



EUROPE'S FAR RIGHT GROUPS LAUNCH UNOFFICIAL CAMPAIGN FOR THE EUROPEAN UNION ELECTIONS - ASSOCIATED PRESS

Posted on May 20, 2024 by TERESA MEDRANO | Associated Press



Photo: Argentina's president Javier Milei gestures as he delivers a speech on stage during the Spanish far-right wing party Vox's rally "Europa Viva 24" in Madrid, Spain

Europe's far-right political parties unofficially launched their campaign Sunday for European Union elections in Spain with strong messages against illegal migration and the bloc's climate policy while declaring their support for Israel in its war against Hamas.

French National Rally party leader Marine Le Pen and Italy's Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni tried to rally voters at an event organized by Spain's far-right Vox party in Madrid ahead of the European Union's parliamentary elections June 6-9. Analysts say the vote across the bloc's 27 nations could see a strong rise of the far right.


"We are in the final stretch to make 9 June a day of liberation and hope," said the French presidential candidate. "We have three weeks left to convince our respective compatriots to go out and vote."

Meloni, whose Brothers of Italy party has foundations in Benito Mussolini's fascism, spoke in Spanish via video conference and called for young people to vote. "You are the only possible future for Europe," Meloni told them.

The defense of the EU's borders was another main theme of the last of two days of a meeting organized by Vox in an arena in the outskirts of the Spanish capital.

"We are not against human rights, but we want strong borders in Europe... because it is ours," said André Ventura, leader of Chega, a party that won the third largest number of parliamentary seats in Portugal earlier this year. "We cannot continue to have this massive influx of Islamic and Muslim immigrants into Europe," he added.

Meloni defended her country's policy of reaching agreements with third countries to try to curb illegal immigration, while Le Pen advocated for reform of the Schengen area — which allows free movement of people within most of the bloc's borders — so that "Europe allows each country to choose who enters and who leaves its territory."

Vox's president, Santiago Abascal, called for unity of the far-right  ahead of the European election.

"In the face of globalism we must respond with a global alliance of patriots in defense of common sense, economic prosperity, security and freedom because we share the threat, and that leads us to solidarity," Abascal said.

The vote will indicate whether the continental political drift will match the rightward swing seen across much of the globe from the Netherlands to Slovakia to Argentina.

Argentina's fiery libertarian president, Javier Milei, who was welcomed like a star amidst chants of "Freedom," used the spotlight to bash Pedro Sánchez, Spain's socialist prime minister, and his wife — something unthinkable for most heads of state visiting a historic ally.

"They don't know what type of society and country (socialism) can produce and what kind of people chained to power and what levels of abuse it can generate," Milei said in his speech, before weighing in on the corruption allegations against Sánchez's wife, Begoña Gómez.

"Even if he has a corrupt wife, he gets dirty and takes five days to think about it," he said, referring to the time Sánchez took considering whether to step down after the accusations came to light.

In response, the Spanish government demanded an apology from Milei and said it was recalling its ambassador from Buenos Aires over the remarks, which Foreign Minister Jose Manuel Albares condemned as bringing "relations between Spain and Argentina to the most grave point in our recent history."

"To hospitality and good faith, he responded with a frontal attack on our democracy, on our institutions and on Spain," Albares said.

Over the course of Sunday's event, supporters who packed the Palacio de Vistalegre arena cheered messages against the European Green Deal and in favor of farm workers, whose protests brought several cities in the continent to a standstill in recent months. They also applauded every speaker's message in solidarity with Israel in its devastating war against Hamas in Gaza following the militant group's Oct. 7 attack.

Israel was represented at the meeting by its Minister for Diaspora Affairs Amichai Chikli.

Prime Minister Viktor Orbán of Hungary and the former prime minister of Poland, Mateusz Morawiecki, also spoke from a video screen.

Meanwhile hundreds of left-wing activists were demonstrating against fascism in Madrid's city center.

"I am here because in Vistalegre we have a summit of hate and we must fight against fascists," said Frank Erbroder, a Polish activist at the gathering. "I am worried because Hitler won because of democracy, and I think that maybe we'll have the same situation."

—

Associated Press writers Iain Sullivan and Alicia León in Madrid and Isabel DeBre in Buenos Aires, Argentina, contributed to this report.

—

Follow AP's global elections coverage at <https://apnews.com/hub/global-elections/>