World News: Anti-Immigration Parties See Openings to Weaken EU Bonds
THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

Abstract Translate

French populist leader Marine Le Pen met with the Freedom Party’s Norbert Hofer, whose near-win in recent presidential elections represented one of the biggest electoral successes for a far-right candidate in Western Europe since World War II.

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VIENNA -- Europe’s anti-immigration, populist parties are working to strengthen their cross-border alliances, hoping to capitalize on recent electoral gains and next week’s U.K. referendum to start rolling back more than five decades of integration efforts.

The parties’ increasing coordination and rising ambitions were on display in the Austrian capital on Friday as the country’s Freedom Party hosted allies from France, Germany, Belgium, Italy, the U.K., the Czech Republic, Poland and Romania.

French populist leader Marine Le Pen met with the Freedom Party’s Norbert Hofer, whose near-win in recent presidential elections represented one of the biggest electoral successes for a far-right candidate in Western Europe since World War II.

“We would like to deepen and extend our cooperation,” Freedom Party Chairman Heinz-Christian Strache said, “along the motto: ‘Patriots of all European countries, unite and work together!’”

The influx of refugees and other migrants has boosted parties across Europe that want to curtail immigration, particularly from Muslim countries, and weaken or dismantle European Union bonds. Beyond Austria, the parties’ gains in the past year range from national parliamentary elections in Slovakia and Poland to state and local votes in Germany and France.

A victory this coming week for the campaign against Britain’s EU membership could bring the biggest boost yet for the euroskeptic movement.
"I hope that 'Brexit' will win, because that would be the start of a process that cannot be turned back anymore," said Gerolf Annemans, a member of the European Parliament who represented Flemish nationalist party Vlaams Belang at the Vienna gathering.

Even if British voters choose to remain in the EU, he added, other countries will also start pushing for less EU integration, meaning that "the decomposing of the Union will be an inevitable fact."

In a news conference earlier Friday alongside her allies, Ms. Le Pen described her wish for a Europe in which individual countries could pick and choose which elements of European integration they want to participate in while having more control over immigration and other matters. Supporters of deep European integration say the bloc works best when all its members follow the same rules.

"Maybe this is the start of a Europe a la carte," Ms. Le Pen said, referring to the coming British referendum.

Credit: By Anton Troianovski

Word count: 377
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