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## **AUSTRIAN FAR RIGHT INVITES ORBAN TO FORM JOINT BLOC**

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The leader of Austrias far-right party raised the prospect Monday (10 September) of forming a common bloc in the European Parliament with the party of nationalist Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán.

I gladly invite Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán and his Fidesz party to work together in future in a common EU bloc!, Vice Chancellor Heinz-Christian Strache, the leader of Austrias far-right Freedom Party (FPÖ), said on Facebook.

Strache and others in the FPÖ have often imitated Orbán's strident anti-immigrant rhetoric, but currently the FPÖ sits with other far-right parties in the Europe of Nations and Freedom (ENF) group.

Strache's comments come on the eve of a speech Orbán will make to the European Parliament defending his governments record against a report outlining a series of concerns over the rule of law and human rights in Hungary.

### **Hesitant MEPs advised to go for a coffee during Hungary vote**

Next weeks vote in the European Parliament on whether to trigger punitive Article 7 against Hungary will be a moment of truth for the EPP political group, whose behaviour will largely determine its outcome, an influential MEP said on Thursday (6 September).

Later this week MEPs will vote on whether to demand so-called Article 7 proceedings against Hungary, which could ultimately see its EU voting rights suspended – a procedure only launched once before, against Poland last December.

Concerns over the erosion of the rule of law and the treatment of migrants have also led to calls for Fidesz to be expelled from the parliaments centre-right European Peoples Party (EPP) grouping.

Strache's colleague in Austrias government, Chancellor Sebastian Kurz – whose centre-right Peoples Party (ÖVP) also sits in the EPP – struck a much more critical note towards Orbán on Monday, saying ÖVP MEPs would vote to support starting Article 7 proceedings and would also back the suspension of Fidesz's EPP membership.

There is no compromise over the rule of law and democracy. Basic values must be protected, Kurz told the ORF 2 TV channel in an interview.

The chair of the EPP, Germanys Manfred Weber, has previously opposed expelling Fidesz but said the party would not get any favourable treatment if he succeeds in his bid to replace Jean-Claude Juncker as head of the European Commission next year.

When its about basic rights and values, no one in our EPP group gets favourable treatment, including Fidesz, Weber said last week.

While Orbáns actions have provoked opposition, they have been applauded by populists elsewhere in the European Union.

Italys new far-right Interior Minister Matteo Salvini has expressed admiration for Orbán and last month the two men appeared together to launch an anti-immigration manifesto aimed at next years European parliamentary elections.

Salvini was also pictured last week meeting US President Donald Trumps former adviser Steve Bannon, who claims to have had talks with Orbán over forming a pan-European right-wing movement ahead of the 2019 poll.

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