



Anti-Europe Political Parties: Will they Conquer the EU?

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The Radical right appears to be on the rise all over Europe, and the approaching European elections are likely to provide – the current IHS Standpunkt argues - a useful opportunity for radical parties and organizations to have their voices heard and their institutional power increased. They are likely to increase their agenda setting capacity (with an exclusivist and nationalistic political discourse on many delicate issues, such as immigration, social policies, in time of crisis), also influencing mainstream moderate right wing and progressive parties. Despite the fact that these organizations do not really cooperate-yet- and are even in competition with each other, the European arena and institutions can be used by right wing radical groups to build contacts with other extremists groups, spread their ideology, and encourage mobilization, creating a new cleavage around which they can aggregate.

Elections for the new European Parliament will take place in the 28 countries of the EU from the 22nd to 25th of May 2014. Voting will start on the 22nd in the United Kingdom and the Netherlands, whereas in the Czech Republic and Ireland citizens will vote on the 23rd, Italy being the last country, with its polling stations open until the 25th. No parliamentary group has ever reached the majority of seats, and traditionally the EP has been ruled by an alliance between the two largest groups: the Group of the European People's Party (EPP) and the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (S&D). However, something new is likely to happen in the next European election: according to several different surveys, the future assembly will see more than a doubling of the current presence of populist, anti-euro, anti-immigration and nationalist political parties, which could account (according to a rough estimation) for 200 MPs out of a total of 766. It goes without saying that these political groups are extremely heterogeneous and range from the English moderate euro-skeptics to the ultranationalist, fascist Greek Golden Dawn, having nevertheless in common the hostility against the EU, and the aim of the return to greater national sovereignty (especially in regards to monetary policy). In particular, the European Alliance for Freedom, the radical right coalition led by Marie Le Pen's Front National, would obtain 38 seats, enough to overcome the required threshold.

In fact the extreme right is on the rise at the national level all around Europe, from Western to Eastern and Central European regions. In many countries, in the last two decades an **increasing intensity of extremist right-wing activities** can be observed. These activities concern either the institutional political arena – e.g. their successful recruitment of new party members– as well as (violent and non-violent) protest incidents that involve right-wing activists. Alongside the success of political parties and movements of a new populist and xenophobic right, an underground subculture of racist and frequently violent young extremists has indeed emerged, with their own symbols, myths, and language.

In particular, the last 2009 European elections, mark a clear advancement of the radical right all over Europe. In England, the fascist *British National Party* (BNP) obtained 6.2% of the votes (electing for the first time two deputies); in the Netherlands, the anti-Islamic *Party for Freedom* (PvV) gained 17% of the votes (and the third position at the 2010 national election, getting support from more than 15% of the voters); in Belgium the *Vlaams Belang* reached 10.9% and in Denmark



the *Dansk Folkeparti* (Party of people) the 14.8%. More recently, Marine Le Pen, after succeeding her father, Jean Marie Le Pen, gained nearly 18% of the ballots cast for the National Front in the first round of the 2012 French presidential election (success repeated in 2014 local elections) and the *Norwegian Progress Party* is represented in the government for the first time in its history after the right-wing coalition victory at the 2013 parliamentary election. Central and Eastern Europe are not exceptions. The ultranationalist, anti-Semitic and neofascist *Jobbik* (the Movement for a Better Hungary), after receiving the 14.8% of vote in the last European election, secured 20.2% in the April 2014 parliamentary elections, becoming Hungary's third largest party in the National Assembly. In Bulgaria, *Ataka* (National Union Attack), which strongly opposes the Turkish minority and is against the entry of the country in the EU and the NATO, has 12% of consensus and in Slovakia the National Party (SNS) 5.6%. In sum, since 2009, including the European as well as national and local elections, right wing radical euro-skeptic political parties gained more than 10% of votes in 11 states: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Denmark, France, Hungary, Italy, Lithuania, Norway, Netherlands and Switzerland (Ferrari 2012).

But what are the **reasons of the success of the radical right**? Usually, with specific reference to right-wing extremist mobilization, economic and social crises are mentioned, as well as political instability, the presence of allies (i.e. conservative parties) in power, the legacy of an authoritarian past, youth sub-cultures and hooliganism and the diffusion of xenophobic values within the society. In addition, disaffection from politics, mistrust in democratic institutions and anti-establishment sentiments, in particular in the form of opposition toward the European Union, are increasingly considered important. In fact, the anti-immigrant, anti-minority rights campaigns are not the only issue which unites the European extreme right. The Far Right is also virulently anti-Brussels. Among the party groups in the European Parliament, two are openly Euroskeptic: the European Conservatives and Reformists and the Europe of Freedom and Democracy.

Although left wing opposition to Europe is very well known and studied, so far there has been scarce scientific attention on right-wing and especially extreme right criticism. Instead, **there are good reasons to investigate how the extreme right responds to the challenge of European integration**, not least since internationalization processes of all kind are contradictory to central myths of the right, namely, racism, nationalism and national identity. Furthermore internationalization processes can also be conceived as one of the main causes of the recent mobilization of the extreme right in Europe, as a reaction against structural and economic changes by which modernity is characterized and anti-Europeism and nationalism are considered two crucial elements of the new right-wing 'populism'. Betz (1994) interprets contemporary radical right-wing politics as a 'late modern populism', others as a reaction against post-materialism (see Minkenberg 1992, 56-58), and Ignazi (1992, 1994) speaks about a "silent counter-revolution" (*ib.*, 245).

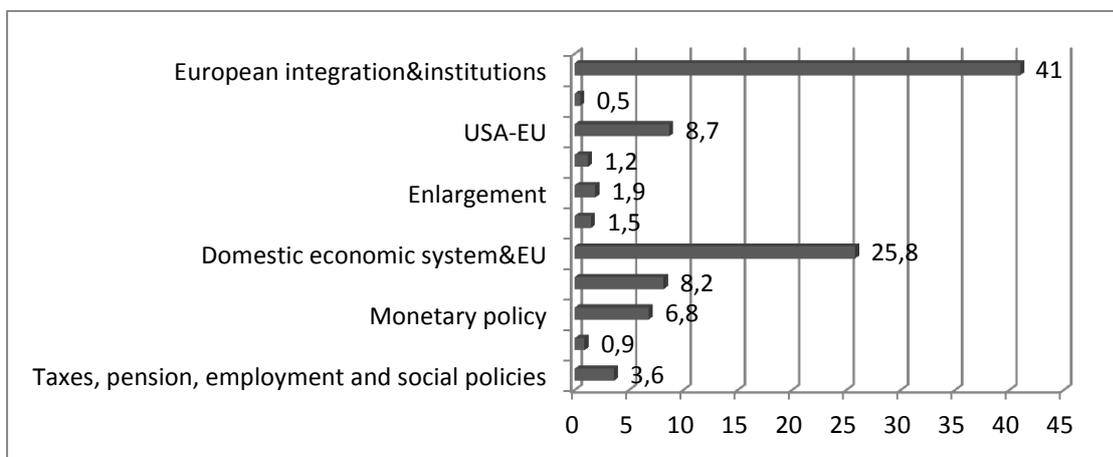
But **what do radical parties and movements say about Europe**? Is it possible to imagine the emergence of **a new cleavage around EU issues** able to unite these nationalist formations?

A recent study based on the analysis of right wing documents (such as newspapers, magazines, leaflets from 2005 to 2009) of different types of radical right organizations - political parties, political movements, cultural groups - in different European countries (Caiani et al. 2013) stresses that European issues represent a significant, debated topic in their political discourse (accounting for 10.6% of all analyzed documents). If we consider that Europe and European integration are

often associated with globalization (14.6% of all found issues debated in right wing documents), it is evident that the internationalization processes play an important role in the rhetoric of this political area (the two topics together account for one-fourth of all issues found).

According to the extreme right, European integration not only leads to the ‘loss of identities of the peoples’, but it also brings ‘limitations to the sovereignty of the national states’. Europe is considered a ‘totalitarian super state’, a sort of ‘dictatorship’, an ‘intrusive body’, a ‘distant and oppressing power’ (very often mentioned in opposition to ‘the European peoples’), a ‘centralizing state’, as well as a ‘marked oriented’ EU, that influence the political and economic choices of the nations, serving the interests of international finance, instead the real interests of the nations.

Fig.2 Specific Issues in the discourse of radical right organizations against the EU(N documents analyzed 2460, 100%)



Source: Caiani and Conti 2013

Nevertheless, in spite of its opposition to the European Union, the extreme right does not reject the idea of “Europe”. Quite to the contrary, it unanimously calls for the re- building of a ‘new Europe’, ‘based on its traditional glorious history’ (i.e. the Roman imperial one), and a Europe which is ‘big and strong, independent from the USA’, ‘with a single own European army’- that could itself become a force of defense against globalization and the American enemy. In other words, a ‘Europe of the European peoples’, a ‘Europe of sovereign states’, a Europe ‘new and different than the EU, which unites nations only economically with the free trade and a stateless coin!’ is envisaged. The general call for action that we find in many documents is to ‘save, with any mean, the millennial history, culture and tradition of Europe against the foreign interferences’. In sum, despite being an understudied aspect of right-wing radicalism, **Euro-skepticism is a common trait of current radical right-wing formations**, as a stance of both political parties and non-party organizations (Caiani and Della Porta, 2011). This negative attitude towards European integration stems from a series of perceived threats to the national community including immigration, multiculturalism, and the loss of national sovereignty and traditional values. These are all core and **traditional myths of the radical right but also resonate with attitudes increasingly spread across European societies.**

The potential success of the radical populist right in the next 2014 European elections can be certainly related in part to institutional political factors as the second-order nature of these elections that rewards opposition parties, but also to the capacity of such parties to represent



sentiments that are widespread in society, but little represented by national governments. For example, De Vries and Edwards (2009) show that the Euroskeptical rhetoric of radical parties has also contributed to shaping widespread discontent in public opinion. In turn, Werts, Scheepers and Lubbers (2013) show that (beyond perceived ethnic threats and political distrust) Euroskepticism (and the building of propaganda and ideologies on it by the radical right) is a contributing factor in explaining citizens' vote for the radical right.

Finally, a sort of **implicit contradiction** is worth noticing **in the current radical right**. Even if extreme right groups are strongly against political globalization and European integration, they become entrepreneurs of a sort of 'transnationalization' of the right wing movement itself. In order to resist Europeanization and protect the nation-state against internationalization processes, they frequently propose to unite the forces of the 'European nationalists movements'; they ask for contacts with other European 'national oppositions' and they also launch concrete initiatives in order to create international networks and campaigns among extreme right movements. It is clear that the transnationalization of the extreme right parties may create the establishment of greater coherence of action within this political area. This impression is reinforced by governmental reports which indicate a tendency of the European extreme right to increasingly organize cross-nationally (e.g. Europol Report 2007), as well as to appeal via the internet to an international audience. As it has been noticed for leftist social movements, the European and international institutions, beyond being the target of a more and more critical discourses, evidently provide occasions for the creation of supranational networks and identities even for the extreme right.

To conclude (policy recommendations),

- ✓ Regardless the precise number of seats that the radical right will gain in the next European elections (namely in spite of its- still?- moderate dimensions in terms of members and mobilization capacity), they are likely to increase their agenda setting capacity, due to the criticism they voice and the "real" policy effects this might have, also on mainstream moderate right wing and progressive parties. On delicate issues such as immigration, unemployment, social policies and economic decisions in time of crisis the radical right can insert exclusive and protectionist discourses in the agenda, based on a nationalistic rhetoric.
- ✓ The way radical right wing parties perceive and (negatively) represent the EU through discourses and slogans is strikingly similar across the European countries, despite the fact that these organizations do not really cooperate-yet- and are even in competition with each other.
- ✓ Ultimately, despite many factors being mature for issue mobilization and the creation of an EU cleavage, the success of this process largely depends on the ability of the radical right organizations to come to terms with their ideological background, give priority to this emerging cleavage and establish more synergies with each other.

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