing that this was an attack against Greek Orthodoxy, which according to them is a central element of the Greek national identity and should be protected and privileged.

## THE FAR-RIGHT THREAT IN 2021

One main threat is how the far right would or could elaborate and instrumentalise the COVID-19 pandemic. A second possible threat that is already taking place is how far right groups could react on the immigration issue which has been the main theme in public debates and to which extent they could influence the right-wing government to incorporate extreme-right policies and ideas. A final threat, not yet visible is that a severe economic recession, which will probably follow after the pandemic, could also give rise to extreme-right groups and parties. Taking into consideration that according to opinion polls many people still hold racist, nationalistic, Islamophobic, Antisemitic, etc. views and ideas and that even after Golden Dawn's conviction in October, 21 per cent of people argued that such a party, without the violent practices, could be useful in the political sphere, raises the question of how the far right could capitalise on the above (the pandemic, immigration and recession) building on the existing nationalist/extreme-right ideology and conspiracy theories within society.



# COUNTRY HUNGARY

Author **Bernard Rorke**



By most assessments, the ruling Fidesz party can be safely categorized as far-right, and in 2020 it stepped up its culture war to protect Hungary's unique "European and Christian identity". Having captured the state, the regime is pitted in what it sees as a hegemonic struggle to "embed the political system in a cultural era." Attacks on media and academic freedom provoked large anti-government demonstrations and a blockade and occupation of the University of Theatre and Film Arts (SZFE) to resist a takeover by a Christian-national board appointed by the government.

Immediately prior to the COVID-19 crisis, Prime Minister Orbán had been engaged in waging an overtly racist propaganda campaign against Roma in Hungary. In his furious reaction to a Supreme Court ruling on 17 May, in favour of Romani children and parents of Gyöngyöspata over school segregation, Orbán made a number of anti-Roma racist broadcasts on national radio, including this tirade against minorities: "It cannot happen that in order for a minority to feel at home, the majority must feel like strangers in their own towns, villages, or homeland. This is not acceptable. And as long as I am the prime minister, nothing of the sort will happen. Because this is the country of the natives, our country, and I see that this whole [Roma court] case was initiated by the Soros organizations."

The LGBTQ community also finds itself in the regime's crosshairs. In April 2020, under the cover of Covid-19 emergency legislation, Orbán launched an attack on the rights of transgender people, by replacing 'gender' with 'gender at birth' in the civil registry, and making it impossible for citizens to change their gender legally; then on 10 November, bills were rushed before parliament effectively banning same-sex couples from adopting, and require children be raised with a Christian interpretation of gender roles.

On 22 October, in the wake of a homophobic book-shredding scandal orchestrated by the neo-fascist Mi Hazánk (see below), eight rights organizations formally protested and called on the Ombudsman to condemn Orbán's homophobic red-lining on radio for its reinforcement of prevailing stereotypes against sexual minorities, and his explicit exclusion of LGBTQ people from the body of the nation by asserting that "Hungary is patient with homosexuals".

Further to the right is neo-fascist "Our Homeland Movement" (*Mi Hazánk Mozgalom*), which organized

anti-Roma marches. Following a fatal double stabbing in Budapest, it called on its supporters to gather outside the offices of the National Roma Self-Government for a rally against "gypsy crime" on 28 May. In defiance of regulations banning protest gatherings, the Mi Hazánk supporters converged with thousands of far-right ultras in the city centre streets, chanting racist anti-Roma slogans, with many giving fascist salutes.

At the end of September's far-right MP Dóra Dúró, posted a YouTube video of herself shredding a copy of a newly-published children's book *Fairy Tales for Everyone* at a press conference. The *Mi Hazánk* leader and proud mother-of-four declared that 'Fairytale Land' does not belong to 'aberrals'; that her party "will not tolerate exposing children to homosexual propaganda, and that homosexual princes are not part of Hungarian culture."

Dúró's book-shredding stunt was followed by a hundred-strong far-right rally outside the offices of the Labrisz Lesbian Association on 3 October, where *Mi Hazánk* leader László Toroczkai told the mob that the "LGBTQ virus" was more dangerous than the coronavirus. Publicist Árpád Szakács, a regular contributor to pro-government media, described LGBTQ activists as jackals who attack families, and called for the creation of Polish-style "LGBTQ-free zones".

The next day, a Sunday-morning theatre matinee program for children had to be cancelled when the well-known homophobic fascist Budaházy siblings, turned up mob-handed with megaphones and sirens outside the venue, shouting obscenities and trying to push their way past security. The police made no attempt to disperse the illegal gathering, and by their inaction failed to protect the rights of families with small children coming to the event.

This episode was following by Orbán's homophobic intervention (see above). What is especially sinister is that a government in an EU Member State is wilfully acting in concert with an overtly neo-fascist party of 'useful idiots' to cultivate a climate of fear and hostility against LGBTQ citizens as a prelude to passing discriminatory legislation.

# COUNTRY ICELAND

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The far-right has a very limited presence in Iceland in general and have been especially quiet during 2020 as there have not been elections and people have been preoccupied with COVID-19.

Iceland has only one known and active organisation, The Icelandic National Front (Íslenska Thjodfylkingin). They occasionally write blog-posts on their websites when immigration issues reach the news.

## MAIN FAR-RIGHT ORGANISATIONS

Name	Ideology
The Icelandic National Front	Right-wing national populists

## ELECTED FAR-RIGHT REPRESENTATIVES

Legislature	Party	Number of elected representatives
Local		0 – none that are known to be far right
National		0 – although 2 parliamentarians for The Centre Party have on several occasions expressed anti-immigration views.
European	NA	1 2 (1 has left from GD and founded another political party, i.e. 'National Popular Consciousness' and the second after he was elected he was self-declared independent).

## KEY NARRATIVES

Islamophobia and the threat to Icelandic cultural identity.



Guðmundur Þorleifsson, chairman of Íslenska Thjodfylkingin

## MAIN FAR-RIGHT ORGANISATIONS

Name	Ideology
Fidesz	Ideologically thin, authoritarian nativist, professedly 'illiberal', unremittingly anti-migrant, Islamophobic (yet has no problem establishing close relations with the likes of Erdogan)
Mi Hazánk	Irredentist, socially conservative, anti-EU, it broke away from Jobbik in 2018, Dóra Duró, summarized the newly formed party's core values by stating that, "Instead of the confusing Rainbow flag, we want the Hungarian tricolor". László Toroczkai who proclaimed that Hungary should remain a "white island" in Europe.
Jobbik	From 2015 to 2020, the party started to re-define itself as a more moderate conservative people's party and came up with a new declaration of principles defining itself as a centre-right, pro-European party with some residual nationalist tendencies. This mendacious makeover has allowed it to make common cause with other opposition parties in opposition to Orbán. This also prompted members including 4 MPs to break away and set up Mi Hazánk.

## ELECTED FAR-RIGHT REPRESENTATIVES

This is complicated, the ruling Fidesz party with a two-thirds majority in parliament is a far-right party, but also a 'broad church national movement' which does include elected individuals, who are not far-right.

Jobbik have re-modelled themselves as a mainstream 'patriotic party' and have found uneasy common ground with other opposition parties in attempts to forge a unified opposition to Fidesz. They no longer count themselves as 'far-right', and many observers have been gullible enough, or it has proven politically expedient in some quarters, to take Jobbik politicians at their word.

Legislature	Party	Number of elected representatives
Local	Mi Hazánk	8 seats in counties' assemblies in 2019 local elections
	Jobbik	10 local mayors elected in 2019 local elections
	Fidesz	In the 23 cities, 13 government-aligned or government-supported candidates won, vs 10 opposition supported mayors
National	Mi Hazánk	4 ex-Jobbik MPs
	Jobbik	26 seats 2018 elections/ minus 4 defectors
	Fidesz	117 seats 2018 elections/ supermajority
European	Jobbik	1 seat 2019 elections
	Fidesz	12 seats 2019 elections

## MOST INFLUENTIAL ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Name	Platform	Followers/Likes
Dóra Duro	Instagram	7,313 followers
	Facebook	171K likes
	YouTube videos attract between 43K and 6k views	
Zsolt Bayer	Facebook	34,157 likes
Viktor Orbán	Instagram	971K followers
	Facebook	904K likes

## KEY NARRATIVES

Anti-Roma (Gypsy crime); Homophobia; Islamophobia; anti-migrant; anti-Brussels sovereigntist; defence of Christian-national civilization; replacement and other conspiracy theories incorporating both explicit and coded antisemitism and 'Soros globalist plots'. Main propaganda outlets are online, broadcast and print media virtually monopolized by government and pro-government consortia, as well as 'national consultation' and nationwide billboard campaigns funded from public money and propagating blatant falsehoods.

## RESPONSE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Hungary is the one EU member state where the far-right has a two-thirds majority. As far as human rights and the rule of law is concerned in the time of pandemic, the raft of emergency measures adopted by the Hungarian government proved to be the most controversial in Europe, and a textbook example of the warning issued by UN Special Rapporteur Fionnuala Ní Aoláin of the dangers of executive overreach in a state of exception; how extraordinary powers made available to government under emergency legislation can become part of the ordinary, normal legal system, rendering the protection of rights "increasingly fraught and difficult."

## WHAT DO YOU THINK THE MAIN FAR-RIGHT THREATS IN YOUR COUNTRY WILL BE IN 2021?

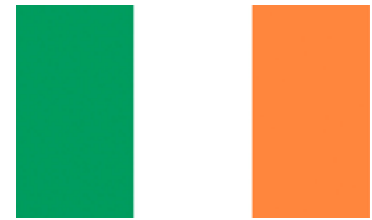
The government will continue to step up its attacks on minorities it does not consider to be part of the 'nation' – this includes Roma, migrants, LGBT community, Muslims, as well as liberal traitors who dissent from the national system of cooperation. As its grip on power becomes less absolute, and the economy nosedives post-pandemic, the regime will revert to scapegoating visible minorities, (especially Roma), as the source of the nation's ills, and escalate the culture war to create a sense of threat from internal and external enemies to justify a state of emergency and the need for vigilance.



# COUNTRY IRELAND

**Author Shaun McDaid**

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The Irish far right scene is centred on a small number of political parties, social movements, or high-profile individuals, although relations between the organisations and individuals vary greatly in terms of cordiality. Most of these are best categorised as populist radical right in orientation.

The year 2020 has been one of mixed fortunes for the far right in Ireland. The general election of February 2020, which witnessed a proliferation of radical right candidates standing for office, was a huge disappointment for the radical right and its supporters. Most radical and far right candidates secured less than 1 per cent of the vote in the constituencies which they stood for election, despite the high media profile of some of those candidates.

However, the COVID-19 pandemic has revitalised the radical and far right scene in Ireland after its lacklustre showing in the election. In particular, the lockdown restrictions have played into the hands of radical and far right groups and acted as a focal point for their activities. Whilst some groups sought to use the early stages of pandemic as a means of embedding their presence in the community, through organising food drops and assistance programmes, this quickly changed into a more hostile, conspiratorial approach to the pandemic, which most of the radical and far right now seek to use to discredit the government, and attack what it regards as the liberal political, business and media elites.

## MAIN FAR-RIGHT ORGANISATIONS

Name	Ideology
National Party	Far-right/populist radical right (registered political party)
Irish Freedom Party	Populist radical right/libertarian (registered political party)
Síol na h-Éireann (The Irish Patriots)	Populist radical right/far-right/nationalist
Anti-Corruption Ireland	Populist radical right/far right/nationalist/anti-vaccination. Primarily associated with leading figures in the movement such as Gemma O'Doherty and John Waters
Identity Ireland	Identitarian. Registered political party, but inactive on social media since 2019.

## ELECTED FAR-RIGHT REPRESENTATIVES

Legislature	Party	Number of elected representatives
Regional	NA	NA. In Ireland, there are no regional level governments.
National		None. Some members have used anti-immigrant rhetoric, but do not identify themselves as far-right and in general do not espouse such views.

## MOST INFLUENTIAL ON SOCIAL MEDIA

NB – Most radical right social media activity is carried out through organisations, parties or networks, as some individuals such as Gemma O'Doherty had their accounts on Twitter, YouTube and Facebook restricted. There are other individual accounts such as Keith Woods, (26k YouTube subscribers), who identifies as nationalist and, coupled with lengthy digressions on obscure political theory, shares content relating to the far right e.g. third positionist ideology.

Name	Platform	Followers/Likes
Grand Torino (Rowan Croft)	YouTube	26.5k subscribers
National Party	YouTube	11.4K subscribers
Síol na h-Éireann – Niall McConnell	YouTube	12.7k subscribers
Anti-Corruption Ireland	Facebook	2372 likes; 2865 followers
(ACI is attempting to navigate several social media restrictions)	Twitter	8,125 followers
Gemma O'Doherty	O'Doherty's Facebook, YouTube and Twitter accounts have been deactivated. She has a small following on her Gab account, but primarily operates through her own website, or her material is promoted by others.	

## FAR-RIGHT TERROR ARRESTS AND CONVICTIONS

There have been no far-right terrorism convictions in Ireland during this period.

## KEY NARRATIVES

There are several common tropes present in the Irish radical and far right scene. One of the most common is the proliferation of the “great replacement theory”. Variants of this theory have been referenced by several prominent radical and far right activists in Ireland. Here, immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers are presented as threatening to replace the native Irish population.

There has been a particular focus on anti-Muslim rhetoric, and Islam is seen as a potentially existential threat to the “native” Irish people. This is sometimes framed in the language of a “plantation”, in an attempt to draw on the emotional legacy of Ireland’s experience of the British Empire. The National Party leader once supported a ban on Muslim immigration to Ireland.

The former Taoiseach (Prime Minister – who currently serves as Deputy PM), Leo Varadkar, was subject to derogatory remarks about his sexuality and ethnic background, by Síol na h-Éireann leader Niall McConnell prior to the February general election.

The radical and far right often combine anti-immigrant/refugee tropes with a hardline anti-abortion rhetoric. Here, those who supported the liberalisation of abortion law in Ireland are deemed complicit in the “plot” to “replace” the native population, through a reduction in the native-born population.

The rhetoric of the radical and far right milieu in Ireland is conspiratorial. For instance, the activist Gemma O’Doherty has deployed the notorious George Soros conspiracy theory, and has accused those on the Irish left of being “cultural Marxists”.

Whilst immigration/anti-abortion is the key focus of the Irish radical right, anti-LGBT narratives are also evident. These tend to focus on opposition to the promotion of LGBT identities in schools, and opposition to reducing the age at which people can change their gender identity. The current Minister for Children, Disability, Equality and Integration, Roderic O’Gorman, was subject to a social media campaign, orchestrated by far right activists.

## RESPONSE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The COVID-19 pandemic has been a boost to the radical and far right in Ireland. It has provided an opportunity to deflect from its poor electoral performance in February, and provided a focal point around which to organise, propagandise, and, potentially, recruit. The unity of purpose among various far right organisations relating to the pandemic may allow, superficially at least, relations between the different groups to become more cordial. The Irish radical and far

right scene is notoriously fractious, and tends to be characterised by intense rivalry, and, at times, ill-feeling between the various organisations. The anti-lockdown movement in Ireland centres on two movements: Health Freedom Ireland (HFI) and Yellow Vest Ireland. Whilst the members, and those who associate with these organisations encompass a broad range of political opinion, including some who regard themselves as left-wing, the radical and far right has used the protests organised by them to promote its own message, and engage in confrontation with counter-protesters of the radical left, at times violently.

Initially, the Irish Patriots (Síol na h-Éireann) sought to use the pandemic as a way of embedding itself in communities through community-assistance programmes. However, it soon abandoned this approach in favour of a more conspiratorial, anti-lockdown stance. Its approach has mirrored that of the international radical right movement, the Knights Templar International (KTI).

Radical and far right groups have also sought to exploit attempts by the Muslim community in Ireland to observe their religious festivals in a manner compatible with social distancing regulations. A small number of Muslim worshippers partook in a prayer service to mark the festival of Eid-Al-Adha in July of 2020. The event was held at Croke Park stadium, the headquarters of the Gaelic Athletic Association. Croke Park was chosen due to its vast size, and ability to facilitate a safe, socially-distanced event. The service was also attended by representatives of other faiths.

Despite the success of the event, it was the focus for a small but vocal series of protests by radical and far right groups. False rumours circulated that animals were to be slaughtered at the stadium, as part of the festival. It was claimed that the prayer ceremony was evidence of “creeping Sharia” coming to Ireland. Several key far right and radical right activists, including Gemma O’Doherty and Niall McConnell, protested at the venue, many of whom recited the Holy Rosary and sang Christian hymns. The National Party claimed that the service was a “humiliation”.

Some groups have also sought to use the language of the pandemic to justify their anti-immigration stances. For instance, in response to a comment from the then Taoiseach (Prime Minister), Leo Varadkar, that racism was a “virus”, the National Party responded that, if racism is the virus, then cultural distancing is the best prevention”.

## WHAT DO YOU THINK THE MAIN FAR-RIGHT THREATS IN YOUR COUNTRY WILL BE IN 2021?

If the Coronavirus restrictions continue in their current form, and if the government does not provide an adequate package of welfare and support for those impacted economically by the restrictions, then there is scope for the radical and far right to

target the economically disadvantaged and attempt to recruit them to their cause. There is some evidence that groups are attempting to recruit in rural, working-class areas which have in recent years suffered the dual impacts of the financial crisis and the current coronavirus restrictions.

Recent far right involvement in anti-lockdown protests have witnessed public order offences and other acts such as alleged assaults taking place, and this is likely to continue to pose challenges in the coming year. Campaigns against asylum seekers and Muslim communities (including protests at mosques), in particular, boosted by social media supporters, are likely to continue as far right actors seek to sow discord during the national emergency.

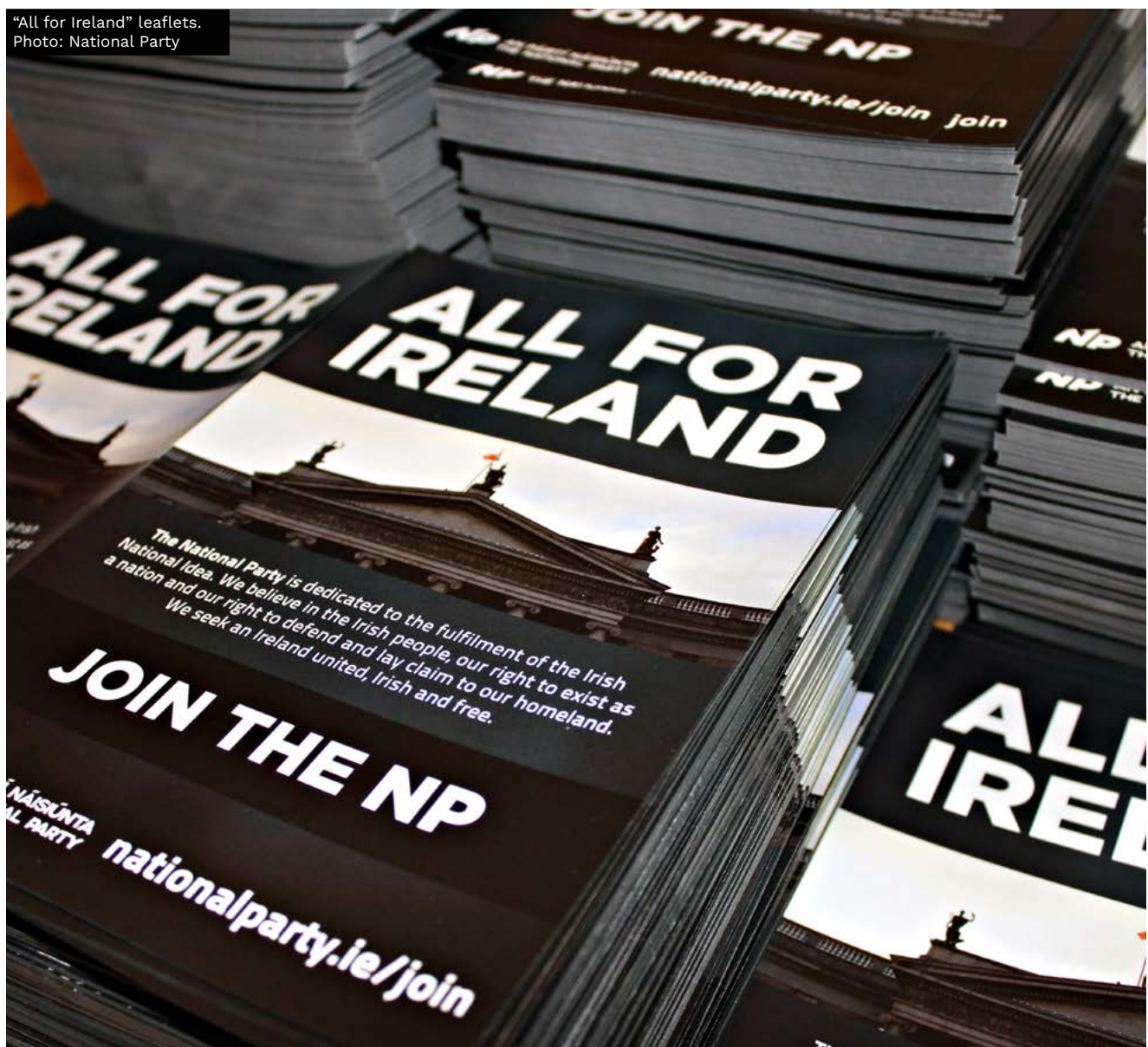
If there is a widespread or compulsory vaccination programme to protect the community against Covid, then the radical and far right may use this as an opportunity to rally support and as a focal

point for their conspiratorial politics, with potential implications for public order. Given the cordial relations between British far right activists and those in Ireland, developments in the United Kingdom may also have an impact on Irish radical and far right activity.

The key threats will arguably be the ways in which the radical and far right, if not sufficiently challenged, may attempt to further erode trust in democratic institutions and the democratic process. It will be incumbent on the mainstream parties to show leadership and set an example to counter these narratives, and to provide support for those in need due to the pandemic.

As already noted, the Irish radical and far right scene is a fractious one, and any unity of purpose driven by the pandemic may be only temporary.

"All for Ireland" leaflets.  
Photo: National Party

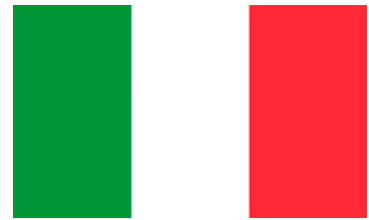




# COUNTRY ITALY

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Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic that hit Italy in late February 2020, the Lega has seen its popularity declining considerably: according to a poll dated mid-October 2020 (Supermedia YouTrend), the party shrank by around -10 percentage points since the latest EU Parliament elections held in May 2019, when the party reached 34 percentage points, or Autumn 2020, when polls were giving the party 40 per cent. Nonetheless, the Lega is still the first political party in Italy.

On the other hand, Fratelli d'Italia (Fdi), the party led by Giorgia Meloni, has been constantly growing since the pandemic, and it is currently polling at around 16 per cent. As concerns extreme-right parties, they are either not political parties anymore (as in the case of CasaPound, which is now simply a movement) or have no elected political representatives (as in the case of Forza Nuova).

## MAIN FAR-RIGHT ORGANISATIONS

Name	Ideology
Lega	Radical-right; Identitarian; Euro-skepticism; 'Sovranismo'
Fratelli d'Italia	Radical-right; Nationalist; Euro-skepticism; 'Sovranismo'
Forza Nuova	Far right/extreme-right; Neo-Fascist; Hard Euro-skepticism
CasaPound	Far right/extreme-right; Neo-Fascist; Hard Euro-skepticism
National Popular Consciousness (Ethniki Laiki Sinidisi)	Far Right (founded by one of the leading figures of Golden Dawn, former MP and currently MEP, Ioannis Lagos)

## ELECTED FAR-RIGHT REPRESENTATIVES

Legislature	Party	Number of elected representatives
Regional	Lega; Fdi	Lega (181); Fdi (52) = 233 Consiglieri regionali
National	Lega; Fdi	Lega (190); Fdi (51) = 241 MPs
European	Lega; Fdi	Lega (29); Fdi (6) = 35 MEPs

## MOST INFLUENTIAL ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Name	Platform	Followers/Likes
Matteo Salvini	Twitter	1,3 M
Giorgia Meloni	Twitter	1 M
Vittorio Feltri	Twitter	490.000
Maurizio Belpietro	Twitter	221.000
Alessandro Sallusti	Twitter	205.000

## FAR-RIGHT TERROR ARRESTS AND CONVICTIONS

There were no conviction in 2020 however, on 21 January 2021 Italian Police arrested a 22-year-old man from Savona (North-Western side of Italy), Andrea Cavalleri, as part of an anti-terrorism operation in radical right-wing circles, related to supremacist terrorism. The suspect is accused of establishing an association for the purposes of terrorism, as well as of carrying out propaganda and incitement to commit crimes on grounds of racial discrimination aggravated by denialism/negationism.

## KEY NARRATIVES

As concerns the main radical right parties in Italy, Lega and Fratelli d'Italia, their narratives have mostly focused on targeting immigrants and refugees in the last years. Part of these narratives is based on (a) crime (selling drugs, in particular), (b) 'welfare chauvinism' and, since the COVID-19 pandemic, on the possibility of illegal immigrants (c) spreading the virus in Italy. Another key narrative of both Lega and Fratelli d'Italia is euro-scepticism, mostly falling under the term '**sovranoismo**' used in Italy.

## RESPONSE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a mixed impact on the far right in Italy, with the Lega in constant decline and Fratelli d'Italia gaining in terms of electoral support. In October 2020, according to latest polls (Supermedia/YouTrend) the party led by Matteo Salvini has declined by around -10 percentage points since the latest EU Parliament elections held in May 2019, when the party was at 34 per cent or in the Autumn 2019, when polls were giving the Lega around 40 per cent. On the contrary, Fratelli d'Italia (Fdi) has been constantly growing since the pandemic, and is currently polling at around 16 per cent. Seemingly, the party

Nascita Fratelli d'Italia.  
Photo: GennaroCri



led by Giorgia Meloni has not been negatively impacted by pandemic.

Overall, since the pandemic, the Italian center-right coalition has been moving towards a full-fledged radical-right coalition, with the populist radical right side highly influential, at both the regional and national level. The center-right, moderate party, Forza Italia (the main pillar of every center-right coalition since 1994), led by Silvio Berlusconi, has been almost completely cannibalised by Lega and FdI. As concerns the leadership of the coalition, the continued 'rise' of Giorgia Meloni may also culminate in Meloni becoming the main leader of the populist radical right in Italy and replacing Salvini as the figurehead of the coalition. Meloni has been skillful in building an international network of partnerships and alliances, in Europe and worldwide. In fact, in sharp contrast to Salvini's Lega, Giorgia Meloni has constructed her political project by patiently building a well-structured political machine alongside an important network of relations, both at home and abroad.

Lastly, it is important to signal that there is currently an open debate within the Lega, with Salvini considering the option of a softer and more moderate stance in the close future, both in Europe and in Italy (moderate move).

### WHAT DO YOU THINK THE MAIN FAR-RIGHT THREATS IN YOUR COUNTRY WILL BE IN 2021?

- The Italian center-right coalition moving towards a full-fledged radical-right coalition, led by Giorgia Meloni and Matteo Salvini, completely cannibalising the moderate side of the coalition once led by Berlusconi.
- Intensification of anti-immigration and anti-refugee narratives, in particular in term of welfare chauvinism or 'war between the poor'.
- Intensification of euro-sceptic narratives ('sovranismo' as a sui generis form of nationalism) that may further complicate the economic recovery in Italy.

# COUNTRY LATVIA

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The main far-right party, the National Alliance (Na), remains a part of the ruling coalition, along with the New Conservative Party (NCP), which includes far right figures.

After the early elections to the Riga city council in August 2020, both Na and NCP have become a part of the ruling coalition in the capital as well.

## MAIN FAR-RIGHT ORGANISATIONS

Name	Ideology
National Alliance	Radical Right
New Conservative Party	National Conservative to Radical Right

## ELECTED FAR-RIGHT REPRESENTATIVES

Legislature	Party	Number of elected representatives
Regional	Not applicable	Not applicable
National	National Alliance	12 of 100
European	National Alliance	2 of 8

*NB this does not classify NCP MPs who fall under far right and those who does not*

## MOST INFLUENTIAL ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Name	Platform	Followers/Likes
Leva Brante	Facebook	7,7K
Raivis Dzintars MP	Facebook	7,6K
Jānis Dombrava MP	Facebook	7,4K
Elita Veidemane	Twitter	7,4K
Jānis Iesalnieks MP	Twitter	6,2K

## KEY NARRATIVES

Russophobia and homophobia. Also anti-refugee, despite the number of refugees being actually quite low

## RESPONSE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

30 March – Dzintars Rasnačs (National Alliance), a former justice minister, blames “youths who do not speak Latvian” and “consumers of Russian propaganda” of not observing self-isolation <https://ru.focus.lv/news/rasnachs-obvinil-ruskojazychnyh-latviicev-v-narushenii-pravil-chs?24417> & <https://press.lv/post/rasnachs-uveren-cto-rezhim-chs-v-rige-narushayut-russkoyazychnye-iz-za-rossijskoj-propagandy>

22 May – Imants Parādnieks (National Alliance), an advisor of the Prime Minister, claims that information about the pandemics should only be translated to English as an international language. He calls parallel use of Russian (the language of 36 per cent of the population, as of 2017) “disrespectful to the state language” <https://mixnews.lv/latviya/2020/05/22/paradnieks-ne-nuzhno-perevodit-obyavleniya-o-covid-19-na-russkij-yazyk-eto-neuvazhenie/>

## THE FAR-RIGHT THREAT IN 2021

In the local elections of 2021, the National Alliance is likely to come to power in the fifth-biggest city of Jūrmala as well. In rhetoric, the far right certainly will exploit the occasion of the Baltic Pride planned in Riga in summer 2021.



# COUNTRY LITHUANIA

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Generally, the far right is weak and fragmented in Lithuania, but in the last election cycle a better organised and more visible entity – National Union (Nacionalinis Susivienijimas) – emerged as a potential force that could consolidate smaller groups of the extreme right.

## MAIN FAR-RIGHT ORGANISATIONS

Name	Ideology
National Union (Nacionalinis susivienijimas)	Extreme Nationalism, Fascism, Neo-Nazi

## FAR-RIGHT TERROR ARRESTS AND CONVICTIONS

There was one case of a bombing attempt by an individual who was said to be inspired by international far-right networks.

## KEY NARRATIVES

Anti-EU, antisemitism, extreme nationalism, nationalistic victimhood.

The National Union's election slogan "Raise your heads Lithuanians!" (Pakelk galvą lietuviai!) is the title of an antisemitic brochure, published in 1933 by Jonas Noreika, a military man and, allegedly an accomplice of the Holocaust in Lithuania. The National Union is among those attempting to deny Noreika was involved.

Leaders of the National Union are frequent quoters of Carl Schmitt, philosopher and admirer of Adolf Hitler, who also serves as a major source of inspiration for Ivan Ilyin, the leading philosopher of Russian fascism and the favourite thinker of Russian president Vladimir Putin.

The National Union is led by small group of Vilnius University professors and consists mostly of a following among students. The leader of the group is philosophy professor Vytautas Radzvilas, who excels in theorising on the survival of the nation along Schmidt's works. The National Movement invited representatives of the German Alternative für Deutschland to Lithuania several times during recent election campaigns. The Union is openly fond of the Marine Le Pen movement in France as well.

The movement has no representation on any level, but is getting more and more visible in the Lithuanian public sphere. So far, public support for the group is limited. In the 2019 Lithuanian European

Parliament election, Radzvilas' group, under a different name, got 3.35 per cent of the vote. In the 2020 Lithuanian Parliamentary election, the National Union got 2.26 percent.

## RESPONSE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

COVID-19 provided favourable conditions for putting forward conspiracy theories about an array of hostile forces who are trying to annihilate ethnic Lithuanians. The focus of the conspiracy narrative is mostly the EU and Brussels. At the same time the National Union lionises Donald Trump and hails Brexit as a people's answer to European cosmopolitanism.

## THE FAR-RIGHT THREAT IN 2021

The far right threat is marginal, but it has the potential to consolidate different far-right groups and gain public support in the context of COVID-19-related economic changes and the disgruntled public. Therefore, in the next election cycle in 2023-2024, there might be voting gains and the first instances of parliamentary representation.

# COUNTRY LUXEMBOURG

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The far right is a very marginal force in the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg. Indeed, far right parties have been largely unsuccessful. This is quite remarkable since the country has historically had one of the highest numbers of immigrants relative to the size of the resident population in all of Europe. While xenophobic sentiments and right-wing populist movements have surfaced occasionally, they have never been able to gain ground electorally.

Although Luxembourg does not have an electorally significant far right equivalent to the French *Rassemblement National* or the German *Alternative für Deutschland*, the Luxembourg *Alternativ Demokratesch Reformpartei* (Alternative Democratic Reform Party or ADR) can be located on the right end of the Grand Duchy's political spectrum and is sometimes referred to as a “soft version” of right-wing populism. While ADR is not openly racist or anti-immigrant, it is undoubtedly the political party in Luxembourg most critical of immigration. In the 2018 general election, the ADR joined forces with the *Wee2050* (‘Way’ or ‘Path’ 2050), a grassroots movement that gained national prominence in the run-up to the 2015 referendum on voting rights for foreign residents.<sup>1</sup> Formerly known as *Nee2015* (i.e. ‘No2015’), the movement was launched by two Luxembourgish citizens, Fred Keup and Steve Kodesch, who started a website to persuade voters to vote “no”, arguing that voting rights for national elections should be reserved for Luxembourgish nationals.

After the referendum, the movement changed its name to *Wee2050*, and in March 2018, the ADR announced that it would form a strategic alliance with the movement by reserving eight of the sixty places on its electoral list for Fred Keup and his team. In the end, six members of the *Wee2050* movement stood as candidates on the ADR list in the 2018 general election, but none of them were elected. Nonetheless, the ADR managed to increase its overall vote share by 1.64 percent to 8.28 percent total, and the party currently holds four (out of sixty) seats in Parliament. In October 2020, Fred Keup was sworn into Parliament following the retirement of the more moderate ADR veteran MP Gast Gibéryen. The departure of Gibéryen might make the party prone to shift further to the right, so the ideological development of the ADR remains to be seen. Despite the absence of an electorally successful far right party, it should be noted that far-right groups and sentiments do exist; however, to date, they are

poorly organised and primarily operate outside the electoral arena (e.g. on social media). In other words, the Grand Duchy is not immune to the far right.

## MAIN FAR-RIGHT ORGANISATIONS

Name	Ideology
Amicitia Luxemburgensis (Luxemburg Defence League)	Neo-Nazi

## ELECTED FAR-RIGHT REPRESENTATIVES

There are no electorally successful far-right parties in Luxembourg. However, there is some evidence of far-right radicalisation inside the mainstream.

## KEY NARRATIVES

Key narratives of the far right in Luxembourg tend to focus on “over-foreignisation”, so a fear of being subverted by foreigners. The perceived threat imposed by mass immigration is a recurring theme in the history of the Luxembourgish far right. Historically, far-right movements often grew out of associations that advocated the preservation of the Luxembourgish language.

The debates surrounding the 2015 referendum on granting foreign residents the right to vote in legislative elections contributed to the politicisation of national identity and brought to the fore new dividing lines in Luxembourgish society. Above all, it introduced an ‘us versus them’ discourse (on the basis of the ‘80 versus 20 percent’ referendum result) and propelled identity politics to the centre of the political debate. Since the 2015 referendum, issues pertaining to the preservation of the Luxembourgish language have gained traction. Yet, blatant anti-immigrant policies would be unthinkable in the Luxembourgish context, since over 70 percent of the workforce is composed of non-nationals (including foreign residents and cross-border workers).

It is worth mentioning here that the 2018 “Being Black in the EU” report by the FRA (EU Agency for Fundamental Rights) indicated that Black people living in Luxembourg face serious discrimination both in the labour market as well as when it comes to finding adequate housing. Furthermore, while on average about 5 per cent of respondents throughout the EU experienced what they perceived as racist violence, “the highest rates

**Lëtzebuenger,  
sidd houfereg déi am  
mannste rassistescht  
Bierger op der Welt ze sinn.**



**Wee2050**

**Gambia & CSV  
Nee, mir wëllen keng Söldnerpolice  
Mir wëllen Leit déi vun hei sinn,  
Meedercher an Jongen aus Lëtzebuerg**



**Wee2050**

were recorded in Finland (14 per cent) and in Ireland and Austria (both 13 per cent), followed by Luxembourg (11 %)."

Due to the *Black Lives Matter* protests, the issue gained some momentum in the Grand Duchy in 2020 and brought to the fore various incidents indicating that Luxembourg has a serious problem with structural and institutional racism.

## **RESPONSE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

Since the far right is a marginal force in Luxembourg, the pandemic has not had a noticeable effect on their presence. There has been a small rise in the visibility of conspiracy theories; for instance, in October 2020, Pierre Peters proclaimed on his Facebook page that the virus was purposely invented and spread by the Chinese. At times, far right individuals target cross-border commuters as a source for spreading the virus. Overall, however, the impact of COVID-19 on the far right in Luxembourg is negligible.

## **THE FAR-RIGHT THREAT IN 2021**

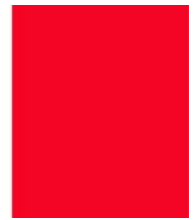
The spread of hate speech and discrimination against cross-border workers, immigrants, asylum seekers, people of colour and other minorities on online platforms and social media networks is a concern in the Grand Duchy. Inside the electoral arena, the ideological development of the ADR could potentially pose a threat.



# COUNTRY MALTA

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The Covid-19 pandemic has served to fuel populism, nationalist rhetoric, racism and right-wing extremism. Far-right groups have been visible and audible in their support and encouragement of Government policy enacted against refugees and migrants in response to Covid-19, and in its response, the Government of Malta has not disappointed. The State has resorted to increasingly inhumane measures and blatant human rights violations against migrants and refugees – all of this couched within a nationalistic rhetoric.

Almost as soon as the island recorded its first case of the virus, the Economy Minister stated that all foreigners who lose their jobs as a result of the crisis should immediately return home or risk deportation, arguing that “Charity begins at home. Our main focus is Maltese workers. When foreign workers lose their jobs, they will have to go back to their country...”. Whilst the Minister was forced to apologise and backtrack, the statement essentially established an us/them divide that left an indelible mark. Whilst the far-right in Malta does not hold any formal power, the Government of Malta, and the main opposition party have both pandered to the right wing in order to retain political influence. As such, whilst the electoral power of far-right parties, and groups in Malta is limited, they are able to shape and sway Government discourse and policy. A number of right-wing anti-immigrant groups have a considerable presence on social media platforms, in particular Facebook. Such groups also serve to shape public discourse and perceptions, whilst fuelling fear and racism. The year 2020 also appears to have witnessed a shift from online protest to direct action, suggesting a degree of emboldenment.

The year has witnessed an escalation of measures that include, but are not limited to, an unlawful pushback to Libya, illegally detaining hundreds of people on ill-equipped tourist-boats just outside Malta’s waters for weeks on end, a new agreement with Libya to prevent boat arrivals, and the ongoing illegal detention of asylum seekers in Malta.

Measures adopted by the far-right include a petition launched by an anti-immigrant party that calls for the island to close its ports, ‘Malta, too small to accept more illegal immigrants’ garnered almost 50,000 signatures, enough to call for a debate in parliament.

Far-right groups have organized a number of small

protests throughout the year calling for the closure of ports, and also organized a small counter-protest at the Black Lives Matter anti-racism protest in the summer.

In October, 2020, the Government launched the first national action plan against racism and xenophobia (NAPRAX) for public consultation. In an effort to acknowledge and address rising racist sentiments, the government is seeking submissions from the public to propose effective and measurable actions to address racism and xenophobia.

## MAIN FAR-RIGHT ORGANISATIONS

Name	Ideology
Imperium Europa	Neo-Nazi
Patrijotti Maltin	Nationalist anti-immigrant
We are Malta	Nationalist anti-immigrant
Partit Popolari	Nationalist anti-immigrant

## MOST INFLUENTIAL ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Name	Platform	Followers/Likes
Malta tal-Maltin	Facebook	9462
We are Malta	Facebook	10,357
Patrojotti Maltin	Facebook	4137
Partit Popolari	Facebook	1800
Norman Lowell	Facebook	5242
Malta Front	Facebook	6982

## KEY NARRATIVES

In the main, anti-immigrant (with an almost exclusive focus on refugees), anti-refugee, Islamophobia, Homophobia, anti-abortion (Malta has among the strictest abortion laws, the practice is prohibited under all circumstances. The position is widely supported, and has resulted in verbal attacks against pro-choice activists), some anti-semitism.

# COUNTRY NETHERLANDS

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Activist far rights group are small, badly organised and infighting. Main typology of action is to try and attract (media) attention by organising provocative actions (tearing pages out the Quran, grilling pig meat in front of a mosque, occupying roof tops of mosques or refugee centers) with small numbers of activists.

Next to activist groups we see online appearance, internationalisation and radicalisation of larger groups of (mainly young, sometimes very young) extreme right activist.

Last, there is the Political party Forum voor Democratie (FvD, Democratic Forum) with two members in Parliament. FvD, and more specific party leader Thierry Baudet and his trustees, associate themselves on frequent occasions with right extremist ideology and right extremist people.

## MAIN FAR-RIGHT ORGANISATIONS

Name	Ideology
Pegida	Identitarian
Identitair Verzet	Identitarian
Voorpost	Identitarian
Erkenbrand	Neo-Nazi/Alt Right
Nederlandse Volks-Unie	Neo Nazi

## ELECTED FAR-RIGHT REPRESENTATIVES

Legislature	Party	Number of elected representatives
Local	Identitair Nederland	1
	Forza!	1

## MOST INFLUENTIAL ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Name	Platform	Followers/Likes
Edwin Wagensveld	Twitter	
Joost Niemöller	Twitter	48.9K
Vizier op Links	Twitter	13.3K

## KEY NARRATIVES

- The main narrative frames are anti-migrant, anti-Muslim, anti-left, anti-'elite' and anti-government.
- Homophobia is not a core ideological feature. (Extreme) right groups use LGBT rights as focus for Islam-bashing.
- There is not much discussion at this moment on refugees, so not very visible in extreme right messaging.
- Antisemitism is widespread in extreme right, but not very visible, because –except for neo-Nazi's – groups are reluctant to share antisemitic ideas in public.

## RESPONSE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

- Not clear. Some extreme right activists have been active in actions against Corona regulations, but on a personal basis.
- Right extremist activism has come to a standstill in the first part of 2020, due to lockdown. A bit of activism has re-emerged.

## THE FAR-RIGHT THREAT IN 2021

Small, scattered, infighting



Voorpost logo

# COUNTRY NORTH MACEDONIA

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The far right in North Macedonia is dominated by nationalist political parties and organisations. There are also Neo-Nazi groups, which have influence in some ultra-groups.

Common features of Neo-Nazi and Islamic fundamentalists is that they are very obscure and absent from the public sphere. In recent years, alt-right ideas are becoming very present, especially on social media.

Since 2018, there has been a surge in nationalist organising in ethnic Macedonian segment of society. It is fueled by the 2018 Prespa agreement between Greece and the Republic of Macedonia, leading to a change of the state name to North Macedonia. The second reason is the broadening of the usage of Albanian language in state institutions in 2019.

In 2020, the surge in nationalist organising and influence was additionally fueled by obstacles to the EU accession process of North Macedonia by the Bulgarian government. The nationalist milieu is increasingly developing anti-NATO and anti-EU sentiments, with part of it openly advocating closer ties with Russia. Because of anti-Bulgarian sentiments, previously more open support for Nazi ideas and practices has been sidelined, since Bulgaria occupied Macedonia during WWII and part of the ongoing North Macedonian – Bulgarian dispute is about the naming of Bulgarian army in Macedonia during WWII as “Fascist occupier”. Due to this, far right groups occasionally adopt anti-fascist rhetoric, but with clear nationalist motives.

The COVID-19 pandemic and conspiracy theories around it have also contributed to the spread of influence of the far right, especially of alt-right narratives, but it is a secondary factor compared with obstacles to the EU accession process of North Macedonia by the Bulgarian government, Prespa Agreement and broadening of the usage of Albanian language in state institutions.

## MAIN FAR-RIGHT ORGANISATIONS

Name	Ideology
Integra – Macedonian Conservative Party (Integra – Makedonska Konzervativna Partija)	Political party, Nationalism / Libertarianism
World Macedonian Congress (Svetski Makedonski Kongres)	Organisation, Nationalism
Movement “I Boycott” (Dvizhenje “Bojkotiram”)	Organisation, Nationalism
Macedonian Patriotic Society “Unyielding Ones” (Makedonsko Patriotsko Zdruzenie “Tvrdokorni”)	Organisation, Nationalism
United Macedonia (Edinstvena Makedonija)	Political party, Nationalism
Fatherland (Rodina)	Political party, Nationalism

## ELECTED FAR-RIGHT REPRESENTATIVES

Legislature	Party	Number of elected representatives
Local	United Macedonia	7

## MOST INFLUENTIAL ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Name	Platform	Followers/ Likes
Vasko Eftov	Youtube, Facebook	50K on YouTube
Ljupco Palevski	Facebook	13.3K on fb
Milenko Nedelkovski	Facebook, Youtube	60K on fb, 12.9 on YouTube
Dimitar Apasiev*	Facebook	61.8K on fb
Petar Kotevski	Facebook	2.1k on fb

\* Formally a left-wing politician, in the wake of 2018 Prespa Agreement, he has made a sharp nationalist turn. He has widespread support of people with nationalist views and his posts on social media are highly influential in nationalist cycles. His views cannot be considered as left-wing nationalist but as typical right-wing nationalist.



## KEY NARRATIVES

The key narratives of the far right in North Macedonia are nationalist. In ethnic Macedonian segments, there are strong anti-Albanian, anti-Greek, anti-Bulgarian and, occasionally, anti-Serb sentiments. In ethnic Albanian segments, there are strong anti-Macedonian sentiments, followed by anti-Serb sentiments.

In far right cycles there is strong homophobia, even though this is not their major focus. Anti-Roma sentiments, islamophobia and anti-refugee narratives are present, but mainly dormant, emerging on the surface from time to time.

There is no widespread anti-Semitism in far-right circles, except among Neo-Nazis. Ethnic Macedonian nationalists generally have very positive opinion on Israel, looking at its treatment of Palestinians as a desired model for the treatment of ethnic Albanians in North Macedonia.

## RESPONSE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Very early, already in May, various conspiracy theories started to gain influence among people in North Macedonia. A survey conducted in May showed that 10 per cent of the respondents thought that COVID-19 virus didn't even exist and an additional 47.6 per cent thought that the virus was created in a laboratory, had broken away from a laboratory or that it was a 5G conspiracy.

Far right people have started to exploit the fatigue from extensive quarantine measures in March-April, seeing opportunity to attack the Social Democratic government, but also to attack globalism. Libertarian ideas about defending freedom, opposition not only to quarantines but also to wearing masks, were highly influential. The antivaxxers were quite vocal in resisting the wearing of masks. There was even a merging of nationalist and anti-vaxxer agenda. One of the members of the newly formed nationalist and pro-Russian party Rodina is Gordana Gogjo, the leader of an anti-vaxxer organisation in North Macedonia. There were two minor protests organised against COVID-19 measures, both of them by the coalition of nationalists and anti-vaxxers. The second one, attended by 300-400 people, was organised on 30 September, the second anniversary of 2018 referendum on changing the state name, with the dual agenda: protesting against the name change and defending freedom in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. The protest was organized by Rodina, the Movement "I Boycott", Ljupco Pavevski's "Third Politics" and the anti-vaxxer organisation "From Us for Us". The low number of protesters on these protests does not mean that the far right is ineffective in exploiting the unwillingness of many people to accept restrictions in combating the pandemic.

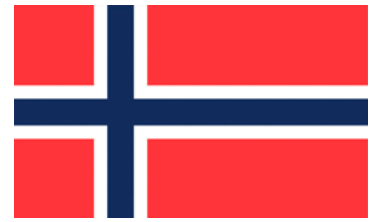


World Macedonian Congress  
Skopje Macedonia. Photo Youtube

# COUNTRY NORWAY

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The main neo-Nazi organisations are the Nordic Resistance Movement and its split-off, Nordic Force. In total, they probably have less than 40 activists in Norway. Both groups are weakened after the split in 2019, and their street activities have been reduced. The Norwegian branches have been less involved in violent activities than the Swedish and Finnish branches.

The most active anti-Islam movement is Stop Islamisation of Norway (SIAN). A small core of street activists specialise in staging provocative events, such as burning and tearing up the Quran. They have more than 10,000 followers of Facebook. The SIAN leader, has been convicted of hate speech.

Phillip Manshaus was convicted to 21 years in prison plus preventive detention for the racially motivated killing of his adopted (from China) stepsister and the attempted shooting attack on Muslims in a mosque, inspired by the Christchurch terrorist.

## MAIN FAR-RIGHT ORGANISATIONS

Name	Ideology
Nordic Resistance Movement (Den nordiske motstandsbevegelsen)	National socialist, wants a pan-Nordic white state
Nordic Force (Nordisk styrke)	Similar ideology and goal
Stop Islamisation of Norway (SIAN)	Anti-Islam, claims to defend freedom of speech and other liberal values against Islam
Alliansen	Alt-right/Identitarian combined with anti-Semitism
Demokratene	Far-right, cultural nationalism. The chairman has an Iranian background
Folkebevegelsen mot Innvandring (FMI)	Anti-immigration, with anti-Semitic hints

## ELECTED FAR-RIGHT REPRESENTATIVES

Legislature	Party	Number of elected representatives
Local	Demokratene	10 representatives elected to the municipal council in Kristiansand, of 71 seats in total (2019)

## FAR-RIGHT TERROR ARRESTS AND CONVICTIONS

No arrests, but one conviction.

## KEY NARRATIVES

Islamophobia, anti-refugee, and to a lesser extent homophobia and anti-semitism.

## RESPONSE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Not to any significant extent.

NMR, Nordic Resistance Movement, in a rally in central Stockholm.  
Photo: Frankie Fouganthin



# COUNTRY POLAND

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For a few years now, we observe a major rise in the activity of far-right in Poland. By the beginning of 2020, the biggest political party on the far-right in Poland was Konfederacja (Confederation). They managed to introduce 11 deputies to the Parliament, making it a total of 6,81% of votes in the 2019 parliamentary election.

Konfederacja is a conglomerate of a few smaller political parties and movements – most notable being KORWiN and Ruch Narodowy (Nationalist Movement, which itself consists of Młodzież Wszechpolska (All-Polish Youth) and several smaller organizations). Ruch Narodowy rose to prominence after hosting the annual March of Independence, the biggest far-right manifestation in Europe. It attracts many far-right and neo-fascist groups from abroad, such as Forza Nuova from Italy or Jobbik from Hungary.

KORWiN is a party that takes its name from the surname of its founder, Janusz Korwin-Mikke. He is a controversial politician present on the Polish political scene for several decades. He is notable for countless sexist, homophobic and antisemitic remarks.

2020 also brought the COVID-19 pandemic, which lay the ground for numerous accounts of racist and antisemitic hate speech and violence, as well as conspiracy theories, often antisemitic and xenophobic by themselves. Another big surge of far-right aggression and violence came in October after the Constitutional Court decided to exacerbate the anti-abortion law. This decision led to massive protests in the whole country. Groups of young men, often coordinated by far-right organizations attacked the protesters – mainly young women.

The Guard of the Independence March, a para-military organization created to “protect” the annual Independence March “defended” churches (some protesters demonstrated against the meddling of the Catholic Church into politics and its hatred towards LGBT people). This “defense” led to acts of violence, again mainly towards women, including older and even the disabled people.

Prominent members of the ruling party, Law and Justice, frequently use homophobic language. Several local governments introduced so-called “LGBT-free zones”. The President of Poland, Andrzej Duda, also used homophobic rhetoric that might be even seen as dehumanizing.

## MAIN FAR-RIGHT ORGANISATIONS

Name	Ideology
Konfederacja (Confederation)	Radical right, euroscepticism, nationalism
Ruch Narodowy (Nationalist Movement)	Ethno-nationalism
ONR (Obóz Narodowo-Radykalny, National-Radical Camp)	Far right, nationalism
Młodzież Wszechpolska (All-Polish Youth)	Radical right, nationalism
KORWiN	Radical free-market ideology, euroscepticism, nationalism

## ELECTED FAR-RIGHT REPRESENTATIVES

Legislature	Party	Number of elected representatives
National	Konfederacja (Confederation)	11

## MOST INFLUENTIAL ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Name	Platform	Followers/Likes
Grzegorz Braun	Facebook Twitter	181 k 39,4 k
Robert Winnicki	Facebook Twitter	88 k 59,9 k
Janusz Korwin-Mikke	Twitter (removed from Facebook)	187 k
Krzysztof Bosak	Facebook Twitter	321 k 243,2 k
Marcin Rola / wRealu24	YouTube	483 k
Rafał Ziemkiewicz	Facebook Twitter	107 k 212,6 k

## KEY NARRATIVES

Since 2015, a big narrative binding the far-right together is Islamophobia and inciting anti-refugee fear. Far-right politicians used the immigration crisis in Europe to convince people that refugees are a great threat to the security of Poland. Another big narrative is the hatred toward LGBT community. It is also a recurring theme, often used instrumentally to cover up bigger and more important issues also by more mainstream politicians and political parties.





Far right National Radical Camp (ONR) march through Gdańsk to celebrate the anniversary of its founding. Members chanted 'Death to enemies of the Fatherland'. Photo: @notesfrompoland / Facebook

In 2020, a new narrative was born – that COVID-19 pandemic is a hoax, or that the virus itself is a biological weapon, or that the vaccine will be used to depopulate the world – all kind of contradictory conspiracy theories. They also include racist and antisemitic themes and lead to violence and discrimination in real life.

## RESPONSE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The far-right used the pandemic to distribute many different conspiracy theories, which pose a great threat to public health and safety. Those theories include racist and antisemitic elements. They are also often contradictory to each other. COVID-19 brought also hatred and violence towards people from other countries – in the beginning people of Asian descent (even those living and working in Poland for many years), but later it spread onto people perceived as “others” in general – Russians, Ukrainians etc. At the end of the day, the pandemic was exploited by far-right leaders as a convenient situation to regroup and gather electorate and followers or gain new ones.

## THE FAR-RIGHT THREAT IN 2021

The COVID-related hatred will most probably continue to exist, and so will the conspiracy theories. In fact, those theories may even rise and become a bigger threat to public safety as the vaccine is now being distributed. LGBT hatred will be also present for sure, also as an instrument for politicians to unite their electorate against a common enemy. Similarly, homophobia will be surely used to cover up current political affairs in the same manner it was used in 2020.

# COUNTRY PORTUGAL

Author **Ricardo Cabral Fernandes and Filipe Teles**



For 45 years, since the end of *Estado Novo* in 1974, Portugal did not have a far-right party in Parliament. The 2019 election of André Ventura, Chega's ("Enough!", in English) leader and the party's only MP, broke that pattern and since then hate speech (anti-gypsy, anti LGBTI+, anti-immigrants and anti-left) has been normalized to levels never seen before in the Portuguese democratic system, creating an environment prone to racist and far-right violence without precedents.

That normalization reached a new level in 2020. In August there was a far-right demonstration with white masks and torches in front of the headquarters of the most well-known anti-racist association in Portugal, SOS Racismo. Racist and xenophobic graffiti in high-schools, universities and refugee centers – and also in SOS Racismo's headquarters – were a common feature in 2020; and a community center was attacked in August by three neo-Nazis, according to activists.

These events prompted the European Network Against Racism to raise concerns about the "worrying growth of racist and far-right attacks in Portugal", underlining that anti-racist activists are "not safe" and calling for "an urgent response of the Portuguese authorities".

Portugal's racism was clearly seen via a series of violent events in 2020. In March, a black woman was attacked by the police because her child did not have a bus ticket, and the black actor Bruno Candé was murdered on the streets of a Lisbon suburb in plain daylight by an elderly person who had told him to go "back to the *senzala* [slave quarters]".

The third case that marked 2020 was the murder by torture of the Ukrainian national Ihor Homeniuk by three border police agents in Lisbon's airport, in March. The practice of human rights violations by *Serviço de Estrangeiros e Fronteiras* had been already identified, but nothing was done to change it.

Finally, a Lisbon court confirmed the condemnation of eight policemen for aggravated kidnapping, qualified physical violence-related offenses, slanderous denunciation and false testimony against six young black men from a peripheral neighborhood in Lisbon. According to a 2020 study written by Universidade de Coimbra, 75% of the complaints of police racism were archived in the last 10 years, and only 30% went to the Public Ministry. None of these ever resulted in a prosecution.

The far-right infiltration of security and military forces was a national spotlight topic in 2020 – the

Council of Europe even noted this phenomenon in 2018. *Movimento Zero* (Zero Movement, similar to Blue Lives Matter) – that joins members from *Polícia de Segurança Pública*, *Guarda Nacional Republicana* and Prison Guards – was very active on social media, harassing and threatening several progressive activists. *Movimento Zero* usually aligns itself with police unions linked to the far-right, and its infiltration in police forces is deepening: this year, *Guarda Nacional Republicana* Facebook page advertised a post from *Movimento Zero*, which is illegal.

Following a huge operation initiated in 2016 by the Portuguese Judicial police, *Polícia Judiciária*, the Public Prosecution Office accused 27 people from Portugal Hammer Skins of qualified murder attempt, qualified physical violence-related offenses and racial discrimination against 18 people, including a black man and a union member. This case didn't stop the neo-Nazi organization from continuing its activities, but it lost some mobilization capacity, Europol revealed.

Politically, Chega was quickly normalized this year by the main right-wing political force, the Social Democratic Party (PSD), especially after the Azorean regional elections in October 2020. The Socialist Party won the elections but didn't achieve enough lawmakers to form a government, after almost a quarter of a century in power on the islands. In this context, PSD made a parliamentary pact with Chega, who elected two lawmakers, and other right-wing forces to be able to govern. This agreement has been seen as the first step for a parliamentary agreement or governmental coalition at the national level with the far-right, further legitimizing Chega.

In November 2020, Chega's polling is much higher than a year ago, when it entered Parliament. It is now polling 7,5% when in the 2019 election it only had 1,29% of the votes. Encouraged by this growth, there was a significant virtual and street mobilization in Lisbon and Évora by far-right militants, hoping this is their opportunity to penetrate Portuguese politics. New organizations were formed, such as National Resistance, responsible for the concentration in front of SOS Racismo headquarters, and Defend Portugal.

In the last presidential elections in January 2021, Ventura secured third place with almost 12% and half a million votes – just 1% off second place – getting close to his self-established goal: to have a better result than Ana Gomes, the self-described

antifascist candidate, and the other candidates from the left.

Ventura's achievement in the presidential elections was also the result of the national media coverage, centered around his candidacy and its talking points, thus naturalizing Chega's program. This happened even when these talking points were not in the realm of the President's office, which has fundamentally a counter-balance nature to the legislative power.

While a lot of people thought that André Ventura would moderate his positions during the elections, the opposite happened. For the first time in Portuguese electoral history, Ventura said he would not be the President of all Portuguese – only “the well intended”; he elevated his anti-gypsy communities' xenophobic discourse to levels not yet seen (except when, in April, he proposed a “special” lockdown for the gypsy communities); imitated Trump's attitude during the debates; linked Ana Gomes's campaign director to paedophilia; charged his nationalistic and religious posture as the “providential man” that came to save Portugal from the last 47 degenerate years full of corruption; and clarified his stance against the Portuguese Constitution.

## MAIN FAR-RIGHT ORGANISATIONS

Name	Ideology
Chega	Populist radical right
Partido Nacional Renovador (today Ergue-te)	Far-right
Escudo Identitário	Identitarians
Associação Portugueses Primeiro	Identitarians
Portugal Hammer Skins	Neo-nazi
Movimento Zero	Right-wing populist Police movement

## ELECTED FAR-RIGHT REPRESENTATIVES

Legislature	Party	Number of elected representatives
Regional	Chega	2 (Azores)
National	Chega	1

## MOST INFLUENTIAL ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Name	Platform	Followers/ Likes
João Tilly	Facebook	161 000
	Youtube	39 000
André Ventura	Facebook	124 500
	Twitter	40 800
Alfredo Rodrigues	Facebook	54 516
José Pinto Coelho	Facebook	13 181
	Twitter	12 800

## KEY NARRATIVES

Chega elevated the Portuguese far-right key-narratives in 2020 to levels never seen before in conventional and parliamentary politics since the end of *Estado Novo*.

In Chega's II Convention, 15% of the delegates voted in favor of a resolution that proposed to remove the ovaries of women who had an abortion. The LGBTI+ community has been a consistent target of the party, who has several evangelical ultra-catholic tendencies. The party rejects same-sex marriages and claims to defend traditional family values. In its convention there was also a proposal to ban parties of Marxist inspiration that was near approval, while the chemical castration of pedophiles is an official party policy proposal.

André Ventura's favorite target though is the gitano community – when it only represents less than 0,4% of the Portuguese population. During the first phase of the pandemic, Ventura asked for special lockdown measures for this community and has been actively committed to the denial of racism in Portugal. Chega organized a demonstration in Lisbon that affirmed that Portugal was not racist and presented a draft law to prevent filming of police actions on “ethnic-minorities or racial groups”.

The anti-immigration narrative is one of the Portuguese far-rights favorite topics and Chega has been echoing it. It has criticized the reception of refugees by Portuguese authorities and denounced alleged trafficking networks after six landings on Algarve's coast from December 2019 to September 2020, while making links between terrorism, Islam and refugees. The party also wants to remove immigrants' access to the Portuguese NHS.

The Portuguese far-right has also been focusing on opposing “gender ideology” and “cultural Marxism”, connecting the media to the left. The “cultural combat” has been one of the main lines of action of this political camp in Portugal.

## RESPONSE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The Portuguese far-right has been trying to take advantage of the discontent, resentment and frustration caused by the lockdown measures to fight the Covid-19 pandemic. In a first moment Chega defended the closure of borders and more restraining measures by the State. Then it started to refuse state of emergency declarations, social distancing, and the use of masks. Its II Convention, in September, was widely criticized because of the lack of social-distance measures in a packed building: there was no social distancing, with members sitting right next to each other, and masks were broadly not used – some members were fined by the police because of it.

Refusing containment measures, the far-right party organized two demonstrations during the summer in Lisbon: the first one with the motto “Portugal Is Not Racist”, after the biggest anti-racist demonstration



ever in Portugal, following George Floyd's murder; the second against paedophilia, a topic very cherished by its ranks. This opened the door to far-right mobilizations organized by pandemic negationist movements that started being relatively frequent (For the Truth, Inconvenient Truth, Doctors for the Truth). These movements have connections with Chega's officials and established links to similar movements in Spain. The protests started with a few dozen participants, but today they have some hundreds of people.

As months went by and more economic sectors suffered greater hardships, as in the case of restaurant owners and its employees, there have been demonstrations demanding bigger support from the government and the lifting of social restrictions. The far-right infiltrated these protests and has been trying to link itself to them – André Ventura, Chega's leader, was present in one restaurant sector protest. In this demonstration, a journalist was the target of threats, forcing the police to intervene.

There has been a significant far-right mobilization on social media, propagating conspiracy theories, propaganda and fake news about the Covid-19 pandemic crisis. QAnon conspiracy universe was adapted to Portuguese reality: the Socialist party government is accused of establishing a far-left dictatorship in the country, Bill Gates is responsible for the pandemic, 5G network is related to coronavirus and vaccines are fake and a product of a globalist conspiracy.

There are at least 250 Portuguese far-right elements well inserted in negationist social media, with the core of this movement in Germany and France, coordinating the demonstrations in Lisbon to happen on the same days as in Berlin and Paris, usually during the weekends.

## THE FAR-RIGHT THREAT IN 2021

The far-right will try to take advantage of the dissatisfaction, frustration and resentment that came with the socio-economic crisis caused by the measures to curb the Covid-19 pandemic. The far-right infiltration in the protests for better life-conditions, as in the case of small and medium business owners, shall continue. And we cannot, in this case, and as the social and economic crisis might get worse, discard the possibility of radicalization in the forms of protest of the Portuguese far-right.

Hate speech normalization by political actors, the intense diffusion of propaganda and social-network disinformation may add fuel to the racist and far-right violence environment already seen in 2020. This context may benefit the creation of new movements and the extension of the far-right social base in Portugal.

Social isolation, consequence of the social restrictions, and the further normalization of racist, xenophobic, and anti-LGBTI+ behaviors in the public sphere might give room to processes of self-radicalization, especially those who suffer more from social exclusion. The identitarian recruitment of young people (male and white) has been one of the new tendencies noted by the authorities in the last years.

The infiltration in security forces by far-right elements and sympathizers has been ongoing for a few years and will still be a national concern. There are sectors of this political camp in the security forces that are mobilizing and show a relative dynamism.

Cartaz do PNR (o segundo, após vandalização do primeiro) no Marquês de Pombal, em Lisboa.  
Photo: Espadheiro



# COUNTRY ROMANIA

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Affiliation **Romania**



The far right adapted to the pandemic in 2020. They are more vocal on their personal webpages. They got involved in promoting their representatives for the Romanian local elections in late September 2020 and then prepared for the Romanian Parliamentary elections in December 2020.

## MAIN FAR-RIGHT ORGANISATIONS

Name	Ideology
Noua Dreapta / New Right	Radical right
Partidul Romania Mare / Greater Romania Party	Radical right. This party has diminished significantly its voice since the death of their leader Vadim Tudor in 2015.
Alliance for Romanian Unity (AUR)	Ultranationalist. Emerged in December 2020 elections, winning almost 9 per cent of the votes.

## ELECTED FAR-RIGHT REPRESENTATIVES

Legislature	Party	Number of elected representatives
Local	Noua Dreapta	At the recent local elections (27 September 2020) Noua Dreapta had local councilors been elected in 2 municipalities, 4 cities and numerous rural areas of Romania.
National	Participated in December 2020 parliamentary elections.	AUR won 9 percent of the vote, and will enter parliament for the first time
European	In the last European Parliamentary Elections (26 May 2019) Noua Dreapta launched their desire to participate under Alianta Nationalistilor but their participation to the elections were rejected by the Romanian Court of Justice due to their aggressive nationalist campaign.	-

## MOST INFLUENTIAL ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Name	Platform	Followers/Likes
Partidul Noua Dreapta	Twitter	7760 followers
Noua Dreapta	Twitter	5727 followers
George Simion (AUR's leader)	Facebook	14000 followers
	Twitter	1204 followers

## FAR-RIGHT TERROR ARRESTS AND CONVICTIONS

There has been no far-right terrorism convictions in 2020.

## KEY NARRATIVES

Key narratives in Romania are on anti-Roma and anti-LGBT. Most of their harsh narratives are against both poor and wealthy Roma housing issues.

## RESPONSE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The effect of the pandemic on the far right was important, because there were no organised manifestations. The far right sought to exploit the pandemic by being more vocal online.

This year they were more interested in preparing local and parliamentary elections in order to be better represented.

## THE FAR-RIGHT THREAT IN 2021

The main far right threats would be the continuous harsh attacks on the Roma minority and on the queer communities.



# COUNTRY SERBIA

Author **Fabio Bego**



Serbian far-right ideas mostly evolve around nationalist ideology. Far-right activists argue that Serbian territories have been unjustly detached from the country during the 1990s conflicts. Their aim is to prevent further territorial repartition and eventually (re)unify the alleged “Serbian” lands in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Croatia, and even Albania. In order to reach their goal, they advocate militarization, the restriction of democratic freedom, the cessation of EU accession talks, and the consolidation of Serbian “traditions” against the dangers of Western culture, neo-liberalism and immigration. Far-right groups claim to be “patriots” not “chauvinists” and affirm that nationalist politics will bring security and justice in the country.

Extremist ideologies are widespread in both underground and mainstream Serbian contemporary culture. Beside football ultras, far-right ideas are propagated by exponents and followers of punk, metal and electro musical scenes. Serbian nationalist trends coexist in a relation of mutual galvanization with those of Hungarian, Bosniak and Albanian minorities who live in Serbia. The latter often take separatist drifts as it is the case of the Albanian Partia Demokratike e Shqiptarëve and the Bosniak Stranka Pravde i Promirenja.

Some far-right organizations such as Nacionalni Srpski Front are openly fascist whereas others such as Srpska Desnica and Srpska Radikalna Stranka pursue more ambiguous propagandistic strategies. Far-right activists have different ideas on the way in which society should be involved in politics. Parties that run for elections are populist and speak on behalf of the Serbian “people”. Other non-party organizations, such as Nacionalna Avangarda and Srpska Akcija advocate a more elitist vision of national politics. Far-right organizations also have different attitudes toward the state. Some parties such as Dveri and Konzervativni Pokret Naši are averse to the current political establishment, whereas other groups such as Srpska Čast and Pokret Levijatan consider themselves as tools for the defence of the Serbian nation, notwithstanding who is in power, and they are dedicated to “humanitarian” activities. Nacionalna Avangarda aims at overcoming the experience of modernity by bringing nationalism and tradition to the future through the concept of “archeo-futurism”. The organization has drawn the endorsement of high-rank political circles and its conventions are frequently attended by Serbian ministers.

These general aspects were also mirrored in the way in which the far-right reacted to the political events that characterized Serbia and the adjacent region in 2020. The beginning of the year was marked by the conflict that opposed the Serbian Orthodox Church and the former Montenegrin government. Far-right groups are sensitive to religion, as most of them place orthodoxism at the core of their nationalist ideology. Tensions grew in the middle of April when Montenegrin authorities arrested the bishop Amfilohije for violating anti-Covid laws. The president of Srpska Desnica Miša Vacić claimed that the attack on Serbian church was an attack against Serbia and demanded the firm intervention of Serbian president Aleksandar Vučić. Other far-right activists evoked the ghosts of “civil war”, which were being provoked – in their opinion – by the divisive politics of Montenegrin president Milo Djukanović.

On June 21st, elections were held in Serbia. Despite having many ideological and programmatic points in common, far-right parties did not join their forces. Some parties such as Dveri and Konzervativni Pokret Naši boycotted elections. Electoral lists included individuals who had been condemned for war crimes such as the leader of Srpska Radikalna Stranka Vojislav Šešelj. The elections were a disappointment as none of the parties reached the necessary quorum for entering the national parliament. The populist party Živim Za Srbiju and the neo-fascist Pokret Levijatan formed a coalition that obtained less than 1%. The coalition was endorsed by former leader of the banned neo-Nazi group Nacionalni Stroj Goran Davidović (known as firer [führer]), who now militates in Nacionalni Srpski Front. Srpska Desnica, which did not take part in the national elections, managed to enter local governments in Southern regions. Srpska Stranka Zavetnici (or simply Zavetnici) leader Milica Djurdjević, criticized the boycott campaigners who, in her view, led to the poor electoral performance of the right-wing.

Soon after the elections, riots broke out in Belgrade due to the reintroduction of stricter anti-Covid-19 laws. According to some reports, protests were initiated by students and were infiltrated by far-right organizations. On July 7, violent clashes between police and demonstrators took place outside of the parliament. The leader of Dveri, Boško Obradović joined the protests and encouraged people to take part in them. He accused the state of instigating violence. Milica Djurdjević blamed the government for what had happened because in her view it had



stolen the elections and thrown the opposition out of the parliament. Also, the far-right organization *Obraz* supported the protests but rejected media allegations concerning their involvement in the fights against state forces. *Srpska Akcija* is the only far-right entity that exalted violence on YouTube videos. The members of *Nacionalna Avangarda* used their audio-visual editing skills to radically condemn attacks on institutions.

Autumn brought some concerns upon Serbian right-wingers. After euphorically saluting the pro-Serb coalition that won the Montenegrin elections at the end of August, the far-right was upset by the agreement signed in Washington by the Kosovo PM and the Serbian president on September 4th. The grounding stone of the Serbian national idea professed by far-right groups is that Kosovo i Metohija would be the heartland of Serbia. Despite the fact that the agreement did not alter Serbia's positioning toward the status of Kosovo, the majority of far-right activists are against dialogues between Belgrade and its (former) province because in their view it would lead to the gradual acceptance of Kosovo's independence. *Obraz* declared that Serbia had been humiliated in the American capital. A post on *Zavetnici* Facebook account, explained that the agreement serves the "Jewish lobby" because Serbia accepted to transfer the embassy to Jerusalem and Kosovo accepted to open its embassy in the same city in exchange of Israel's recognition of its independence. Since Serbia listed Hezbollah as a terrorist organization, it also undermined its relations with Arab countries that do not recognize Kosovo's independence.

## MAIN FAR-RIGHT ORGANISATIONS

Name	Ideology
Srpska Radikalna Stranka	Extreme nationalism/ Irredentism/ Radical Right/ Extreme anti-communism
Dveri	Radical Right/ Extreme nationalism
Srpska Stranka Zavetnici	Radical Right/ Traditionalism/ Orthodoxism
Srpska Desnica	Identitarian/Irredentism/ Traditionalism
Pokret Živim Za Srbiju	No-Vax/ Conspiracy theories/ Xenophobia
Pokret Levijatan	Squadristo/ Neo-Nazi/ Humanitarianism/ Extreme anti-communism

## ELECTED FAR-RIGHT REPRESENTATIVES

Legislature	Party	Number of elected representatives
Local	Srpska Desnica / Srpska Stranka Zavetnici	
Regional	Srpska Radikalna Stranka (Parliament of the Vojvodina Autonomous Region)	4

## MOST INFLUENTIAL ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Name	Platform	Followers/Likes
Milica Djurdjević	Facebook	Over 64K followers
Boško Obradović	Twitter	Over 62K followers
Bojan Stojković	Instagram	Over 58K followers
Jovana Stojković	Facebook	Over 35K followers
Pavle Bihali	Instagram	Over 25K followers

## KEY NARRATIVES

The key narratives of Serbian far-right are addressed against those actors who represent a threat to Serbian "traditions" and to the integrity of Serbian territories. All far-right groups reject LGBTQ rights. Party leaders and activists are accustomed to the use of homophobic slurs. The official program of *Dveri* predisposes the ban on the "promotion of homosexuality" whereas *Konzervativni Pokret Naši* advocates Orthodox religious education in order to protect children from "gay ideology".

Refugees are particularly exposed to physical aggressions. Migration from Africa and the Middle East is portrayed as a threat to the Serbian nation that might not only bring direct and immediate physical harm, but also permanently alter the traditional cultural and racial character of Serbia as it has allegedly happened in Western European countries that are now forced to deal with Islamist terrorism. News and rumours about migrants' attacks and riots are highly emphasized. In order to curb the 'migrant threat', far-right activists have encouraged the formation of vigilantes to guard borders and cities. *Pokret Levijatan* has carried out several aggressions on inoffensive young migrants, often catching them as they sleep in the caves of Kalemegdan fortress in Belgrade, and scaring them with clubs and dogs that they claim to protect from abuses. Revolting videos documenting these exploits are edited in a Serbwave fashion and posted online to gain public approval.

The attitude of the far-right toward the Roma minority goes in opposite directions. The media has reported attacks on an exponent of a Roma community by *Pokret Levijatan* in April 2020. *Srpska Desnica* has instead conducted propaganda campaigns among the Roma of Vranje who apparently rewarded the party with their votes. The electoral success was overshadowed by allegations



Pokret Levijatan supporters.  
Photo facebook

of vote buying from Roma community that Vacić categorically denies. The leader of *Srpska Desnica* has also shown sensitivity toward Jews and Roma by mentioning them the day of commemoration of Serbian victims in Nazi-fascist concentration camps. However, Vacić, as other far-right leaders, frequently share content published by Goran Davidović whose racist and anti-Semitic views are quite well-known. Anti-Semite discourses are openly propagated by neo-fascist organizations such as *Srpska Akcija* and more subtly by far-right parties such as *Konzervativni Pokret Naši* that emphasize the alleged control that Soros exerts over Serbia.

Croats, Bosniaks (Bosnians Muslims) and Albanians are designated as the major regional enemies of Serbs. Croats are usually associated to “Ustaša”, that is the Croat fascist military formations of World War II that carried out crimes against Serbs. Croats are also accused of ethnically cleansing Serbian territories during the recent post-Yugoslav conflicts. Bosniaks are indicated as a threat because they allegedly import radical Islam in the Serbian regions. But the attitude toward them is not univocal. Whereas on the one hand, far-right activists propagate negative stereotypes of Muslims, on the other the ambition to extend the territorial domain entails the necessity to extend the concept of Serbianness to non-Orthodox Slavic-speaking populations. Notwithstanding political calculations that might at times smoothen their approach towards Muslims, all far-right groups deny the Srebrenica genocide. They retain that Ratko Mladić, the major culprit of the massacre, is a national hero. Any attempt to stimulate public sensibility toward

the issue, is vehemently opposed. *Zavetnici* harshly criticized an artistic representation of the genocide that was performed at the Centre for Cultural Decontamination in Belgrade claiming that it was “shameful propaganda”.

Since the outbreak of religious tensions in Montenegro, president Milo Djukanović and all Montenegrins who reject to be identified as “Serbs” have become a target of the far-right who accuse them of being traitors. The idea that Djukanović works against Serbia was reinforced by a video of Albanian PM Edi Rama in which he endorsed the party of the Montenegrin president by speaking in Serbian.

Most of the efforts of the far-right are dedicated to the Kosovo question. In order to disenfranchise Albanian-Serbian rapprochement which in their view might lead to the recognition of the independence of Kosovo, far-right activists stimulate ethnic animosities. One of the rare occasions in which the far-right marches together, occurs during the Mirdita, Dobar dan! festival that is annually organized by the Centre for Cultural Decontamination to promote knowledge between Albanians and Serbs. According to the Serbian far-right, Kosovo is run by Muslim terrorists and war criminals. Any news that seems to confirm this opinion is highly emphasized, such as the indictment by The Hague Tribunal of Kosovo president and former Kosovo Liberation Army (UÇK) leader Hashim Thaçi earlier in June. Other information that exposes Serbian crimes in the Kosovo war such as the discovery of a mass grave of Kosovo-Albanians in Serbia this November, is ignored. Serbian far-right groups are prepared to

adopt any means necessary to reobtain the control of the rebel region. *Zavetnici* suggests that Serbia can repopulate Kosovo with fortified kibbutz-style settlements.

Far-right groups propagandize the idea that Albanians are committed to accomplish the project of “Great Albania” which will allegedly unite Albanian-inhabited territories at the expenses of Serbia and of the other Balkan countries. This narrative mirrors the actual programs of some political organizations in Albania, Kosovo, and Serbia. To some Serbian observers, the Great Albanian project is the objective of the recent diplomatic initiatives carried out by Kosovo and Albania. In a meeting held at the beginning of October, Edi Rama declared that borders with Kosovo will be abolished and Durrës will become the harbour of Prishtina. In the same event, Kosovo and Albania created a common fund for the Albanian communities in Southern Serbia.

Bilateral relations carried out on account of national affiliations, are in contradiction with the transnational framework adopted by other regional initiatives such as the so-called Mini-Schengen. Former Defence Minister Alexander Vulin reacted to the declaration of Edi Rama on the abolition of Kosovo-Albanian borders, with a statement that was published on the institutional webpage in which he affirmed that Serbia was the only barrier to the formation of a “Great Albania”. Vulin, who in the meantime has become Minister of Interior, used the ethnic slur “Šiptari” to refer to Albanians. The term “Šiptar” derives from the deformation of the word *Shqiptar* that Albanians employ to define themselves. In the Serbian language, independently of its etymology, the word is used as an insult that Vulin had already used in the past. In 2019, the President of the Albanian National Council in Serbia Ragmi Mustafa filed a lawsuit against him for discriminatory language. The Serbian Minister entered the courtroom in December 2020, and defended his right to say “Šiptar”.

Albanian communities in Serbia are concentrated in the districts of Preševo, Bujanovac and Medvedja. Albanians refer to this area as “The Valley of Presheva”. Like other national minorities, Albanians generally demand more autonomy and the possibility to develop national culture and use national symbols. In order to assert rights, MP Shaip Kamberi put the Albanian flag next to the Serbian one on his desk inside the Serbian Parliament. Some Albanians claim their union to Kosovo according to a referendum that was held in 1992 that Belgrade does not recognize. The leader of the *Partia Demokratike e Shqiptarëve* Ragmi Mustafa (not to be confounded with the homonymous president of the Albanian National Council), sees no other solution, but the union of territories populated by a majority of Albanians in Southern Serbia with Kosovo and then with Albania. Mustafa glorifies the UÇPMB (Army for the liberation of Preševo, Medvedja and Bujanovac), that was the local branch of the Army

for the Liberation of Kosovo (UÇK), which Belgrade considered a terrorist organization.

Albanians in Serbia have recently been concerned by a census that local authorities have undertaken in the region. Apparently this policy has led Albanians who work abroad to lose their residence and has jeopardized their right to vote and to own lands or houses. The Albanian and Kosovo government, who have started to act as guarantors of the rights of Albanian minorities in Serbia, have made an appeal to the Council of Europe and to the UN to monitor the process. To counterbalance the intromission of Albania in Serbian internal affairs, some Serbian far-right activists have shown more interest in the conditions of the Serb minority in Albania. The diametrical views that characterize relations between Albanians and the Serbian far-right, are defied by actors such as Demo Berisha, the (Albanian) leader of the association *Matica Albanaca Srbije / Amëza e Shqiptarëve ne Serbi*, who has shown public support to Miša Vacić. On the social media I have come across profiles that declare allegiance to both Albanian and Serbian nationality and promote hybrid forms of neo-fascist Serbian-Albanian nationalism. Such manifestations are rare, and might perhaps seem odd, but are not unknown to historians.

The Kosovo question conditions the attitude of the far-right toward foreign policy. Since Serbian accession in the EU seems to depend on Belgrade’s recognition of Kosovo’s independence, far-right activists demand that the government abandon the accession path. Moreover, the EU is considered a threat to Serbia because it will allegedly import values that are in contradiction of local traditions. Far-right activists argue that the EU and the West are in decay. They point at the emergence of populist/nationalist movements around the continent and at Brexit in order to claim that the EU is about to collapse from within. In December, Italian neo-fascist leader Robert Fiore announced on his Twitter that *Srpska Desnica* had joined the far-right European organization *Alliance for peace and freedom*.

Instead of the EU, the Serbian far-right recommend tightening relations with powers that have supported Serbia in the Kosovo question such as Russia and/or China. Most far-right groups in Serbia advocate accession into the Eurasian Union. *Srpska Akcija* is strictly against the accession in the Eurasian Union because it exposes Serbia to immigration from Muslim countries. The organisation has also criticized Putin for favouring Russian oligarchs who allegedly aim at taking possession of the resources of Belarus. In the last year, Lukashenko seems to have become more popular than Putin among some Serbian right-wing circles.

The attitude of the far-right activists toward the USA is basically similar to their attitude toward the EU. The US is mostly associated to the NATO bombing of Serbia in 1999, and the far-right is adamantly against the accession of the country in the Atlantic



alliance. However, Trump contributed to change the discursive pattern. The Trump administration became particularly popular in March 2020, when Donald Trump Jr. called for the withdrawal of US troops from Kosovo. The far-right took the side of Trump during the BLM protests. Goran Davidović welcomed Trump's declaration that the US were going to list Antifa as a terrorist organization. He and *Nacionalni Srpski Front* delegitimized BLM movements by sharing biased and racist content in their twitter accounts. Differently from most of far-right organizations who look toward Russia, *Nacionalna Avangarda* is inspired by USA conservative tradition. In analogy to Davidović, the organisations praised Trump for condemning Antifa and claimed that it was a far-left agency that brought havoc to American cities. Biden's victory represented a great disappointment for Serbian far-right activists as the president-elect is considered to have played a pivotal role in the intervention of the US in favour of Bosniaks and Albanians during the post-Yugoslav conflicts.

## **RESPONSE TO COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

The overall emergency situation created by Covid-19 has been used by far-right activists to show that their humanitarian activities are useful and necessary to the community. Soon after the spread of the pandemic, several leaders of the far-right have published pictures that portrayed their personal involvement in the delivery of food, medicines and other basic commodities to people in need.

The Covid-19 pandemic turned into an opportunity for populist organizations such as *Živim Za Srbiju*, which is run by no-vax crusader Jovana Stojković, to gain more public attention. Most far-right parties are sceptical about the ways in which the government is dealing with Covid-19 and advocate non-compulsory vaccination. Some groups have shared material designed to create panic and rage toward the protocols that have been adopted to hinder the spread of the virus. *Živim Za Srbiju* has posted content on alleged harm that the use of masks caused on children and has spread allegations concerning the inclusion of a nanochip in the vaccine. The attitude of right-wing supporters has been contradictory. *Srpska Čast*, *Srpski Nardoni Pokret 1389* and *Srpska Desnica* have recommended that people follow the dispositions of the government.

On October 30<sup>th</sup>, the Serbian bishop of Montenegro Amfilohije who had become a symbol of the struggle against Milo Djukanović died due to Covid-19 complications. A few weeks later, the Serbian patriarch Irenej who had celebrated the funeral of Amfilohije in Montenegro, died of Covid-19 related issues. The passing of the two biggest authorities of the Serbian church strongly accentuated the religious character of the nationalist propaganda carried out by far-right activists on their social media.

## **FAR-RIGHT THREAT IN 2021**

Despite their absence from the parliament and the scarce quantity of votes collected in the last elections, far-right groups will condition public opinion through their propaganda. Far-right groups will continue to promote nationalism by advocating the withdrawal from EU accession talks. It is rather difficult to estimate how Serbian pro-EU political forces will react, given that the EU itself does not have a solid ideological strategy to oppose captivating although biased and superficial far-right arguments. The far-right might succeed in passing the message that the EU is an ephemeral organisation and that it is not worth waiting for it.

Biden's presidency might incentivise the far-right anti-West propaganda. However, this will strongly depend on the way in which the new American administration will approach the question of Serbs in Kosovo. Until recently, some Serbian far-right parties have sympathised with Israel, which they portrayed as a country that is facing similar separatist and terrorist threats. However, Israel's recognition of Kosovo makes it pointless to carry on a solidarity discourse between the two countries and might instead engender anti-Israel and, by extension, anti-Semite tendencies.

The inability of Balkan governments to pursue a coherent foreign policy strategy and the existence of mutual diffidence and ethno-national antipathies, makes it difficult to overcome current issues through diplomatic initiatives. The Serbian government is conditioned by the far-right and separatist trends that pervade the country and seems unable to get rid of them partly because it does not want to, and partly because it is does not want to lose popular support. The influence of far-right ideas and think-tanks on the government encourages militarisation policies that in turn stimulate symmetrical responses from other Balkan countries – some of which are NATO members – that feel threatened when Serbia acquires new weapons.

Propaganda against minorities and migrants, and attacks against them from organised far-right groups, are likely to continue and become more frequent if the government does not take countermeasures to prevent them. The sense of insecurity engendered by anti-migrant propaganda and the Covid-19 situation contributes to making vigilante and humanitarian services provided by far-right groups acceptable and desirable. Ethnic relations inside Serbia will depend on the attitude of far-right party leaders who try to mobilise local communities. The presence of *Srpska Desnica* members in city councils of Southern Serbia regions where Albanian and Serbian communities live intermingled or close to each other, might have effects on local relations.

# COUNTRY SLOVAKIA

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The far right in Slovakia is dominated by a single political party led by Marian Kotleba – Koltebovci-LSNS (LSNS further on) which entered parliament in 2016 and was re-elected in February 2020 with 8 per cent support. LSNS managed to integrate other smaller actors and tried (unsuccessfully) to get rid of its radical past. While the party leadership changed the logo and toned down the messaging, hard-line elements within the party still dominate. As an illustration of this trend, the new party spokes person – Ondrej Ďurica is a well know member of a neo-nazi music group White Resistance (Biely Odpor in Slovak), who later began his solo career of nationalist folk singer. In this capacity he participated in several meetings of the LSNS.

An important development was the sentencing of Marian Kotleba for handing out checks to the amount of 1488 Euros on the anniversary of Slovak's wartime state establishment and was convicted of illegal use of neo-Nazi symbols. The decision is not yet final, since Kotleba appealed it. If convicted, this could mean a significant blow to the party and its supporters.

## MAIN FAR-RIGHT ORGANISATIONS

Name	Ideology
Koltebovci-LSNS	Far Right
LSNS Youth	Alt-right
Slovak Revival Movement (SHO)	Far right
Slovak Togetherness (SP)	Alt-right

## ELECTED FAR-RIGHT REPRESENTATIVES

Legislature	Party	Number of elected representatives
Local	LSNS	1 mayor, 42 local MPs
Regional	LSNS	2 Nitra region and Banská Bystrica region
National	LSNS	17
European	LSNS	2

## MOST INFLUENTIAL ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Name	Platform	Followers/Likes
Marián Kotleba	Facebook	27581
Milan Uhrík	Facebook	64407
Milan Mazúrek	Facebook	61872
Ondrej Ďurica	Facebook	23690
Luboš Hrica	Facebook	49131

## KEY NARRATIVES

- Anti-Roma – historically this has been the main topic, and continues to drive far right support
- Anti-migration – since 2015 second most dominant narrative, based on Islamophobia, identitarian arguments, using western Europe as a negative example what might happen to Slovakia as well.
- Anti-EU – Brussels' dictates, destruction of so-called traditional values, pushing LGBT agenda (which is vehemently opposed in Slovakia – no same sex marriages are allowed or recognised).
- Anti-COVID – this has become one the main narratives, questioning the very existence of COVID-19, accusing authorities of using vaccination as a pretext to nanochip people, rejecting face masks.
- Various conspiracy theories - Soros conspiracy, Bill Gates, Jewish world control, 9/11, Chemtrails etc.
- Pro-Russian – mighty Slavic brother standing up to US world hegemony, pro-Putin, anti-NATO.

## RESPONSE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

COVID-19 measures, which are having significant economic and social consequences served as a powerful mobilisation tool. Far right and anti-system actors started to build narratives against COVID-19 as early as the summer, rejecting the seriousness of COVID-19 being as dangerous as claimed and rejecting face masks as a symbol of oppression.

They managed to mobilise large groups of the population that was dissatisfied with the way the Slovak government dealt with the crisis and on 17 November (anniversary of the Velvet Revolution) organised one of the largest demonstrations in

A rally of LSNS members .  
Photo: Ec1801011



recent years with some 15-20 000 people in the streets of Bratislava, marching to the seat of National Parliament. This demonstration, originally organised as an apolitical protest against the government was captured by the LSNS, which turned it into their own political meeting.

LSNS support has increased by some 2 per cent since February 2020 and currently has 10 per cent of support among the population.



# COUNTRY SPAIN

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The only far-right political party in Spain has focused most of its efforts on attacking the government's handling of the Covid-19 outbreak. Specifically, it has led a number of protests in violation of the lock-down and social distancing restrictions imposed by the government.

It has also voted against all attempts by the government to extend the official state of alarm and is sceptical of the Covid response measures which it views as "totalitarian".

## MAIN FAR-RIGHT ORGANISATIONS

Name	Ideology
VOX	Populist radical right

## ELECTED FAR-RIGHT REPRESENTATIVES

Legislature	Party	Number of elected representatives
National	Vox	52 seats in the Congress of Deputies, 2 seats in the senate

## MOST INFLUENTIAL ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Name	Platform	Followers/ Likes
Santiago Abascal	Twitter	530K followers
Javier Ortega Smith	Twitter	187K followers
Hazteoir.org	Twitter	56K followers
VOX	Twitter	428K followers
Rocio monasterio	Twitter	209K followers

## KEY NARRATIVES

Anti immigration, anti-EU, anti-feminist, anti-globalisation, anti-seperatist and ultra nationalist narratives.

## RESPONSE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The far right have sought to exploit it by trying to position itself as the primary party of the opposition. Centre parties have seen themselves forced to vote alongside the government because of the extreme nature of events and the normal opposition has become diluted. This has given more space for the far right to emerge. VOX has also piloted a vote of no confidence motion against the government, presenting their own leader Santiago Abascal as the alternative prime minister in waiting.

## THE FAR-RIGHT THREAT IN 2021

The economic crisis that will emerge once the immediate Covid health response has been resolved/ diluted will provide a fertile breeding ground for the far right to consolidate more support. Poor economic conditions, fear of immigration and discontent with the political class are also likely to increase as the hardship of Covid extends over time – all of this will feed into VOX's narrative.



Acto de Vox en Vistalegre.  
Photo: Contando Estrelas

# COUNTRY SWEDEN

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## RADICAL RIGHT

The Sweden Democrats, the dominating radical right party in Sweden, remains the third largest party in Sweden but has lost slightly in public opinion and popularity during the year. The party has found it difficult to navigate the new political landscape where the Covid pandemic has occupied most of the political conversation and media reporting. The party has also been characterised by local problems where several politicians at the local level have been expelled or pressured by the party to step down after racist statements and political scandals. However, during the second half of the year, issues relating to immigration and crime have returned to the center of the political discussion, which has benefited SD. The party's communication towards the end of the year has been characterised by the perceived threat of Islam and Muslims and crimes committed by immigrants. Another issue has been opposition to what the party labels as "anti-Swedish" hostility directed against the majority population.

## THE EXTREME RIGHT

During 2019 the number of documented white supremacist activities has declined.

A drop in activities can always be expected after an election year but numbers are significant and a result of the weakening of the Nordic Resistance Movement, the largest neo-Nazi organization in Sweden after an intensive but unsuccessful election campaign in 2018.

Division within the NRM ranks led to a split in 2019 where the organisation lost many regional and mid-level leaders. The main form of activity is dissemination of propaganda (stickers and leaflets), followed by physical exercise and martial arts training.

A focus during the last few years has been on acquiring real estate to be used as social centres. Inspiration comes primarily from Germany and Italy. The Free Sweden ("Det Fria Sverige"), established in late 2017, has developed the "House of the Swedes", which they acquired in 2018 in the Västra Götaland region as a centre for social activities. DFS are also involved in the activities of the Swedish branch of the openly Nazi Hammerskins who have a centre in the Värmland region.

Due to the Corona pandemic The Nordic Resistance Movement has canceled its annual demonstration on

first of May, which is usually their largest gathering every year. This means that the organisation lost an opportunity to be seen, get public attention and reach new activists and members.

The extreme right in Sweden is in a process of heterogenisation, instead of one dominating organisation there are now a number of actors who are cooperating, competing and completing one another by filling different roles. In line with this pattern, there is also an increase in what can be called asymmetric activism. To many far-right extremists, formal organisational affiliation is becoming less and less important. An activist can be involved in many overlapping organisations and networks at the same time. The evident antagonism between NRM and DFS have settled and cooperation between the two organisations are now common. Mutual martial arts training has been documented in the Västmanland region and a DFS ideologue attended an important NRM gathering in September.

Interest in eco-fascist ideology has increased in the Swedish extreme right during the last two years, particularly among younger extremists. In December 2020, two young men (aged 18 and 20) connected to The Green Brigade were charged with arson against a mink farm in Sölvesborg, in the south of Sweden.

During 2020, younger activists, born around the turn of the millennium, have chosen to break away from NRM and other groups to join or form smaller extremist networks focusing primarily on body building and increasing their capacity for violence through martial arts training.

Another trend that has emerged in the same age group, as well as among even younger individuals, is a revival of the Nazi Skinhead aesthetics and sub-culture. Two young men belonging to one such group are suspected of a violent assault with hate crime motif in Stockholm, in late November.

The ethnonationalist Alternative for Sweden (AFS) has established itself as the serious parliamentary contender to the right of the Sweden Democrats. During the national elections in 2018 and the European parliament elections in 2019 the party fared better than its predecessors, the disbanded Party of the Swedes and the National Democrats before that. However, they came far from their goals of entering parliaments. In previous years AFS has mostly been visible during election campaigns but in 2020 some of the organisation's younger activists have targeted schools for dissemination of leaflets while many of the main profiles of the party are

involved in streaming video programs on the extreme right media platforms Exakt24 and SwebbTV.

## MAIN FAR-RIGHT ORGANISATIONS

Name	Ideology
The Sweden Democrats	Radical Right
The Nordic Resistance Movement	Neo-Nazi
The Free Sweden	White supremacist
Alternative for Sweden	Far right ethnonationalist

## ELECTED FAR-RIGHT REPRESENTATIVES

Legislature	Party	Number of elected representatives
Local	The Sweden Democrats	1806 / 12700
Regional	The Sweden Democrats	224 / 1696
National	The Sweden Democrats	62 / 349
European	The Sweden Democrats	3 / 20

## MOST INFLUENTIAL ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Name	Platform	Followers/ Likes
Vedad Odobasic (aka Angry Foreigner)	YouTube Facebook	230 000 22 000
Jimmie Åkesson	Facebook Twitter	160 000 103 500
Marcus Follin (aka The Golden One)	YouTube Twitter	110 000 21 000
Katerina Janouch	Twitter Facebook	61 000 17 500
Henrik Palmgren	Twitter	27 000

## KEY NARRATIVES

The Swedish far right landscape consists of several actors with differences and similarities between them. The populist narrative of a “corrupt elite” that has betrayed “the people” and prejudice and hostility towards immigrants from Africa and the middle east unites them. Nazis and overt white supremacists are characterised by the antisemitic conspiracy theories and the focus on hostility and racism towards non-whites. The national populists are characterised by islamophobia, anti-immigrant discourse and an emphasis on cultural homogeneity. The ethnonationalists position themselves somewhere in between.

Sparked by the Danish far-right extremist Ramus Paludan’s attempts to stage Quran burnings in Sweden and further fueled by the radical Islamist terror attacks in France during the autumn, Swedish far-right extremists have carried out several threats against mosques around the country. There have also been several incidents where pork and a burned Quran have been left outside Halal shops and places

of worship.

Although “The great replacement”-trope has its origins in race- and ethnonationalist environment, it seeps into the national populist milieu and can be found in statements by SD politicians and opinion makers.

Overt antisemitism is sensitive in the national populist sphere but the strong traction of conspiracy theories with George Soros as a scapegoat has provided an infrastructure for spreading antisemitic language and ideas in wider circles. In 2019, a high-profile SD politician accused Soros of “pulling the strings” in EU politics.

The term “svenskfientlighet” which translates roughly to “anti-Swedish hostility”, is used by the whole far right spectrum, from national populists to Nazis. Crimes, regardless of the motif, with a majority Swedish victim and a perpetrator with immigrant background or of minority descent are regarded as examples of “anti-Swedish hostility”. The term is elastic and is also used, for instance, against opponents of the Sweden Democrats’ cultural policies. During the spring of 2020 the gruesome murder of a 19-year-old man became an important symbol of “anti-Swedish hostility” for far-right organisations on the whole spectrum. The intensity of the campaign led to it being picked up by many far-right media outlets and organisations abroad.

## RESPONSE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Like the rest of Swedish society, the far-right environment has seen its room for manoeuvre shrink with the spread of the corona virus. Several events planned by far-right actors have been cancelled or postponed. The Nordic Resistance Movement (NMR) had planned to hold a demonstration in Uppsala on 1 May but complied with the Swedish restrictions and cancelled the event.

Far-right parties and media outlets and opinion makers across the far-right spectrum have been divided on the issue of the COVID-19 pandemic. Some almost immediately engaged in a strong critique against the government and the public health agency. Others, on the more extreme end, invoked the idea of accelerationism and welcomed the crisis. Some took a different position and claimed that tough actions must be taken and accused the Swedish authorities of murder.

A dilemma soon became apparent: On one hand there was an opportunity to criticize the government and the authorities, which adopted mild restrictions compared to the policies of many other countries. On the other hand, the international peers were taking a different path and the Swedish far right is sensitive to trends.

At times during 2020 the scapegoating against minorities has provided some unification.

When the newspapers reported in March that many



Sympathizers of the Sweden Democrats party leader Jimmie Åkesson .  
Photo: Frankie Fouganthin



Swedes with Somali background were among the first who died with the COVID-19 virus in Stockholm, the news was met with gleeful racist comments in many far-right social media forums channels.

The conspiracist environment, which overlaps with the far right, immediately rolled out propaganda about the pandemic being a hoax. Overtime this theory has gained increased support from the far right. The response by the government and the public health agency was characterised by recommendations rather than the type of strict lockdown policy imposed in many countries. This delayed the establishment of anti-lockdown protests in Sweden. Towards the end of the year, though, as the recommendations and restrictions grew stricter and had been in place for large parts of the year, manifestations began taking place in major cities as well as in smaller towns. The extreme end of the far right spectrum is increasingly on board with this message. However, far-right extremists have usually been limited to a smaller segment of the demonstrators. It should be noted that some far-right extremists also arrange rallies against COVID-19 restrictions themselves.

The lack of a unified far right response to COVID-19 has made many organisations eager to find other topics and talking points than the pandemic.

## **THE FAR-RIGHT THREAT IN 2021**

### **SWEDEN DEMOCRATS AND THE FORMATION OF A CONSERVATIVE BLOC**

During the last elections in Sweden, the Sweden Democrats have grown substantially and increased their popularity. As SD has become a more accepted political player, the party has approached but also become more courted by the Conservatives, and by the Christian Democrats. Should these parties reach power and form a government, SD is likely to play an important role as a support party.

### **INCREASED DISSEMINATION OF EXTREMIST NARRATIVES**

Several of the terrorist attacks in recent years by lone perpetrators with a right-wing extremist motive have been inspired by previous perpetrators. Contact over the Internet with like-minded individuals around the world has also played an important role.

In Sweden, far-right groups and individuals have a large and established presence on the internet, in social media and via podcasts. The ideology of the far-right, the story of society and strongly biased “news” about, for example, the crime and violence of immigrants are rapidly spreading and reaching many consumers.

### **FOCUS ON CAPACITY FOR VIOLENCE**

The post-election disillusionment with “established” far-right extremist groups risk leading individuals or smaller groups to reach the conclusion that it is time to fight more radically. There is also a development where the focus has shifted from propaganda dissemination and flyer distribution to more internal activity with increased elements of martial arts training. Many of those who have joined the new groups and networks with such focus are young individuals, born around the turn of the millennium.

### **POLITICAL VIOLENCE AND TERRORISM**

Sweden’s intelligence and security services have issued warnings of a heightened risk of extreme right attacks. The violence and terrorist attacks in Europe and in the United States in recent years may have lowered the threshold for certain individuals to move from thought to action.

As in previous years, the terrorist threat from the violent far-right environment is likely to be based on lone actors, individuals who are no longer part of the organised parts of the environment and from smaller groups on the periphery of the environment. This international trend, combined with extreme right propaganda being spread in wider circles in Sweden, is a dangerous development.

# COUNTRY SWITZERLAND

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Right-wing extremism in Switzerland is rather inconspicuous, as the SVP (Swiss People's Party) with the largest number of voters represents the interests of conservatives and racists and anti-feminist positions. The PNOS (party of nationally oriented Swiss) is really radical. In 2020 a small right-wing extremist group was uncovered in Winterthur that had planned acts of violence, the NJS / EJS (Nationalist Youth Switzerland or Eisenjugend (Iron Youth) Schweiz)

## MAIN FAR-RIGHT ORGANISATIONS

Name	Ideology
SVP	Schweizerische Volkspartei right-wing populist to right-wing extremist
PNOS	Partei national orientierter Schweizer NS-Ideology, anti-Semitism, Homophobia, anti-Islamism
Schweizer Demokraten SD	The Swiss Democrats is a right-wing populist and nationalist political party in Switzerland
Coronarebellen (CoronaRebels)	Coronarebellen spreads conspiracy-ideology in connection with the coronavirus. Many right-wing extremists are members of the Telegram channel
NJS / EJS	a small group of violent right-wing extremists in Winterthur

## ELECTED FAR-RIGHT REPRESENTATIVES

Legislature	Party	Number of elected representatives
Local	SVP	Around 25-30%
Regional	SVP	Around 25-30%
National	SVP	25,6% 53 representatives
European	Switzerland is not in the EU / the EU-Parliament	

## MOST INFLUENTIAL ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Name	Platform	Followers/Likes
Roger Köppel politician SVP, chief of the right-wing magazin Weltwoche	Twitter Facebook	21,400 26,770
Ignaz Bearth ex-PNOS Member, works together with Jobbik (Hungary) IB (Identitäre Bewegung, Identitarian Movement) the german PEGIDA	Telegram Facebook	186,550 911
Claudio Schmid SVP Kantonsrat Zürich Representative in the council of canton Zurich	Twitter	5662
Daniele Ganser writer, conspiracy theorist, Athroposophist	Twitter	31,308

## KEY NARRATIVES

The SVP almost exclusively focuses politics on the issue of migration and repeatedly launches referendums on topics such as limiting immigration, abolishing dual citizenship, and simplifying expulsions.

The Coronarebellen have become more and more dangerous because they radicalise themselves very quickly and they act largely anonymously.

Anti-Semitic and racist attacks regularly occur in Switzerland. Unfortunately, the perpetrators' hostile sentiments are usually not taken into account in legal proceedings. In Switzerland there are also no prohibited symbols such as the swastika. Denial of the Holocaust is usually not pursued either, e.g. in the case of the Geneva-based Holocaust denier Gerard Menuhin who wrote the book "Tell the truth and shame the devil".

The Swiss police forces are massively xenophobic, there is a lot of racial profiling

## RESPONSE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

In addition to the conspiracy ideologues of the corona rebels, right-wing parties such as SVP and PNOS are also spreading fake news and conspiracy theories about the mask requirement and the corona measures as well as about the alleged background of the pandemic

Bills of the SVP (party)  
during the referendum about  
foreigners and asylum .  
Photo: Shoe200



## THE FAR-RIGHT THREAT IN 2021

The population of Switzerland is already very conservative and many racist sentiments are normalised in Switzerland as a result. The economic situation of many refugees in Switzerland is precarious. Since the corona conspiracy ideologues are currently given a lot of space, it is to be expected that in addition to political right-wing extremism, right-wing populism will spread new, above all anti-Semitic and anti-democratic thinking in the population.



# COUNTRY UKRAINE

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The far right continues to solidify its presence in Ukraine, and there continues to be little appetite in the country to confront the problem. Far-right actors continue to enjoy a great deal of impunity for their rhetoric and actions, with only obvious and public episodes of far-right violence (e.g., the actions of Azov members attacking a pro-Russian party on a highway in August 2020) gaining any significant attention of law enforcement.

The Azov movement continues to be by far the most dominant far-right force in the country, encompassing a number of linked, related subgroups, and beginning to monopolise organised far-right activities in the country. Some formerly more independent groups, like Tradition and Order, have clearly come under Azov's umbrella, while groups that used to conflict more openly with Azov, like Society for the Future/C14, appear to have to come to an understanding and, in some cases, cooperation.

The COVID-19 pandemic, as well as a stream of international press attention in 2019, has put a near halt to the Azov movement's international outreach activities. However, the movement's activities within Ukraine, as well as the activities of other far-right movements within Ukraine, have hardly stopped. However, unlike far-right movements in other countries, Ukraine's far right generally has not engaged in overt conspiracism or denial related to the COVID-19 pandemic (e.g., no far-right 'anti-lockdown' protests, etc.), though it has tried to exploit the pandemic to promote itself.

## MAIN FAR-RIGHT ORGANISATIONS

Name	Ideology
Azov movement (encompassing Azov Regiment, National Corps, Centuria, etc.)	Extreme right, neo-Nazi (some elements)
Society for the Future/C14	Extreme right
Tradition and Order	Extreme right, Christianity, anti-LGBT
Karpatska Sich	Neo-Nazi
Svoboda (political party)	Radical right
Praviy Sektor	Extreme right

## ELECTED FAR-RIGHT REPRESENTATIVES

Legislature	Party	Number of elected representatives
Local	Svoboda	912 (out of ~43122; 2.2%); 20 mayors (out of ~1400)
	National Corps	23 (out of ~43122; 0.04%)
	Praviy Sektor	3 (out of ~43122; <0.01%)
	Others	A small number of independents, other local representatives may also be affiliated to the far-right
National	Svoboda	1

## MOST INFLUENTIAL ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Name	Platform	Followers/Likes
Andriy Biletsky	Telegram	15,000
Sergei Korotkikh	Telegram	25,000
Maksym Zhorin	Telegram	6,000
Rodion Kudryashov	Telegram	5,600
Yevhen Karas	Telegram	2,100

*\*the Azov movement has officially been banned from Facebook and Instagram, and few personalities, Azov or otherwise, make significant use of any social media platform other than Telegram*

## KEY NARRATIVES

White nationalism (i.e., white genocide conspiracy theory), anti-Russian, anti-communism, neo-Nazism (some elements), anti-Roma, antisemitism, homophobia, Islamophobia.

## RESPONSE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The COVID-19 pandemic has limited the ability of the country's far-right, particularly the Azov movement, to carry out significant international outreach work and other international activities. While foreign citizens have been able to travel relatively freely to Ukraine since June 2020, large-scale events cannot currently be held in Ukraine as the COVID-19 pandemic situation, and the stress placed on Ukraine's already-beleaguered health system, continues to worsen. For example,

the annual Asgardsrei festival was cancelled this year, replaced by a much smaller NSBM (National Socialist black metal) event with limited international focus.

The pandemic has also limited the far-right's ability and willingness to carry out large-scale marches and other events; for example, the 14 October annual march in honour of the foundation of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) was a much smaller spectacle than in years past, with much less promotion of the event in advance by the far right. This may also negatively impact the far right's ability to recruit and retain members.

The far right has sought to exploit COVID-19 by using it as an opportunity to promote itself as a force 'stepping in' to take care of Ukrainians when politicians and oligarchic forces have not. Early on in the pandemic the Azov movement formed a volunteer corps that would transport health care workers to and from work and otherwise assist with pandemic relief efforts; the movement would promote these efforts extensively on their social media channels. These volunteer efforts, though, appear to have ceased as of November 2020. The Azov movement has also protested against larger businesses – businesses usually linked to 'pro-Russian' individuals or oligarchs – reportedly circumventing COVID-19-related regulations. The far right, however, has generally not pushed 'anti-lockdown' protests or outright Covid-19 conspiracizing in a manner that has been seen in other European countries.

## THE FAR-RIGHT THREAT IN 2021

Within Ukraine, the main threats will be the continued entrenchment of the far-right as a legitimised (extra)political and social force in the country, and the continued ability of far-right actors to act with impunity and fear little pushback or punishment for their activities. The Azov movement will continue to consolidate its dominant position on the far-right scene in the country under the de facto protection of interior minister Arsen Avakov. While the far-right, especially the Azov movement, will not grow by leaps and bounds in 2021, they will continue to play the metapolitical 'long game,' adapting their rhetoric, focuses and even branding (e.g., the 'new' Centuria organisation replacing the former National Militia) as circumstances change. With Ukraine's far right increasingly being banned from Facebook and Instagram, one can expect Telegram to become an even-more dominant mode of social media communication.

Beyond Ukraine, the threat will largely revolve around the COVID-19 pandemic situation. If the situation improves and international travel and networking becomes more common and more feasible, we should expect to see the Azov movement continue some of the international networking that it was doing before 2020. However, given the negative press and attention the Azov movement received in 2019 for its international activities and presence – including several investigations by this author – one should not expect Azov's future international activities to be as open or as obvious (e.g., broadcast all over social media) as they had been in the past.



Euromaidan in Kyiv  
Photo: Antanana

# COUNTRY UNITED KINGDOM

**Author Joe Mulhall**

**Affiliation HOPE not hate**



With Britain in lockdown for much of 2020 the ability of the UK far right to organise offline as it usually would was severely curtailed, meaning much of their activity was confined to online activism.

However, there were a series of important events during 2020 that affected the direction of the UK far-right scene.

The issue that most animated the UK far-right was cross-channel migration. While the number of asylum seekers crossing the English Channel in small crafts this year remained relatively small the issue cause a huge amount of anger within the UK far-right.

Since early May, a handful of far-right activists have spent large amounts of time filming the arrival of boats and various locations used to house arriving migrants, such as hotels. Their videos, which have sometimes included chasing migrants with cameras, have quickly spread across far-right social media platforms and whipped anti-immigrant activists up into a peak of anger. Each new video seeks to confirm the far right's existing belief that the UK is under siege.

Most notable amongst this group of right-wing content creators is Alan Leggett (AKA Active Patriot UK), who has quickly accrued over 50,000 YouTube

subscribers due to his regular livestreamed videos which have attracted thousands, and sometimes tens of thousands, of viewers. Leggett has been active within the UK far right for several years, being one of Stephen Yaxley-Lennon's (AKA Tommy Robinson) most ardent supporters. In fact, much of his viewership comes via Lennon, who has taken to referring to him as "our man on the ground" and regularly promoting his videos.

Since 6 May Leggett has been accompanied on numerous outings by Nigel Marcham (AKA The Little Veteran), who has posted his own footage from Dover. While he has accrued just over 100,000 views since starting his channel in 2018, he has become increasingly well known in far-right circles in recent months, spending long periods on the south coast living out of his car and making videos about arriving migrants. His newly acquired profile resulted in an invite to speak at a far-right demonstration in Nottingham, which saw an array of figures and organisations, including some extreme figures from the neo-nazi Blood and Honour scene, coming together to protest against a range of issues, including veteran's affairs, Muslim grooming gangs and illegal immigration. Alongside Leggett are a group of other smaller content creators, including "Tyrant Finder U.K" from the West Country, and Chris



Johnson, whose Facebook videos have been shared by Yaxley-Lennon on Telegram.

In addition to this group of ‘citizen journalists’ has been the more traditional far-right which have jumped on the issue with a view to garnering political capital. Nigel Farage of the Brexit Party has been very outspoken on the issue and been important for pushing the issue up the political agenda via the right-wing media.

More extreme groups such as For Britain and Britain First have also campaigned extensively around the issue. Britain First recently claimed to be “the only political movement anywhere in the world with its own navy” when they launched, to widespread mockery, “HMS Alfred the Great”. In reality, it was a small yacht captained by one of the group’s leading activists Samuel Cochrane, who was recently detained at Belfast International Airport under Schedule 7 of the Terrorism Act 2000.

### **REACTION TO BLACK LIVES MATTER**

2020 saw a series of large Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests across the UK and a national discussion about systemic racism and Britain’s imperial history. Unsurprisingly the far-right mobilized in opposition the BLM protests and sought to use them to push their own racist politics. This was especially done through the use of the slogan White Lives Matter.

The anti-Muslim organisation Britain First, for example, released numerous images of Lee Rigby, Emily Jones and Charlene Downes – all white murder victims – with text overlaid reading ‘White Lives Matter’. The hashtag #WhiteLivesMatter has also trended in the UK, though admittedly much of the traffic is in condemnation of its use. Similarly, the name of Lee Rigby, the British soldier murdered by al-Muhajiroun activists on the streets of London, also began to trend on Twitter. Many on the far-right have sought to draw false equivalency between the two tragedies. Katie Hopkins for example tweeted, ‘Outrage. Available in any colour, as long as it is black #leerigby’.

For some, this more open discussion of race was something of a departure. Prominent figures and groups such as Stephen Yaxley-Lennon (AKA Tommy Robinson) and Britain First, known primarily for their Islamophobia, switched their focus to race as part of broader plans to ‘defend’ various statues and memorials, in response to protests about their links to slavery and colonialism. When a Burnley FC supporter was condemned for organising a plane to fly the ‘White Lives Matter’ slogan over Manchester City stadium, Lennon likewise lent his support. While the likes of Lennon and Britain First were far from moderate in their view prior to this, such a move is clearly worrying to the extent it can normalise more extreme far-right ideas in such a socially divided time.

The most sustained use of the slogan White Lives Matter in the UK has come from a new racial nationalist organisation called Patriotic Alternative.

Formed in 2019 by Mark Collett, former Head of Publicity for the British National Party, the group has quickly grown to a following of nearly 18,000 on Facebook. PA is a racist far-right organisation with antisemitism at its very core. They aim to combat the “replacement and displacement” of white Britons by people who “have no right to these lands”. In this regard PA follows the broader trend in recent years amongst many in the far right of rebranding white nationalist

ideology as a defence of ‘indigenous’ Europeans against their ‘Great Replacement’ from non Europeans. On 9 August Patriotic Alternative (PA) held a day of action across the UK to coincide with International Indigenous People’s Day (IPD). The event involved repeating, at a national scale, a strategy the group employed on 4 July when they displayed a ‘White Lives Matter’ banner on the top of Mam Tor, a hill in Derbyshire. The image of the banner was intended to stir up controversy and in so doing bait the media and concerned members of the public into giving the marginal group free publicity. Though only local press covered it, the event attracted attention on social media and was successful in bringing in new supporters to PA. Due to this success they decided to hold the much larger event on IPD. The result was images of roughly 80 locations displaying the slogan, alongside related phrases, from just over 100 activists. There were also a handful of pictures submitted from abroad, including by the fascist groups Nordic Resistance Movement in Denmark and Action Zealandia in New Zealand.

### **MAIN FAR-RIGHT ORGANISATIONS**

Name	Ideology
Reform UK (Brexit Party)	Populist Radical Right
British National Party	Fascist
National Front	Fascist
Patriotic Alternative	Fascist; Neo-Nazi; Racial Nationalist
United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP)	Far-Right
For Britain	Far-Right; Anti-Muslim

### **ELECTED FAR-RIGHT REPRESENTATIVES**

Legislature	Party	Number of elected representatives
Local	United Kingdom Independence Party	21
	For Britain	2

## MOST INFLUENTIAL ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Name	Platform	Followers/ Likes
Paul Joseph Watson	Youtube	1.87M
	Twitter	1.1M
	Instagram	20K
Nigel Farage	Twitter	1.6M
	Facebook	1M
	YouTube	215K
	Instagram	166K
Carl Benjamin (aka Sargon of Akkad)	YouTube	929K
	Facebook	116K
	Instagram	53K
Stephen Yaxley-Lennon (aka Tommy Robinson)	YouTube	356K
	Telegram	42K
Katie Hopkins	Instagram	182K
	YouTube	132K

## FAR-RIGHT TERROR ARRESTS AND CONVICTIONS

There were at least 14 convictions of far-right terror related offences in 2020 and at least eight ongoing trials after charges brought during the year. Many of the convictions involved individuals involved in National Action or its splinter groups such as the Sonnenkrieg Division, which was proscribed alongside System Resistance Network (a National Action splinter group) in February. Online terror advocating group Feuerkrieg Division was also proscribed during the summer and two of its members charged and convicted.

Notably, Britain First leader Paul Golding was convicted under terrorism legislation after refusing to give police access to his phone on his return from a political trip to Russia. Separately, a man faces terror charges after attempting an attack at a lawyer's office motivated by their representation of migrants. An attack motivated by racism against an NHS worker in Bristol where the perpetrator aimed to deliberately hit the victim with their car resulted in murder charges.

## KEY NARRATIVES

With levels of societal prejudice towards Islam and Muslims remaining high, islamophobia continues to be central to the UK far-rights politics. However, 2020 has seen a return to more explicit anti-black racism in response to Black Lives Matter and anti-asylum seeker rhetoric in response to visible cross-channel migration. There has also been a worrying rise in antisemitic conspiracy theories resulting from the spread of wider covid-related conspiracy theories.

## RESPONSE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Established far-right groups and activists in the UK were caught off-guard by the Covid-19 pandemic, and it took some months before they broadly coalesced around a conspiracy-oriented, anti-lockdown narrative. Unwilling to take a concrete stance on a rapidly evolving situation, many chose to say little about the disease itself or the measures to control it until Summer, when the UK's initial outbreak had subsided and frustration with lockdown measures began to seem like a potential tool for radicalisation and recruitment.

Instead, early focus on the far right tended towards efforts to blame China, with some suggesting that the virus was a bio-weapon released either by accident or as an act of war, and on claims that the virus' spread was a consequence of mass migration and lax border control. The latter narrative lost relevance as time went on, with the UK's infection rate far exceeding that of much of the world, but the focus on Chinese responsibility for the pandemic has not receded and dovetails with efforts on the broader right to rally support for a new Cold War with China.

Many on the UK far right also began to make greater use of conspiracy theories, which saw a huge surge of interest and support from wider society as the pandemic broke out. Alongside more traditional far-right conspiracy fare aimed at demonising minority groups, figures such as Stephen Yaxley-Lennon and Mark Collett have sought to exploit fears over vaccines and suggest that official data around COVID-19 death rates have been fabricated in order to terrify the population. Some figures such as former UKIP leader Gerard Batten have also flirted with QAnon and Pizzagate theories, while themes pushed by that movement have seeped into broader far right discourse due in no small part to QAnon's preeminent role in the creation and spread of COVID-19 conspiracy theories.

## THE FAR-RIGHT THREAT IN 2021

This year will likely continue to see the British far-right become increasingly conspiratorial as the Covid-19 lockdown continues to be in place and the vaccine is rolled out. Major figures such as Stephen Yaxley-Lennon (aka Tommy Robinson) have already become increasingly anti-lockdown and skeptical of vaccines.

Another emerging trend is anti-China politics. Nigel Farage has already begun to pivot towards this issue and other elements of the UK scene are likely to follow him as they seek to find a new issue to exploit now that Brexit has been completed.

In the longer term we are likely to see the UK far-right attempt to exploit the economic turmoil that is being caused by the pandemic.







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