

Steve Bannon's stuttering European adventure

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At prima facie, Steve Bannon's foray into EU politics seems to be wavering, but he is adamant that it has been a success | Adrian Bretscher/Getty Images

Donald Trump's former chief strategist was supposed to shake up European politics.

But Steve Bannon's ["club" to support right-wing populist groups](#) in the run-up to May's European Parliament election has yet to set the Continent ablaze.

Mischaël Modrikamen, a Belgian lawyer and Bannon's partner in the venture, said they have scaled back their original plans for the club — known as The Movement — and a summit for populists originally slated for January has been postponed. In addition, many Euroskeptics said their enthusiasm for Bannon has waned and they are not interested in working with him.

"Bannon has been a little too optimistic on what we were able to achieve," said Modrikamen, who launched the far-right Parti Populaire in Belgium in 2009, and set up The Movement in 2016. Few noticed until last year, when he joined forces with Bannon to turn The Movement into a foundation to support right-wing, anti-establishment groups across Europe and serve as a central source of polling, messaging advice, data targeting and think tank research.

But if The Movement has failed to move Europe's populists, no one seems to have told Bannon.

Bannon is also not scaling back his ambitions, and has his eyes on France's Yellow Jackets movement.

He said the club "has not been a failure, it's actually a great success."

"It's just that we aren't doing polling or war-room because lawyers have told us that it's illegal in different countries and we know we are being closely looked at so we don't want to do anything which is against the law. What we are doing is workshops, conferences, talking to like-minded people," Bannon said in an interview in Rome.

"We aren't the Americans coming in and trying to influence other countries' politics. Modrikamen is doing a good job playing it down," Bannon said, describing their relationship as "great."

Bannon said he plans to travel throughout Europe in the run-up to the election and is "waiting for late March or early May to do a big conference in Brussels."

Hope of success is fleeting for Steve Bannon's (right) "club," as many Euroskeptics say they do not wish to work with Trump's former right-hand man | Drew Angerer/Getty Images

Modrikamen said of the planned conference: "We are relentlessly working on it. The room is available, and the contracts are ready."

Surge from the right

Right-wing, populist forces are expected [to make major gains](#) in the election, with the Europe of Nations and Freedom (ENF) group — home to Marine Le Pen's National Rally in France and Matteo Salvini's League in Italy — [projected to win 60 seats](#).

When Bannon spoke to POLITICO in September, he said he hoped populist parties could win 30 percent of the vote in May's election, but now, he declared, "we can probably aim for 50 percent."

He said the League, Brothers of Italy, National Rally and Spain's [Vox](#), plus "other parties I can tell you more about next time," are all part of The Movement. "They are all going to run in the EU Parliament [election] as part of one bloc but obviously we're not a party, we're a club. These parties are doing a great job on a local level on their own."

However, some European populist parties have tried to put distance between themselves and Bannon.

“Bannon is not on the radar” — *Senior League official*

When asked about a European populists’ alliance, a spokesperson for the ENF said the group is “not planning these kinds of meetings.”

Last year, Le Pen told reporters at a joint press conference with Salvini in Rome that she is wary of Bannon, because he doesn’t “come from a European country” and is an American.

“It is up to us, and us alone, to structure the political force that will emerge from the election because we are attached to our freedom, our sovereignty,” she said.

While Bannon has cultivated ties with the League, at least some of the party’s senior officials are wary of getting too close to him.

“Bannon is not on the radar,” one of them said, describing the American as someone who “looks like he’s going after money.”

Marine Le Pen is wary of the American due to his nationality | Sylvain Lefevre/Getty Images

Members of other Euroskeptic factions also say they have distanced themselves from any Bannon-led alliance. “I would say that there isn’t much follow-up on Bannon,” said an official from Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy (EFDD), another Euroskeptic group in the European Parliament that’s home to UKIP and the 5Star Movement. The latter hasn’t joined up with Bannon even though he said Italy’s [League-5Star coalition government](#) is an “experiment that, if it works, will change global politics.”

“Bannon has collided with the *mille-feuille* that is Europe,” the EFDD official said. “The only thing he can do at this stage is to encourage Euroskeptic parties in the election race.”

Modrikamen said Bannon’s role should be to act as a “facilitator” because most populist leaders “don’t talk to each other.” The Belgian is also still thinking big when it comes to the future of The Movement, saying he wants it to become “a Davos of populists.”

Bannon is also not scaling back his ambitions, and has his eyes on France’s Yellow Jackets movement.

The Yellow Jackets “are great,” he said, “they are self-organizing, they are like the Tea Party [in the U.S.] in 2010. They forced Macron, the No. 1 man of the Davos set, to [cancel his attendance](#) at the World Economic Forum to attend town halls in rural France, which I think is great.”

Jacopo Barigazzi contributed reporting.

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