

# [***Europe Day marks 1 month till EU elections. Rise of hard right, wilting of Green Deal are possible***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6C09-SYW1-JC5B-G1RK-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Body**

BRUSSELS — The European Union marks its annual Europe Day on Thursday, but instead of the humdrum celebrations, all eyes are on the [*EU elections*](https://apnews.com/article/eu-elections-campaign-defense-ukraine-war-8c83c494c0f0a6b32ab81e27bf6669d0) in a month's time, which portend a steep rise of the extreme right and a possible move away from the bloc's global trendsetting climate policies.

After decades in which the EU elections hardly caused a ripple, the June 6-9 voting is the most important in memory. It is being held at a time of continuous crises on a continent which is experiencing a [*war in Ukraine*](https://apnews.com/hub/russia-ukraine), climate emergencies, a shifting of geopolitical plates and fundamental questions on the reach and purpose of the EU itself.

“It will be an existential fight,” said Guy Verhofstadt, a former Belgian prime minister and outgoing free-market liberal member of parliament who has been in the thick of EU ***politics*** for over a quarter century. It will pit “those who want less Europe and, then, those political forces who understand that in the world of tomorrow you need a far more integrated European Union to defend the interests of the Europeans,” he said in an interview.

In naked political terms, it means those traditional socialist, liberal and green forces that ran the EU parliament with the Christian Democrats over the past five years against the surging powers of the hard nationalist right, exemplified by leaders like [*Viktor Orbán*](https://apnews.com/hub/viktor-orban/) of Hungary and [*Georgia Meloni*](https://apnews.com/hub/georgia-meloni) of Italy.

The vote is the second-biggest exercise in democracy behind the elections in India, as the 27-nation bloc of 450 million people will be picking 720 parliamentarians to serve them over the next five years with decisive votes on everything from digital privacy rules to international trade policy and climate measures.

But more than that, when the results are made public late on June 9, it will be an indication whether the continental political drift will match the rightward swing seen across much of the globe from Argentina to the Netherlands and Slovakia.

Even if surveys diverge somewhat on the margins of the gains, they all point toward one thing: The nationalist hard right and populist parties will make strong gains.

“If I look at the polls all over Europe, more or less, I can always see the same scenario,” said Nicola Procaccini, Meloni's man in the European Parliament, who typically considers himself as part of the center-right far removed from the neo-fascist roots of his Brothers of Italy party.

He said likeminded parties "are rising more or less, everywhere.” That includes election victories in the Netherlands and Slovakia and polls showing they lead the way in France with [*Marine Le Pen*](https://apnews.com/hub/marine-le-pen) 's National Rally.

When it comes to the fundamentals, the EU battle could be seen as Verhofstadt vs. Procaccini, with one insisting only more joint policies on issues like defense are the answer to the EU's global challenges ahead, and the other saying how the individual member states, with their cherished nationhood at its core, should always come first.

While 27 nations with often inefficient individual defense programs have left western Europe at the mercy of U.S. goodwill for much of the past half century, Verhofstadt wants a full defense union to stave off a belligerent Russia, and anticipate a non-committal United States if Donald Trump becomes president in November. “It is not individual member states which will protect the people,” he said.

“And that’s the reason why it’s an existential fight. Because if we lose this fight against the right-wing parties, we will be without defense, without security,” Verhofstadt said.

Procaccini instead centers on what many far-right parties see as encroachment and downright meddling in national affairs by the EU's institutions in Brussels and Strasbourg, France. They have specifically lashed out at the [*EU Green Deal*](https://apnews.com/article/farmers-environment-eu-elections-tractors-protests-9e6369d9fb4c06c31c26c71a30ec2f40) to keep climate change at bay and have specifically targeted measures to force farmers into more environmentally friendly methods as overbearing and overruling national decision making. They want to hark back to the EU's timid origins some 60 years ago when cooperation was much more voluntary and limited.

“We want to restore the original idea of Europe,” Procacinni said.

It is unlikely the anti-EU parties will get a grip on legislative power but a surge into third place behind the Christian Democrats and Socialists would have a major impact. If the forecast of the European Council on Foreign Affairs holds, the think tank says "this ‘sharp right turn’ is likely to have significant consequences for European-level policies ... particularly on environmental issues, where the new majority is likely to oppose ambitious EU action to tackle climate change."

EU Commission President [*Ursula von der Leyen*](https://apnews.com/hub/ursula-von-der-leyen) has already softened some of the climate rules and her center-right Christian Democrat European People's Party, the biggest in the legislature, has moved rightward on migration on top of climate policy.

With a wilting of the Green Deal, it would make sure that beyond facing geopolitical crises, the EU would also face one of its own making.

Thursday's Europe Day honors the memory of Jean Monnet, one of the founding fathers of the European Union, who once said: “Europe will be forged in crises.”

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