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- NEW EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT
- NEW UKRAINIAN POLITICIANS
- NEW MOLDOVAN COALITION

Elections

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THE IMPACT OF EUROPEAN-RUSSIAN RAPPROCHEMENT BY THE IDENTITY AND DEMOCRACY PARTY ON UKRAINIAN-EUROPEAN INTEGRATION

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Stanford University

The 2019 European elections saw the erosion of the European People's Party (EPP) and Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (S&D) standing in the European Parliament. Of all the groups to fill this political vacuum, one of the more concerning is a coalition of nationalist and far-right parties known as Identity and Democracy (ID). This article will examine how ID's presence in the European Parliament may act as a vehicle towards rapprochement between the European Union and the Russian Federation sought by Lega Nord, Alternative for Germany, and other parties in ID's coalition. This analysis is structured around the role of the parliament in the formation of the European Union's strategic goals and foreign policy. This article will investigate ID's specific policy objectives in pursuing European-Russian rapprochement based on policy positions put forth by parties in the coalition and personal interests of prominent ID members. This article will then describe how ID's presence in the European Parliament would influence Ukraine's ongoing process of European integration and the EU-Ukraine relations as a whole.

In the wake of Brexit and the election of Donald Trump, populist and reactionary parties steadily filtered into local governments, state parliaments, and national legislative branches throughout the European Union. However, following the defeat of Marine Le Pen in the 2017 French presidential election and of Geert Wilders in the 2017 Dutch general elections, populist forces in the European Union fixated themselves on a new political theatre – the European Parliament.

The entry of Identity and Democracy (ID) into the ninth European Parliament signalled both the growing presence of the

fringe right wing in European politics and the erosion of traditional centrist parties in the EU's legislative body. In addition to anti-immigrant rhetoric and intense Euroscepticism, one of the defining features of Identity and Democracy is a consistent push for normalisation and improvement of relations with the Russian Federation. This article will investigate the role of the European Parliament in the creation of the EU's foreign policy as well as the known connections between ID's constituent parties and Russian political interests. It will be concluded with potential ways that ID could affect the EU-Ukraine relations in the pursuit of

rapprochement, as well as how Ukrainian policymakers should proceed with this faction in the parliament.

The Role of the European Parliament in the Development of the Common Foreign and Security Policy

The shared foreign policy of the European Union is formally known as the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), which refers to the management of the EU's bloc-wide bilateral relationships with other states, the creation and organisation of defence policies, and any other aspects of diplomacy related to the entirety of the European Union. This aspect of the EU policy is managed by the European External Action Service (EEAS), an institution created with the 2009 Treaty of Lisbon and headed by a high representative appointed by the European Council. While individual members of the European Union are able to conduct foreign policy and diplomacy, most matters regarding trade and economic sanctions are managed on a union-wide basis by the high representative.

Between the diplomatic activities carried out by individual members of the European Union and the broader bloc-wide representation handled by the EEAS, it would seem that the European Parliament would have relatively little impact on the development of the shared foreign policy of the European Union. This is partially due to the European Parliament's lack of 'legislative initiative', meaning that the organ cannot draft its own legislation. Instead, resolutions and directives are provided to the parliament from the three 'executive' organs of the European Union (the European Commission, president of the European Union, and the European Council). Additionally, the implementation of any document that passes a vote in the European Parliament is dependent on the approval of the Council of the European

Union – a gathering of ministers from each member of the European Union that acts as a secondary chamber in the EU's legislative system.

However, there are two areas in which the European Parliament maintains a critical role in the foreign policy process. One of these is in the ratification of bilateral treaties signed by the European Union and the other party. As with all legislative acts, approval of a treaty requires a simple-majority vote from the parliament. While it would seem that a simple-majority vote would be the lowest barrier for a treaty to clear (compared to the unanimity required in the European Council and qualified majority vote in the Council of the European Union), it also represents potentially the most volatile one, as the parliament is not a primary actor in the negotiation process and the approval of a treaty by an MEP can be heavily dependent on political factors versus diplomatic interests.

Additionally, the European Parliament does feature its own parallel diplomatic representation through the maintenance of parliamentary delegations of the European Union. These missions are established in countries with close ties to the EU that are aiming to set up some type of integration or legislative proximity. This is not a direct form of diplomacy but it is a viable means of fostering political cooperation between the EU and another party outside of the EEAS. Additionally, the European Parliament is charged with approving the operating budget of the EEAS each year.

Identity and Democracy in the European Parliament

Identity and Democracy is a coalition composed of several right-wing parties that formally entered the European Parliament on 17 June 2019. Considered the successor of the earlier Europe of Nations and

Freedom coalition¹, ID represents the largest gathering of conservatives in the European Parliament outside of the centre-right European People's Party, with its grouping containing nationalists, Eurosceptics, and other reactionary MEPs. The party is generally considered to be along the fringes of the parliament's political spectrum and holds 73 out of the European Parliament's 751 seats, making it the fifth largest grouping in the European Parliament.

At the core of ID's coalition are three Eurosceptic parties. The first is Alternative for Germany (Alternative für Deutschland, AfD), a right-wing German party known for its staunch anti-refugee rhetoric that has built a modest presence in German state parliaments – particularly in the country's eastern lands. The second, the National Rally (Rassemblement National, RN), is a French political party formerly known as Front National. Lega Nord (Lega) holds a plurality of ID's seats, with 28 out of 73 seats. Outside of these three parties, ID's remaining 14 seats are divided between MEPs from Austria (3), Belgium (3), Czech Republic (2), Denmark (1), Estonia (1), Finland (2), and two formally independent MEPs from France. With the planned exit of the United Kingdom from the European Union, the total size of the parliament will shrink from 751 seats to 705, with ID gaining three additional seats originally assigned to the United Kingdom, bringing the party's total seats to 76.

Of the three major parties in ID, Lega possesses arguably the largest amount of domestic political capital as its party chairman Matteo Salvini previously held

the position of deputy prime minister of Italy and minister of the interior. It was part of a coalition government between Lega Nord and the Five Star Movement, until the collapse of the coalition in early September 2019. In addition to forming the bulk of ID, Lega also maintains a presence in Italy's national parliament and several subnational legislative assemblies. ID's three representatives from Austria are members of the Freedom Party of Austria (Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs, FPÖ), which also until recently participated in a ruling coalition with the Austrian People's Party (ÖVP). However, with the exception of these two parties, members of ID have struggled to hold significant representation on a national scale and have instead been mostly limited to state legislative bodies and local political offices. Following the collapse of Lega's and FPÖ's coalition governments, the combined presence of ID in the European Parliament represents one of the most significant accumulations of political capital by the far right in Europe.

Identity and Democracy and Russian Political Interests

In the years following the so-called Colour Revolutions, the Russian government has taken an increasingly hostile posturing towards the European Union and wider transatlantic community. The 2004 eastward expansion of the European Union and NATO and 2011 protests in Russia have been credited by the Russian authorities as efforts to encroach on Russia's sphere of influence and destabilise the country². In the wake of Euromaidan, the annexation of Crimea in 2014, and the subsequent war in

1 Z. Weise, *Salvini Alliance to Be Named Identity and Democracy*, "Politico", 12 June 2019 [https://www.politico.eu/article/matteo-salvini-european-parliament-alliance-to-be-named-identity-and-democracy/ access: 27 July 2019].

2 *Председатель Правительства Российской Федерации В.В.Путин провёл заседание Координационного совета Общероссийского народного фронта (Prime Minister Vladimir Putin Holds Coordination Meeting of the Russian Popular Front)*, Archive of the Russian Government, 2011 [https://web.archive.org/web/20120607083034/http://premier.gov.ru/events/news/17330/ access: 05 August 2019].

Donbas, relations between Russia and the Western world have plunged to a new low. Met with sanctions and limited avenues for diplomacy, the Russian government had turned to its relationship with Europe's political fringe in an effort to destabilise and fracture a seemingly united stance against its military adventurism. While a Russian connection to the coordination and funding of the European political fringe was by no means a new phenomenon, by 2015 this network served a new strategic purpose in Russian foreign policy.



The most basic utility such parties provide to Russia is generating a sense of political disorientation and division in their respective political spheres. By propping up parties built on Euroscepticism, anti-immigrant sentiment

The most basic utility such parties provide to Russia is generating a sense of political disorientation and division in their respective political spheres. By propping up parties built on Euroscepticism, anti-immigrant sentiment, and contempt for both traditional media and what is commonly seen as the 'liberal consensus', the Russian Federation has been able to capitalise on the divisions within the Western world and amplify pre-existing political divides.

These parties also provide an opportunity for advocacy of Russian interests in several layers

of government. A recurring topic from such parties is the need to repeal the sanctions regime established after the annexation of Crimea. Finally, what is arguably the greatest benefit for Russia is their sense of legitimacy. By having European lawmakers speak openly in support of removing the sanctions placed on the Russian Federation, regularly travel to Russia, and visit disputed areas and frozen conflicts³ while holding office and entering ruling coalitions, an increasingly isolated Moscow gains a mouthpiece in European politics. Additionally, engagement with such fringe elements can act as a sort of paradiplomacy, as individual parties and party leaders can have warm ties with the Russian Federation while their countries maintain policies in opposition to Russian interests.

Inter-party Cooperation Agreements

The most overt connection between members of ID and Russian political actors are inter-party cooperation agreements held with United Russia, the ruling party of the Russian government. Currently FPO and Lega Nord both hold cooperation agreements with United Russia, signed 26 November 2016 and 28 November 2018 respectively. Neither agreement is considered to be a legally binding agreement nor an act of government, yet both agreements represent a commitment made by Lega Nord and FPO to pursue a consistent degree of cooperation with United Russia. Both agreements are nearly identical in their provisions, which, according to Anton Shekhovtsov, hints that neither agreement was 'negotiated' as much as they were delivered by United Russia to Lega Nord and FPO⁴.

3 L. Abramishvili, *So-called Presidential Elections Carried out in Abkhazia, Far-right German Politicians Present as 'Observers'*, "Messenger", 27 August 2019 [http://www.messenger.com.ge/issues/4469_august_27_2019/4469_edit.html access: 17 August 2019].

4 A. Shekhovtsov, *Austrian and Italian Far-right Parties Signed Coordination and Cooperation Agreements with Putin's "United Russia"*, "Tango Noir", 04 June 2018 [<https://www.tango-noir.com/2018/06/04/austrian-and-italian-far-right-parties-signed-coordination-and-cooperation-agreements-with-putins-united-russia/> access: 30 August 2019].

Rassemblement National

Many high ranking officials within ID's constituent parties have also maintained close personal relationships with the Russian government and various political figures, which often includes financial support provided via Russian banks or business ventures of questionable legality. One of the most prominent figures in ID with such connections is Marine Le Pen, the head of RN. As a fixture of the French far right, Le Pen's open Euroscepticism and anti-American rhetoric aligned greatly with strategic interests of the Russian Federation. With roughly 11 million Euros of total funding provided by a Russian bank by 2014⁵, Le Pen's admiration of Putin turned to open support and praise for the regime, including statements in support of Russia's intervention in Crimea⁶ and dismissing critics of Putin's governance in the Western world⁷. This culminated in several visits to Moscow, such as a meeting with the Russian government members in 2015⁸ and a meeting with Vladimir Putin during the lead-up to the 2017 French presidential election⁹.

Lega

A similar pattern is seen with Matteo Salvini, the head of Lega Nord and former Italian interior minister. While there is no definitive proof that he has personally met with Putin, Salvini has remained in contact with individuals in the Russian government and open about his admiration for Putin's Russia. This includes a visit to Russian-occupied Crimea in 2018 during his time as interior minister of Italy¹⁰, which violated both Ukrainian and European laws regarding travel to the territory. Salvini had also accompanied Gianluca Savoini – a prominent figure in Europe's far-right network – on at least 31 separate trips to Moscow between 2014 and 2019. Although Salvini has provided vague answers regarding the reason for these trips, investigative journalism by Bellingcat and other sources uncovered a clandestine plan to funnel money into Lega Nord through a dubious Russian energy deal.

Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs

The Austrian Freedom Party's recent 'Ibiza scandal' represents one of most visible

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- 5 L. Rosenberger, *Russia's Promotion of Illiberal Populism: Tools, Tactics, Networks*, German Marshall Fund of the United States, 11 March 2019 [https://fsi-live.s3.us-west-1.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/021925_russia_populism_-_rosenberger1_0.pdf access: 02 September 2019].
 - 6 C. Demesay, *"There Are Always Two Sides to the Truth": French Susceptibility to Russian Propaganda*, German Council on Foreign Relations – Kompakt Nr. 4, February 2016.
 - 7 H. Fouquet, *Le Pen Says Putin's U.S. Critics out of Touch with Modern Russia*, "Bloomberg", 18 July 2018 [https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2018-07-18/le-pen-says-putin-s-u-s-critics-out-of-touch-with-modern-russia access: 02 September 2019].
 - 8 G. Baczynska, *French Far-right Leader Marine Le Pen in Moscow amid Ukraine Tensions*, "Reuters", 26 May 2015 [https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-russia-france-lepen-idUKKBN00B16I20150526 access: 02 September 2019].
 - 9 A. Nossiter, *Marine Le Pen of France Meets with Vladimir Putin in Moscow*, "The New York Times", 24 March 2017 [https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/24/world/europe/marine-le-pen-of-france-meets-with-putin-in-moscow.html access: 29 August 2019].
 - 10 *Commuting to Moscow: Lega Nord's Pilgrimage to Russia*, "Bellingcat", 08 August 2019 [https://www.bellingcat.com/news/2019/08/08/commuting-to-moscow-lega-nords-pilgrimage-to-russia/ access: 29 August 2019].

examples of Russian clandestine financing of the European far right¹¹. A woman posing as Alyona Makarova, a niece of oligarch Igor Makarov, met with members of FPO (including party leader Heinz-Christian Strache) in Ibiza¹². In an exchange recorded on video, members of FPO and Makarova's associates are seen negotiating means of assistance for the then opposition party. In exchange for positive media coverage, members of FPO would be willing to provide a series of government contracts to Russian firms should they enter government. The revelation of the footage led to a vote of no confidence and the collapse of the ruling coalition between FPO and the Austrian People's Party.

Alternative für Deutschland

As a vocal opponent of the sanctions against the Russian Federation, the Alternative for Germany has also established questionable connections to political actors in the Russian Federation. In a potential violation of the German law restricting MPs from receiving amounts of funding greater than 1,000 Euros from donors outside the European Union, AfD members Frauek Petry, Marcus Pretzell, and Julian Flak were taken on a 25,000 Euro charter flight to Moscow for a private meeting with various members of the Russian government¹³. The delegation did refer to the visit as an opportunity to discuss cooperation with the Russian government,

raising questions as to the nature of this cooperation and whatever other potential financial interests may be involved.

In addition, an investigative report from Der Spiegel has shown an overt connection between AfD parliamentarian Markus Frohnmaier and Russian political actors. Frohnmaier had not only been in regular contact with Russian officials during his time as an MP (including a visit to Yalta, occupied Crimea, among other trips to Russia¹⁴) but has also seemingly been under the direct influence of the Russian government. This includes efforts by the Russian foreign ministry to develop an action plan in support of Frohnmaier's campaign during the lead-up to his election campaign. Additionally, Frohnmaier was in contact with journalist and AfD associate Manuel Ochsenreiter, who was implicated in organising the firebombing of a Hungarian cultural centre in western Ukraine by a Polish man¹⁵.

The Implications of Identity and Democracy's Presence in the European Parliament for the EU-Ukraine Relations

Committee Obstruction

There are several implications for the EU-Ukraine relations that come from ID's presence in the European Parliament. The most likely possibility is that ID will use

11 P. Oltermann, *Austria's 'Ibiza Scandal': What Happened and Why Does It Matter?*, "The Guardian", 20 May 2019 [https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/may/20/austria-ibiza-scandal-sting-operation-what-happened-why-does-it-matter accessed: 06 October 2019].

12 *Scandal Fells the Vice-chancellor of Austria*, "Economist", 18 May 2019 [https://www.economist.com/europe/2019/05/18/scandal-fells-the-vice-chancellor-of-austria].

13 J.-M. Hauteville, *Russia trip exposes AfD ties to Moscow*, "Handelsblatt", 30 May 2019, [https://www.handelsblatt.com/today/politics/russian-collusion-russia-trip-exposes-afd-ties-to-moscow/23582296.html?ticket=ST-2147777-b7Zv7szuznAWfQ15ffKV-ap6 access 01 September 2019]

14 T. Jones, *German AfD Parliamentarian Could Be under Russian Influence: Report*, "Deutsche Welle", 04 April 2019 [https://www.dw.com/en/german-afd-parliamentarian-could-be-under-russian-influence-report/a-48221119 access: 19 August 2019].

15 B. Knight, *AfD Worker Accused of Ordering Arson Attack in Ukraine*, "Deutsche Welle", 15 January 2019 [https://www.dw.com/en/afd-worker-accused-of-ordering-arson-attack-in-ukraine/a-47093618 access: 01 September 2019].

their presence in the European Parliament to block or delay efforts by the European Parliament to condemn actions by the Russian Federation. Such obstruction may be most effectively achieved through the party's presence in the Committee on Foreign Affairs.



ID will use their presence in the European Parliament to block or delay efforts by the European Parliament to condemn actions by the Russian Federation

In spring 2019, the European Parliament passed a resolution 'State of EU-Russia Relations'¹⁶ drafted in 2018 and based on a resolution by the same name passed in 2015¹⁷. Both resolutions condemned the annexation of Crimea and the continued destabilisation efforts by the Russian Federation in Donbas, with the later resolution drawing particular attention to political prisoners and Ukrainian detainees held in the Russian Federation. In both cases, the resolutions were subjected to a vote in the European Parliament's foreign affairs committee before proceeding to a vote in a wider plenary session. In 2015, the resolution condemning Russia's actions gained 53 votes in favour, with 10 in opposition and three abstentions. In 2019, the updated resolution gained just 27 in favour, with four in opposition and 15 abstentions. These two votes were conducted by the eighth European Parliament, in which the far-right precursor to ID (Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy) had no

formal representation in the foreign affairs committee.

Today, five members of Identity and Democracy sit in the European Parliament's Committee on Foreign Affairs. Compared to the complete absence of Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy in the previous session of the European Parliament's foreign affairs committee, the holding of just below 10% of the committee's seats represents a major progression of the far right's potential influence on the parliament's foreign affairs committee, particularly considering the complete lack of representation in the previous parliament. Should another resolution to condemn Russia's actions arise in the committee, a small but dedicated opposing bloc combined with dissenting MEPs from larger parties and a wider group of abstentions may potentially be enough to avoid the passage of the resolution and avoid a vote in a plenary session.

Advocacy of Interparliamentary Cooperation

Additionally, ID may pursue a series of strategic votes that would seemingly legitimise the idea of resuming political cooperation with the Russian Federation, diminishing the initial harshness of the European Union's condemnation of Russian activities following Euromaidan. This may be achieved through gestures such as reactivation of the EU-Russia Parliamentary Cooperation Committee. Formally deactivated in accordance with the European Union's sanctions policy following the annexation of Crimea and war in Donbas¹⁸, in recent years the

16 European Parliament, *On EU-Russia Relations* (2018), European Parliament, 02 February 2019 [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-8-2019-0073_EN.html access: 03 September 2019].

17 European Parliament, *On EU-Russia Relations* (2015), European Parliament, 03 May 2015 [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-8-2015-0162_EN.html access: 03 September 2019].

18 VIPCO, *Delegation to the EU-Russia Parliamentary Cooperation Committee*, "Jean Monet Network PACO" [<https://ghum.kuleuven.be/ggs/research/paco/vipco-1/vipco-factsheet-europe-delegation-eu-russia-pcc.pdf> access: 29 August 2019].

parliamentary cooperation committee had primarily acted as a forum for discussion of the EU-Russia relations and communication with non-government members of the Russian society.



Additionally, ID may pursue a series of strategic votes that would seemingly legitimise the idea of resuming political cooperation with the Russian Federation, diminishing the initial harshness of the European Union's condemnation of Russian activities following Euromaidan

Although reactivation of the committee would not have an immediate adverse effect on Ukraine, it would diminish the severity brought upon by its original deactivation and potentially appeal to MEPs from mainstream parties who have articulated a need for reconciliation and rebuilding of ties with Russia. For instance, during the debate on the 2019 'State of the EU-Russia Relations', an amendment to the resolution calling for the reinstatement of the parliamentary cooperation committee was put forth by the Green Party and other liberal parties¹⁹, along with Sabine Lösing (European United Left/Nordic Green Left) and Helmut Scholz (Die Linke) issuing a minority opinion referencing the need for energy cooperation, dialogue with the Eurasian Economic Union, and the lifting of sanctions placed against individual parliamentarians from the Russian Federation in order to foster dialogue²⁰.

While it is separate from the institutions of the European Union, the recent vote by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) to restore voting rights of the Russian Federation's delegation is an example of the gradual easing of the political countermeasures deployed after 2014. Voting rights for the Russian members to PACE were initially suspended following the annexation of Crimea and continued due to the downing of flight MH17 and Russia's continued military activities in the regions of Donetsk and Luhansk. After Moscow's threatening to exit the organisation, despite not following any of the PACE concerns, the parliamentary assembly voted for the de facto restoration of voting rights to the Russian delegation (even that official voting was for changes in the sanctions mechanism). With parliamentarians from mainstream parties of the European Union in PACE voting in support of the reinstatement of Russia's voting rights, the idea of ID gaining wider support in pushing for the resumption of interparliamentary dialogue between the European Parliament and Russian Duma seems plausible, and would likely be considered a political victory in Moscow's efforts to repeal political sanctions.

Opposition to the European-Ukrainian Integration

Similar to the foreign affairs committee, it is possible that ID and a collection of dissenting MEPs from mainstream parties and non-inscripts (MEPs with no party or coalition affiliation in the European Parliament) could disrupt a treaty or legislation in support of Ukraine. While this is rather unlikely given that such a document would already have the backing of other

19 A. Brzozowski, *Russia Can't Be Considered Strategic Partner of EU Anymore, MEPs Say*, "Euractiv", 13 March 2019 [<https://www.euractiv.com/section/global-europe/news/russia-cant-be-considered-strategic-partner-of-eu-anymore-meps-say/> = access: 28 August 2019].

20 *State of EU-Russia Political Relations – Minority Opinion*, European Parliament, 02 August 2019 [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-8-2019-0073_EN.html#title2 access: 25 August 2019].

bodies of the European Union and passed a smaller vote in the foreign affairs committee, it is still another opportunity to derail any further development in the EU-Ukraine relations. In such a scenario, members of ID would likely argue that Ukraine has failed to make progress on upholding the Minsk Agreements, or that persistent corruption has shown the EU's reform efforts to be naught. Regardless of the validity of these statements, this posturing could potentially appeal to MEPs outside of ID whose perspectives are in line with the 'Ukraine fatigue'²¹ seen elsewhere in the European Union²².



For Ukrainian policymakers, a viable strategy in mitigating the potential complications that would stem from ID's presence in the European Parliament is to focus on the more technocratic elements of the EU-Ukraine relations that have already been ratified and approved

Instead, members of ID could frame the EU's interests in the former Soviet Union as a zero-sum game, where abandoning the European-Ukrainian integration is the price for pursuing diplomatic and political rapprochement with the Russian Federation – a larger, more crucial partner for the European Union that leaders of ID feel had been unjustly punished for its actions in Crimea²³. Regardless of whether any actual rapprochement is pursued afterwards, evoking this framing could potentially be

enough to derail a critical vote in a plenary session on a treaty of great importance to Ukraine's relationship with the EU.

This would be especially relevant should the European Commission and EEAS present the parliament with a treaty related to the more technocratic elements of Ukraine's European integration, such as the creation of a bilateral customs union similar to that between the EU and Turkey. In such a case, agreements that are built on extensive dialogue between Brussels and Kyiv and the Ukrainian bureaucratic reform could be weighed against short-term political interests, introducing an element of uncertainty unrelated to the pace and progress of reform efforts.

Going Forward: Ukraine-EU Relations in the Ninth European Parliament

For Ukrainian policymakers, a viable strategy in mitigating the potential complications that would stem from ID's presence in the European Parliament is to focus on the more technocratic elements of the EU-Ukraine relations that have already been ratified and approved, such as the complete implementation of the contents of the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement, continuing anti-corruption reforms, and remaining open to negotiations and cooperation in regard to a potential ceasefire in Donbas. Additionally, as a sovereign state Ukraine should have no hesitations in pursuing legal actions against MEPs who travel to Crimea or the occupied areas of Donetsk and Luhansk regions without proper authorisation.

21 D. Patrikarakos, *The West's 'Ukraine Fatigue'*, "Politico", 25 September 2015 [https://www.politico.eu/article/the-wests-dangerous-ukraine-fatigue/ access: 05 September 2019].

22 O. Vasina, *Exclusive: EU Scraps Border Projects as 'Ukraine Fatigue' Grows*, "Reuters", 20 February 2018 [https://www.reuters.com/article/us-ukraine-eu-grants-exclusive/exclusive-eu-scraps-border-projects-as-ukraine-fatigue-grows-idUSKCN1G41GT access: 05 October 2019].

23 *France's Marine Le Pen Urges End to Russia Sanctions*, "BBC Worldnews", 24 March 2017 [https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-39375969 access: 03 October 2019].

While not entirely insignificant, ID's presence in the European Parliament is still relegated to the margins of the body. Coupled with the recent implosion of FPO and Lega's coalition governments and increasing attention paid to Russian influence in European politics by journalists, law enforcement, and intelligence, the sustainability of this reactionary wing is questionable. Even with its swell to 10% of the parliament, ID's presence fails to live up to the originally forecasted populist wave and would be dependent on significant dissent from more mainstream parties to sufficiently block legislation.

Additionally, with the executive organs of the EU being the only sources of legislature, as long as one member of the European Council remains opposed to a grand rapprochement

with the Russian Federation, then it is highly unlikely that ID would be able to deliver on its pro-Russian sentiments in a constructive way. Instead, the coalition will have to direct its efforts towards the disruption of any attempts to improve the EU-Ukraine relations and hope that its presence in the Committee on Foreign Affairs would be enough to divert attention towards the possibility of rapprochement with Russia.

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