

Welcome to Barbieland: The dangers of racism and xenophobia in Europe



European political advertising. XI / @GeorgeSpartacos

Brussels, September 26 (RHC)-- The European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR) published a report on Wednesday highlighting the rise of xenophobia and white supremacy sentiments in European countries.

In a report titled 'Welcome to Barbieland: European Sentiment in a Year of Wars and Elections', ECFR experts use the movie Barbie as a reference to point out factors that could weaken EU democracies.

Currently, the European Union "resembles Barbieland: a place inclined to see itself as more perfect than it actually is, while harboring some notable blind spots," they warn and urged giving voice to underrepresented groups, reversing the trend towards an "ethnic" conception of European identity, and defending the foundational European values.

"This year's European Parliament elections and the aftermath of the war in Gaza exposed the low participation of groups such as non-white and Muslim Europeans, Central and Eastern Europeans, and young EU citizens. At the same time, developments related to these groups signaled a shared challenge: the dangerous xenophobic drift of the bloc," the ECFR report summarizes.

By analyzing the experience of these groups, the experts detected feelings of disillusionment and disengagement. "Considering these three groups together is also justified by their connection to a common challenge: the bloc's shift towards an 'ethnic' rather than 'civic' understanding of European identity," they emphasize.

"The vast majority of EU governments remain pro-European in their outlook and policies. The exceptions are Hungary, Slovakia, and the Netherlands, where government attitudes are negative; and Italy, where Giorgia Meloni has shown a pro-European stance abroad but a skeptical one at home. Austria may soon join this group," the ECFR experts add.

The researchers identified three "blind spots" that disrupt the average European sentiment. First, they refer to the "whiteness" of the European Union, which has been reflected in the lists of candidates for the European elections and the anti-immigration rhetoric in many campaigns. Second, they note a "subdued European sentiment in Central and Eastern Europe," where the presence of Eurosceptic parties and attitudes is normalized.

Lastly, they express concern for those citizens under 35. "Despite being, on average, more pro-European and tolerant on social issues than older generations, many young Europeans did not turn out to vote in the elections, and when they did, they often chose far-right or anti-establishment alternatives," the researchers said.

"The question here is whether the increasingly normalized xenophobia in the EU is driving some young people away from the European project, while accustoming others to an 'ethnic' conception of European identity, thus paving the way for their support of the far-right."

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