

Six Books to Read to Understand Europe's Hard Right

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THE HARD RIGHT is on the march in Europe. The Alternative for Germany, a party declared extremist by domestic spooks, scored a record result in a national election in February. France's National Rally (RN) came top in the first round of voting in snap parliamentary elections in June 2024; it is increasingly accepted in polite society. The Law and Justice party has the Polish presidency, though not the more important post of prime minister; the Brothers of Italy govern Italy. Reform UK leads the polls in Britain. If you want to understand this new movement, its beliefs and its bugbears, read these six books.

1 Conservatism: A Rediscovery. By Yoram Hazony. Regnery Gateway; 480 pages; \$29.99. Forum; 445 pages; £25.00

Yoram Hazony, an Israeli-American academic, is the ideologue-in-chief of “national conservatism”, which urges populist nationalists around the world to form a common front. In this book, he outlines his vision. His principal argument is that the true conservatism of American federalists or English thinkers such as Richard Hooker, an influential 16th-century theologian, was hijacked by cold war politics, which promoted individual freedom as a bulwark against Soviet communism. National conservatism's mission, therefore, is to put national sovereignty before the individual. Mr Hazony aims to restore belief in public religion and family values, and to impose legal systems around the world based on “the Bible and the common law”. His book is a

helpful guide to the ruptures between MAGA and old-school Republicans in America.

2 Orban: Europe's New Strongman. By Paul Lendvai. Hurst; 224 pages; £15.99

Paul Lendvai was born and raised in Budapest, but fled after the Hungarian uprising of 1956 against Soviet domination. As a journalist, he has closely observed the arc of Viktor Orban's career, from bearded revolutionary in the late 1980s to reactionary prime minister. Mr Orban's party, Fidesz, was born as a youthful challenge to the crumbling Communist Party in 1988. It was closely allied to Hungary's liberals. But, as Mr Lendvai shows, the nationalism that inspired many of those who overthrew communism in Hungary has now been harnessed in Fidesz's campaigns against supranational institutions. Mr Lendvai quotes a legal scholar who described Mr Orban's politics as a "permanent liberation struggle"—which is exactly how the hard right sees itself. This rigorous, well-researched book is the best yet on the hard man of Europe's hard right.

3 Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe. By Cas Mudde. Cambridge University Press; 404 pages; £15.99

Cas Mudde, a left-leaning Dutch political scientist at America's University of Georgia, was an early and clear-sighted analyst of the tilt towards right-wing populism in Europe. This book, from 2007, is his best. In it he identifies several common features of parties, such as Hungary's Fidesz and France's RN, that have since moved into the spotlight. Chief among them is "nativism": feeding "upon the feeling of endangered or threatened ethnic, or national, identity". But he also highlights the authoritarian streak of the hard right, and its conviction that political concerns should be more important than economic ones. "Globalisation" is seen as "the multi-faceted enemy", he writes.

4 Revolt on the Right. By Matthew Goodwin and Robert Ford. Routledge; 366 pages; £39.99

This book chronicles the rise of the UK Independence Party (UKIP). Published two years before UKIP's triumph in helping to secure Brexit in 2016, it still offers the most incisive and detailed analysis of how Nigel Farage's party managed to grow so fast after it was founded in 1991—and who voted for it. Those insights are particularly valuable given that Reform, UKIP's successor, now commands the loyalty of the same kinds of voters, and is currently propelling Mr Farage to pole position in British politics. Messrs Goodwin and Ford were among the first writers to identify the hard right's support among disaffected working-class voters. Using plenty of data, they pinpoint the hopes and fears of “left-behind” social groups, an analysis that applies to post-industrial regions in Europe as well as Britain. Indeed, Mr Goodwin broadened his analysis to Europe in his post-Brexit book “National Populism: The Revolt against Liberal Democracy”, written with Roger Eatwell.

5 The Rise of the Fourth Political Theory. By Alexander Dugin. Arktos Media; 248 pages; £17.99

Alexander Dugin, a prominent Russian writer sometimes called “Putin's Rasputin”, has captivated the global populist right with his pseudo-philosophical rants against liberalism and Western values. He expounds his objections to democracy, modernity, progress and free trade, which he thinks have been foisted on the world by the West as a bogus “universal law of development”—a view that has been invoked by Donald Trump and Vladimir Putin, as well as Messrs Orban and Farage. Instead, Mr Dugin would like to see a multipolar world co-ordinated by Russia. He believes in “Eurasianism”: the idea that Russia's national identity is determined by its unique, continent-spanning ethnicity, geography and destiny. Sometimes, Mr Dugin can appear faintly plausible, if misguided. But madness lurks in the details. Apparently the “most impudent” threat to Eurasia is... surfing. “There is nothing more disgusting”, he writes, “than riding with a wide smile on that

loathsome board.”

6 The Strange Death of Europe: Immigration, Identity, Islam. By Douglas Murray. Bloomsbury; 352 pages; £18.99

Douglas Murray is perhaps the most articulate polemicist of the hard right. A British journalist, he is popular in America as well as Europe, though his main argument is that Europe has become so swamped by (mainly Islamic) immigrant cultures that Europeans are no longer confident in standing up for their own admirable Christian values. His primary example is the police’s apparent reluctance to investigate reports of Asian grooming gangs in northern England for fear of appearing racist, a case that prompted an online spat between Elon Musk, a plutocrat, and Sir Keir Starmer’s Labour government in January. Mr Murray paints a wildly incomplete picture of Europe today, but he hits on some unhappy truths.