
LIBERAL MEPS OFFER TO JOIN MACRON 'MOVEMENT'

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Liberal MEPs want to form an anti-nationalist "movement" with French leader Emmanuel Macron to contest the far right in next year's EU election.

Guy Verhofstadt, the leader of the Liberal group in the European Parliament (EP), unveiled the offer in an interview on Sunday (9 September).

Emmanuel Macron (c) is touring Europe to recruit like-minded politicians (Photo: nato.int)

"We're ready to create this alternative with Macron," Verhofstadt, a former Belgian prime minister, told French newspaper Ouest-France.

"It'll be something new - a movement, a pro-European alternative to the nationalists. Our group is ready to participate now, without waiting," he said.

"The goal is to create a decisive group in the future [EU] parliament - a tool to stop the nationalist wave," he added.

It remains to be seen if Macron's party, La Republique en Marche, takes up the offer.

"We're not ready for an alliance," Christophe Castaner, the party chief, told the Reuters news agency on Sunday.

But Macron and Castaner are currently touring the EU to recruit like-minded politicians to form a new pro-European platform by the end of the year.

The initiative comes after Macron declared himself the "main opponent" of a nationalist-populist axis led by Hungary and Italy.

The liberal Alde group has 68 MEPs in the EP. That figure could swell to over 100 in the new formation proposed with Macron's party.

Macron's project has also attracted centre-left politicians in Denmark and Sweden.

The platform could get even bigger if it attracted MEPs from the centre-right EPP group, amid an internal EPP conflict on whether Hungarian leader Viktor Orban is fit to remain a member of its ranks.

"These progressive solutions that we carry are the most respectful of the values of our Europe, but also the most efficient to face its challenges," Macron said after meeting the leaders of Belgium,

Luxembourg, and the Netherlands last week.

"We see this as a cooperation of the progressive forces that will combat the far right. We need to form a critical mass," Pieyre-Alexandre Anglade, a Macron party MP, said.

Meanwhile, far-right forces coalesced further over the weekend, when Italian and Dutch populists met in the Italian town of Cernobbio on Saturday.

Matteo Salvini, the leader of the far-right League party in the Italian government, has also teamed up with Steve Bannon, a US hard-right media chief, who is opening a consultancy in Brussels to help the populist side win seats in next May's EU vote.

Salvini's cooperation with Bannon showed that "this is the place to be for the unifying of the populist movement in Europe," Mischael Modrikamen, Bannon's top man in Brussels said.

The far-right side, which hopes to win one third of seats in the EU vote, intended to create a "blocking power" in the EP that could paralyse EU legislation, Modrikamen said.

Verhofstadt, the EP liberal leader, told Ouest-France that migration would be a central issue in the campaign.

"It starts with the management of the EU's external borders. We made the mistake, the 'soft pro-Europeans' made the mistake, of not affording themselves the means [to control irregular migration]," he said, amid a surge in support for anti-migrant parties in Hungary, Italy, Austria, Germany, Poland, and Sweden.

Europe needed more "solidarity" on sharing asylum seekers, Verhofstadt said.

"It's precisely because there's an asylum system based on the country of entry, which denies solidarity, that we're stuck," he said.

The EU also needed to end its unanimity rule on homeland security and defence and foreign policy, Verhofstadt, a federalist, added.

"Do you want a world dominated by the Chinese empire, India, the Americans, the Russian Federation, while we meet four times a year and decide unanimously at 27? It doesn't work," he said, referring to the 27 EU states which will be left after Brexit.

"If we don't care [about the EU], it'll disappear. Nothing's forever," he said.

Kaynak/Source: