



By: Tomorrow's Affairs Staff

Far-right populists will weaponise the anti- corruption investigation against Federica Mogherini



European right-wing populists have never found greater validation for their Eurosceptic policies than in the investigation of former EU top diplomat **Federica Mogherini**.

In this high-profile corruption case, they see confirmation of all the main tenets of their ideology: the corruption of the highest levels of Brussels bureaucracy, alienation from democratic rules and institutions, and above all, the untouchability of the unelected EU elite, which, according to them, essentially governs the Union.

Regardless of the outcome of the investigation against the former Vice-President of the European Commission, right-wing populists will weaponise this case as definitive proof of the correctness of their policies, which focus on weakening EU institutions and strengthening the influence of national governments. Moreover, they are already doing so.

"It's been demonstrated the last few years, time and time again, that Europe is dirty and needs to be cleaned up," said **John O'Brien** from the Brussels think tank MCC, organiser of the recent conference of European right-wingers under the motivational title "Battle for the Soul of Europe".

The arrest of Federica Mogherini and her associate Stefano Sannino in relation to a fraud probe is a perfect illustration of the situation that every right-wing Eurosceptic could wish for.

Ideological rival

The main actor, by rank, was one of the highest and most influential officials in the EU administration from 2014 to 2019.

Although, after her mandate as EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, there were expectations that she would move to another high office (there was also talk of her going to NATO), Ms Mogherini became the rector of the College of Europe in Bruges.

For Euro-populists, the course of her career is in itself sufficient to support claims about the self-reproduction of the highest Brussels bureaucracy, which operates without electoral legitimacy and, thus alienated, pursues its own interests, far from those of the citizens.

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No less important is that Federica Mogherini is an ideological rival of right-wing Euro-populists, as she comes from the social-democratic pole of European politics, the one to which right-wingers attribute more or less all troubles, from immigration to green policies.

Altogether, this well greases the wheels of the European right in propagating the concept that the Union needs to be loosened, not strengthened, by giving supremacy to the decisions of national governments over joint policies.

Ignoring the facts

While the fight against corruption is the sole motive for the action of the European Public Prosecutor's Office against Ms Mogherini, European right-wingers will focus only on the content of the case.

They will ignore the fact that this anti-corruption effort, which they welcome, is undertaken by the **EPPO**, a joint European institution, and not by any comparable organisation with national authority.

In particular, they will ignore the fact that **corruption** has no ideological affiliation, because otherwise how could they continue to promote the ideas of conservatism and sovereignty as inherently anti-corruption?

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However, the recent history of anti-corruption investigations at the highest levels of European politics shows that the main perpetrators of financial malfeasance, both nationally and at the EU level, are far-right politicians, and far less often, their rivals.

Right-wing corruption scandals

The **EU prosecutor's office** is still investigating the former far-right group in the European Parliament, "Identity and Democracy", for the alleged misuse of about €4.3 million from European funds, which were channelled to companies owned by associates of Marine Le Pen.

This bloc was disbanded last year. It brought together factions of the European populist right, such as Le Pen's National Rally, Germany's AfD, and Italy's League.

The European investigation has further burdened **Marine Le Pen's** career, as just a few months earlier, in March, she and her associates were found guilty by a French court of embezzling EU funds.



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Marine Le Pen is also banned from running for political office for the next five years, which includes the 2027 presidential election.

The so-called "Ibiza Affair" shook Austrian and European politics for a long time when then Vice-Chancellor Heinz-Christian Strache of the far-right Freedom Party offered alleged Russian oligarchs public contracts in exchange for illegal donations to his party.

Accusations of widespread corruption and the use of smear campaigns to discredit its opponents have fuelled a movement against Prime Minister Viktor Orbán in Hungary, led by his former ally Péter Magyar, that now holds an advantage ahead of the elections in April.

Populist paradox

Populists are characterised by strong anti-corruption rhetoric, using it to draw a clear distinction between the uncorrupt "us" and the corrupt "them" in the alienated establishment that forms the basis of all populist politics.

However, the growing number of corruption cases involving far-right politicians as main actors confirms the phenomenon known as the "corruption" or "**populist paradox**", where the most vocal opponents of corruption are, in fact, the most corrupt politicians.

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When they come under legal scrutiny, they indiscriminately defend themselves with counter-accusations about the alienation and political bias of the courts, using slogans such as "witch hunt"—this sounds familiar from the numerous court cases against Donald Trump.

Therefore, the satisfaction of European far-

right politicians regarding the anti-corruption investigation into Federica Mogherini will rapidly turn into a weapon against the EU establishment and the entire structure on which the Union is built.