

# After the elections – the European political groups

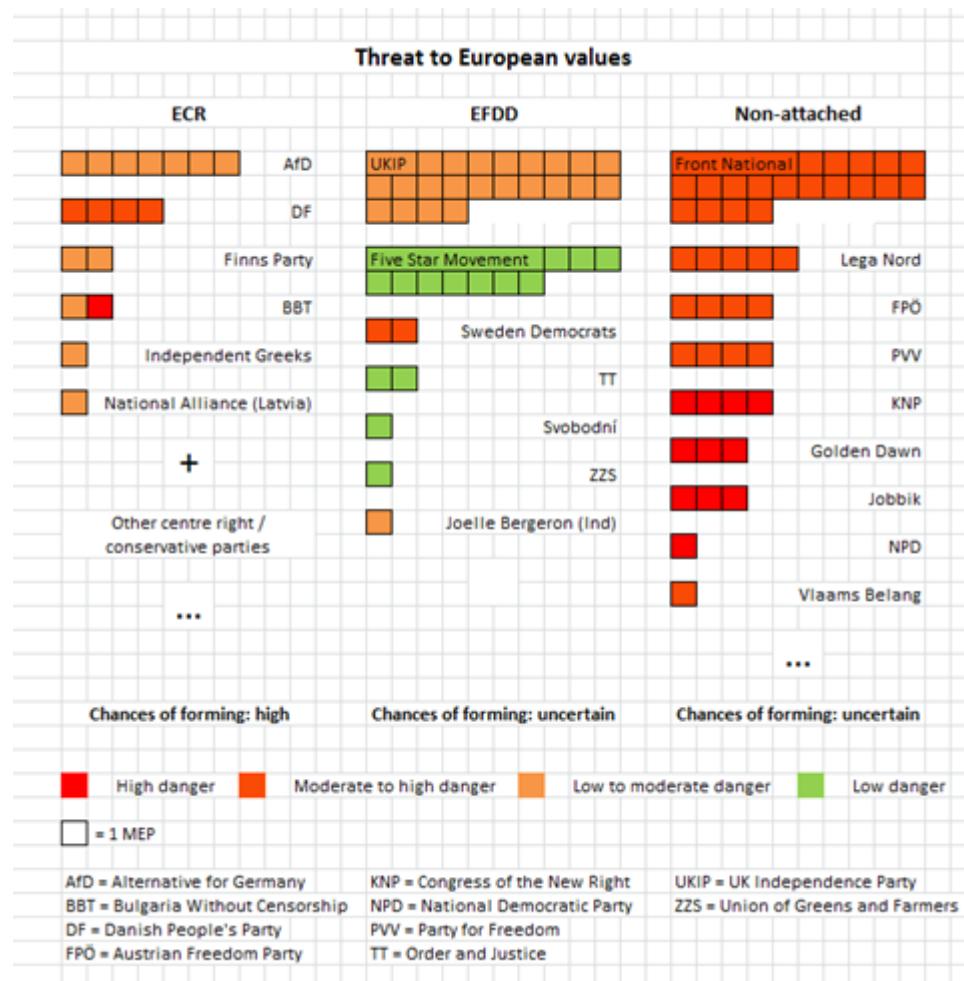


Chart 1: populist groupings in the European Parliament (rated according to threat to European values)

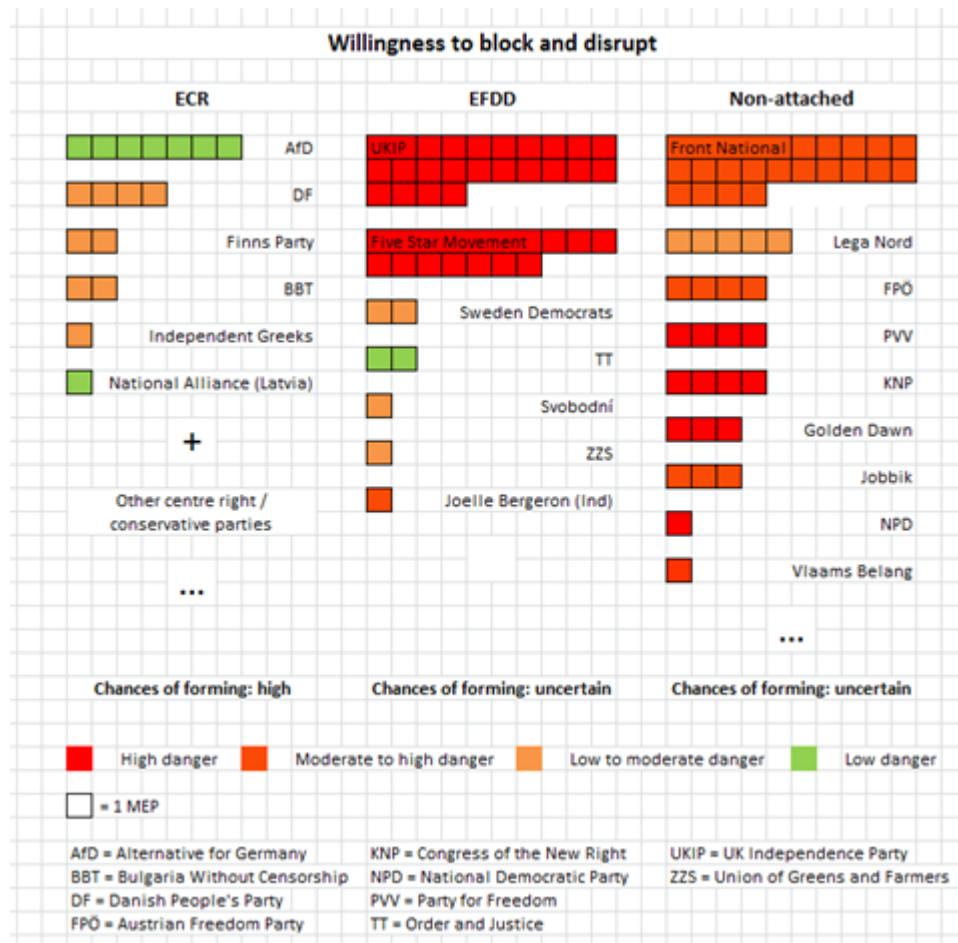


Chart 2: populist groupings in the European Parliament (rated according to willingness to block and disrupt)

Note: this is an update of our original post-election analysis, before the final composition of the European Parliament's political groups was announced on June 24. We have updated the analysis in line with this new information.

## Summary

- A strong performance by some populist parties at the European elections means that there is a significant increase in populist MEPs in the new Parliament.
- We have previously warned of the risk that the functioning of the Parliament will be hindered and disrupted by the incoming populists.
- Our charts (above and below) show that populists will be severely fragmented in the Parliament.
- UKIP has succeeded in forming a political group: the newly titled 'Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy' (EFDD). The Front National has failed to form a group for now.
- We have rated populist parties according to their threat to European values (openness, tolerance, democracy, etc.) The first chart shows that some populist parties are far more dangerous on this measure than others.

- *We have also rated populist parties according to their willingness to block and disrupt the functioning of the European Parliament. A high score on this measure does not necessarily coincide with a high score on 'threat to European values'. We give UKIP a relatively low score on the 'threat to European values' measure but a high score on the 'willingness to block and disrupt' measure.*
- *The more moderate populist parties – both in terms of their threat to European values and their willingness to block and disrupt – are more likely to have influence in the Parliament in comparison to more extreme forms of populism.*

## In-depth analysis

Last month we released a [matrix](#) comparing Europe's different populist parties. With the European elections resulting in record scores for some (though not all) populist parties, it is worth seeing how these strong performances will translate into a populist presence in the European Parliament. The variations we charted clearly show that populists won't all band together in the Parliament – their priorities, histories and strategies are too different for that to be an option. But there are some commonalities: here we chart them based on our analysis last month.

The charts shown here indicate the current arrangement of populist parties in the European Parliament. Parties had to submit a request to form a group by June 24. These groups can change over the coming Parliament – members can leave groups, join new ones, and form completely new ones. But this is the state of play for the moment. In our chart, the size of each of the party's blocks represents the number of MEPs they now have.

The danger these parties pose is twofold: a threat to open societies and European values but also a block to constructive policymaking and the functioning of the Parliament. The first chart rates the different parties on the first of these dimensions: 'Threat to European values'. The second chart rates them on the second of these: 'Willingness to block and disrupt'. We use a four-colour scale, from green (low danger) to amber, orange and red (high danger).

So, for instance, UKIP is rated as red on the 'Willingness to block and disrupt' dimension but amber on the 'Threat to European values' dimension'. This is because UKIP MEPs tend to operate as a purely unconstructive force in the Parliament, tending to vote no to any proposal put to them, but the party still broadly upholds European values: in our matrix last month, it received mostly greens and ambers on measures such as racism, xenophobia, homophobia and anti-Semitism.

Below we explain in more depth the methodology behind the two charts, including both the reasons for our decisions on the composition of the different groups and the rationale behind our ratings. First, though, we summarise the key messages we can glean from our charts.

## Key messages

To form a political group in the European Parliament you need 25 MEPs from seven different member states. The main political groups with little populist influence are, in order of size, the centre right European People's Party (EPP), the centre left Progressive Alliance of Socialists & Democrats (S&D), the liberal Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE) and the Greens-European Free Alliance (Greens/EFA).

Then there's the radical left GUE-NGL, containing a number of parties that have performed well at the European elections, including the anti-austerity Syriza in Greece and Podemos in Spain. With perhaps a couple of exceptions – such as the Dutch Socialist Party – parties in this group are not populist (see our [analysis](#)), so we won't focus on the group here.

This leaves us with newly formed EFDD group – led by UKIP – as well as the ECR and the parties that will not be part of any group (known as 'non-attached'). Populists are present across all three groupings – testament to their fragmentation and their differing priorities and aims. We look at each of these groupings in turn.

## The ECR

The ECR is dominated mostly by the centre right British Conservatives and the Polish Law and Justice party. Despite rumours before the elections that the group would struggle to meet the requirements to form, the ECR will in fact be the third largest group in the European Parliament: new allies include the Flemish regionalist N-VA, Bulgaria without Censorship, Electoral Action of Poles in Lithuania, two small conservative Slovakian parties, the Independent Greeks – and, more controversially, the Finns Party and the Danish People's Party. In short, plenty of MEPs from plenty of different member states.

Only a few of these parties could be considered populist – specifically the Danish People's Party and the Finns Party, as well as possibly the Independent Greeks, the Latvian National Alliance and Bulgaria without Censorship. We have included these parties in our chart. (In fact, the Danish People's Party is considered by the political scientist Cas Mudde to be a populist radical right party; he treats the Finns Party as a borderline case.) Within our matrix of populist parties, they were on the more moderate end of the spectrum. But they still exhibit the typical traits of populism – and the Danish People's Party in particular has a record of xenophobia and Islamophobia. Its [party programme](#) from 2002, for instance, states: 'Denmark is not an immigrant-country and never has been. Thus we will not accept transformation to a multiethnic society.'

On top of this, the Alternative for Germany party – again a moderate populist party according to our matrix – also joined the ECR after a vote by the group's MEPs. This was against the wishes of Conservative leader and UK Prime Minister David Cameron and a number of ECR members.

Finally, and most controversially of all, the ECR has admitted Angel Djambazki. Djambazki ran with Bulgaria without Censorship at the European elections but is in fact the Deputy Chair of the nationalist VRMO. He has made

a number of stridently anti-immigration, homophobic and transphobic comments and could prove a liability for the ECR.

The effect of including MEPs from parties such as the Finns Party, the Danish People's Party and the VRMO in the ECR is two-fold.

First, it could potentially help to moderate these parties – as Counterpoint author Martin Sandbu argued recently in the Financial Times, the inclusion of the populist Norwegian Progress Party in government has hastened its march towards respectability and reasonableness.

Second, it could help to legitimise more extreme and xenophobic voices. It appears to have opened the way for the Sweden Democrats – which has an extremist past but which also has a relationship with the Danish People's Party – to join with UKIP. (Previously UKIP leader Nigel Farage had said that he thought it was 'unlikely' that his party would work with the Sweden Democrats.) And individuals within the Finns Party and the Danish People's Party – for instance, the controversial Finns MEP Jussi Halla-Aho, who was in 2012 charged with inciting hatred against ethnic groups – have been legitimised by the move.

For the most part, what marks out these populist parties (particularly the Finns, the Danish People's Party and the AfD) from others in our charts is a willingness to participate in constructive policy-making. These are not just parties of 'no' – they have in the past shown an inclination to fight for reform rather than just block and hamper parliamentary activities. This is presumably one of the reasons the ECR is open to working them.

## THE EFDD

UKIP has successfully reformed its former group, 'Europe of Freedom and Democracy', under a slightly different name: 'Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy' (emphasis added). The group's members are very different to the EF(D)D's former incarnation. Other than UKIP, only one party remains as a member: the Lithuanian Order and Justice party (TT). Most of the others have left the group to join the ECR, though some have lost representation in the European Parliament altogether (the Slovak National Party and the Greek LAOS), while Lega Nord, UKIP's former major partner, left earlier in the year to embark on an ultimately fruitless attempt to form a group with the Front National and other likeminded parties.

In UKIP's new group, Lega Nord has been replaced by Beppe Grillo's Italian Five Star Movement, a populist party that promotes Internet-based direct democracy but that doesn't have a focus on immigration. In last month's matrix, we rated it as one of the most moderate populist parties. The two parties differ on major issues, including environmental policy, the economy, and the EU itself. But Beppe Grillo has showered praise on Farage, defending him from allegations of racism and stressing their commonalities. In particular, the two parties have emphasised their shared appreciation of direct democracy, presumably one of the reasons for the group's name change.

Still, despite this overlap, the sheer variety of MEPs within the EFDD make it a very fragmented political animal, less about a shared platform than about the individual benefits that come with official group recognition: funds, speaking time, committee seats, etc. The earlier EFD worked in a similar way. It had a very low rate of cohesion – its members voted in very different ways – and was held together ideologically by a critical attitude to the EU. (Even on this issue the different parties that joined with UKIP had quite different views – UKIP’s fully-fledged anti-EU position was much more extreme than other members.) There was no whipping system – members could vote however they liked.

The EFDD has not admitted violent or anti-Semitic parties, nor will it align with the stigmatised Front National. The purpose of this group is not to pursue a populist radical right message: it is, in the words of Nigel Farage, to ‘have fun causing a lot of trouble for Brussels’ without associating itself with parties considered too toxic. This is reflected in our two charts above: the parties currently under the ‘EFDD’ column are for the most part not fundamentally against European values, but they are willing to hinder the functioning of the European Parliament.

### **The non-attached members**

Before the elections, five populist groups – including the French Front National, the Dutch PVV, the Italian Lega Nord, the Austrian Freedom Party, and the Belgian Vlaams Belang – joined forces in an attempt to form a strong Eurosceptic block in the Parliament. However, they appear to have fallen at the first hurdle, unable to meet the rule stipulating that the group contain MEPs from at least seven member states. Many parties distanced themselves from the alliance, including the Sweden Democrats, who initially showed signs that they might join but ultimately went with the more politically acceptable EFDD. Others (such as the Greek Golden Dawn, the Hungarian Jobbik and eventually, after private talks, the Polish Order of the New Right) were too extreme for Marine Le Pen and Geert Wilders, the respective leaders of the Front National and the PVV. And finally, some potential allies – such as the Slovak National Party – failed to retain any seats in the European Parliament. While there is a possibility that these parties will pick up some independent MEPs and will meet the requirements for forming a group down the line, for now we expect them to remain as non-attached MEPs. (There is a small possibility that some will try to join the EFDD, but it’s unlikely that they would be admitted at this point.)

This means that there will be a large rump of non-attached MEPs in the Parliament, including the Front National and its allies as well as parties that are more overtly racist, anti-Semitic, homophobic and in some cases violent. (Some of these more extreme parties may not be considered populist, but we have included them here because they were considered by many as potential allies of other populist parties. For instance, the Polish KNP is better described as a conservative libertarian party with anti-democratic tendencies as opposed to a populist one. But it did engage in talks with the Front National and other populist about forming an alliance and for this reason we include it.) In last month’s matrix, these parties all tended to get red and amber labels along many measures, and in our chart above they clearly pose the greatest threat to European values. Most are also very willing to disrupt the

functioning of the Parliament. But their ability to do so is limited – without a formal political group, mainstream MEPs will find these parties much easier to ignore.

All in all, the encouraging message from our analysis is that, roughly speaking, the more dangerous populists will find themselves more likely to be marginalised in the Parliament than their comparatively moderate counterparts. Moderate populists looking to make more constructive contributions to policy, such as the Finns Party and the Danish Peoples Party, will, we expect, have more influence by virtue of their inclusion in the ECR, the third largest political group in the European Parliament. Other populists who are more willing to disrupt the Parliament's working will congregate in the EFDD. Finally, the most extreme parties won't be part of any political group. Few populists will be particularly influential in the Parliament – but the most dangerous will be completely ostracised.

## Methodology

How does the rating system for 'Threat to European values' in the first chart work?

The four ratings (green, amber, orange, red) are based on the scores we gave in our matrix last month. Taking the first nine columns in the matrix as proxies for 'European values' (from 'violent?' to 'sexist?'), we scored each red light as 2, each amber light as 1 and each green light as 0. We then summed the scores according to this rule for each party. We found four clusters of parties:

- Golden Dawn, Jobbik, Ataka and the BNP scored between 16 and 18 – we rate these parties as red ('high danger')
- The Austrian Freedom Party, the Slovak National Party, the Front National, Vlaams Belang, the Sweden Democrats, the PVV, Lega Nord and the Danish People's Party scored between 6 and 15 – we rate these parties as orange ('moderate to high danger')
- The Finns Party, the AfD and UKIP scored between 4 and 5 – we rate these parties as amber ('low to moderate danger')
- The Five Star Movement and the Norwegian Progress Party both scored 2 – we rate these parties as green ('low danger')

Some of these parties are not in the European Parliament, however, and some parties currently in the Parliament that are included in our chart were not in our original matrix. For this latter group of parties, we have given an approximate overall rating based on our knowledge of the parties and our judgment of where they stand in relation to the others in the chart. (The BBT block is split into two colours. This is because it consists of MEPs from two different parties: the nationalist VMRO and the BBT itself.)

How does the rating system for 'Willingness to block and disrupt' in the second chart work?

The four rating (green, amber, orange, red) are based on the behaviour of populist MEPs in the European Parliament. Table 5 (pp. 27-28) of our report 'Conflicted Politicians' ranks parties in the European Parliament according to how often they opposed the consensus in the Parliament on a range of issues. According to our analysis, four clusters of parties emerge:

- 'Parties of no' – such as UKIP and the PVV – who tend to vote against proposals regardless of the issue. They are at the top of Table 5 in our report (red – 'high danger').
- Somewhat less contrary parties, such as the Front National, the Austrian Freedom Party and Vlaams Belang. They are at towards the top end of Table 5 in our report (orange – 'moderate to high danger'). (We have placed Jobbik here despite the fact that it is ranked fairly low in the table in our report, given that Jobbik's position in the table is partly due to a high abstention rate among Jobbik MEPs and given that the party has a record of antagonistic behaviour in plenary debates in the Parliament.)
- More cooperative parties, such as the Finns Party, the Danish People's Party and Lega Nord. They are in the middle of Table 5 in our report (amber – 'low to moderate danger').
- Parties that are most likely to align with the political consensus in the Parliament, such as the Latvian National Alliance and the Lithuanian Order and Justice party. They are towards the bottom of Table 5 in our report or do not appear in the table at all (green – 'low danger').

Of course, we do not yet have information about parties previously not in the European Parliament. Here we have made judgements based on our general information about these parties as well as how these parties have behaved in their respective national parliaments.