



## The Transnationalization of the Far Right between Movements and Parties

*Manuela Caiani* 

*“The time of the patriots has come, in Italy, Finland, Sweden, Poland,  
and the Czech Republic, we have shown that we patriots can govern  
and contribute to increasing the prosperity of the people. Your victory  
can give impetus to the whole of Europe”*

—(Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni at the Vox rally in Spain  
(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yxj8ACKjuRM>))

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For the purposes of this work, we use a broad and inclusive meaning of the ‘far-right’ category, which encompasses other labels commonly used in the literature, such as ‘radical Right’ or ‘populist Far Right’. This is consistent with the increase in internal heterogeneity in far-right parties in the current context of the so-called global ‘fourth wave’ of the Far Right (Wondreys & Mudde, 2022).

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## INTRODUCTION

As part of its contemporary fourth wave (Mudde, 2019), far-right politics is increasingly becoming an international phenomenon. Accordingly, scholars emphasize the need to focus on the global dimensions of populist nationalism (Miller-Idriss, 2019).

Indeed, like many other political actors, the Far Right has expanded beyond national borders, creating transnational connections and international cooperation (Caiani, 2018). However, empirical analyses on this topic are still ongoing (e.g. Nissen, 2022; Anievas & Richard, 2023; Caiani 2025; Reem & Pisoiu 2021; Varga & Buzogány 2022; Fominaya, 2022; current European projects such as the AUTHLIB project, <https://www.authlib.eu/>). Although left-wing transnationalization is very well known and has been extensively studied (e.g. della Porta & Caiani, 2009), right-wing and especially extreme responses to processes of transnationalization (whose European integration can be considered a regional case) have so far received relatively less scholarly attention (for exceptions see below). However, there are good reasons to ask how the Far Right has responded to the challenges of transnational politics, not least since internationalization processes of all kinds contradict a number of the central myths of the Right, namely, racism, nationalism and national identity (see also, for a non-Western centric perspective, Pinheiro-Machado & Vargas-Maia, 2023). In addition, several scholars have pointed to internationalization processes as an important explanation for the recent dynamism of right-wing extremism in many Western European democracies. Some scholars interpret contemporary far-right politics as a form of ‘late-modern populism’, while others see it as a reaction to post-materialism or, more precisely, as ‘anti-modernity/globalization’. Despite their opposition to transnationalization processes, far-right forces, including both political parties and movements, increasingly feel the need to establish contacts and crossnational coordination, discuss and frame transnational politics and organize themselves to cope with this level of political contention.

This chapter aims to contribute to this debate by identifying some useful concepts, drawing mainly on social movement studies, which can be used to study the transnationalization of right-wing groups—including both political parties and movements—and providing empirical cases to support the argument. Firstly, we will look at the contextual political opportunities that European integration provides for the transnationalization of the Far Right. It is important to note that nowadays right-wing

activists and movements also positively identify as European. We term these ‘pro-European nativists’ (which differ from the left-wing progressive ‘anti-nationalist Europeans’, Caiani & Weisskircher, 2022), underlining the existence of strong European identities across the political spectrum deeply embedded in the mindset of these groups even when they sharply criticize European integration in its current form. These pro-European stances are culturally exclusive and relate in a specific way to the issue of nationalism or the nation-state. Secondly, we will suggest that frames (for a review on the application of this concept to collective action studies, see Caiani, 2023) are another important lens and mechanism (at the meso-organizational level) for the development of crossnational far-right links and cooperation. Indeed, collective action frames allow us to (symbolically) construct the collective problems to be dealt with and to define the scene of allies and enemies, thus providing organizations and activists with a cognitive reference point within which to locate their activism and motivate their actions. This can be applied to transnational politics. Thirdly, we will consider the initiatives, actions and practices that have the potential to nurture the transnationalization of the current Far Right (including the role of the Internet). The findings presented here reveal that despite the fact that they criticize a supranational system, many far-right actors consider it necessary to engage in politics on a transnational level.

In *social movement studies*, transnationalization is defined as “sustained contentious interactions with opponents—national or non-national—by connected networks of challengers organized across national boundaries” (Tarrow, 2005). The literature distinguishes between transnational issues, targets—namely the subject towards which the claim or the mobilization is directed—and mobilization. Bourne and Chatzopoulou (2015) argue that the collective political Europeanization of actors “occurs when movements collaborate, or make horizontal communicative linkages with movements in other countries, contest authorities beyond the state, frame issues as European and claim a European identity” (2015, p. 34). In this sense, the European Union (EU) arena not only offers new potential targets for protest, but also a shared space of contention for collective actors from across the member states of the EU (Monforte, 2014).

Other scholars identify transnationalization on the Far Right with a shared issue focus among individuals and organizations that have sustained ties of across the borders of multiple nation-states, including interactions that range from low to high levels of institutionalization (Froio & Ganesh, 2019). In this regard, they refer to the far-right transnationalization when

closely interrelated groups and organizations from more than one country place a similar discursive emphasis on particular issues.

Transnationalization is also closely connected to *diffusion*, another concept from social movement studies, which is defined as the adoption of similar frames and strategies of action across distant locations, in two different social movements (della Porta & Mattoni, 2014). Recent developments (on the progressive side of mobilization) have emphasized the importance of cognitive, relational and emotional mechanisms for the diffusion of contention, beyond the more classical considerations (cultural and geographical proximities) (Eren, 2023).

Research on the supranational politics of far-right forces has mainly focused on radical right-wing political parties (and electoral success) and their ‘Europeanization’ (e.g. Conti, 2011). On the other hand, although left-wing transnationalization is very well known and studied in social movement studies (e.g. della Porta & Caiani, 2009; Tarrow, 2005, on ‘scale shift’ of mobilization), so far there has been much less scientific attention paid to right-wing forces (for important exceptions see Caiani et al., 2012; Caiani & Weisskircher, 2022; Nissen, 2022). We must admit that on the ‘regressive’ side there is an increase in studies on anti-gender right-wing social movements—which have been strongly transnational from the very beginning (Kuhar & Paternotte, 2017)—while research is still developing on pandemic-related movements (e.g. Caiani et al., 2024). Finally, there is a quite abundant corpus of studies focusing on the use of social media by right-wing actors for the transnationalization of (‘illiberal’) content (e.g. Heft et al., 2023; Ahmed & Pisiou, 2021; Davis, 2019). Yet there has been practically no research carried out on diffusion (of ideas, frames, ideologies and related mechanisms) in relation to regressive actors (for exceptions, Lavizzari & Siročić, 2022).

Since the transnational aspect of the Far Right may refer to different dimensions, drawing on this scholarship, in this chapter we stress that the transnationalization of the Far Right in Europe can take at least three forms (or trajectories), which can also be understood as ‘mechanisms’<sup>1</sup> (McAdam et al., 2001): transnationalization in terms of transnational and cross-country networks and organizations; in terms of common frames

<sup>1</sup>We refer here to mechanisms in the terms of Charles Tilly’s definition, as “a delimited class of events that change relations among specified sets of elements in identical or closely similar ways over a variety of situations” that, when frequently occurring, constitute the processes of social life.

and ‘identities’; and in terms of common or coordinated actions/events/practices. In the following sections, we will focus on each of these forms, reflecting on each of them in relation to both far-right social movements and political parties.

### POLITICAL OPPORTUNITIES AND THE TRANSNATIONALIZATION OF FAR-RIGHT MOVEMENTS AND PARTIES

European integration is seen as having restructured social and cultural cleavages, creating an opposition between the positions of trans- and supranational integration and those of national demarcation, with far-right parties and movements standing on the side of the defence of positions of ‘demarcation’ through economic and cultural protectionism. As has been noted, “racial-nationalist leaders in both North America and Europe are able to exploit the new political conditions and widespread fears to their advantage (...). Advocating white-European privilege and heritage, racial-nationalists can effectively formulate a troubling but potent transnational message” (Wright, 2009, p. 190).

With regard to the mobilization of the Far Right in the *electoral arena* in Europe, there have been many attempts by far-right parties to create a ‘European’ right-wing group within the European Parliament (Conti, 2011). Since the mid-1980s, European Parliament elections have represented an occasion where Western European far-right parties have tried to coordinate themselves, at least during the political campaign itself (Almeida, 2010, p. 243). The two most recent rounds of European elections have not only seen Europe being targeted by political posters from far-right parties, but it has also become the arena for the transnationalization of the Right, which has increasingly achieved success in European-wide elections.

The 2009 European elections, in particular, marked a clear advance of the Far Right all over Europe. In England, the fascist British National Party (BNP) obtained 6.2% of the votes (electing two deputies for the first time); in the Netherlands, the anti-Islamic *Party for Freedom* (PVV) gained 17% of the votes (and later came third in the 2010 national election, gaining support from more than 15% of voters); in Belgium the *Vlaams Belang* reached 10.9% and in Denmark the *Dansk Folkeparti* (Party of People) took 14.8% of the votes. More recently, having succeeded her father, Jean

Marie Le Pen, Marine Le Pen gained nearly 18% of the ballots cast for the National Front in the first round of the 2012 French presidential election (a success that was repeated in the 2014 local elections). The *Norwegian Progress Party* is represented in the government for the first time after the victory of the right-wing coalition in the 2013 parliamentary elections in Norway. Central and Eastern Europe are no exception. Having received 14.8% of votes in the previous European elections, the ultranationalist, anti-Semitic and neofascist *Jobbik* party (the movement for a Better Hungary) secured 20.2% in the April 2014 parliamentary elections, becoming the third largest party in the Hungarian National Assembly. In Bulgaria, *Ataka* (National Union Attack), which is strongly opposed to the Turkish minority in the country and is against the entry of Bulgaria into the EU and NATO, enjoys 12% of the vote share, while in Slovakia, the National Party (SNS) sits at 5.6%. In summary, if we look at European elections as well as national and local elections since 2009, right-wing, radical, Eurosceptic political parties have gained more than 10% of the votes in 11 member states: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Denmark, France, Hungary, Italy, Lithuania, Norway, Netherlands and Switzerland.

The 2014 EU elections confirmed the increasing success of nationalist and Eurosceptic far-right actors all over Europe. The French *Front National* (FN, National Front—now rebranded as National Rally: Rassemblement National, RN) and British UK Independence Party (UKIP) performed very strongly, winning twenty-four and twenty-two seats respectively. In Denmark, the far-right *Dansk Folkeparti* (DF, Danish People's Party) triumphed with 27% of the votes, doubling its representatives in the European Parliament (MEPs) from two to four. In Austria, the *Freiheitliche Partei Österreich* (FPÖ, Freedom Party of Austria) increased its vote tally by 7.2% from the previous election. Even the neo-Nazis of the *Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands* (NPD, National Democratic Party) in Germany managed to gain one seat in the European Parliament. On this occasion, the attempt by the Far Right to form a parliamentary group within the European Parliament almost succeeded in the form of the European Alliance for Freedom (EAF), the far-right coalition led by Marine Le Pen of France. The EAF was a pan-European political party made up of far-right Eurosceptics founded in 2010, which initially brought together the delegations from the FN, the Dutch *Partij voor de Vrijheid* (PVV, Party for Freedom), the Belgian *Vlaams Belang* (VB, Flemish Interest), the FPÖ, the Sweden Democrats (SD), the *Slovenská Národná Strana* (SNS, Slovak National Party), and the Italian *Legha Nord* (LN,

Northern League). The DF, UKIP and the *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD, Alternative for Germany) refused to join the new alliance. At the same time, the more radical and anti-Semitic European nationalist parties, such as the NPD in Germany, the British National Party (BNP), Golden Dawn in Greece and Jobbik in Hungary were blocked from entering the party. However, due to internal splintering after the European elections, the proposed EAF group did not reach the EU requirement of representation from seven member states, and as a consequence their MEPs sat as *non-inscrits*, meaning that they were not members of one of the recognized political groups.

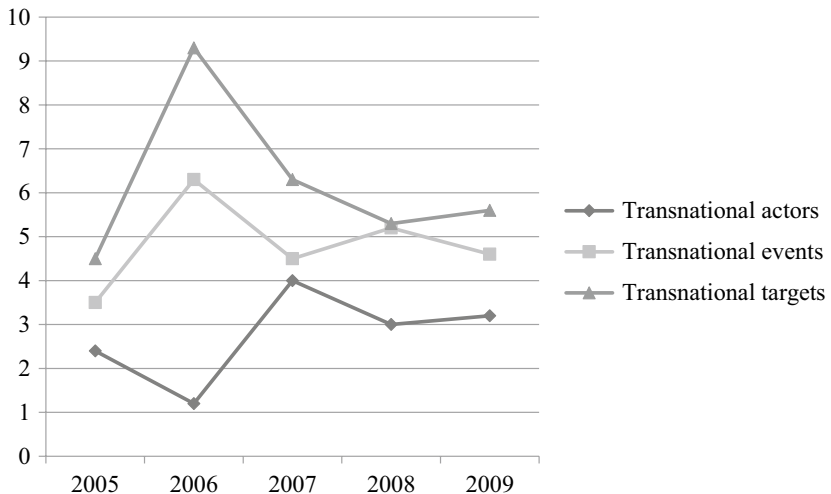
In comparison to the 2014 European Parliament elections, the Far Right consolidated itself into two key political groups after the 2019 elections: the Identity and Democracy Group (ID) and the European Conservatives and Reformists Group (ECR), which brought together the majority of the largest far-right parliamentary parties in the 27 EU member states. The ID group was headed by the National Front of Marine Le Pen and the Lega of Matteo Salvini, and held 64 seats in the European Parliament. At the same time, the ECR was dominated by its Polish member, the Law and Justice Party (PiS), and had 63 representatives. Some of the far-right political parties remained independent in the European Parliament, including the Hungarian *Fidesz* party, which abandoned its membership of the European People's Party in 2021. The latest European Elections, in 2024, have seen far-right parties gain a large number of seats in the EU parliament. Indeed, extreme right-wing parties won in many countries in Europe, coming out on top in France, Italy and Austria, while also registering successful results in the Netherlands. The AfD came second in Germany—but still ahead of Chancellor Olaf Scholz's SPD party. Some experts warn against overestimating this success too much, while others point to the possible causes, but also consequences for the future of Europe of the victory of parties that see as their core ideology values of nationalism, or rather ethno-nationalism, conservative values (in particular authoritarianism, and law and order) anti-establishment and in some cases anti-system criticism. In this period of crisis and the ongoing implementation of PNRR, a victory for the Far Right in the next European elections could mean a rise in 'neoliberalism'. In addition to the issue of identity policies, such as the traditional policies on immigration that we tend to focus on when looking at the Right, this 'neoliberalism' combines economic neoliberalism with illiberal politics, economic neoliberalism with illiberal politics (Caiani & Meardi, 2022). The question is

whether in the future the two main far right-wing groups in the Parliament—the newly formed Patriots for Europe (Pfe) and the European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR)—might join forces to create a transnational supergroup.

As for the *social movements* that exist outside of the institutional arena, in recent years a far-right network has emerged that extends beyond national borders, made up of “close contacts throughout the EU” and supported by the participation of “like-minded nationals from all around the states at right-wing events, such as White Power Music concerts” (Europol, 2011, p. 29). It has been argued that “transnational processes of exchange and learning play an important role in the success of right-wing extremism and right-wing populism in Europe” (Langenbacher & Schellenberg, 2011, p. 22). Confronted with the ‘global challenges’ of the twenty-first century, right-wing extremists have sought to create a transnational network based on a ‘global white identity’ (Daniels, 2009). Indeed, Nissen has shown that the European Union and its policies are increasingly the target of protest events by far-right movements (2022). However, the relationship between far-right groups, parties and social movements, and transnational politics is far from clear. Despite their opposition to a supranational system, many far-right movements consider it necessary to engage in politics on a transnational level. Transnationalization in terms of mobilization can be further differentiated. On the one hand, we must consider cooperation at the European Union level, looking at both successful and unsuccessful attempts at building electoral alliances and parliamentary groups. In line with previous literature, this dimension focuses mainly on political parties. Tentative case studies for this could be the *European Alliance for Freedom* (populist Far Right), the *Alliance for Peace and Freedom* (Far Right, previously known as the *European National Front*) and the *Alliance of European National Movements*. On the other hand, it is necessary to consider international meetings and occasional gatherings, such as demonstrations, commemorations and meetings marking historical events. This dimension is relevant for all groups: parties, movements and subculture groups. Examples of this type of transnational activities include the Dresden demonstration commemorating the bombing of the city during Second World War, but also the occasional participation of foreign far-right activists in national protests organized by far-right organizations (e.g. Golden Dawn, Casa Pound, and Forza Nuova).

One investigation, based on protest event analysis of far-right mobilization between 2005 and 2009, showed that although right-wing

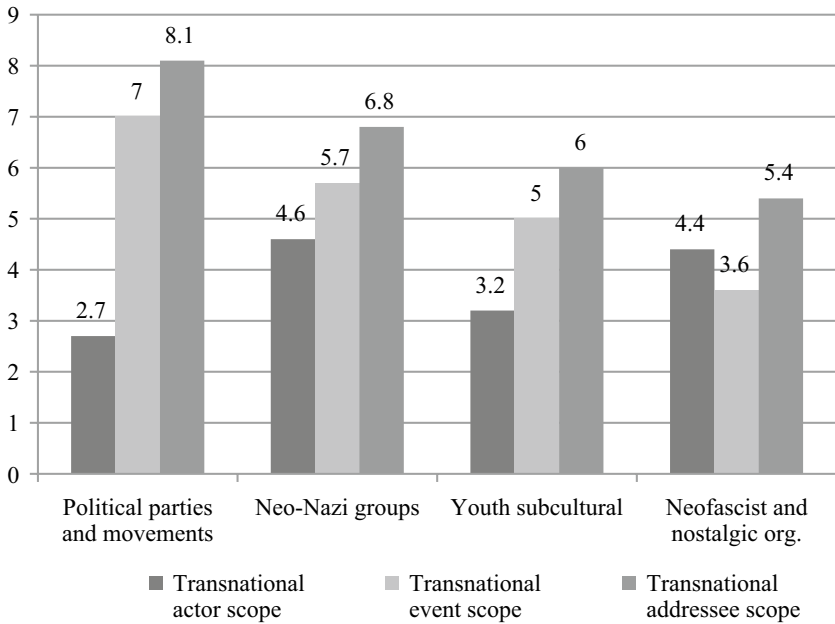
mobilization primarily focuses on the domestic (or, more precisely, the local) level (e.g. 28% of registered right-wing events have a national scope, 40% are organized by a right-wing national actor and 33% have a national target), there are significant signs of an emerging transnationalization of right-wing action (either in terms of targets, actors and scope of the mobilization) (Figs. 10.1 and 10.2). Moreover, it is not only political parties that appear to be able to transnationalize their mobilization, as this is also the case for not-party organizations (in detail, Fig. 10.2). In this regard, we can point to the emergence of the European-wide, Stop Islamification of Europe movement, which was founded in 2007 in the United Kingdom against “the overt and covert expansion of Islam in Europe”<sup>2</sup> and is active in several European countries. Another example is the well-known international neo-Nazi organization, Blood and Honour, which is active both in Europe and the United States, with many affiliated groups,<sup>3</sup> as well as



**Fig. 10.1** The development of transnational far-right actors, events and targets (2005–2009), all countries (%)

<sup>2</sup>The Guardian, 24th October 2007.

<sup>3</sup>E.g. ADL Archive, 30th August 2008 and El País, 27th April 2005.



**Fig. 10.2** Transnational far-right mobilizations, by type of group (%) (2005–2009)

the extreme right neo-Nazi network, Stormfront.<sup>4</sup> The types of transnational, right-wing protests include events such as the European campaign to boycott products from American multinational companies entering Europe,<sup>5</sup> as well as cultural events such as international concerts or gatherings.<sup>6</sup> As observed in relation to other characteristics of right-wing mobilization, this emerging trend toward a transnationalization of these organizations also seems to be helped by their use of the Internet

<sup>4</sup> ADL Archive, 13th April 2008.

<sup>5</sup> As the slogan of the campaign explained, “We are doing consultations among leaders of nationalist movements in Europe, with the aim of extending the boycott campaign against the USA to a transnational level ...” (Forza Nuova, March 2003—our translation).

<sup>6</sup> Such as the international neo-Nazi gathering, organized by a number of French skinhead groups, involving 300–400 participants coming from different countries, above all Germany (Le Monde, 24th January 2005) or the music festival Hammerfest organized in the USA in 2005, involving extreme right-wing bands from all over the USA and Europe (The Atlanta Journal and Constitution, 1st October 2005).

(something that was evident even prior to the spread of social media). For example, when the German extreme-right group Blood and Honour was banned in 2008, it managed to survive and continue its activities through its website, which was hosted on non-German servers and permitted the group to continue advertising and organizing mobilization events, such as concerts both within the country and abroad.<sup>7</sup>

## NETWORKS AND THE TRANSNATIONALIZATION OF THE FAR RIGHT

In this regard, we cannot neglect the key role played by the Internet in the internationalization of the Far Right (Törnberg & Nissen, 2022). As numerous studies have highlighted, far-right organizations in both Europe and America increasingly rely on the Internet for their activities, in order to circumvent national laws and police scrutiny (Bartlett et al., 2011; Caiani & Parenti, 2013; Ramalingam, 2012). The new virtual means of communication offered by the Internet are considered to favor transnational solidarity. As has been observed, “the development of information and communication technologies” and the “easing of Europe’s border” are the “new enablers allowing white supremacists and neo-Nazis to connect and cooperate” (Whine, 2012, p. 317). Furthermore, as a number of social movements scholars have underlined, the Internet can play an important role in facilitating the processes of mobilization by reducing the cost of communication with a large number of individuals, solving the problem of leadership and networking, and allowing for the organization of transnational and even global events.

One example of transnationalization in terms of the development of crossnational links (also online) is the cooperation between far-right actors on specific topics. In this regard, one aspect of transnationalization that we can conceptualize is an issue-based cooperation by political parties and social movements that build temporary coalitions on specific campaigns and topics. Previous examples of this are the networks that were created in solidarity with Russia (against Russophobia), Ukraine, Palestine and, more recently, the *European Solidarity Front for Syria* ([www.esfsyria.org](http://www.esfsyria.org)). In addition, one could also look at ultra-conservative Catholic networks, such as the Society of St. Pious X (<http://www.fsspx.org/en/>), or similar ultrareligious groups that exist in contexts where the religious dimension

<sup>7</sup> Sueddeutsche Zeitung, 30th August 2008.

is a crucial element for far-right mobilization (e.g. Hungary, Poland, Slovakia).

In the summer of 2021, populist far-right leaders in several European capitals signed a document calling for a deep reform of the EU, which they framed in exclusivist terms, concerning migration policies and borders. This was followed by networking events in Warsaw (December 2021) and Madrid (January 2022), which were attended by most of the signatories (although the Finns Party and the Danish People's Party were absent). While it is difficult to clearly pinpoint who this initiative was initiated by, the Polish PiS party and the Hungarian Fidesz party—both of whom have been responsible for democratic backsliding within the EU—undeniably played a significant role. However, divisions soon began to emerge between the signatories over the issue of Russia, with parties from different countries disagreeing on crucial matters such as the imposition of sanctions against Russia and the delivery of aid for Ukraine.

It should be noted that there is also a long legacy of 'pan-European' ideas on the Far Right, most visibly in France immediately following the Second World War. The essay 'What is Nationalism?', written by Dominique Venner in the 1960s, still remains influential in far-right intellectual circles, while Alain de Benoist has long advocated the need for European unity—and unity between Germany and France in particular. Even the name of the think tank that he founded, GRECE (Research and Study Group for European Civilization), indicates a positive association with Europe. It is no surprise that Griffin (2000, p. 166) refers to the "Europeanization of fascism" as a "striking feature of the post-1945 fascist far right" (see also Macklin, 2013). In a similar fashion to their left-wing and liberal counterparts, the pro-Europeanism of current far-right groups reflects the heritage of previous waves of activism.

On an EU level, for example, the Brothers of Italy party (*Fratelli di Italia*, FdI), which is one of the most successful far-right parties in Europe in recent years, managed to enter the European Parliament in the 2019 election, where it joined the European Conservatives and Reformists grouping (ECR). The fact that the party decided to join the ECR, which at the time was perceived as less far-right than the ID grouping, can be interpreted as an attempt by Giorgia Meloni to construct a more moderate image for herself on the European level (Vampa, 2023).

At the same time, however, FdI has been vocal on an international level about its support for the Hungarian governing party Fidesz and its leader Viktor Orban. While Fidesz does not currently sit with any group in the

European Parliament, it had previously been a member of the EPP, before it was expelled in 2021 following years of controversies. Giorgia Meloni has maintained a very close relationship with the Hungarian Far Right, and in the Trieste Thesis (a document that sets out the development of a European Right),<sup>8</sup> FdI describes itself as being partly inspired by Central European countries that have a solid potential for far-right mobilization:

We believe that all the European treaties must be revised and start afresh from a new pact, from a confederation of free and sovereign states that cooperate on major strategic issues, from security to immigration, from the common market to foreign and defence policy, but without the headless tyranny of an anonymous bureaucratic superstructure incapable of representing the needs of the member states and the demands of their citizens. With this in mind, we look with attention to the ‘Visegrad group’, of which Hungary, Poland, the Czech Republic and Slovakia are already members, and which could soon be joined by Austria, as a symbol of opposition to the bureaucratic degeneration of the European Union and the defence of real and historical Europe. (Tesi di Trieste 2017)

For a number of years, FdI has also been building a similarly close relationship with Law and Justice (PiS), the far-right party that until recently was governing Poland. Collaboration between the two parties continued even after FdI entered government in Italy. In an interview he gave to the Italian state broadcaster during an official visit to Rome, the Polish president, Andrzej Duda, stated, “I am Andrzej, I am a man, I am a father, I am a Catholic”, echoing the words of a famous speech given by Giorgia Meloni.<sup>9</sup> Another important international partner of FdI is the Spanish far-right party Vox. Given the strong nationalistic position of Vox, as well as the support that the Lega had expressed for Catalan independence, the Spanish party found a much stronger basis for collaboration with FdI (Pucciarelli, 2022). In the case of both parties, it is possible to trace a refocusing of language, from words such as ‘nationalism’ to terms such as ‘patriotism’ and ‘sovereignism’, as well as a diminishing centrality of religion and religiousness in their strategic framing (Botti, 2022).

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.giorgiameloni.it/tesitrieste/>

<sup>9</sup> Rome, 24 January 2020—From the Ravenna stage to support the candidate for the Presidency of the Emilia-Romagna Region Borgonzoni, Giorgia Meloni takes the floor. The leader of the Brothers of Italy relaunches her slogan: “I am Giorgia, I am a woman, I am a mother....” See, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mFYoFOaJvMs>

Beyond institutionalized contacts within the European Parliament, other studies have revealed the presence of crossnational contacts among *far-right social movements* (i.e. political movements, cultural associations, subcultural and neo-Nazi groups. See Table 10.1). A research project that included fifty-four interviews with representatives of the most important far-right organizations in six European countries (Austria, France, Germany, Great Britain, Italy and Spain) and the United States (Caiani & Kröll, 2014) revealed that most of the far-right groups interviewed (71%) have frequent transnational contacts, either with right-wing groups in other countries or at the international level with umbrella federations. For instance, a representative of the English Democrats stressed that they “have been approached by several foreign organisations such as the Flemish Nationalist Party and the Austrian FPÖ in order to find topics of common interest and to work on a common platform” (Caiani & Kröll, 2014, p. 10). Similarly, the German movement *Junge Nationaldemokraten* (JN, Young National Democrats) declared that it was in regular contact with a variety of right-wing youth organizations in Europe, including the *Nordisk Ungdom* (Nordic Freedom), and the NPD claimed links with other European far-right parties, such as the *Falange Española de las JONS* (Spanish Phalanx of the Committees for the National-Syndicalist Offensive), the BNP from the United Kingdom and *Dělnická Strana Sociální Spravedlnosti* (DSSS, Workers’ Party of Social Justice) from the Czech Republic (Caiani & Kröll, 2014, p. 11). A representative from the American Third Position explained that his group had recently had ‘trans-oceanic’ contacts with the French RN, while other American organizations have had contact with the BNP (Caiani & Kröll, 2014, p. 12). This

**Table 10.1** International and cross-national ties by type of E.R. organizations

Country	%	Types of groups	%
USA	30.0	Political parties	12.5
ITALY	41.3	Political movements	32.1
SPAIN	29.3	Nostalgic groups	17.9
FRANCE	25.0	Neo-Nazi groups	54.2
UK	36.4	Cultural organizations	36.4
GERMANY	10.0	Subculture groups	37.5
All countries	29.5	All groups	29.5

Source: Caiani and Parenti (2013)

high degree of horizontal ‘transnational embeddedness’ may be related to the weak institutionalization of supranational right-wing actors, which pushes national far-right movement organizations to be directly involved at multiple levels.

### INTERNATIONALIZATION OF FAR-RIGHT ‘FRAMES’ AND IDENTITIES

Some scholars look at the internationalization of collective actors as a diffusion of ideas, norms and values and indicate processes of diffusion of ‘frames’ as a precondition for the formation of transnational cooperation and identities, which can function in turn as a basis for the development of crossnational linkages (della Porta & Diani, 2020). As with any political party, networking represents an essential political activity for the Far Right, particularly on an international level, functioning as a crucible for the exchange of ideas and information on policy and praxis (Macklin, 2017, p. 177). This ‘diffusion’ of shared ‘frames’ and common ‘repertoires of protest’ also facilitates the further development of ‘tolerant’ support networks for ‘intolerant’ ideologically inspired action, which can yield logistical and indeed emotional support to activists who are frequently marginalized within the context of their domestic politics. The diffusion of ideas can be analysed by applying fame analysis, focusing on the social construction of problems and solutions and the way organizations spread their vision of society (Caiani, 2023).

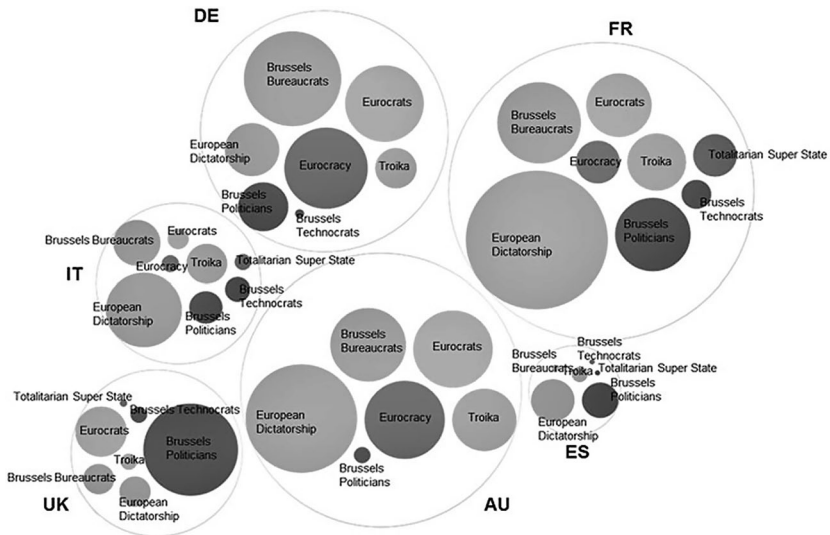
An example of transnationalization in terms of identities (i.e. lower level indicators to be looked at) is the transnationalization of identities through online mobilization and web-based channels of socialization, clothing choices and the diffusion of art and musical cultures (White Power, Blood and Honour, Identitaria Rock). This is particularly relevant for social movements and subcultures (such as the neo-Nazi, White music groups).

One recent study has highlighted how the main far-right parties and movements in seven European countries share similar interpretative frameworks on Europe and the process of European integration: these include similar diagnoses of the socio-political reality, similar prognoses and

similar solutions and calls for action (Pavan & Caiani, 2017)<sup>10</sup> (Figs. 10.3 and 10.4).

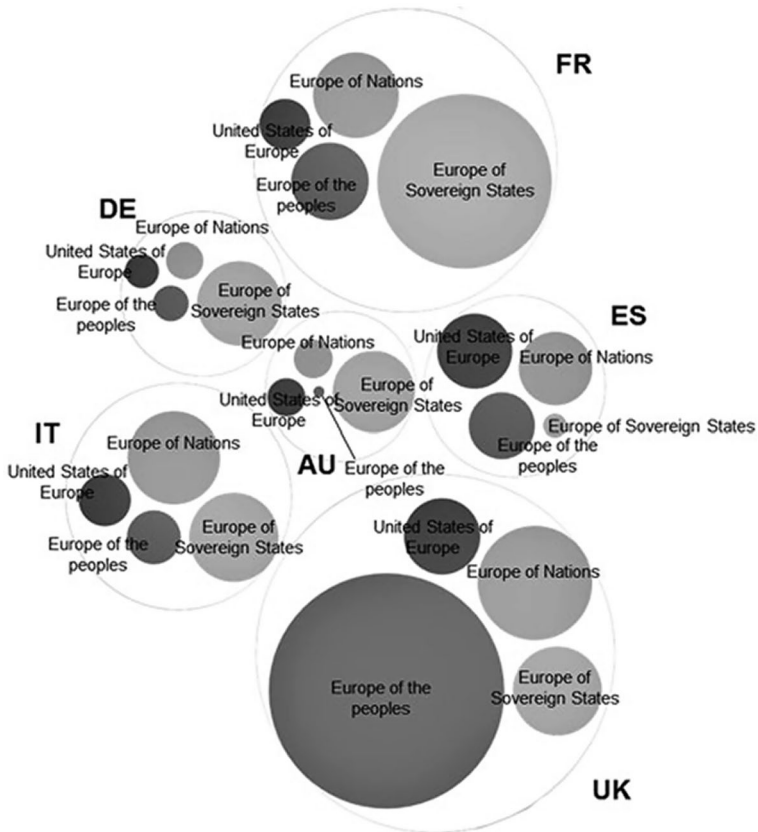
These similar interpretative schemes on current politics also serve to create what in sociology is called the structure of discursive opportunities, that is, the “political-cultural or symbolic opportunities that determine what kind of ideas become visible for the public, resonate with public opinion and are held to be ‘legitimate’ by the audience” (della Porta & Diani, 2020).

Turning to the *political party side* and returning once again to the example of the Italian far-right party FdI, we can observe that their alternative vision of the European Union frames it as a historical ‘civilizational’ project that exists in spite of foreign influence, and in particular the so-called process of ‘Islamization’. This is a frame that is shared by many right-wing parties across the continent. During a recent wave of criticism,



**Fig. 10.3** ‘Diffusion’ and ‘Transnationalization’: Common Identities (critical frames on Europe by the RR in 7 countries)

<sup>10</sup> As seen in the figure, for each country, circles with larger diameters correspond to aspects particularly emphasized by programmers through the pages of their sites. Overall, the findings suggest that opposition to current European integration processes is an issue discussed with a wealth of nuances in the online conversations between far-right sites.



**Fig. 10.4** Diffusion' and 'Transnationalization': Common Identities (positive frames for reforming Europe by the RR in 7 countries)

when 15 EU member states and the European Parliament attacked Hungary for its anti-LGBTQ+ legislation, Georgia Meloni took the decision to stay out of the debate (Lancari, 2023). The openly islamophobic and nativist discourse of FdI means that it is closely relatable to identitarian mobilizations in Central Europe.

Looking at *far-right social movements*, one of the key developments in the contemporary European protest arena is the development and the dominance of European identities also on the Far Right, even when activists heavily criticize the existing reality of European integration (Caiani &

Weisskircher, 2022). It has been observed that right-wing movements, having to grapple with the changing structure of discursive opportunities, have moved away from traditional notions of nationalism and race and have adopted a broader language of civilizational struggle, rallying around the nebulous idea of the ‘West’ to create a syncretic assemblage of cultural signifiers (Bergmann et al., 2021). This has been seen to manifest itself in a new trend among populist reactionaries in Western Europe, some of whom have paradoxically declared themselves to be the champions of free speech, human rights, women’s emancipation and LGBTQ+ acceptance, while also simultaneously endorsing Christendom and secular values (Brubaker, 2017). More recently, activists across the political spectrum have also increasingly tended to advance their visions of Europe based on solid European identities (Caiani & Weisskircher, 2022). Far-right groups have organized protests in response to the intensifying ‘refugee crisis’ (Caiani & Císař, 2019). These protesters have also emphasized a European identity, albeit to call for the so-called defence of Europe against the alleged threats of ‘Islamization’ and ‘decay’. One well-known example of this can be seen in the far-right group PEGIDA (Berntzen & Weisskircher, 2016), a group that is predominantly active in Dresden and is opposed to non-European immigration, the mainstream media and has demanded more direct democracy—although without making strong references to European integration. A further group that is active in several European countries and opposes non-European immigration is the Identitarians (Zúquete, 2018) (Table 10.2).

**Table 10.2** Key elements of European identities of far-right ‘pro-European nativists’

	<i>‘Pro-European nativists’</i>
Identification with Europe	Strong
Criticism of the existing reality of European integration	Strong
Identification of Europe with culturally inclusive stances	Weak
Identification of Europe with culturally exclusive stances	Strong
Attitude towards nationalism	Positive

Source: Author’s elaboration from Caiani and Weisskircher (2022)

## TRANATIONALIZATION OF ACTIONS AND MOBILIZATION

Focussing specifically on *far-right social movements*, the contemporary European Identitarian movement began to develop in France at the beginning of the 2000s, and subsequently inspired the creation of a number of different groups and organizations. The movement spread and created connections with a number of social movements and political parties in various European countries, including Austria, Germany, Italy, Switzerland, Spain, Portugal (Jacquet-Vaillant, 2021). One of the most well-known cases of its transnationalization is the ‘Generation Identity’ network, which spread to thirteen countries in the period between 2012 and 2017 (see Nissen, 2022).

As an example of this spread, we can look at the example of the anti-Islamic PEGIDA movement, which was established in 2014 and initially developed in Germany, before subsequently spreading to Norway and Austria (Berntzen & Weisskircher, 2016). Its development has been based on utilizing the opportunities offered by the refugee crisis (2015–2016), as well as the subsequent pandemic crisis (2020–2022) and the climate crisis (Nam, 2021). Although PEGIDA’s protest mobilization has significantly decreased since its peak in 2014 and 2015, in recent years researchers have noted its persistence in a novel form of symbolic performances (Volk, 2022).

Among the other far-right movements, the anti-gender movement is one of groupings with the greatest success in achieving transnationalization. Motivated by detailed strategic reflections of US and European conservative activists, the ‘Agenda Europe’ organization currently brings together more than 100 groups and organizations mobilizing against human rights, women’s rights and LGBT rights across more than thirty European countries (Datta, 2021). A particularly notable phenomenon over the past decade has been the far-right protest actors developing as complementary support to the strongly authoritarian governments in Poland and Hungary. An example of such activity in Poland is the traditional Independence March, which has become one of the central rallies attended by various far-right actors and is mainly focused on promoting xenophobic and nativist messages. Parliamentary and extra-parliamentary actors often collaborate and share resources. This is especially the case in the context of Hungary, where researchers have observed the extent to which the patient, long-term development of grassroots networks and activities has helped in strengthening the power of far-right parties and

movement parties (see Greskovits, 2020). More recently, in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, far-right movement actors have mobilized around a range of conspiracy theories (Caiani et al., 2024).

With regard to the transnational initiatives and actions of *far-right parties*, party rallies, gatherings and cultural events are on the increase. Far-right party leaders often deliver keynote speeches at each others' conventions, such as the National Conservatism Conference, the first edition of which was organized in Rome in 2020 by the conservative think-tank the Edmund Burke Foundation. For many of the political parties in the current European electoral landscape, transnational collaboration is not simply an addition to their domestic activities but also a source of inspiration as well as resources. A case in point is the personal experience of Giorgia Meloni in organizing the Atreju festival, which was established by the youth branch of FdI's direct predecessor, Alleanza Nazionale (AN), and has hosted high-profile political figures such as Steve Bannon and Viktor Orbán (Vampa, 2023). The Italian party has invested a great deal of time and energy into building up her profile at international far-right events. Examples of this process include the recent gathering of the international sovereignist right in Rome (September 2023): the National Conservatism Conference, held in Italy in 2020 and attended by, among others, Giorgia Meloni, Viktor Orban, Matteo Salvini and a representative of the Le Pen family; and the meeting between the Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni and the Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki. Given the numerous attempts and failures by European radical right-wing forces to create a single political entity (grouping or party) at this level, this will remain an open question (plausible and desired) for many right-wing political actors (McDonnell & Werner, 2020).

## CONCLUSION

As has been shown in this chapter, despite the fact that they criticize supranational systems of governance (as multicultural threats for peoples identities, as superpower dictatorships, even as not socially carrying national citizens), many far-right organizations consider it necessary to engage in politics on a transnational level. This holds true for both social movements and political parties on the right of the political spectrum. Indeed, as has been seen, these actors increasingly co-organize events and mobilizations transnationally, coordinate crossnational networks and use similar framing strategies to frame similar issues in a similar fashion.

Among the explanations for this key trend in European politics, it must be noted that the existence of the European Union and the process of European integration has favoured processes of transnationalization on the Far Right, both with regard to political parties and the extra parliamentary arena. In terms of far-right political parties, although a discussion had already developed after the Second World War around the possibility of a ‘black international’, aimed at bringing together European far-right groups,<sup>11</sup> the turning point were the first elections to the European Parliament (in 1979), which offered a new arena for radical right parties in Europe with opportunities for cooperation. Indeed, it was precisely around the Front National that the Group of the European Right (GDE) developed in the EU Parliament in 1984. This is an emblematic case of nationalism prevailing over the drive for international cooperation. In 2007, the ITS (Identity, Tradition, Sovereignty) grouping was created as another attempt to build a European far-right grouping in the EU parliament. However, the ITS also fell apart when members of the Greater Romania Party (PRM) left the group after Alessandra Mussolini (the leader of *Fiamma Tricolore*) made controversial comments about Romanian people. There are currently two large groups representing the radical right in the EU Parliament: the ECR (European Conservatives and Reformists) and the P/E (Patriots for Europe).

With regard to extra-parliamentary far-right organizations, such as the social movement organizations described in this chapter, recent research has pointed to the existence of a ‘hydraulic’ relationship, according to which the stronger the far-right allies in power are (i.e., European far-right parties), the more successful the far-right mobilization is. In relation to this, an additional topic that deserves greater attention in future research looking at the transnationalization of the far-right is the fact that in a context with increasingly hybrid actors (e.g. right-wing ‘movement parties’, Caiani & Císař, 2019), even the transnationalization of the right is becoming more fluid. Consequently, networks of alliances are created that not only involve traditional parties but also foundations, think tanks and movements (e.g. Pegida). We must also note that there are significant differences that make collaboration across Europe quite difficult. These

<sup>11</sup> In 1951, the congress of European far-right parties was held in Malmo, where however there was a split between the European Social Movement (MSE) which wanted to promote a neo-fascist international and the New European Order (NOE) which had ‘biological racism’ as its cornerstone.

include the migration issue, as mentioned above, but also economic ideology (Poland and Hungary are ‘anti-neoliberal’, for example; Buzogány & Varga, 2023), as well as ideology more generally (i.e the Western European Far Right vs. the US-based Far Right).

Research on transnational activism frequently reveals the challenges related to reaching beyond national borders, both online and offline. Whether strong European identities contribute to enhanced transnational practices, in the long run, remains to be seen. However, just as is the case on the progressive side of contention, this should not be taken for granted. This will depend, among other things, on the ability of these collective actors to broaden their opportunities (also at the EU level), through framing (Ringe & Rennó, 2023).<sup>12</sup>

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