

Circulation of Extremist Narratives in National and Transnational Political Contexts

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April 2026
Deliverable 3.2

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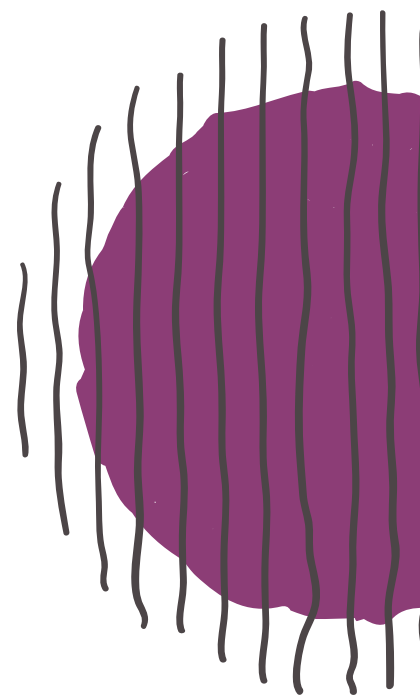


This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon Europe research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 101094731

About ARENAS

The ARENAS project looks at extremist narratives that affect political and social life in Europe. It examines the nature of these narratives and seeks to understand the discourses they impact, particularly about science, gender and the nation. By understanding how these narratives work, ARENAS will empower people to resist them. To foster a spirit of people living together in harmony across Europe, policy recommendations will be made as to how to prevent such narratives from taking hold in the future.

The ARENAS Analysis of and Responses to Extremist Narratives project is funded by the **EU Horizon Programme**, the Framework Programme for Research and Innovation (2021-2027), and is coordinated by **Julien Longhi** and his team in **CY Cergy Paris Université, France**. It brings together a multidisciplinary consortium of nine Universities, one NGO, two SME's as well as three associated impact partners comprised of an International Association, a National Association and an NGO.



Project Topic

HORIZON – CL2-2022-
DEMOCRACY -01-05 -Evolution
of political extremism and its
influence on contemporary social
and political dialogue

Funding Scheme

HORIZON-RHA – HORIZON
Research and Innovation Actions.
Grant agreement ID: 101094731

Duration

May 1 2023
– 30 April 2027

OUR PARTNERS

Our partnership consists of 12 organisations from 9 countries, each bringing unique experience, expertise and skills to the project.



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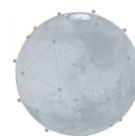
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D3.2 Circulation of extremist narratives in national and transnational political contexts.

Publication date: April 2026

Authors

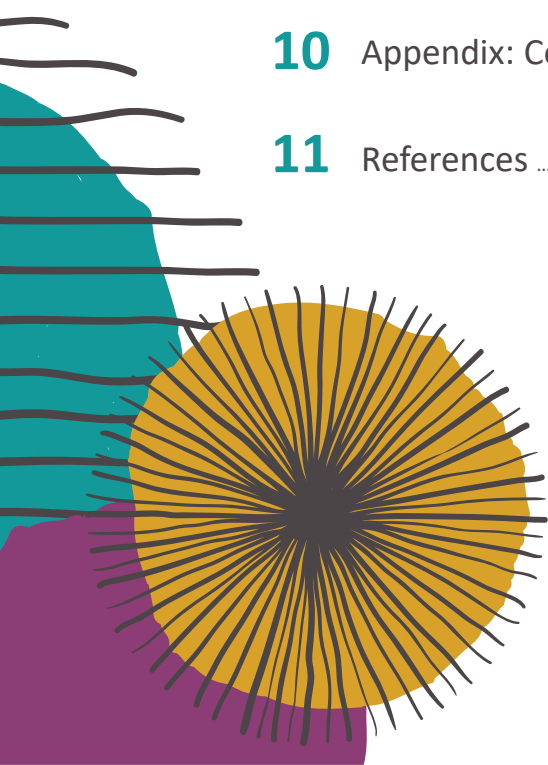
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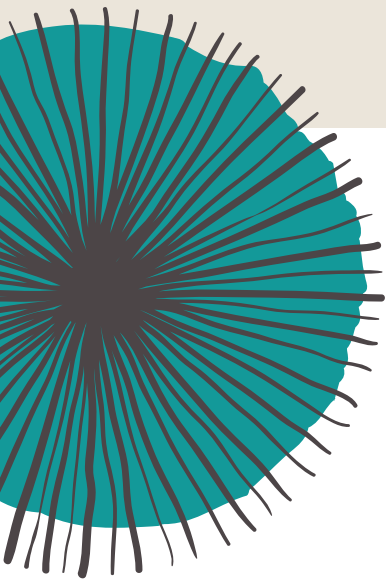
01

About This Report



This report presents the findings of Task 3.3, which investigates how extremist narratives circulate within parliamentary discourse and represents the deliverable 3.2 of the Arenas project. Building on the results of Deliverable 3.1 (Forti 2024) produced by Task 3.2, which examined the historical foundations of such narratives, this report addresses one of the remaining two objectives of Work Package 3: to trace the presence and dissemination of extremist narratives in both parliamentary and media contexts. Here, the focus is on the former, approaching **parliamentary activity as an important site for shaping public discourse** and potentially dismantling or amplifying extremist messages. In keeping with the broader goals of Work Package 3, Task 3.3 concentrates on extremist discourses produced by far-right and traditional right party members found in the parliaments of Croatia, Czech Republic, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Slovenia, Spain, and the EU.

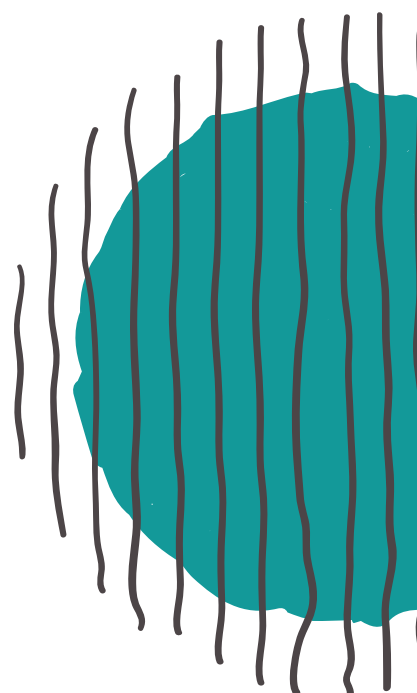
The report focuses on the parliament as an institution central to the system of liberal, deliberative and representative democracy. By both legitimising political decisions and descriptively representing the electorate, parliament constitutes the immediate environment in which the extremist narratives examined in Task 3.3 emerge, transform, and circulate. The parliament's long-standing traditions, its operations through formal and informal rules, and its entrenchment in a broader political and social context (such as electoral processes) provide a specific institutional background – one that sets it apart from other environments, like the traditional or social media spaces. Within this institutional context, the parliament plays a distinct role in the circulation of extremist narratives.



*This report consists of an introduction outlining the **main concepts and methodological decisions guiding the analysis** and **three separate sections** that bring insights into the circulation of extremist narratives in parliaments across Europe on the topic of Nation, Gender and Science. Finally, the national cases are linked to the use of extremist narratives in the European Parliament.*

Abbreviations:

AfD	Alternative für Deutschland (Alternative for Germany)
CZ	Czech Republic
ČSSD	Česká strana sociálně demokratická (Czech Social Democratic Party)
DE	Deutschland (Germany)
ECR	European Conservatives and Reformists
EFDD	Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy
ENF	Europe of Nations and Freedom
EP	European Parliament
ES	Spain
EU	European Union
Fdi	Fratelli d'Italia (Brothers of Italy)
FI	Forza Italia (Forward Italy)
FIN	Finland
FP	Perussuomalaiset (Finns Party)
FR	France
HR	Croatia
HU	Hungary
ID	Identity and Democracy
IT	Italy
KDNP	Kereszténydemokrata Néppárt (Christian Democratic People's Party)
LSP	Lega per Salvini Premier (League for Salvini Premier)
M5S	Movimento 5 Stelle (Five Star Movement)
NI	Non-Inscrits
NSi	Nova Slovenija–Krščanski demokrati (New Slovenia–Christian Democrats)
ODS	Občanská demokratická strana (Civic Democratic Party)
PiS	Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (Law and Justice)
PL	Poland
RN	Rassemblement National (National Rally)
SDS	Slovenska demokratska stranka (Slovenian Democratic Party)
SI	Slovenia
SNS	Slovenska nacionalna stranka (Slovenian National Party)
SPD	Svoboda a přímá demokracie (Freedom and Direct Democracy)
UKIP	UK Independence Party



02

Executive Summary

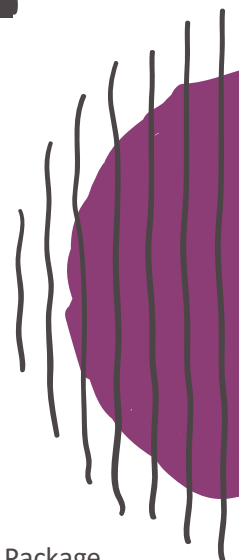


*Studying extremist narratives in parliamentary settings is crucial because parliaments are not only **spaces where laws are adopted**, but also powerful platforms for **shaping public discourse**. The formal and highly visible nature of parliamentary debate gives speakers enhanced **authority and legitimacy**.*

When certain narratives are voiced in this setting, they gain a sense of democratic endorsement, even if their content challenges democratic norms. This can gradually shift perceptions of what is socially and politically acceptable, making once-marginal views appear mainstream. Such discursive shifts play a key role in the normalisation of extremist positions, not necessarily by changing what people believe, but by changing what they feel permitted to express. Understanding how these narratives are used within parliament is therefore essential to strengthen democratic resilience and promote critical engagement with political discourse.

Extremist narratives rely on rigid oppositions, framing a virtuous in-group against a demonised, threatening out-group. This black-and-white moral framing replaces openness and pluralism with suspicion and exclusion. A core feature of such narratives is their strategic simplification of complex issues, presented in emotionally charged yet clearly structured ways that enhance their coherence and appeal. Even when not overtly hostile, these narratives inherently divide, offering no space for dialogue or alternative perspectives. The concept of **narrative circulation**, utilised in this report, addresses how particular realisations of narratives travel through society – not merely being transmitted, but also transformed, adapted, resisted, and recontextualised in the process. In the case of extremist narratives, this dynamic is particularly crucial, since these narratives often gain power, legitimacy, and resonance precisely through their circulation across media platforms, social contexts, and interpretive communities, and negatively impact social cohesion.

In line with the general orientation of Work Package 3, the analytical focus of Task 3.3 is on the extremist narratives used by right-leaning parties in **the parliaments of Croatia, Czech Republic, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Slovenia, Spain and the EU**. To this end, we look into parliamentary proceedings between 2015 and 2024, which is a period that has sometimes been referred to as the perma-crisis because of an active renegotiation of social rights across Europe and major events like the increased migration inflow and the COVID pandemic. This delimitation also facilitates comparable study since parliamentary proceedings of most countries are available through language corpora, like ParlaMint or GermaParl, that enable easy but powerful querying. To uncover the extremist narratives, we use, when possible, corpus linguistic methods as an exploratory tool to retrieve relevant data without imposing predefined assumptions. We then perform qualitative reading of the results in order to establish whether the obtained statements actually represent instantiations of extremist narratives. These are defined based on the identification of key narrative elements, like the in-group, out-group, problematization and solution. The recurrence of these elements across different communicative contexts allows us to observe the circulation of narratives from various perspectives, for example, between past and present, different topics and national parliaments.



03

Introduction

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This introduction serves to alert the reader to the main concepts and assumptions driving the analyses. We start by explaining the motivation to study debates in parliaments, outline the main characteristics of extremist narratives and talk about the concept of circulation.

On discursive activity in the parliaments



In recent years, Europe has witnessed a notable increase in the visibility and influence of extremist narratives, particularly those propagated by far-right political actors.

While much attention has been devoted to the spread of such narratives in digital spaces and public demonstrations (Askanius et al. 2024; Munk 2024; Gounari 2021), one **crucial arena for their circulation and, particularly, legitimisation** has been less often in the spotlight: national and supranational parliaments. In a context where more citizens than not tend to have low or no trust in their national government (OECD 2024) and where misinformation and disinformation are ever more abundant, understanding the role of parliamentary discourse in the dissemination of such narratives becomes crucial. Parliamentary debates **reflect broader societal tensions and actively shape** them by either fostering more inclusive discourse or normalising exclusionary rhetoric.

Parliament occupies a distinct position within the political landscape. Parliament stands for the political idea of popular representation. It embodies both the ideal and the practice of politics as reasonable deliberation and careful consideration of opposing social interests on a higher level. At the same time, many parliaments are closely related to national history, the formation of the national state or the self-image of the political class. Next to the monarch, or even in their place, they have become

the **symbolic centre of national government** (Aerts et al. 2020). At the same time, parliaments act by speaking. Communication occurs on multiple levels: between members of parliament, within parties, with the government, through the media, and in full view of the public (Schulz and Wirsching 2012). Considering this, we see parliamentary activity as a driving force in the development of society – not only because parliaments pass legislation that directly shapes the everyday lives of citizens, but also because they provide a codified, highly visible, and institutionally legitimised platform for public debate. Within this setting, elected representatives and invited guests can introduce and debate ideas under the veil of democratic procedure. As such, the parliamentary environment amplifies the authority of its speakers and grants them privileged access to public discourse. This enhances their capacity to influence the change of particular social norms that, according to Valentim (2024), allowed the recent increases of far-right activity. While we understand the growth of the far right as a multifactorial phenomenon, we follow Valentim's claims that the success of far-right parties cannot be attributed primarily to the change in voting preferences, but rather to the change in individuals' perception of how acceptable their preferences have become.

These perceptions can be influenced by *discourse shifts*, which “must be viewed as reflecting and changing as well as fostering the transformation of key social norms” (Krzyżanowski 2020:432). Discursive shift, sometimes also referred to as the *Overton window*,¹ allows the *process of mainstreaming* a range of ideas that were previously deemed illegitimate, but start to be seen as acceptable or mainstream in public debate.

As suggested, the change of the norms deemed acceptable in a society is crucially influenced by the narratives espoused by speakers in formal positions of power, like politicians. However, it is also important to recognise that other actors contribute to this process. As Brown et al. (2023) point out, while, for example, far-right actors are often seen as key agents shifting discourse – either through their own strategies or by pressuring the mainstream to adopt previously unthinkable positions – mainstream actors themselves also have the

capacity to shift the goalposts. Crucially, the discourse shift is always brought about by multiple actors. In this light, even counter-narratives can inadvertently contribute to the circulation and legitimisation of extremist framings (Bélanger et al. 2020), making the ecosystem of discourse more complex than a simple opposition between extremes and norms.

By focusing on parliaments, we seek to contribute to a broader **understanding of the mechanisms that enable extremist ideas to enter mainstream political debate** and public consciousness, with special attention to critical analysis of the parliament as one of the specific environments in which extremist narratives emerge and circulate (Bayley 2004). By equipping the readers with knowledge about the extremist narratives propagating in the parliaments, we aim to help them recognise, understand, and critically assess extremist narratives also beyond the parliamentary arena.



On extremist narratives

We base our analysis of extremist narratives in the parliaments on the interim definition of extremist narratives produced by T2.2 of the ARENAS project

Here, extremist narratives are “intricate constructs characterised by narrative structure, storytelling power, simplification of complexity, conspiracy theories and binary visions. [They] clearly distinguish between a (morally and ethically) superior in-group that it perceives as legitimate and an out-group that is framed as both inferior and dangerous, and against whom the in-group has to defend its interests at all costs, including by hostile actions and not accepting any alternative views.

Extremist narratives are narratives that often rely on “storytelling” in the sense of evoking a structured sequence of events caused or experienced by actors and involving a construal of Us/Them dichotomies, to emotionally anchor and reinforce worldviews, but also to propagate and normalise ideologies” (Postigo Fuentes et al. 2024).

Extremist narratives are built around distinctive storytelling techniques that serve both persuasive and ideological functions. These narratives commonly draw on a mix of personal testimonies, official statements, and culturally embedded myths, creating a multi-layered form of communication that can resonate differently within different social structures and can thus effectively shape citizens' perceptions. While narratives are a normal and necessary part of discourse, it is important to distinguish between those that foster a healthy, if radical, agonistic debate, and those that cross the line into antagonism and hostility. The latter, which we understand as extremist, threaten democratic norms by normalising exclusion, suppressing pluralism, and encouraging conflict.

1 The concept was proposed by Joseph Overton and further developed at the Mackinac Center for Public Policy.

Extremist narratives operate through rigid dichotomies, presenting a morally superior in-group in opposition to a demonised and threatening out-group. This storytelling device constructs a black-and-white moral universe, where tolerance and plurality are replaced by suspicion and exclusion. Moreover, a defining feature of extremist narratives is their strategic reduction and selective framing of complex social, political, or economic issues through identifiable discursive patterns and interests, communicated in an emotional but clearly structured manner, which makes the narrative appear coherent, accessible and highly persuasive. Ultimately, even when not explicit in their

propositions, extremist narratives pit groups against each other and close off space for dialogue by leaving no room for alternative solutions. This can be nicely represented by one of the most prominent storytelling techniques used in extremist narratives, namely the **technique of scapegoating**. In times of heightened social tension or perceived crisis, extremist rhetoric usually identifies the out-group, which represents an external enemy that is believed to be responsible for societal decline. Violence or exclusion against this scapegoated group is then framed not only as justified but as necessary to prevent collapse or preserve the integrity of the in-group.

On circulation of narratives

The meaning-making process humans engage in is fundamentally shaped by the narratives that are circulated in and between discourse communities



While circulation is often referenced in discussions about narratives, it is only rarely explicitly defined and operationalised. In our work, we adopt Herman's and Vervaeck's (2019: 270) view of circulation as a narrative's "transference from one social and cultural field to another". This is a complex process that can be broadly described in terms of reproduction and renewal (Boch et al. 2009). Reproduction consists of simple reuse of the told narrative, while renewal includes creative recycling of its content and structure. In the analysis of non-literary or natural narratives, it is this second perspective on circulation that becomes especially interesting, since it uncovers how narratives shape and are shaped by society.

In historiography, this concept of transfer was introduced in 1994 by Michel Espagne (Espagne, 1994). He understood transfer as the processes through which the norms, images and representations of one culture appear in another through the transmission of concepts. Two key components mark the framework of transfer studies: attention to experiences and time, which is an essential element, since transfer studies are always analysing change. Since then, various approaches to comparison in historiography have taken place, yet not much empirical research followed to establish the field (Kaelble 2009).

Traditional comparative history has often focused on juxtaposing national cases, but the concept of cultural transfer, which has in recent decades been a focus of research in Transnational History and Global History (Werner & Zimmermann, 2006; Gupta 1992), shifts attention toward the connections and exchanges between societies. The intricate interrelationship between nations and transnational existences, between national preoccupations and transnational agendas, or between national interests and transnational concerns is of fundamental importance to the study of transnational history (Iriye, 2013: 15).

In our context, this perspective supports the relevance of tracing interactions between national parliaments and the European Parliament. Cultural transfer brings cultural encounters and exchanges to the foreground of historical analysis, offering a more dynamic understanding of the past. As Calic (2019: 11) notes, "exchanges and connections between people, ideas, and things have, in the past, played a much more prominent role than suggested by the established historical records." By highlighting societal permeability and the fluidity of cultural boundaries, cultural transfer also challenges essentialist views that treat cultures as monolithic entities (Štuhec, 2020).

The individual instantiations of narratives, often called stories, are based on a cultural canon of narrative templates shared between members of a discourse community (Herman & Vervaeck 2019). These templates include a repertoire of narrative realisations concerning specific groups of people, as well as socially salient phenomena and events that are adapted to a particular situation and that influence how individuals make sense of their own experiences and how groups construct collective identities. According to Frank (2010), users possess embodied, often tacit knowledge of narrative templates that guide how people communicate their positions, what they find compelling in those narratives, and how they complete or respond to incomplete stories. Importantly, this ability is not inborn, but is learned by the repertoire of stories to which speakers are exposed daily and which enable the speakers to anticipate, recognise, and align with particular narratives.

In the context of extremist narratives, the idea of templates is particularly useful since it alerts the analyst to the fact that such narratives – for example, the previously mentioned scapegoating plot which uses a heroic struggle of a pure, victimized in-group against an evil, corrupt out-group – do not emerge spontaneously or in isolation but are rooted in pre-existing, culturally sedimented patterns of meaning, and are only then adapted to the current spatio-temporal context. In fact, not only do narratives not emerge spontaneously, but they are often deliberately framed, institutionalised, and

circulated through strategic channels. By using the notion of templates and their individual instantiations, we can better understand how extremist narratives become normalised, internalised, and taken-for-granted within specific social contexts. It also allows for an analysis of how these narratives may evolve, mutate, and be strategically repurposed as they are passed on between different social contexts.

This template-based conceptualisation of narratives is useful in the context of circulation analysis, since it assumes a more or less **diversified reuse of the template**. The abstract level of templates enables narratives to be adapted to the needs and concerns of a particular discourse community – an understanding that has been linked in T3.2 Report to the *rhizome theory* postulating that narratives are being recycled in a non-linear manner, like the roots of a rhizome, which allows them to easily fit changing socio-historical contexts (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987). For this reason, narratives always need to be analysed in a concrete cultural context in order to understand what set of (political) purposes led to their creation (Smith 1980). These political drivers include various factors, from objective/technical circumstances linked to the specific arenas and infrastructures of communication (such as social media platforms, traditional news outlets, public gatherings, etc.) to several societal factors like class, age, gender, education, etc., and communicative intentions and expectations of the interlocutors.

Finally, it is important to conceive of circulation not as a linear transfer of ideas from person A to person B, but as a dynamic and reciprocal process that affects not only those actively participating in the dissemination of narratives but also those passively exposed to them (Östling et al. 2018).

As mentioned earlier, within this process, narrative circulation becomes a site of power struggle, where actors compete to impose their framing of events, identities, and values. This is why our analysis focuses on parliament, understood as a key institutional arena in which narrative framings are publicly articulated, contested, and amplified.



04

Methodology

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In this section we explain the main methodological decisions that shape our analytical take on the circulation of extremist narratives in parliaments.

Issue 1: Actors

This report focuses specifically on the circulation of far-right extremist narratives in parliamentary settings between different actors of the right political spectrum present in the parliaments of Croatia, Czech Republic, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Slovenia, Spain and the EU.

The decision to focus on the far-right ideology is motivated by the fact that it often stands in direct opposition to the foundational values of the European Union, such as inclusivity, equality, and mutual respect (Mudde 2007, Mudde 2019). As highlighted in the D3.1 Report (Forti 2024), the growing presence of far-right parties in democratically elected bodies across Europe – where it is no longer confined to the political margins but often plays a leading role – demands careful scrutiny. As of the 2024 European elections, these parties secured over 20% of the seats in the European Parliament. Moreover, since 2010, far-right parties have entered government in numerous EU member states, including Austria, Belgium, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, the Netherlands, Poland and Slovakia, whether as dominant forces or coalition partners.

However, the far-right ideology is not propagated only by far-right parties, but is increasingly used also by parties (once) considered mainstream right (Kallis 2013, Brown et al. 2023, Ivaldi 2024). For this reason, we do not limit our analysis of extremist narratives in parliaments to far-right parties only, but look for their instantiations across the right political spectrum. In this way, we aim to capture how extremist ideas may be adapted, softened, or strategically embedded in broader political discourse, contributing to their increased normalisation (Simpson 1993).

Within parliament, we focus on speakers, whether members or invited guests, who directly perform the narratives in question. Speakers active in parliaments on national and supranational levels are all bound to a similar condition. As institutional language users, they are constrained by discourse practices within the parliament, while at the same time they can use the resources of language both to undermine and to underpin the effectiveness of these very practices (Ylä-Anttila, Bauvois, Pyrhönen 2019). This is achieved in different ways, depending on the politicians' actual power positions, motivations and goals, the degree of freedom of expression and action, as well as the overall environment of a given sociopolitical system. When taking the floor, parliamentarians rely heavily on familiar rhetorical patterns and culturally resonant topics to frame and convey their messages. These discursive choices often invoke widely recognised themes, such as the nation-state, which serve to anchor the narratives they perform in shared cultural understanding. Through repeated use across time and institutional settings, these themes reappear and evolve, contributing to the circulation of associated concepts, structures, and narratives. All speakers within the parliament are, in one way or another, shaped by the institution's discursive constraints and possibilities, as well as its embeddedness in a broader sociopolitical context (Ihalainen et al. 2016).



Our analysis of the circulation of extremist narratives in parliaments draws on the official parliamentary proceedings, which are to a large extent available through the ParlaMint corpora (Erjavec et al. 2024), a comparable multilingual and diachronic collection of parliamentary transcripts from over 20 European countries

The ParlaMint corpora include rich metadata about speakers (name, affiliation, role, age, etc.) and speeches (term, body, date, etc.), which allows us to trace how particular narratives evolve, recur, or shift across national contexts and political actors. Since ParlaMint does not include parliamentary debates of the lower or the main house of all countries covered in Task 3.3, or the time span covered in ParlaMint was deemed insufficient, data for certain countries were obtained from the following sources. For Italy, for which only the debates of the upper house are available, the data for the analysis was obtained from the official website of the Senate and Chamber of Deputies that keeps the records². For the Spanish case, ParlaMint data was supplemented with additional materials from the Congress of Deputies website³. For Germany, which is currently not included in ParlaMint at all, the data was harvested from the German parliamentary corpus GermaParl 2, which consists of transcribed parliamentary speeches from the German Bundestag⁴. For Finland, in addition to examples available on the ParlaMint database, the same number of examples were used from more recent parliamentary debates, available on the Finnish Parliament's website in order to enable the examination of the temporal dimension of circulation⁵.

To enable meaningful comparison across national parliaments, our analysis focuses on a shared timespan, i.e., from 2015 to 2024, depending on the country and available data. This period was marked by intense political debate on several issues closely tied to the project's central themes of nation,

gender, and science. Among the most prominent topics were the increased migration influx to Europe after 2015, shifting legislation on sexual and gender minority groups' rights, and polarising debates on reproductive rights and gender identity. In many countries, this period also saw heightened disputes over climate change policy, vaccination and pandemic management (especially during COVID-19), and academic and scientific freedom, particularly in Hungary and Poland. In recent years, marked by the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, and the accompanying rise of far-right mobilisation across Europe, discussions surrounding national identity, sovereignty, and EU integration or resistance also featured prominently in the parliamentary discourse of the countries in focus.

To complement this primary source of parliamentary debates, we also draw on a range of contextual materials in order to situate the parliamentary discourse within its broader political and social environment. This includes legislative documents, mass media coverage and relevant secondary literature that help us understand how specific narratives are embedded in discourses over time. We use these additional sources to interpret not only what is said in parliament, but also why it is said, by whom, and under what circumstances. This multi-source approach ensures that our analysis goes beyond textual patterns and considers the wider discursive and institutional landscape in which extremist narratives circulate.

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- 2 Chamber of Deputies, Legislature XVIII. Official transcripts search page. Available at: https://banchediti.camera.it/tiap_18/ctrStartPage.asp. Chamber of Deputies, Legislature XVII. Official transcripts search page. Available at: https://banchediti.camera.it/tiap_17/ctrStartPage.asp. Senate of the Republic, Legislature XVIII. Official stenographic records (chronological list). Available at: <https://www.senato.it/legislature/18/lavori/assemblea/resoconti-elenco-cronologico>; Senate of the Republic, Legislature XVII. Official stenographic records (chronological list). Available at: <https://www.senato.it/legislature/17/lavori/assemblea/resoconti-elenco-cronologico>
- 3 Congreso de los Diputados. <https://www.congreso.es/es/cem/sesplencel>
- 4 The GermaParl Corpus of Plenary Protocols (v2.0.1). <https://polmine.github.io/GermaParl2/>
- 5 Minutes of the parliamentary session PTK 158/2022. https://www.eduskunta.fi/FI/vaski/Poytakirja/Documents/PTK_158+2022.pdf

Issue 3: Analytical approach

We adopted a mixed-methods and historically informed approach, combining corpus linguistics with qualitative and contextual analysis.

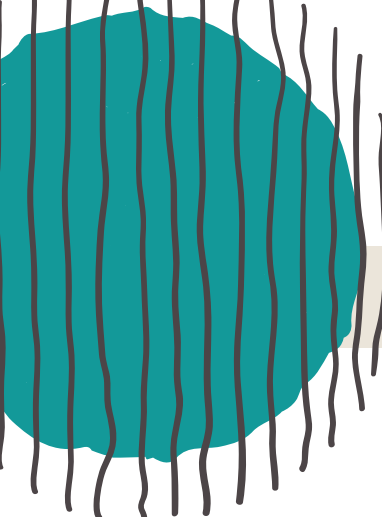
When corpus data was available, corpus linguistic methods served primarily as an exploratory tool to retrieve relevant data **without imposing predefined assumptions**.⁶ These included concept-based searches, keyword calculations, and collocation analysis (McEnery & Hardie 2011). Concept-based searches and keyword lists provided an initial filtering of speeches related to our main topics, e.g., nation, gender, and science, while collocation analysis highlighted the typical discursive contexts in which these topics appear. Potential instances of extremist narratives were identified through close qualitative reading, contextualised by rich metadata, e.g. speaker, role, party affiliation, date, available either in the corpus itself or other sources used, and situated within broader historical and political developments.

While our workflow followed a common structure, we allowed for flexibility in how national teams combined methods. This enabled us to draw on the expertise of individual researchers and to adapt to national contexts, where different topics appeared with varying prominence. Given that parliamentary corpora were our primary, though not exclusive, source of data, such methodological variation reflects

For more on corpus-assisted discourse analysis, see the Appendix to this report.

6 For more on corpus-assisted discourse analysis, see the Appendix to this report.





Issue 4: Narrative circulation

Our operationalization of extremist narratives is based on the working definition of extremist narratives developed in Work Package 2 of the ARENAS project, which was presented above (Postigo Fuentes et al. 2024). In the analysis, we seek to dissect the statements into narrative elements that indicate whether a statement is part of an extremist narrative or not.

The narrative elements that we identify are based on a simplified interpretative framework for extremist narratives presented in Postigo Fuentes et al. (2025), and include determining:

1. who are the in-group and out-group and what is the relationship between them,
2. what is the general and specific problematization articulated in the statement, and
3. what is the proposed solution to the problematization.

While these elements can be expressed explicitly or implicitly, we take into consideration only statements for which the analyst was able to identify the elements with relative certainty, in order to avoid overinterpretation and facilitate comparative work. Moreover, in order to be able to account for the narrative, the statement needed to allow at least the identification of the in-group, out-group, their mutual relationship and the problematization.

In line with the above, we claim that the problematization constitutes the core element of the narrative. The overlap at the problematization level, regardless of the overlap of other elements, indicates that the analysed statements promote the same (extremist) narrative. Depending on the level of generality of the identified problem and diversity of the in-group/out-group, we talk either about the same core narrative or about a meta-narrative that is able to bring together in-groups that are in other circumstances, stark ideological opponents. Importantly, we acknowledge that the extremist

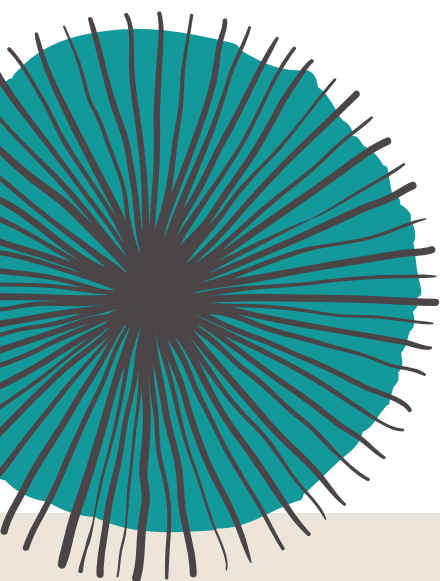
character of a narrative exists on a spectrum. The level of extremism promoted by a particular narrative can be established based on the identity of the in-group vis-à-vis the out-group and the type of solution proposed (if present). Specifically, the less negotiability there is about the two aspects, the more extreme the narrative. For example, an extreme narrative portrays the out-group as a direct and imminent threat to the in-group, one that must be eliminated swiftly and completely. By contrast, a more moderate narrative merely links the out-group to a problem that can be addressed with limited, non-violent measures.

Understanding narratives as chains of interlinked elements allows us to operationalise the concept of circulation by identifying overlaps between specific narrative components across contexts. As theorised in previous sections, circulation refers to the transfer of a narrative from one communicative context to another (Herman & Vervaeck 2019).

This transfer is not linear but multidirectional and can be observed across several axes (Östling et al. 2018).

In this report, we focus in particular on the following dimensions of circulation:

- **circulation of previous historical narratives in present time**, drawing on insights from Report T3.1 on the Historical Roots of Extremist Narratives (Forti 2024), which highlights how past discursive patterns are reactivated and reframed in contemporary contexts;
- **circulation across topics**, by tracking the recurrence and recombination of narrative elements in speeches concerning nation, gender, and science;
- **circulation between communicative arenas** (which will be addressed in task 3.4 of the Arenas project), observed through explicit references within parliamentary discourse to other spheres (e.g., social media, public protests), or through the adoption of conventions typically associated with other genres (for example, as noted by Garric and Longhi (2013), Marine Le Pen’s adaptation of an advertising slogan in her parliamentary speech);
- **circulation between parties (far-right to mainstream right)**, where narrative elements originating in the discourse of far-right actors are adopted – often with some rhetorical moderation – by mainstream right-wing parties, contributing to the normalization of extremist ideas;
- **circulation between national contexts**, by identifying recurring narratives that emerge across different countries, adapted to local political and cultural settings;
- **circulation from national to supranational level**, particularly the transfer of national narratives into the European Parliament.



As narratives circulate across different contexts, their various instantiations become intertwined, mutually shaping and transforming the underlying narrative pattern (Holsten 2018). This pattern carries embedded assumptions about causes, preferred responses, and likely outcomes. Circulation is therefore not a simple repetition, but a dynamic process that can shift a narrative’s meaning and implications over time. Moreover, circulation also

shapes how a narrative is presented. Depending on the communicative context and medium, certain arguments are foregrounded while others are suppressed (Mabi 2016). Recognising these dynamics is essential for understanding how extremist ideologies gain visibility, legitimacy, and ultimately the appearance of common sense in public discourse.

05

Circulation of Extremist Narratives in national parliaments: Nation

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Circulation of Extremist Narratives in national parliaments: Nation

05

Executive Summary

The concept of nation has long been a central theme in European political discourse, shaping not only questions of identity and belonging but also the very legitimacy of institutions and policies.

In recent years, this theme has become increasingly entangled with extremist narratives, including within parliamentary debates. Parliaments, as highly visible arenas of political communication, serve not only as decision-making bodies but also as stages where identity is publicly articulated and contested. Speeches delivered in these contexts do not merely reflect pre-existing social divisions; they actively constitute the boundaries of who belongs to the nation and who does not. They share a series of

recurring patterns that link narratives about the nation to extremist narratives. They shape political culture, normalise exclusionary and illiberal positions, and gradually erode the boundaries between extremist and mainstream politics. In this sense, parliamentary discourse is not a neutral reflection of social sentiment but a powerful instrument that redefines and legitimises the parameters of democratic debate.

Introduction

The report identifies several recurring features of extremist narratives related to the nation. These narratives draw on global discourses of migration, identity, and power, while remaining rooted in specific national contexts. As explored in more detail further down, they typically involve the construction of enemies, challenges to institutional legitimacy, and the transnational circulation of ideas.



Enemies of the Nation

*The **construction of enemies** is a defining feature of extremist narratives in parliaments across Europe. The nation is imagined not simply as a community with shared traditions or institutions, but as a group with clear boundaries.*

To speak of the nation is therefore oftentimes to speak of those who threaten it. This logic makes the introduction of enemies – whether external or internal – a central topic of parliamentary rhetoric, repeated across the Czech Republic, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Slovenia, and Spain. Although the national contexts differ, the pattern is consistent: enemies are portrayed as a danger to sovereignty, unity, and identity, thereby justifying exclusionary and often radical policies.

The most visible enemy in parliamentary debates is the Other, most often embodied by the **migrant**, **refugee** or **asylum seeker**. Migration is dramatised as an existential danger, with refugees described as **criminals** who disrupt local communities and whose very presence corrodes the imagined purity of the nation. In this framing, migrants are not seen as desperate individuals but as **invaders**, and police violence against them is justified as a defence of national sovereignty. Extremist narratives often

include elements of criminalising generalisation, portraying migrants as potential **terrorists** and as a threat to personal security, while right-wing parties position themselves as the protectors of the native population. Such rhetoric is reinforced by ethno-nationalist ideology and by religious arguments that present migration, particularly Muslim migration, as a direct challenge to the traditional identity roots of society.

Migration is also linked to terrorism, with claims that uncontrolled immigration opens the door to Islamic infiltration. In this construction, the migrant is not an individual in need but a vector of danger – a source of crime, social disintegration, and demographic destabilisation. Even in contexts where actual migrant numbers are low, parliamentary actors invoke the figures to resist EU quotas or to claim that outsiders are abusing the welfare state. In this way, migration becomes the preferred embodiment of the external enemy.

“Some processes had already begun, for example, the basic framework of radical Islam, which was set in place over past decades when everything and everyone was accepted uncritically /.../ But what I later described as being like screwing a detonator onto a nuclear bomb happened last year, when another million, almost a million and a half people, unverified, were let into Europe /.../ Even if only a few percent among them have bad intentions, it’s a catastrophe of the highest order, because things become unmanageable.”

(SI, Grims, SDS, 21. 6. 2016)



*“But which refugees? The other day one even arrived with a poodle /.../ [Salvini] warned to be cautious because among **that mass of desperate people**, there were not only the ones I spoke about earlier but potentially terrorists too. And indeed, it was later found that **terrorists were present**. Moreover, today we are facing another serious issue that must concern us all: among this **new wave of migrants** arriving, unfortunately, **many are Covid-19 positive, hundreds upon hundreds disembarking**. /.../ Isn’t this a threat to public health? Because of ideology, you choose to deny it. This is precisely why the danger is ignored.”*

(IT, Balboni, Fdi, 2020)

*“We defend the response of our law enforcement officers, just as we have had to do from this very podium in reference to other **assaults on our border** – and therefore **assaults on our national sovereignty**.”*

(ES, Ortega Smith, Vox, 2022)

*“In reality, **Islamism is triumphing over our values**. We are **surrendering our freedom** – living in physical and cultural insecurity, gradually relinquishing our freedom of expression, and submitting to restrictions that should apply only to the adherents of this deadly ideology, not to all. We are **surrendering equality**, too, by tolerating the normalization of the Islamic veil, accepting gender-segregated swimming pool hours, and allowing bars that ban women – like the one in Sevrans – to operate unchecked. Finally, **we are surrendering fraternity** by letting communitarianism flourish, fracturing the unity of the nation.”*

(FR, Meizonnet, RN, 2021)

“



*“Where we could avoid costs and dangers, in the **illegal import of hundreds of thousands of foreign food consumers**, we draw on the full potential of entire resettlement programmes. [...]. If you want to calculate your budget, close the front door first. [...]. Citizens do not understand it when **illegal border violators of unknown origin** receive the same as the German unemployed. The unconditional basic income already exists – for foreigners. So many people in need of protection have come into the country that the **Germans are now in need of protection**. There is a new foreign language in prisons: German. And revolts are expected.”*

(DE, Curio, AfD, 2018)

The enemy is not always external. Parliamentary debates also construct **internal adversaries** accused of **betraying** the nation from within. These include **political opponents, perceived cultural marxism, socialism or communism, minority nationalists, progressive elites, NGOs, and intellectuals**, all of whom are portrayed as **collaborators** with hostile

external forces such as “Brussels”, international institutions, or global financial actors. Narratives often fuse anti-communist sentiment, anti-globalism, and anti-elitism into a broader rhetoric of treason, framing domestic opponents as enablers of migration, threats to sovereignty, or agents of foreign influence.

*“Mr. Sánchez. /.../ You are not truly a government; in reality, you are a socialist-communist Popular Front, **in alliance with separatists and terrorists**.”*

(ES, Abascal, Vox, 2020)

*“It is about our protection against the defamation action, against the defamation of Poles, against **anti-Polonism**.”*

(PL, Kaczinski, 2015)

Parliamentary rhetoric often merges the figure of the external intruder with that of the internal collaborator, **imagining the nation as besieged from both sides**: endangered by outsiders crossing its borders and undermined from within by domestic actors accused of betrayal. What unites these different articulations is the use of the enemy figure as an element of extremist narratives that **define the nation negatively by exclusion**. The nation is not described in civic or inclusive terms but is constructed in opposition to migrants, political opponents, separatists, supranational institutions, or

elites. This logic establishes a moral hierarchy: the in-group, composed of true citizens, stands against the out-group, composed of illegitimate others. **The result of this enemy construction is the normalisation of a defensive and exclusionary nationalism**. Migrants, minorities, political opponents, and supranational institutions are narratively transformed into existential dangers, their very presence undermining sovereignty and identity. **This logic fosters a politics of resentment and fear**, in which parliamentary actors claim the role of protectors.



Sovereignty and national survival

*If enemies define the threats to the nation, sovereignty is consistently presented as the solution. Across parliamentary debates, extremist actors frame **sovereignty as both the essence of nationhood and the key to its survival.***

It is not portrayed as a legal principle alone, but as a moral and existential imperative: the ability to defend borders, resist foreign influence, and maintain cultural and political autonomy. Sovereignty is almost always invoked in moments of crisis, be it migration, separatism, supranational interference, or war, and presented as being under siege and therefore in need of **radical defence**.

The most prominent way in which sovereignty is mobilised is through its **association with migration**, where border control and exclusion are cast as the

ultimate test of national independence. Over time, migration has been framed not only as a practical challenge but also as a civilizational threat, intertwined with appeals to cultural identity, religious heritage, and resistance to foreign pressure. Similar frames extend beyond migration: demands for non-interference by supranational institutions are tied to claims of preserving domestic governance models; NGOs and critical voices are branded as “foreign agents”; and security concerns are elevated as justification for exceptional measures

*“Of course, in this situation [migration] /.../ would lead to the **collapse of our civilization**, this civilization that created freedom, created modern technology /.../ the closest people come first, **the family, then the nation, then others** /.../ We can help refugees, but I repeat, **in a way that is safe for Poles.**”*

(PL, Kaczyński, PiS, 2015)

*“And in **Brussels**, again, nothing else is happening than that **they want to decide over people's heads on issues that determine people's everyday lives.** /.../ A visible, clear, clean, enforceable system must be created, because otherwise the **BSS axis – the Brussels-Strasbourg-Soros axis – will sweep us away.**”*

(HU, Vejkey, KDNP, 2023)

The second variation of sovereignty discourse ties the concept to **historical continuity**. Sovereignty is not only about present policies but about safeguarding a legacy of independence and national survival. Such historical framings elevate sovereignty into a civilizational duty, embedding current disputes in narratives of decades or even centuries-long

struggle. Across all cases, **sovereignty is equated with survival**. Parliamentary actors portray it not as one policy option among others but as the foundation of the nation's continued existence. This survival logic elevates sovereignty into **an absolute value**: any compromise is presented as an existential surrender.

Institutions and their (de)legitimacy



Across European parliaments, extremist narratives consistently portray political institutions – governments, courts, parliaments, and supranational bodies – not as arenas of representation but as corrupted instruments that betray the will of the nation.

Legitimacy is claimed not through legal authority or institutional procedures but through appeals to a higher, more authentic national mandate rooted in history, culture, or civilization. This rhetorical strategy turns political disagreements into **crises of legitimacy**: institutions are depicted as illegitimate intrusions, foreign agents, or passive executors of external will. Supranational organizations, particularly the European Union, are reframed as hostile powers imposing dictates from outside, while domestic opponents who align with them are branded as traitors.

This delegitimization extends to independent courts, the media, and civil society organizations, which are often portrayed as **controlled by external forces or hostile elites**. Elections themselves are recast as plebiscites on national survival rather than competitive contests, and opposition voices are dismissed as agents of foreign influence rather than legitimate adversaries. In this way, institutions are stripped of their mediating role and reduced to instruments of national defense, their legitimacy conditional on embodying the “true” will of the people.

*“But, if the hands of Brussels agree, I have no doubt that this Government will be ready to hand over the Croatian Army into the hands of bureaucrats and European powerholders as its next strategic goal after the euro – all under the pretense of modern sovereignty. Not the sovereignty of the people, which the Croatian Sovereignists advocate for, but a **modern sovereignty** in which there is little room for the people and their needs.”*

(HR, Milanović Litre,
Domovinski pokret, 2022)

*“The dictate of Brussels has exceeded all limits. /.../ The citizens of this country should have the right to decide on our future, on whether we become a **multicultural province of Brussels**, or whether we retain our own identity /.../.”*

(CZ, Fiala, Úsvit, 2015)

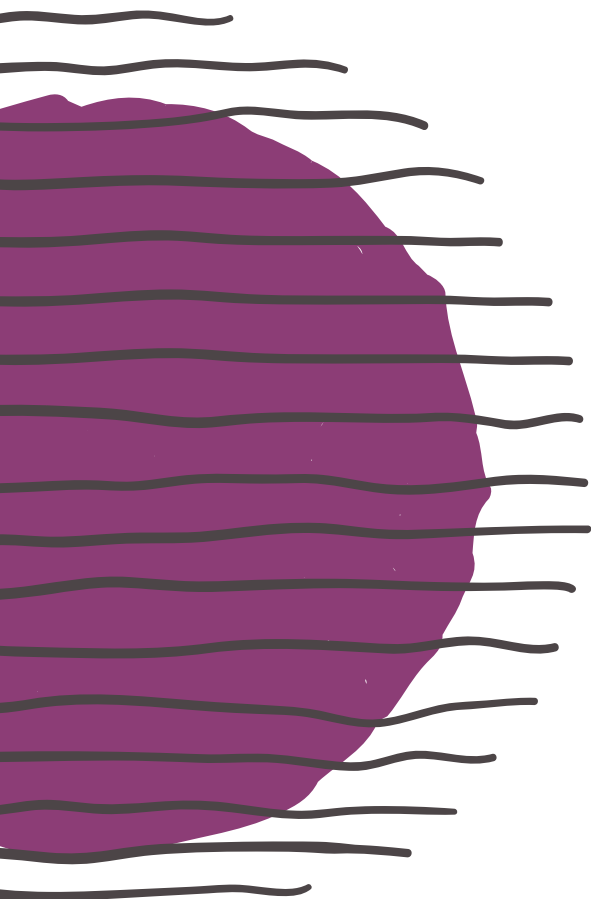
The consequences are twofold. First, **distrust of institutions becomes normalised**, making accusations of betrayal or fraud a routine feature of parliamentary rhetoric. Second, **extraordinary measures** – from defying international law to centralising power – are justified in the name of

restoring authentic legitimacy. **By decoupling legitimacy from institutional frameworks and relocating it in an abstract notion of national authenticity, extremist narratives redefine democracy itself as direct, exclusive identification between “the people” and their leaders.**

*Although extremist narratives in European parliaments are embedded in national contexts, they do not develop in isolation. A striking feature is their circulation across borders: **parliamentary actors borrow metaphors, tropes, and strategies from one another, adapting them to local histories** while reinforcing a shared transnational repertoire. This horizontal exchange strengthens nationalist claims by **situating them within a larger civilizational struggle.***

The most visible example concerns migration. The framing of migration as an “invasion” recurs across diverse settings, showing how a common lexicon travels and is adapted nationally. Narratives of internal enemies also circulate widely: opponents are delegitimised as traitors aligned with external forces, while the nation is cast as pure and authentic. Similarly, distrust of institutions – particularly elections and democratic processes – is not confined to one context but forms part of a broader transnational repertoire of far-right politics.

Parliament plays a central role in this circulation. As a public stage, it amplifies rhetoric that is echoed by media, spread through digital platforms, and picked up by actors elsewhere. Underlying these processes is the growing alignment of far-right parties across Europe, which – while each claims to defend its own nation – together construct a shared imaginary of a continent under siege. Their parliamentary discourse reflects this **paradoxical combination of nationalism and transnationalism**: rejecting supranational integration while building an integrated narrative space of their own. The result is a continent-wide discursive repertoire in which extremist language is normalised through repetition, turning once fringe rhetoric into familiar features of parliamentary debate.



06

Circulation of Extremist Narratives in national parliaments: Gender

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Circulation of Extremist Narratives in national parliaments: Gender

06

Executive Summary

This report shows that extremist gender narratives are not confined to the fringes but are increasingly echoed and mainstreamed within parliamentary discourse across Europe.

These narratives revolve around recurring topics: the natural order and the traditional family, demographic survival, education, the authority of science, masculinity in crisis and anti-feminism. Although the specific narratives differ across national contexts, the structural logics are strikingly similar. Parliamentary repetition lends these narratives legitimacy, contributing to their normalisation and embedding them in legislative agendas. The comparative synthesis presented here highlights both national specificities and the transnational circulation of extremist rhetoric, with serious implications for democratic resilience and gender equality in Europe.

Even when debates formally address gender-related legislation, such as family codes or reproductive rights, the discussion rarely remains confined to

gender itself. Instead, gender serves as a prism through which broader struggles over nationhood, sovereignty, science, and morality are articulated. Opponents of gender equality frame their interventions as defences of the healthy, historical nation – rooted in the heterosexual family, safeguarded by “uncorrupted” science, and protected from the threats of migration and supranational liberal institutions. What begins as a debate on gender identity or school curricula often extends into arguments about demographic decline, the corruption of children, the loss of scientific truth, or the erosion of sovereignty. Gender thus rarely functions as a self-contained topic: it operates as a **gateway into broader ideological battles**, enabling extremist claims to travel between domains, across parties, and across borders.

Introduction

The circulation of extremist gender narratives has become a defining feature of contemporary European politics.

These extremist narratives target feminism as well as sexual and gender minority groups, deny gender as a social construct, and seek to reinforce patriarchal and heteronormative orders. While such narratives are often associated with far-right parties, their reach extends into mainstream conservative politics, revealing a broader process of normalisation

– one that is accelerated by their articulation within parliaments, institutions that carry strong legitimising power. The following sections exemplify how arguments adapt to local political struggles while maintaining common frames across parliaments.

Natural order and preservation of the nation

The defense of a “natural” order anchored in the heterosexual family emerges as a recurring theme across European parliamentary debates

This narrative frames the family as both the **microcosm of society** and the **ultimate safeguard for the social continuity**, nothing less than a bedrock of national survival. This narrative evokes an atmosphere of fear through warnings of **moral decline** and **demographic collapse**, and in doing so creates the ground for advancing policies presented

as necessary solutions to an existential crisis. Traditional family is mobilized in ways that connect biology, tradition, and even divine authority, casting progressive reforms on gender and sexuality as a multilevel threat to **legitimacy of the state, society’s continuity, traditional gender roles, perceived natural order, and cultural identity**.

*“I wonder how it will be possible to implement Article 53 of the Constitution /.../ which states that the State protects /.../ motherhood /.../ But I have a problem, **how will the State protect motherhood if a child lives between two gay men.**”*

(SI, Horvat, NSi, 2015)

*“So everything would be family and nothing would be family anymore. No society has survived the **destruction of the family**”*

(IT, Pillon, LSP, 2021)

*“Yes, a child needs a father and a mother. Both are essential for a child. To be deprived of them is **always a lack and a tragedy.**”*

(FR, Ménard, RN, 2021)

“There are currently 100,000 abortions for every 700,000 births. That is 100,000 abortions too many, ladies and gentlemen.”

(DE, Jens Maier, AfD, 2018)

*“The demography of a country is not important because of the issue of the workforce, although that is an important aspect, but rather because of its relevance from the **perspective of national security.**”*

(HR, Miletić, Most, 2021)

*"I wish you to live your femininity to the fullest; not to let yourself be diverted by the confusing and ultimately **anti-life ideologies** that are spreading violently today."*

(HU, Semlyén, KDNP, 2021)

*"The Finns are opposed to the amendment of the Trans Act. We believe that a **father cannot give birth.**"*

(FIN, Lehto, FP, 2019)

*"When this House voted on the registered partnership in the past /.../ We had our finger taken off and today they're ripping off our whole hand. And I ask: **What will come next?** Marriages with children? Polygamy?"*

(CZ, Majerová-Zahradníková, ODS, 2018)

*"Various family support and protection programs will be the axis of my government's policy, not only **in the name of tradition and identity**, but also in the name of the **future, freedom and normality.** /.../ We do not consent to social experiments and ideological revolutions."*

(PL, Morawiecki, PiS, 2019)



In the prism of **nation preservation**, narratives often cast **women** – especially native, white, heterosexual women - as **passive but morally deserving victims**, endangered both by immigration and by the state's failure to protect them. In this framing, **women do not appear as autonomous political agents but as**

emblems of a violated and threatened nation. Gendered insecurity thus becomes a rhetorical means to promote, for example, the idea of racialized criminality, problematic immigration, international interference, and a nationalist model of protection.

*“Why are you trampling on Article 1 when it comes to the dignity of these girls and young women in Germany? After two years in the Bundestag, I know why you are so upset here and why you are not protecting these girls and women. You would have to admit that **multiculturalism has failed** /.../”*

(DE, Sichert, AfD, 2019)

*“The SPD movement refuses the ratification of this dangerous and damaging international agreement [Istanbul Convention], and you can see that ODS is the one who takes a positive approach to it. So the ODS promotes **gender totalitarianism** and this neo-Marxist nonsense.”*

(CZ, Okamura, SPD, 2023)

*“Polish women are **safe** in Poland because there are **no illegal immigrants**, there are **no absurd policies**. In Poland, women are respected in Christian culture /.../”*

(PL, Czarnek, PiS, 2023)

As exemplified above, the political actors espousing extremist anti-gender narratives often rhetorically frame gender equality measures as well as sexual and gender minorities groups **rights activism as absurd distortions**, thus delegitimizing them as unnatural or even chaotic rather than as legitimate subjects of debate about rights and inclusion. Such rhetorical moves use a classic *reductio ad absurdum* technique, whereby a policy’s hypothetical extreme consequences are presented as inevitable outcomes, thereby discrediting the original proposition through exaggerated logical extension. Furthermore, the argumentative structure relies on cause–effect (migration leads to violence), slippery slope argument (tolerance leads to collapse), and moral absolutism (if one woman is unprotected, the state has failed).

These narratives all espouse an **essentialist worldview in which the heterosexual family is sacralised**, whether as a biological, cultural, or divine imperative. This sacralisation **legitimises exclusionary politics, reinforces the in-group/out-group boundary between natural families and deviant identities, and positions the state as the guardian of both national and cultural survival**. Even in contexts where progressive legislation and gender equality reforms have been broadly accepted (as in France or Finland), actors across the political spectrum continue to uphold the heterosexual family as the unquestionable foundation of society. The circulation of these narratives is therefore observable not only at the transnational level but also traverses political blocks, allowing arguments first voiced on the far right to reappear in conservative and centrist discourse.

Science, education and gender theory indoctrination

Science and education appear as central battlefields in extremist narratives across European parliaments.

Both are mobilised **to legitimise restrictive policies and to delegitimise progressive reforms**, which are framed as **indoctrination** displacing patriotic education. In this framing, biology and natural sciences are elevated as real science, while findings from social sciences and humanities are dismissed as

pseudoscientific. The authority of science is weaponized, so that essentialist views of sex are presented as objective truth, while gender studies are cast as ideology (similar to examples related to nation above).

*“Within this savage promotion, we come to the most intolerable point of this law: children. Madam Minister of Equality, **like a true totalitarian, you want to educate our children about sex.** /.../ Today is the day to shout: the grass is green, boys have penises and girls have vaginas, sex is binary, **biology is real, gender ideology is a cancer.**” (ES, Toscano de Balbín, Vox, 2022)*

*“These are the consequences of the **gender ideologues' political battle against biology, against reality and against normal common sense** – sheer madness. In their motion, the Greens refer to the current state of science, by which they mean the ideological rubbish that is being churned out at state expense by the 250 gender chairs.”*

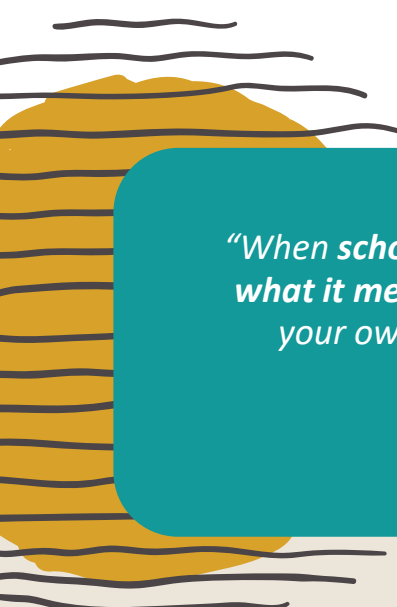
(DE, von Storch, AfD, 2020)

*“It is **unanimously accepted in the scientific community** that an individual's sex is determined by their chromosomes /.../ On the other hand, the use of the concept of “gender” is far from unanimous. Its use in place of the word “sex” implies adherence to a sociological theory /.../ This theory is not currently accepted by science, nor is it accepted by society.”*

(FR, Ménard, RN, 2018)

Education is similarly politicised. Schools are portrayed as gateways to authoritarian control and attacks on freedom of expression. This discourse ties into broader anti-Cultural Marxism narratives, where progressive or “woke” agendas are recast as **foreign**

impositions threatening domestic culture. A common rhetorical move, especially in Italy, is to leave the word “gender” in English, marking it as alien and externally imposed.



*“When **schools teach cultural Marxism and LGBT**, but they do not teach **what it means to have your own country**, what added value it is, what your own nation means, what our tradition is, what our history is, what we Slovenians have achieved in the past.”*

(SI, Grims, SDS, 2019)

*“Parents can raise their children, or they can allow various **LGBT organizations** into kindergartens and schools to **re-educate their children.**”*

(HU, Rétvári, KDNP, 2021)

*“Whoever wants to **poison children with ideology** /.../ whoever wants to enter schools without an invitation and write ideological textbooks, is planning an explosive device under Poland /.../”*

(PL, Morawiecki, PiS, 2019)

*“Today we will not talk about how some **LGBT Studio M** has started – now listen to this, my friend - in cooperation with the Faculty of Arts, to **re-educate our little children** aged 3 to 6 in so-called “gender equality,” or whatever it’s called in Croatia. Please, in a democracy, where every human life is precious, where we do not detect any violence at all against people of different sexual orientation - we do not want to accept someone **re-educating us, re-educating our culture, our style, our way of life**, starting from kindergarten age and who knows how far.”*

(HR, Sačić, DP, 2022)

These appeals often rest on **selective evidence** and reinforce the myth of non-existence of violence on the grounds of sexual orientation: isolated studies, anecdotal references, and personal experience of members of the majority are elevated as proof, while a whole body of opposing research is ignored. **Religion**, the constitution, and expert testimony are all invoked as authorities, yet the epistemic core of

such arguments is not technocratic expertise but biology as common sense truth. In this framing, **gender theory is cast as a denial of reality**, where ideology is understood as distortion of reality and common sense as truth; and queer identity as a threat to the cognitive order underpinning national coherence

*“This bill, crafted through tunnel vision and thick ideological lenses /.../ **damages the credibility and moral authority of this Parliament** and also demonstrates how strongly ideological bills can override all consideration of their devastating consequences.”*

(FIN, Taunus, KD, 2023)

*“Furthermore, we must mention **a whole series of psychologists and scientific arguments** that demonstrate according to well-known international journals that children raised by homosexual parents have significantly more problems compared to those raised by heterosexual couples. **We can cite Professor (...)**’s research, published in a scientific journal /.../”*

(IT, Aracri, FI, 2016)

*“Please, **return to reality**, abandon the virtual and do not lead us into the Apocalypse. Even without the permission of the politically correct, I pray to the Madonna, Saint Francis, and Saint Catherine, patrons of Italy, and Saint Pio of Pietrelcina, who was a good man, that they may protect us. More Italy within its borders, more **Christian civilization, order and security.**”*

(IT, Perosino, FI, 2019)

Discursive strategies in parliamentary speeches frequently discredit government initiatives in the name of **common sense**. Gender ideology is portrayed as a cultural delusion that denies biology, undermines legal clarity, and ridicules ordinary reasoning. By invoking common sense, **far-right actors present their views as self-evident truths** shared by “ordinary people”, while depicting opponents as elites blinded by ideological tunnel vision. This framing legitimises discriminatory policies by masking prejudice as rational judgment and shields actors from critique: if biology is “obviously binary,” then anyone who disagrees can

be dismissed as an irrational extremist. When children are imagined as the nation’s future and science as indisputable truth, education comes to the frontline of cultural survival. By casting **schools as sites of indoctrination and gender studies as pseudoscience**, political actors fuse child protection with epistemic authority. This powerful narrative makes defending children and defending science appear inseparable, justifying urgent restrictions and framing gender equality not as democratic debate but as an existential threat – to knowledge, morality, and the survival of society itself.

Masculinity in Crisis and Anti-Feminism

*Another prominent theme across European parliaments is the alleged **crisis of masculinity**.*

parliaments is the alleged **crisis of masculinity**. These narratives lament the decline of true men, warn of institutionalized discrimination against men, and depict **feminism as extremist** or destructive. They invert feminist claims, reframing men as victims and feminists as aggressors intending on subverting the family and the social order. **Masculine strength** is often linked to **national**

survival and therefore its perceived absence from society is lamented as a sign of broader cultural weakness. Such arguments are further developed by cautioning against what is framed as the **excessive pursuit of equality**, suggesting that pushing egalitarian policies 'too far' could precipitate radical, undesirable societal transformations.

*“/.../ this law, which is **another brick in the wall of sexual apartheid that men suffer in Spain**. /.../ Is this not violence? Is it not political violence, institutional violence against men /.../ because the goal is not to protect women, but to destroy men – specifically, white heterosexual men.”*

(ES, Toscano de Balbín, Vox, 2022)

By presenting **men as victims**, these narratives legitimise rollbacks of gender equality policies and reposition the defence of traditional gender hierarchies as a patriotic duty. In this way, the “crisis of masculinity” is framed not as a narrow gender issue but as a civilisational one: the weakening of men signals demographic decline, moral decay, and national vulnerability. **By defending men against feminism, extremists claim to be defending the very survival of the nation.**

Extremist narratives with an economic underpinning also strengthen this anti-feminist framing. Gender initiatives such as quotas, counselling, and inclusive language are derided as elite frivolities, contrasted with the hardships of ordinary workers, and

depicted as distractions from pressing economic or security concerns. NGOs representing other than mainstream genders and sexual orientations are portrayed as conspiratorial and marginal groups disproportionately funded at the expense of more deserving constituencies such as police officers or the unemployed. Sexual and gender minority groups are considered unproblematic only when they accept subordination, deny claims to equality, and adapt silently to the dominant order – effectively sacrificing their lived experience for the preservation of the nation. In both cases, gender-related political activity is framed as wasteful symbolic projects, diverting scarce resources away from the real problems of the real nation

*"The national debt has exploded. 7 million employees are on short-time work, hundreds of thousands of people are fearing for their livelihoods, and the Greens are calling for nationwide tax-funded gender identity counselling centres /.../ **These are the luxury problems** of left-liberal prosperity neurotics who have lost all touch with reality /.../ But Germany has real problems. We will take care of them."*

(DE, Beatrix von Storch, AfD, 19.06.2020)

*"A **normal homosexual** knows the order of the world, that he was born this way, that he became this way. He tries to adapt to this world **without necessarily considering himself an equal.**"*

(HU, Kövér, Fidesz, 2015)

*"This is a systematic attempt by the **homolobby** to change the way our society works."*

(CZ, Nytrová, ČSSD, 2016)

*"Legebitra, the leading Slovenian homosexual organization, which unites a small group of **homosexual activists**, is **financed exponentially from public funds.**"*

(SI, Pojbič, SDS, 2016)

Circulation Mechanisms

Gender debates in European parliaments rarely stand alone

They are mobilised as proxies for broader ideological struggles centred on nationhood, often intertwined with migration, religion, sovereignty, and security, as shown below in the example from the Italian Senate. This shows how **different topics help circulate the same core extremist narrative**. In this context, **extremist narratives on gender are not deployed to advance equality but to serve as gateways into nationalist and anti-liberal agendas**, where gender

can be easily instrumentalized as in the example from the Slovenian parliament, where the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women was reframed to highlight historical victimhood, shifting attention away from structural gender-based violence and aligning the event with nationalist and revisionist interpretations of the past.



*“These figures, who are notable icons of the homosexual world, have made very clear and honest statements. /.../ Furthermore, we must mention **a whole series of psychologists and scientific arguments** /.../ This Europe, which has recently shown its fragility, a Europe of bankers, broccoli and duck purchases, is not a union of peoples. It cannot meddle in each nation's destiny /.../”*

(IT, Aracri, FI, 2016)

*“Greetings to everyone on this symbolic day of the fight against violence against women, because **among the victims of totalitarianism were many women of all ages, children, families, everyone.**”*

(SI, Grims, SDS, 2021)

Narratives also **circulate across different discursive environments**. Politicians draw on popular imagery, media representations, public events, etc. to strengthen their appeal, often cross-referencing external sources (see section on *Science, education, and gender theory indoctrination*) or extra-

parliamentary arenas. Such **cross-referencing illustrates how parliamentary debate both draws on and feeds into wider public mobilizations**, facilitating the uptake of particular narratives by the broader public.



“

“And outside we are greeted by a crowd of several thousand people, who remind us to protect the traditional family of a husband and wife, to protect children, but nowhere do they say that the rights of same-sex couples should be curtailed.”

(SI, Bah Žibert, SDS, 2015)

Across the examples, we have seen how common **extremist narratives reappear across national contexts and are adapted to serve local political goals**. At the same time, it is worth highlighting that extremist arguments **circulate also inside parliaments**, gaining legitimacy through repetition. Core themes – family, parenthood, and biology – **migrate from the far right into the mainstream right**, with voting patterns on reproductive as well as sexual and gender minorities groups rights reflecting this convergence. Often, the main difference lies in

tone: far-right MPs openly deride gender quotas as unnatural and devalue certain professions as feminised, while mainstream right-wing MPs debate similar positions in softer terms, invoking the need for protection of the traditional family. Yet the underlying ideological stance is largely the same, so that radical ideas about gender do not remain confined to the margins but are normalized through their repetition and adaptation in mainstream discourse.

07

Circulation of Extremist Narratives in national parliaments: Science

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Circulation of Extremist Narratives in national parliaments: Science

07

Executive Summary

Across contemporary parliamentary debates, extremist narratives consistently repurpose science to serve nationalist and identity-centered agendas.

Scientific institutions and experts are framed as detached elites or ideologues, while the so-called common sense is elevated as a truer, more democratic form of knowledge. Climate and ecology represent typical battlegrounds: environmental research is recast as partisan dogma, mitigation policies as punitive, and conservation as hostile to ordinary livelihoods. Humanities and social sciences are similarly delegitimised, with historical scholarship instrumentalised to sanitise the past and portray evidence-based critique as censorship. Appeals to freedom and free speech are used to invert accountability, depicting expert oversight as

authoritarian overreach. The result is a binary moral landscape in which virtuous “people” must resist corrupt “elites,” and scientific consensus is treated as a tool of coercion rather than inquiry. Rather than rejecting science outright, these narratives selectively embrace or dismiss it to validate pre-existing ideological commitments. Overall, science is rebranded as a national instrument, stripped of technocratic authority, and mobilised to defend tradition, sovereignty, and a staged ‘common-sense’ pragmatism aimed at political signalling rather than problem-solving.

Introduction

Extremist actors in parliamentary arenas advance a coordinated discourse that subordinates scientific authority to nationalist politics and identity claims.

Their interventions cluster around several recurring patterns: **delegitimising expertise, politicising science, contesting climate and ecological research, instrumentalising history, and attacking gender**

studies and social sciences. These strategies erode trust in expertise and reframe knowledge through ideological and “common-sense” lenses, as outlined in the following subsections.

Politicised Science

Scientific knowledge and scientists frequently appear as targets in extremist parliamentary speeches, especially in relation to climate change, ecology, the COVID-19 pandemic, or the interpretation of historical and social issues.

In such cases, **science is framed not as neutral inquiry but as ideological indoctrination**, portrayed as the **product of supranational institutions, government agendas, or “woke” elites**. Research in fields such as gender studies, sociology, or political science is singled out as especially suspect, and even efforts like state-funded research and media initiatives to counter disinformation are cast as **official propaganda**. The **notion of freedom** is for this reason also central to extremist narratives about

science. Far-right actors cast themselves as **defenders of free expression**, while depicting liberal or progressive **governments as authoritarian** for fact-checking or challenging revisionist claims. This inversion allows them to present restrictions on misinformation as censorship and to position themselves as protectors of the nation’s “true” history. In doing so, they reinforce a stark in-group/out-group divide that legitimises their broader agenda.

*“I therefore consider it to be completely nonsensical and sad that the interests of citizens, municipality representatives and people living in Šumava are put against some higher interests of ecologists and scientific community. **We should not allow the act on nature preservation to destroy the act of municipalities.**”*

(CZ, Vilímec, ODS, 2017)

*“**We must liberate academic debate.** We must really make it so that these leftist militias at universities stop terrorizing /.../ our youth and our scientists. We must bring about a situation in which academic debate will truly be free /.../.”*

(PL, Czarnek, PiS, 2021)

Another central element of such narratives is **anti-elitism**. Scientists are depicted as technocrats detached from ordinary life, **imposing their views and silencing alternative opinions**. Findings in the social sciences and humanities are dismissed as mere opinions promoted against the will of the

people. Environmental science in particular is framed as privileging elite interests over those of “ordinary citizens,” with conservation or climate measures described as ideological projects that undermine everyday life.



*“We have realised that **death is not caused solely by the virus**. It is our children who suffer most, their spirits damaged. The right to education will only be granted with a bracelet to accustom them to supervised freedom, forced treatments, and virtual camps, in exchange for an electric scooter and a tablet. This serves the interests of financial capitalism, driven by conflicts of interest embodied by the WHO, primarily funded by philanthropist Bill Gates. We all know: Gates predicted a pandemic in 2018, simulated one in October 2019 at Event 201 with Davos associates, and for decades has pursued depopulation plans and authoritarian control over global politics. His vaccines allegedly sterilised millions of African women and caused a polio outbreak paralyzing 500,000 Indian children. Meanwhile, he plans to distribute mRNA vaccines to reprogram our immune systems and profits from 5G infrastructure companies in the US. This scenario reveals the deep state in Italy. The ultimate goal is **total control, absolute dominance** over humans reduced to guinea pigs and slaves, violating sovereignty and free will.”*

“
(IT, Cunial, independent – formerly M5S, 2020)

*“I know that this scientific conclusion has been contested, and that other **scientists for whom the fight against climate change is part of their ideology** have challenged this scientific work, but we must realize that it is not 100% proven that climate change is caused by human activity. It goes so far as to say that **anyone who dares to question** the evidence that this is one of many climate changes that have happened in the history of the planet /.../ **is labelled as a climate change denier.**”*

(CZ, Zahradník, ODS, 2019)

*“The **so-called experts from the left-wing political option** claim to know more than all the world’s experts in the field of economics. They argue that the economic results are extremely poor.”*

(SI, Jelinčič Plemeniti, SNS, 2022)

*Extremist narratives promoting **profound distrust of expert knowledge** employ **conspiracy theories**, **selective recognition of authority**, **decontextualised data** and **moral or historical hyperbole** to delegitimize experts and institutions.*



Parliamentary discourse thus reinforces a binary worldview of corrupt elites versus virtuous citizens, transforming science into another battleground for defining who belongs to the authentic nation and who represents an alien or hostile interest. In this regard, extremist actors often appropriate the authority of science rather than rejecting it outright. Academic titles, institutional affiliations, and selective citations are used to lend credibility to partisan claims, even as other forms of expertise are

dismissed as ideological or corrupt. This ambivalent stance allows unwanted scholarship to be attacked while the symbolic power of scientific authority is exploited to bolster extremist positions. In this context, global policy frameworks such as the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development are frequently singled out, portrayed as technocratic or conspiratorial projects that threaten national sovereignty and everyday livelihoods.

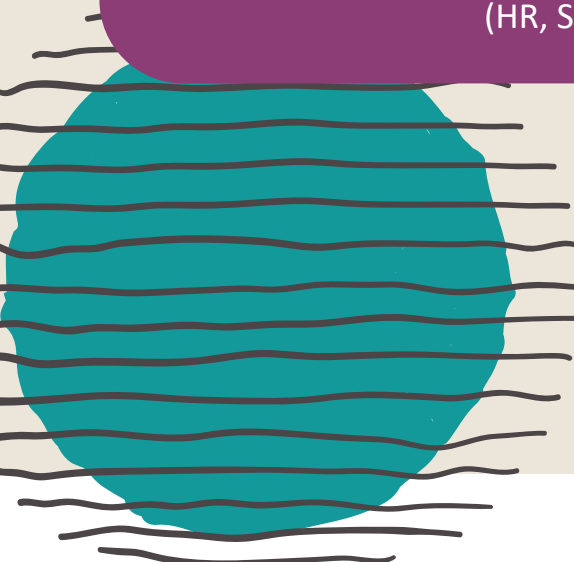
Instrumentalised Past

*In many cases, extremist narratives concern the past. As an academic discipline, historiography and related fields in the humanities and social sciences are subject to misuse, while the **past itself is mobilised as a powerful legitimising tool.***

Politically motivated revisionism portrays authoritarian periods as less harmful than commonly understood, or even as moments of strength and progress to which society should return after the perceived failure of liberal democracies. When such revisionism is challenged by scholars, extremists often accuse academia of censorship, framing attempts to discredit or refute their interpretations as proof of an ideological bias.

This ideologization of knowledge enables **revisionism to be presented as “plurality” or simply as “different opinions about history.”** In this way, the interpretation of the past becomes directly tied

to how the in-group understands the state, with **historical memory serving as a mirror of political identity.** Division between in-group and out-group is reinforced through historical arguments, casting present-day adversaries as the heirs of discredited ideologies. Topics such as past wars, periods of authoritarianism, or socialism are used to equate political opponents – liberals, globalists, or multiculturalists – with the ideological legacy of communism or other “hostile” traditions. In doing so, **political disagreement is transformed into a moral struggle over history itself**, where control of the past becomes inseparable from the struggle for sovereignty and national authenticity.



*“Esteemed gentlemen, ladies and gentlemen, colleagues, before us is a report that informs us about a great tragedy that has befallen the Republic of Croatia, the Croatian people – a tragedy that is ongoing, that even after 30 years continues to take lives. All of this was caused by the Greater Serbian Chetnik aggression against the Republic of Croatia, and **that is the beginning of all evil, and we must be aware of that today, as we discuss – in the comfort of this parliamentary chamber – what was the original cause of it all.**”*

(HR, Sačić, Domovinski pokret, 2021)

*“It is about teaching history. You have brought about, over the years of your rule – you from the Left, you from the Civic Platform – that **Polish youth are completely unaware of their history of the second half of the 20th century. And because of that, they are very susceptible to manipulation.**”*

(PL, Czarnek, PiS, 2021)

Climate and Ecology

Scientific knowledge and scientists frequently appear as targets in extremist parliamentary speeches, especially in relation to climate change, ecology, the COVID-19 pandemic, or the interpretation of historical and social issues.

Ideologization of knowledge is also evident in extremist narratives concerning natural science, especially climate change. Pro-environmental movements are portrayed as irrational “fanatics,” a framing that delegitimises both their activism and the scientific communities defending green policies. Ecology is sometimes described as a “new religion,” implying that environmentalism is a form of misguided belief or even blasphemy. **Extremist actors capitalise on scientific discourse selectively:** they invoke findings when these serve their political goals but dismiss or discredit research when it does

not. Environmental restrictions are often framed as “punitive” or ineffective, supposedly harming ordinary citizens, in particular their electorate, while serving elite agendas. In contrast, extremists promote **an ecology of common sense or pragmatism**, which typically involves endorsing anti-scientific positions that align with the interests of their constituencies. Appeals to common sense function less as rational engagement and more as political performance, reinforcing in-group identities against liberal or cosmopolitan elites.

“This bill could have been an ambitious plan, yet it contains **little to nothing promoting localism** – despite half our greenhouse gas emissions being tied to imports. /.../ Instead, you’re piling up bureaucratic, **freedom-restricting measures** with negligible impact on our carbon footprint. In short, it’s a masterclass in punitive environmentalism. /.../ Environmental action concerns everyone, yet it’s been hijacked by a handful of ideologues. **We must urgently return to pragmatic, common-sense ecology.**”

(FR, Meizonnet, RN, 2021)

Another recurring topic of ecological extremist narratives is **localism**. While presented as environmentally sound, its main purpose is to evoke an **idealised vision of traditional rural life**, despite the fact that local production does not inherently ensure environmental sustainability. This nostalgic imaginary legitimises productivist, nationalist, and neoliberal agendas, contrasting “authentic” rural populations with urban elites portrayed as detached from everyday realities.

A variation of this narrative does not deny climate science but reframes it as misused – an instrument for irrational or authoritarian policies. Green reforms are depicted as detached from real-world feasibility, serving as moral theatre for political elites while

imposing economic burdens on ordinary citizens. Even where climate change itself is acknowledged, its politicisation is cast as economically irrational and democratically illegitimate. These claims invoke themes of inefficiency, bureaucratic absurdity, and national decline, presenting science-based reforms as foreign impositions that undermine sovereignty. Rhetorically, such arguments rely on faulty cause–effect chains, slippery slope reasoning, and populist accounting: billions are said to be wasted on climate measures while practical problems remain unsolved. Scientific consensus is thereby repositioned as a tool of elite-driven transformation, delegitimising expertise while reinforcing nationalist critiques of global governance.

“The plan to have 1 million electric cars on our roads by 2020, which the Federal Government has of course not realized, is being chalked up as a success in the Ministry of Transport because we have now established that electric vehicles are, firstly, a toy for the rich and well-to-do in the second or third car segment at most due to their purchase price, secondly, they naturally do not have a good CO₂ balance if we look at them holistically and not just through their direct emissions, and thirdly, in terms of consumption in an environment in which a kilowatt hour is polluted with 400 grams of CO₂, they cannot make any contribution to reducing CO₂.”

(DE, Kraft, AfD, 2021)

Gender Studies and Social Sciences

*Extremist narratives are particularly prominent in relation to the humanities and social sciences. A central focus lies on nation and gender, with **parliamentary debates often framing academic research through the lens of national interest and cultural values.***

Accusations that academia is dominated by left-wing intellectuals are widespread, with universities portrayed as **indoctrinating students** through one-sided interpretations. Fields perceived as challenging

nationalist or conservative narratives – such as gender studies or migration research – are singled out for delegitimisation and targeted as illegitimate areas of inquiry.

*“Gender studies have no business in universities because it is **an ideology, not a science.**”*

(HU, Semjén, KDNP, 2018)

*“As you can see, ladies and gentlemen, you are dealing with **serious science.** The IPCC works day and night on the **fundamental issues of the future of humanity, such as gender.** But at least the ladies and gentlemen of the IPCC still have their wits about them: They only know two genders.”*

(DE, Kraft, AfD, 2018)

“



Climate and ecology

Similarly to the observation laid out in relation to the circulation of extremist narratives in the parliaments on the topic of nation and gender, the circulation of extremist narratives on science in parliamentary debates also relies on several mutually reinforcing mechanisms.

Discursive borrowing enables actors to adopt metaphors and tropes – such as “climate fanaticism”, “gender ideology” or “common-sense ecology” – from transnational debates and adapt them to local contexts. Framing that is based on simplification and performance reduces complex issues to emotionally resonant binaries (science vs. common sense, elites vs. the people), making the narratives highly portable across discursive contexts. Strategic appropriation of authority allows selective use of academic titles, data, or institutions to legitimise partisan claims while dismissing unwelcome expertise as ideological. Across these mechanisms, science is not rejected but reclaimed as a space of rationality and common sense – a domain portrayed as hijacked by elites and in need of restoration. Scientific knowledge is moralised: it is expected to serve the nation rather than global

agendas or identity-based claims. In this configuration, science functions rhetorically as both validator and expositor: validating nationalist, biologically grounded worldviews, and exposing elite delusions or bureaucratic excess. It reinforces gender narratives by opposing biology to gender theory, supports economic arguments by discrediting green policies, and aligns with sovereignty claims by depicting expertise as ideological governance. Crucially, these flexible framings circulate so effectively because they can be detached from specific contexts and re-nationalised elsewhere. They are also highly instrumental, easily linked to other agendas – such as gender, sovereignty, or cultural identity – so that science becomes a vehicle for advancing broader ideological positions.

08

Extremist Narratives in the European Parliament

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Extremist Narratives in the European Parliament

08

Executive Summary

The rhetoric of right-wing factions in the European Parliament between 2015 and 2024 shows that political conflict in the EU has long since ceased to unfold solely along economic or institutional lines, but has penetrated deep into the cultural and symbolic sphere.

In plenary debates on nation, gender and science, it becomes apparent that right-wing parties do not primarily view Europe as a political order, but rather as a civilisational project that, in their view, is in danger of losing its cultural basis.

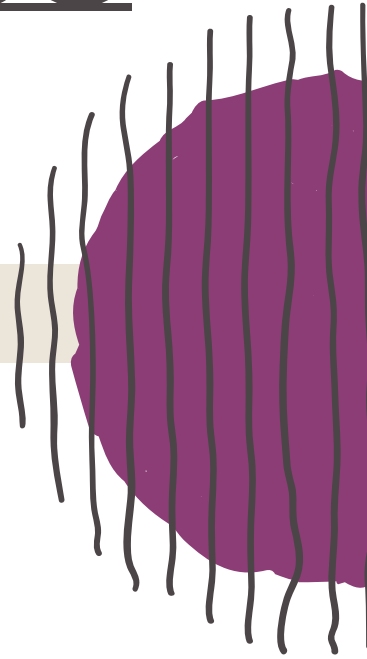
At the heart of their argument is therefore the protection of what is theirs: national sovereignty, traditional gender roles and useful, "non-ideological" science. This discourse of protection is both reactive and performative: it responds to what is perceived as a threat of supranational integration, but through its escalation it itself creates a new political identity – that of the defender of normality.

This self-staging has a dual effect: internally, it creates community ("we, the people"), while externally it sets itself apart from "the elites," "Brussels" or "the ideologues." In this way, right-wing factions contribute to the re-politicisation of European identity – albeit in a particularistic, often exclusionary form. In their language, Europe does not appear as a space of shared values, but as the sum of sovereign cultures that must assert themselves against homogenisation.

For the political culture of the European Parliament, this means a fundamental ambivalence: on the one hand, right-wing factions reinforce the **pluralism of**

the European public sphere through their provocative rhetoric – they make it clear that Europe is not a monolithic project. On the other hand, they **undermine the normative core** of the European idea by delegitimising equality, inclusion and universalism as "ideology".

Between 2015 and 2024, a shift can be observed: right-wing factions have used the European Parliament as a stage to translate their national narratives into European conflicts. The plenary chambers have become venues for symbolic debates about belonging, truth and authority. In these discourses, Europe is no longer merely negotiated politically – it is defined and defended culturally. This shows that the rise of right-wing narratives in the EP is less an expression of pure anti-EU sentiment than a symptom of a deeper **struggle for interpretive authority over the idea of Europe** itself. This struggle will determine whether Europe continues to exist as a pluralistic community of values – or whether it reverts to a mere alliance of sovereign, culturally isolated nations.



Between 2015 and 2024, the European Parliament (EP) has become a central arena for ideological debates about the future of the European Union. In particular, the political groups on the right wing – including the European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR), Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy (EFDD), later Identity and Democracy (ID), and independent nationalist MEPs – have used this stage to formulate **an alternative understanding of Europe**.

Their goal was not so much to help shape European integration as **to reinterpret the European project from the perspective of national identity, cultural homogeneity and ideological demarcation**. These factions differ in their party political orientation and national origin, but share common discourse strategies. In their plenary speeches, they draw on narratives that make nation, family, religion and scientific rationality symbolic reference points for a

"true Europe". This is contrasted with an image of the European Union as an overregulated, morally unrestrained and ideologically egalitarian project. **The parliamentary debates thus exemplify how right-wing politics is rhetorically constituted in the European context: not primarily through institutional criticism, but through cultural and moral opposition.**

A common core can be reconstructed across all three topics: right-wing factions in the European Parliament link political and cultural sovereignty to a metanarrative framework of "defence"

1. the nation must assert itself against supranational institutions,
2. the people against cultural alienation,
3. and science against "ideologies".

These discourses create a moral hierarchy: "naturalness", "tradition" and "independence" have positive connotations; "globalism", "elites" and "ideology" have negative ones. In the language of these factions, **Europe only appears legitimate when it is composed of national and cultural entities**, not as an independent political project. Extremist narratives in the EP thus fulfil a dual function: they **mobilise emotions (pride, threat, defence) and politicise identity** – both in the national and epistemic sense. For the political culture of the European Parliament, this means a **permanent tension between universalism** (human rights, equality, research as a common good) **and particularism** (nation, tradition, utility orientation). For several years now, right-wing populist and far-right parties have been gaining ground in European

elections. In Europe, we can observe that the cordon sanitaire that has long isolated far-right parties is no longer effective in many nation-states. This has a direct impact on the European Parliament. It is striking that there are **ideological elements of argumentation that form a narrative at both the national and European levels**. These elements **include statements on the central position of the nation and who belongs to it in political thinking, a very conservative view of women and a conservative attitude towards science and its role in society**. The European narrative of the right-wing parties in the European Parliament is characterised, among other things, by anti-liberal, anti-democratic and sometimes racist statements by members of right-wing factions.

Nation and nationalism: sovereignty as a guiding narrative

Right-wing factions in the European Parliament (EFDD, ENF, ID, ECR) construct the theme of nation primarily around the motif of regaining control and sovereignty.

This rhetoric reduces "nation" to the unity of people, territory and political self-determination – a counter-image to the "EU bureaucracy" that is perceived as

intrusive. Nigel Farage (UKIP/Brexit Party) provides a paradigmatic example with his calls for an "independent, self-governing normal nation".

"We want our fishing waters back, we want our borders back, we want to be an independent, self-governing normal nation, and that is why, what we have done and what must happen. And in doing so, we now offer a beacon of hope to democrats across the rest of the European continent."

(EP, Farage, EFDD / UKIP / Brexit Party, 2016)

The discourse of reconquest ("we want our borders back") positions national identity as a threatened asset that must be defended against supranational institutions. This pattern can be found across right-wing factions: whether in Farage's British sovereignty narrative or in German, Polish and Hungarian voices from the ECR defending "tradition" and "pride" against Brussels' interference: "I don't

agree that you attack Poland, its tradition and its pride" (Krah, ID; see Kantola and Lombardo, 2021). Central to this is the rhetoric of the people as victims who must "regain" their voice. Right-wing MEPs speak on behalf of homogeneous, culturally defined people. The EU appears to be **alienating people from national authenticity and democratic control**.

"People don't agree with this pressure to introduce gender ideology into our families, schools and societies. Millions of people in Europe say no, no in France, Italy, Croatia, Slovakia."

(EP, Škripek, ECR, 2015)

In the semantic structure of this narrative, nation, people and democracy combine to form a moral triad: national equals democratic equals legitimate. This distinguishes right-wing narratives from federalist or liberal-inspired integration narratives, in which "Europe" is seen as a democratic idea of progress. Here, **Europe is instead stylised as a threat to democracy**.



Gender: "gender ideology" and rejection of EU gender norms

*Right-wing populist actors in the EP first **confirm the consensus on the problem** (violence is bad) and then **radically devalue the analytical instruments of feminist equality**.*

Agreement with the norm (anti-violence) functions here as a door opener, in order to then frame gender as "ideology". This step paves the way for the semantic reversal. Equality is not understood here as

the dismantling of real asymmetries, but as a **discourse on the criminalisation of men** (victim reversal; see Kantola and Lombardo, 2021).

“

"We are against any form of violence against human beings. ... Protection from violence is too important to become an instrument of ideology."

(EP, Wiśniewska, ECR, 2021)

The next step is to feed this into a populist antagonistic frame in an **expansive, mobilising manner**. Gender no longer remains a policy issue, but rather the point of contact in a conflict between the people and the elites. In between, the performative devaluation of the topic as a waste of time emerges (mediated by the media). It is precisely this motif – "we have more important things to do" – that then accompanies the national-traditional movement to restore traditional roles.

Gender equality appears as egalitarianism that destroys "natural complementarity". This shows that these political groups do not treat "gender" as an empirical category in policy mode, but as a signifier of attack on "tradition", "family" and "nation". Gender policy materialises as part of a larger **antagonistic master frame: the people against ideologues, nature against construction, tradition against the EU**.

"...it proceeds from the idea that the roles of men and women, naturally complementary, must in everything, always, everywhere, be absolutely identical. The only thing that counts for you is that there be absolutely as many men as women everywhere ..."

(EP, Gollnisch, NI, 2019)

“

"Of course women must earn less than men because they are weaker, they are smaller, they are less intelligent, and they must earn less. That is all."

(EP, Korwin-Mikke, NI, 2017)

Science and innovation: technology as sovereignty, social science as ideology

Right-wing and right-wing populist factions in the EP are not generally anti-science.

Rather, they frame science and innovation selectively – along **the principle of benefit and harm**: science is good if it strengthens sovereignty and competitiveness; science is bad if it appears to

be an "ideological" threat to traditional values. In a sovereignty-related mode, research takes on a geopolitical dimension, including a geostrategic dimension.

“Horizon Europe must be a clear, simple and fast-paced programme ambitious enough to meet the challenges facing the Union. ... The COVID-19 pandemic has confirmed the need to invest more in research and innovation. ... Horizon Europe will help the EU adapt to the future by supporting the health system to prepare for future pandemics, its industry to decarbonise and its businesses to innovate. [...] My calling upon the Member States is to increase to 3% their investment in research and innovation ... Europe will never be economically wealthy nor safe without substantial financing for its basic and applied research.”

(EP, Zanni, ID, 2021)

“

“We have to invest more in Horizon Europe, in research and innovation. This makes Europe strong. Here we have concrete benefits for the people of Europe, including medical research.”

(EP, Czarnecki, ECR, 2024)

“Proper investment in digital research and innovation will be critical for increasing the global competitiveness of Europe's industries ...”

(EP, Zahradil, ECR, 2020)



Science appears here as an instrument of national and, potentially, European strength, both economically and militarily: "scientific leadership" is connected to protection of both society and values, where research is preferably situated under national control. This fits in with real debates about a "European Sovereignty Fund" (2023), where the idea of a more pan-European technopolitical fund logic was met with scepticism (gracacarvalho.eu).

And in the EP context, these actors consistently frame research in terms of economic competitiveness. Yet at the same time, **the same political groups delegitimise science when it appears to them to be a vehicle for socially critical or social-science questioning of the traditional order** (gender).

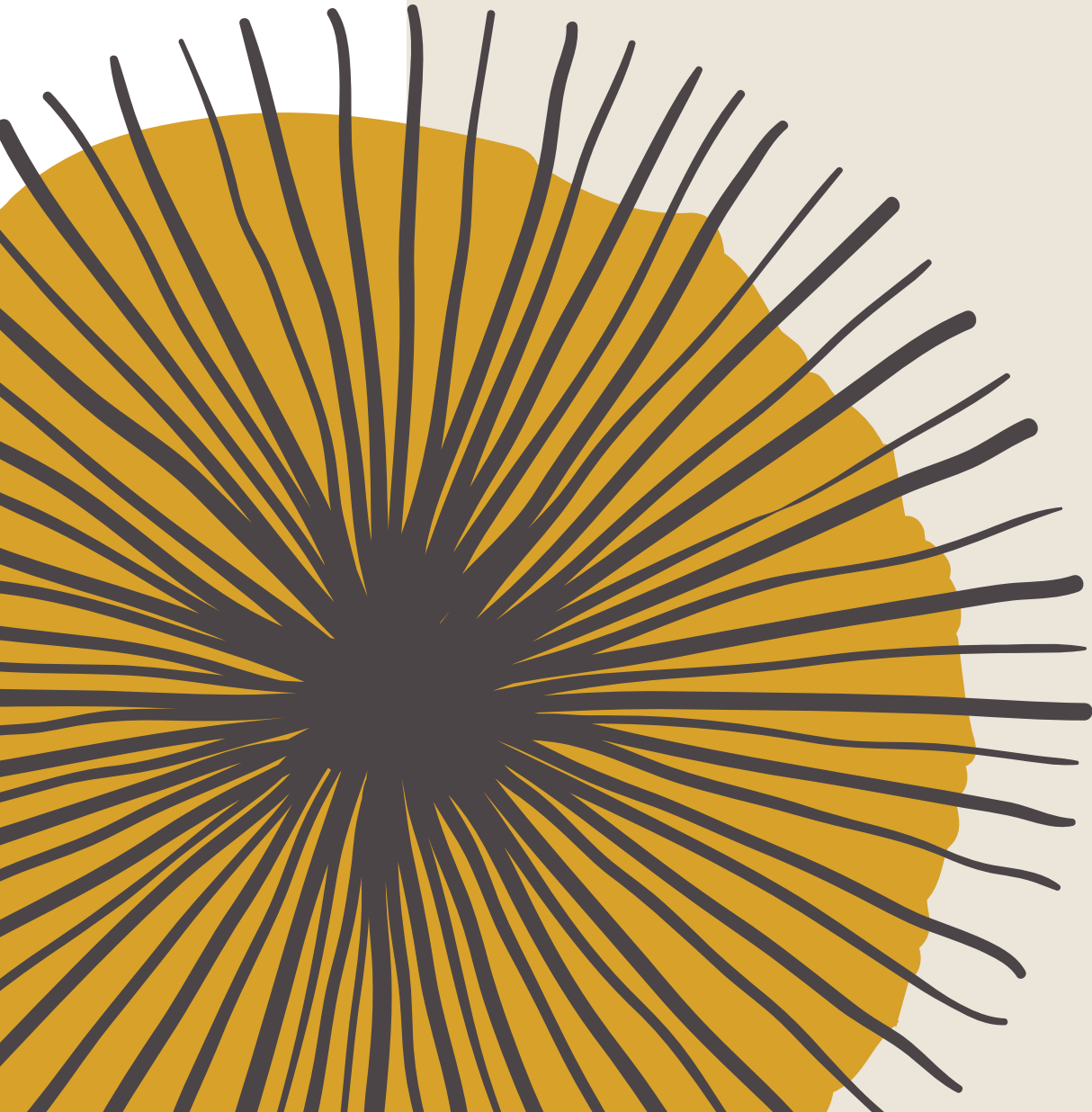
This is precisely what clearly highlights the dual structure of the discourse: while topics and terms such as high-tech, industry, AI, and quantum are interpreted as positive and welcome, while science concerning gender studies and gender criticism is equated with ideology and thus carries a negative connotation. It is selective advocacy of science: "science" is accepted when it functions as a means of protecting traditional values or as a competitive tool; it is, however, delegitimised when it relativises values that right-wing populist actors understand as "natural", "traditional" and "national". Right-wing MEPs are not blanketly "anti-science", but **selectively instrumentalise science to defend sovereignty, nation and traditional values**. Innovation is advocated as long as it remains

disciplined. However, as soon as science challenges the semantic order (gender, egalitarianism, progressive equality), it falls into the "EU ideology" and "elite" category and is no longer framed as "scientific knowledge" but as **a cultural threat**.

Our analyses illustrate the predominance of the **metanarrative of polarisation** in the current era. Metanarratives can be defined as comprehensive explanations of reality that override other, competing explanations. By determining the production of knowledge, experience, and truth in a wide array of specific narratives, metanarratives reflect the constellation of power relations of a society (Foucault 1980; Lyotard 1984). In other words, **the data are characterised by a divide between the in-group and the out-group in terms of their access to reality and truth. The in-group is presented as the possessor of facts based on common sense and reality, and therefore also the possessor of truth. The out-group, in turn, is portrayed as infested with false, nonsensical, ideological, and distorted ideas and positions.**

09

Policy Recommendations



The recommendations below aim to strengthen democratic resilience, protect social cohesion, and enhance critical engagement with political discourse across Europe. We emphasise that the recommendations below represent only a possible set of measures based on the findings of Task 3.3. The implementation of these recommendations will always be country-specific.



Independent evidence and discourse-monitoring body:

We suggest establishing an entity similar in spirit to a Parliamentary Evidence Service (PES) that would use Task 3.3's comparative, corpus-based methodology to continuously analyse, contextualise, and communicate patterns in parliamentary speech. Building on the approach used in this report to identify recurring narrative templates and to trace their circulation across topics, parties, and countries, such a body could produce evidence-based briefs that map which topics and framings are gaining prominence, without judging intent. Each brief would summarise claims made in high-salience debates, present the range of existing evidence, and cite primary sources. Briefs would be published alongside the full debate record to add context rather than alter content. To safeguard freedom of expression and ensure trust, periodic independent evaluations should be conducted to check for unintended chilling effects or bias. The analytical outputs could connect to media-literacy initiatives, journalistic briefings, and educational resources on democratic debate and its boundaries.

Supporting equality and dignity through parliamentary ethical standards:

Introducing and consistently enforcing parliamentary ethical codes that explicitly safeguard democratic values—alongside freedom of expression—would help ensure that equality and dignity are treated as co-equal principles rather than secondary considerations. Such codes could clarify acceptable standards of conduct and rhetoric in parliamentary work, provide guidance for navigating high-salience and polarising debates, and set out proportionate procedures for addressing breaches in a way that strengthens trust without constraining legitimate political speech.

Update parliamentary rules of procedure:

Following the spirit of support for equality and dignity, we suggest an update of the parliamentary rules of procedure. This would mostly serve to establish clear distinctions between legitimate political critique and extremist framing that targets institutions.

Professional historical commissions:

Given the fact that exclusive nationalism and sovereignty are key elements of far-right parties' narratives, the first meaningful step against the political misuse of the past is the establishment of mixed intergovernmental independent professional historical commissions, which, by producing joint reports, at least partially diminish the political appeal of historical issues.

10

Appendix: Corpus Assisted Discourse Analysis



Appendix: Corpus assisted discourse analysis

10



*Our analysis uses the **CADS approach**, i.e. corpus-assisted discourse studies/analysis approach (Baker 2023) which combines traditional discourse analysis with corpus linguistic methods to identify and examine the circulation of extremist narratives within parliamentary speeches. While the CADS approach for parliamentary data is not new (Bayley et al. 2006, Sarfo-Kantankah 2018, Calzada Pérez 2023), it is now getting increasingly facilitated by openly available corpora, like ParlaMint (Erjavec et al. 2024).*

This mixed-methods approach allows us to explore how particular **groups, events, actions, and ideas are represented in the discourse, while maintaining sensitivity to context and speaker intent** (Taylor 2022). Corpus tools were used to surface patterns worth examining, without fixing hypotheses in advance. This exploratory approach, paired with the rich metadata embedded in the corpora (such as speaker identity, party affiliation, date, parliamentary term, etc.), enables us not only to locate relevant discourse patterns but also to **interpret them in light of their broader political and historical context**. To apply corpus linguistics methods, we used two complementary tools: **noSketchEngine**, hosted at CLARIN.SI and developed by Lexical Computing, and **TEITOK**, hosted at LINDAT/CLARIAH-CZ.

We used corpus searches mainly to target potentially relevant material, combining concept searches, keyword statistics, and collocation analysis. These steps helped narrow the data to passages related to our core themes (nation, gender, and science), as well as to the recurring contexts in which they are discussed. Candidate cases were then assessed through close reading. Metadata (e.g. speaker, role, party affiliation, date) supported contextual interpretation of each instance. While our workflow was shared across the project, the exact mix of methods was adapted to each national case. Partners prioritised procedures that best captured how the focal topics were debated in their parliamentary setting. Such variation reflects the **practical requirements of comparative work** and does not undermine the final interpretations.

In general, we began **with keyword analysis**, a quantitative method that identifies words more frequently used in one set of data compared to another (McEnery & Hardie 2011). We started off by comparing speeches from right-wing versus (centre-)left parties, first overall and second, when relevant, only for debates on particular law proposals (i.e., the Foreigners Act). The resulting keyword lists, representing words that are more typical of one of the groups, were then reviewed in context to keep only those words/statements that corresponded to our thematic focus and that could be classified as an instantiation of an extremist narrative (either one that was previously observed in the Task 2.3 Report (Forti 2024) or a new one).

In addition, we explored data linked to our core topics through the **occurrences of a predefined set of general topic-related keywords**. For instance, in analysing the discourse on science, we searched for terms such as science, scientist, researcher, expert and expertise. We intentionally chose general terms to minimise the impact of prior assumptions. Once the relevant occurrences were identified, we conducted **collocation analysis** to generate lists of the words most frequently appearing near the target terms and showing their typical context (McEnery & Hardie 2011). This allowed us to assess the **prevailing sentiment** around the topic and the dominant argumentative frames. However, as with keyword analysis, identifying instances of extremist narratives required returning to the original textual context and applying qualitative judgment through **close reading**.



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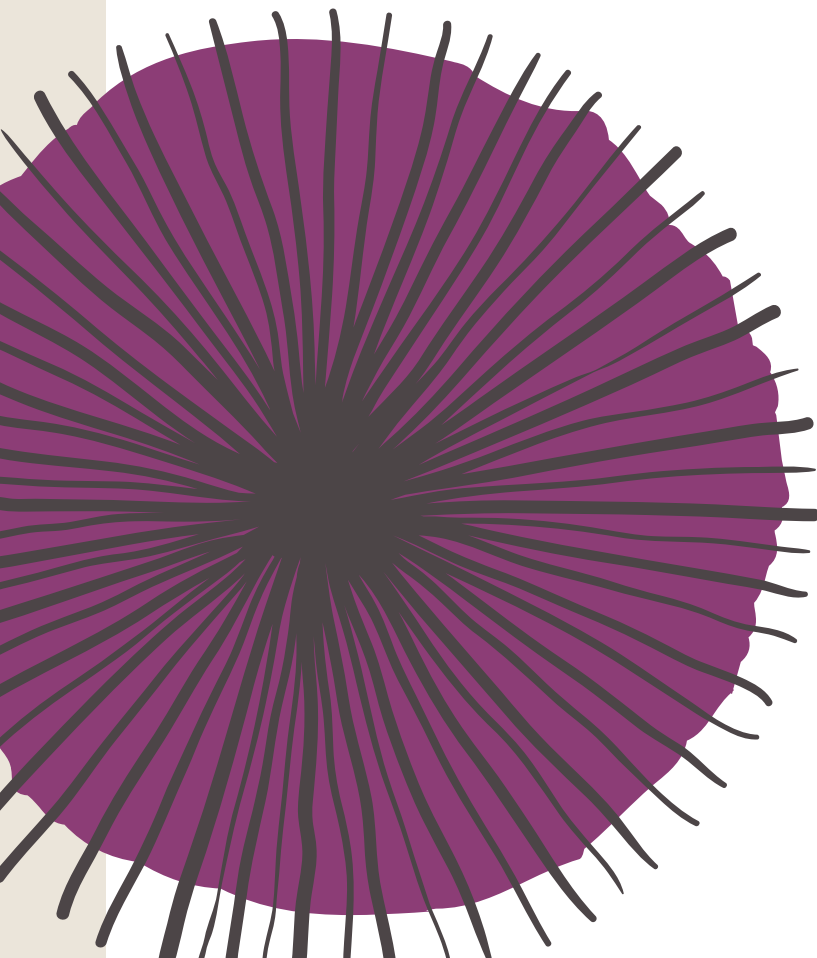
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This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon Europe research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 101094731