

IDENTITY AND DEMOCRACY

IMPACT: Identity and Democracy (ID) is the fourth-largest group in the European Parliament, representing thirteen far-right parties with heavy anti-Muslim agendas. It is the successor of the 2014 Europe of Nations and Freedom (ENF) group and emerged after the 2019 European Parliament elections. ID's policy platform focuses on increasing security, tackling illegal immigration, and creating economic growth, as well as making the EU less bureaucratic. The group is currently headed by Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) from the Italian League and the French National Rally. It has been able to connect nationalist far-right parties and overcome nationalist cleavages by emphasizing the common 'Muslim enemy.'

- Identity and Democracy (ID) is a far-right parliamentary group established after the 2019 European Parliament elections. ID is currently composed of Portugal's Chega, France's National Rally, the UK's For Britain, Belgium's Vlaams Belang, Greece's New Right, Bulgaria's VOLYA, the Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ), the Czech Republic's Movement of Freedom and Direct Democracy (SPD), Slovakia's SME Rodina, Poland's Congress of the New Right (KNP), the Conservative People's Party of Estonia (EKRE), Italy's Lega, and Italy's Lega Per Salvini Premier.
- According to its party platform, ID stands for six values: democracy, sovereignty, identity, specificity, (individual) freedoms, and culture. **Their website's section on "identity" states that "the right to control and regulate immigration" is a "fundamental principle" in accordance with the "preservation of the identity of the peoples and nations of Europe."** According to reporting by Radio France Internationale, the stated goals of ID are to **"return power to European member states, curb immigration, and prevent the spread of Islam in Europe."**
- From the first European Parliament elections in 1979 to the 2009 elections, far-right groups formed only a small minority. Prior to 1979, European far-right parties attempted to cooperate with the founding Eurodestra in 1978. While the Spanish Fuerza Nueva, the Italian MSI and the French Parti des Forces Nouvelles came together, poor election results blocked their entry into parliament. In 1984, the first formal far-right group was established by MEPs from the Italian MSI, the Greek Ethniki Politiki Enosis (National Political Union, EPEN), and the National Rally. However, border disputes and quarrels over leadership led to the dissolution of the group in 1989. Amongst others, the German Republikaner and the Italian MSI fought over the status of South Tyrol, an autonomous province in northern Italy.
- Between 1989 and 1994, the Technical Group of the European Right represented the far-right bloc, which was home to MEPs of the French Front National, the German Republikaner, and the Belgian Vlaams Blok (later Vlaams Belang). However, the group did not make it into the European Parliament. From 1999 to 2009, a smaller fraction of the Technical Group of the European Right existed called Union for a Europe of Nations (UEN), composed of a few far-right parties (among them the Alleanza Nazionale and Dansk Folkeparti). Parallel to UEN's development, EuroNat, another far-right group, was established in 1997 by the French National Front with the Sweden Democrats, the British National Party (BNP), the Italian Fiamma Tricolore, the Spanish Democracia Nacional, and the Dutch Nieuw Rechts. In all, twenty-one parties had been a part of EuroNat by March 2011.

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- The National Front was simultaneously part of a group called the [Alliance of European National Movements](#), formed in 2009. The Alliance is also home to far-right parties including the [Hungarian Jobbik](#), the BNP, and another seven parties, although only three have elected MEPs. A faction called [Identity, Tradition, Sovereignty \(ITS\)](#) existed between January and November 2007. ITS was composed of twenty-three MEPs from eight countries, but soon dissolved after MEP Alessandra Mussolini [said](#) that “breaking the law had become a way of life for Romanians. Not petty crimes, but horrifying crimes, that give one goose bumps.” This statement was unacceptable to the Romanian contingent within the ITS, as she made no distinction between Romanians and Roma. While MEPs from the [FPÖ](#), [Vlaams Belang](#), [FN](#), and [Ataka](#) did not belong to any faction for some time, those from Lega Nord, Dansk Folkeparti, the [United Kingdom Independence Party \(UKIP\)](#), and others were organized as the [Europe of Freedom and Democracy group \(EFD\)](#).
- Although Islamophobia was part of the political platforms of some of these parties, the uniting cause of the members of the EFD was related more to [Eurocepticism](#). This focus changed at the beginning of the twenty-first century, as [Islamophobia became more important](#) in election campaigns. **In the 2006 “Salzburger Deklaration,” the youth wings of a number of far-right parties spoke about European identity as threatened by “a powerful alliance of opposing enemies, ranging from liberals relativizing values, to exclusively profit-oriented economists and Marxists, to fundamentalist Islamists.”** Today, the idea that Muslims pose a [powerful, conspiratorial threat](#) has become a regular feature in far-right ideology.
- According to political scientist and Bridge Initiative Senior Research Fellow Farid Hafez, [until 2014](#) “a stable far-right fraction in the European parliament [had] failed to emerge, and formal cooperation between different national far-right parties [had] proved so far impossible due to divergent national interests.” Furthermore, he [argues](#) “a strong grouping of the European right as a relevant political actor at EU-level has always been stymied by the lack of a common ideology, an authoritative structure and an international organizing principle. Instead, differing nationalist views, controversies about leadership, and the negative image of some far-right parties have prevented pragmatic cooperation.” However, Islamophobia would prove to play a significant role in strengthening the unification process of far-right parties.
- **The adoption of Islamophobic policies by local and national parties culminated in the creation of the Europe of Nations and Freedom (ENF) group in 2015**, which [became](#) the Identity and Democracy (ID) group in 2019. A smaller political group, the Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy (EFDD), was dominated by UKIP MEPs and subsequently disappeared after the UK [left](#) the European Union in January 2020.
- Following the elections of the European Parliament in May 2019, ID became the [fifth largest group](#) with only one seat behind the Green Party. After British MEPs left the European Parliament, ID progressed to the [fourth largest group](#). While the European Parliament is dominated by the two largest parties, the [EPP](#) (Group of the European People's Party, Christian Democrats) and the [S&D](#) (Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament), ID beat another conservative group, the [ECR](#) (European Conservatives and Reformists Group), which is also home to

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some far-right parties such as the [Sweden Democrats](#) and [VOX](#). ID is dominated by the Italian League (twenty-eight seats), the French [National Rally](#) (twenty-two seats), and the German [Alternative for Germany](#) (eleven seats).

- [Marco Zanni](#) (Italy) was elected chair of ID in July 2019 and [Nicolas Bay](#) (France) holds the position of vice chair. **The ID group claims its policy focus is increasing security, tackling illegal immigration, and creating jobs and growth, as well as making the EU less bureaucratic.** MEPs of ID do not hold any vice-presidential posts within Parliament but are members and leaders of several [parliamentary committees](#). Since 2018, EU parties have received a [contribution](#) of up to 90 percent of reimbursable expenditure, doubling ID's budget. As [past audit and donation reports reveal](#), the annual accounts show that ID (then ENF) had a balance sheet total of 673,219.88 euros in [2015](#), 744,000 euros in [2016](#), 966,388 euros in [2017](#) and 1,772,511 in [2018](#). The increase is also due to its growing strength in the European Parliament.
- **Far-right political parties have shown increasing strength in European elections.** One year after the 2014 European Parliament election, the Italian League became a founding member of the [Europe of Nations and Freedom](#) (ENL) group. After the 2019 European Parliament election, Northern League co-founded the ID group [alongside](#) the French [National Rally](#), the Danish People's Party, the [Freedom Party of Austria](#), the [Conservative People's Party of Estonia](#), the [Finns Party](#), the Belgian [Vlaams Belang](#), the Czech [Freedom and Direct Democracy](#) party, and [Alternative for Germany](#). National Rally became a second stronghold for the far-right ID in the European Parliament. The Belgian [Vlaams Belang](#) has been represented in the European Parliament elections [since 1989](#). In June 2015, it joined ENF and is today part of ID. In 2019, VB [became](#) the second-strongest force in the European Parliament elections in Belgium with 11.68 percent of the vote, and currently [holds](#) three seats in the European Parliament.
- It is commonplace for many far-right parties to maintain connections with other far-right parties in alternative political groups. For instance, the Italian Lega has contacts with the [Spanish Vox](#), the [Hungarian Fidesz](#), and the [Polish Law and Justice party](#), who are members of the [European Conservatives and Reformists Group](#) and the largest faction in the European Parliament, the [European People's Party](#) (EPP). The move by the [Sweden Democrats](#) to join the [European Conservatives and Reformists Group](#) has been [described](#) as an attempt to "clean up its image to become more mainstream." In the past, some MEPs from the German AfD had been part of this group [for a short while](#), but were expelled and moved to ID. [Marine Le Pen](#), leader of France's National Rally, also has contacts with individuals who are not part of her party family but who are well-known for their anti-Muslim platforms and policies, such as [Thierry Baudet](#) of the Dutch political party Forum for Democracy (FvD), who became a serious political challenger to [Geert Wilders' Party For Freedom](#) (PVV).
- According to the [American Security Project](#) (ASP), "Russia's use of commerce as a facade to mask support of far-right European movements is widespread ... [and] by aiding the growth of far-right political power in Europe, Russia plays the long-game of weakening key Western alliances." In 2014, Le Pen [received](#) 11 million euros in the form of loans from Russian banks after publicly supporting the annexation of Crimea. In December 2016, the Austrian far-right FPÖ [travelled](#) to Moscow and signed a [contract of cooperation](#) with Vladimir Putin's political party United Russia (Jedinaja

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Rossija). In March 2017, the Italian far-right Northern League also signed a cooperation agreement with United Russia. According to analysis by political scientist Anton Shekhovtsov, United Russia was interested in securing external legitimacy of Putin's regime, strengthening subversive movements within European societies, and enhancing ultranationalist attitudes in European societies in order to undermine the European Union. In April 2018, Matteo Salvini, leader of the League, pushed for lifting sanctions imposed on Russia after the annexation of Crimea. In 2019, rumors appeared online suggesting the Northern League had received funds from Russia.

Bridge Initiative Factsheet