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The Rise of Radical Right and Eurosceptic Political Forces and the Impact on the EU's Enlargement Policy

The report [*"The Rise of Radical Right and Eurosceptic Political Forces and the Impact on the EU's Enlargement Policy"*](#) was prepared in the framework of the initiative [*think nea – New Narratives of EU Integration*](#) by the **Hellenic Foundation for European & Foreign Policy (ELIAMEP)**, supported by the **Open Society Foundations – Western Balkans**. It examines the growing influence of radical right and Eurosceptic political forces within the European Union (EU) and their impact on EU enlargement policy. As these parties continue to gain traction across member states, they are reshaping the political landscape and challenging the long-standing consensus on EU integration.

The analysis reviews the recent electoral victories of radical right parties, such as Giorgia Meloni's Fratelli d'Italia (FdI) in Italy and Geert Wilders' Freedom Party (PVV) in the Netherlands. These results reflect a broader trend of rising right-wing Euroscepticism, potentially posing substantial challenges to the EU's enlargement agenda. Key drivers behind this rightward shift include public discontent with immigration, economic disparities, and a perceived loss of national sovereignty.

The report explores how these political dynamics could shape the bloc's decision-making processes, particularly regarding candidate countries seeking EU membership. The radical right's scepticism over further enlargement raises doubts about the feasibility of integrating countries such as Ukraine and Bosnia and Herzegovina, particularly considering ongoing conflicts and political instability. Through an analysis of party manifestos, official statements, and expert interviews, this study identifies major patterns and trends among these parties regarding their views on enlargement. It also highlights key concerns that may resonate with the public, potentially influencing the EU's future trajectory.

Even though several of these parties, including VOX in Spain and the Sweden Democrats, have yet to form cohesive views on enlargement or take explicitly anti-enlargement positions, the issue is likely to become more politicised in the coming years. This is largely due to its connections with other politically sensitive areas for these parties, including migration, fiscal policy, agricultural policy, and national sovereignty, all of which are fundamental to their agendas.

Building on its findings, the report concludes that radical right parties share five core thematic concerns shaping their views on EU enlargement:

1. **Financial concerns: Opposition to the financial costs associated with the accession of economically weaker states is a common theme among these parties. For example, the PVV in the Netherlands advocates for a "frugal" economic stance, arguing that admitting less developed countries would place an undue burden on net-contributing member states. Similar concerns are echoed by the National Rally (RN) in France, Alternative for Germany (AfD), the Sweden Democrats (SD), and the Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ), all of which represent net contributors worried about additional budgetary strain.**
2. **Migration and security: Enlargement is closely tied to migration and freedom of movement, both key issues for radical right parties. The RN frequently associates enlargement with increased illegal immigration and organised crime, aligning this stance with its broader domestic agenda. Similarly, the AfD and FPÖ focus on anti-immigration narratives targeting Muslim populations, while the PVV places more emphasis on perceived cultural and social risks.**

3. **Foreign policy: Relations with Russia and concerns about geopolitical consequences also shape these parties' positions. The AfD's longstanding sympathetic stance toward Russia influences its opposition to Ukraine and Moldova's accession. Conversely, Italy's FdI under Giorgia Meloni has so far adopted a pro-enlargement position, reflecting its alignment with pro-Western and NATO-oriented foreign policy strategies.**
4. **Popular support and electoral strategy: Public opinion and domestic political dynamics affect these parties' positions. In Austria and Germany, where public scepticism towards enlargement is significant, the FPÖ and AfD capitalise on these sentiments to gain electoral support. Additionally, these two parties craft targeted narratives appealing to specific demographics.**
5. **Concerns over EU functionality and sovereignty: Radical right parties often link enlargement to broader debates on EU governance. They argue that incorporating new members would necessitate institutional reforms like introducing Qualified Majority Voting (QMV) in foreign and tax policy, which they see as a threat to national sovereignty. This contrasts with earlier radical right strategies, which favoured enlargement as a counterbalance to deeper EU integration. Although a shift to QMV could enhance decision-making efficiency, it may also intensify divisions among member states, creating an opening for radical right parties to amplify their Eurosceptic discourse.**

The EU must carefully navigate these complexities, balancing the challenges posed by radical right parties with its broader goals of unity and expansion. The growing influence of these parties complicates the EU's decision-making process: on one hand, their scepticism can stall or obstruct enlargement policy, particularly regarding Ukraine and the Western Balkans; on the other, their focus on sovereignty and national identity raises questions about the EU's integration model, potentially paving the way for alternative structures such as a "multi-speed Europe" or associate memberships.

However, dividing lines between radical right parties on enlargement are not uniform. For example, Italy's FdI supports enlargement for economic and strategic reasons, whereas parties such as the PVV in the Netherlands and FPÖ in Austria maintain strong opposition. Thus, the report identifies three broad categories of radical right parties based on their EU enlargement stance: "supportive" (e.g., FdI), "ambiguous" (e.g., VOX), and "opposed" (e.g., AfD).

Overall, the report aims to provide valuable insights for policymakers by examining the intersection of radical right parties and the EU's enlargement policy. It offers a nuanced perspective on how these forces could shape the EU's future, explaining why the issue of EU enlargement, currently largely falling below the radar, is poised to get more politicised in the coming years, posing an extra challenge to the bloc's long-term goals.

Disclaimer:

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Weitere Informationen zum Projekt:

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