

## New 73-strong far right grouping formed in European Parliament

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News

Alliance of extreme-right, populist and nationalist parties say they will become a “thorn in the flesh” for EU policymakers.



*Photo credit: European Parliament Audiovisual*

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The leaders of a new far right group in the European Parliament say the “door is open” to Nigel Farage’s Brexit party and others joining them in the new term.

French MEP Marine Le Pen announced the formation of the new cross-national extreme right coalition at a sometimes-chaotic news conference in the European Parliament on Thursday.

Le Pen, the leader of France’s National Rally party was among ten MEPs who formally launched the

Identity and Democracy (ID) group, otherwise known as ID.

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She pointed out that the alliance of eurosceptic and nationalist parties from across Europe will hold 73 seats in the European Parliament and will replace the Europe of Nations and Freedom (ENF) group that was formed during the previous parliamentary term.

Speaking alongside her, Marco Zanni, a member of Italian deputy PM Matteo Salvini's League party, spoke of the group's "enlargement policy", adding that it was "open to discussions with any other groups" in parliament.

But both Zanni and Le Pen insisted that any groups wishing to join forces with ID must "share" its priorities across a range of policy areas.

Zanni, who was elected as the group's leader, said, "I respect Nigel Farage and the Brexit party for trying to fulfil the desire of British people to leave the EU. We are open to them and others if they want to cooperate."

He said, "Europe has to be built on the basis of the nation state. The attempt to create a European super state hasn't brought any added value."

The news conference was interrupted twice by journalists complaining that the event had been hijacked by supporters of Le Pen and the new group who packed the room hosting the press conference.

*"Europe has to be built on the basis of the nation state. The attempt to create a European super state hasn't brought any added value" **Marco Zanni, a member of Italian deputy PM Matteo Salvini's League party***

The group has been formed after major gains in last month's European elections. It will hold around 10 percent of the parliament seats compared with five percent for the former ENF grouping..

Le Pen described ID as "more dynamic and more mature" than ENF and said the elections had "changed the political chessboard" in parliament.

She told reporters ID would "constantly put pressure" on other mainstream groups and aims to shift decision-making away from the centre ground.

"The EU and parliament still seem to be in denial about the result of the elections, thinking nothing has happened or changed and that it is business as usual. It still refuses to listen to what happened at the polling stations."

Claiming that its success at the polls gave it the mandate to play an influential role in the coming five-year parliamentary term, Le Pen said the new group aims to “usher in new and alternative” policies.

She declared, “We now have clout and have much to contribute to the creation of a ‘new Europe.’ We can influence voting and decision making in a way that has never happened in the past.”

Another ID MEP, Jörg Meuthen, of the far right Alternative for Germany party, said ID was “not just a new version” of ENF “but an entirely new creation.”

“We now have clout and have much to contribute to the creation of a ‘new Europe.’ We can influence voting and decision making in a way that has never happened in the past”  
**Marine Le Pen, the leader of France’s National Rally party**

He denied accusations that it “wanted to destroy the EU”, adding, “We want to construct a new EU but that means sometimes saying ‘No’ and disagreeing with the way things are done.”

Meuthen said the group would seek to be a “thorn in the flesh” of the EU institutions and “those who want to create an EU super state.”

Further comment came from Zanni who, responding to a question from The Parliament Magazine, said the group also supported the idea of greater gender balance at EU level.

But he said the distribution of the EU’s top jobs, including the presidencies of the European commission and council, must be decided on “merit” and nothing else.

Finnish member Jussi Halla-Aho said the nationalists in parliament would be a more cohesive and effective force than in the last parliamentary term, adding, “Last time, we were split into four different groups, but these were split and this made us weaker which, of course, pleased our political opponents.”

He added, “Yes, we are still a minority in the new parliament but, this time we are a much bigger minority than last time.”

The increase in electoral support for so-called populists was matched by gains for the Liberals and Greens, both pro-EU forces.

Their strong showing means the political centre is still likely to hold sway although the parliament’s centrist EPP and Socialist groupings saw their combined share of seats fall below a parliamentary majority for the first time in the assembly’s history.

The European Parliament, which now has 751 MEPs, starts its new five-year term next month.

## **About the author**

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