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## THE BRIEF: EUROPE OF NATIONS AND FREEDOM - A CLOSER LOOK

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EuroNews (22 May 2019)

You'll not see EU flags waving at a rally of French far-right leader Marine Le Pen.

While she's no longer leading the Europe of Nations and Freedom (ENF) party, she remains a figurehead for the European Parliament's smallest political group, which has just 36 members.

They're calling for "those who are angry" to vote in EU elections

With 15 members, her French National Rally party makes up the bulk of the group.

They're propped up by six MEPs from Italy's League party, which now shares power in the government in Rome.

Four Dutch members from the far-right Party of Freedom sit for the ENF.

Austria also has four members sitting with them.

There are three British MEPs and two Poles in the grouping.

And there are single MEPs from Belgium and Germany each.

Despite their relatively small seat number, the former advisor to Donald Trump, Steve Bannon, predicts an earthquake in this year's elections. Bannon has been actively courting both Le Pen and Italian deputy prime minister Matteo Salvini. The Franco-Italian duo wants their group to become the third largest in the parliament.

They see eye-to-eye on issues like rolling back multiculturalism, fighting socialism and cracking down on migration.

But their 'Nations First' approach which puts national interests above collective European ones could make their populist partnership tricky. While their Kremlin connections are increasingly in the spotlight.

A video showing Austria's Vice-Chancellor Heinz-Christian Strache from the ENF-affiliated Freedom Party touting government contracts to Russians forced him to resign just one week away from the European elections.

And Salvini and Le Pen have also been criticised for their stance on Russia, and a lack of transparency on their funding.

The French wing of the ENF got caught mispending funds destined for parliamentary assistants and the EU's general court ordered they repay the European Parliament three hundred thousand euros in 2018.

But the group's co-leader says their party is the one really listening to the people.

Nicholas Bay, co-president of ENF, said: "I believe the European institutions need to start listening to the people now and engaging finally in defending the vital interests of our nations and our populations."

The faces of this group are hitting as many as three rallies every day as they try to drum up support in their cause for the elections.

Controversially even from the same balcony as Italy's fascist dictator Benito Mussolini spoke from.

Their speeches may be persuading voters but in order to build power in the European Parliament, they'll also need to win over other mainstream right-wing politicians to sing from the same songsheet.

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Kaynak/Source: