

**Feeling Left Out: Rise of Right-Wing Extremism and Populist Nationalism
in the European Union and How It Can Be Tackled**

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Introduction

The world today is facing a multitude of risks that disrupt societies, economies, and ecosystems on a global scale. These risks span across various domains, from misinformation and disinformation, rising geopolitical tensions, surging financial stress, trade fragmentation, and climate change. These threats have the potential to exacerbate regional disparities and challenge the progress and stability of nations. Climate-related threats are long-term risks that dominate the top 10 risks global populations will face. On the other hand, misinformation and disinformation, for instance, pose a significant short-term risk, threatening the integrity of democratic processes worldwide.¹ According to experts, misinformation and disinformation are some of the most important threats to electoral integrity.² With the European Parliament elections between June 6-9 2024 and national elections of Member States afterwards, the threat of misinformation during democratic processes is crucial to the European Union (EU).

The European Union also stands at a critical point in its home affairs and the international political scene as it faces significant risks to its cohesion and stability in the following years, specifically the following term of the European Parliament. The rise of right-wing extremism and populist nationalism is a formidable threat to the union's future.³ Leading to many other threats such as the decline of democracy, and the escalating impacts of climate change, if not addressed with robust policy measures, this rise could undermine the foundational principles of the EU and internal unity, global influence, and overall strength as a leader on the international stage.

The surge in right-wing extremism and populist nationalism poses a direct challenge to the EU's unity and democratic values. This phenomenon, already visible across several Member States, threatens to fragment the EU's political landscape, foster xenophobia, and erode the principles of tolerance and inclusivity that underpin the union.⁴ This leads to the decline of democracy within

¹ Lahiri, Indrabati. "Global Risks 2024: What Are the Key Geopolitical Risks This Year?" Euronews, January 10, 2024. <https://www.euronews.com/business/2024/01/10/global-risks-2024-what-are-the-key-geopolitical-risks-this-year>.

² Banbury, Anthony, and Mohammad Irfan Abdool Rahman. "Disinformation Has Become the Single Biggest Threat to Electoral Integrity." POLITICO, March 28, 2024.

<https://www.politico.eu/article/disinformation-become-single-biggest-threat-electoral-integrity-election-2024/>.

³ Wax, Eddy. "This Time, the Far-Right Threat Is Real." POLITICO, February 6, 2024.

<https://www.politico.eu/article/brussels-braces-for-far-right-wave-as-eu-election-looms/>.

⁴ Öner, Selcen. "Different Manifestations of the Rise of ... - Dergipark." MARMARA JOURNAL OF EUROPEAN STUDIES, 2014. <https://dergipark.org.tr/tr/download/article-file/1610>.

Member States characterized by the erosion of democratic institutions, the rule of law, and civil liberties. Leading to the jeopardization of the integrity of the EU's democratic framework.⁵

Within this term of Parliament and next year specifically, this could gain further traction, increase in severity, and disrupt the EU's political equilibrium. This would transform the political landscape into one where authoritarian tendencies prevail over democratic norms due to its nature of being driven by concern in cultural and economic terms. Thereby, it will be weakening the EU's collective political and moral authority. The EU does and will continue to face the indispensable need to mitigate the impacts while simultaneously adapting to new environmental realities, or otherwise face the exacerbation of regional disparities within the union.

The contemporary European landscape also faces challenges that stem from a series of unexpected and impactful events. These incidents, spanning geopolitics, climate change, health, economics, and democracy, have far-reaching implications for the stability and future of the EU. The European Parliamentary Research Service has identified fifteen critical shock events, highlighting the need for strategies and coordinated efforts to mitigate their effects.⁶ One significant shock event from each of these areas, underscoring the necessity for comprehensive and collaborative approaches to safeguard Europe's stability, security, and well-being in an increasingly unpredictable world will be examined.

What is it?

The rise of right-wing extremism and populist nationalism is a pressing concern for the European Union (EU), reflecting deeper socio-political and economic currents within its Member States. This phenomenon is marked by a significant shift in the Union's political landscape, with far-right parties gaining traction through their anti-establishment rhetoric, nationalist policies, and opposition to EU integration.⁷

Historically, right-wing extremism and populism in Europe have roots in periods of socio-economic distress and political instability. For instance, the Interwar Period (1918- 1939) saw the rise of fascist regimes in Germany and Italy, driven by economic hardships and widespread

⁵ "Governments Continue Weakening Democratic Oversight in 2023: Eu Report." Liberties.eu, March 18, 2024. <https://www.liberties.eu/en/stories/rolreport2024-pressrelease/45012>.

⁶ Future Shocks 2023 - European Parliament, July 2023. [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2023/751428/EPRS_STU\(2023\)751428_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2023/751428/EPRS_STU(2023)751428_EN.pdf).

⁷ Liger, Quentin, and Mirja Gutheil. Right-wing extremism in the EU - European Parliament, May 2022. [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2021/700953/IPOL_STU\(2021\)700953_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2021/700953/IPOL_STU(2021)700953_EN.pdf).

discontent with existing political systems.⁸ These historical patterns have also influenced the resurgence of right-wing extremism in the early 2010s, the refugee crisis of 2015, and ongoing economic disparities within and between EU Member States.

Today, following the 2010s and the war period (1939-1945), we have similar patterns emerging as contemporary far-right parties capitalize on public grievances related to economic insecurity, perceived threats from immigration, and disillusionment with traditional political elites. These crises have exacerbated public fears and frustrations, providing fertile ground for extremist ideologies.⁹

Right-wing extremist parties have seen varying degrees of success across Europe. For instance, Marine Le Pen's *National Rally* in France has consistently secured substantial votes in both national and European elections.¹⁰ Similarly, the *Alternative for Germany (AfD)* has made significant inroads into the German *Bundestag*, challenging the traditional political order.¹¹ The traditional political order of the *Bundestag* has been dominated by centrist parties like the *Christian Democratic Union (CDU)*, the *Christian Social Union (CSU)*, and the *Social Democratic Party (SPD)*, focusing on pro-EU policies, a social market economy, and democratic values. The AfD challenges this order by opposing immigration policies, questioning EU integration, and using nationalist rhetoric, disrupting the traditional consensus and polarizing German politics.¹²

However, to tackle the rise of right-wing extremism, the root cause of it needs to be known. Recent data, connecting historical patterns have shown that the economic instability and high unemployment rates, particularly among the youth, have driven many to support parties

⁸ Fontana, Nicola, Tommaso Nannicini, and Guido Tabellini. "Historical Roots of Political Extremism: The Effects of Nazi Occupation of Italy." *Journal of Comparative Economics*, June 20, 2023. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0147596723000537>.

⁹ Georgiadou, Vasiliki, Lamprini Rori, and Costas Roumanias. "Is the Resurgence of Europe's Far-Right a Cultural or an Economic Phenomenon?" *EUROPP Blog*, October 22, 2019. <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/europpblog/2019/10/16/is-the-resurgence-of-europes-far-right-a-cultural-or-an-economic-phenomenon/>.

¹⁰ Darmanin, Jules. "Le Pen's National Rally Wins Seats, Airtime and Money in French Vote." *POLITICO*, June 20, 2022. <https://www.politico.eu/article/marine-le-pen-national-rally-win-seat-airtime-money-france-legislative-election/>.

¹¹ "The Populist Wave and Polarisation in Europe in 2024." *Solace Global*, May 27, 2024. <https://www.solaceglobal.com/report/populism-europe-2024/>.

¹² Lees, Charles. "Vote Seeking and the Strategy of Provocation: An Initial Analysis of the AfD's Impact on the German Bundestag." *AUSTRALASIAN PARLIAMENTARY REVIEW*, 2018. <https://www.aspg.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Lees-APR-33.1.pdf>.

promising radical change, just like in the Interwar Period.¹³ In some EU countries, the effects of financial crises and downturn trends in economics have eroded trust in traditional parties, pushing voters towards populist alternatives.¹⁴

Some citizens concluded that they also have heightened fears over cultural dilution and economic competition due to the refugee crisis and subsequent influx of migrants. Far-right parties have capitalized on these fears, promoting anti-immigrant policies and rhetoric.¹⁵ In Hungary, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's Fidesz party has used stringent anti-immigration measures to consolidate power and rally support.¹⁶ Additionally, many far-right parties like Fidesz are inherently Eurosceptic, advocating for national sovereignty over supranational EU governance.¹⁷ This stance resonates with voters disillusioned by what they perceive as the EU's overreach into national affairs. The Brexit vote is a stark example of Euroscepticism manifesting in a significant political shift.¹⁸ This action taken by the Brits highlights the tangible consequences of Euroscepticism, demonstrating its potential to alter the trajectory of a nation and the cohesion of the EU.

The appeal of right-wing extremism is not solely rooted in economic factors but also in cultural and ideological shifts. There is a growing sentiment among certain populations that their national identity and cultural heritage are under threat from globalization and multiculturalism. This narrative is skillfully exploited by far-right leaders to garner support.

¹³ Sipma, Take, and Carl C. Berning. "Economic Conditions and Populist Radical Right Voting: The Role of Issue Salience." *Electoral Studies*, November 1, 2021. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0261379421001281>.

¹⁴ Liger, Quentin, and Mirja Gutheil. Right-wing extremism in the EU - European Parliament, May 2022. [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2021/700953/IPOL_STU\(2021\)700953_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2021/700953/IPOL_STU(2021)700953_EN.pdf).

¹⁵ "Standard Eurobarometer 82 - Autumn 2014." Eurobarometer, December 2014. <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2041>.

¹⁶ Bíró-Nagy, András. "Orbán's Political Jackpot: Migration and the Hungarian Electorate." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, February 9, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2020.1853905>.

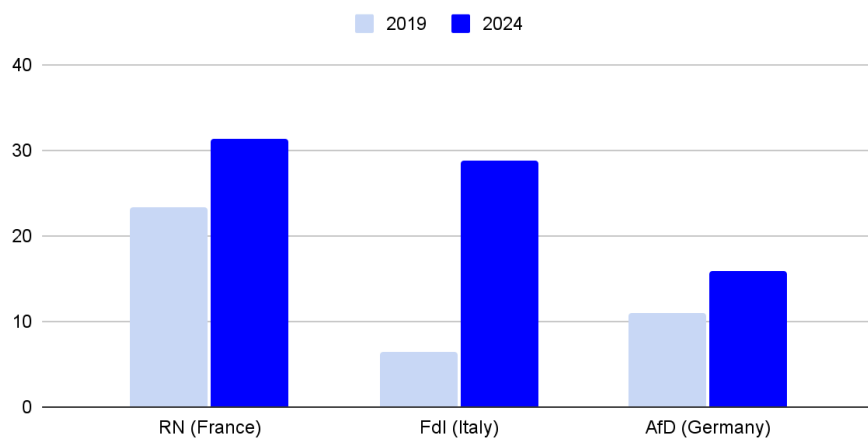
¹⁷ Bíró-Nagy, András, and Áron József Szászi. "The Roots of Euroscepticism: Affective, Behavioural and Cognitive Anti-EU Attitudes in Hungary." *Sociology Compass*, March 19, 2024. <https://doi.org/10.1111/soc4.13200>.

¹⁸ Shore, Cris. "Britain, Brexit and Euroscepticism." *Berghahn Journals*, September 1, 2021. <https://www.berghahnjournals.com/view/journals/ajec/30/2/ajec300201.xml>.

Moreover, the use of social media and digital platforms has amplified the reach of extremist ideologies. Far-right groups have adeptly used these tools to spread their message, mobilize supporters, and coordinate activities across borders.¹⁹

Possibly being impacted by this propaganda, the European Parliament elections this year reflected the overall support for far-right parties soaring with some countries highly contributing to this increase such as France, Italy, and Germany. Although it is important to note that the national parliamentary snap elections' results with round 2 being held on July 7, 2024, might alter the importance of this situation, *The National Rally* led by Marine Le Pen won over 31% of the vote, with a 7% increase previous result in France. Furthermore, *The Brothers of Italy* led by Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni claimed votes more than three times the previous result, and *the Alternative for Germany (AfD)* finished second with nearly 16% of the vote, up 5 percentage points from 2019 (Figure 1). With these countries being considered the most powerful countries in Europe, both politically and economically, policies that the MEPs from these parties have the potential to undermine the core values of the Union.

Percentage of Votes Gained at the European Parliament Elections (2019 - 2024)



[Figure 1: Percentage of Votes Gained at the European Parliament Elections \(2019-2024\), Comparative tool of the European Parliament.](#)

¹⁹ “The Media and Polarisation in Europe: Strategies for Local Practitioners to Address Problematic Reporting.” Publications Office of the European Union, 2023. https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2023-05/ran_the_media_and_polarisation_052023_en.pdf.

The rise of these parties has also already influenced national policies, often resulting in more restrictive immigration laws and a rollback of liberal democratic norms. In Poland, the Law and Justice Party (PiS) has enacted judicial reforms that have drawn criticism from the EU for undermining judicial independence.²⁰ The rhetoric of far-right parties often exacerbates social divisions, fostering an environment of intolerance and xenophobia. This can lead to increased incidents of hate crimes and social unrest. For example, Italy's League party, led by Matteo Salvini, has taken a hardline stance on immigration, resulting in polarized public opinion and social tensions.²¹ This polarization not only disrupts social cohesion within nations but also highlights the fragility of liberal democratic values when confronted with populist and nationalist ideologies.

Addressing the rise of right-wing extremism necessitates a coordinated effort at both national and EU levels. Nationally, Member States are best positioned to respond to specific local contexts, implement tailored policies addressing socio-economic disparities, and ensure law enforcement capabilities are adept at handling domestic security threats. However, the EU provides a crucial framework for collaboration and support across Member States. At the EU level, coordination enhances collective resilience by facilitating information sharing and intelligence cooperation, harmonizing legal frameworks to combat hate speech and extremist propaganda, pooling resources for prevention programs, promoting European values, addressing root causes like socio-economic factors, and fostering cross-national solidarity.

In conclusion, the rise of right-wing extremism and populist nationalism in the EU is a multifaceted issue driven by economic, social, and cultural concerns. It poses significant challenges to the unity, stability, and democratic values of the EU. Addressing this threat requires a nuanced understanding of its root causes and a coordinated effort at both national and EU levels.

²⁰ "The Populist Wave and Polarisation in Europe in 2024." Solace Global, May 27, 2024. <https://www.solaceglobal.com/report/populism-europe-2024/>.

²¹ "Italy Anti-Immigration Rally Draws Thousands in Rome." BBC News, February 28, 2015. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-31674709>.

How Might It Evolve in 2025?

The evolution of right-wing extremism and populist nationalism in Europe by 2025 is likely to be influenced by several interrelated factors, however, the main ones will most likely focus on policy influence, anti-EU sentiment, increased social polarization—referring to the deepening divisions and conflicts within society, often exacerbated by political, ideological, or socioeconomic differences—and authoritarian tendencies in governance. In this section, potential reasonings for this risk will be analyzed and a deeper examination based on current trends related to politics, economics, and social issues as well as expert projections will be provided.

Continued Electoral Gains and Policy Influence

Right-wing populist parties may continue to gain electoral victories across more EU Member States. Given their current trajectory, it is plausible that these parties will secure key positions in national governments and influence EU policies more directly. For instance, parties like Italy's Brothers of Italy and Hungary's Fidesz might consolidate their power, making it increasingly difficult for the EU to enforce collective decisions. The proliferation of the presence of far-right members in the European Parliament could lead to more frequent legislative blockages and delays due to these parties' ideologies leaning towards opposing initiatives related to liberalization, deeper integration, climate policies, and immigration reforms, potentially leading to institutional paralysis within the EU.

Within policy influence, we have seen when Hungary's Fidesz continuously succeeded in blocking the Union's support for Ukraine and sanctions on Russian aggression.²² With the provisional results of the European Parliament elections, right-wing and far-right parties skeptical of the EU's "Green Deal" package of environmental policies have also claimed a big portion of the

²² Schickler, Jack. "Revealed: The Far-Right EU Election Ads Flooding Social Media." Euronews, May 28, 2024. <https://www.euronews.com/my-europe/2024/05/28/revealed-the-far-right-eu-election-ads-flooding-social-media>.

parliament while Green parties have lost seats.²³ The skepticism of these parties of the Green Deal will inevitably lead to climate-friendly policies being harder to pass, while there may be attempts to weaken currently in-place green measures. Less focus on climate policies and a shift to industry will, in return, lower the EU's place in green-friendliness charts and exacerbate weather conditions, potentially leading to problems with agriculture, which then impacts the economy and turns this situation into a loophole, again, shift of focus to industry. This poses a big threat to the EU in terms of economy, stability, and progress.

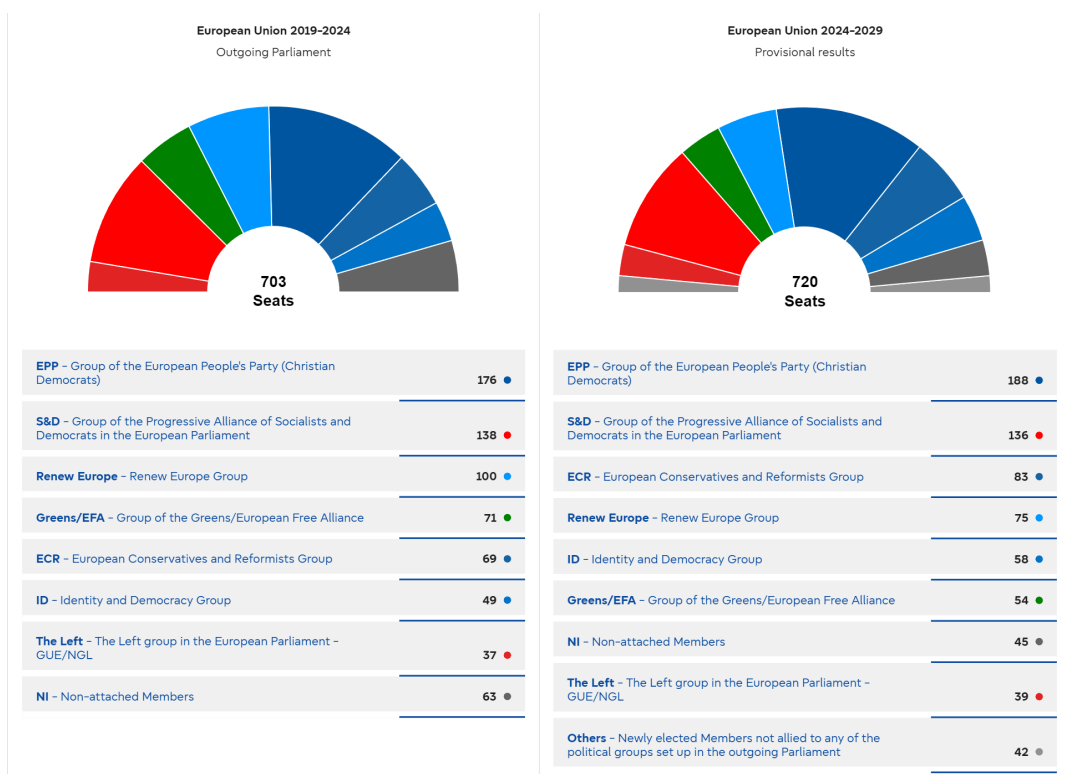


Figure 2: Elected MEP amount per party (2019-2024). Comparative tool of the European Parliament.

²³ Abnett, Kate. "EU Climate Policies Could Be Slowed in Future after Rightward Shift in Election" Reuters, June 10, 2024. <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/uphill-road-europes-climate-plan-after-eu-election-2024-06-10/>.

Intensification of Anti-EU Sentiment and Euroscepticism

As socio-economic challenges persist, public discontent with the EU could rise, further strengthening the appeal of populist parties in the eyes of citizens with greater life dissatisfaction. Economic inequality, unemployment, and perceived threats from immigration are likely to remain central issues due to the instability around the borders of the EU such as the Russo-Ukrainian War, Israel-Palestinian War, etc.

However, the EU's response to recent crises has shown its capacity to reinforce unity and resilience. The Brexit referendum was a significant test for the EU, with many predicting its collapse.²⁴ Contrary to these predictions, the EU emerged stronger, demonstrating its ability to adapt and maintain cohesion. The collective response to the Ukraine crisis, where member states united to impose sanctions on Russia and support Ukraine, highlighted the EU's dedication to its foundational values and mutual support, countering the narrative of inevitable disintegration.²⁵

Regardless, the high levels of life dissatisfaction—influenced by many factors such as social, political, and economic factors—can be exacerbated by far-right rhetoric that blames the EU for national problems, thus fueling Euroscepticism. Right-wing parties may intensify their campaigns for greater national sovereignty, pushing back against EU regulations and oversight. This could manifest in more Member States pursuing policies that don't align with EU norms, leading to legal confrontations and further weakening the cohesion of the union.

Far-right parties have also leveraged significant financial resources to amplify their messages and influence public opinion. For instance, far-right parties from Hungary and Belgium have spent €557,253 and €133,315 respectively on social media ads (Figure 3), using these platforms to bolster their electoral campaigns, and most importantly, spreading their anti-EU agenda. Hungary's Fidesz has been promoting its pro-Russian stance which has repeatedly blocked

²⁴ Vollaard, Hans. "One down, Many to Go? European Disintegration after Brexit." LSE BREXIT, March 24, 2020. <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/brexit/2020/03/23/one-down-many-to-go-european-disintegration-after-brexit/>.

²⁵ Tocci, Nathalie. "How the War in Ukraine Has Transformed the EU." Social Europe, November 15, 2023. <https://www.socialeurope.eu/how-the-war-in-ukraine-has-transformed-the-eu>.

the EU's support for Ukraine and sanctions on Russian aggression.²⁶ These expenditures highlight the sophisticated and well-funded strategies employed by populist movements to reach a wider audience and shape public discourse.

Party / Candidate With the Priciest Ads on Meta, 25 April - 24 May

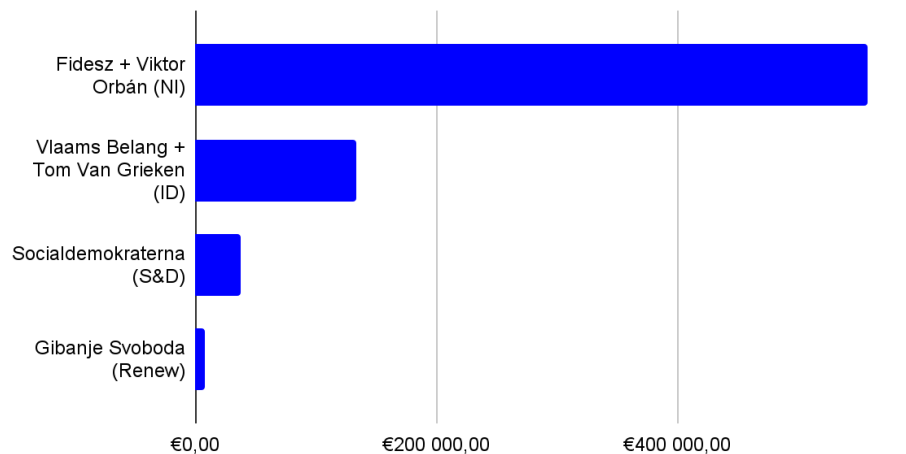


Figure 3: Political parties and candidates with the highest ad expenditures on Meta, as reported by Jack Schickler in Politico (2024).

Furthermore, after AI chatbots were found to be spreading falsehoods about the European Parliament elections on topics such as where and how to vote,²⁷ there has also been found a video on YouTube that said citizens were fleeing dictatorship in Poland, a member of the European Union, to seek refuge in Belarus in Russian.²⁸ Knowing that there are clear Russian-speaking minorities in European countries bordering Russia such as Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania with a part of their citizens acquiring Russian as a language due to parents, media, etc. this could pose a significant problem if the video was to circulate for a long time before the European Union's disinformation busted it.

²⁶ Schickler, Jack. "Revealed: The Far-Right EU Election Ads Flooding Social Media." Euronews, May 28, 2024. <https://www.euronews.com/my-europe/2024/05/28/revealed-the-far-right-eu-election-ads-flooding-social-media>.

²⁷ Simon, Felix, Marina Adami, Gretel Kahn, and Richard Fletcher. "How AI Chatbots Responded to Basic Questions about the 2024 European Elections Right before the Vote." Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, June 6, 2024. <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/news/how-ai-chatbots-responded-basic-questions-about-2024-european-elections-right-vote>.

²⁸ Mukherjee, Supantha. "Few AI Deepfakes Identified in EU Elections, Microsoft President Says" Reuters, June 3, 2024. <https://www.reuters.com/technology/few-ai-deepfakes-identified-eu-elections-microsoft-president-says-2024-06-03/>.

Increased Social Polarization and Civil Unrest

The cultural narratives promoted by far-right parties, focusing on anti-immigration and national identity, are likely to deepen societal divides. This polarization can result in increased civil unrest, as groups opposing these narratives clash with supporters. Countries like Germany and France, which have significant immigrant populations and strong far-right movements, might see heightened tensions and sporadic violence. As far-right parties continue to challenge the legitimacy of traditional institutions and the media, public trust in these entities may decline further. This erosion of social trust can undermine democratic processes and create an environment where misinformation and extremist views flourish unchecked.

Political violence is also witnessing an alarming surge in the European Union, driven by extremism and disillusionment. The gain of far-right parties has led to an unusually contentious political climate. The more extreme supporters of these parties, including violent and racist street gangs, are engaging in escalating levels of political violence. Analysts from the European Policy Centre attribute this uptick in violence, in part, to the general political climate and the upcoming European elections. This charged political environment has implications for European democracy and is seen as a forewarning of political earthquakes to come.

The EU's crime-fighting agency, Europol, reported in its December 2023 report that there were 45 arrests of far-right extremists in 2022.²⁹ Although this is a decrease from 2021's number, which is 61, ethno-nationalist and separatist terrorism done by extremist groups is something that can be expected with the rise of the right-wing.

A notable incident involved the Prime Minister of Slovakia, Robert Fico, who was shot and critically injured in the central Slovakian town of Handlová, in front of its House of Culture after a government meeting. The suspect, Juraj Cintula, a 71-year-old man who opposed Fico's national

²⁹ European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Report 2023, October 2023.
[https://www.europol.europa.eu/cms/sites/default/files/documents/European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend report 2023.pdf](https://www.europol.europa.eu/cms/sites/default/files/documents/European%20Union%20Terrorism%20Situation%20and%20Trend%20report%202023.pdf).

and international policies, was detained by police at the scene.³⁰ Although this incident was to oppose the right wing, it underscores the severity of the political violence and civil unrest that is currently plaguing the EU—whether in favor of the right wing or not.

Potential for Authoritarian Tendencies in Governance

In countries where far-right parties hold significant power, there has always been a risk of democratic backsliding, and this continues to be so. These governments might implement policies that weaken judicial independence, limit press freedoms, and curtail civil liberties. The cases of Hungary and Poland, where such tendencies are already evident, could become more widespread if not tackled adequately. Far-right parties in power might seek to establish their position by reshaping institutions to favor their agenda. This can include appointing loyalists to key positions, altering electoral laws to disadvantage opponents, and using state resources to support party activities. Such actions would further erode the democratic fabric of the EU.

The Trump effect, referred to as the impact of President Donald Trump's political rhetoric on society, is another factor that can further increase these tendencies. As Orbán is “waiting for Donald Trump”³¹ for the US elections this year, we know that his history with the President is extremely friendly with their relationship’s main focus being their far-right ideologies. Although the EU survived the previous Trump presidency, this time around things might be harder for the Union with two nearby wars and an ongoing energy crisis.³² In the case of Trump’s victory in the US elections in November, initially, Viktor Orbán followed by other far-right party leaders, will feel more empowered in both governance and passing far-right policies in the European Parliament.

³⁰ “Political Violence Rises in EU Driven by Extremism and Disillusionment.” Euronews, May 17, 2024.

<https://www.euronews.com/2024/05/17/political-violence-is-on-the-rise-in-eu-driven-by-extremism-and-disillusionment>.

³¹ Bayer, Lili. “Waiting for Trump: Viktor Orbán Hopes US Election Will Change His Political Fortunes.” The Guardian, April 25, 2024.

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/apr/25/waiting-for-trump-viktor-orban-hopes-us-election-will-change-his-political-fortunes>.

³² Moens, Barbara, Jacopo Barigazzi, Karl Mathiesen, Alex Ward, and Camille Gijs. “How a Second Trump Presidency Could Tear Europe Apart.” POLITICO, April 24, 2024.

<https://www.politico.eu/article/donald-trump-second-term-presidency-united-states-tear-europe-eu-apart/>.

With national elections with EU members such as Denmark, Estonia, Netherlands, and Greece having their Parliamentary Election in early 2025, we can also expect to see another wave of the far-right at a national level, especially if former President Trump is elected in November. All of these combined are inherently negative for the Union's political cohesion, and its unity as a new Trump-era will also trigger anti-EU sentiments highly.

In conclusion, the rise of right-wing extremism and populist nationalism poses a significant threat to the stability and unity of the European Union. The potential for continued electoral gains, intensified anti-EU sentiment, increased social polarization, and authoritarian tendencies in governance paint a concerning picture for the future.

Strategy to Tackle the Rise of Right-Wing Extremism and Populist Nationalism

The strategy to tackle the rise of right-wing extremism and populist nationalism goes through major changes in law and policies. The major actor with capabilities and a focus on lawmaking, policy Coordination, foreign policy and security, and international agreements is the main decision-making body of the EU; the Council of the European Union. As the Council is responsible for the lawmaking processes in the European Union, it is the institution needs to adopt coherent policies. In return, the Council should tackle the rise of right-wing extremism and populist nationalism with a focus on the main risks that will contribute to the evolvement of this risk. These are a) continued electoral gains and policy influence; b) intensification of anti-EU sentiment and Euroscepticism; c) increased social polarization and social unrest; and d) potential for authoritarian tendencies in governance.

Continued Electoral Gains and Policy Influence

Strategy: Strengthening EU Cohesion and Democratic Engagement

Promoting and adopting legislation that targets economic inequality within the EU is one of the crucial things the Council needs to work on. This includes enhancing the [European Social Fund Plus \(ESF+\)](#) to support job creation and training programs, particularly for youth and marginalized groups. Furthermore, coordinating with Member States to develop and implement national action plans focusing on social inclusion and reducing regional disparities would involve sharing best practices and ensuring coherent policies across the EU alongside collaborating with the European Commission and the European Parliament to introduce policies that support civic education across Member States. This could include funding for programs that educate citizens about EU institutions and their benefits.

Intensification of Anti-EU Sentiment and Euroscepticism

Strategy: Addressing Root Causes and Enhancing Communication

The Council of the EU should implement approval and coordination of policies that address the root economic causes of Euroscepticism, such as high unemployment and regional economic disparities. Focusing on green and digital transitions to create new job opportunities would be an action that aligns closely with the Union's values and might be an effective method of improvement. In addition, working with the European External Action Service (EEAS) to develop a strategic communication plan that highlights the EU's achievements and counteracts misinformation would be also crucial, as effective communication is one of the most important things when building relationships with citizens to ensure about the EU's structure, values, and

mission. Another measure might include facilitating agreements between the EU and Member States to support local engagement initiatives, such as community dialogue programs, town hall meetings, and initiatives that engage citizens specifically.

Increased Social Polarization and Civil Unrest

Strategy: Promoting Social Cohesion and Resilience

Negotiating and adopting union-wide legislation to combat hate speech and promote social cohesion is one of the key factors in dealing with social polarization and civil unrest. These legislation might include stricter regulations on online platforms to prevent the spread of extremist content. Next, coordinating policies among Member States to ensure robust social safety nets, which can be supported by the EU budget, with allocations specifically aimed at healthcare, education, and social services for vulnerable populations is crucial for the Council to ensure that there is unity within the EU in terms of social services.

Collaboration of the EU with its Member States is crucial. The situation of polarization in each nation might be dependent, for this reason, urging Member States to adopt policies that promote inclusivity and integration relative to their country's specific circumstances is significant. This includes funding for programs that support intercultural dialogue and community cohesion.

Potential for Authoritarian Tendencies in Governance

Strategy: Upholding Democratic Norms and Rule of Law

The Council should strengthen its role in upholding the rule of law by supporting the European Commission's Rule of Law Mechanism by ensuring that any Member State's deviation from democratic norms is addressed promptly. Promoting policies that ensure judicial

independence across the EU, the Council can facilitate discussions and provide support for reforms that safeguard judicial autonomy. Using its role in budget approval, the Council of the European Union is able to ensure that funds are contingent on adherence to democratic principles and the rule of law, meaning that any Member State undermining these principles could face financial consequences, especially if they are one who uses the EU's support to uphold the country's economic prosperity and strengthen their GDP.

While these strategies are plausible, their success depends on the Council's ability to achieve consensus among Member States, each with its own political climate and priorities. Additionally, the implementation of such policies can be limited by the necessity to respect national sovereignty and the differing degrees of commitment among member states, which may hinder uniform adoption and enforcement. Furthermore, members of the Council are often appointed by national governments, which can include right-wing administrations, potentially complicating the adoption of measures aimed at curbing right-wing extremism and populist nationalism.

It is also important to note that the Council Presidency rotates every six months. In the second half of 2024, Viktor Orbán will be holding this position, meaning that a Eurosceptic will be in this position. With such limitations, it is also necessary to call upon youth organizations and large companies to work on awareness and pressure. Nevertheless, by implementing these strategies within the Council's legislative and policy coordination framework, the EU can effectively tackle the challenges of right-wing extremism, Euroscepticism, social polarization, and authoritarian tendencies.

Shock Events

Shock events are sudden, unexpected incidents with significant impacts on societies and economies, often disrupting normal functioning and leading to substantial changes in social, economic, and political systems. The European Parliamentary Research Service has identified fifteen critical shock events in the areas of geopolitics, climate change, health, economics, and democracy for the European Union. Russian destabilization of the EU through political interference, cyberattacks, and military posturing; extreme weather events driven by climate change that disrupt agriculture and water supply; the decline in mental health among young Europeans due to economic uncertainty and social pressures; elevated sovereign debt limiting fiscal flexibility and risking economic stability; and threats to the democratic information sphere from misinformation and foreign influence³³ will be discussed in this section.

Geopolitics: Russian Destabilization Of Europe

Russia's military aggression against Ukraine, as part of its long-standing hybrid warfare strategy,³⁴ has destabilized various regions, including the Middle East³⁵ and Africa,³⁶ impacting EU security. The 2022 invasion significantly altered European security, prompting diplomatic effort

³³ Future Shocks 2023 - European Parliament, July 2023.

[https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2023/751428/EPRS_STU\(2023\)751428_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2023/751428/EPRS_STU(2023)751428_EN.pdf).

³⁴Clark, Mason. "Russian Hybrid Warfare." Russian Hybrid Warfare ISW Report 2020, September 2020.

[https://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/Russian Hybrid Warfare ISW Report 2020.pdf](https://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/Russian%20Hybrid%20Warfare%20ISW%20Report%202020.pdf).

³⁵Cordesman, Anthony H. "Russia in Syria: Hybrid Political Warfare - CSIS." 150922_Cordesman_Russia_Syria_Hybrid_Political_Warfare, 2015.

https://csis-website-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/legacy_files/files/publication/150922_Cordesman_Russia_Syria_Hybrid_Political_Warfare.pdf.

³⁶Stent, Angela, Daniel L. Byman, Harold Trinkunas Vanda Felbab-Brown, Vanda Felbab-Brown, Alexandre Marc Bruce Jones, Steven Pifer, and Yun Sun Angela Stent. "Russia's Wagner Group in Africa: Influence, Commercial Concessions, Rights Violations, and Counterinsurgency Failure." Brookings, March 9, 2022.

<https://www.brookings.edu/articles/russias-wagner-group-in-africa-influence-commercial-concessions-rights-violations-and-counterinsurgency-failure/>.

and warnings from the US and EU. Russia's tactics include weaponizing migration, energy, and cyber activities to undermine EU democracy and economy.³⁷

The EU's economic and energy ties with Russia changed drastically post-2022 invasion, leading to sanctions, a push for green initiatives, and reduced fossil fuel dependence. This has also prompted increased defense spending and support for Ukraine,³⁸ reinforced NATO's stance towards Russia and enhanced EU-NATO cooperation against hybrid and cyber threats.³⁹ Russia's future actions could vary from the expansion of the Russo-Ukrainian War to high conflict and hybrid warfare, impacting EU policies. The EU needs a revised strategy on Russia, emphasizing defense cooperation, expanded sanctions, and accelerated green transition, avoiding new dependencies on raw materials. Otherwise, Euroskeptics will blame the European Union in case the war escalates and more anti-EU sentiment will start spreading.

Climate Change: Extreme Weather Events

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) in its sixth assessment report (AR6) warns that significant climate change risks could materialize much sooner than expected, even at just 1.2°C of global warming.⁴⁰ Europe, warming twice as fast as the global average over the past 30 years,⁴¹ faces extreme weather events like droughts, heatwaves, storms, and floods that threaten health, economies, and ecosystems. Water stress, already affecting 20% of Europe's land and 30% of its population annually,⁴² is spreading from southern to central and western regions.

³⁷Bilal, Arsalan. "Russia's Hybrid War against the West." NATO Review, April 26, 2024.

<https://www.nato.int/docu/review/articles/2024/04/26/russias-hybrid-war-against-the-west/index.html>.

³⁸Aydemir, Emrah, and Oğuz Güner. "Crisis Management Policies Concerning the Russo-Ukrainian War in the European Union's Security and Defence Approach: Soft Power and Euam." Sosyal Mucit Academic Review, June 30, 2023. <https://doi.org/10.54733/smar.1223897>.

³⁹EU-NATO: 9th progress report stresses the importance of ever closer cooperation at a key juncture for Euro-Atlantic security EU-NATO: 9th progress report stresses the importance of ever closer cooperation at a key juncture for Euro-Atlantic security, June 13, 2024.

<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2024/06/13/eu-nato-9th-progress-report-stresses-the-importance-of-ever-closer-cooperation-at-a-key-juncture-for-euro-atlantic-security>.

⁴⁰Pörtner, Hans-Otto, and Debra C. Roberts, eds. "Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability." Intergovernmental Panel On Climate Change, 2022. https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg2/downloads/report/IPCC_AR6_WGII_SummaryVolume.pdf.

⁴¹Temperatures in Europe increase more than twice global average, March 16, 2023.

<https://wmo.int/news/media-centre/temperatures-europe-increase-more-twice-global-average>.

⁴²Zal, Nihat, Henrik Wolters, Alexander Psomas, Gerardo Anzaldúa, George Bariamis, Sebastian Birk, and Josselin Rouillard. Water Resources across Europe - confronting water stress: An updated assessment, October 27, 2021.

<https://www.eea.europa.eu/publications/water-resources-across-europe-confronting>.

The [EU's Water Framework Directive](#) aims for sustainable water use and mitigating droughts, but implementation lags. Reducing water demand, adopting new irrigation methods, and enhancing wastewater treatment are essential to optimizing water resources and mitigating the crisis.

Exceeding climate targets will worsen droughts, threaten food security, and displace millions, possibly creating a surge in [climate refugees](#). Europe must choose between adopting sustainable practices, such as drought-resistant crops and water conservation, or facing severe water scarcity and potential societal breakdown. The potential surge of climate refugees will alarm citizens with anti-immigrant views and further polarize the Union.

Health: Decline In Mental Health And Societal Well-Being Among Young Europeans

Young Europeans face a unique set of challenges affecting their mental well-being, including the digital world's pervasive presence, the threat of climate change, and disruptions from the COVID-19 pandemic. Digital technologies, while beneficial, pose risks like addiction,⁴³ social comparison-induced inadequacy,⁴⁴ and harmful content exposure. Climate change adds anxiety about environmental degradation,⁴⁵ and the pandemic exacerbated issues with social isolation, fear, and economic hardship, leading to increased mental health disorders.⁴⁶ Information overload, economic pressures, and potential social isolation further contribute to stress and anxiety.

⁴³Dresp-Langley, Birgitta, and Axel Hutt. "Digital Addiction and Sleep." *International journal of environmental research and public health*, June 5, 2022. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC9179985/#B9-ijerph-19-06910>.

⁴⁴"Mental Health in the Digital Age: Applying a Human Rights Based, Psychosocial Approach as Compass." *Mental Health Europe*, December 2022. <https://www.mhe-sme.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/Mental-health-in-the-digital-age-Applying-a-human-rights-based-psychosocial-approach-as-compass.pdf>.

⁴⁵Hickman, Caroline, Elizabeth Marks, Panu Pihkala, Susan Clayton, R Eric Lewandowski, Elouise E Mayall, Britt Wray, Catriona Mellor, and Lise van Susteren. "Climate Anxiety in Children and Young People and Their Beliefs about Government Responses to Climate Change: A Global Survey." *The Lancet Planetary Health*, December 2021. [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanplh/article/PIIS2542-5196\(21\)00278-3/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanplh/article/PIIS2542-5196(21)00278-3/fulltext).

⁴⁶Global prevalence and burden of depressive and anxiety disorders in 204 countries and territories in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, October 8, 2021, [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(21\)02143-7/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(21)02143-7/fulltext).

The report from the European Parliamentary Research Service outlines four scenarios for the future: strong social cohesion and mental health investment leading to resilience, effective climate action restoring faith in the EU, societal overwhelm with collapsing mental health services and rising populism, and rising anxieties despite a period of calm leading to social dissatisfaction.

Building mental resilience through strong social connections, healthy digital habits, and effective climate policies is crucial. Increased access to mental health care is also essential. A decline in mental health could devastate European society, leading to unemployment, homelessness, and suicide, with significant economic impacts. Societal dissatisfaction could rise, potentially fueling populism and threatening democracy.

Economics: Elevated Sovereign Debt

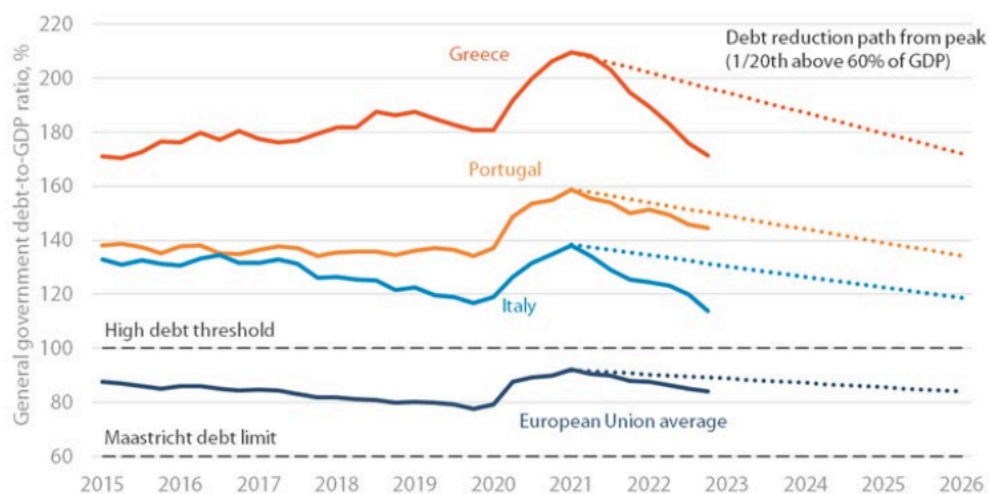
The EU faces a polycrisis⁴⁷ due to the pandemic and the war in Ukraine, resulting in significant economic and social impacts. Governments responded with fiscal stimulus to counter falling real incomes and investment, initially causing high deficits, but subsequent economic growth and inflation helped lower the debt-to-GDP ratio.⁴⁸ However, high debt levels remain a concern amid tighter financing conditions and the need for green and digital investments.

⁴⁷Janzwood, Scott, and Thomas Homer-Dixon. "What Is a Global Polycrisis? ." Cascade Institute, April 27, 2022. <https://cascadeinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/What-is-a-global-polycrisis-version-1.1-27April2022.pdf>.

⁴⁸Government finance statistics, April 22, 2024. https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Government_finance_statistics.

The Union supports its Member States through initiatives like the Recovery and Resilience Facility, but balancing debt reduction, public investment, and sustainable growth remains challenging. High government debt makes Europe vulnerable to economic shocks, especially with rising interest rates, and managing this debt while supporting economies is difficult.

The current economic governance framework is ineffective, and the European Central Bank's (ECB) actions to control inflation could exacerbate the situation, raising concerns about a new sovereign debt crisis. The future of European sovereign debt is uncertain, with rising interest rates making debt management difficult for highly indebted countries and potentially creating a negative feedback loop. A potential debt default of a Member State would significantly impact the EU, leading to increased economic instability and social unrest and resulting in the rise of right-wing and Euroscepticism as citizens will increasingly turn to political movements that promise to restore national sovereignty and prioritize domestic interests over EU-wide solutions.



[Figure 4: General government gross debt, EU and selected countries, 2015 Q1 to 2022 Q3, % of GDP, Eurostat \(2023\)](#)

The economic crisis has changed Europe's approach to public debt and fiscal policy, highlighting the need for a well-designed economic framework that allows for investment while maintaining sustainable government debt. Discussions include central fiscal capacity and joint

debt issuance to prevent future crises and make EU bonds safer, though there are concerns about the long-term risks of central bank interventions.

Democracy: Strategic And Systemic Threats To The Democratic Information Sphere

The online space for public debate is under attack by foreign and domestic forces through disinformation and fake news, amplified by social media algorithms that create echo chambers and limit exposure to diverse viewpoints.⁴⁹ Traditional media faces financial struggles and pressure on journalists, making it harder to find reliable information, thereby weakening democracy and enabling foreign actors to push their agendas. Artificial intelligence could exacerbate this by mass-producing disinformation. Information manipulation threatens individuals, governments, and international organizations, fueling conflicts like the war in Ukraine and weakening institutions like the UN and the EU. This erosion of public trust can lead to a rise in populism and hinder addressing global challenges.

The future of information is uncertain, with tech companies potentially becoming more political and misinformation blurring the lines between reality and fiction. In such an environment, where populist leaders and movements already exploit disinformation and mistrust in traditional institutions to gain support, this dynamic further polarizes societies and undermines the democratic process.

Democracies must collaborate to create a trustworthy online information space. The EU can combat foreign information manipulation by strengthening news media, supporting local journalism, reducing economic inequality, and setting global standards for online information, helping people critically evaluate the information they encounter online.

⁴⁹“Media & News Survey 2022.” Eurobarometer, July 2022. <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2832>.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the rise of right-wing extremism and populist nationalism in the European Union presents a multifaceted threat to the unity, stability, and democratic values that underpin the Union, driven by economic, social, and cultural factors. Far-right parties have skillfully exploited fears of cultural dilution and economic competition through anti-immigrant rhetoric and policies, eroding trust in traditional political parties and creating fertile ground for radical ideologies, leading to the increasing electoral success of far-right parties and their influence on national policies pose significant challenges to the EU's internal cohesion and external credibility.

Right-wing governments within the EU have enacted measures undermining democratic institutions and the rule of law, drawing criticism from the EU. These developments threaten the very foundation of the EU, which is built on principles of democracy, human rights, and the rule of law. Looking ahead to 2025 and the next term of the Parliament, the evolution of right-wing extremism and populist nationalism in Europe will likely be shaped by more national electoral gains, intensified anti-EU sentiment, social polarization, and authoritarian tendencies in governance.

The EU must address the root causes of right-wing extremism which requires a comprehensive and coordinated approach at both national and EU levels, initiated by the Council of the EU. Member States must implement tailored policies to address socioeconomic disparities, enhance law enforcement capabilities, and promote social cohesion. At the EU level, it is essential to strengthen mechanisms for collaboration, including information sharing, harmonizing legal frameworks, and supporting prevention programs that uphold European values.

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