CONTENTS

List of Main Characters vii

List of Illustrations xi

Preface and Acknowledgements xiii

Abbreviations xvii

1 Introduction 1

2 Parliamentary Microcosm 23

3 The Stakes at Play in Direct Elections 48

4 Breaking the Rules in Plenary 73

5 The Cordon Sanitaire 105

6 Hungary, the Christian Democrats and Article 7 140

7 Uncharted Europe 168

Notes 193

References 217

Index 241

1

Introduction

JANUARY 2015. I began my journey as a parliamentary assistant in the European Parliament. The backdrop was the aftermath of the European elections held just six months prior in 2014, which resulted in a significant turnover in staff. Many newly elected members of the European Parliament were seeking assistants, creating opportunities for newcomers like myself. It was then that I unexpectedly found myself standing before the imposing revolving doors, ready to embark on a new chapter working in the office of a member of the European Parliament.

The European Parliament might seem strange to the outside world at first. One of the main institutions of the European Union, it is the only directly elected body.[1] The 720 elected members of the European Parliament (often referred to hereafter simply as 'members', or as 'MEPs': I will use these terms interchangeably) come from more than two hundred national political parties that are grouped into only a few transnational political groups (EPRS 2024, 5).[2] The latter are arranged according to their political affinity, not along national lines. In addition to this immense diversity, the Parliament interprets and translates all official meetings and documents into the twenty-four official languages of the European Union. It is thus a place in which the European Union motto 'Unity in diversity' really comes to life. The Parliament is also occasionally compared to a 'wandering circus', because it has two seats—one in Strasbourg (France) and one in Brussels (Belgium).

This is the general context I found myself working in. The atmosphere in the European Parliament was very different from the Commission, where I had worked before: younger, more dynamic, faster paced, more media-focused and, of course, more political. It took me some time to get used to political party lines, to work in a small team for a member of the European Parliament, to network with external stakeholders and to get acquainted with the

procedures and 'dos and don'ts' of parliamentary work. What are 'amendments'? Where, how and when should they be tabled? What are 'group coordinators' and 'rapporteurs' and 'shadow rapporteurs'? What is the role of the political advisor? Not to speak of the monthly trips to Strasbourg that always felt a bit like an excursion, with most of the Parliament's staff travelling there for the plenary session, exchanging the everyday parliamentary life in Brussels for a week of fast-paced negotiations and plenary voting.

We shared our office storey with fellow Green members from the various EU member states. What I really enjoyed was the daily exchange with people from so many different countries working towards a similar political goal. On an average day, I might find myself speaking in four different languages, and this linguistic and cultural diversity in the European Parliament really appealed to me. I would meet for lunch with other assistants, and we would exchange information about our current work and what we had been dealing with in the various committees we were following. I would gain much information in passing on the political situations in different countries: the access to information was indeed enormous.

In the corridors, I might happen to walk past prominent far-right figures like Marine Le Pen, the leader of the then French National Front (now French Rally), or Nigel Farage, head of the UK Independence Party until 2016, whom otherwise I would only see on television. It was not uncommon for me to witness debates in a plenary session, only to later hear them reported on the evening news, or catch an interview with an MEP whom I regularly encountered in meetings. Such proximity to the daily workings of EU politics I found truly remarkable. Throughout this time, my primary professional circle consisted of members, staff, and assistants of the Green group, along with friends and colleagues from the Social Democrats, some from the Left, and acquaintances from the Christian Democrats and Liberals. Interestingly, many of the Christian Democrats and Liberals I knew were former classmates from my Bachelor's degree in European Studies at Maastricht University. Indeed, this programme often leads on to careers in the European institutions, which explains why I encountered so many familiar faces in the Parliament a few years later. Others I knew from my internship at the Commission when I first arrived in Brussels in 2013.

Members and staff of political groups positioned further to the right than the Christian Democrats I rarely interacted with. These included, for example, the far-right Europe of Nations and Freedom (ENF) political group, founded by Marine Le Pen, which existed from 2015 to 2019.[3] The only exposure I had

to them was during committee meetings, in which a member from the ENF occasionally participated, although their presence was minimal. I did not pay much attention to them or their assistants, and frankly, I did not actively seek out interactions with them. I often wondered, in fact, whether the ENF group was actively engaged at all in parliamentary legislative activities, because I rarely saw them. Our worlds did not meet. Yet they were undoubtedly part of this parliamentary microcosm, as much as I was.

It was about at six months into my assistantship in the Parliament, in June 2015, that Marine Le Pen succeeded in establishing the ENF group, and I vividly recall the uproar it caused within the Parliament. Among the Greens, there were internal deliberations on how to approach this group: when to engage—or was it better to ignore it altogether? The Greens eventually approved an internal document outlining their approach to the ENF, which leaned towards firm rejection; and I noticed meanwhile an almost palpable unease within the Green group regarding this new formation. Previously, members of what was now the ENF had been categorised as 'non-attached'—lacking group affiliation—resulting in limited rights and visibility in terms of speaking time and leading parliamentary reports. They were relatively inconspicuous within the parliamentary landscape, and lacked organisation. Suddenly, however, they had acquired the status of a political group, granting them increased speaking time, dedicated funding and a seat in the Conference of Presidents, one of the European Parliament's principal decision-making bodies.

Many were left in a quandary over the significance of this newfound ENF group. But by steadfastly turning their backs, and refusing to acknowledge their presence or actions, it seemed as though the Greens were attempting to wish away the issue by simply ignoring it. Such an approach could never make the ENF disappear as if by magic, however. I wondered, moreover, how the Greens could effectively combat racism and xenophobia, commonly associated with the far right, if they remained oblivious to the ENF's activities in everyday parliamentary life. This neglect, even outright dismissal, this disinterest in 'knowing thy enemy', was what originally pushed me to start the investigation that underpins this book. My attention was also caught by recent academic debates about the role of social media in fuelling political polarisation, whereby people tend to read primarily only news that corresponds to their own political beliefs (Rabb, Cowen and de Ruiter 2023). The 'echo chamber' dynamics I observed—our worlds operating in silos—raised a fundamental question for me: could meaningful opposition to these emerging forces exist at all without a serious understanding of how the other side operates?

At the time, no one from the established parties would have predicted that the current successors of the ENF, the Patriots for Europe (PfE) group led by Jordan Bardella, the young president of the far-right National Rally since 2022 in France, would emerge as the third largest force in the European Parliament following the 2024 elections. Nor would they have anticipated the effective gradual crumbling of the 'cordon sanitaire' against the Patriots, or the emergence of a new generation of far-right politicians in the Parliament—more self-assured, ambitious and determined to reshape the political landscape at the EU level.

Parliamentary Defences

On the basis of these observations, I began to ask myself how the European Parliament as an institution reacts to political forces within itself that openly challenge its very existence and the liberal and democratic values it claims to represent. It is fair to say that the European Parliament has long served as a platform for far-right politicians, including the French Jean-Marie Le Pen and British Nigel Farage. They have exploited their roles as MEPs to gain credibility and visibility, as well as EU funds to develop their political projects (Startin 2010; Delaine 2022). In a seeming contradiction, while opposing international organisations and undermining the EU project, many far-right parties have incubated and expanded their influence within the EU's institutions. In essence, therefore, this study contributes to the broader discussion of a familiar political paradox: how should democracies and democratic institutions 'tolerate the intolerant in their midst?' (Downs 2012, 1). My research thus came to focus on the 'system side'—the system within which the far right had inserted itself—rather than on the far right as such.

In this book I examine intricately the paradoxical role, in this respect, of the European Parliament: an international organisation despised by the far right, yet significantly infiltrated by it. I explore the challenge of responding to far-right actors who are democratically elected and hold positions in supranational parliaments (Downs 2012, 1). Previous research on how democracies defend themselves has addressed the issue mainly at the national level, and classified their responses to perceived threats in terms of a comparative politics tradition (Eatwell and Mudde 2004; Capoccia 2005; Downs 2012; Minkenberg 2013; Kaltwasser 2017; Van Spanje 2018). This book, by contrast, takes an ethnographic approach, to broaden our understanding of the field in relation to everyday politics at the European level; for the European Parliament, insofar as it can be seen as an actual breeding ground for the far right, indeed raises

questions about tolerance and the role of international organisations in providing support for its ideas and behaviour.

The book therefore raises a crucial question: to what extent do international organisations such as the European Parliament play along with far-right actors and provide them and their politics with an international stage? Does the far right in fact thrive in contemporary Western democracies precisely thanks to these transnational organisations? It also takes these discussions to the international level, showing how the European Parliament, as one of the main EU institutions, and the individuals that staff these institutions, make and shape rules against those that they deem 'far right', and how they (re)negotiate their behaviour towards these people in everyday interactions. The analysis illuminates how, despite concerted efforts by prominent MEPs to contain the far right, certain institutional actors and the structural set-up of the Parliament have undeniably facilitated its growth and access to an international stage. From being perceived as a merely external force, the far right has become integral to the European Parliament itself, at many levels and across different political groups. This has made it difficult to provide effective institutional responses against it. This book captures a pivotal historical moment, at which the far right experimented with taking over an institution, thus simultaneously prompting those who opposed it to experiment with how to counter it. And in the process, the very nature of contemporary politics seems to have been transformed: the study portrays an ethnographic present that continues to unfold—a historical drama still pregnant with relevance for the future.[4]

This ongoing transformation of contemporary politics is not only a political phenomenon, but also a lived reality which I explore through an ethnographic lens. I share an ethnographic story that stems from deeply immersing myself in the world of the European Parliament from May 2017 until April 2019, with follow-up visits to Brussels until the end of 2025.[5] This narrative sheds light on a specific period and place, offering a glimpse into an institution that is often seen as closed off. Throughout this period, I conversed with individuals in various roles within the Parliament, including MEPs, their assistants and their political advisors, as well as political groups and administration staff. These discussions helped me understand the diverse roles, motivations and perspectives within (far-right) parliamentary politics. It was through these everyday interactions and discussions that I gradually uncovered the dynamics at play. Additionally, many informal conversations in corridors, cafeterias and lifts complemented these interviews. By immersing myself in the European

parliamentary microcosm, I witnessed political events at first hand. To gain a comprehensive view, I spoke with people from diverse political backgrounds, and even attended far-right rallies and meetings in cities such as Berlin, Antwerp and Brussels.

The story in the book is also informed by broader observations from my time working within the European Parliament, and prior to that in the European Commission. These experiences provided me with a deep understanding of how the EU institutions operate, of the mentalities and mindsets of those involved.[6] They also facilitated access, as I was able to draw on an already established network of people in the Parliament with whom there was a pre-existing level of trust. Throughout this project, I ensured that my interlocutors provided informed consent before collaborating with me. I took care to preserve their confidentiality and anonymity, unless they explicitly agreed to be identified. For reasons of privacy, I changed all the names of interviewees and interlocutors quoted in this book and made efforts to ensure that quotations could not be traced back to specific individual, except for a few members of the European Parliament who consented to be named. Wherever possible, I was transparent with my interlocutors about the research project and my identity as a researcher.

When studying the far right ethnographically, I was mindful of the tendency to adopt an 'us versus them' mindset (Pasieka 2019, 6). In my fieldwork and interactions with the far right, as well as with other actors, I aimed to understand their perspectives and how they perceived their role in the European Parliament and the broader contemporary context. I sought to capture the 'intellectual labour' of people within the Parliament. This approach aligns with what Douglas Holmes and George Marcus refer to as para-ethnography (Holmes and Marcus 2008b). It recognises that interlocutors are not merely informants for one's research, but also shape one's theoretical considerations and fieldwork methodology, given their own knowledge of the field (ibid., 595). Conducting ethnography in this way transforms research into something of a collaborative effort—'overt, epistemic, and mutually invested in' (Holmes and Marcus 2008a, 85). I drew on the reflexivity of the politicians and staff I interacted with: I became, perhaps, the interlocutor they were seeking. My presence was both anticipated and welcomed, even by those with whom I had political disagreements. Especially with the latter, this interaction had its personal challenges, as seeking to understand their perspective could not be taken to imply concurrence.

Embarking on this ethnographic journey within the European Parliament, with its diverse actors and complex political dynamics, my focus was on studying parliamentary life in relation to far-right groups. I was aiming to uncover the Parliament's multiple 'entanglements'—to borrow a term coined by political anthropologist Emma Crewe to describe the mix of power dynamics, social practices and personal lives within parliaments (Crewe 2021). In her ethnographic explorations of the British Houses of Parliament at Westminster she highlights how parliaments are complex spaces filled with rituals and contradictions. Understanding these entanglements means taking into account these multifaceted nets of interactions, relations and exclusions (Crewe 2021, 2). Zooming in on the complexities of relationships and the systems in which they are embedded has allowed me to tell a previously untold part of a larger story on European integration.

Immersed in this microcosm that is the European Parliament, with all of its entanglements, my goal was not to conduct an ethnography of this institution in the tradition of ethnographer Marc Abélès in the 1990s. I was more interested in the relationship between parliament and the far right within this institutional setting at the European level. I could not help but ponder the fact that many far-right political parties, such as the French National Rally, the UK Independence Party or Alternative for Germany made their political debut in the European Parliament. These parties were incubated at the EU level: they cannot be seen solely as phenomena in isolation at the national level. The emergence of these political parties is embedded within a wider set of occurrences, scattered across Europe, and is linked intrinsically to the political ambiguities of European integration (Holmes 2019, 82; Lorimer 2024). Arguably, the far right evolved specifically in relation to European integration, and therefore clearly constitutes a Europe-wide phenomenon.

Douglas Holmes makes a compelling argument for this, based on his conversations with Jean-Marie Le Pen, founder and former leader of the far-right French National Front, in the late 1980s and 1990s (Holmes 2009, 55–56). Holmes came to realise that Le Pen was one of the first people to understand the extent to which European integration was intrinsically linked to issues of identity. Le Pen managed to make identity a key topic in domestic politics, which inspired many far-right movements in other European countries. He injected an illiberal twist into the idea of a European identity, and increasingly opposed European integration on the basis on his own perception of that identity (Holmes 2009, 56). He created the narrative of a common European

heritage, a 'European civilisation', that was distinctly opposed to the project of integration (Lorimer 2020, 1393–94).

Paradoxically, Le Pen developed these ideas from within the European institutions themselves, while he held office as member of the European Parliament (Holmes 2009, 56). He knew that it was possible for his idea, 'designed to address a tiny conservative, if not reactionary, French public' to be 're-crafted, giving it wide currency that could inspire activism beyond the borders of France' (Holmes 2009, 56). Le Pen's experience in the European Parliament was key to the development of his far-right discourse at the European level. The Parliament served as a platform from which this far-right discourse could grow and prosper throughout Europe. Other politicians across the EU then picked up on Le Pen's initial push (Holmes 2009, 56–57). Holmes sees a 'division of labour' (Holmes 2019, 62) of the far right in the EU, one whereby each of the various far-right movements and political parties develops its own 'expertise' and they merge to create a broader pan-European phenomenon (ibid.).

Holmes's insights also reminded me of Jessica Greenberg's notion of institutional 'pathways' (2020, 429), whereby individuals exploit the features of an organisation to disseminate their ideas and messages. They use language and framing strategically, to convey their message effectively within the institution. Numerous prominent far-right MEPs in the European Parliament have, like Le Pen, honed their ability to navigate the procedural intricacies of EU institutions to their benefit. For such politicians the European Parliament has been a place for experimentation with far-right ideas. Long before Brexit manifested itself in the United Kingdom, for instance, the UK Independence Party was rehearsing a discourse of wanting to leave the EU in the European Parliament (see, e.g., Clarke, Goodwin and Whiteley 2017). Many such parties project their national issues onto the European level, and the EU can thus become a scapegoat for things that are going wrong at the national level. There is a tendency for such parties in their programmes and discourses to frame the international sphere as the cause of all 'ills, fears and insecurities' that they are focusing on, projecting local and national issues onto the international level (Saull et al. 2015, 13). The international sphere is thus no mere side-factor in relation the emergence of the far right, but rather is central to it (ibid., 13): far-right movements have emerged not only at the national level, but simultaneously as a cross-border phenomenon; one that I found intriguing and at the same time complex to study.

It should be mentioned at this point that there is an ongoing debate in political science about what actually constitutes the far right.[7] One thing

seems clear, however: the contemporary far right has become 'extremely heterogeneous' (Mudde 2019b, 163). Mudde describes it as 'anti-system', inasmuch as, across its spectrum, it is 'hostile to liberal democracy' (ibid., 7). Within this spectrum, however, the extreme right dismisses core democratic principles such as popular sovereignty and majority rule (Adolf Hitler and Benito Mussolini being prime historical examples); the radical right, on the other hand, accepts democracy in principle, but is against key aspects of liberal democracy, such as minority rights, the rule of law and institutional checks and balances. While both wings challenge the postwar liberal democratic order, they do so in different ways—the extreme right seeks revolutionary change, whereas the radical right pushes for reform (ibid.).[8] For all such groups, however, key issues include immigration and integration, security and crime, corruption among elites and foreign policy (ibid., 31).

While these categorisations can help highlight key differences, applying them in practice often proves more complex. Throughout the research for this book, I have followed the common conventions used within the European Parliament, where these groups are typically referred to as the 'far right' or 'extreme right'. Given the diversity of actors and positions within this political spectrum, I have opted to use the broader term 'far right'. By the end of my fieldwork, and even more so following the 2024 European elections, it became increasingly apparent that some of these forces were undergoing a significant transformation. Some within the European Parliament, as well as in academic circles, have begun to associate this shift with the rise of a new, though still not clearly defined, form of contemporary fascism. This development has sparked lively debate within anthropology and the social and behavioural sciences more widely over how best to understand and describe what is unfolding. Although its precise form remains unclear, it certainly seems that something is taking shape that exceeds conventional understandings of 'the far right', and is therefore yet to be defined.[9] This book may be read as a prehistory to that story (of a transforming far right and the academic quest to make sense of and describe it). My aim is not so much to resolve emerging debates, as to contribute an ethnographically grounded account that sheds light on how institutions—and in particular the European Parliament—have responded to these evolving political forces. In doing so, I have attempted to present my observations with restraint and clarity, while acknowledging the serious political and conceptual questions at stake.

The Political Context

At the onset of my fieldwork in the European Parliament, a variety of political processes were in play that caused me to suspect that something was slowly unfolding that amounted to more than just a series of isolated political incidents. It became clear to me that significant political processes were underway—processes that continue to reshape the balance of power in the EU today, both within the Parliament and across the other EU institutions. When I began my ethnographic immersion, the far right did not seem to play a substantial role in the Parliament's day-to-day operations. The situation has shifted considerably since then, particularly following the 2024 European elections; but at that time, while far-right groups did hold their own meetings and events, their involvement in legislative activities was limited. My guess was that this was partly due to exclusionary measures imposed by other parties (see chapter 5 below), and partly because their primary focus was often upon gaining media attention at the national level (see chapter 4). What I noticed instead, during my early days of fieldwork, was a quiet yet persistent opposition movement gradually forming against the far right within the European Parliament. As I will demonstrate, this was a development that became more pronounced over time. One main struggle stood out for me: upholding democratic values and the rule of law became increasingly central topics in parliamentary debates, and caused much friction among political actors. It is this institutional struggle that forms the core focus of this book, as it fundamentally shaped the European Parliament's evolving responses to the far right.

To understand this central struggle, some context, if not an exhaustive description, is required regarding key background events that helped set the political stage within the Parliament. The creation of the Europe of Nations and Freedom (ENF) group in 2015 had caused quite a stir in the institution—not least after a series of scandals involving misuse of funding both for fake 'assistants' and for the financing of European political foundations became public.[10] In the same year, the increased influx of migrants and refugees into the European Union provoked intense political debates in the European Parliament and its member states on issues related to migration and asylum. Far-right groups such as Alternative for Germany or the French National Front were quick to link migration issues to security concerns, which in turn led to heated verbal exchanges in the Parliament between different political groups. The so-called migration crisis exposed deep divisions between European leaders and their clear failure to find effective solutions. It also led far-right parties

to call for closed borders, directly calling into question the EU's fundamental principles of solidarity and free movement (Germond 2023, 344).

Then, in June 2016, the United Kingdom decided by referendum to leave the European Union (the process generally referred to as 'Brexit'), leading to the departure of the seventy-three UK MEPs and creating a political vacuum in the European Parliament. Meanwhile, Poland and Hungary came under increasing EU pressure over domestic rule of law concerns. The Parliament was one of the driving forces in calling on these countries to adhere to democratic and liberal values as enshrined in the EU treaties. In 2018, it launched a legal procedure against Hungary (the Article 7 TEU procedure) for potential breaches of the rule of law (see chapter 6 below); the European Commission had done likewise for Poland a year prior. (At the time of writing, however, Viktor Orbán is in his fourth consecutive term as Hungarian prime minister, and continues to chip away at the foundations of liberal democracy in Hungary.)

What I was witnessing at first hand was what the then European Commission president Jean-Claude Juncker described in 2016 as a 'polycrisis'—overlapping crises in finance, economics and society that reinforced one another (European Commission 2016). He warned that these challenges could jeopardise the EU's cohesion and legitimacy while fuelling political polarisation (Nicoli and Zeitlin 2024, 3011). At the time, the EU was still grappling with the aftermath of the sovereign debt crisis, which had cast doubt on one of its key promises: economic prosperity (Germond 2023, 343). Since then, the list of crises has only grown—first with the COVID-19 pandemic, then Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and more recently the war in Gaza. Scholars describe this new wave of crises as unprecedented: 'The EU was struck, within less than three years, by its worst recession, its worst health crisis, its worst energy crisis, and its worst security crisis since the end of the Second World War' (Nicoli and Zeitlin 2024, 3012). These events have had a deep impact upon the European Parliament and fuelled growing public discontent, contributing to the far right's rise across the EU (Germond 2023, 344; Krastev 2017). One aspect often overlooked, nevertheless, in discussions of the EU's polycrisis, is the systematic challenge to its foundational principles of democracy and the rule of law (Raube and Costa Reis 2021, 628), which has been described as nothing less than a 'crisis of fundamental values' (ibid.). Debate on the rule of law and democratic values surfaced increasingly during my time in the European Parliament; and of all institutional issues, this is the one that I examine most closely in this book, as it is a matter central to the European Parliament's significance as an institution.

The developments sketched above have had significant political implications for the dynamics within the Parliament. I also observed there a growing mobilisation against those it deemed 'unwanted outsiders'. In 2018, the Parliament found itself amidst a process of revising its internal Rules of Procedure, which included crucial changes related to political group formation, funding for European political groups and foundations and the code of conduct for members, particularly concerning racist and defamatory language. This coincided with a pivotal case involving a far-right Polish MEP who appealed to the European Court of Justice to overturn a sanction imposed by the Parliament for racist and misogynistic remarks he had made during plenary sessions; and indeed, as a result of the growing frequency of challenges, including such legal ones, from the far right, the European Court of Justice has increasingly been called upon to provide guidance to EU actors in relation to freedom of speech, the rule of law and democratic institutional structures.

As I write, at the end of 2025, the European Parliament and the EU as a whole face a political reality starkly different from what was previously the norm. The traditional 'cordon sanitaire'—the practice of isolating the far right—has weakened significantly. The EU as a whole has shifted significantly to the right, with far-right parties included in the governments of countries such as Italy, Finland, Slovakia, Hungary, Croatia, the Czech Republic and (until mid-2025) the Netherlands, while in Sweden the government relies on the support of the far-right Sweden Democrats, the second-largest party in the Swedish parliament,[11] and in Austria the Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ) won the parliamentary elections in 2024, although it did not manage to form a government. In Germany, Alternative for Germany (AfD) recorded major victories in the regional states of Saxony and Thuringia in 2024 and came in second in the federal election in early 2025—an outcome for the far right unprecedented since the Second World War. It now forms the biggest opposition party in the German Bundestag. Notably, in May 2025 the AfD was officially classified as 'confirmed right-wing extremist' by the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution. The party has challenged the decision in court, and the case is currently pending. There is also an ongoing initiative in the German federal parliament to ban the AfD entirely, a measure legally possible under Germany's militant democracy.[12]

In France, meanwhile, a Paris court ruled in March 2025 that Marine Le Pen, former leader of the French National Rally, could not run for public office for five years, with immediate effect. She was found guilty of misusing public funds from the European Parliament. This ruling triggered a political storm,

given that Le Pen had been expected to run in the 2027 French presidential elections.[13] She has since appealed against the decision, with a ruling expected in 2026. This underlines once again that struggles within the European Parliament can be decisive, and have a direct impact on national politics.

The rightward political shift is also reflected in the EU's institutions, where the far right is directly represented. They hold seats on the European Council, influence decisions in the European Commission and wield growing power in the European Parliament. Their increasing presence will potentially influence EU policymaking and direction for years to come.[14] The 2024 European parliamentary elections were marked by a decisive move to the right, making the current Parliament the most right-leaning in the EU's history, and causing the traditional cordon sanitaire to weaken significantly. This raises important questions about parliamentary defences and the growing normalisation of far-right politics at the EU level and beyond. In the lead-up to the vote, media outlets warned that 'this time, the far-right threat is real'.[15] Indeed, Viktor Orbán successfully formed a new parliamentary group, the Patriots for Europe, now the third-largest group in the Parliament, bringing together parties such as Fidesz, the French National Rally, Italy's League, the Dutch Party for Freedom and Spain's Vox. Meanwhile, Giorgia Meloni, leader of Italy's far-right Brothers of Italy, won a significant victory in the European elections, alongside Marine Le Pen in France and the AfD in Germany. Further complicating the picture, Donald Trump was re-elected as US president in January 2025. He seems to see Meloni as a key ally in Europe, positioning her as a bridge between the EU and the United States, while demonstrating too his admiration (and support) for Viktor Orbán (extending to active support, as in his recent exemption of Hungary for one year from Russian oil sanctions), whilst Orbán has in turn wholeheartedly aligned himself with Trump's 'MAGA' model, adapting it to a 'Make Europe Great Again' version.[16] Meanwhile, in January 2025, Trump's senior advisor at the time, tech billionaire Elon Musk, virtually joined the German AfD's campaign launch event in the run-up to the German federal elections, stating via video call that he thinks the AfD is 'really the best hope for Germany':[17] an especially striking endorsement given the party's official classification cited above as 'confirmed right-wing extremist'. The far-right network is undoubtedly spreading, moreover, and with the European Commission under Ursula von der Leyen's leadership, rule of law debates have become increasingly politicised. Von der Leyen herself, for example, was heavily criticised for delaying the 2024 annual rule of law report in a bid to secure support from Meloni's party for her own re-election as Commission president.[18]

These, then, are some of the many 'entanglements' that I tried to make sense of when analysing the evolving dynamics between far-right and mainstream actors in the European Parliament. Such complex interactions also prompted me to situate my analysis within broader theoretical debates, so a few points on theory are in order.

On Militant Democracy, Institutional Ethnographies and the Far Right

This book engages with a range of scholarly discussions across political science, anthropology, legal studies and political sociology, as is only to be expected given the highly interdisciplinary nature of its overall topic. To begin with, the research reported here aspires to enrich scholarly debate on legal and political approaches to democratic backsliding (Bermeo 2016; Waldner and Lust 2018; Vachudova 2021) and militant democracy (Downs 2012; Capoccia 2013; Müller 2016; Bignami 2019; Scheppele and Kelemen 2020; Malkopoulou and Kirshner 2021; Schupmann 2024). In recent years, a growing body of literature has addressed the challenges facing democracies, and in particular the erosion of democratic institutions and processes. The term 'democratic backsliding' refers to the deliberate weakening or dismantling of democratic systems by political leaders, often for their own gain (Vachudova 2021, 489). This process can take various forms, and ultimately undermines the foundations of democratic governance: Nancy Bermeo defines it at its most fundamental level as 'state-led debilitation or elimination of any of the political institutions that sustain an existing democracy' (2016, 15). Scholars are divided over the implications of this backsliding, with some questioning the viability of the democratic system itself and proposing alternative models (Brennan 2017; Grayling 2017), while others have explored how factors such as neoliberalism contribute to democratic destabilisation, and have sought ways to bolster democratic resilience (Deneen 2018; Brown 2015).

Within the European Union, instances of democratic backsliding have been particularly evident in certain Eastern European countries, such as Hungary and Poland (Bakke and Sitter 2020; Vachudova 2020). Some scholars posit that it is mostly elites who exploit democracy's weaknesses, once elected, to further entrench themselves in power. Larry Bartels argues that the shortcomings of citizens have typically not been the determining factor in explaining instances of democratic backsliding; It is rather the case that political leaders such as Viktor Orbán in Hungary and Jarosław Kaczyński in Poland had

considerable experience as 'mainstream conservative' political figures before deciding to turn to a dismantling of democratic institutions. The political mainstream has itself endangered liberal democracy (Bartels 2023, 210).

In the legal literature, there is ongoing discussion around the concept of militant democracy being activated to counter extremism at the national level (Capoccia 2005; Invernizzi Accetti and Zuckerman 2017; Kirshner 2014; Malkopoulou and Norman 2018; Müller 2016). Cited here is 'the idea that elected governments should erect legal barriers to protect democracy from extremist parties' (Malkopoulou 2019, 1): a concept particularly relevant in the current context of the rise of an illiberal politics whereby increasingly autocratic leaders use legal means to erode institutional oversight and weaken democratic systems (Scheppele 2025). Numerous scholars have advocated for militant action, which often involves legal sanctions (Malkopoulou 2019, 2). They have also debated the risks of democracy itself becoming 'undemocratic', by mobilising thus against undesirable political actors (Downs 2012, 2).[19] Some have also pointed to the need to find new conceptual approaches to militant democracy by focusing on the everyday functioning of political institutions and standard political processes, rather than solely looking at formal legal restriction of rights (Bourne 2023).

While much of the existing literature has focused on domestic national contexts, there is an increasing interest in understanding how supranational institutions like the EU address these challenges. A growing body of literature has examined the concept of the 'cordon sanitaire', involving non-cooperation with certain parties and movements. This practice was first adopted at the domestic level (Downs 2012; Van Herpen 2021; Van Spanje and Van der Brug 2009) and was then also applied at the EU level, notably in the European Parliament (Brack 2018; Ripoll Servent 2019; Ripoll Servent and Panning 2021). In this body of literature, a debate has ensued regarding whether such exclusionary measures contribute to the radicalisation and increased popularity of extremist parties, rather than diminishing their political influence (Akkerman and Rooduijn 2015; Van Herpen 2021; Meijers and Williams 2020). Moreover, scholars have begun to explore how the EU can utilise legal mechanisms to uphold democratic principles (Bárd 2021; Bignami 2019; Kelemen and Blauberger 2017; 2017; Scheppele, Kochenov and Grabowska-Moroz 2020). Legal scholars have identified provisions within EU treaties that could be invoked for militant-democratic purposes, particularly in response to violations of the rule of law principle. There is ongoing debate about how the EU can better enforce the fundamental values outlined in its treaties, given their importance

to the functioning of the EU system (Jakab and Kochenov 2017b; Neuwahl and Kovacs 2021; Scheppele and Kelemen 2020; Wouters 2020).

There is a notable scarcity of sociological and anthropological research in the realm of militant democracy and democratic backsliding, and this book presents a nuanced departure from conventional legalistic and macro-focused approaches. It delves into the informal practices employed by institutional actors within the European Parliament to safeguard the institution from far-right influence and subversion. Through an ethnographic lens, it illustrates how individuals in their everyday interactions make and shape rules against the far right. While most existing studies concentrate on national-level politics, this book offers an international perspective by examining how the European Parliament addresses the presence and impact of the far right at the EU level. It thereby offers fresh insights into the dynamics of defending democracy within the EU context.

The book moreover adds a contribution to those anthropological and sociological investigations into the functioning of legal and political structures in Western Europe that employ an ethnographic approach to gain a comprehensive understanding of decision-making processes within EU institutions (see, for example, Ross 1995; Scully 2005; Greenberg 2020; 2021). Pioneering the ethnography of EU institutions, French anthropologist Marc Abélès (1992) explored the rituals of power and informal organisational cultures shaping daily life in the European Parliament during the 1990s. His work, particularly in *La vie quotidienne au Parlement européen* (Daily life in the European Parliament), offered detailed insights into the institution's hierarchies, structures, practices and daily routines. This research significantly broadened and redirected anthropological enquiry from traditional exotic locales to political institutions within Western Europe, which are now recognised not merely as technical entities, but also as cultural and social constructs (Ciavolella and Wittersheim 2016, 171; Cohen and Vauchez 2010; Herzfeld 1993). These institutions are cultural in their possession of diverse 'representations, visions, aspirations, affects, and sentiments' (Ciavolella and Wittersheim 2016, 170), while they are social due to the myriad practices that sustain and reshape them, including negotiations, procedural processes and individual or group behaviours (ibid., 171). Following Abélès's lead, French scholars such as Irène Bellier (2000) and Delphine Gardey (2015) have conducted ethnographic studies on the European Commission and the French National Assembly, respectively; while Julien Navarro (2009) studied the role of MEPs in the European Parliament in the early 2000s.

In the English-speaking sphere, anthropologist Emma Crewe's extensive ethnographic research on the British Houses of Parliament from 1998 to 2015 explores the ritualised dynamics of power and social practices (Crewe 2005; 2015). Similarly, there are recent ethnographic works on EU institutions, such as sociologist Frédéric Mérand's (2021) study following a French commissioner's professional life in the European Commission, and political and legal anthropologist Jessica Greenberg's research (Greenberg 2020; 2025) on the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg. Collectively, these studies deepen our understanding of how consultation, negotiation and decision-making unfold within EU institutions. Numerous anthropologists have pointed out the lack of ethnographic studies on party politics (Gusterson 2017; Faucher 2021), which this book attempts to address. Moreover, in the field of political science, there is growing recognition of the advantages and novel insights that ethnographic research can provide, prompting political scientists to explore its potential to complement their existing methods (Miller 2022). As a study written by an anthropologist investigating a field typically associated with political science and comparative politics, this book embraces these emerging trends, with the goal of fostering connections between disciplines.

The book furthermore adds indirectly to discussions of right-wing extremism and Euroscepticism, which often take place within the realms of political science and EU studies. This literature offers valuable insights into the political and ideological backgrounds of various political parties now active at the EU level. However, most existing studies of far-right movements focus on local and national contexts, comparing movements within or across different countries (Eatwell and Mudde 2004; Mayer and Perrineau 1996; Minkenberg 2013; Mudde 2016a; Perrineau and Rouban 2007). In specialised journals focused on the EU, scholarly research centres primarily on the concept of Euroscepticism, examining the rise of radical parties (of both left and right) concerned by European integration. Studies on party-based Euroscepticism aim to understand the nature of opposition to the EU (Kopecký and Mudde 2002; Sondel-Cedarmas and Berti 2022; Taggart 1998; Taggart and Szczerbiak 2004; Vasilopoulou 2017). A significant portion of the literature focuses on the strategies used by transnational far-right groups in the European Parliament and the obstacles they encounter (Almeida 2010; Brack 2018; Carlotti 2018; McDonnell and Werner 2017; Startin 2010). In this book I am less interested, however, in developing typologies of the far right, or feeding into the debates on Euroscepticism, than in pursuing an ethnographic understanding of the intricate realities and perceptions of the actors in the European Parliament with regard

to the far right. The approach taken here moves beyond existing categories and political labels. By focusing on parties viewed as problematic by EU institutions and key political figures, I aim to avoid the highly politicised debates surrounding pro- and anti-EU factions and other such labels.

Within anthropology, research on far-right movements remains relatively nascent. There has been a small circle of anthropologists studying extremism in Europe and they have mostly focused on local and national movements (e.g. Pasieka 2021; Szombati 2018; Shoshan 2016; Thorleifsson 2019). More recent studies have begun to explore the interaction between local and transnational dynamics of these movements (Pasieka 2024). Among the few scholars conducting ethnographic research within the European Parliament, sociologist Estelle Delaine (2022) analysed Marine Le Pen's French National Rally in the European Parliament, illustrating how far-right MEPs from this party use the resources and networks provided by the institution; while among the pioneers, anthropologist Douglas Holmes published a book back at the turn of the century about his ethnographic research on far-right deputies in the European Parliament in the 1990s (Holmes 2000). He conducted a multi-sited ethnographical study (in north-east Italy, London and the European Parliament), to analyse a phenomenon he called 'integralism', a term he used with reference to those political movements and parties that re-emphasise tradition, ethnic identity and solidarity in an increasingly pluralistic world. These parties lay stress upon territorial heritage and belonging, with a degree of essentialism. In Holmes's view, integralism has strongly influenced political discussions in Europe and led to exclusionary and discriminatory policies (Holmes 2016). Yet again, his focus was not so much on the European level as such, as upon how the political phenomenon he identified as integralism was spreading across Europe and through different levels of political organisation. Some of the issues Holmes presented in 2000 have crystallised more clearly in today's world—not least the emergence within EU institutions of a new generation of very skilled far-right politicians who play strategic political games to their own advantage.

What all of these research strands have in common is an omission: they do not investigate how EU institutions have reacted to far-right challenges. The novelty of *Defending Democracy* is that it focuses on the response side—investigating how the EU institutions have responded and adapted to far-right challenges. What distinguishes this analysis is its ethnographic approach, a perspective that is embedded within the everyday political dynamics of the European Parliament and that it is hoped can shed light on aspects that might

not be visible in other kinds of qualitative or quantitative research. The core question of how political institutions react and adjust to the presence and participation of such political parties corresponds to a major gap in the research literature on extremism and Euroscepticism—a gap that this book seeks to address.

Organisation of the Book

The present study evolved organically. I followed what I believed to be influential political actors, as well as the politicians and events they deemed important, allowing their perspectives to shape the text's structure. Comprising seven chapters, the book traces the nature of confrontation between EU institutional actors and the far right in the European Parliament since 1979. Chapters 3–7, in particular, explore different aspects of this confrontation. Collectively, they argue that despite the Parliament's efforts to oppose the far right, it has significantly contributed to its rise. This paradox becomes evident inasmuch as certain political parties and groups have been de facto accomplices in the far right's ascent, adding a layer of ambiguity to the whole dynamic.

Chapter 2 examines the inner workings of the parliamentary microcosm, highlighting characteristics of the European Parliament that are relevant to all individuals navigating its space, regardless of their political leanings. It delves into the different spaces within the Parliament and the daily routines of MEPs and their staff. Most importantly, it argues that the Parliament is not isolated within the confines of a Brussels tower, but is rather a dynamic microcosm with interconnected networks reaching into every EU member state. It also places the Parliament in a broader context, tracing its evolution and significance in the debate over the EU's democratic deficit, as well as how far-right actors have gained traction in this body over the last three European elections.

Chapter 3 explores how the introduction of direct elections to the European Parliament, first held in 1979, paved the way for far-right political parties to enter the European stage. On the basis of archival research, I show that the Parliament did not foresee a need for any safeguards against extremist parties while drafting the electoral law provisions for those first direct elections. Politically sensitive aspects, such as voting arrangements and electoral thresholds, were left to each member state: a diversity in electoral laws that made it easier for the far right to gain votes in some countries. The perception of European

elections as being of a secondary order, less crucial than national ones, further facilitated the far right's entry. Following the French National Front's success in the 1984 European elections, however, attempts to build a European far-right movement faced resistance. Glyn Ford's call for a committee of inquiry signalled a turning point, this influential British MEP playing a crucial role in the Parliament's response to far-right presence at the time.

Building upon this historical context, Chapter 4 shifts the focus to the contemporary dynamics within the European Parliament. It examines the disruptive tactics employed by the far-right during plenary sessions—which often serve as a stage for attention-seeking and publicity manoeuvres by certain MEPs—illustrating how these politicians have exploited parliamentary rules and procedures for visibility and provocation. Analysing their actions in terms of Howard Becker's concept of 'outsiders' (Becker 1966), I proceed to examine the consequent legal responses orchestrated by the Parliament to counteract this behaviour: how it has striven to adapt existing rules to curb such disruptions. Despite these efforts, however, the far-right groups have been adept at finding legal loopholes, persistently challenging the Parliament's authority; and the disruptive nature of their interventions has fuelled the common perception of a destructive purpose of the far right at the EU level.

Chapter 5 delves into the broader landscape of the European Parliament, showing how the far right has become endemic across its political groups. It investigates how mainstream political groups in the European Parliament use an informal practice called the 'cordon sanitaire' to exclude far-right political groups from policymaking. Drawing from many interviews, I uncover the fluid and contradictory boundaries each group sets for deeming certain actors as 'unacceptable' for cooperation. When Marine Le Pen, leader of the French National Rally, formed a far-right group in 2015, it triggered reactions from other groups such as the Socialists, who adopted a policy of non-cooperation. However, these cordon sanitaire measures prove porous, partly because the far right spans various political groups beyond Le Pen's. I argue that efforts to marginalise specific far-right groups miss the intricacies of their involvement across political groups (such as Fidesz in the Christian Democrats: see Chapter 6), revealing a complicity that the cordon sanitaire conceals. Additionally, I contend that the operational dynamics of political groups in the European Parliament provide a platform for the far right to breed and expand into a multitude of political groups.

While Chapter 5 uncovers the far right's widespread influence in diverse political groups within the European Parliament, Chapter 6 narrows the focus

to examine its direct impact on mainstream Christian Democratic politics, focusing in particular on Viktor Orbán's Fidesz. The chapter reveals how the far right, notably Fidesz, has been protected within the core of EU politics. Despite Orbán's undermining of Hungary's rule of law and democratic institutions, he met with continued protection and support from prominent European Christian Democrats for many years; and these close ties have jeopardised the proper functioning of the European Union system. The chapter follows the internal struggles in the Parliament to address Hungary's democratic backsliding, spotlighting MEP Judith Sargentini's pivotal role in initiating the Article 7 TEU procedure against Hungary in 2018: a legal procedure that provides for the suspension of certain membership rights of a member state. The chapter analyses a series of highly political events that prompted the European Christian Democrats to distance themselves from Orbán and that led to Fidesz's departure from the European People's Party in 2021. I endeavour to capture this historic moment, its ongoing influence and the broader impact of the European rule of law crisis on the European Parliament.

Chapter 7, finally, does not serve as a standard conclusion, but rather as an exploration of critical questions regarding the future of Europe and the safeguarding of democratic structures. The recent shift towards budget protection has ignited a new phase of institutional tension, sparking a deep conflict between EU bodies. This conflict was triggered by the Rule of Law Conditionality Regulation 2020/2092, which came into force in 2021. The regulation seeks to shield EU funds from misuse by member states infringing democratic norms, and was first applied against Hungary. The chapter examines meticulously the intricate dynamics surrounding the application of this tool, offering insights into the internal frictions between EU institutions. In this conflict, the European Parliament emerges as a pivotal actor advocating for compliance with the regulation and rule of law tools. The battleground lies within the EU institutions themselves, where the European Commission and Council employ political bargaining strategies that seem to undermine the intended purpose of measures such as budget protection. Ethnographically, this chapter gestures towards the future, capturing a historical 'moment' in the process of its unfolding. It offers insights to comprehend the intricate dynamics between the far right and its opposition within EU institutions today. Since the 2024 European elections, the previous shield—the cordon sanitaire—has been significantly weakened, and the far right has become increasingly normalised, its leaders claiming prominent spots on the European stage while simultaneously driving forward a radical agenda. What began as a small grouping of far-right parties

in the mid-1980s has evolved into a significant opposition to European integration. And just as the first direct elections in 1979 marked a turning point for that integration, 2025 now stands as another critical juncture for the project as a whole. The further unfolding of this historical drama will only gradually reveal itself.

So now, before I begin this ethnographic story, and just as Frédéric Mérand took the Berlaymont lift to explore the cabinet of a European commissioner (Mérand 2021), let us walk towards the esplanade near the Place du Luxembourg in Brussels and climb the stairs to the main entrance of the European Parliament to explore the world of this parliamentary microcosm: at once a peculiar small community and a mirror of the broader European one, where debates and decisions echo and reverberate across the EU member states, shaping politics on the continent and beyond.

INDEX

Abélès, Marc, 16, 24–25, 29, 31
Adenauer, Konrad, 59, 132
AfD. *See* Alternative for Germany
ALDE. *See* Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe, Group of the
Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe, Group of the, 128–30, 160
Alternative for Germany, 7, 12, 116, 121, 183, 185
Annemans, Gerolf, 102, 113, 137
Article 2 TEU. *See* Treaty on European Union: Article 2
Article 7 TEU. *See* Treaty on European Union: Article 7
Ashton, Catherine, 91
Atkinson, Janice, 110
Austrian People's Party, 143
authoritarian equilibrium, 143–44

Babiš, Andrej, 129–30
Balas, Guillaume, 117
Bardella, Jordan, 4, 184, 189
Barroso, José Manuel, 145
Becker, Howard, 73, 76–77, 88, 92, 100
Berès, Pervenche, 119
Berlusconi, Silvio, 34, 95, 143
Bermeo, Nancy, 14
Boká, János, 178
Borghezio, Mario, 85
Brack, Nathalie, 80
Brandt, Willy, 57
Brexit, 8, 11, 43–44, 47, 78, 89–90, 193n2. *See also* Farage, Nigel
Brok, Elmar, 32
Brothers of Italy, 13, 46, 115, 180, 182, 185–86
budget protection, 21, 168, 178, 210n3. *See also* Rule of Law Conditionality Regulation (EU) 2020/2092
Bullmann, Udo, 151
Buonanno, Gianluca, 75, 93–95, 103. *See also* sanctions
Buzek, Jerzy, 34

Cas, Mudde, 7
Castaldo, Fabio Massimo, 134
Central European University, 148, 160
Churchill, Winston, 59, 197n1
Ciampi, Carlo Azeglio, 85
Ciocca, Angelo, 75, 122
Commissioners-designate, 185
Committee of Inquiry into the Rise of Fascism and Racism in Europe. *See* Ford, Glyn
Common Assembly of the ECSC, 50–51, 56
conditionality regulation. *See* Rule of Law Conditionality Regulation (EU) 2020/2092
Confederal Group of the European United Left - Nordic Green Left, 117, 124, 137, 154
Conference of Presidents, 3, 123–24
Constitution for Europe, Treaty Establishing a (2004), 84–85, 87
Corbett, Richard, 34, 77–78, 98, 101–3

cordon sanitaire, 12, 69, 182–83; against ECR, 115–16, 127; against EFDD, 116, 127–28, 133–35; efficacy of, 12, 107, 138, 177–78, 182, 184–86; against ENF, 111–14, 119, 122–26, 128–29, 136–38; around Fidesz (*see* European People's Party); forms of, 105–7 (*see also* Article 7 TEU); history of, 68–69, 106–7
Council of the European Union, 21, 37, 39, 159, 179, 193n1
Crewe, Emma, 7, 17, 28
Cseh, Katalin, 170

Daul, Joseph, 157, 161, 205n5
Dehousse, Fernand, 53. *See also* Draft Convention on direct elections: of 1960
democracy, 48, 197n1, 205n1
democratic backsliding, 14, 21, 140–41, 163, 178, 187–88
democratic defense, 4–5, 13, 138. *See also* cordon sanitaire
democratic deficit, 35–41, 195n3
democratic values, 11, 71–72, 144–46. *See also* rule of law
Deutsch, Tamás, 165
direct elections. *See* European Parliament: direct elections of
Downs, William, 4, 106
Draft Convention on direct elections: of 1960, 52–53; of 1975, 55–56, 198n10
Dragnae, Liviu, 124

ECR. *See* European Conservatives and Reformists Group
ECSC. *See* European Coal and Steel Community
EFDD. *See* Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy Group
ENF. *See* Europe of Nations and Freedom Group
EPP. *See* European People's Party (Christian Democrats), Group of the
ESN. *See* Europe of Sovereign Nations Group
European Coal and Steel Community, 50–51, 197n3
European Commission, 13, 36, 40–41, 193n1; and budget conditionality, 171–77; and Fidesz, 161–62; and Leyen, Ursula von, 186
European Conservatives and Reformists Group, 46, 115, 121, 127, 183. *See also* cordon sanitaire
European Council, 13, 177–78, 193n1; summit December 2022, 172; summit December 2023, 173–75
European Court of Auditors (ECA), 176–77
European Court of Justice (ECJ), 12, 38, 193n1; Article 7 TEU, 147; Korwin-Mikke case, 74, 98; Rule of Law Conditionality Regulation (EU) 2020/2092, 169, 171
European elections: of 1979, 57–58; of 1984, 61–63; of 2014, 40, 43–44; of 2019, 44–45; of 2024, 9, 13, 45–47
European integration, 7, 24, 166–67; history of, 38–40, 49–51, 70; Jean-Marie Le Pen, 42–43, 61 (*see also* National Front); liberal identification, 59; non-liberal conceptions of, 60
European Parliament, 1, 193n1; calendar of, 29; committees of, 27–28; direct elections of, 35, 37 (*see also* democratic deficit); informal powers, 69–71; interconnectedness of, 34–35; microcosm, 5–6, 24–25; plenary chamber, 26; powers, 39–40; rules of procedure, 74; Strasbourg week, 29
European People's Party (Christian Democrats), Group of the, 130–33, 205n5, 207n43; cordon sanitaire practices of, 130–33, 163–66, 182–83; and Fidesz, 141, 158, 162–66
European Right, Group of the, 61–63, 83. *See also* Ford, Glyn
European Union, 1, 193n1
Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy Group, 102, 114–16, 121. *See also* cordon sanitaire
Europe of Nations and Freedom Group, 2–4, 109–11, 117. *See also* cordon sanitaire

Europe of Sovereign Nations Group, 46, 182. *See also* cordon sanitaire
Euroscepticism, 17, 41–43
Evrigenis, Dimitrios, 64, 66, 69–70
extreme right, 9, 67, 111, 126, 185. *See also* far right
extremism: at national level, 15; right-wing, 12–13, 17–18, 116

Farage, Nigel, 4, 23, 43–44; cordon sanitaire against, 114, 116; and EFDD, 109, 133, 135; in plenary, 89–93
far right: concept of, 4, 8–9; division of labour of, 8; escalation of, 189; at European level, 4, 7–8, 188–89 (*see also* Le Pen, Jean-Marie); movements, 68, 188–89; at national level, 12, 184; normalisation of, 13, 183, 187–88; political groups, 45–46; responses to the, 4, 10, 63 (*see also* cordon sanitaire)
fascism, 9, 59–60, 63–64, 67
FdI. *See* Brothers of Italy
Fico, Robert, 124, 215n86
Fidesz, 13, 131, 140–42, 205n2; and Article 7 TEU procedure, 155–56 (*see also* Sargentini, Judith); and EPP, 131, 143, 160–66
Ford, Glyn, 63–64
FPÖ. *See* Freedom Party of Austria
Freedom Party of Austria, 12, 146
Freund, Daniel, 170–72, 174–75, 211n15
Frontex, 188
fundamental rights, 69, 71. *See also* democratic values
fundamental values, 145; crisis of, 11

García Pérez, Iratxe, 99, 185
Gardiazabal Rubial, Eider, 170, 211n17
Gaulle, Charles de, 53
Gebhardt, Evelyne, 99
General Court. *See* European Court of Justice (ECJ)
George, Marcus, 6
Giscard d'Estaing, Valéry, 54
Goddyn, Sylvie, 117
Gollnisch, Bruno, 64
Greenberg, Jessica, 8, 17
Greens/European Free Alliance, Group of the, 3, 45–46, 117, 125–28, 134. *See also* Freund, Daniel; Sargentini, Judith
GUE/NGL. *See* Confederal Group of the European United Left - Nordic Green Left

Habsburg, Otto von, 64
Handó, Tünde, 141
Heubuch, Maria, 30–31
Heurtin, Jean-Philippe, 27
Hitler, Adolf, 9, 64, 94
Hix, Simon, 45
Hollande, François, 94
Holmes, Douglas R., 7–8, 18, 68–69, 132
Hungary: Article 7 TEU, 156, 160–61, 186–87. *See also* Rule of Law Conditionality Regulation (EU) 2020/2092

ID. *See* Identity and Democracy Group
Identity and Democracy Group, 45, 193n3
illiberalism, 15; and democracy, 140, 142, 148, 158, 205n1 (*see also* Orbán, Viktor); identity, 7–8 (*see also* Le Pen, Jean-Marie); politics, 15, 68

Járóka, Lívia, 162–63
John Paul II, Pope, 82–83
Joint Declaration against Racism and Xenophobia, 69. *See also* Ford, Glyn
Juncker, Jean-Claude, 40, 90, 131, 143, 210n3; Hungarian government campaign against, 161–62; and polycrisis, 11

Kaczyński, Jarosław, 14
Kelemen, Daniel, 211n15
Korwin-Mikke, Janusz, 74–75, 89, 95–101
Kuciak, Ján, 124

Law and Justice party, 115–16, 180, 209n1
Lefèvre d'Ormesson, Olivier, 66
Left (GUE/NGL), Group of the, 177

Le Pen, Jean-Marie, 4; and European identity, 7–8, 42, 48; in European Parliament, 7–8, 60–63, 68 (*see also* cordon sanitaire). *See also* National Front
Le Pen, Marine, 3, 62, 119–20; 2025 ruling, 12–13; ENF, 108, 109, 110, 112 (*see also* cordon sanitaire); National Front, 43, 62
Leyen, Ursula von der, 13, 40, 143, 195n18; cordon sanitaire policies of, 185–87; and Rule of Law Conditionality Regulation (EU) 2020/2092, 170, 174, 177
Lisbon Treaty of 2007, 39–40, 91
Lucke, Bernd, 116

Maastricht, Treaty of 1992, 36, 39, 42, 62
Macron, Emmanuel, 34, 44, 46
Magyar, Péter, 179–80
Mélenchon, Jean-Luc, 34
Meloni, Giorgia, 13, 46, 180; and Leyen, Ursula von, 185–86; and normalisation of the far right, 188–89. *See also* Brothers of Italy
Member of the European Parliament, 1, 31–35, 195n2; code of conduct, 79–81
MEP. *see* Member of the European Parliament
Mérand, Frédéric, 17, 22
Merkel, Angela, 93–95, 143, 158, 169
Merz, Friedrich, 185
microcosm. *See* European Parliament: microcosm
militant democracy, 12, 14, 15; at European level, 15; at national level, 15–16, 198n8, 198n9
Mogherini, Federica, 93
Monnet, Jean, 49–50, 58, 70
Morano, Nadine, 131
Morijn, John, 211n15
Mudde, Cas, 8–9, 41, 110, 188
Musk, Elon, 13
Mussolini, Benito, 9, 24, 59

National Front, 62; electoral success, 43–44, 48, 54, 61–63 (*see also* cordon sanitaire); and European identity (*see also* Le Pen, Jean-Marie); ideology, 42–43, 62–63. *See also* National Rally
National Rally, 7, 12–13, 46. *See also* National Front
New Flemish Alliance (N-VA), 127, 204n39
non-discrimination and anti-racism, 68

Onesta, Gérard, 86–87
Orbán, Balázs, 178
Orbán, Viktor, 13, 179–81; and Article 7 TEU, 150–51; budget conditionality, 171–74, 177–78; domestic reforms, 142, 147–48; and EPP, 141, 143–44, 151–52, 157–59, 160–61; illiberal democracy, 140, 142, 158 (*see also* Article 7 TEU). *See also* Fidesz
outsiders, 73, 76. *See also* Becker, Howard
ÖVP. *See* Austrian People's Party

Paisley, Ian, 82–83
Palais Bourbon, 24–26
Pannella, Marco, 57
Paris, Treaty of 1951, 51
Patijn, Schelto, 55–56
Patriots for Europe Group, 13, 46, 182–84, 189
Pech, Laurent, 175, 211n15
PfE. *See* Patriots for Europe Group
Pflimlin, Pierre, 65
Philippot, Florian, 121
PiS. *See* Law and Justice party
Pistillo, Michele, 55
Poland: and Article 7 TEU, 11, 145; and Rule of Law Conditionality Regulation (EU) 2020/2092, 171, 176, 180, 204n50. *See also* Law and Justice party
Pöttering, Hans-Gert, 85
Pretzell, Markus, 121
Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats, Group of the, 46; and Article 7 TEU on Hungary, 151–52, 164; Committee of Inquiry, 63–64; and cordon sanitaire policies, 118–25, 181–82, 185. *See also* Corbett, Richard; Ford, Glyn

Qatargate affair, 45

Rabin, Yitzhak, 64
Rai, Shirin, 73
Renew Europe Group. *See* Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe, Group of the
Rompuy, Herman Van, 91–92
Romualdi, Pino, 67
rule of law, 10–11; crisis, 21, 41, 168; Hungary, 140–42, 144–45, 148, 163–64; Poland, 116; Slovakia, 124, 213n47; tools (*see* Article 7 TEU; Rule of Law Conditionality Regulation (EU) 2020/2092)
Rule of Law Conditionality Regulation (EU) 2020/2092, 169; enforcement of, 170–72, 174–75; Hungary, 169, 172–73, 177–79
Rules of Procedure, 12, 74, 76–82

S&D. *See* Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats, Group of the
Salvini, Matteo, 34, 44, 85, 109
sanctions: Article 7 TEU, 144–47; code of conduct for MEPs, 75, 85–87, 97–98, 101–102. *See also* Rule of Law Conditionality Regulation (EU) 2020/2092
Sargentini, Judith, 141, 149–50, 153–57, 159–61. *See also* Treaty on European Union: Article 7
Sarvamaa, Petri, 170, 211n17
Sassoli, David, 163
Scheppele, Kim Lane, 205n4, 211n15
Schulz, Martin, 93, 97, 112, 118
Schuman Declaration, 49, 60, 197n3
Schuman, Robert, 49
second-order elections, 60–61
Séjourné, Stéphane, 34
Single European Act of 1986, 71
Smith, Alyn, 44
Soros, George, 160–161, 208n49
Speroni, Francesco Enrico, 85
Spinelli, Altiero, 24, 58, 71
Spitzenkandidaten, 40. *See also* Lisbon Treaty of 2007
Stauffenberg, Franz-Ludwig Gustav Schenk Graf von, 64
Storch, Beatrix von, 135
subsidiarity, 39, 132, 207n43. *See also* Maastricht, Treaty of 1992
Szájer, József, 141

Tajani, Antonio, 34, 101, 143; Article 7 TEU, 152–53, 156–57, 159; code of conduct for MEPs, 99, 101; cordon sanitaire policies, 123–24
Tavares, Rui, 147–48
Treaty on European Union (TEU), 141; Article 2, 144, 146; Article 7, 144–47, 152–53, 159, 209n1
Trump, Donald, 13, 180–81
Tusk, Donald, 143, 163, 165–66, 180

UKIP. *See* Farage, Nigel
Ukraine, 11, 45, 47; and Orbán, Viktor, 173–75, 177–78, 180
United Kingdom Independence Party. *See* Farage, Nigel

Várhelyi, Olivér, 186
Veil, Simone, 57–58
Verhofstadt, Guy, 34, 160
Visegrád Group, 124, 204n50

Wachowiec, Patryk, 211n15
Warborn, Jörgen, 183
Weber, Manfred, 40, 205n5; and Fidesz (*see* EPP); cordon sanitaire, 182–83, 185, 186–87; Hungary, EU funds, 174
Weiss, Louise, 57–59
Wever, Bart De, 127
Wieland, Rainer, 93, 201n32
Wilders, Geert, 109–110, 184
Wójcik, Anna, 211n15

Zanni, Marco, 45, 134
Zelenskyy, Volodymyr, 45
Zuckerberg, Mark, 123–24