

RIGHT-WING POPULIST PARTIES FORM TWO NEW BLOCS IN THE EU PARLIAMENT

Patriots for Europe to become third largest bloc as Europe of Sovereign Nations launches, further dividing the far-right

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SUMMARY

One month after the European parliamentary elections, three right-wing populist formations from Central Europe – Hungary's ruling Fidesz-KDNP alliance, the Czech ANO movement and Austria's FPÖ – have redrawn the composition of the next European Parliament by forming the Patriots for Europe (PFE) bloc. With 13 member parties from 12 different EU countries, Patriots for Europe has quickly emerged as the third largest group in the European Parliament by absorbing most of the member parties of the Identity and Democracy Group (ID).

The emergence of the new group is seen as a major political achievement for its founders, particularly Hungary's ruling Fidesz-KDNP alliance, even if France's National Rally (RN) will be the group's de facto leader. Fidesz was notably ejected from the EPP in 2021 and has so far been unable to form an alternative European alliance.

While the PFE's emergence is arguably significant from an EU parliamentary perspective, its formation was likely centered around impacting EU-level decision-making not in the EU Parliament but rather within the European Council and the Council of the EU. Should Austria's FPÖ win the country's elections in September and ANO return to power after the 2025 Czech elections, the founding parties will be able to create a blocking majority in the Council, significantly impacting the EU's decision-making processes.

The launch of Patriots for Europe comes as Germany's far-right AfD, previously a prominent ID member but expelled from the bloc shortly before the EU elections, also launched a new EU parliamentary group on 10th July. Called Europe of Sovereign Nations (ESN), the group includes 25 MEPs from eight member states, including Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia. A key difference between PFE and ESN is that while the former unites right-wing parties either in government or with potential to govern, the latter consists of far-right minority formations.

 **Below, Aretera takes a deeper look at the two newest EU parliamentary groups and their possible political future.**

PATRIOTS FOR EUROPE EMERGES AS THIRD LARGEST BLOC

On 8th July, 13 European political parties across 12 EU member states formed the Patriots for Europe (PFE) bloc, the newest parliamentary group in the European Parliament, which will become the third largest group in Brussels/Strasbourg after the centre-right European People's Party (EPP) and the centre-left Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (S&D).

Initiated by Hungary's ruling Fidesz-KDNP alliance, the Czech lead opposition ANO movement of former PM Andrej Babiš and Austria's lead opposition FPÖ, PFE includes 84 of the total 720 MEPs, also from Belgium, Denmark, France, Greece, Italy, Latvia, the Netherlands, Spain and Portugal.

Hungary's Fidesz has been unaffiliated in the European Parliament since it left the EPP in 2021. ANO recently left the liberal Renew Europe Group, while Austria's FPÖ is a previous member of the nationalist Identity and Democracy Group (ID), as are most of the new group's members, including France's National Rally (RN) and Italy's Lega.

GERMANY'S AFD FORMS NEW FAR-RIGHT GROUP

While most former ID member parties decided to join Patriots for Europe, Germany's AfD, which was a prominent ID member but was expelled from the bloc shortly before the EU elections, launched a new EU parliamentary group on 10th July, called Europe of Sovereign Nations (ESN).

Led by the German far-right, the bloc includes 25 MEPs from eight countries, including Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, France, Hungary, Lithuania, Poland and Slovakia. As for policies, the group has vowed to stand in opposition to migration, "Islamization" and the Green Deal, aiming to return powers from Brussels to the national level.

EU ELECTION RESULTS BREAKDOWN

The Composition of the European Parliament			
EU Parliamentary Group	Number of MEPs (2019-2024)	Number of MEPs (2024-2029)	Share of MEPs (%)
EPP (centre-right, pro-EU, majority)	176	188	26.1
S&D (centre-left, pro-EU, majority)	139	136	18.9
PFE (right-wing populist, hard Eurosceptic)	did not exist	84	11.7
ECR (conservative/populist, soft Eurosceptic)	69	78	10.8
Renew Europe (liberal, pro-EU, majority)	102	77	10.7
Greens/EFA (green-leftist, pro-EU, majority)	72	53	7.3
ID (right-wing populist, hard Eurosceptic)	49	merged into PFE	0
Left (Eurosceptic, left-wing populist)	37	46	6.4
ESN (right-wing populist, anti-EU)	did not exist	25	3.5
Unaffiliated (ideologically diverse)	61	33	4.6
Total	705	720	100

Source: [European Parliament](#)

KEY REGIONAL TAKEAWAYS FROM THE FORMATION OF THE NEW GROUPS

CEE-based MEPs will hold prominent roles within both PFE and ESN. While RN's Jordan Bardella was elected as PFE's President (reflecting the leading role of the group's French member party), Fidesz MEP Kinga Gál will serve as the group's First Vice President. Additional Vice Presidents include EU lawmakers from the Czech ANO (Klára Dostálová), Italy's Lega, the Danish DF, the Spanish VOX, the Portuguese Chega and the Dutch PVV. The former Secretary General of the Identity and Democracy Group, Philip Claeys, will serve in the same capacity in the new group. As for ESN, Bulgaria's far-right Revival and the Slovak Republika are expected to play key roles in the bloc's leadership.

PFE includes 84 MEPs from 12 countries. Within CEE, representation includes 11 Fidesz-KDNP MEPs (making it the second largest group after France's RN), seven ANO MEPs (fourth largest group), as well as two other Czech MEPs from the right-wing Přísaha and Motorists alliance.

ESN includes 25 MEPs from eight countries: among their regional EU lawmakers are three MEPs from Poland's Confederation, three MEPs from the Bulgarian Revival, two MEPs from the Slovak Republika, as well as one each from Hungary's Our Homeland, the Czech SPD-Trikolór and the Lithuanian TTS. A notable absentee is the far-right SOS Romania, whose application was rejected due to objections from Hungary's Our Homeland.

The PFE's emergence as the third largest EU parliamentary group is seen as a major victory for its founders, particularly for Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán. The formation comes three years after Fidesz was ejected from the EPP and follows a number of unsuccessful attempts to form a united right-wing front by merging (most of) the ECR and ID member parties. This was reportedly followed by a recent refusal from Italian Prime Minister (and ECR Chair) Giorgia Meloni to allow Fidesz to join the ECR. Hungary's junior ruling KDNP also left the EPP after Hungary's Respect and Freedom Party (TISZA), which scored 30% in the country's EU elections¹ only three months after entering politics, was admitted to the centre-right group. Fidesz was quick to pursue alternative directions, working on an entirely new parliamentary group, deemed necessary from a domestic perspective to counter TISZA's emergence and admission to the EPP.

As for the internal power structure of Patriots for Europe, France's RN is expected to be the leading force behind the new EU parliamentary group, even if Central European parties are credited with its formal launch. RN has 30 MEPs in the new bloc and is its largest member, with Fidesz-KDNP being a distant second with 11 MEPs. In the case of ESN, the group will likely be dominated by the AfD as 14 of the 25 ESN-linked MEPs belong to the German far-right party. At the same time, ESN hopes to raise the number of its MEPs above 45 by the end of this year.

LOOKING AHEAD

The formation of Patriots for Europe will likely bring political benefits for most of its members, especially for the leading member parties, including France's RN and Hungary's Fidesz. Notably, ID was only the sixth largest group in the outgoing EU Parliament, while PFE will be the third largest in its next convocation, and other – currently unaffiliated – MEPs may also join the bloc.

Leaving the ID brand behind will also help the group's previous leading members to further distance themselves from Germany's nationalist AfD, which was expelled from the ID Group shortly before the

¹ See [here](#) for Aretera's overview of Hungary's double elections from June 2024

EU elections over a series of scandals. For Fidesz, keeping a fair distance from AfD is crucial to preserving the Hungarian government's relations with Germany and its business community.

At the same time, Aretera expects the returning EU parliamentary majority of the EPP, S&D, the Greens and Renew Europe to maintain its "cordon sanitaire" against not only the ESN but also the PFE, as it did against the ID Group during the 2019-2024 legislative cycle. This means that nationalist parties deemed controversial by the EU parliamentary majority will not receive certain institutional benefits, including committee leadership positions or assignments. However, some PFE-linked MEPs may play a role in the new Parliament, given the size of their parliamentary group.

IMPLICATIONS FOR EU LEADERSHIP


While the emergence of the Patriots for Europe bloc is arguably significant for the future composition of the European Parliament, several EU observers have pointed out that the joint Austrian-Czech-Hungarian concept behind it is likely associated with the European Council (the EU heads of state of government actually running the EU) rather than the Parliament.

Austria's FPÖ is preparing for a victory in September's parliamentary elections, while the Czech ANO movement is also hoping for an electoral comeback in 2025 after falling out of power in 2021. (The presence of both ANO, as well as the Přisaha and Motorists alliance in PFE also hints at a possible cooperation between the two blocs after the next Czech elections.) These hypothetical electoral outcomes would mean there could be three PFE-affiliated heads of government sitting in the European Council (together with the Hungarian PM), which would mean a potential "blocking majority." At the same time, certain individual ANO MEPs have hinted at the possibility of leaving PFE if it turns out to be a Russia-friendly group.

Such a scenario could significantly impact EU decision-making (both in the case of qualified majority voting but especially when it comes to decisions requiring unanimity) as these PFE-linked parties have a fundamentally different view to the EU consensus on a series of critical issues. Accordingly, the formation of PFE is likely intended to rally right-wing and nationalist parties with experience in government or a credible chance to govern in the near future. This is a key difference between PFE and ESN since the latter is uniting mainly ultranationalist formations, with no realistic prospects to govern.

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*If you would like to schedule a discussion of this paper, please contact:
[Dominik Istrate](mailto:D.Istrate@AreteraPA.com), Aretera's Research Director for CEE at D.Istrate@AreteraPA.com*

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