

POLITICAL DYNAMICS IN SELECTED EUROPEAN STATES IN THE CONTEXT OF THE 2024 ELECTIONS: IMPACT ON SUPPORT FOR UKRAINE

France, Austria, the United Kingdom, Belgium, the Netherlands

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Introduction

A full-scale invasion of the Russian Federation of Ukraine and the ongoing economic consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic have heightened the overall level of frustration and sense of insecurity in Europe. Based on this, far-right parties are shaping their agenda by promoting ideas of Euroscepticism, anti-immigration policies, and demands for the lifting of sanctions against Russia. Following the results of the European Parliament elections in June 2024, as well as some and national campaigns, far-right political forces gained influential positions in certain countries. The growing support for far-right parties is largely driven by their success in other countries. For example, the victory of the far-right in Belgium's general election this year was significantly influenced by the far-right's success in the Netherlands in November 2023. Thus, cross-border influence is an important factor causing a chain reaction in the spread of far-right forces' popularity.

Another factor is the erosion of centrism in the political landscape of several countries, where traditional elites are losing authority in the face of complex challenges and are unable to form a government or ensure its stable operation. For example, the political crisis in the Netherlands and Belgium regarding prolonged coalition negotiations, the impeachment of former Austrian Chancellor Sebastian Kurz, etc., discredits centrist political forces and "old" elites in the eyes of voters. Moreover, France may also plunge into a prolonged crisis of government appointment, where centrist forces will find themselves under double pressure – from both the far-right and far-left that got into the new parliament as a result of early elections in July 2024. This creates an image of incapacity and ineffectiveness for the conditional political center, as well as enhances the mobilization potential of radical parties.

The next factor is the exacerbation of internal political conflict, within which far-right parties shift the focus from external threats to internal ones. Such a discourse can directly affect the interests of Ukraine fighting against Russian aggression. Despite awareness of the danger from Russia's actions, as evidenced by some sociological studies, far-right forces tend to shift emphases and seek an internal enemy. In this context, anti-immigrant rhetoric, which is a characteristic feature of the discourse and one of the main issues used to shift the focus from external to internal danger, turns out to be dangerous.

The article analyzes the factors that contributed to strengthening the positions of far-right parties in Austria, Great Britain, France, Belgium, and the Netherlands; as well as the political and social dynamics that formed in the context of local conditions. To analyze political dynamics, the following factors are considered: political stakeholders, narrative of political discourse, impact on Ukraine's interests, and cross-border cooperation of far-right parties.

The article also analyzes cross-cutting trends and provides recommendations for further interaction between Ukraine's political representatives and the main stakeholders of the mentioned countries.

Austria on the Eve of Autumn Parliamentary Elections

In the European Parliament elections in Austria, the far-right Freedom Party (FPÖ) led, securing 24.5% of the votes. This was preceded by victories in two local campaigns in previous years. Opinion polls confirm that on the eve of the general elections, scheduled for September 29, the Freedom Party (FPÖ) continues to enjoy the highest support (around 30%). In second place (20%) are the ruling conservative Austrian People's Party (ÖVP) and the opposition Social Democratic Party (SPÖ). The current parliament, which is ending its term, also includes the Green Party, which forms a coalition with the "People's Party", and the New Austria and Liberal Forum (NEOS), which takes an anti-Russian stance and questions Austrian neutrality. These political forces share the remaining votes. Thus, the current political dynamics in Austria are quite stable and predictable, as the far-right Freedom Party has been demonstrating a strengthening of its positions for several years in a row.

As early as 2022, during early local elections in Tyrol, Austrian far-right managed to regain their positions for the first time in four years after espionage and corruption scandals that had previously damaged the party's reputation. Their positions continued to strengthen in 2023 during local elections in Carinthia and Salzburg. The impeachment in 2021 of then-Chancellor Sebastian Kurz from the Austrian People's Party and the subsequent passivity of the "People's Party" in shaping the agenda also contributed to the strengthening of the far-right¹.

¹ <https://www.fondapol.org/en/study/the-fpo-and-the-challenge-of-europe-ideological-radicalism-and-electoral-constraints-in-austria/>

The current coalition is formed by the "People's Party" and the Greens, and distrust in the ruling parties is growing proportionally to the rise in popularity of the far-right. Among the challenges causing Austrians' disappointment in the current government are inflation; rising prices; and uncontrolled migration, which has reached significant proportions, considering the country's small size, after the start of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

The far-right Freedom Party was founded in 1955 and in its early years represented former Nazis, remaining in weak positions for decades. Its current leader is Herbert Kickl, a historian, philosopher, and *specialist in ideological design of political campaigns*. Thanks to him, Austrian far-right have an extensive network of horizontal partnerships with far-right parties in Europe, including the National Rally, the Dutch "Party for Freedom" (PVV), and the German Alternative for Germany.

Relations with Russia, particularly with the ruling "United Russia" party, were also formalized through a cooperation agreement, which officially terminated with the start of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. However, informal ties between the parties still remain active.

Currently, Austrian far-right have the closest contacts with the Hungarian party "Fidesz". Kickl views V.Orban's political system as an institutional model and advocates for an "illiberal" Austria. Kickl and Orban founded a new far-right group in the European Parliament called "Patriots of Europe"², so their partnership is central to the consolidation process of far-right parties in Europe.

Kickl and the Freedom Party oppose deepening European integration, calling for a clear division of powers between the European level and member states.

Meanwhile, globalization, the USA, and immigration have always been the main enemies for Austrian far-right to this day. Regarding the war in Ukraine, the Freedom Party takes a pro-Russian stance, calling for a "diplomatic settlement of the war" that implies Ukraine's capitulation, and opposing Ukrainian refugees and any form of Austrian aid to Ukraine, including humanitarian assistance.

Thus, socio-political discontent in society can be a source of support for the far-right and a consequence of the far-right exploiting sensitive topics to strengthen their power. Moreover, in the Austrian context, the historical experience of cooperation with Russia and shared past with neighboring Hungary are important, leading to closer cooperation between the far-right of these two countries compared to parties from other states within the "far-right network".

However, public opinion surveys show that over 60% of respondents support providing humanitarian aid to Ukrainian refugees and consider Russia's attack a challenge to European

² <https://suspilne.media/780117-patrioti-za-evropu-orban-ogolosiv-pro-stvorennia-novogo-ultrapravogo-bloku-v-evroparlamentni/>

security. Most Austrians lean towards the view that Austria should maintain its neutral status³. Thus, the presence of contradictory ideas, such as understanding security challenges while simultaneously supporting a far-right party that downplays the seriousness of the danger, may indicate typical cognitive dissonance in collective consciousness.

A growing support for far-right ideas (while in France, support for both far-right and far-left has increased) indicates the nature of social conflict underlying political dynamics in Austria, which tends towards isolationism. A support for the far-right is often associated with issues of national "purity", identity, authoritarianism, and social discontent can be directed at migrants, representatives of marginalized and vulnerable groups who are recognized as a "threat" to national identity. It's worth noting that according to sociological research results, Austrians consider neutrality part of their identity, and this confirms such a direction of social conflict⁴.

Political Uncertainty in France

In early July, early general elections to the Chamber of Representatives took place in France. After the victory of the far-right party "National Rally" (31.5%) in the elections to the European Parliament, the president of France Emmanuel Macron dissolved the parliament, which had three more years of its mandate ahead. Macron announced that early elections should clarify the real political situation, given the strengthening of far-right forces.

According to the results of the first round, the far-right led again, but in the second round, they received the least support as the coalition of left-wing forces and presidential centrists fielded joint candidates in regions depending on which political force a particular constituency leaned towards⁵.

The strategy for the second round worked, and the coalition of left-wing forces "New Popular Front" won (obtaining 182 seats in the parliament out of 577). The centrist party of the current president Emmanuel Macron "Renaissance" (163/577) took second place, while Marine Le Pen's far-right political force "National Rally" (143/577) came in third⁶. The elections also saw the highest turnout since 1997 at 66.7% (first round) and 66.6% (second round).

The left-wing coalition "New Popular Front" (NFP) includes several left parties, among which is the far-left "La France Insoumise" (LFI) (78/188/577) of Jean-Luc Mélenchon. The party has already declared its priority to be the cancellation of Macron's pension reform, which raised the retirement age to 64. The left-wing forces also include the pro-European Socialist Party (65/188/577), the Green Party (33/188/577), and the Communist Party (9/188/577) –

³ <https://www.fondapol.org/en/study/the-fpo-and-the-challenge-of-europe-ideological-radicalism-and-electoral-constraints-in-austria/>

⁴ https://ciaotest.cc.columbia.edu/olj/iirp/26_2006_summer/26_2006_summer_b.pdf

⁵ <https://www.france24.com/en/france/20240704-2024-french-legislative-elections-results-of-the-second-round>

⁶ <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/how-do-the-french-elections-work-b2574607.html#>

one of the oldest communist parties in Europe. However, Mélenchon is the only radical representative of the left spectrum, and his presence in parliament may threaten the cohesion of the "Left Forces" bloc⁷.

Far-right forces doubled the number of their deputies compared to the 2022 general elections⁸, so even third place is not an actual loss in historical perspective. Thus, the number of far-right deputies in parliament increased, despite their defeat in the second round. Moreover, the far-right remain a monolithic formation in parliament compared to their opponents.

A parliamentary majority must consist of at least 289 deputies. None of the three main political forces will be able to form a government based on the election results, so the next stage will be coalition formation. The current composition of parliament, where all three ideologically different blocs are represented by a significant number of mandates, indicates that coalition negotiations may be complex and lengthy. Emmanuel Macron has already proposed forming a situational coalition to prevent far-right and far-left forces from coming to power, despite Mélenchon's far-left being part of the "New Popular Front" that won the election. The French Constitution does not set deadlines for government formation, so the period of uncertainty may be prolonged.

Given that the situational defeat of the far-right "National Rally" was made possible through cooperation between left-wing forces and Macron's centrists, it is likely that these political players will form the parliamentary majority, although there is also a possibility of forming a minority government and technocrats.

The weak point of the situational partners, especially the "left forces" bloc, will remain the lack of an ideological basis as a unifying factor. The centrists, who positioned themselves as "neither left nor right" after Macron came to power, are now trying to become "both left and right". Thus, compared to Austria, democratic forces are trying to seize the initiative by adapting to ideological "swings" in society.

The election results were approved on the eve of the Olympics, which took place in Paris this year⁹, so the country continues to be governed by a "caretaker government", carrying out its functions within limited powers¹⁰.

Traditionally, the position of Prime Minister in France is held by a representative of the political party that won the elections, but both the Prime Minister and the government are appointed by the French President. Despite this, the parliament can declare a vote of no confidence in the head of government and his cabinet, so the appointment of the executive

⁷ <https://www.onedecision.com/article/who-won-the-elections-in-france-ceRGyioqzC>

⁸ <https://www.politico.eu/article/france-election-results-2024-map-constituencies-emmanuel-macron-marine-le-pen-live-new-popular-front-national-rally/>

⁹ <https://www.nbcnews.com/sports/olympics/bitterly-divided-france-comes-together-paris-olympics-rcna164985>

¹⁰ <https://www.rfi.fr/en/france/20240716-what-is-a-caretaker-government-and-what-does-it-mean-for-france>

head should generally reflect the parliamentary majority as well. Appointing a candidate from the presidential party as Prime Minister is the most balanced scenario, but it is possible for the government to be headed by a representative of a non-presidential or even an opposition political force¹¹.

In such a case, a situation called "cohabitation" arises. Therefore, currently, if a coalition is formed between the presidential "Renaissance" and the left-wing forces of the "New Popular Front" (or, as Macron proposes, with separate left parties, not including Mélenchon's political force), the candidate for the Prime Minister position will likely represent one of these two forces.

In recent times, France has already experienced a political crisis when the parliament and the president represented different political forces and had to "coexist". This crisis lasted from March 1986 to May 1988, when President François Mitterrand from the socialist camp was forced to appoint the right-wing Jacques Chirac (RPR – Rally for the Republic, a Gaullist, center-right and conservative political party in France) as Prime Minister after the parliamentary elections in March 1986.

From the perspective of strengthening radical ideas in society, the situation in France differs significantly from Austria, as the social conflict encompasses a broader spectrum of economic, cultural, and social issues, embodied in the increased support for both far-left and far-right.

Unlike Austria, where the split still occurs along the line of identity and tends towards isolationism, the social dynamics in France consist of confrontation between different strata of the population. In an extreme form, such a conflict can manifest itself in the form of civil unrest and violent confrontations.

Change of Power in the United Kingdom and Redistribution of Resources

In early July, general elections to the House of Commons took place in the United Kingdom. According to the final results, the Labour Party won, securing a majority of 411 seats out of 650; the Conservative Party held 121 seats; and another 72 seats went to the Liberal Democratic Party, which has been consistently strengthening its position since 1997¹². The Conservative Party, which had been in power for the last 14 years, lost about half of its parliamentary seats and is moving to the opposition.

¹¹ <https://www.politico.eu/article/france-election-french-prime-minister-new-popular-front-socialists-greens-communists-jean-luc-melenchon-france-unbowed-lfi-movement-marine-le-pen-national-rally/>

¹² <https://time.com/6995176/uk-election-result-labour-keir-stammer/>

The Labour Party traditionally enjoys support from voters in industrial areas of northern and northwestern England, in London, as well as in Wales and Scotland, where this time the "Scottish National Party" won, securing 9 seats, while only one candidate from Labour won.

Labour Party leader Keir Starmer was immediately appointed as the new Prime Minister¹³. During the previous Labour government from 1997 to 2010, then-Prime Minister Tony Blair led his party to power three times¹⁴, gaining support with promises of a "new way" and improvements. This year's Labour campaign also focused on "changes for the better".

If during their previous rule the Labour Party lost public support when they backed Great Britain's participation in the Iraq war in 2003¹⁵, the current challenges (which the previous Conservative Party government also dealt with) mainly concern the negative consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic and the completion of the Brexit process. At the same time, the start of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine is an issue on which both parties take a pro-Ukrainian stance.

In their election manifesto, Labour promised to strengthen the course towards "green politics" and spend 2.5% of GDP on defense. In particular, this concerns the Labour Cabinet's intentions to revoke licenses for new oil and gas projects in the North Sea¹⁶, which has already sparked a wave of criticism. Labour plans to stop issuing new licenses for oil and gas extraction in favor of investments in renewable energy sources such as wind power and nuclear energy, which is part of a broader strategy aimed at transforming the United Kingdom into a "clean energy superpower" and achieving zero emissions by 2050.

The result of Nigel Farage's far-right "Reform UK" party, who is the ideological inspiration and leader of the Brexit movement, can also be considered a victory. Despite Farage and his political force being in the European Parliament, He led his political party to power for the first time, and his "Reform UK" party secured four seats. While British far-right is unlikely to influence the strategic decision-making process, in their new status, they will be able to legitimize their discourse.

Farage's election campaign focused on anti-immigration policies and criticism of NATO. On the eve of the vote, Farage stated that the West was to blame for Russia's war against Ukraine due to NATO's eastward expansion, which received a barrage of criticism in response. Although this did not prevent the party from receiving votes, these statements demonstrated the line that Farage and his allies will promote in parliament.

Social dynamics in Great Britain are largely determined by the confrontation between the conservative and social-democratic camps, which will unfold around the redistribution of

¹³ <https://apnews.com/article/uk-election-keir-starmer-profile-labour-e98d16e0810273f6041b61747e084aac>

¹⁴ <https://sdplatform.org.ua/blogs/btrlbr>

¹⁵ <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2016/jul/06/david-cameron-uk-must-never-repeat-iraq-war-mistakes>

¹⁶ <https://www.carbonbrief.org/daily-brief/labour-confirms-plans-to-block-all-new-north-sea-oil-and-gas-projects/>

resources as a result of the changes that Labour promises to undertake. However, the polarization around anti-immigration policies, which, in addition to far-right rhetoric, was reinforced by the Conservatives' initiative to deport illegal migrants to Rwanda, expands the spectrum of disputes in society.

Prime Minister Keir Starmer, having barely appointed his Cabinet, faced his first serious challenge. After a deadly attack on children in Southport, which resulted in the deaths of three young girls, protests against migrants, particularly against Muslims, erupted across the country. In such conditions, the Labour Cabinet, which promotes a more multicultural and inclusive policy, began its first weeks of work. Starmer immediately accused far-right groups of destabilizing the situation and provocations, which caused a barrage of criticism, including from his supporters.

"Deep State" Saves the Netherlands from Far-Right Rule

After the general elections at the end of 2023, a political crisis unfolded in the Netherlands surrounding the appointment of a government, which lasted for over seven months (223 days). Finally, in early July 2024, a government was formed and approved by King of the Netherlands Willem-Alexander¹⁷.

Following the victory of the far-right "Party for Freedom" (PVV) in the November 2023 elections, which complicated coalition arrangements, after lengthy talks, the winners agreed that the government would be led by a politician who does not represent any party. The former head of Dutch intelligence, Dick Schoof, became Prime Minister.

As intelligence chief, Schoof led the Dutch investigation into the shooting down of Malaysian Airlines flight MH17 in July 2014 over temporarily occupied Donbas¹⁸, making this good news for Ukraine in the short term. Schoof is knowledgeable about the course of Russia's aggression and the real threats Russia poses to European security. At the same time, public opinion, which shows growing sympathies for far-right parties, indicates that the internal situation is complex and will remain fertile ground for Russian propaganda against Ukraine and the EU.

The newly appointed Prime Minister is non-partisan and was not included in the electoral lists during the elections last November. Dick Schoof replaced Mark Rutte, who, in turn, was confirmed as NATO Secretary General after Jens Stoltenberg's mandate ended this autumn¹⁹.

Thus, despite the government being led by a compromise candidate, the far-right "Party for Freedom" (37 seats/150) led by Geert Wilders won the November 2023 elections²⁰. It

¹⁷ <https://www.eunews.it/en/2024/07/02/netherlands-new-right-wing-government/>

¹⁸ <https://www.dw.com/en/dick-schoof-ex-spy-chief-sworn-in-as-dutch-prime-minister/a-69534805>

¹⁹ <https://www.dw.com/en/new-nato-chief-mark-rutte-faces-balancing-act/a-69416886>

²⁰ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-67504272>

surpassed the liberal "People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD)" (24 seats/150) of former Prime Minister Mark Rutte, as well as the "Green Left – Labour Party" alliance (25 seats/150), led by former Executive Vice President of the European Commission Frans Timmermans. The center-right "New Social Contract" party (20 seats/150) came in fourth place.

Timmermans' party refused to negotiate with Wilders' far-right, so the populist "Farmer–Citizen Movement (BBB)" (7 seats/150), which has 20% of the seats in the Senate, joined the majority, although in the 2023 general elections their support fell again to less than 5%. The populists question green policies, so they have more in common with the far-right than liberals and centrists. Negotiations between these parties lasted about seven months, and eventually, the participants agreed on a coalition program. The document focuses primarily on strengthening migration control and implementing stricter migration mechanisms. Wilders' Islamophobic rhetoric regarding the ban on mosques and the Quran was not reflected in the program. Interestingly, the program envisages the construction of four nuclear power plants.

The liberals (PVV) retain control over the climate department, justice, and defense. Notably, liberal Ruben Brekkelmans, a fervent supporter of Ukraine, has been appointed as Minister of Defense. The far-right will have their ministers in key positions in the migration, finance departments, and the Ministry of Internal Affairs. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs will be headed by Caspar Veldkamp from the "New Social Contract" party, a former diplomat with pro-European views. Sophie Hermans from VVD, who is the Minister of Climate Policy and Green Growth, has become Deputy Prime Minister.

Despite losing ground, the "People's Party for Freedom and Democracy" (VVD) retains important positions: Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Defense, Minister of Foreign Affairs, and Minister of Justice²¹. Wilders, in turn, has publicly declared his determination to shake the EU from within, and the new government's program includes a clause on promoting the procedure for a member country's exit at the EU level.

The social conflict underlying the political confrontation in the Netherlands is characterized by deep polarization, growing nationalism, and anti-immigration sentiments. The prolonged process of coalition formation could have caused deep distrust in the government. As in Austria, far-right forces in the Netherlands emphasize national identity and sovereignty, deepening polarization in society. Similar to Belgium, the political crisis after the elections complicated government formation, exacerbating the situation. The appointment of non-partisan Prime Minister Schoof was an attempt to stabilize the situation, but the polarized political landscape will maintain significant pressure on the "non-political" Prime Minister.

²¹ <https://www.politico.eu/article/netherlands-right-wing-government-dick-schoof-mark-rutte-party-for-freedom/>

Consequently, this will not solve the problem of social instability in the country, which is stimulated by the far-right.

The appointment of Ukraine supporters to key positions, such as the Minister of Defense, may maintain a certain level of support, although the far-right parliament will be able to pressure the government on certain issues – both regarding Ukraine and relations with the European Union.

Belgium in the Process of the Government Formation

Simultaneously with the European Parliament elections, Belgium held regional elections and general elections for the Chamber of Representatives. At the national level, far-right parties emerged victorious: N-VA (The New Flemish Alliance) led by Bart De Wever, securing 16.7% (24 out of 150 seats), and VB (Vlaams Belang) led by Tom Van Grieken, obtaining 13.7% (20/150). The latter advocates for the separation of the Flanders region from Belgium. Despite a VB MEP being accused of ties with Russia, misuse of European funds, and support for Nazism prior to the elections, this did not affect the overall voter sympathies²². All other moderate parties received 10% or less: MR (Reformist Movement), PVDA-PTB (Workers Party), PS (Socialist Party), social-democratic Vooruit, Flemish Christian Democrats CD&V, centrist French-speaking Christian Democratic party "Les Engagés", Prime Minister Alexander De Croo's liberal-democratic party OpenVLD, as well as other green and left-wing political forces.

The election results showed a significant gap between far-right and democratic parties. Notably, Prime Minister Alexander De Croo's OpenVLD party, who took office in 2020, lost half of its seats in the Chamber of Representatives, receiving support at only 5.45%. Belgium's political landscape reflects the country's internal regional division. Far-right parties are predominantly supported by voters from Northern Flanders. In particular, this region supports ideas of broader autonomy and even a change in territorial structure that could lead to separation. Southern Wallonia, the French-speaking part of the country, mostly supports left-wing political parties, and in the 2024 elections largely backed the MR reformists and socialists²³. Despite Alexander De Croo being one of the country's most popular political figures across all three regions (Flanders, Wallonia, and Brussels), his OpenVLD party suffered a crushing defeat, after which he announced his resignation.

Government appointment in Belgium is traditionally a long-term process due to the customary heterogeneity of the country's political landscape. In 2010, this process took a record 541 days after the June 2010 elections. The previous government was appointed by a coalition consisting of seven parties. Over the next few months, negotiations will be aimed at forming

²² <https://www.brusselstimes.com/1076987/nazism-fraud-and-russian-influence-vlaams-belang-mep-under-investigation-but-why>

²³ <https://www.dw.com/en/belgian-pm-announces-resignation-after-difficult-evening/a-69318069>

a coalition government between predominantly right-wing parties from the Dutch-speaking region and more left-wing parties from the French-speaking south.

This year's results indicate the presence of voter disappointment with the ruling elites, which resulted in a defeat for the former Prime Minister's party despite his personal popularity. Therefore, it is likely that coalition negotiations between parties will once again be prolonged²⁴.

Cross-Cutting Trends and Interdependence

Cross-cutting trends and interdependencies in pre-election and post-election dynamics in the United Kingdom, France, Austria, Belgium, and the Netherlands create challenges and opportunities for Ukrainian national interests and efforts to promote them.

The UK's support for Ukraine may become uncertain, given the need for the new Labour government to focus more on domestic socio-economic challenges and protest moods. At the same time, the newly elected French parliament, compared to its previous composition, will also be less stable due to the strengthening of right-wing parties and the beginning of the coalition and government formation process, which will also require greater concentration on internal issues.

The situation in Belgium will depend on the dynamics of coalition formation due to the increased representation of the right-wing party and greater support for far-right forces compared to democratic parties. Austria demonstrates an upward trend in support for the far-right Freedom Party, which is a traditional partner of Russia in the country. Russia has long-standing ties with Austria, as well as with Marine Le Pen's far-right forces in France.

The political context in the Netherlands, after seven months of searching for consensus, was stabilized by appointing an "apolitical" head of government, but public sympathies for far-right politicians remain. The appointment of former intelligence agency head Dick Schoof as a compromise figure indicates that the country has powerful stabilizing mechanisms of intervention in a political crisis. However, the social conflict caused by the support of radical far-right ideas may lead to new challenges and conflicts in the future.

Although the growing support for far-right parties in the aforementioned countries is a common feature, the political dynamics differ. Public opinion in Austria primarily indicates an identity crisis, while the situation in France and the UK is largely a consequence of broader polarization among different social groups mainly in the economic sphere. Prolonged coalition negotiations and the radicalization of political preferences in Belgium and the Netherlands indicate a decline in the level of trust in the ruling and traditional elites. This is

²⁴ <https://www.euronews.com/my-europe/2024/06/09/right-wing-new-flemish-alliance-wins-belgian-election>

particularly important given that Brussels is the center of European politics, and the Hague in the Netherlands is the center of international criminal justice. This situation is further radicalized by efforts from the Russian Federation, which may create additional socio-psychological pressure on local communities in conditions of uncertainty and danger. All far-right parties in the above-mentioned countries have various ties with the Russian Federation, as well as a developed network of horizontal connections, which is mostly used against European unity. An important role in the network of far-right parties is played by Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's "Fidesz" party, which maintains particularly close ties with Freedom Party of Austria, as well as with the "Party for Freedom" of the Netherlands.

The results of the European Parliament elections also demonstrated that the success of far-right parties in one country encourages similar sentiments in others. For example, the success of the far-right in the Netherlands contributed to the victory of Flemish separatists in September. This factor can also be applied to the mutual influence of the political landscape in Austria and Hungary.

Such cross-cutting trends may lead to a domino effect, creating a risk for the EU's collective position on various issues, including support for Ukraine. Although the strengthening of far-right parties began even before Russia's full-scale invasion, *the trigger narrative that stimulates today's social conflict around this political confrontation is precisely Russia's war against Ukraine.*

Against the backdrop of such dynamics, the pan-European agenda embodies the confrontation between far-right and liberal-democratic doctrines (in the UK – conservative and social-democratic), as well as the juxtaposition of ideas about preserving EU unity with strengthened integration on one hand, and the desire to strengthen national priorities and sovereignty on the other (in the UK – the desire to strengthen global leadership).

Far-right parties use this prism both to stimulate discourse on national sovereignty and identity at the national level, and to spread discord in the EU through narratives about the "aggressive" West (which is common to both the EU and the UK), among others. At the pan-European level, such rhetoric will threaten the reform of institutions, the implementation of green policies (and weak support for this course is clearly visible in the results of national campaigns), the continuation of sanctions against Russia, and Ukraine's European integration.

At the same time, the key narrative of far-right parties' political programs is EU skepticism and anti-immigrant rhetoric. These narratives can weaken public support for foreign policy initiatives, including aid to Ukraine, and may have negative consequences for Ukrainian refugees and Ukraine's European integration process.

Russian disinformation campaigns are often directed at these states to sow division, strengthen Euroscepticism, and promote hate speech against national minorities and vulnerable groups.

The issue of Ukrainian refugees may be particularly sensitive for Austria, as the country became a refuge for a significant number of Bosnian refugees after the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina. This prioritizes the European integration of the Western Balkans over Ukraine's European integration for the Austrian political class.

Considering that parliamentary elections will be held in Bosnia and Herzegovina this October, it should be expected that Austria's focus as an EU member state will be directed towards the Western Balkans, and far-right parties, in the context of their own political interests, may manipulate the topic of Ukraine's European future.

System of Risks for Ukraine's National Interests in the Context of European Political Discourse

The risks for Ukraine, shaped by the current situation in the EU in the context of political dynamics considering elections in several countries, can be assessed through conditional factors that prioritize current significance (X) of a particular risk for European and national politics, as well as the potential for escalation (Y). According to the analysis of the above situation, we provide a list of risks in appropriate order:

i. Risk of further growth of populism and far-right influence (8,8);

The strengthening of far-right parties and populists is one of the growing trends in Europe that could threaten Ukraine's national interests and EU unity. These movements are gaining momentum across Europe and could significantly change the foreign policy of key countries, promoting isolationism, reducing international commitments, and undermining EU unity, while acting jointly to undermine further integration.

The rise of populism directly threatens the pro-European and pro-Ukrainian policies that currently dominate in many EU countries. This risk is rapidly growing (X) and poses an immediate threat to Ukraine's interests. The risk is also significant (Y) due to its potential to influence decisions regarding support for Ukraine.

ii. Context of contrasting EU unity with national sovereignty (7,7);

The tension between preserving EU unity and the desire for greater national sovereignty is becoming increasingly palpable. This dynamic affects how collective decisions are made in the EU, particularly regarding foreign policy and sanctions against Russia, and also distorts public opinion about the EU, hinders discussions on reforming European institutions, and may negatively impact the European integration of candidate countries.

This risk is critical, as a shift towards national sovereignty policies could lead to fragmentation of EU policy, reducing readiness for collective decisions in support of Ukraine. The risk also has high significance on the significance axis (Y) due to its growing relevance, especially with the rise of populist and nationalist movements. However, it is somewhat lower than the previous one on the growth rate axis, as this is a broader issue that affects EU mechanisms and is not an immediate electoral effect.

iii. Economic pressure and foreign policy changes (6,6);

Economic pressure, especially in the context of post-pandemic recovery and energy costs due to the war, is leading to changes in foreign policy priorities. Countries facing economic problems may prioritize domestic issues over international commitments, including support for Ukraine.

This risk is significant as economic downturn can lead to reduced public and political support for foreign aid, including military and financial assistance to Ukraine, and may also lead to demands to return to economic relations with Russia and reduce sanctions.

The risk is in the middle of the scale. Although it is causing increasing concern, it is predictable and can be mitigated through strategic economic partnerships and diplomacy on Ukraine's part.

iv. Cross-border influence of Russia's propaganda on public opinion (5,5);

Russian propaganda narratives and their impact on public opinion are increasingly shaped by transnational influences, as well as by far-right parties that broadcast a pro-Russian agenda. This can significantly affect public sentiment and, in turn, political decisions.

This risk is in the middle of both axes, as its impact is growing but also heavily depends on the specific electoral context.

v. Russia's influence on European politics (4,4);

Russia's influence on European politics through direct support of certain political parties, disinformation campaigns, and energy blackmail remains a significant threat. This influence can alter election results and shift policies in Russia's favor, undermining support for Ukraine.

vi. Economic interdependence and energy security (3,3);

Europe's economic interdependence with Russia, especially in the energy sector, complicates foreign policy decision-making. Countries dependent on Russian energy may be reluctant to support tough sanctions or increase aid to Ukraine. This risk is placed lower on the Y-axis as Europe's efforts towards energy diversification are gradually reducing dependence on Russia, however, hidden supplies of Russian energy should be investigated and made public.

vii. The role of the European Union and NATO (2,2);

The EU and NATO are critically important institutions for Ukraine's security and support. However, their effectiveness is often questioned due to internal disagreements, bureaucratic delays, and differing priorities of member countries.

This risk is relatively insignificant due to the conditional stability of the EU and NATO as organizations. The main concern is the potential for internal disagreements.

viii. Migration and refugee flows (1,1);

The influx of Ukrainian refugees to Europe creates both challenges and opportunities. This could drain resources and inflame anti-immigrant sentiment, which populists can exploit. At the same time, it strengthens the direct human connection between Ukraine and Europe. This risk has the lowest level on the Y-axis because it does not increase rapidly, but remains constant. It is placed last on the X-axis because it is less likely to cause immediate policy change compared to other risks, but requires careful management to prevent its transformation into a more sensitive issue.

The proposed risk system reflects a strategic assessment of their urgency, growth potential, and direct impact on Ukraine's national interests. The growth of far-right sentiments and associated risks are prioritized due to their rapid increase and the immediate threat they pose to European support for Ukraine.

Matrix Analysis of Socio-Political Dynamics

Country	Main Political Actors	Political Discourse Narrative	Possible Short-term Scenarios	Social Dynamics and Public Opinion (Based on D. Moisi's "Geopolitics of Emotions" concept)	Impact and Risks
United Kingdom	Conservative Party, Labour Party, Prime Minister, newly appointed government	Conservatives: for improving "British standards", education, living standards. Liberals: for a fair society. Far-right: anti-immigration policy, economic reforms.	Scenario 1: Active countermeasures in the context of mass events provide temporary order, but destroy the Labour's "democratic" image and deepen social fragmentation. Scenario 2: Passive participation in resolving mass protests stabilizes the situation in the longer term,	Mass protests in the UK, anti-immigrant sentiments. Ongoing consequences of Brexit contributed to general frustration and fatigue with the Conservatives. Labour's victory led to conditional attribution of responsibility with the previous government. The dominant emotion of anxiety (anger), which is a	Support for Ukraine is likely to continue, but political uncertainty may deepen as a result of economic reforms and the outcome of crisis resolution and mass protests. This may contribute to public resistance to spending on aid to Ukraine.

POLITICAL DYNAMICS IN SELECTED EUROPEAN STATES IN THE CONTEXT OF THE 2024 ELECTIONS: IMPACT ON SUPPORT FOR UKRAINE

			requires significant public spending.	catalyst for mass protests.	
France	Far-right "National Rally", centrist "Renaissance", left-wing bloc "New Popular Front"	Far-right: tax reduction, anti-immigration policy, flirtation with young voters through promises of economic incentives, security issues. Left-wing bloc: cancellation of Macron's pension reform. Macron's centrists: improving labor legislation, stabilizing the economy.	Scenario 1: Appointment of a majority government as a result of forming a majority between pro-presidential centrists and the left bloc, the far-right remains an influential monopoly force. Scenario 2: Appointment of a minority government as a result of forming a majority between pro-presidential centrists and the left bloc, the far-right remains an influential force. Scenarios 3 and 4: Appointment of a minority government or a Prime Minister representing the opposition (left bloc), a far-right government is unlikely.	Shocking results of the European Parliament vote, post-electoral discourse of seeking consensus, reflection on the results of the Olympics. The dominant emotion of hope as a result of successful consolidation of efforts against the far-right.	Strengthening of radical ideas of both right and left orientation complicates France's socio-political dynamics compared to other countries analyzed, deepens polarization in society and creates double pressure on centrist democratic forces. At the same time, this state of affairs excludes isolationism and expands options for political play. Support for Ukraine is beneficial for Macron's centrists. If a centrist government is appointed, support may grow until the end of the presidential term, which ends in 2027, and also in the context of competition with the US for leadership in the context of the EU security situation.
Austria	Far-right "Freedom Party", pro-government "People's Party", "Social Democratic Party", pro-Euro-Atlantic party "New Liberal Forum"	Euro-scepticism, opposition to EU green policy, traditional conservative values, neutrality, economic ties with Russia, skeptical attitude towards sanctions. NEOS: pro-European position, for deepening European integration.	Scenario 1: As a result of strengthening, the far-right forms a coalition with an ally – the "People's Party" – following the 2017 model, which is the most likely scenario, given the proximity of pre-election narrative vectors. Scenario 2: Formation of a broader coalition between the "Freedom Party",	Local perception of neutrality and economic interests with Russia. Fear is the prevailing emotion, causing rejection of multiculturalism, avoidance of responsibility and passivity through discourse instrumentalization (neutrality as part of identity).	Austria is likely to continue avoiding involvement in practical support for Ukraine. At the same time, there is a risk of Austrian elites influencing the course of international investigations of war crimes (their sabotage or promotion of pro-Russian positions), blocking the course of negotiations between Ukraine and the EU on further European integration in the

			<p>"People's Party" and "Social Democrats".</p> <p>Scenario 3: Formation of a coalition between the "People's Party", "Greens" with the involvement of other political parties to limit the influence of the far-right.</p>		<p>context of supporting Western Balkans European integration on the eve of elections in Bosnia and Herzegovina.</p> <p>2024 does not seem favorable for constructive cooperation with Austria at the highest level, but Ukraine should develop contacts with the pro-Euro-Atlantic "New Liberal Forum".</p>
Belgium	<p>Far-right N-VA and Vlaams Belang, "Reformist Movement", "Socialist Party", liberal Open VLD</p>	<p>Far-right Vlaams Belang: independence of the Flanders region, anti-immigration policy, flirtation and strengthening of regional differences in the country.</p> <p>Far-right N-VA promotes more moderate views and promotes a confederal model of Belgium's structure.</p> <p>Socialists: social and economic equality.</p> <p>Labor Party: radical economic changes, luxury taxes, expanded social guarantees.</p>	<p>Scenario 1: Vlaams Belang coming to power destroys the coalition, leading to reduced attention to Ukraine and a prolonged internal crisis that will have consequences for the entire EU.</p> <p>Scenario 2: A stable coalition is formed in the long term and continues moderate support for Ukraine within the EU framework.</p> <p>Scenario 3: Involvement of "apolitical" stabilizing factors following the example of the Netherlands.</p>	<p>Separatist sentiments contribute to increasing confusion and disbelief in the constitutional order. Given Belgium's significant place in the European context, such sentiments may have a negative impact at the EU level.</p> <p>Confusion is likely the dominant emotion of the period, caused by political fragmentation and identity conflict.</p>	<p>Coalition stability is crucial; any breakdown could reduce Belgium's support for Ukraine.</p> <p>Moderate risk, depends on coalition stability and far-right influence.</p>
Netherlands	<p>Far-right "Party for Freedom", liberal "People's Party for Freedom and Democracy", "Green Left – Labor Party" alliance, center-right "New</p>	<p>Liberals: stable economy, "pragmatic" immigration policy.</p> <p>Far-right: strict anti-immigration policy, national identity, sovereignty</p>	<p>Scenario 1: PVV's growth questions the Netherlands' pro-Ukrainian position, which may lead to reduced support.</p> <p>Scenario 2: Centrist parties maintain strong EU sanctions</p>	<p>Public sentiments about immigration and their impact on foreign policy are at the heart of social tension.</p> <p>At the same time, there is an "ambivalence" in the search for an enemy</p>	<p>Pro-Ukrainian policy is likely to continue due to the fact that the far-right did not receive key foreign policy positions.</p> <p>However, the broad polarization of the population due to the strengthening of both</p>

	Social Contract", populist "Farmers' Party", Intelligence agencies	evolving into Euroscepticism. Left and Greens: social policy, social equality, green policy.	and support for Ukraine. Scenario 3: Intelligence structures continue to play a crucial role in stabilizing the political landscape.	due to Eurosceptic discourse, which exists in parallel with the anti-immigrant narrative (internal and external enemy). Uncertainty (anger) caused by political and social tension.	left and right ideas is a favorable ground for Russian information interference. Potential isolationist shift if the far-right gains influence. Strong Eurosceptic sentiments.
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Conclusions and Recommendations

1. As a result of the elections in France, a parliament was formed in which no political force (left bloc, far-right, pro-government centrists) formed a majority, so political tension will lie in finding consensus on forming a majority and appointing the Cabinet of Ministers.
2. The appointment of a Prime Minister from the ruling political force will strengthen the position of the country's leader Emmanuel Macron in the second half of the presidential mandate, which ends in 2027, while the appointment of a Prime Minister from the right-wing forces will help reduce social tension.
3. France's support for Ukraine will continue to be a matter of competition for leadership in Europe with the United States, so political confrontation in France generally does not create significant risks for Ukraine. However, it is recommended to take into account cross-border cooperation between far-right parties that promote ideas of Euroscepticism.
4. At the same time, situational cooperation between the far-left (Mélenchon) and the far-right (Le Pen) may have a negative effect on Ukraine.
5. Mass protests in the UK demonstrated significant potential for inter-ethnic tensions in society, creating substantial risks for the newly elected Labour government, which positions itself as a more democratic political force. Under such conditions, decisive actions and decisions by the authorities to counter violence may undermine the image/trust in the newly appointed government and deepen social conflict.
6. The issue of the war in Ukraine remains consensual for British public opinion. However, in case of escalation of social tension, the Ukraine factor may become a trigger of irritation for public opinion, which will demand greater focus of the authorities on internal issues. Such risks also create grounds for anti-Ukrainian rhetoric from far-right forces.
7. Far-right forces in the above-mentioned countries are generally guided by narratives about anti-immigration policy; demonization of the West as an "aggressor" in Russia's

- war against Ukraine; justification of economic challenges by the introduction of anti-Russian sanctions; Euroscepticism and stimulating distrust in the EU. At the same time, moderately right-wing and conservative political parties that mainly focus on nationalist and sovereignist ideas do not pose a danger to Ukraine as long as their rhetoric does not focus on Euroscepticism.
8. The landscape of European right-wing political parties requires more detailed analysis by Ukrainian government representatives and intelligence agencies to determine acceptable risks from possible cooperation with moderate right-wing parties (European reformists and conservatives).
 9. Ukraine should work on creating transnational alliances with centrist and pro-European parties in these countries to counter the growth of populist and far-right movements. This may include diplomatic work, participation in European forums, and public diplomacy campaigns.
 10. Ukraine should emphasize its historical ties with European countries, especially those based on shared experiences of resisting authoritarianism. This can strengthen emotional and moral support for Ukraine's struggle against Russian aggression. Such a strategy, with additional analysis, may be appropriate for the Austrian context in cooperation with the "New Liberal Forum", which is the country's most prominent pro-European force.
 11. For stable economic support, Ukraine should formulate long-term benefits that would be attractive to partners, and emphasize the long-term economic benefits of partnership on recovery issues, further investments in energy security, and trade opportunities in the post-war period.
 12. Ukraine should cooperate with European countries on managing refugee flows, ensuring the needs of Ukrainian citizens abroad are met, while also taking into account the concerns of host countries. This can help mitigate any negative political reactions related to migration issues and reduce the negative effect of anti-immigration policies in several countries that may threaten Ukrainian citizens.
 13. Ukraine should cooperate with European media, non-governmental organizations, and governments to expose and counter Russian information interventions; create and disseminate convincing content that not only debunks Russian propaganda but also promotes the Ukrainian perspective in the context of positioning a strong Ukraine in the world, and the "gains" from this for the international community.
 14. Ukraine is recommended to diversify communication within public diplomacy, taking into account local peculiarities and contexts in different countries.

15. Ukraine's efforts should also be aimed at undermining Russia's ability to influence European public opinion, especially in the context of interference in elections, lobbying economic interests, and lifting sanctions.

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The information and views set out in this study are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official opinion of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung e.V. or the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine.

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