

# S&D Interparliamentary Newsletter - Connecting with National Parliaments

BRUSSELS, 22/05/24

## NATIONAL AND EUROPEAN PARLIAMENTARY GROUPS JOIN FORCES FOR THE FIFTH S&D INTERPARLIAMENTARY NETWORK MEETING

Dear Arielle,

On 6 May, the S&D Group in the European Parliament held its fifth S&D interparliamentary network meeting. Currently, **our network is composed of over 70 senior staff from 32 parliamentary chambers across 27 Member States and 4 non-EU countries** (i.e. EEA- candidate countries). To date, the network consists of former ministers, MEPs and MPS, parliamentary secretary-generals, heads of cabinet, cabinet members and senior EU advisors. **The aim of this network is to strengthen the ties of our political family in Europe and beyond.** This network was set up during the debates on the Conference on the Future of Europe, and developed over the last two and half years. Today it is a strong network, which meets at least twice a year and cooperates on issues pertinent to our political family.



The S&D Group strongly believes that cooperation between the European and national parliamentary groups is key to the development of the European integration process. The **S&D interparliamentary network met just 30 days before the European elections** to address key issues, such as the outgoing Belgian presidency, the S&D information campaign and rise of the extreme-right parties and governments.

### The Belgium presidency shaped progressive policies

From 1 January to 30 June 2024, it is Belgium's turn, for the thirteenth time, to hold the [presidency of the Council of the European Union](#) (EU). Belgium's well-known reputation for concluding agreements and negotiations has been put to the test in recent months. Ahead of the presidency, 60 dossiers were identified as potentially leading to an agreement: the **Belgian Presidency has already concluded 67 agreements with the European Parliament more than expected.** Key legislative files such as directive to protect platform workers, the directive on a European health data area, the cyber-solidarity regulation and the inter-institutional agreement on a new independent European ethics body were approved under the Belgian Presidency .



Compared to the previous Belgian presidency in the second half of 2010, **the role of national parliaments in European policymaking has increased significantly.** Interparliamentary cooperation has therefore become much more important.

Together with [Eliane Tillieux](#), Speaker of the [Belgian House of Representative](#) & co-chair of the Federal Advisory Committee on European Affairs, we reflected on the intense four months of work achieved during [this Presidency from a parliamentary perspective](#). Indeed, during this presidency, **12 interparliamentary conferences took place, at which 86 Members of national parliaments and 35 MEPs from our S&D family had the opportunity to meet and influence its outcomes.** The highlight of the parliamentary dimension in this presidency were certainly the COSAC meetings, the Joint Parliamentary Scrutiny Group on Europol, the Interparliamentary Conference on CFSP/CSDP and lastly, the conference of Speakers of the European Union Parliaments.



Thanks to the strong commitment of Eliane Tillieux, important issues for our political family were put in the forefront. Indeed, **essential topics such as the European foundation of social rights, equality between men and women, the future of democracy and the rule of law in Europe, and open strategic autonomy, competitiveness and resilience were addressed** and even included in the final contributions. The Speaker of the House of Representatives has also pushed for an issue, which is very close to her heart and our political family: the gender equality issue. On average, **women account for 32% of members in national parliaments and the European Parliament, and 28% of committee chairpersons.** Furthermore, 21 out of 37 parliaments have no internal gender policy - an essential tool for encouraging female leadership. At the initiative of Eliane Tillieux a “[Joint Declaration for more gender-sensitive parliaments](#)” was adopted at the Speakers conference- this highlights the importance of gender equality in national and European parliaments, and welcomes the initiatives taken by the Presidency of the Council of the European Union in the field of gender equality.

## **SOCIALISTS AND DEMOCRATS ACROSS EUROPE STAND-UP AGAINST EXTREME RIGHT AND POPULIST PARTIES**

The far right, associated with fascist and populist tendencies, is on the rise in Europe at regional, national and European level. They are a clear danger to freedom, democracy, and European values.

Standing up to the far right is crucial for Socialists & Democrats across the continent, as we want to keep our values intact and protect everyone's rights, including the most vulnerable in society. By standing up against these ideologies, we are working to stop discrimination and to make sure our society is fair and inclusive

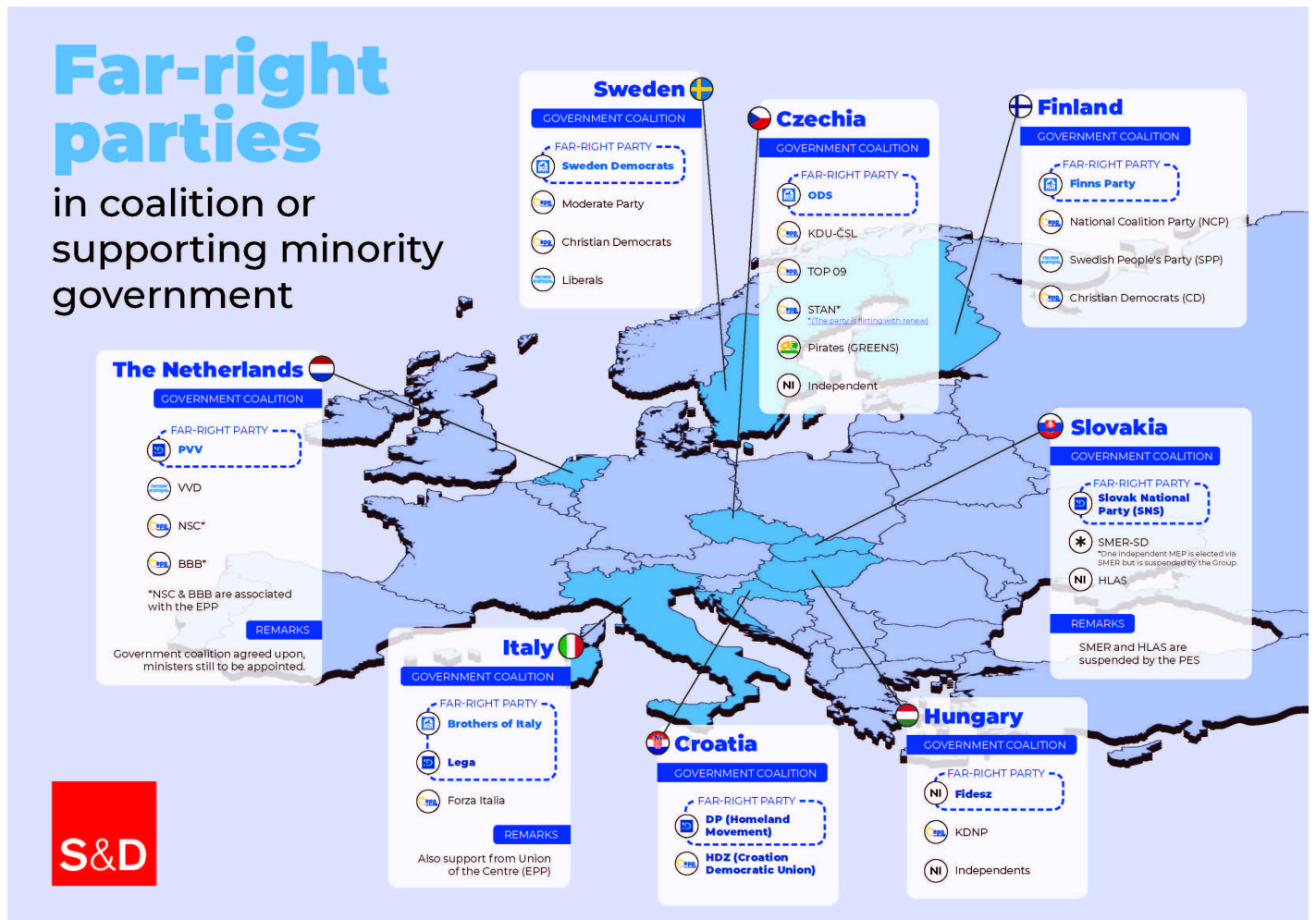
### **The slippery slope of centre-right and populist collaboration**

Following a joint analysis (available upon request per e-mail) of key national and regional legislation adopted in recent years, the S&D interparliamentary network on 6 May discussed crucial findings on the growing partnerships between **the supposedly moderate centre right**



(certain Renew and EPP-aligned parties), and the far right nationalists and populists (ECR, ID and non-aligned groupings) across our Union. At our online meeting, we took stock of the damage already caused by this collaboration, and discussed how to cope with the possible advance of right-wing and populist parties at the European elections.

In eight Member States (Croatia, Czechia, Hungary, Italy, Finland, Slovakia, Sweden, and the Netherlands) far right forces are currently in government (through formal coalitions or informal arrangements), or in the process of doing so. In several other countries, citizens may soon fall victim to the influence of populist governments. Consequently, radical-right forces may soon be enforcing their extreme agendas in almost one third of EU countries, and have received at least 20% of the vote in the latest legislative elections in nine Member States. Beyond this, EPP and Renew-associated parties across Europe are pandering to the populists, recklessly abandoning the cordon sanitaire, which was upheld for decades after the fall of fascism.



On 6 May, many pertinent examples provided from our colleagues helped us to form a collective understanding of these political developments, to harmonise progressive strategies to counter them, and to raise awareness of the normalisation tactics of extremists. These cases covered a wide range of policy topics including housing, migration, workers' rights, taxation, public spending, civil liberties and constitutional affairs. Our progressive allies from all over Europe shared their insights in a collaborative and productive forum.

### Reactionary alliances and their scapegoats

In Finland, for instance, a rollback of social welfare benefits and housing allowance has been imposed upon many citizens, something pursued by the ECR-aligned Finns Party and supported by conservatives and liberals. Another issue of major concern shared at our network meeting was the Finnish Government's recent anti-strike legislation, something which will severely restrict the permitted duration of political demonstrations, and which will impose major fines (up to €150,000) on employees engaged in industrial action that exceeds these new rules. Such developments are contrary to the International Labour Organisation's practices and wholly incompatible with the social democratic vision.

In Italy meanwhile, we discussed Meloni's hard-right coalition and its hostile crackdown on migrant advocacy efforts in the Mediterranean. The Government's plans to amend the constitution and centralise more power in the office of the Prime Minister were also exposed- this could result in a serious weakening of legislative and judicial oversight, and damage the fabric of Italian democracy.

An important assessment from our Italian friends provided a stark lesson on this very phenomenon; the far right disguising themselves as conventional and reasonable. Essentially, we heard that, when Giorgia Meloni saw the opportunity to enter government, she assumed a profile that we would call more moderate. This tactic is one of the greatest risks we face. Because although the path to European-level accreditation of Giorgia Meloni's party followed a more traditional one, within the established European Conservatives, the nature of this party remains very similar to the more extremist Identity and Democracy Group.

The undermining of the rule of law through extremist political agendas was another common theme running through this presentation. On this note, we were provided with a precise assessment of Fidesz's flagrant disrespect for democratic standards in Hungary, and significantly, the EPP Member Party KDNP's support for their policy agenda which includes curtailing LGBTQ+ rights (the infamous "child protection law"), outlawing rough sleeping and criminalising multiculturalism- all features of ultra-right ideology.

## Contradictions and counter-measures

At the core of these examples lie **major contradictions in the rhetoric of Europe's right and centre-right wing parties**. Often, their political narratives in Brussels are inconsistent with their actions at home, and as highlighted by our friends in Austria and Spain, these contradictions can even exist within a country, between national and regional level.

Thanks to our colleagues and partners across the European social democrat family, a deeper understanding of our emerging political landscapes was forged. It is clear that **cooperation between progressive, pro-European forces who prioritise the social dimension is needed now more than ever**, to counter the slippery slope that the identitarian-right intend to take us down.

## D-15 DAYS: 6-9 JUNE 2024

### S&D Information Campaign

Over recent months, the S&D Group has directed and coordinated outreach activity on behalf of the parliamentary group, orienting its efforts towards June's elections to maximise success for our progressive organisation. It has also driven cooperation with strategic partners and undertaken key political research and analysis in an electoral context.

At the 6 May network meeting, we demonstrated our **47 different projects across 18 Member States**, which covered a broad array of political issues, all with our progressive stamp on them. Such initiatives included improving access to housing, advancing women's rights, strengthening workers' conditions and fighting disinformation. From Germany to Ireland, Sweden to Hungary, Slovenia to Spain and beyond, we revealed how the S&D bolstered progressive activity in the media, online, in high-level conferences and via open discussion forums.



### An unfamiliar European Parliament?

Additionally, with the European elections in sight, the network meeting observed some discussion on how parliamentary dynamics might shift next month. As identified by the Information Campaign's polling analysis, the three broad-centre, pro-European groups (S&D, Renew, EPP) are set to face their biggest opposition yet, with Eurosceptics, populists and nationalists projected to make historic gains and potentially influence policy decisions in the formal sense for the first time.

While the liberal Renew group is currently the third largest in the European Parliament, the two far right groups, ECR and ID, could soon overtake it. Interestingly however, our research has found that, despite their powerful rise across Europe, the far right, and particularly the **ID Group, is very internally fragmented**, with a disparate pattern of voting cohesion over the last legislative term. This political factor is very consequential for the future of the European Parliament's legislative process- **will the far right unite across a cohesive policy platform as their representation grows, or will they continue to push their brand of obstructive, nationalistic populism?** Only time will tell.

### The ultimate test for Ursula von der Leyen

The question of Commission President von der Leyen's leadership was also raised and more pressingly, her political tactics and instincts as we approach a new legislative era. The network meeting touched upon alliances post-election and, significantly, **the degree to which von der Leyen may cooperate with hard-line populists on the right to remain in her position at the top of the Berlaymont**. We highlighted that key legislative files such as the Green Deal and the Migration and Asylum Pact risk being thrown out if the Commission President panders to the extremists and populists on the right.

Once again, our meeting emphasised the centrality of the cordon sanitaire to our liberal democracy, to our European values and our collective democratic strength. We, the **S&D Group, as outlined in a [recent declaration](#) with certain other political groups, reject any normalisation of cooperation with the extremists and call on EU leaders to do the same!**

## LATEST NEWS

- [Political leaders sign declaration in defence of democracy](#), 08/05/2024
- [S&Ds: 20th anniversary of EU Enlargement – a milestone that healed scars of history and made EU stronger in face of global challenges](#), 30/04/2024
- [Voting far right is like giving Putin's interests a voice in European Parliament](#), 24/04/2024
- [S&Ds: Growth plan for Western Balkans gives fresh impetus to enlargement](#), 24/04/2024
- [MEPs approve new rules to strengthen free movement](#), 24/04/2024
- [Iratxe García on Middle East: "We are committed to Israel's security and we are also against the humanitarian tragedy imposed by Netanyahu on Gaza"](#), 24/04/2024
- [After eight-year battle, S&Ds deliver historic EU law to 30 million platform workers](#), 24/04/2024
- [Due diligence: Europe will finally have new rules on responsible business conduct](#), 24/04/2024

## WHAT'S NEXT

- 24 - 27 May, **NATO Parliamentary Assembly**; Spring Session, Sofia - Bulgaria
- 6 - 9 June, **European elections**
- 29 June -30 July, 31st annual session of the **OSCE Parliamentary Assembly**, Bucharest, Romania
- 28-29 July, **COSAC** Chairpersons meeting, Budapest -Hungary

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The Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (the S&D Group) is the second largest political group in the European Parliament. We stand for an inclusive European society based on principles of solidarity, equality, diversity, freedom and fairness. We promote social justice, jobs and growth, consumer rights, sustainable development, financial market reforms and human rights to create a stronger and more democratic Europe and a better future for all citizens.

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