



Challengers and insurgents: Who are the new forces shaping foreign policy across the EU?

By Susi Dennison

The European Union's political elites are being challenged more than ever before on their foreign policies. Digital developments are changing the ways that the public can hold them to account for their stance in stuffy negotiating rooms on agreeing a Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP), or question them on the legality of the EU-Turkey deal on managing refugee flows. Newer, smaller, and leaner political organisations are playing mainstream political parties at their own game, standing for – and winning – seats in local, regional, national, and European parliaments to challenge establishment views on how policymaking should be conducted. Alternative forces are using media, popular pressure, and new legislation to force national referendums on issues previously the preserve of governments and civil servants.

To understand how these developments are likely to influence EU foreign policy, ECFR's network of researchers in the 28 member states conducted a survey of "challenger and insurgent" political groups across the EU, interviewing them on their views on foreign policy. For each member state we aimed to focus on the most influential non-mainstream groups. The only member state in which we found no relevant party was Luxembourg.

The parties we have included are not exclusively of the right or the left; they range from the Communist Party in France and the socialist Die Linke in Germany, to far-right groups such as Golden Dawn in Greece, Lega Nord in Italy, and Jobbik in Hungary. Some are anti-establishment; some, such as Law and Justice in Poland and Syriza and the Independent Greeks in Greece, are serving in coalition governments. They are broadly sceptical about the EU in its current state, but with a huge range, from the Front National in France and UKIP in the United Kingdom, founded with the objective of taking the UK out of the EU, through to Portugal's Left Bloc and Podemos in Spain, which are pro-EU reform. Almost all see a need to "re-democratise" policymaking. They conceive of their role as speaking truth to elites on behalf of the people.

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The youngest, ALFA, was formed in Germany in July 2015 as a breakaway from Alternative für Deutschland, while the oldest, Sinn Féin in Ireland, was founded in 1905.

In our interviews with foreign policy representatives from each party and analysis of their public pronouncements on the issues, we explored their positions on the EU's key challenges, including the refugee crisis and the EU's relationship with Turkey; security and terrorist threats to Europe; the Ukraine crisis and the EU's relationship with Russia; EU- United States relations including on Middle East policy and trade; and the Brexit referendum.

A flash scorecard, setting out the results in full, with analysis on the implications for forthcoming foreign policy challenges, will be shared at the ACM. However, the headline findings of this study were:

- For 34 out of the 46 parties covered, the refugee crisis or the threat of terrorism and radical Islamism should be the top two priorities of the EU. This position was not solely the preserve of the right: Die Linke in Germany, the French Communist Party, Podemos in Spain, and the Lithuanian Labour Party all voted this way too.
- On the causes of the refugee crisis, Merkel's "refugees welcome" policy does not attract the universal blame that might have been expected: only seven parties named it in their top two explanations for the crisis. US strategy in the Middle East was the most popular answer, with President Bashar al-Assad's regime-sponsored violence in Syria taking second place.
- There is a widespread scepticism around future European or US interventionism generally, particularly in the Middle East, from Sinn Féin in Ireland, to UKIP in the UK, to the Front National and the Communist Party in France, to AFD and Die Linke in Germany, to Jobbik in Hungary and the Five Star Movement in Italy.
- This is linked to a general anti-Americanism and distaste for the EU toeing the US line, particularly on foreign policy in the Middle East. As is well documented, for many challenger parties, spurning

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Transatlanticism is also linked to strong suspicions of TTIP, with 27 of the parties answering that the EU should not conclude the deal with the US.

- There is a general consensus that more enlargement would be a bad thing. However, there is slightly more openness and understanding for countries to the East (notably Ukraine) than those to the South (notably Turkey, where serious fears were expressed about the possibility of Turkish accession). Still, only ten parties unequivocally supported Ukraine's path to EU accession, and of these, two would not support NATO membership for Ukraine.
- Although there is general sympathy for Russian foreign policy (30 parties agreed with at least some recent Russian positions, including particularly Russia's intervention in Syria in the absence of other actors playing a decisive role in conflict resolution), views on specific policies such as EU sanctions against Russia were much more mixed. Twenty-four parties argued that sanctions should not stay in place beyond July. Views on Russia policy tend more towards national perspectives than towards right-left divisions – for example, in Germany, both Die Linke and AfD believe that the sanctions on Russia should be lifted, and in Greece, both Syriza and Golden Dawn thought the same. On Ukraine's accession, slightly more of a split between left and right was evident, with leftist parties generally more supportive of Ukraine's path to EU membership.
- Views on whether to cooperate with Russia on current EU crises (the refugee crisis, terrorism, Ukraine, Syria) were fairly evenly split, but on the eurozone crisis particularly, there was a generally negative view of the need to engage Russia, or any other outsiders.
- In relation to security the parties were fairly evenly divided, with seven parties responding that NATO should build up militarily against the Russian threat, and eight parties arguing that NATO should take in more members from the European neighbourhood, but seven parties arguing conversely for their country to withdraw from the alliance altogether.

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