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The Global Significance of an Electoral Showdown in Europe

*The upcoming fight for seats in the European Parliament is an important battleground for authoritarian National-Populists, attempting to extend their reign to the heart of the European Union, explains Dr. **Daniel WOKER**, Co-founder of [Share-an-Ambassador/Geopolitical coaching](#) and Former Swiss Ambassador to Kuwait, Singapore and Australia.*

The 700plus members of the European Parliament (EP) are elected in each of the 28 member countries of the European Union through a system of general proportionality. The parliament is thus the main democratic corrective to the national representatives in the Council of Ministers – the EU heads of state or government meet as the supreme European Council, presided by Donald Tusk – and in the European Commission (presided by Jean-Claude Juncker and assisted by the European civil service) who are appointed and sent to Brussels by the governments. Traditionally the EP has been formed by a majority of politicians originating from the traditional democratic parties in the member countries. They understand the EU as a tool for increased cooperation in view of global challenges as well as more unity and thus global influence of a permanently pacified Europe.

A hitherto small minority of members, emanating from Europhobic, nationalist-populist parties – the UK Independence Party is an example – sees the EP as their means to prevent, and roll back any measure that they perceive as abandoning their idea of absolute national sovereignty. If ever true at all such national sovereignty is illusionary as both the nature of present challenges such as inequality, climate change, migration flows and regulating digitalization as well as the shift of the global fulcrum from the North-Atlantic to the Greater Asia Pacific leave individual European states on their own isolated.

Emboldened by the election and the policies of US President Trump, especially his apparent affection for authoritarians in all parts of the world, as well as assisted by money and hackers from Putin's Russia, European National-Populists believe their time has come with the next election to the EP scheduled for the end of May. Operating from their power-base in Eastern (Hungary, Poland, the Slovak Republic) and South-Eastern (the Italy of the Five Star/Lega coalition, Romania, the Balkans) Europe, they will try to increase their share of votes for the EP everywhere, especially in Germany and France.

Steve Bannon, erstwhile ideologue of Trumpian America-Firstness, has been trying for some time to formally unite European nationalists, likely helped by funds from his usual backers in the US. Without much apparent success so far as it is probably in the nature of such nationalist parties and their authoritarian leaders to avoid any supranational ties. Both the German 'Alternative für Deutschland' as well as Le Pen's former 'Front National' in France have shunned Bannon so far, at least publicly.

However, counting on such lack of unity among their foes will not do for the traditional parties in the bastion countries of European unity if they want to avoid the EP becoming a block to, rather than an accelerator of further Europeanization. It will take a clear vision why and how the EU cannot only serve and protect its peoples better but also how Europe intends to partner with likeminded countries such as Canada and Australia in carrying the flame of liberal and enlightened democracy when nationalist authoritarians (US, Brazil)

and ruthless totalitarians (China, Russia, Arabian countries) in large parts of the world seem to gain the upper hand.

President Macron of France is at this time the only European leader to speak out on this larger issue. His key term 'a Europe that protects' implies that European solutions are the only way for its own peoples to counter the present big challenges but is also meant with regard to more European, as opposed to transatlantic, might on the global stage. He will likely soon be joined by others after the recent Munich Security Conference. There, US Vice-President Pence's exclusive and obsessive demonization of Iran was met by icy silence from the assembled European security establishment. Their present state of mind could not be clearer: Not only is NATO in hibernation, attending different stewardship in Washington, but the latter is, under Trump and his clan, unable and unwilling to carry the torch of Western values. So, Europe must do more to carry the burden of the traditional system to safeguard those values.

But it will of course take more than pan-European rhetoric to decisively push back against the nationalist far-right – and occasionally far-left, e.g. Jean-Luc Mélenchon with his party of 'Unbowed French' – and the present outlier in Washington, for the traditional big parties in Western Europe to regain that part of the population which feels abandoned by policies favouring the rich over the poor.

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