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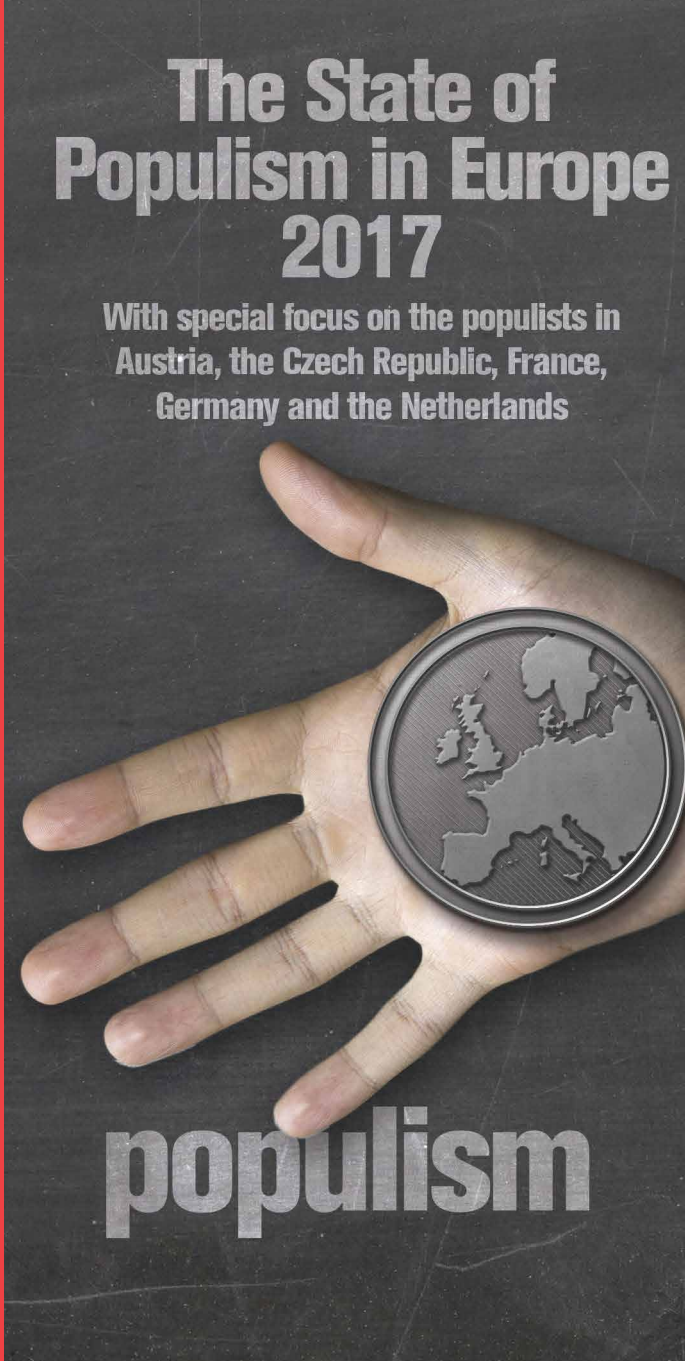
The State of Populism in Europe 2017

With special focus on the populists in Austria, the Czech Republic, France, Germany and the Netherlands



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INTRODUCTION

Even those who thought of themselves as worn out by politics, and who had reached a level of cynicism that was supposed to equip them with some degree of immunity against shocks, were stunned for a moment in light of the major international events of 2016. Within the span of a few months, public opinion was rocked by the referendum leading to the United Kingdom's departure from the European Union, the coup attempt against the Turkish president and the brutal wave of retribution and repression that followed it; the recurring terror attacks; the continuously shifting turns of events in the Austrian presidential election; and the election of Donald Trump to the US presidency. Based on these events, the Hungarian prime minister, Viktor Orbán, predicted that the "year of rebellion" would carry on in 2017.

At the end of 2016 also a substantial number of political observers felt that while the popularity of populists, of anti-EU and authoritarian-type leaders is soaring, centre-right and centre-left politicians are struggling, and the leaders of the European Union are stumbling from crisis to crisis. In this situation, many pundits fell prey to the temptation of exaggeration, predicting a scenario where in 2017 the *far-right* would take power in the Netherlands and France, and that it would dominate public discourse in Germany as well. Yet at the end of 2017 we can declare that these predictions were off, the anticipated breakthrough in western Europe failed to materialise. Voters once again endorsed the centre-right main governing party in the Netherlands; the victor in the French presidential election was the pro-European and liberal candidate; Merkel won again in Germany; and even though in Austria the FPÖ is now part of the government, it remains only the third strongest party. Populists lost all major elections they contested in western

Europe. Ultimately, 2017 did not turn out to be the year of rebellion but that of liberal democracy.

How did that happen? Why were the doomsayers wrong, why were all the projections so far off, and why did the populists ultimately lose? Four fundamental factors need to be stressed.

One of the most fundamental factors – as ever so often in politics – was the economy. This was the first time in the past decade that all 28 EU Member States simultaneously experienced economic growth, and the boom is still on going. Employment and household consumption are still rising, unemployment is plummeting, and public debts are falling. The improved economic prospects naturally boost the positions of traditional parties rather than those of the "rebels."

The second important element is the mitigation of the impact of the refugee crisis – or at least of those aspects of the crisis that are directly felt on the European continent such as managing the refugee inflow and integration. Only Italy had to grapple with more refugees in 2017 than previously, in the other EU countries the refugee situation became more consolidated – thanks to the deal with Turkey, the strong policing of the borders and continuous deportations.

This is connected to the third factor that has led to the stalling of the "rebellion," namely the changes in the styles of the centrist parties. Every successful centrist party's policies now include the promise to handle immigration more strictly, as well as pledges to boost public order. It is important to stress, however, that these shifts in the given parties' policies did not turn them into either populists or extremists, they are still not characterised by a deliberate incitement to conflict or by hatred towards foreigners and

Islam. Moreover, they still do not define themselves as the "people's" genuine and sole representative against the elite. Although centre-right and centre-left parties adapted to the changed political environment and the needs that dominate in this environment, unlike their "rebelling" opponents they never abandoned their pro-European outlook or their commitment to the values of liberal democracy.

Ultimately, another unfavourable development for European populist parties was that the two major events of 2016 – the Brexit referendum and Trump's election – failed to yield spectacular results, in fact it appeared that chaos rather than order was on the rise in the Anglo-Saxon countries. The obvious confusion after the Brexit referendum of leading Leave politicians in the UK, followed by the protracted Brexit negotiations, along with Trump's thus far largely ineffectual politics, appear to suggest to the critics of the prevailing world order that "the current system may be unlikeable, but the alternative isn't any better."

Nevertheless, it would be a mistake to conclude based on the above that politics are gradually returning to a state of normality. Though the populists haven't won anywhere in western Europe in 2017, they still enjoy substantial public support: almost a quarter of European citizens vote for parties that stand in opposition to the prevailing democratic consensus. Almost two-thirds of Europeans – despite the improving economic situation – believe that the next generation will be living under worse economic conditions. And despite the relief in the pressure from migration, half the population remains concerned about the refugees arriving on the continent. Furthermore, there still aren't many voters out there who believe that the European political elite is capable of solving people's everyday problems.

In addition to the segment of the population that is angry with the elite and is continuously anxious and afraid of losing their socio-economic status, there is also one more significant slice of the electorate that opts for right-wing populists. These are commonly referred to as – without any negative connotations – voters with authoritarian personality traits. Here, authoritarian personality traits merely mean that the given individual places a high priority on such values as order and security, that he/she is uncomfortable in the absence of a guiding authority that defines for him/her what "good" and "bad" are. These voters are prone to think in terms of communities rather than individuals, and it is important for them to draw distinctions between those who are in the same group as they are and those who are outside of this group, the strangers.

These voters are anti-EU because they feel that the EU threatens their traditional community, the nation. These voters are anti-immigration, and not primarily because of the often-voiced argument that "they are afraid that immigrants will take their jobs," but because they perceive immigrants as belonging to the "other", a group that differs from "our kind." Voters with authoritarian personality traits are opposed to the diversity, variety and openness that liberalism engenders because the latter is antithetical to the order and predictability that they value. The populists' base consists mainly of angry folks who are afraid of losing their socio-economic status and voters who are keen on authority.

Previously, established left-wing and right-wing parties were able to integrate these voters politically. It was obvious that those people who were in danger of becoming impoverished, who lacked the opportunities for social mobility, and who were angry and critical of the prevailing system would vote for the left-wing. Just as it was obvious that voters who desire order, predictability, traditions, constancy and authority would opt for conservatives. But

just as the centre-left gave up on its economic programme for the benefit of the centre-right, the centre-right sacrificed its social conservatism for the benefit of the centre-left, leaving these voters orphaned.

The improving economic environment may well prevent the populist, anti-EU and illiberal forces from gaining significant ground, but rendering these parties totally irrelevant is a tall order. Especially so since in the meanwhile social democratic parties, unfortunately, have suffered historic defeats in several countries, for example France and the Netherlands. Ever growing segments of the left-wing base have begun to vote for the populist right already, but the centre-left formations that have shrunk to a size of 6-7% may lose what little remains of their working-class support as they become politically irrelevant. Moreover, in France Emmanuel Macron also cut a major slice out of the left's base, these voters helped him prevail in the presidential election.

The "centre-left" or "progressive" political course is no longer distinctive enough for voters. They either vote for parties that promise to protect the country from globalisation, the disappearance of jobs and socio-economic changes, or, alternatively, for parties that promise more freedom, modernity, "more Europe" and openness. Hybrid solutions that simultaneously promise austerity and solidarity; protection and openness; progress and stability; higher pay and lower taxes find it increasingly difficult to win approval from voters. Ultimately, in those countries where the left has weakened the populists have emerged as the main alternative.

In 2017, pro-Europeanism, liberal democracy, future-orientation and openness are ascendant again. But if the parties and politicians that embrace these values do not deliver in the coming four-five years, then in the next elections the alternation of power

that characterizes democracy will automatically put the populists in a winning position once again. The year 2022 may thus genuinely become the year of rebellion. Except, of course, if the rebellious voters are brought back into the fold by either right-wing parties with a genuinely conservative outlook or social democratic parties that pursue authentic left-wing programmes.

If that will be the case, then the revolution of 2022 will also be cancelled.

Ernst STETTER, FEPS Secretary General
Tamás BOROS, Co-Director of Policy Solutions

Methodology

Some of the recurring and controversial questions that feature in research related to populism ask which parties and politicians can be called populists, how precise and/or important this concept really is, and whether populist parties pose a threat to democracy. Foundation for European Progressive Studies and Policy Solutions classify parties as populist on the basis of several criteria, and we use the word descriptively rather than in an evaluative or negative sense. We primarily examined whether a given party's programme, the rhetoric of its leading politicians and its official campaign messages cohere with Cas Mudde's definition, which argues that populism is *a thin-centred ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, "the pure people" and "the corrupt elite", and which argues that politics should be an expression of the volonté general (general will) of the people.*

The party programmes, leadership rhetoric and campaign slogans are then assessed in terms of their tendency to build upon animosity in society, the use of the "us versus them" dichotomy, the rejection of social and political pluralism, and whether they prefer direct democracy to a representative system. If a party met all or several of these criteria in 2017, and their popularity was sufficiently significant in the polls, we included it in our list of populist parties. In compiling this list, we also took into consideration categorizations in the relevant academic literature – that is to say, designations by leading political analysts and researchers. Naturally, populist politicians often supplement their messages with other ideologies and values, such as nativism, ethnocentrism, nationalism, illiberalism, socialism or communism. We have attempted to categorize individual parties as either leftwing or rightwing populists. We are of course aware that choosing to label

a party as populist or to deliberately omit one of these parties from this study could be controversial. Nonetheless, we hope that the categorization we came up with based on our methodology will mesh with the assessments of our readers.

About Populism Tracker

The Populism Tracker of The Progressive Post is the most comprehensive website investigating the trends in populism in all the countries of the EU. The website is operated by FEPS and Policy Solutions. Populism Tracker allows readers to continuously monitor the popularity of all European populist parties by using its Populism Map. It allows for the analysis of trends with the help of a continuously updated Populism Graph, and the website also offers studies, research and analyses published by Policy Solutions, FEPS and their partners on the subject of populism.

Link: progressivepost.eu/spotlights/populism

OVERVIEW
The Most Important Trends in the Support for Populism in 2017

The year 2016 was a challenging one for progressives: The Brexit referendum, the election of Donald Trump as president of the United States, the political earthquake of the Austrian presidential election, the expansion of Russia's influence on world politics and the several terrorist attacks in the EU shocked the progressive voters and led to grim electoral expectations for the coming year.

Many people thought that 2017 would be a continuation of the previous year and that populists would irrevocably transform the political landscape in the western world. Viktor Orbán, the most powerful of European populists, said in an interview in 2016 that the following year would be the year when nation-states rise up against the "globalist-liberal" status quo. This study will show that his prediction was not borne out by reality.

In 2017, there were elections of huge importance in three western European EU countries (The Netherlands, France and Germany), and the populists won neither of these elections, although anti-establishment forces were backed by considerable portions of their respective societies. The two most crucial moments of populism in 2017 were the first round of the French presidential elections, in which left-wing and right-wing populists won more than 40% of all the votes cast,[1] and the German parliamentary elections, when a far-right party, the Alternative for Germany (AfD), entered

1 Marine Le Pen: 21.30%, Jean-Luc Mélenchon: 19.58% (French Presidential Elections, official first round results)

the Bundestag for the first time since Second World War (with 12.6%). Furthermore, Jean Luc-Mélenchon from the left-wing populist France Unbowed party and Marine Le Pen from the far-right Front National in France, as well as the Party for Freedom in the Netherlands, received more votes than in previous elections they had contested.[2]

Although in France, Germany and the Netherlands populist parties were unable to gain governmental power, there were two elections in which the populists' performance was strong enough to earn them ministerial portfolios. After the legislative elections of 1999 and again in 2002, the Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ) became the junior coalition partner of the Austrian People's Party (ÖVP) in the right-wing government. In the Czech Republic, Andrej Babis from the populist ANO party was sworn in as prime minister, though it is uncertain whether his minority government can survive politically.[3]

There are many reasons for the failure of the predicted populist breakthrough in 2017, but the primary cause is a slight shift in the traditional parties' positions towards the extremes. The current Austrian Chancellor and leader of ÖVP, the Austrian conservative party, Sebastian Kurz won the election by borrowing elements from the populist FPÖ's rhetoric, while the Tories' increasingly hardline position on Brexit contributed massively to the decline of UKIP. Even the new liberal icon of Europe, French President Emmanuel Macron, a pro-EU centrist politician won the French

2 In the Netherlands, the Party for Freedom achieved 10.1% in 2012, and 13.1% in 2017. In France, the France Untamed party was created in 2016, but its leader Jean-Luc Mélenchon had run for the presidency in 2012 and received 11.1% of the votes cast back then. Marine Le Pen received 17.9% of the votes in 2012.
3 As of December 2017.

presidential election by loudly attacking the national establishment -- what he did not emphasise at the same time, however, is that he was part of the French financial and political establishment as a former Rothschild banker and the Minister of Economy, Industry and Digital Affairs in Francois Hollande's government for years.

As we see, some elements of populism have filtered into mainstream politics, but the numbers show that on the whole, in most "old' EU Member States, such as the UK, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, etc., support for populists was either stagnant or even declining in 2017. But political developments are far more distressing in eastern Europe. Populism in the region has several faces: the nationalist populism of the Polish Law and Justice Party (PiS) or of the Hungarian Fidesz party has a different character than the anti-politician populism of the Czech billionaire Andrej Babis, who is a political outsider. It should be noted that almost 30 years after the fall of the Iron Curtain, central and eastern European democracies have not been able to consolidate and, moreover, the democratic superstructure is in severe jeopardy in several of these countries.

Until 2017, European populism had been fuelled by two main factors: austerity and migration. In 2017, left-wing populists found themselves at a disadvantage on account of the economic recovery in the EU, while far-right populism also appears to be mellowing as the number of migrants arriving in Europe is decreasing. Nevertheless, as FEPS-Policy Solutions' Populism Tracker clearly shows, a quarter of the voters in the EU would still opt for a populist party. Thus, these forces still have a huge impact on European politics and will continue to play a decisive role in the coming years.

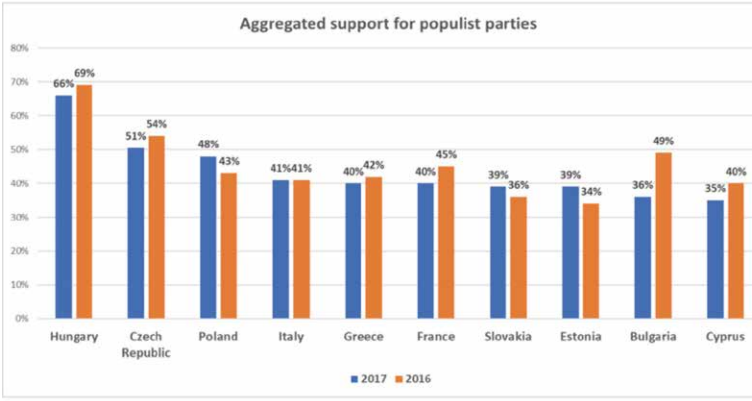
Tops and Flops in 2017

The current state of populism in the EU can be studied from many different perspectives. One of the possible approaches is to look at the popular support of populist parties and to track shifts in the levels of that support. The "Populism Tracker" monitoring system, which was jointly developed by FEPS and Policy Solutions in 2015, analyses the changes in the popularity of approximately 80 parties in the 28 Member States of the EU that are labelled as populists in academic literature.[4]

Based on the data provided by the Populism Tracker, with exception of Malta (where no populist party has managed to gain a seat in the parliament) populism affects the entire European Union. However, eastern Europe is significantly overrepresented among the top 10 Member States with the highest levels of aggregated support for populist parties: six of the ten most affected countries are found at the eastern side of the former Iron Curtain (See: Graph 1).

Just as in the previous year, Hungary still has the highest aggregated level of support for populist parties in 2017, as two-thirds of voters would opt for anti-establishment parties.[5] The Czech Republic, where more than half of society support populist parties, came in second.[6] They were followed by Poland, where almost every second voter backed populist forces at the end of 2017.[7]

4 See our methodology in the "Methodology" text box.
5 The Hungarian populist parties are Fidesz and the far-right Jobbik party.
6 The list of Czech populist parties includes ANO, the Czech Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (KSCM) and the far-right Freedom and Direct Democracy (SPD).
7 We categorise Law and Justice (PiS) and Kukiz'15 party as populist parties with significant electoral support in Poland.



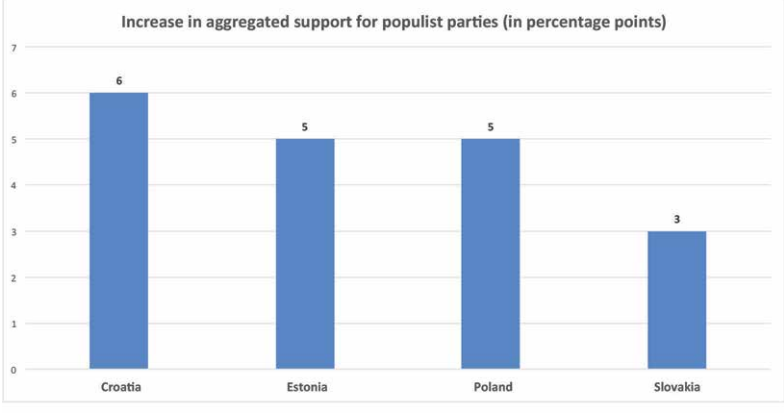
Graph 1 (Source: Populism Tracker, Q4 2017)

In fourth and fifth place of our virtual ranking we find two countries from southern Europe, Italy (41%)[8] and Greece (40%)[9], while another country from the region, Cyprus[10], ended up at the bottom of the "top 10" list. The only country in western Europe struggling seriously with populism is France – the share of populist voters in one the EU founding states exceeds 40%. We also find three eastern Europe members states in which over a third of the society back anti-establishment parties: Slovakia (39%),[11] Estonia (39%)[12] and Bulgaria (36%)[13].

Increase in the aggregated support for populist parties

There were only four countries where the increase in the support of populists between December 2016 and December 2017 exceeded the margin of error, and all of them are in eastern Europe. We observe a 6-point increase in Croatia, a 5-point increase in Poland and Estonia, and a 3-point increase in Slovakia. It is interesting to note that with the exception of Croatia, every Member State with a considerable growth of aggregated support for populists is also on the list of countries most affected by populists (See Graph 2).

8 The list of Italian populist parties includes the Five Star Movement and the League party.
9 SYRIZA, the Communist Party of Greece, Golden Dawn and the Independent Greeks are considered as the Greek populist parties.
10 Cypriot populist parties: The Progressive Party of Working People (AKEL), the National Popular Front and Citizens' Alliance.
11 Slovakian populist parties: Ordinary People party, Slovak National Party, Kotleba - People's Party Our Slovakia, We Are Family party.
12 Estonian Centre Party and Conservative People's Party of Estonia
13 The Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria (GERB), the United Patriots and the Volya party are considered as populist parties in Bulgaria.

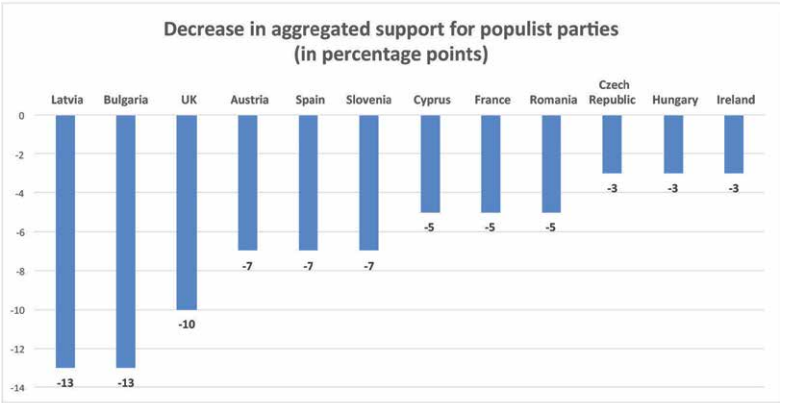


Graph 2 (Source: Populism Tracker, Q4 2017)

Decrease in aggregated support for populist parties

There are 12 countries in the EU in which the level of support for populist parties dropped by more than the margin of error (See Graph 3). The geographical distribution of this decline was more balanced when compared to distribution of the Member States where the support for populism increased last year. Out of the twelve countries, six countries are in eastern Europe, four are in western Europe, but we find only two Member States from southern Europe among the countries in which populist parties visibly lost support. With a 13-point drop in the support of populist parties, mainstream parties (such as the Bulgarian Socialist Party and the Latvian Social Democratic Party "Harmony") performed best in Latvia and Bulgaria in terms of their ability to lure back voters from anti-establishment parties. The collapse of UKIP was the factor underlying the United Kingdom's third place on the list, as Tories and Labour politicians were successful in reaching out to its former voters.

In western Europe, the popularity of populists dropped by 7 points in Austria, by 5 points in France and 3 in Ireland. However, the only countries in southern Europe where populism diminished in 2017 were Cyprus and Spain. In the latter, this resulted especially from Podemos' 7-point drop in the opinion polls. In eastern Europe, Slovenian populist parties lost 7 points, they fell by 5 points in Romania, and by 3 each in the Czech Republic and Hungary.



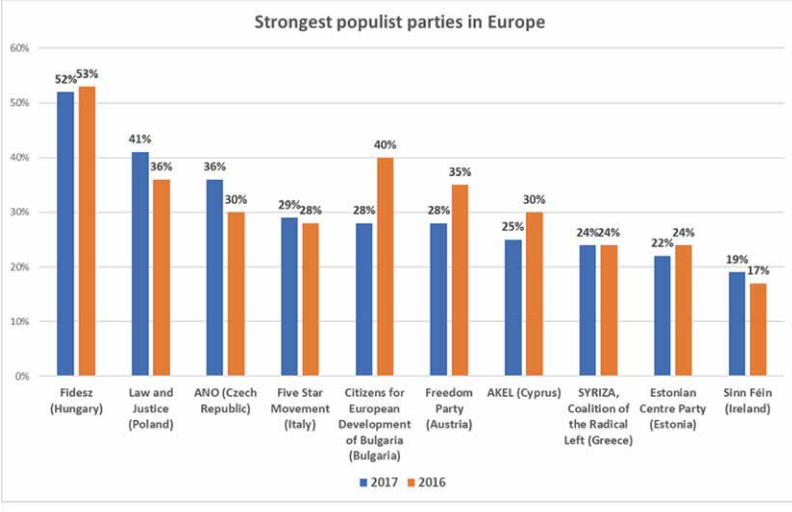
Graph 3 (Source: Populism Tracker, Q4 2017)

Strongest populist parties in Europe

For a long time now, Fidesz in Hungary continues to boast the largest social base among European populist parties (see Graph 4). Over half of Hungarian voters support Viktor Orbán's right-wing populist formation. The second one on the list is an old friend of Hungarian populists, the Polish ruling Law and Justice party, which stood at 41% in the latest opinion polls of 2017. The third strongest anti-establishment party in the EU was also from eastern Europe; the ANO party led by Andrej Babis, the recently elected prime minister, enjoyed the support of more than one-third of the Czech public in the polls.

In the following three slots we find three parties with similar levels of support, including two centrist populist parties, the Italian Five Star Movement and GERB from Bulgaria, which were backed by 29% and 28% of voters, respectively. The right-wing Freedom Party of Austria, which became the junior coalition partner of the conservatives after the election in autumn 2017, was backed by 28% of the voters, and consequently it enjoys the highest level of support of all western European populist parties.

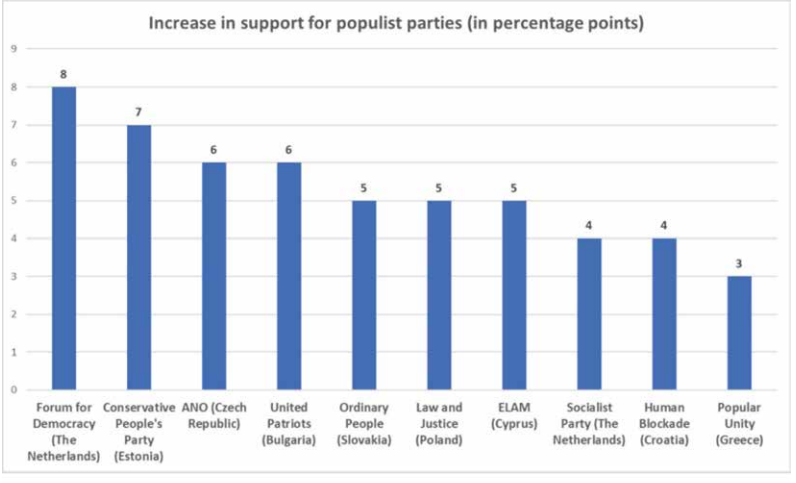
In addition to Five Star Movement, there were two other populist parties from southern Europe on the list of the 10 strongest populist parties: 25% of Cypriots backed the communist AKEL and 24% of the voters would choose the far-left governing party Syriza in Greece. The remaining strong populist parties were the moderate Estonian Centre Party (22%) and the Irish Sinn Féin (17%).



Graph 4 (Source: Populism Tracker, Q4 2017)

Increase in support for populist parties

There were ten populist parties in the EU that were able to increase their voter base by more than the margin of error during 2017 (See Graph 5). Among populist parties, the greatest winner of 2017 in the opinion polls was the Dutch Forum for Democracy, a freshly established conservative formation, which did not even appear in the survey questionnaires in December 2016 but was nevertheless able to attain a support of 8% in the Netherlands at the end of 2017. In Estonia, the Conservative People's Party expanded considerably during the year, advancing by 7 points in the polls. The Czech ANO party and the Bulgarian United Patriots improved their results by 6 points in 2017, the Slovakian Ordinary People, the Cypriot ELAM and the Polish Law and Justice each grew by 5 points. We should also note that the Socialist Party in the Netherlands, the Human Blockade in Croatia (both parties increased their supports by 4 percentage points) and the Popular Unity in Greece (3 percentage point growth) performed well too in 2017.

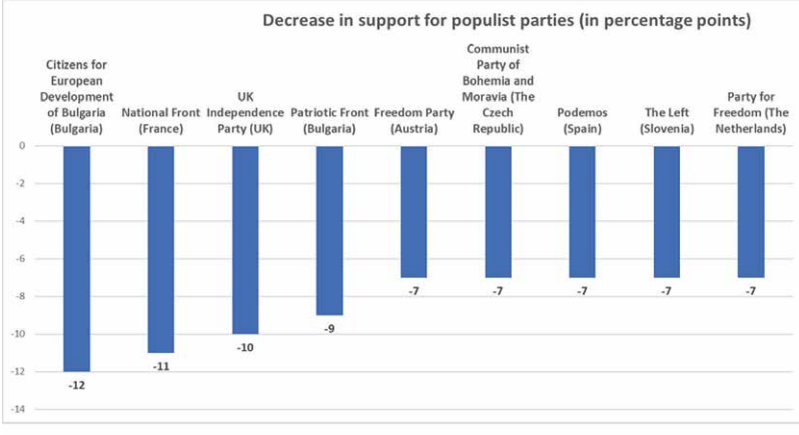


Graph 5 (Source: Populism Tracker, Q4 2017

Decrease in support for populist parties

At the top list of the European populist parties that experienced the greatest decline in 2017, we find four parties from eastern Europe, four from the western part of the continent and one from the South (see Graph 6). The greatest loser of the year was the Bulgarian ruling party GERB, which dropped by 12 points in the opinion polls during 2017. For the two strongholds of western populism, last year was also a disaster, as the National Front and UKIP lost 11 and 10 points, respectively. The Austrian FPÖ also lost 7 points of their level of support. The Bulgarian Patriotic Front became a member of a new party alliance, called United Patriots, which explains why they are not measured anymore in the Bulgarian opinion polls.

Podemos performed worst in southern Europe, as it lost 7% of Spanish voters during 2017. In eastern Europe, the Czech communists dropped 8 points, and the Slovenian anti-capitalist The Left dropped 7 points in the opinion polls conducted during last year. 2017 was also disappointing for Geert Wilders' Party for Freedom, as the party dropped 7 points in the polls within a year.



Graph 6 (Source: Populism Tracker, Q4 2017)

* * *

All in all, in 2017 the "good news" may be limited to some Member States, especially in western Europe, but still: populist parties lost a significant number of votes during the last 12 months, and these losses also extended to three large members (France, UK and Spain) of the European Union. Looking at the decline of overall public support for populists in France and the UK, this is quite a significant change in Europe. If you add up the number of voters who have abandoned UKIP since the 2014 EP election, when it stood at 26%, and consider that the Front National lost almost half their support compared to their peak performance, then the conclusion is that well over seven million potential populist voters have returned to the non-populist fold over this period.

Even if the UK ends up leaving the EU, as long as mainstream politics in Germany, France and the rest of western Europe manage to marginalise the populist threat in their countries, this might end up creating a populist/non-populist divide within the EU that will compel more leaders in the regions where populism is spreading (especially in central and eastern Europe) to critically reassess their allegiances, as Robert Fico in Slovakia appears to be doing.

Yet it must be pointed out that this is an optimistic scenario, and even as such it already assumes that moving eastern and southern Europe away from populism will be a long journey. A less optimistic outlook might point out that the popularity of German mainstream politics is buoyed by an astonishingly long and stable period of modest but perceptible economic growth, and that this popularity has not been tested under conditions of economic or other social duress. Similarly, Emmanuel Macron's ultimate massive victory in the presidential and parliamentary elections barely plastered over the fact that over 40% of French voters opted for

populist candidates in the first round of the presidential election; that structural problems – i.e. the fact that four voters out of 10 are basically anti-establishment voters – remain in France that threaten to undermine the success of any president; and that President Macron plans to enact a whole range of policies (especially reforms in the French labour market) that will upset large segments of the French electorate and could further boost populists.

Previously, political analysts had predicted that populists would rise quickly and would fall just as quickly, and that their success would be just a brief interlude. Apparently, that may well be true for some western European countries, but the sustained stagnation observed today in most central and eastern European Member States suggests that at least some of the players are becoming entrenched with fairly high levels of social support, and that we might have to wait years for their decline – if it will ever come.

POPULIST PARTIES IN EU MEMBER STATES

For a more detailed understanding of the populist trends in the EU that provides a deeper understanding of the 2017 top lists discussed above, a brief review of each Member States is helpful.[14] The review below helps us to discern which populist forces influence today's European politics. Following this chapter, in our "Special Focus" section, readers can learn in more detail about the state of populism in five EU countries where elections were held in 2017.

Austria

Austria's only populist party, the **Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ)** has become one of the governing parties again after over 10 years in opposition; this was more or less the general expectation long before the October 2017 election. But a more detailed review shows that they actually performed below expectations in the election. Back in 2016, FPÖ had been the leading party in the Austrian polls, but in the course of 2017 they lost one-fifth of their voters. At the beginning of the year, the Eurosceptic party's support still stood at 35%, and FPÖ was the most popular Austrian party. But in the election in October they received only 26% of the votes, which made them the third largest parliamentary force

14 For the complete list of populist parties in the EU, see the Appendix. Source of all data for this chapter is the Populism Tracker website *(http://progressivepost.eu/spotlights/populism/graph/)*

in the *Nationalrat*. After the spring, there was a significant drop in FPÖ's support, mainly due to the invigoration of the conservative ÖVP, which successfully reclaimed conservative voters from the nationalist and anti-immigration party. Generally, being a junior partner in a coalition government ends up damaging anti-establishment parties, so it remains to be seen whether FPÖ will be able to stabilise its support or whether it will see its support continue to drop in 2018. However, at 28% in December 2017, their level of support still makes them the strongest populist party in western Europe.

Belgium

In Belgium, **Flemish Interest** party (Vlaams Belang, VB) is still the only populist political formation in the country's fragmented political landscape. The past year was not a particularly successful one for Flemish Interest, as they lost two points in the opinion polls between the beginning and the end of the year. They reached new lows in their popularity in early autumn 2017, when only 8% of Belgians backed the party. While during 2016 their support ranged between 12-14%, in 2017 their peak value was 12%, and in December only every tenth Belgian indicated that would vote for the far-right party.

Bulgaria

In Bulgaria we observed one of the greatest declines in the support of populist parties among all EU Member States. The aggregated support of populist parties fell by 13 points during 2017, from 49% to 36%. As a result of the parliamentary elections held in March

2017, **Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria** (GERB), the largest populist party, was able to form a government in coalition with an anti-Islamic nationalist party, the **United Patriots**. In December 2016, GERB was backed by 40% of the electorate, but in the actual election they only received 33% of the votes. By the end of the year, only 28% of Bulgarians indicated that they would vote for the main governing party. With that drop in support, GERB is the biggest loser among populist parties in 2017. United Patriots, which was formed in 2016 as a result of the fusion of three parties, IMRO, NFSB and Attack, won 9% of the votes in the election. With that result, United Patriots became the junior partner of GERB in the government. Toward the end 2017, it had also lost support and stood at 6% in the opinion polls. A recently reorganised political formation, **Volya**, was able to pass the electoral threshold of 4% in March 2017 and won 12 seats in the Bulgarian National Assembly. By the end of the year, however, only 2% of voters backed the Russophile party that promotes patriotism and strict immigration controls.

Croatia

There were three populist parties in 2017 with a discernible level of support in the most recently acceding EU Member State. Compared to 2016, there was a considerable increase in the aggregated support of populist parties. As of December 2017, 16% of Croatians would have chosen an anti-establishment party. **Human Shield** (Živi zid), a party with syncretic political views against the current monetary system, enjoyed 12% support in the opinion polls at the end of 2017, which is 4 points higher than a year earlier. The two right-wing populist parties, **Croatian Democratic Alliance of Slavonia and Baranja** (HDSSB) and **Bandić Milan 365 - Labour**

and Solidarity Party (Bandic Milan 365), were unable to expand their electoral bases in 2017, as their level of support stood at 1% and 3%, respectively, which means they are still not crucial players in the Mediterranean country's politics.

Cyprus

Populist parties are still major players in the political life of the Mediterranean island, as 35% of Cypriots backed anti-establishment parties at the end of 2017. The greatest opposition party, the left-wing **Progressive Party of Working People** (AKEL), was supported **by 25% of** voters in Cyprus, which means they have thus far been unable to expand their electoral base since the legislative election of 2016, when 26% of the votes went to the communist party. 2017 proved disillusioning for the **Citizens' Alliance**, as at the end of the year only 3% of the electorate expressed a preference for this nationalist and social democratic organization. The Cypriot ally of the Greek Golden Dawn, **National Popular Front** (ELAM), was preferred by 7% of voters – it is alarming that support for the ultranationalist and xenophobe formation has risen during 2017.

Czech Republic

Following the legislative election held in October 2017, the Czech Republic joined the club of Member States with a populist head of government. **Action of Dissatisfied Citizens** (ANO) party received almost 30% of the votes cast in the election and was by far the largest party in the Chamber of Deputies, far ahead the second strongest force, the Civic Democratic Party. Still, ultimately ANO leader Andrej Babis was unable to find a coalition partner

because of his alleged subsidy fraud, and as a result he had to form a minority government. These accusations, however, did not damage his popularity, and 36% of voters still indicated that they would have chosen the billionaire's party in December 2017. For the **Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia** (KSCM), 2017 was a disaster, as they lost half of their electorate with only 8% of voters supporting them at the end of the year. The recently formed **Freedom and Direct Democracy** (SPD) – which was a split-off of Dawn of Direct Democracy party – also performed very well in the October 2017 election. They garnered over 10% of the votes. Nevertheless, in the final poll of 2017 they stood at only 7%. The aggregated support of populist forces has remained high throughout recent years, and 2017 was no exception. More than half of the voters, 51% of Czech likely voters, backed anti-establishment forces, but this still marks a 3-point drop compared to 2016.

Denmark

We observed only a minimal increase within the margin of error in the support of the only populist party in Denmark. The **Danish People's Party** (Dansk Folkeparti, DF) increased its support from 16% to 18% in 2017, but they achieved the highest level of popular support during the year in autumn, when 19% of Danish voters would have chosen the Eurosceptic political party. Although the anti-immigrant far-right party is not a member of the Rasmussen III cabinet, it provides the government with external support in the legislature. The party has been hovering around the 20%-mark in opinion the polls over the last few years, which means that they have successfully stabilised their electoral base at this level of support.

Estonia

There was a considerable increase in the support of populism among the voters in the Baltic state: as compared to the aggregated support of populists in 2016, when these parties stood at 34% overall, in December 2017 39% of Estonians would have chosen a populist party. The Eurosceptic **Conservative People's Party of Estonia** (EKRE) registered a major boost in public support, and between the end of 2016 and the end of 2017 support for the nationalist party surged from 10% to 17%. The **Estonian Centre Party** (Eesti Keskerakond), by contrast, which is a unique centrist-populist organization in the European political spectrum, lost 2 points and stood at 22% in the polls at the end of 2017. However, during the spring there were moments when more than every fourth voter, 27% of the electorate, would have chosen the party.

Finland

The easternmost Scandinavian country, Finland, has two populist parties, and both have exactly the same level of support in the polls: at the end of 2017, the leftist and the nationalist party would each have been the first choice of 9% of voters. These formations stood at similar level a year before, the only difference being that in December 2016 the **Finns Party** (PS) had a support of just 8%. The electoral base of the **Left Alliance** (vas.) has been impressively stable over the last two years, there were no major shifts in its popularity. Regarding the Finns Party (formerly known as the True Finns), they rapidly lost half of their voters after the election of 2015 and have been stagnating around a level of 8-10% support ever since. There was a huge crisis within the Finns Party after a leadership election during the summer, which split the party for a

while, but they have remedied the situation and the two opposing wings have re-united. A closer look at their situation makes it clear that a position as a governing party in a coalition government is generally detrimental to the long-term political prospects of populist forces as it tends to substantially diminish their popularity.

France

We witnessed a major realignment of populist parties in France during 2017. After the defeat of **Marine Le Pen** and the **National Front** (FN) in the second round of the presidential election, their result of 13% in the first round of the legislative election held in June was far below expectations, especially for a party whose popularity had peaked at 28% a few months before, in December 2016. However, the National Front have recovered to some degree, and at the end of the 2017 17% of French voters would have chosen the anti-EU far-right party. Regarding the other sovereigntist nationalist party, the support of **France Arise**'s (Debout la France, DLF) has not changed significantly in the course of 2017 and increased by only 1 point, from 5% to 6%. Far left populism in the country also could not break through in 2017: after the outstanding 19% result of **Jean-Luc Mélenchon,** the founder of the left-wing **France Unbowed** (La France Insoumise) party, in the first round of the presidential election, 11% of the votes for his party in the legislative elections were a disappointment. Still, the populist left party achieved a better result than the mainstream left (9.5%), at the end of the year, Mélenchon's party stood at 14% in the polls.

Germany

The past year was a memorable one for the German anti-migrant party, **Alternative for Germany** (AfD), because for the first time since the Second World War a far-right power has entered the *Bundestag*. At the same time, it was also a year of ups and downs for them, because their support of 12% at the end of 2016 dropped by 5 points in the first half of the year. But ultimately they emerged even stronger than before and won 13% of the votes in the legislative election, which made them the third strongest party in the Bundestag. At the end of 2017, they stood at 12% again in the opinion polls. We cannot observe any major shift in the support of the far-left **Die Linke**. In December 2017, the far-left party's support is slightly lower (9%) than at the same time last year (10%). Still, almost every tenth German would choose them, just as they did in the federal election, where they received 9% of the votes.

Greece

The popularity of populism in Greece did not increase in 2017. In fact, the aggregated support for populists changed only slightly within 12 months – from 42% in 2016 to 40% in December 2017. We did not observe any changes in the support for the far-left **Coalition of the Radical Left** (Syriza) or the **Communist Party of Greece** (KKE) between the last polls performed at the end of 2016 and 2017, respectively. Syriza is backed by 24% of the voters and the KKE by 6%. The greatest winner of the year among the Greek populists is **Popular Unity** (LAE), whose support grew by 3 percentage points during the year. Only 1% of voters had supported them at the end of 2016, but a year later 4% would have opted for the party founded by former Syriza members. On the other hand,

the extreme right **Golden Dawn's** base shrank by 2% during 2017, and at the end of 2017 only 7% of Greeks preferred the neo-Nazis. The nationalist, right-wing **Independent Greeks** (ANEL) have become irrelevant during the year, their support was not detectable in the final polls of 2017.

Hungary

At the heart of European populism, in Hungary the popularity of anti-establishment parties is still by far the highest among Member States: At the end of 2017, aggregated support for populist parties stood at 66%. This means that two out of three Hungarians prefer **Jobbik, the Movement for a Better Hungary** (Jobbik) or the ruling **Fidesz** party, the two major nationalist political forces in the country. However, Jobbik lost 2 points in the polls compared to December 2016, and Viktor Orbán's party also dropped one point in the polls by the end of 2017. Due to the fragmentation of the left-wing parties,[15] Jobbik's 14% support made the far-right party the strongest opposition party. Fidesz's comfortable 52% support implies that Viktor Orbán's efforts at building an illiberal democracy will certainly continue after the legislative election in April 2018.

15 The Hungarian Socialist Party (MSZP) has 13% support among the likely voters, Democratic Coalition (DK) – the party of the former socialist prime minister Ferenc Gyurcsány – exceeds 8%, while the Hungarian green party, Politics Can be Different (LMP) is currently above 5%.

Ireland

Looking at the changes in the support of populist parties in Ireland, we observe two different trends. At the end of 2016, the leftist **Sinn Féin**'s support stood at 17%, but by December 2017 they increased their support to 19% –, which means that they were once again successful in appealing to voters, after their unsatisfactory result in the last Irish general election, when only 14% of the votes went to the left-wing party. By contrast, the Trotskyist radical left party **Solidarity - People Before Profit** lost 4 points in the polls during the year, and they stood at only 1% at the end of 2017.

Italy

Italy is still the EU Member State with the highest level of populism among the founding countries of the European Communities. In 2017, Italian anti-establishment parties held on to the level of support they had enjoyed at the end of 2016: after last year's 41%, their aggregated support was at exactly the same level in December 2017. The **League** (LN) fell by 1 point from 13% to 12%, while Five Stars' 29% means that they were able to expand their support by 1 point. With that result, the **Five Star Movement** (M5S) – which rejects the traditional left-right paradigm – is the most supported populist party in the EU 15, that is the "old" Member States. The refugee crisis is still one of the most important issues on the political agenda of Italian politics, which could further fuel populist rhetoric in the country before the March 2018 elections.

Latvia

In the Baltic country, the loss of support for populist parties was remarkable as more than half of their voters turned away from them. At the end of 2016, the aggregated support for anti-establishment parties stood at 24%, while at the end of the analysed period only 11% of Latvian voters would have voted for them. Together with the decrease in Bulgaria, Latvia featured the greatest decline in the support of populism within the entire European Union. All of the Latvian right-wing populist parties lost support. The greatest loser was the governing **National Alliance** (NA), which lost 6 points during 2017 and stood at only 7% in December. The conservative populist **From Latvia from the Heart** also lost 3 points, and only 2% of Latvians would choose the small party now. Support for the third anti-establishment party, **Who Owns The State?** (KPV LV) essentially evaporated over this period: only 2% of Latvians would have voted for them at the end of 2017, a 4-point drop as compared to their result in December 2016.

Lithuania

Just as in Latvia, 2017 was not a memorable year for Lithuanian populist parties. Their aggregated support dropped two points during 2017. The right-wing **Order and Justice**'s (TT) support did not change in 2017, at the end of the year they were still at 6% in the polls. Nevertheless, there were ebbs and flows periods during the year. The leftist populist formation **Labour Party** (DP) lost two points in a year, which means that only 3% of Lithuanians would vote for the left-wing party now. The Labour Party received only 4.9% of the votes in the 2016 parliamentary election and failed to take the 5% threshold to enter parliament, though they won two seats in single member constituencies.

Luxembourg

There is still no fertile soil for populism in Luxembourg. The country's only anti-establishment party, **The Left** (Déi Lénk), was supported by only 3% of voters at the end of 2017, meaning that except for Malta, Luxembourg has the lowest level of aggregated support for populist forces. Luxembourg's The Left is a democratic socialist and anti-capitalist political organization, which was backed by 5% of the mini-state's population last year. Consequently, they lost 2 points during 2017.

Malta

As 2017 still was not the year for the creation of a new populist formation in the small island, Malta remains the only Member State of the EU without any notable populist party.

Netherlands

There was a significant realignment in the support of populist forces in the Netherlands in 2017. The main factor driving that change was the emergence of a brand new national-conservative party, the **Forum for Democracy** (FvD), which successfully lured the voters of the Party for Freedom. The small Eurosceptic group received only 2 seats in Parliament in the general election held in March, but in December it stood at 8% in the opinion polls. Geert Wilders' **Party for Freedom** (PVV) failed to gain in strength after their underperformance in the election, when they received only 13% of the votes. At the end of 2016, their support had stood at 19%, but then they

hugely underperformed during the year and were at 12% by the end of 2017. Nevertheless, the PVV is still the second largest political force in the country and the most potent opposition force against the newly formed government. The populist left-wing **Socialist Party** (SP), which was supported by 9% of the voters in the polls in December 2016 and won the same share of votes in the election, were preferred by 8% of Dutch voters in the last polls of 2017.

Poland

Poland's populist parties are still deeply rooted in the country. Moreover, they were even able to expand their electoral base by 5 points during 2017, and the aggregated support for anti-establishment parties was 48% in the last polls of 2017. **Law and Justice** (PiS) is still the largest political party in Poland with its result of 41%, which makes the governing party the second largest populist political formation in the EU after Fidesz in Hungary. In December 2016, PiS was preferred by 36% of Polish society, which means that the party managed to improve its standing in the polls by 5 points in the course of 2017, but their support peaked in autumn, when 45% of Polish voters would have opted for the governing party. The libertarian **Kukiz'15** performed identically at the end of both years surveyed, as 7% of the Polish electorate backed the former musician's party in December 2017.

Portugal

Populists in Portugal have not managed to raise their level of support, and the country has continued to successfully resist far-

right populism in 2017. In the south-western part of the Iberian Peninsula, we find two left-wing parties with a moderate amount of support. **Left Bloc** (BE), just like the **Unitary Democratic Coalition** (PCP–PEV), supports the Socialist Party's minority government from the outside. The two parties have had a stable electoral base over the past few years, with both of them losing only one point in the opinion polls during 2017. The anti-capitalist Left Bloc, whose main ideology is democratic socialism, stood at 9% and the communist Unitary Democratic Coalition was backed by 7% of the voters in the latest polls of 2017.

Romania

It is still impossible to find a populist political force with considerable support in Romania, although mainstream left-wing parties very often resort to populist rhetoric. The only anti-establishment force is the **Save Romania Union** (USR), but for them 2017 was a disillusioning year: Although during the first quarter of 2017 they managed to expand their electoral base from 9% to 12%, by December only 5% of Romanians still preferred the syncretic party. USR does not have a clear program or ideology, instead they try to win over new voters based on the appeal of their candidates' personalities.

Slovakia

Slovakia's right-wing populists expanded their total support by 3% during 2017. Their aggregated support of 36% at the end of 2016 had risen to 39% by December 2017. The strengthening of the

populist parties in Slovakia was mainly the result of the good performance of the **Ordinary People** (OĽaNO) party, which increased its support by 5 points during 2017. In December 2016 only 8% of Slovakians had backed the conservative party; a year later, they enjoy the backing of 13%. The greatest loser of the year was the **Slovak National Party** (SNS), since they dropped 4 points during the year and stood at only 9% in the last opinion polls of 2017. The popularity of the party of the former governor of the Banská Bystrica region, **Kotleba - People's Party Our Slovakia** (L'SNS), did not change this year. The far-right party still has 8% support in society, though there were moments in 2017 when every tenth voter would have chosen the radical party. Boris Kollár's Eurosceptic group **We Are Family** (Sme Rodina) experienced a modest increase in support during the year. While at the end of 2016 they had stood at 7%, in the last polls of 2017 9% of Slovakians backed the anti-migrant party.

Slovenia

We observe a considerable loss of support for anti-establishment forces in Slovenia. Specifically, the nationalist **Slovenian National Party** (SNS) had become totally irrelevant by the end of 2017. Although there were months in 2017 when SNS had been supported by 3-5% of the voters, at the end of 2017 the extremist party was no longer detectable in the polls. The last year was also a huge disappointment for leftist populists, as the anti-capitalist **The Left** (Levica) lost more than half of their voters: their result of 12% in December 2016 dropped to a mere 5% by the end of the following year. The party was affected by internal strife during the summer, which might have had a crucial impact on their popularity since before June 11% of voters would have chosen them.

Spain

With respect to populism in Spain, we can note that the country's only anti-establishment power, **Podemos,** has lost a lot of support. At the end of 2016, almost every fourth Spaniard had backed the left-wing party; they stood at 23% at the time. Twelve months later, at the end of December 2017, by contrast, only 16% of voters would have chosen them, meaning that they have lost 7 points over the year. Their loss of support was also influenced by the intensification of the Catalan crisis, as the far-left party supported a new independence referendum in the region. In the first half of the year, every fifth voter had backed the anti-austerity party, but they lost 4 points in the second half of the year.

Sweden

The last year was not a very active one for the Swedish populists in terms of changes in their popularity. We observe only a minimal level of decrease in their aggregated support, as they lost only 1 point in the opinion polls between December 2016 and December 2017. The **Left Party**'s (Vänsterpartiet, V) support did not change at all, they were still at 7% in the polls in December 2017, the same as a year ago. However, during the first half of the year 8% of Swedish voters would have chosen them. The nationalist **Sweden Democrats** (Sverigedemokraterna, SD) lowered the national average of populist parties because contrary to their 17% result in the opinion polls in December 2016, at the end of 2017 only 16% would have voted for the radical organization.

United Kingdom

For the United Kingdom's only populist party, **UK Independence Party** (UKIP), the year 2017 was perhaps the worst one in their history. The party fell apart after the successful Brexit referendum and the departure of long-time leader Nigel Farage and has not been able to reclaim its former glory. UKIP, which received 27.5% of votes in the 2014 European Parliament election, stood at only 14% in the opinion polls at the end of December 2016, and received fewer than 2% of votes in the UK general election of 2017. According to the final polls of 2017, 4% of British citizens would choose the far-right party, so the new party leader Henry Bolton has a lot to do in 2018 if he wants to restore the party's reputation.

SPECIAL FOCUS: AUSTRIA IN 2017

A Populist Party Returns to Power

BY GÁBOR GYŐRI

SUMMARY

After over a decade in opposition, the populist Freedom Party (FPÖ) is back in government, once again as the junior partner under a conservative chancellor. Populism scored a huge victory in the Austrian parliamentary election of 2017, but interestingly it is not because of a massive breakthrough by the country's most prominent populist party, the FPÖ. At 26%, it did reasonably well, but it remains stuck in third place. Instead, the populist breakthrough owed to the rightward shift of the conservative Austrian People's Party (ÖVP) and the fact that after a long period of a coalition with the Social Democrats (SPÖ), the ÖVP expressly preferred the far-right party as a coalition partner. The public reception of the second (though formally third) ÖVP-FPÖ coalition ever differs markedly from the first iteration of this governmental constellation. The first time, in 2000, the European Union sanctioned Austria and boycotted its government; this time it was mum on the issue. It is true that unlike populists in eastern Europe (Poland and Hungary in particular), FPÖ has thus far not evinced a desire to assail the fundamental tenets of Austrian democracy (nor could it as a junior partner in a coalition government). Even more importantly, it has accepted Austria's EU membership, and while the recently installed Austrian government will plead for

less integration in certain areas – refugee policy stands out – it remains solidly committed to the European project, and has said so expressly in the coalition agreement. Despite its scepticism regarding the EU, the FPÖ apparently has no problems selling this to its voters. This is clearly distinct from the Hungarian and Polish versions of populism, which directly threaten both domestic democratic constitutionalism and European integration. Primarily with respect to its desire to end the quota regime and join the V4 countries in their sustained effort to impede any political compromise solution on the refugee question, the new Austrian government has made clear that it will be a very different, less cooperative partner in EU affairs. Moreover, there is a threat that as democracy deteriorates in certain countries of eastern Europe, Hungary and Poland in particular, Austria may join those countries that block a potential forceful defence of democracy by the EU (if such an effort were to take shape, that is). If that were the case, then the current ÖVP-FPÖ government in Austria would be far more damaging to European integration and European democracy than the previous conservative-far right coalition was.

KEYWORDS: FPÖ, refugees, mainstreaming of populism, Sebastian Kurz, neoliberal populism

Introduction

In many respects, recent developments in Austrian politics are not so different from what is happening elsewhere in Europe. But before highlighting the common features, it is only appropriate to acknowledge the key differences. The far-right in Austria has become normalised, the Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ) is neither fringe nor even particularly disreputable any longer. It has become indisputably an established player in the party system, and in fact it is one of three top players who are roughly even in strength. This, meaning the FPÖ's position as an established party, is not a fluke, it is not temporary and, alarmingly, it is not even shocking anymore. That is the ordinary extraordinariness of Austrian politics.

Now that the new chancellor of Austria, the conservative politician Sebastian Kurz, has been installed at the helm of a coalition government of his conservative Austrian People's Party (ÖVP) and the Freedom Party, it is worth recalling what happened the last time when such a coalition took power in Austria in 2000. At the time, the rest of the EU was in shock over the inclusion of the FPÖ in the government, which was deemed a breach of democratic ground rules. To those with deep reservations about the FPÖ on account of its xenophobic rhetoric that frequently veered into racist territory, the EU's decisive action in response was a relief: In a unanimous decision, the 14 other EU member states at the time imposed sanctions, freezing bilateral relations with the new Austrian government. It was the first time that the EU acted decisively in response to disconcerting political developments in a member state. It would also be the last for at least over a decade and a half, though at this point I hesitate to call the actions in the context of Poland decisive. In fact, the sanctions in 2000 proved to be a monumental blunder that have led the EU to steer clear of other attempts at reacting to domestic politics in a member state.

For me, this story has a strong personal resonance: At the time, I was heartened by the EU's resolute reaction to the FPÖ's inclusion in the Austrian government, so much so that I wrote a blistering letter to the editor of the college newspaper, which – though it was also critical of the Austrian government – felt queasy about the EU's interference with the internal politics of a member state. It turns out that they were right and I was wrong. If nothing else, the sanctions were premature and counterproductive, and the EU's swift and quiet abandonment of the effort a few months later reflected this insight. While this is not the topic of the present discussion, the EU's hasty action at the time likely caused a collective posttraumatic stress disorder that has stopped the Union from acting in time as the Hungarian government began its slide into authoritarianism, and also makes it far too lenient in the context of the ruling Polish PiS party's abuses in the realm of democracy.

It is telling that almost two decades later, with the second instalment of this previously controversial coalition, hardly anyone batted an eyelash when Sebastian Kurz – whose preference for a coalition with the far-right party was common knowledge – formed the government with the FPÖ. Instead of the EU leaders deciding on jointly freezing relations with Austria, the official EU institutions were completely silent on the issue, and an open letter calling for the boycott of the "heirs of Nazism" in the Austrian government, which was published in *Le Monde*[16] and signed by left-wing intellectuals and a few retired politicians, failed to receive the backing of European governments. In fact, among the eastern European

16 Autriche: *«Il faut boycotter les ministres d'extrême droite et la future présidence du Conseil de l'UE»*, [in]: lemonde.fr, 28 December 2017, http://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2017/12/28/autriche-il-faut-boycotter-les-ministres-d-extreme-droite-et-la-future-presidence-du-conseil-de-l-ue_5235286_3232.html

governments in particular, there is palpable relief that they have found a new partner in Austria that will break rank with the western European countries on the issue of the refugee quota; Orbán has already thanked Kurz for his support on this issue. Moreover, given the FPÖ's sympathies for Hungary's Prime Minister Viktor Orbán in particular and for less EU integration in general, the current governmental constellation makes it less likely that the new Austrian government will endorse sanctions against Hungary or Poland in the event that the European Union finally decides to act firmly in response to the transgressions against democracy in these countries. This is all the more true since the conservative chancellor, Sebastian Kurz, has also expressed strong sympathies for Orbán's refugee policies.

Ironically enough, because of the broader regional context and its potential impact on the EU's relations with its eastern European members, the current iteration of the ÖVP-FPÖ coalition in Austria is potentially liable to do far greater effective damage to the EU than its predecessor in 2000, but the Union is no longer in a position to respond to this threat, not to mention pre-empt it. With populists in power in Hungary and Poland, the last thing the EU needs is another government that sees greater value in allies against a common refugee policy than in defending the foundations of democracy in the EU. Thus, even if the ÖVP-FPÖ coalition respects democratic norms domestically and maintains Austria's basic commitment to Europe, they might well end up damaging the cause of European integration indirectly, by tolerating the deconsolidation in democracy in exchange for short-term political alliances with the populist regimes in central and eastern Europe.

A populist surge?

This is not where the irony ends, though. The Austrian election in October 2017 and the new coalition that it engendered is arguably the biggest success of European populism in 2017. Electorally speaking, however, there was very little of an actual shift in favour of the main populist party when compared to two decades ago: in fact, at 26% FPÖ is one percent weaker than it was in 1999 – the previous election that resulted in its inclusion in government – and it finished third this time, whereas back then it finished second, barely edging out the conservatives who nevertheless went on to lead the government.[17] As compared to the 2013 election, when it won only 20%, the FPÖ's 6 percent plus seems more like a breakthrough, but arguably it is only a return to form for the Freedom Party. In 2013, a rival, short-lived populist party had siphoned off some of the Freedom Party's support, but now the FPÖ has reconsolidated its fairly solid base, which comprises roughly a quarter of the Austrian electorate. And while over the years there have been some ebbs and flows in the support of the FPÖ due to the emergence of rival parties, none of them proved lasting and they did not exert a major impact on the number of citizens open to voting for the populists.

Even broken down to the regional level, the similarities between 1999 and 2017 are striking: in only two of the nine Austrian federal states did the difference in the FPÖ's tally exceed 5 percentage

17 The fact that they felt compelled to accept the junior role owed to the unusual scenario, that is that ÖVP's willingness to risk international opprobrium for breaking a taboo. What made it more palatable to the Freedom Party was that the difference between their vote totals was a mere 400 – not a whole lot as compared to the 2.5 million votes between the two parties.

points. It received 7 points less in Carinthia,[18] its bastion and the former home of the late Jörg Haider, the man who refashioned the previously centre-right FPÖ into a far-right populist party in the 1980s and 1990s, and it dropped by 5.8% in the tiny state of Vorarlberg. In some states the FPÖ's results were essentially the same as in 1999.[19]

Yes, a populist surge

The similarities to 1999 are eerie, but the differences are sobering, for they indicate how deeply entrenched the party has become in Austrian politics. As compared to the 1999 election that provided its first foray into the federal government since it shifted to the far right in the 1980s, the FPÖ has lost some support in the urban social democratic bastions of Vienna and Salzburg, but it has gained in many rural areas and its support is more evenly distributed throughout the country: in six out of nine federal states its share of the vote fell within a three percent range (24-27%) that was fairly close to its national average of 26%. Crucially, there are only three states left where the centre-left SPÖ remains stronger than the far-right party.

18 The FPÖ remains the strongest party in Carinthia, the only state it carried in 2017 and one of the two it won in 1999. The shift in Carinthia is in part a legacy of the party's conflictual relation with its erstwhile patriarch, Haider, who left the FPÖ in 2005 and founded a rival far-right party, which eventually floundered after his 2008 death in a car accident. A longtime prime minister of Carinthia, Haider was a towering figure in his home state.

19 *Nationalratswahl 2017: Gesamtergebnis, Detailergebnisse, Wahlbeteiligung, Koalitionsrechner und Wählerstromanalyse*, [in:], Die Presse, 17 October 2017, https://diepresse.com/home/innenpolitik/nationalratswahl/5300771/Nationalratswahl-2017_Gesamtergebnis-Detailergebnisse

The presidential election in May and December 2016 was more instructive still: with the choice of a Green Party politician, Alexander van der Bellen, and an FPÖ politician, Norbert Hofer, in the run-off, the country split almost evenly in two, ultimately giving the Green candidate a modest but decisive edge in the rerun of the election, after the first attempt had to be voided due to irregularities. At the time, in December 2016, much of Europe sighed in collective relief after Hofer lost, but the outcome of the election may have obscured the more relevant underlying insight: every second voter did not feel that having a representative of a far-right party in the symbolically important presidential office would be a bad thing for their country. This is even more indicative of the FPÖ's normalisation in Austrian politics than its consistently high parliamentary election returns or the facile obviousness with which Chancellor Kurz included the Freedom Party in his cabinet.[20]

Moreover, it's no longer just the ÖVP: While the Social Democrats remain deeply divided over the issue of entering into a coalition with the Freedom Party, at this point an SPÖ-FPÖ coalition is not something that can be automatically ruled out. In principle, some Social Democrats have recognised that in a system with three major parties that are roughly equal in strength, any winning coalition must include two of the three players. For the foreseeable future, the SPÖ is considerably more limited politically if its only viable coalition is with the conservative ÖVP, while the latter can pick and choose between the far-right and the centre left and form a government with whoever makes a more attractive offer. For the time being, there is still a party congress decision in place that

20 There was no internal debate (at least publicly) in the ÖVP whether a coalition with the FPÖ is advisable, and the coalition agreement was concluded fairly quickly: It suggests that all those involved looked at this is kind of a "natural" situation.

bars the SPÖ from entering into a coalition with the SPÖ, but in the party's only rural stronghold, the state of Burgenland in eastern Austria, the influential regional prime minister Hans Niessl entered into a coalition with the local Freedom Party in 2015, claiming that "the Burgenland FPÖ is different" from the national party.[21] It is difficult to maintain that the conservatives are paving the way for the mainstreaming of the FPÖ when a leading social democratic politician enters into a regional coalition agreement with the populists. And while the party remains deeply divided over the issue – the mayor of Vienna, Michael Häupl, who has been the leader of the most important SPÖ-led social democratic federal state since 1994 and is among the most influential figures in the national party, is vehemently opposed to any coalition –, the outgoing SPÖ Chancellor Christian Kern pointedly refused to rule out a cooperation with the FPÖ following the 2017 national election.[22] After 23 years of joint governance in the past 30 years, the only coalition constellation that both conservative and social democratic politicians seemed most eager to avoid was another SPÖ-ÖVP coalition.

Even in European comparison, the FPÖ's results still stand out (see: Appendix). Very few populist parties in Europe poll better than the FPÖ. Nevertheless, when I wrote above that the differences to 1999 are sobering, the point was not only a reference to the internal dynamics of Austrian politics but also to the broader European context: even as the FPÖ's level of national support is virtually unchanged, Austria has moved from being one of a few

21 *Niessl sieht den Fehler bei der Bundes-SPÖ*, [in]: Orf.at, 6 June 2015, http://orf.at/stories/2282564/2282569/

22 *Kern will auch mit FPÖ verhandeln - Häupl ist dagegen*, [in]: Die Presse, 16 October 2017, https://diepresse.com/home/innenpolitik/nationalratswahl/5303632/Kern-will-auch-mit-FPOe-verhandeln-Haeupl-ist-dagegen

glaring exceptions in Europe as a country with a massively successful far-right party – and the only one at the time that would give the far-right such a prominent role in government – to being only one of several such countries. Populist parties dominate throughout much of eastern Europe. In France, Marine Le Pen missed a victory in the presidential election, in fact she performed below expectations, but her 34% of the vote in the second round of the presidential elections nevertheless shows a very high populist potential; moreover, it's one that has the potential to genuinely tear the EU apart because of France's size and its role as the engine, along with Germany, of European integration. The example of the UK illustrates the gravity of the threat. As recently as 2014, the anti-EU UKIP emerged as the strongest party in the EP election, making this the first time that a challenger beat out the mainstream parties in Britain. On the plus side, only three years later UKIP was eviscerated in the national election. On the negative side, however, the party appears to have lost support because it had achieved its raison d'être: with the successful Brexit referendum in 2016, there was no more reason to vote for UKIP.[23]

So, one can see how the FPÖ is no longer exceptional in its success, though it is of course still one of the very few populist players in Europe that has solidly entrenched itself in national politics.

23 *Has the general election 2017 finished UKIP?* [in]: New Statesmen, 8 June 2017,
https://www.newstatesman.com/politics/june2017/2017/06/has-general-election-2017-finished-ukip

Austria as a poster child

The massive success of today's populism is a reflection of the crisis of traditional representative democracy. After the early days of consternation about the rising support of populist parties, there is a growing consensus that large segments of the public feel left out of the economic and cultural benefits of globalisation, or that more broadly they do not feel represented by the political elite. Whether the current populism is a temporary wave that all systems are occasionally prone to undergo or a systemic challenge remains to be seen, but either way, the world has not seen such a massive shift towards populism since the 1920s and 1930s, which certainly ought to caution us against taking the phenomenon lightly.

Austria is an interesting example of the malaise of representative democracy because by many measures it was the country in which the two dominant parties, the SPÖ and the ÖVP, were the embodiments of successful representation – at least until the gradual systemic breakdown that set in in the 1980s. It is worth taking a look at the comparative table of the electoral performance of the top two parties in various European democracies between the end of WWII and the mid-1980s, when a rising FPÖ began to successfully challenge the two-party hegemony in Austria.

Country	Time-frame	Num-ber of elec-tions	Average share of total votes cast for top two parties*	Average share of the votes cast for top party**	Aver-age partici-pation
Austria	1946-83	12	90.2%	45.6%	93.9%
Belgium	1946-85	14	67.23%	37.1%	92.72%***
Denmark	1945-84	17	55.58%	36.67%	85.78%
Finland	1945-95	12	45.4%	24.9%	75.55%
Germany	1949-83	10	83.3%	45.5%	87.3%
Greece	1974-85	4	76.47%	43.27%	79.65%
France	1958-93	10	54.3%	28.9%	75.5%
Holland	1946-82	12	57.15%	28.65%	89%
Ireland	1948-82	12	76.95%	45.24%	73.42%
Italy	1948-83	9	64.48%	39.67%	92.41%
Norway	1945-85	11	63.79%	42.3%	81.6%
Portugal	1976-83	4	53.37%	31.52%	82.55%
Spain	1977-85	4	57.17%	39.17%	74.55%
Sweden	1948-85	11	65.67%	46.31%	78.2%
United Kingdom	1945-83	12	85.89%	43.5%	76.61%
Average of all countries except Austria	—	—	59.96%	35.4%	76.38%

* The author's own calculation by adding the result of the top two performing parties over the time period measured, regardless of whether they were in the top two in all of the elections.
** Determined by calculating the average of the strongest party over the elections in this time, regardless of whether the party was always the strongest.
*** Belgium and Greece make voting mandatory.
Source: The author's own calculations based on election results on the website Parties and Elections in Europe[24]

24 *Parties and Elections in Europe:* http://www.parties-and-elections.eu/

It also bears pointing out that unlike the British or the French electoral system, the Austrian electoral system – proportional representation with a 4% threshold – is not particularly conducive to large parties: the pre-1983 success of SPÖ and ÖVP did not owe to voters' desire to avoid wasting their votes. Austria's special place among democratic regimes was marked even more strongly by the astonishing level of party permeation in society: from World War II until the 1990s, roughly a quarter of the adult population were party members, naturally almost exclusively of one of the two major parties.[25] Among those who voted, the proportion was even higher, approaching a third. Austria had the highest percentage of party members in the overall population among all European countries[26]– which included Communist countries in which party membership was a prerequisite for virtually any social position of importance – and even in absolute numbers Austrian party membership was among the highest in Europe, in spite of the country's small population. Even to date, actually, the SPÖ's over 200,000 members are nearly half that of the German SPD's – the leading left-wing party in a country that is nearly ten times Austria's size – and *exceed* that of the British Labour Party. But in 1979, SPÖ membership had stood at 720,000[27] – almost as high as the communist party membership in Austria's larger eastern neighbour, Hungary.

This translated into enormous social influence for the major parties whose interests spanned all walks of life, connecting all manners of social and business organisations to politics in deep

25 KR Luther and K. Deschouwer (eds.), *Party Elites in Divided Societies*. *Routledge*, New York 1999.
26 O Lahodynsky*: Der Proporz Pakt,* Vienna: Verlag Carl Ueberreuter 1987.
27 *SPÖ verliert rund 10.000 Mitglieder jährlich,* [in]: Die Presse, 24 November 2014, https://diepresse.com/home/innenpolitik/4603088/SPOe-verliert-rund-10000-Mitglieder-jaehrlich

networks of patronage. It also led to systemic corruption that was one of the first lines of the attacks advanced by Jörg Haider who began rebranding the Freedom Party as a populist force in the 1980s. The deep social embeddedness of the major parties might have been one of the reasons that made them too comfortable to react in a timely manner to the massive challenge that the FPÖ meant for their political hegemony: as their support began to decline from election to election, with the populists taking ever more votes, they saw no alternative but to continue forming coalition governments with one another, supported by ever shrinking popular and parliamentary majorities.

Neoliberal nationalists

The rise of the FPÖ was a necessity of sorts, a reflection of the established parties' failure to innovate, to offer political alternatives and – certainly not least – to capture an increasingly xenophobic zeitgeist. Nevertheless, just as the FPÖ's inclusion in government in 2000 did not result in long-term damage to Austrian democracy, the present government is not likely to be fundamentally different. The coalition agreement includes a firm commitment to Austria's EU membership[28] and a line in the preamble saying that a *strong Austria can only exist in a strong Europe.* This is certainly not the FPÖ's word choice – party chairman Heinz-Christian Strache made clear that they *could have*

28 *Wien bekennt sich zu Europa,* [in]: Spiegel Online, 16 December 2017, http://www.spiegel.de/politik/ausland/oesterreich-das-sind-die-kernpunkte-des-koalitionsvertrags-a-1183724.html

imagined asking the citizens[29] about EU membership – but they signed the coalition agreement and, more importantly, the fervent anti-Europeanism that animated UKIP and that is still espoused by Marine Le Pen's Front National (in a largely pro-European country, to boot). Yes, the coalition agreement also contains an ominous call for the EU to focus back on its core competencies and to leave more policies in the authority of national governments. Austria is thus clearly moving into the Eurosceptic direction, aligning itself openly with its eastern European neighbours. This is undoubtedly fuelled in major part by the centrality of the refugee issue, which has emerged as a top concern for Austrian voters. The refugee issue is also where the Austrian government will veer most sharply towards the right, with drastic cuts in social benefits for recognised asylum seekers and a complete exclusion from many social services for new immigrants for periods of up to five years.[30]

The rightward shift is not limited to refugee policy, however, and it comprises a paradoxical element: though its far-right tinge pre-dated Jörg Haider, by the 1980s the FPÖ was more or less a classical liberal party before Haider assumed control of the party and shifted it decisively to the right. In a country with a strong Catholic clerical/conservative and socialist/working party tradition, it stood for classical economic liberalism, Protestantism (Haider's Carinthia being the only majority protestant federal state in Austria) and nationalism (often including pan-German nationalism). Despite the fact that over the years the FPÖ has emerged as the top-performing party among

29 *Kein «Öxit»: Österreichs neue Regierung bekennt sich zu EU*, [in]: Westfälische Nachrichten, 16 December 016, http://www.wn.de/Welt/Thema/3092820-Kurz-setzt-auf-Frauen-Kein-Oexit-Oesterreichs-neue-Regierung-bekennt-sich-zu-EU

30 A. Endres, V Vu, V Völlingerand, T Steffen: *Ein Land rückt nach rechts*, [in]: Zeit Online, 18 December 2017, http://www.zeit.de/politik/ausland/2017-12/oevp-fpoe-oesterreich-regierung-minister-asyl-europa

working class voters as well as among voters with low educational attainment, a position it had held in 2017[31] just as it had in 2013,[32] its economic programme[33] remains firmly committed to a neoliberal economic vision of reducing taxation and lowering the state's social engagement – albeit both from fairly high levels in international comparison. Even as the programme includes a repeated rhetorical commitment to "fairness", in reality it is mostly about corporate tax cuts, more modest income tax cuts and a freezing/reduction of social benefits, along with the abolition of taxes on "income already taxed", such as for instance the estate tax. Hayek and Mises might finally feel at home in the FPÖ's Austria. It is hard to see, however, how less educated and low-income voters who vest their hopes in the FPÖ will profit from the neoliberal shift, even if the ÖVP – which represents a wealthier segment of the electorate – will prove a willing partner in realising parts of this programme.

What this means is that the party mixes an inhumane refugee policy with an economic policy that bears many of the hallmarks of the failed economic policies that have given rise to populism throughout the West. This can be seen as wrong-headed, maybe even cynical, but at this point it also bears emphasising that the FPÖ appears to be at peace with the political regime it is operating in. This is not to say that the party has rid itself of extremism. Racist comments by FPÖ politicians are still fairly

31 G. Gartner, *Arbeiter zur FPÖ, Akademiker zur SPÖ: Welche Wählergruppen wohin gewechselt sind - derstandard.at/2000066198328/Welche-Waehlergruppen-wohin-gewechselt-sind*, [in]: der Stanard at 17 October 2017, https://derstandard.at/2000066198328/
Welche-Waehlergruppen-wohin-gewechselt-sind

32 Institute für Strategieanalysen, *Wahlanalyse Nationalratswahl 2013*, http://strategieanalysen.at/wp-content/uploads/bg/isa_sora_wahlanalyse_nrw_2013.pdf

33 FPÖ Bildungsinstitute, *Das freiheitliche Wirtschaftsprogramm*, 2017, https://www.fpoe.at/fileadmin/user_upload/2017_freiheitliche_wirtschaftsprogramm_web.pdf

common, and the apologies often sound half-hearted at best.[34] In fact, Israel is thus far the only country that has reacted officially by freezing relations with the FPÖ-led federal ministries,[35] despite the fact that like many other far-right parties, the FPÖ has also sought rapprochement with Israel, even leading Strache to recommend that Austria follow Donald Trump in recognising Jerusalem as Israel's capital.[36] Moreover, even a cursory review of the bios of the FPÖ-delegated cabinet members is illustrative of a very widespread phenomenon among Freedom Party politicians: their membership in far-right student fraternities, so-called *Burschenschaften*,[37] which often discriminate on the basis of race and, of course, gender. The same holds for 5 out of 6 members of the party's executive board, *and this ratio also prevails in the lower levels of party management boards*, writes the German newspaper *Der Tagesspiegel*.[38]

34 A few examples: In September 2017, a local FPÖ politician called a football player at FC Liverpool a "schwarze Drecksau", which loosely translates as "black mother***" ("*Schwarze Drecksau": Grüne werfen FPÖ "offenen Rassismus" vor* [in]: Standard Online, 11 September 2017, https://derstandard.at/2000063903632/Schwarze-Drecksau-Gruene-werfen-FPOe-offenen-Rassismus-vor);
in February 2013 a local FPÖ politician portrayed German Chancellor Angela Merkel with a Star of David and the comment "Traitor to the Homeland"; in one of several incendiary comments, the FPÖ MEP Andreas Mölzer referred to the EU as a "Negro conglomerate"; in June 2014 a local FPÖ politician posts that "people are like bananas – no one likes the black ones" (source for all of the latter: Mauthausen Komitee Österreich: *Lauter Einzelfälle? Die FPÖ und der Rechtsextremismus*, 10 August 2017, http://www.mkoe.at/sites/default/files/files/aktuelles/MKOE-A5-Broschuere-Die-FPOE-und-der-Rechtsextremismus.pdf).

35 *Israel boykottiert Zusammenarbeit mit FPÖ-Ministern*, [in]: Zeit Online, 19 December 2017, http://www.zeit.de/politik/ausland/2017-12/oesterreich-israel-fpoe-benjamin-netanjahu-sebastian-kurz

36 *Jerusalem: Strache will Verlegung, die ÖVP winkt ab ,* [in]:Kurir.at: 12 December 2017, https://kurier.at/politik/ausland/jerusalem-strache-will-verlegung-die-oevp-winkt-ab/301.780.400

37 Not all of these are far-right, but the FPÖ members are typically associated with ones that are.

38 *Wie aus dem FPÖ-Chef der gefragteste Politiker Österreichs wurde*, [in]: Der Tagesspiel, 23 October 2017, http://www.tagesspiegel.de/themen/reportage/heinz-christian-strache-wie-aus-dem-fpoe-chef-der-gefragteste-politiker-oesterreichs-wurde/20473244.html

Nevertheless, it appears that the FPÖ is determined enough in its desire to become a fixed part of the political elite with its natural claim to be a governing party to avoid jeopardising this goal by trying to mess with the system – especially at a time when it finally works in the FPÖ's favour. Still, just like last time, the FPÖ's stint in government might provide a fresh round of disappointment. It might once again convince a large number of loosely affiliated FPÖ voters that, on the whole, the Freedom Party's solutions to Austria's problems are not an iota more fresh or innovative than that of the traditional parties. Along with internal bickering, this insight already led to a massive collapse in the FPÖ's support after their last term in government. Waiting for reality to overtake the overhyped expectations that attach to a populist party is of course a far less ideal solution to the populist challenge than relying on society's internal defence mechanisms. But when that line of defence has been so visibly overburdened for so long already, as in the case of Austria, ordinary political gravity may be the next best hope.

SPECIAL FOCUS: THE CZECH REPUBLIC IN 2017

Czechmate for Democracy?

BY DÁNIEL BARTHA

SUMMARY

The Czech elections took place on 20 and 21 October 2017 and resulted in the "landslide victory" of the ANO (Action of Dissatisfied Citizens) Party.[39] The party, founded by the Czech billionaire Andrej Babis, secured 29.6% of the votes and 78 seats in the 200-member Chamber of Deputies. Normally, the results of ANO wouldn't be outstanding. There have been a number of cases in which political parties managed to secure a similar number of votes[40]. What makes these elections special is that eight other parties[41] managed to get into the lower house, creating the most

39 *Babis' ANO score resounding success in Czech general elections*, Radio Prague, 21 October 2017, http://www.radio.cz/en/section/news/babiss-ano-score-resounding-success-in-czech-general-elections

40 In 2006, Civic Democratic Party (ODS) won 35.28% of the votes (81 seats) while Czech Social-Democratic Party secured 32.32 % of them (74 seats).

41 The nine parties that managed to get into the Czech lower house are: the liberal-centrist-populist ANO (29.6% -78 seats), the centre-right Civic Democratic Party (ODS) with 11.3% (25 seats), the libertarian Pirates (Pirati) with 10.8 % (22 seats), the anti-migrant, hard Euroskeptic Freedom and Direct Democracy (SPD) with 10.6 % (22 seats), the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (KSCM) with 7,8% (15 seats), the Czech Social Democratic Party (CSSD) with 7.3% (15 seats), the pro-European conservative Christian and Democratic Union – Czechoslovak People's Party (KDU-CSL) with 5.8% (10 seats), the liberal-conservative TOP 09 with 5.3% (7 seats) and the centre-right localist Mayors and Independents (STAN) with 5.2% (6 seats).
Source: Ibid.

fragmented political landscape in modern Czech history. The runner-up of the elections, the Civic Democratic Party (ODS), received only a third of ANO's vote total, which was enough for 25 seats in the Chamber of Deputies. Despite the election victory, it soon became evident that ANO wouldn't be able to form a government, and the Czech Republic would have to brace itself for a long-term political crisis. This governmental and broader political crisis can only serve to increase the existing tensions in the Czech public, and to render the dissatisfaction and anti-establishment sentiments worse. The crisis has two interlinked dimensions. The first one is related to the fragmentation of political life and the bad relationships between the political parties, which render coalition formation nearly impossible. The other is the corruption investigation against the ANO leader and PM candidate, Andrej Babis, which render him unacceptable to all political parties but his own.

The present paper would like to examine the immediate impact of the election results, along with some of the leading threats facing Czech democracy.

KEYWORDS: migration crisis, eurozone, populism, middle-income trap, media

Introduction

Central European countries have been characterised recently as a heaven for illiberal regimes. In the Czech Republic, ANO, one of the most feared, populist and anti-establishment parties, is officially a liberal party and a member of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE) in the European Parliament. This also implies that if we accept the labelling of all V4 governments as populist and illiberal, then all of the four most prominent European party families have an internal problem to deal with.

While the Visegrad States are labelled as xenophobic, anti-migration and nationalist, the new Czech prime minister is originally a Slovak citizen with ethnic Hungarian roots, while the leader of the far-right party is half Japanese and half Czech, and he was born in Tokyo.

These are also the most often mentioned clichés concerning the 2017 parliamentary elections in the Czech Republic. Most of the correspondents described the results as unexpected, even though the most significant trends had been apparent for some time, and the majority of the opinion polls forecast the election results accurately.[42] The winning party, ANO, had been ahead in the polls for years and was growing in popularity. Also, those surprised by the outcome forget how similar the Czech results were to those in other European and regional elections.[43] Clearly, a trend was emerging.

42 For a collection of opinion polls about the Czech legislative elections, see: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Opinion_polling_for_the_Czech_legislative_election,_2017

43 The latest example could be the Austrian elections. More details at: *Austria election results: Far-right set to enter government as conservatives top poll*, [In] Independent, October 2017 http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/austria-election-exit-poll-result-sebastian-kurz-ovp-latest-projection-freedom-far-right-a8001811.html

Still, the results of the Czech legislative elections make it clear why we talk so often about the crisis of liberal democracy. It also displays some characteristics that reflect recent developments not only in the Czech Republic but at the central European level as well. Moreover, these match certain global trends too. In the present article, we would like to review how populism dominated the Czech election and to show how the established political parties tried to run on a populist agenda.

Crisis of the traditional parties

The first takeaway is the crisis of the traditional parties and that the political establishment is no longer welcome, while politicians that remain outsiders and keep their anti-establishment non-professional political profiles are becoming increasingly popular. As a result of the recent elections, three new parties gained representation in the lower house of parliament, and the ANO party led by Andrej Babis also campaigned as an anti-establishment party. Meanwhile, the traditional parties in the Czech Republic suffered significant losses, and both members of the previous coalition, the Social Democratic Party (ČSSD) and the Christian Democratic Union (KDU-ČSL), along with the liberal-conservative TOP09, barely passed the electoral threshold despite the fact that they have been present in the Czech Parliament continuously throughout the last decade. They are now facing crises that jeopardise their entire existence. The populist agenda was so dominant in the election campaign that even traditional parties have adopted a populist tone by now.[44] Recently, it

44 Anti-migration statements and critical notes on the EU were present in all party programmes.

has become extremely hard to determine who is not a populist in the Czech political sphere. Based on the description below, in the present study I consider the ANO, SPD, Pirates and KSCM parties as parties with predominantly populist agendas. In addition to the aforementioned, the ODS campaign also included substantial populist elements.

ANO's populist agenda was overwhelming in the campaign. PM candidate Babis promised a more professional state, and his proposals included the abolition of the Senate and city-councils to save money and increase efficiency. In line with this constitutional populism, he suggested to lower the number of representatives in the Czech lower house to 101 MPs from the current number of 200. The ANO also campaigned with the promise of introducing lower income taxes for the vast majority of the population. Like most of the other Czech political parties, ANO actively campaigned against the introduction of the euro and mandatory refugee quotas. These ideas of Andrej Babis were best summarized in his book *What I dream of when I happen to sleep*, which offers a vision for Czechia until 2035.[45] The book was published six months before the election and included a number of initiatives. In addition to the issues above, he idolises Czech rural life and promised large-scale infrastructure developments to improve conditions and halt urbanisation. He supports free higher education but wants a dual education system to meet the needs of businesses. Most importantly, he promises to fight corruption. He claims that he joined politics because he was fed up with the corrupt Czech political system and that his main goal is to stop corruption. Transparency was at the centre of ANO's

45 A. Babiš: *O Čem Sním, Když Náhodou*, Praha 2017 https://www.anobudelip.cz/file/edee/2017/o-cem-snim-kdyz-nahodou-spim.pdf , English translation is available at https://issuu.com/andrejbabis/docs/what_i_dream_of_when_i_happen_to_sl

programme despite the fact that there is an ongoing investigation against Babis by the Czech authorities and OLAF, the European Anti-Fraud Office. The investigation was concluded after the elections, and it determined that Babis was responsible for fraudulent acts related to EU subsidies.[46]

Other parties were no less populist in their respective campaigns. The Pirates' programme focused on political transparency, e-government, preventing tax avoidance, supporting SMEs and increased direct public participation in decision-making. The party travelled across Czechia with a "jailbus" campaign that promised to jail financial wrongdoers and to prevent tech from *becoming a tool of digital totalitarianism*. The party's programme was as populist as ANO's, but unlike the latter it was targeted at the younger generation.[47] The far-right SPD focused its campaign on strengthening its anti-migration and anti-Muslim stance, and on boosting anti-EU sentiments in Czechia.[48]

The Communists in Czechia stand for policies that are much closer to the Venezuelan-style populist socialism than to classic communism. The KCSM's programme for the 2017 elections included well-known populist elements such as increasing the tax burden of large corporations, lower tax rates for citizens, free schooling, wage increases in a number of sectors and the valorisation of pensions. The programme

46 *OLAF ends investigation into Czech EU subsidy fraud* [In] Prague Monitor, December 2017, http://www.praguemonitor.com/2017/12/21/olaf-ends-investigation-czech-eu-subsidy-fraud

47 The main elements of the Pirate party's programme: *20 nejdůležitějších bodů pirátského programu* https://www.pirati.cz/program/psp2017/20-nejdulezitejsich-bodu-programu/

48 Mortkowitz Bauerova, Ladka: How a Tokyo-Born Outsider Became the Face of Czech Nationalism, [In] Bloomberg News , October 2017 https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2017-10-13/xenophobia-victim-poised-to-boost-czech-far-right-in-parliament

combines massive redistribution and a strong social welfare state with nationalism, by putting a strong emphasis on national culture and interests; this reinforces the similarity with "Chavismo".[49]

Polls from December 2017 suggested that while ANO had been able to significantly increase its support to 35%, both TOP09 and the liberal-moderate Mayors and Independents (STAN) party would not pass the electoral threshold.[50] This meant that Babis might have an interest in calling for early elections, primarily if he were able to communicate the prevailing situation as one in which he plays the role of the victim of the traditional political elite.

The fact that more than 50% of Czech voters voted for anti-establishment parties[51] is a warning sign, but what is even more disconcerting is that if the populist ANO were to decide to go down a Eurosceptic road, anti-EU MPs would wield a two-thirds majority in the Czech lower house.

These anti-EU parties include the far-right Freedom and Direct Democracy (SPD) and the far-left Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (KSČM), along with an established party, the conservative ODS. SPD has ruled out the possibility of giving parliamentary support to the Babis government after the new defence minister called SPD a *modern fascist movement*, but the pro-EU democratic parties also continue to reject any negotiations while Babis is under investigation. The Communists remain the only party that has not ruled

49 The programme of the Communist Party is available at https://www.kscm.cz/sites/default/files/soubory/Program%20KS%C4%8CM/volebni_program_kscm_pro_volby_do_ps_pcr_2017.pdf
50 *Tisková zpráva, Centrum pro výzkum veřejného mínění*, December 2017, https://cvvm.soc.cas.cz/media/com_form2content/documents/c2/a4476/f9/pv171221.pdf
51 ANO (29.6%), Pirati (10.8%) and SPD (10.6%) adds up to 50%. but the Communist party (7.8%) can also be considered an anti-establishment choice.

out supporting the Babis government, but their seats would not be enough to attain a majority. All other parties have also rejected tolerating a minority government. The fact that the ANO-led government can only rely on the Communists for outside support raised further concerns about the future of liberal democracy in the Czech Republic.

No more Czechs and balances?

What is worrisome from the perspective of Czech democracy is the fact that Babis was campaigning with the promise of limiting the power of the legislature in favour of the executive branch as described above. On the other hand, ANO promised to reduce the number of ministers in the government and to simplify parliamentary procedures to expedite the adoption of laws. He also pledged to lower the number of MPs from 200 to 100, which would severely threaten proportional representation.[52]

Babis views the country as a private company, and he promised to streamline state management by increasing efficiency through centralisation.[53] The populist promise of limiting politics and improving efficiency by scaling back the size and influence of public administration holds a number of threats to democracy. Primarily, as it suggests that the overall aim is not to strengthen the executive power in general, but rather the power of the prime minister. As such, it is reminiscent of one of the recent developments in Hungary and to some extent in Poland.

52 A. Babiš, A: *O Čem Sním, Když Náhodou*
53 P. Laca: *Why Czechs May Elect a Populist Billionaire Too,* [In] Bloomberg News, L. Bauerova, October 2017. https://www.bloomberg.com/politics/articles/2017-10-12/why-czechs-may-elect-a-populist-billionaire-too-quicktake-q-a

The situation is worse when one sees how Babis dominates the Czech media as the most prominent media tycoon in the country[54]. Reporters Without Borders noted that even though his influence in the media is still not dominant, the trends are generally bad.[55] The ownership structure in the Czech media changed completely in recent years, with many media outlets shifting from foreign strategic investors into the hands of local oligarchs. Recently, media freedom has emerged as one of the most pressing issues in central Europe.[56]

Only a few days after the election, the far-right SPD called for direct state supervision over the Czech public media.[57] This initiative is very much in line with the intentions of the new Prime Minister, as the ANO movement and Babis himself is often criticized by Czech public television and radio, which are quasi-independent, although their board is dominated by delegates nominated by the Czech Social Democratic Party.

Keeping in mind Babis' personal dominance in the commercial media, the threat of an ANO-controlled state media raises many questions, but the possibility of further centralisation in the private

54 J. Adamec: *Who owns the Czech media?* [In] Visegrad Revue, February 2014. http://visegradrevue.eu/who-owns-the-czech-media/
55 *Local oligarch conflicts of interest dominate Czech Media,* [In] Reporters Without Borders, July 2016. https://rsf.org/en/news/local-oligarch-conflicts-interest-dominate-czech-media
56 For further details check the country reports of Freedom House: *Freedom of the Press 2017*, https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/freedom-press-2017
57 *Czech politicians reject Okamura's call for state-run ČRo, ČT* [In] Prague Daily Monitor October 2017 http://praguemonitor.com/2017/10/25/czech-politicians-reject-okamuras-call-state-run-%C4%8Dro-%C4%8Dt

media sector should also alarm the EU.[58] So far, Brussels has been reluctant to comment on Babis' media influence, but this might well change if he begins to directly manage the state media.[59] He needs outside support to enact such changes, but SPD appears willing to provide it to some extent, although the political price is unknown.

On the other hand, it should be noted that Babis tried to calm those worried about the future of democracy in the Czech Republic. The government appears to lack both the will and the capability for introducing judicial reforms similar to the ones recently seen in Poland. The new Czech government tried to calm those worried about the future of democracy in the Czech Republic by stating that he has no intention of initiating judicial reforms similar to the ones recently seen in Poland. [60]

Babis also heavily criticised the Czech police and the prosecutor's office, which have petitioned to lift his and his fellow MPs' immunity before the new Parliament was even formed. The investigation of Babis' role in a fraud allegation that involved EU subsidies was a dominant issue in the election campaign but had little to no impact on ANO's electoral support. Babis successfully spun this corruption case as a politically motivated attack against him and the ANO, arguing that the investigation had no basis. In a certain way, Babis

58 V. Štětka: *The Czech elections and the future of media independence*, [In] Visegrad Insight, January 2018. http://visegradinsight.eu/the-czech-elections-and-the-future-of-media-independence/

59 A. Eriksson, *EU washes hands of Czech media debate*, [In] EUobserver, Brussels, May 2017. https://euobserver.com/political/138071

60 *The speech of Prime Minister Andrej Babiš at the meeting with ambassadors*, Government of the Czech Republic, January 2018 https://www.vlada.cz/en/clenove-vlady/premier/speeches/the-speech-of-prime-minister-andrej-babis-at-the-meeting-with-ambassadors-162902/

even tried to use the case against him as an example of the level of corruption among the opposing parties and in the bureaucracy.[61] The previous Parliament had lifted his immunity once, and the process led to his dismissal from his ministerial position at the time, but with the new election his immunity was renewed.

Corruption is a major issue on the political agenda, but many voters respected that in his previous position as finance minister, Babis himself did a lot to lift the Czech economy and his strict fiscal policies led to a budget surplus for the first time in modern Czech history. Although a number of opposition parties, especially the Pirates, used the notion of fighting corruption in a very populist manner in their campaign (promising to send the entire political elite and all the oligarchs to prison), this had a limited impact on the public's perception of Babis and his ANO party. Incidentally, they too ran on an anti-corruption platform. It appears that anti-corruption campaigns coupled with populist movements did help parties such as the Pirates succeed in gaining popularity but failed to topple ANO's base of support.

The further rise of anti-EU sentiments

Currently, the Czech Republic is one of the most Eurosceptic EU Member States. In the Standard Eurobarometer 87 opinion poll, only 31% of the Czech citizens supported further enlargement policies, a

61 *Czech Police ask parliament to allow prosecution of prospective PM Babis*, [In] Reuters November 2017. https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-czech-politics/czech-police-ask-parliament-to-allow-prosecution-of-prospective-pm-babis-idUKKBN1DL0TO?il=0

mere 20% endorsed accession to the eurozone, 39% were in favour of a common migration policy.[62] Trust in EU institutions has been traditionally low, and the image of "Brussels" is extremely negative.[63] Czech citizens remain extremely cautious to any form of common EU migration policies, even though the Czech Republic doesn't have a non-EU border and it is not a destination country for migrants, either, as evidenced by the low number of asylum claims during the height of the migration crisis.[64] Nevertheless, as the most recent Eurobarometer showed, this fear fuelled and dominated the election campaign. Czechs are less concerned about migration as a domestic problem than as a global EU issue. Furthermore, most Czechs are also somewhat worried about the rise in prices and living costs, which leads them to a general opposition to joining the eurozone.[65]

The fear of inflation is obviously linked with the question of introducing the euro, and almost all of the political parties that succeeded in the election attempted to attract voters by arguing against the euro and promising to do their best to keep the Czechs away out of the eurozone. Currently, 73% of Czechs oppose the euro while the share of the public who reject the common currency in Hungary and Romania is only 36%.[66]

It is by no means a coincidence that all parties had a strong message with populist undertones when it came to the issues of

62 Note these number are compared to the European average of 40%, 60% and 68% respectively. *Standard Eurobarometer 87. Spring 2017.* Retrieved from: http://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/Survey/getSurveyDetail/yearFrom/2016/yearTo/2018/surveyKy/2142
63 *Ibid*
64 *Migration Crisis: migration to Europe explained in seven charts*. BBC News. March 2016. http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-34131911
65 Standard Eurobarometer 88, December 2017, pp.6-11. http://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/Survey/getSurveyDetail/instruments/STANDARD/surveyKy/2143
66 Ibid, p.37

migration and the introduction of the euro. As a recent FES report highlighted, there is an overwhelming consensus among the Czech parties on opposing relocation quotas and supporting the strengthening of external borders.[67]

In the Czech elections there was a strong public consensus to oppose migration and the adoption of the euro. Political parties unanimously met that demand regarding migration but thy were significantly more split regarding joining the eurozone. Traditional anti-EU parties, such as the SPD and the communists, have historically rejected eurozone membership. It is alarming, however, that more mainstream parties adopted similar positions during this last election and are also attempting to raise their political profile by relying on political capital generated by anti-euro sentiments.[68] Clearly, there is a popular demand for political parties that oppose the Czech Republic's accession to the eurozone. This was clearly apparent in the case of the ODS, which was the runner-up in the election; the party even stated that this question would be the primary issue they want to raise during the coalition talks. As they have emphasised, the ODS will only participate in a coalition government if the other coalition partners guarantee that the Czech Republic will remain outside the eurozone.[69] These hard-line approaches reflect a public demand for an EU-sceptic government.

The social democrats and the ANO played a double game.

67 M. Falter and V. Stern: *Fall Elections in Germany, Austria, and the Czech Republic and their Impact on European Migration Policies*, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Regional Project "Flight, Migration, Integration in Europe", Budapest 2018, http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/budapest/14036-20180117.pdf

68 Note the earlier references to the high percent of Czech voters who are opposed to the introduction of the euro in their country.

69 *Nižší daně či zrušení EET. ODS představila dvanáct podmínek pro vstup do budoucí koalice*, Novinky.cz, August 2017

Although the CSSD supported joining the ERM II exchange rate mechanism, at the same time it was against introducing the euro at this stage.[70] ANO evinces even less support for the euro, as Babis see the crown/euro exchange rate as a pre-condition of joining the eurozone.[71] Even in the best of circumstances, this would take several years to implement.

Interestingly, the TOP09, the Pirate and the KDU-ČSL parties[72] all support full eurozone accession, while the STAN party's stance is very similar to the CSSD's half-hearted support for the euro project. This phenomenon is an interesting element of Czech political life, as most of the parties have taken positions that defy the will of their respective base.

Still, populist parties, including ANO, refused to support the introduction of the euro, despite the fact that because of his business interests, Andrej Babis would personally benefit from introducing the common currency.

70 *ČSSD, KDU-ČSL, i TOP 09 jsou pro zavedení eura, ODS ho odmítá*, Ceské Noviny, June 2017 http://www.ceskenoviny.cz/zpravy/cssd-kdu-csl-i-top-09-jsou-pro-zavedeni-eura-ods-ho-odmita/1493799

71 Note that eurozone accession requires stable exchange rates and membership in and compliance with the rules governing the European Exchange Rate Mechanism. The EU's exchange rate mechanism. European Commission. Retrieved from: https://ec.europa.eu/info/business-economy-euro/euro-area/enlargement-euro-area/introducing-euro/adoption-fixed-euro-conversion-rate/erm-ii-eus-exchange-rate-mechanism_en

72 *Nechat si českou korunu, nebo ne? Na přijetí eura se strany jen tak neshodnou*, Novinky.cz, October 2017 https://www.novinky.cz/domaci/451408-nechat-si-ceskou-korunu-nebo-ne-na-prijeti-eura-se-strany-jen-tak-neshodnou.html

Reasons behind the anger

There are a number of analyses trying to describe the roots of the Czechs' EU scepticism and their attraction to populist parties. In a recent report, researchers of the Carnegie Endowment suggest that one of the main driving forces of the populism and of "illiberal trends" in the region is linked to the concept of the so-called middle-income trap.[73] While the Czech economy has converged to the EU average, wages remained at one-third of the European level, while prices, by contrast, have risen quickly and are converging to the EU average. This phenomenon is also readily apparent in the abovementioned fear of inflation that manifests itself in the Eurobarometer surveys.

Meanwhile, even populist and nationalist leaders will not revolt against western capital. V4 countries are currently the most open economies and most rapidly growing markets in the European Union.[74] While central Europe is protesting against free markets and capitalism or the eurozone, its leaders have to serve the interests of western investors[75] by keeping taxes for the biggest investors low, while taxation on labour is higher than the EU average.[76]

It is no surprise that voters throughout the region are becoming increasingly disillusioned with traditional left-wing values or come

73 B. Jarábik and P. Ucen: *What's Driving Czech Populism?*, Judy Dempsey's Strategic Europe, Carnegie Europe, January 2018, http://carnegieeurope.eu/strategiceurope/75228
74 *Central Europe is rising fast*, Central European Financial Observer, July 2017. https://financialobserver.eu/poland/central-europe-is-rising-fast/
75 L. Bershidsky: *How Western Capital Colonized Eastern Europe*, Bloomberg, 12.09.2017, https://www.bloomberg.com/view/articles/2017-09-12/how-western-capital-colonized-eastern-europe
76 *Tax burden of typical workers in EU28*, Institut Molinari, 2016 http://www.institutmolinari.org/IMG/pdf/tax-burden-eu-2016.pdf

to doubt whether left-wing parties can represent the interests of the working class. This can be seen in the dissatisfaction with the centre and left-leaning parties during the election.[77] The region is beginning to show an ongoing trend where working class voters leave the political left and choose populist or far-right parties. This was first visible in Hungary when MSZP voters chose Jobbik in 2010.[78] Furthermore, this trend continued in the Slovak Republic, while in the Czech elections ANO and the far-right SPD gained most of their voters from the CSSD and to a lesser extent from the Communists. These parties were more popular in the poor rural areas and among the elderly and less educated voters.

We also have to highlight that the Czechs voted against their own political elite. During the campaign, the political elites in parties such as Pirates, ANO, SPD, STAN, and to some extent the Communists, all attempted to portray themselves as not being part of the traditional elite and focused instead on trying to appear as grassroots organisations. Czech voters saw that their political elite was unable to solve the impact of the economic crises, and together with Brussels they were seen and labelled as incompetent and unable to control and reduce social and economic differences within the country.

Intolerance is also not a new phenomenon. Even before the migration crises, EU surveys highlighted that the region is the

77 Note that the Communists, Social Democrats, Christian Democrats and Top 09 parties all lost support in the election. Source: *Czech elections have become really volatile. This year is no exception.* October 2017. https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2017/10/24/czech-elections-have-become-really-volatile-this-year-was-no-exception/?utm_term=.f8972845a154

78 *Medián: Hogy szavaztak a magyarok 2010 áprilisában*, http://www.median.hu/object.7c017750-53b9-4a03-87c6-a771ee519bb8.ivy

least open to external migrants in Europe.[79] Xenophobia was also relatively high, but it was mostly directed at the Roma minority. Yet in the last decade, no EU programme challenged this issue in the broader region and clearly these sentiments have flourished.[80]

What will happen in 2018?

The Andrej Babis-led ANO will not be able to form a government in 2018. The alleged corruption of Babis is an excellent and reasonable excuse for every political party to call him a persona non-grata in Czech politics. He has two options at this time, since he has no chance of winning a parliamentary vote on his immunity. He could nominate somebody else as prime minister or call for a snap election. In any case, Babis and populist and extreme parties will remain in the Czech public sphere. In this situation, Babis is simply a symptom of a deeper condition afflicting Czech politics. If he is forced out without addressing the serious concerns listed in this paper, Czech politics will repeat itself and find a new Babis-like figure. Those who think that they should approach this trend by challenging the symptoms of populism –in this case by forcing Babis out of the power – instead of finding the cure for the real problems are wrong. The situation is serious and while the EU and liberal forces need to be aware of what is happening, they also need to understand that the rise of populism is now an integral part of European politics, particularly in the V4. If populism comes

79 *The Czech Republic: Migration trends and political dynamics*, Globsec Policy Institute https://www.globsec.org/publications/czech-republic-migration-trends-political-dynamics/

80 *Ibid.* Note: even though migration was rejected by the Czech public prior to the crisis, still there was an increase from pre-migration crisis statistics.

under attack from more traditional political elites, it will simply infuriate the populist voting base, give ammunition to the populist leaders and further engrain their ideas. EU and liberal forces may relax for a few moments, but they need to realise that the problems that have given rise to populism are here to stay, populism will continue to grow, and people's dissatisfaction in the Czech Republic will only increase as the elites and the EU continue to ignore their political will.

Babis can highlight how traditional parties hinder reforms, while his enemies can stress the fight against corruption as the most important goal and the EU can be also blamed for intervening in Czech domestic politics through OLAF.[81]

In the meanwhile, the potential Czech elections in 2018 will raise plenty of issues that will provide us with the opportunity to analyse the state of illiberal Czechia at the end of the year.

81 *EC evaluates OLAF's report on the Stork's Nest case*, Radio Praha, December 2017. http://www.radio.cz/en/section/news/ec-evaluates-olafs-report-on-the-storks-nest-case

SPECIAL FOCUS: FRANCE IN 2017

Movement in the Radical Opposition: Struggle for Dominance

BY ESZTER PETRONELLA SOÓS

SUMMARY

Two radical parties that are in many respects very similar in their outlook compete for the status of the main opposition force in France. Even though in 2017 the National Front (FN) and its leader, Marine Le Pen, achieved their biggest electoral success to date, winning more votes than ever, the party is riddled with dissatisfaction because of the electoral defeat suffered in the presidential election. Though basically the underlying dissatisfaction is ideological in nature – in other words it focuses on the political course that the party ought to pursue to become successful –, it also involves an element of contention concerning the party leadership. In fact, the personnel debates have recently led to a party split. At the end of 2017, the National Front remains mired in a state of psychological crisis.

An opposite trend has played out on the radical left, where presidential candidate Jean-Luc Mélenchon and his France Unbowed movement achieved a surprisingly good result in the presidential election, and then also surpassed the National Front in the competition of radical parties in the parliamentary election, win-

ning 17 seats in the National Assembly. Jean-Luc Mélenchon and his party tried to seize the opportunity that thus opened up, and in the fall season they sought to portray France Unbowed as the leading opposition party. Nevertheless, the polls still do not give Mélenchon and his party an unequivocal edge over FN, nor compared to the other opposition parties.[82] The radical left has until the respective party congresses of FN and of the Socialists in March 2018 to establish and consolidate a lead. President Emmanuel Macron, in the meanwhile, has an interest in a situation in which Marine Le Pen will continue to be seen as his chief rival, while preventing Jean-Luc Mélenchon from emerging as his main challenger.

KEYWORDS: France Unbowed, National Front, Marine Le Pen, Jean-Luc Mélenchon, European Union, opposition, Emmanuel Macron

82 *Popularité: Macron et Philippe repartent à la baisse* [in:] Challenges, 22 October 2017, https://www.challenges.fr/politique/popularite-macron-et-philippe-repartent-a-la-baisse_508027

Introduction

In France, the presence of an anti-elite populist style in politics has in many respects reached systemic proportions. For one, mediatised modern politics inevitably begins to assume populist attributes. Second, the underlying constitutional set-up of the Fifth Republic in France (1958-) involves a certain type of populist monarchism, a hostility to parliamentarism, an anti-elite attitude, and a direct, "personal" relationship between the sole leader, the president of the republic, and the people. Consequently, persons who are deemed capable of performing the duties of the presidency are far more important in the Fifth Republic than party manifestoes, and this is especially so since presidential elections are regularly held before elections to the National Assembly.[83]

Thus, in 2017 Emmanuel Macron's presidential campaign was governed by an anti-elitism of sorts, and his victory led to a retrenchment in the role and influence of the governing elite that had controlled France for decades. Since the use of the term populist could open up too many debates concerning the essential features of the political system, we may be better advised in referring to the parties commonly called "populists" as radical right-wing or radical left-wing parties (right and left-wing because in contemporary France radicalism is present on both sides). Since we do not simply analyse these parties' activities in the French context, however, we naturally also accept and use the term populism, too, for in the international literature and press the political movements in question are widely referred to as populists.

83 Also see: E.P. Soós, *A köztársaság-fogalom értelmezésének szintjei Franciaországban*, [in:] Politikatudományi Szemle, 2013/2, pp. 51-69.

While in the early period of the Fifth Republic the communists, later complemented by a continuously growing National Front (*Front national* – FN), dominated the field of radical politics, today the main radical movements are the FN on the right and the left-wing France Unbowed (*France insoumise* – FI), both of which vie for the status of the "leading opposition force." Indeed, with respect to these parties, the most important event of 2017 was the following: As compared to early 2017, the FN and Marine Le Pen appear to have lost their position as the main (radical) challengers of mainstream politics, and as a result the game has become open-ended once again, though we shall somewhat qualify this general observation below. One of the major issues in France in 2018 will be whether a "main challenger" to Emmanuel Macron will emerge, and if so, whether he or she will be a radical. For the incumbent president and his movement, such a development would be most beneficial.

The 2017 election: Le Pen falls back, Mélenchon rises

By contrast, the year 2017 had begun with the possibility that Marine Le Pen and her National Front could achieve a major breakthrough in the presidential election, winning dozens of seats in the National Assembly, and that with the increased influence thus attained they could confidently look forward to 2022. Press reports suggested that FN officials hoped for 40-100 seats in parliament, based on the assumption that in the second round of the 2015 regional elections FN's representatives had finished with results exceeding 45% in 49 National Assembly districts, and also based on the fact that in the 2017 presidential election Marine Le Pen finished ahead of Macron in 217 of the 577 parliamentary

constituencies.[84] There were also some who hoped that maybe FN would not even have to wait until 2022 for an even greater breakthrough; the election of Donald Trump to the US presidency might well be followed by the election of Marine Le Pen in France. The state apparatus, too, seriously considered the possibility of a Marine Le Pen presidency, as "secret" plans were drawn up in the event that the candidate of the radical right were to become president. It is rumoured that the state bodies were prepared for potential riots and public disorder, and they would have called a special session of parliament. It was also planned that the government of the Socialist Party (PS) politician Bernard Cazeneuve would not resign – as is customary in such a situation – but would wait for the results of the parliamentary elections a few weeks later, in the hope that the new president would not win a majority in the National Assembly. Thus, the new president would not receive a full mandate to govern from the public and would be compelled to accept a so-called co-habitation – in other words, the populist president would have to govern jointly with a moderate left-wing or moderate right-wing prime minister.[85]

Ultimately, that's not how things played out, though. True enough, in the presidential election of 2017 Marine Le Pen did indeed attain the best result ever for her party, since in absolute numbers FN never received as many votes as it did last year (10,638,475 votes

84 *Législatives: les ambitieux calculs du FN*, [in:] Bfmtv.com, 27 April 2017, http://www.bfmtv.com/politique/legislatives-les-ambitieux-calculs-du-fn-1151942.html.
85 On the "secret" plan, see: H. Jon, *Secret plans to 'protect' France in the event of Le Pen victory emerge*, [in:] The Guardian, 18 May 2017, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/may/18/secret-plans-protect-le-pen-french-republic-emerge.

in the second round of the presidential election[86]). Nevertheless, despite the stunning success the party perceived this result as a disappointment that triggered an internal leadership and ideological crisis. The internal expectations (ideally, an unanticipated victory, but at least around 40% or more of the votes in the second round) far exceeded the actual results (33.9%). Marine Le Pen could not – any maybe she did not even want to – reduce the inflated internal expectations. She probably did not believe that she had a realistic shot at winning: in the debate between the two rounds, she did not position herself as a presidential candidate/potential president, but as the next opposition leader facing the prospective President Macron (thinking about 2022, this was not a totally irrational idea, but in the debate Le Pen ought to have assumed a different role, namely that of a potentially governing alternative president). Moreover, in what was labelled an aggressive appearance by Le Pen, she was unable to clearly and intelligibly explain her key proposals – including, for example, the abolition of the euro and the reintroduction of the ECU structure[87] – and their anticipated impact. Her debate strategy proved to be a serious strategic flop that led to what was deemed a weak performance in the presidential election, which then proceeded to cause a crisis and party split in the FN.

The former PS politician Jean-Luc Mélenchon and the left-wing radical France Unbowed movement he leads were on a completely opposite trajectory in 2017. Mélenchon performed surprisingly well in the 2017 presidential election, his popularity increased as

86 For all 2017 presidential election results and voting data see: *Résultats de l'élection présidentielle 2017*, https://www.interieur.gouv.fr/Elections/Les-resultats/Presidentielles/elecresult__presidentielle-2017/(path)/presidentielle-2017/FE.html.
87 *Le Pen proposes return to ECU-style system to replace euro*, [in:] Euractiv, 4 January 2017, http://www.euractiv.com/section/euro-finance/news/le-pen-proposes-return-to-ecu-style-system-to-replace-euro/.

the campaign went on. With a 19.58% vote share and the 7,059,951 votes he won in the first round, he nearly doubled his first-round performance in 2012[88] (back then, he had received 3,984,822 and 11.10%). Moreover, the candidate of the radical left won practically three times as many votes in 2017 as the candidate of the governing Socialist Party, Benoît Hamon (2,291,288 votes, 6.36%). The collapse of the Socialist Party thus offered an opportunity and momentum for the radical left in its effort to try to establish itself as the leading political force of the left – and to assume at the same time the mantle of the "main challenger of Emmanuel Macron."

In the two rounds of the elections for the National Assembly (held on 11 and 18 of June), which followed the presidential election held on 23 April and 7 May, the two radical parties attained roughly the same result. Yet, while France Unbowed managed to win 17 seats in the National Assembly, the National Front only clinched 8 – though as a matter of fact this was still four times as many as five years before.[89] However, this outcome occurred despite the fact that the National Front won *more* votes than Mélenchon's party in both rounds of the parliamentary election. In the first round, the National Front's 2,990,454 votes exceeded France Unbowed's 2,497,622 by nearly half a million, and in the second round the Front won 1,590,869 votes while the candidates of Mélenchon's party received 883,573.[90] The reason for this striking dispropor-

88 For all 2012 presidential election results and voting data, see: *Résultats de l'élection présidentielle 2012*, https://www.interieur.gouv.fr/Elections/Les-resultats/Presidentielles/elecresult__PR2012/(path)/PR2012/FE.html.
89 *Deux députés FN entrent à l'Assemblée nationale*, [in:] Franceinfo, 17 June 2012, https://www.francetvinfo.fr/politique/legislatives-marine-le-pen-battue-d-une-courte-tete-a-henin-beaumont-marion-marechal-le-pen-elue-a-carpentras_108525.html.
90 For all 2017 parliamentary election results and data, see: *Résultats des élections législatives 2017*, https://www.interieur.gouv.fr/Elections/Les-resultats/Legislatives/elecresult__legislatives-2017/(path)/legislatives-2017/FE.html.

tionality is clearly that in the French electoral system based on single-member constituencies that must be won (in the first round) with absolute majorities, what counts is not the party's share of the votes but its ability to concentrate votes in the districts where they are most needed, as well as its skills in cutting deals with other parties about the mutual tactical withdrawal of candidates to ensure victories in districts where only one candidate from the coordinating parties remains in the race. Moreover, there is the possibility of securing the endorsement of other politicians (for example Socialists) who dropped out of the race in the first round. In the second round runoff, France Unbowed was clearly better able at mobilising reserves than the National Front, especially since the FN's national organisation is known to vary substantially in strength across the regions of France, with many local gaps: In south-eastern and eastern France, as well as in the north, it traditionally does better than in the country's central and western regions, though it is also true that step-by-step FN is fighting to overcome the gaps in its local organisation.

It's no coincidence: It appears that in France – where, it is worth recalling, communist ideology has had deep roots in the 20th century – left-wing radicalism is more respectable than right-wing radicalism, or at least it is more accepted in society. An interesting aspect of this phenomenon is that when the presidential race began to tighten before the first round, in light of the statistical margin of error in the polls there were four candidates that appeared to have a potentially realistic shot at making it into the run-off. At that point, pollsters tried to find out which victor each of the various potential matchups of runoff candidates would

yield.[91] Jean-Luc Mélenchon was the favourite in several match-ups (he would have defeated both François Fillon and Le Pen). At the same time, however, there was no conceivable scenario for the second round that would have ended up with Marine Le Pen becoming president. A few months later, in autumn, by contrast, survey data on Mélenchon's personal appeal began to deteriorate substantially. These survey results caution us to accept uncritically the notion that under certain circumstances Mélenchon could have become president: in autumn, 53% of respondents assessed that he was not competent, 55% found him unappealing and 68% considered him aggressive.[92]

In any case, with its electoral successes France Unbowed gained momentum in the second half of the year, precisely at the time when the National Front lost its own momentum after what was perceived as Marine Le Pen's disappointing performance in the presidential election. In the summer and fall, France Unbowed emerged as the most active opposition party that also drew the highest level of public attention. Moreover, on the left they become the dominant force at this time.

91 *Sondage: Macron et Le Pen en baisse mais toujours en tête,* [in:] BFMTV, 11 April 2017, http://www.bfmtv.com/politique/sondage-macron-et-le-pen-en-baisse-mais-toujours-en-tete-1140292.html.
92 *Les Français dressent un portrait sévère de Mélenchon, selon un sondage Odoxa*, [in:] Challenges, 21 September 2017, https://www.challenges.fr/top-news/les-francais-dressent-un-portrait-severe-de-melenchon-selon-un-sondage-odoxa_501186.

Le Pen's issues

In her presidential campaign, Marine Le Pen focused on migration, integration, Frexit (i.e. France's exit from the European Union) and especially the pledge to leave the euro-zone. She promised to suspend the implementation of the Schengen Agreement, and she said she would negotiate with the European partners about France's departure from the euro-zone after the German election. She further promised to hold a referendum on France's EU membership – that is on reclaiming French sovereignty, in her own interpretation – following these talks, and that she would quit her office if the public disagreed with the answer she proposed.[93]

In addition to Le Pen's weak performance in the debate between the two rounds of the presidential election, the difficulties that the National Front and its presidential candidate experienced in 2017 were also exacerbated by the problems in setting the party's political course. For one, a significant portion of French voters wanted to retain the euro, which put a ceiling on the potential support attainable by the National Front. Second, after the Brexit referendum and the victory of Donald Trump in the US presidential election, the radical right-wing party launched into a massive campaign for Frexit because it felt that it would be able to ride the wave generated by these two monumental international events. In so doing, however, it tied its own fate to these events, while the media was also speculating whether "Brexit and Trump" might indeed be followed by a Le Pen victory. However, by early-mid 2017 it was readily apparent that Brexit would not be a smooth process, and to this day it is far from clear whether it will benefit

93 *Le Pen attendra l'élection allemande pour négocier sur l'euro*, [in:] Reuters, 26 March 2017, https://fr.reuters.com/article/topNews/idFRKBN16X0K3-OFRTP.

the Brits. At the same time, since the entry into office of President Donald Trump, whose proclamations also veered into the territory of isolationism, things in the US have also not shaped up in a way that would allow his presidency to be unequivocally seen as a model to follow.

Thus, FN had to contend with the problem that Le Pen's personal performance was seen as lacklustre, while both Frexit and the pledge to abandon the euro-zone were increasingly controversial. This was a problem because since 2012 the National Front had pursued quasi-Gaullist, socially more sensitive and left-wing policies, and it was in this context that it pushed for sovereignty – which is also a vital component of Gaullism (the other core policies of the Front are the emphasis of identity and a more liberal (in the classical sense) representation of the interests of small businesses). The main representative of this Gaullist outlook in the FN, and thus the architect of the strategy that yielded substantial new electoral successes, was vice-chairman Florian Philippot, who also endowed the National Front with an aura of modernism in that he was publicly known to be active in the right-wing radical party as a gay politician (though originally he had been outed by the media).

It was known that despite the electoral successes, Florian Philippot was not really popular[94] within the National Front. After Le Pen's disastrous debate performance, it soon became clear that his intra-party opponents would try to realise their cherished goal of ridding the party of Philippot,[95] by making his departure a condition

94 *Florian Philippot et le FN: pourquoi tant de haine?* [in:] Le Point, 23 March 2017, http://www.lepoint.fr/presidentielle/florian-philippot-et-le-fn-pourquoi-tant-de-haine-23-03-2017-2114234_3121.php.
95 For more information, see: *Gilbert Collard voudrait "virer" Florian Philippot du FN*, [in:] Challenges, 13 March 2017, https://www.challenges.fr/politique/gilbert-collard-voudrait-virer-florian-philippot-du-fn_460063?xtor=RSS-40.

for Marine Le Pen staying on as party chair. After a few weeks of internal tension, Philippot decided to leave FN and formally established a new, competing movement called *Les Patriotes.* This was indeed a party split. The weakening of the sovereignty-focused, socially sensitive and anti-EU line in the party was expressly stated by the FN, [96] even as the party's representatives continued to struggle with the problem of explaining what exactly they planned to do with France's EU membership.[97] And while Florian Philippot's movement continues to propagate Frexit, the National Front's course and Le Pen's own position likely won't be clarified until the party congress scheduled for 10-11 March 2018 in Lille.

Moreover, throughout the entire year the National Front was also burdened with various problems involving corruption and party financing. On the one hand, there are proceedings ongoing against the party in connection with the party funding scheme it has set up – with the involvement of the communications company Riwal –, which is suspected by investigators to be based on inflated invoices whereby the party has allegedly defrauded French taxpayers who foot the bill for the campaign reimbursement received by FN. This issue did not implicate Marine Le Pen personally, but others did. Thus, for example, there was the case involving the assistants in the European Parliament that the National Front had employed – the suspicion was that in reality these assistants, who were officially working for FN MEPs, actually worked for the central party organisation. This controversy

96 *Pour Marine Le Pen, la sortie de l'euro n'est plus une priorité du Front national*, [in:] Franceinfo, 10 November 2017, https://www.francetvinfo.fr/politique/front-national/marine-le-pen-revoit-sa-position-sur-la-sortie-de-l-euro-plus-une-priorite-du-front-national_2414353.html.

97 See M. Clarisse, *Marine Le Pen ne conduira pas la liste FN aux élections européennes*, [in:] RTL, 2 December 2017, http://www.rtl.fr/actu/politique/marine-le-pen-ne-conduira-pas-la-liste-fn-aux-elections-europeennes-7791240923.

remained on the political agenda throughout the year, and in the summer the accusations connected thereto implicated the party chair herself. Nevertheless, at least in the political dimension (though not in the legal one), FN might have drawn some level of solace from the fact that there is practically no French party in the European Parliament that has not been the subject of such accusations. Jean-Luc Mélenchon, who had also served as an MEP between 2009-2017, was no exception: in the summer of 2017 an investigation was launched against him, too, following a report by an FN MEP who claimed that in reality Mélenchon's accredited parliamentary assistants were employed by the politician's previous organisation, the *Parti de Gauche* (PdG)[98] (the MEP Sophie Montel named 19 French MEPs as being guilty of similar offences, including representatives of the centrist party Modem, who were compelled to leave the first government of President Emmanuel Macron in the wake of these charges after only a few weeks in office).

Incidentally, Le Pen's funding problems are widely known. French banks do not like to loan money to the radical right-wing party, which is a problem for FN because the French system requires that campaign funds be advanced by the political organisations, which are then reimbursed upon the presentation of invoices and the review of the latter by the authorities. (An interesting titbit about the relation between FN and the banks is that in 2017 two major banks, the Société Générale and HSBC, almost simultaneously closed both the party's and Marine Le Pen's personal bank

98 D. Albertini and P. Steinmetz, *Assistants parlementaires: l'eurodéputé Mélenchon ciblé à son tour par la justice* [in:] Libération, 18 July 2017, http://www.liberation.fr/france/2017/07/18/assistants-parlementaires-l-eurodepute-melenchon-cible-a-son-tour-par-la-justice_1584730.

accounts). As a result, the National Front often turns to foreign banks, especially Russian financial institutions, which is a hot button issue in French politics due to the fears about Russian political meddling.[99] FN's potential funding by Russia is seen as a national security issue in France, so much so that President Emmanuel Macron's government has proposed to set up a state-owned bank that would fund French political parties in a non-discriminatory manner. However, the State Council has failed to ratify the proposal at first, and thus for now the idea of setting up a "democracy bank" is stalled.[100]

Mélenchon – how similar is he?

The French press found it extraordinarily interesting how similar the economic programmes of the radical left and the radical right looked, though of course the underlying motivations were different. Similarly to Le Pen, Jean-Luc Mélenchon also proposed a Eurosceptic programme, and he, too, was critical of the economic policy course offered by the Germans (this has been a longstanding bone of contention for the left-wing of the French left, including the left-wing of the Socialist Party[101]). The candidate of the radical left wanted to cooperate against Germany with the southern EU

99 A. Rettman, *Le Pen wanted millions more from Russia* [in:] Euobserver, 31 March 2017, https://euobserver.com/elections/137459. M. Turchi and M. Destal, *Le Pen-Putin friendship goes back a long way* [in:] Euobserver, 22 April 2017, https://euobserver.com/elections/137629.

100 V. Chocron and J-B. Jacquib, *Le projet de banque de la démocratie repoussé* [in:] Le Monde, 14 June 2017, http://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2017/06/14/le-projet-de-banque-de-la-democratie-repousse_5144390_3224.html

101 To understand how and why French parties (left and right) criticize Germany and its policies, see: D. Vernet, *Épouvantail ou modèle: l'Allemagne instrumentalisée sur la scène politique française*, [in:] Allemagne d'aujourd'hui, 214, (4), pp. 107-117.

Member States, which take a more generous approach towards inflation, the deficit and public debt. He also wanted to end the independence of the European Central Bank, was going to allow monetary financing and wanted to loosen inflation controls.[102] Moreover, unless he could attain some amendments to certain EU treaties, Mélenchon also believed that France might have to leave the EU. Furthermore, Mélenchon wanted France to unconditionally withdraw from NATO, the WTO, the World Bank and the IMF as well.[103] While Le Pen found herself forced to explain her friendship with Russian President Vladimir Putin, Mélenchon in turn had to explain why he sympathised with the late Hugo Chávez, why he found Chávez's policies to be social democratic in outlook and why he wants to join the anti-globalisation Bolivarian Alternative created by Hugo Chávez and Fidel Castro. A major difference between Mélenchon's and Le Pen's international programme was that the former wanted to pursue a very pro-migrant policy, including policies aimed at improving the conditions under which refugees were received; relaxing naturalisation requirements for migrants; issuing extended residency permits; and legalising the status of those who were in France illegally. The French press also reported in detail about the economic similarities between the candidates.[104] Both of them wanted to lower the retirement age to 60 and promised to increase salaries and the minimum wage; they

102 G. Poingt, *Dette publique: Mélenchon fait le pari de l'inflation* [in:] Le Figaro, 10 April 2017, http://www.lefigaro.fr/conjoncture/2017/04/10/20002-20170410ART-FIG00145-dette-publique-melenchon-fait-le-pari-de-l-inflation.php

103 T. Mcnicoll, *Mélenchon: Far-leftist surges in French polls, shocking the frontrunners* [in:] France24, 13 April 2017, http://www.france24.com/en/20170413-france-melenchon-far-leftist-giving-presidential-election-frontrunners-run-money.

104 See for example: G. Chazouillères, *Jean-Luc Mélenchon et Marine Le Pen: l'étonnante ressemblance de leurs programmes économiques* [in:] Capital.fr, 3 February 2017, http://www.capital.fr/economie-politique/jean-luc-melenchon-et-marine-le-pen-l-etonnante-ressemblance-de-leurs-programmes-economiques-1204870#xtor=RSS-217.

wanted to end privatisation; and sought to impose protectionist trade measures. Neither of them supported the implementation of the Posted Workers Directive, though it must be pointed out that both the previous, Socialist cabinet, the centre-right Republican opposition and President Emmanuel Macron, too, found this legislation to be detrimental from a French perspective (once installed as the new French president, Macron spent weeks bargaining with the European partners about changing the directive). Incidentally, Mélenchon was also considering raising taxes (an income tax with 14 tax rates and a ceiling on income), shorter working time and a massive public investment package.

Nevertheless, it was in the second half of 2017 that the focus on Jean-Luc Mélenchon and his France Unbowed – which was very active in parliament – really intensified. As one of their first actions, they wanted to have the EU flag removed from the National Assembly[105] and to replace it with the UN flag (the UN is the only international organisation that is uncontroversial with the French radical left). One should also note that this surge in anti-EU symbolism is logical in light of the fact that the party that is most distinctly identified as an anti-EU party – the National Front – is undergoing a crisis and might end up abandoning a portion of its left-wing manifesto commitments. Consequently, Mélenchon's team may well assume that with the right policies they could win over some FN voters. Another interesting turn of events is that even as the National Front, which is widely regarded as anti-Semitic, has striven hard to improve its stand-

105 *Assemblée nationale: La France insoumise ne parvient pas à faire remplacer le drapeau européen*, [in:] Le Monde, 4 October 2017, http://www.lemonde.fr/politique/article/2017/10/04/la-france-insoumise-souhaite-supprimer-le-drapeau-europeen-a-l-assemblee-nationale_5196015_823448.html?xtor=RSS-3208

ing in the Jewish community since 2012, Mélenchon's France Unbowed proffers harsh criticisms of Israel, often raising the charge of "Islamic-leftism" and of a new anti-Judaism stemming from anti-Zionism.[106] In the second half of 2017, even politicians affiliated with the French radical left – including four MPs who belong to France Unbowed – were banned from Israel after planning to visit Palestinian prisoners who are regarded as terrorists by the Israelis.[107] Furthermore, France Unbowed often complains about the media – maybe it is no coincidence that among French politicians and presidential candidates, Mélenchon was the most skilled, most deliberate and most effective in using his YouTube channel as an independent platform of communication. Now his party wants to take this a level further, it wants to create its own media in the form of a crowd-funded online television channel.[108]

Although the above might appear to suggest that in the period following the presidential election the popularity of Jean-Luc Mélenchon and his France Unbowed have surged, while those of Le Pen and her National Front have plummeted, in reality that is not exactly what transpired. A poll conducted six months after the election shows that despite the strategic shifts, the status quo continues to prevail in the respective positions of Mélenchon and Le Pen*:* the popularity of the latter remains stable (she would still make it into the presidential run-off), while Mélenchon's support has dropped slightly, though the change is within the margin of

106 See: P-A. Taguieff, *La nouvelle judéophobie*, Mille et une nuits, 2002.
107 *Sept élus, dont quatre députés "insoumis", interdits d'entrée en Israël* [in:] L'Obs, 14 November 2017 https://www.nouvelobs.com/politique/20171114.OBS7310/sept-elus-dont-quatre-deputes-insoumis-interdits-d-entree-en-israel.html?xtor=RSS-15
108 F. Bougon, *La webtélé des « insoumis », Le Média, dévoile financement et contenus* [in:] Le Monde, 19 November 2017 http://www.lemonde.fr/actualite-medias/article/2017/11/19/
avant-son-lancement-en-janvier-la-webtele-des-insoumis-le-media-devoile-financement-et-contenus_5217307_3236.html.

error.[109] The poll included François Fillon as the hypothetical candidate of the centre-right Republicans, and his support was five points lower compared to the result of the presidential election in spring 2017. President Macron, by comparison, had gained four points in the same poll, obviously owing in part to the fact that the right-wing base approved of the new French president's policies until then. One poll is of course just that, a single survey, and, moreover, Fillon is no longer active in French political life. In any case, the trends discussed above have thus far failed to manifest themselves in the relevant polling figures. What bears emphasising again is that the question of who is regarded as fit to discharge the duties of the president (how *présidentiable* he or she is) is more important in the French system than people's opinions about individual parties. Emmanuel Macron's success has also shown that as little as a year can be enough to build an organisation with the clout to win a national campaign: In other words, if we monitor the data and the relevant numbers (it may be too early, the next presidential election is still far off), then we should focus on how persons are assessed rather than parties.

109 *Popularité: Macron et Philippe repartent à la baisse* [in:] Challenges, 22 October 2017 https://www.challenges.fr/politique/popularite-macron-et-philippe-repartent-a-la-baisse_508027.

Expected trends in 2018

For the time being, the trends in French political life are dominated by President of the Republic Emmanuel Macron and his *La République en Marche* movement. The collapse of the Republican movement (*Les républicains* – LR) and of the Socialist Party (*Parti socialiste* – PS*)* during the presidential campaign led to internal debates and crises in both parties concerning the party leaderships and their ideological orientations. In December 2017, the Republicans elected Laurent Wauquiez as the new president of their movement, and thus the moderate right is one step ahead of the centre-left: The Socialists will only elect a new Secretary General in March 2018 and will hold their party congress on 7-8 April, when they will decide what type of policies they want to pursue during the coming years.

In any case, President Macron has thus far been able to sustain a political situation in which he has both a left-wing and a right-wing opposition. Moreover, this opposition is further divided still, as both the left and right are split between various parties, they are weak and do not appear to be capable of taking the reins of government. On the left, Mélenchon's party has declared its ambition to become the leading force, while on the right FN's potential new, economically more liberal and increasingly identity politics-focused course might give Laurent Wauquiez – the Republican movement's new leader, who hails from the party's rural, identity-focused conservative right wing – sleepless nights.

Emmanuel Macron, however, continues to eschew the traditional left/right divide, and instead he seeks to reinvent French politics along the lines of a new global/local divide. To do so, he must dominate the moderate field in French politics, to act as the only force in this segment that is capable of governance. And, thus the

unspoken message of Macron, he must be able to portray Marine Le Pen and the National Front as the opponents on the other side of this divide whose aspirations will compel even those to line up behind Macron who would otherwise opt for either the Socialists or the Republicans. We can already see signs of such a cleavage emerging in French politics, but at this point it can hardly be called consolidated or the main dividing line in French politics. In other words, Macron has a far greater interest in ensuring that Le Pen, who is viewed as "unacceptable" and a "bad guy" in French politics, holds on to her role as the leader of the opposition than in letting Mélenchon and his movement move to the fore, because with Le Pen as his main opponent he is more likely to realise his ambition of consolidating the new cleavage in French politics, especially if the moderate opposition fails to recover. Marine Le Pen is of course his partner and ally in this endeavour, for she, too, wishes to consolidate this new division. The question in this situation is whether Le Pen – who in the debate of the presidential election of 2017 had misjudged what role she must play and in what style she ought to present herself – will be capable of consolidating her own position within her party and whether she can fill the role envisioned for her.

SPECIAL FOCUS: GERMANY IN 2017

Catching up, but still at the bottom of the European league

BY DÁNIEL HEGEDÜS

SUMMARY

The year 2017 was marked by important symbolic changes in German politics. For the first time in the history of the *Bundesrepublik*, the right-wing populist party AfD (Alternative für Deutschland/Alternative for Germany) was able to enter the German federal parliament, the Bundestag, receiving 12.6% of the votes cast.[110] However, in spite of the party's aggressive propaganda touting its own success, and the temporary doomsday mood in the German and European public, the electoral support and political influence of right-wing populist players is far more limited in Germany than in several key western and northern democracies. On the one hand, AfD has definitely shifted the party-system's and party competition's centre of gravity to the right, and its parliamentary presence contributes significantly to the fragmentation of the party-system and to the increased complexity of government formation. On the other hand, AfD's electoral support remained

110 Results of the 2017 Bundestag elections, http://www.wahlrecht.de/news/2017/bundestagswahl-2017.html#absolut

far below its high-water mark of 16-17%, measured in the polls during the summer and autumn of 2016. As it is effectively held in political quarantine by all other parties, and since those votes that express systemic protest remain divided between right-wing and left populist parties (Die Linke/The Left Party), the AfD's influence on national politics remains modest in comparison with several other European radical right-wing populist parties. Although the German party system is definitely moving closer and closer to the Austrian model, instead of resorting to exaggeration or moral panic, the challenge posed by AfD should be treated with a sense of proportion. Radical right-wing populism in Germany is catching up, but it still plays only at the bottom of the European league.

KEYWORDS: Germany, Populism, AfD, Die Linke, Bundestagswahl 2017

Players and opportunity structures

The German party system includes two relevant populist parties that fit the minimum definition of populism put forward by Cas Mudde:[111] *a thin-centred ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, "the pure people" and "the corrupt elite", and which argues that politics should be an expression of the volonté générale (general will) of the people.*

In strong contrast to the typical Western European model, which is characterised by the paramount role of one radical right-wing populist party (France – Front National, Netherlands – PVV, Austria – FPÖ, Switzerland – SVP), the supply side of populist politics in Germany is mainly divided between the radical right-wing populist party Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) and the left populist Die Linke. Although there was a considerable flow of voters from Die Linke to the AfD (420,000) at the last Bundestag election, the division between the two parties' electorates largely matches the cleavage between voters who choose their populist party predominantly on the basis of identitarian[112] motives and those who vote chiefly based on economic-distributive[113] considerations.

AfD was founded in 2013 during the Eurozone crisis by conservative intellectuals who opposed the euro-bailout and rescue packages, especially the German contribution to the Greek bailout. The relations between the different, conflicting wings within

111 C. Mudde, *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe*. Cambridge University Press, 2007, p. 23.
112 Infratest Dimap, AfD Surveys, http://wahl.tagesschau.de/wahlen/2017-09-24-BT-DE/umfrage-afd.shtml
113 Infratest Dimap, Die Linke Surveys, http://wahl.tagesschau.de/wahlen/2017-09-24-BT-DE/umfrage-linkspartei.shtml

the party – especially the EU-sceptic moderate conservative and the radical-right ethno-nationalist (*völkisch*) wings – was a key constitutive feature of the party's internal development and thematic reorientation.[114] Rebelling against the party leadership that had sought to distance AfD both from the radical-right anti-immigration movement Pegida and from former members of other German radical-right or extremist parties, like The Republicans (REP), the "Bund Freier Bürger" (Union of Free Citizens – BFB), or "Die Freiheit" (German Freedom Party – DF), the ethno-nationalist wing effectively re-oriented AfD from a primarily Eurosceptic to a predominantly anti-immigration party, forcing AfD's then-chairman and party-founder Bernd Lucke and his moderate conservative followers out of the party during the summer of 2015.[115] Following Lucke's departure and the party's successful performance in several state elections (*Landtagswahlen*) in 2015 and 2016, AfD's main internal cleavage in 2017 ran between the realist wing surrounding party co-chair Frauke Petry, interested in the mainstreaming of AfD as a right-wing-conservative people's party ready to take governmental responsibility in a coalition with other centre-right parties at some point in the foreseeable future, and the key figures of the ethno-nationalist wing, who argue for retaining the party's anti-system protest character.

In strong contrast to the internal conflicts within the party leadership, at the programmatic level the Eurosceptic and anti-immigration orientations effectively complemented each other and

114 F. Decker, *Die Alternative für Deutschland aus der vergleichenden Sicht der Parteiforschung*, In. A. Häusler (ed.), *Die Alternative für Deutschland, Programmatik, Entwicklung und politische Verortung*, Springer, 2016.
115 A. Häusler, *Die "Alternative für Deutschland": Rechte Radikalisierungstendenzen im politischen Werdegang einer neuen Partei*, Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, January 2017, http://www.bpb.de/politik/extremismus/rechtspopulismus/240958/werdegang-der-alternative-fuer-deutschland

contributed to the party's electoral successes.[116] According to the populism theory of Benjamin Moffit and Simon Tormey, the perception and conscious performance of crisis is a key characteristic of populist politics, or, in their words, of populism as a political style.[117] In contrast to other approaches based on an understanding of populism as an ideology, discourse, etc., the concept of Moffit and Tormey provides the most adequate theoretical framework for explaining the extraordinary success of AfD and the comparatively modest performance of Die Linke in German politics.

In spite of its weak party structure, and despite the personal and ideological quarrels within the party, the rather pluralistic ideological structure of the AfD allowed it to effectively adapt the party to both major "crises" of the past years, the euro and the refugee crisis. The party successfully and credibly addressed all two big issues in the form of Euroscepticism, collective welfare chauvinism, and anti-immigration xenophobia. It actively exploited the political opportunities offered by the "performance of the crisis". In short, the AfD excelled in using both "populist moments"[118] of the past years, while the left-populist party Die Linke struggled with the situation.

116 D. Bebnowski, *'Gute' Liberale gegen 'böse' Rechte? Zum Wettbewerbspopulismus der AfD als Brücke zwischen Wirtschaftsliberalismus und Rechtspopulismus und dem Umgang mit der Partei*, In. A. Häusler (ed.), *Die Alternative für Deutschland, Programmatik, Entwicklung und politische Verortung*, Springer, 2016, pp. 25-35.

117 B. Moffit & S. Tormey, *Rethinking Populism: Politics, Mediatization and Political Style, In. Political Studies*, 2014, Vol. 62, pp. 381-397 and B. Moffit, *How to Perform a Crisis: A Model for Understanding the Key Role of Crisis in Contemporary Populism, In Government and Opposition*, 2015, Vol. 50, No. 2, pp. 189-217.

118 L. Goodwyn, *Democratic Promise. The Populist Moment in America*, Oxford University Press, 1976.

As David Benovski argues, the fundamental elements of xenophobia, such as the strategy of collective labelling, the simplistic cultural and anthropological "common sense" reasoning in highly sophisticated financial matters (like the euro bailout packages), and the aversion to "strangers", were already present in the pre-2015, allegedly "moderate conservative" period of the party, e.g. in the discourse about the lazy Greek/South European societies not being fit enough for the Eurozone and exploiting the transfers paid by hard-working north Europeans.[119] Hence, in spite of all the changes in the party's style and orientation, there was a definite common psychological foundation, which inspired some level of consistency in its political messages throughout the years.

In contrast, the Left party did not perform successfully in terms of exploiting the crises, it was not able to link the euro crisis and the refugee crisis to any consistent narrative of its own. The party's traditional anti-capitalist and anti-globalisation position, combined with left-wing solidarity with both the European and the global South, put Die Linke in positions that were antithetical to that of the AfD on the issues of solidarity within the eurozone and refugee policy, while the common denominators, like the criticism of the current form of European integration as a neoliberal hegemonic (Die Linke) or cosmopolitan (AfD) project, respectively, were clearly relegated to the background.

It is fair to say that the AfD was able to effectively address both the identitarian and – with its national protectionism – the redis-

119 D. Bebnowski, *'Gute' Liberale gegen 'böse' Rechte? Zum Wettbewerbspopulismus der AfD als Brücke zwischen Wirtschaftsliberalismus und Rechtspopulismus und dem Umgang mit der Partei*, In. A. Häusler (ed.), *Die Alternative für Deutschland, Programmatik, Entwicklung und politische Verortung*, Springer, 2016, pp. 29-31.

tributive dimensions of the social protest attitudes that made up the growing demand for anti-system populist politics. Die Linke, in the meanwhile, was only present in the context of the social justice dimension of the issue. On identitarian issues, the Left Party remained committed to its progressive roots, despite some attempts in the party leadership to exploit the welfare chauvinism that is definitely present in the party's electorate when it comes to asylum seekers.[120] The decreasing attractiveness of Die Linke among the party's traditional voters, especially in East Germany, and those voters' openness to right-wing populist identitarian discourse underline both the growing importance of "working-class authoritarianism"[121] in Europe and the Left Party's – or it might even be fair to say the left-wing parties' – growing distance to their traditional voters on identitarian issues and the lack of appropriate leftist political offerings in the identitarian field.

120 Sahra Wagenknecht, the speaker of the party's parliamentary group in the German Bundestag, expressed her views several times during 2016 about the limits of social acceptance and state capabilities regarding the arrival of large numbers of asylum seekers in Germany and the "abuse of hospitality by refugees". Wagenknecht was harshly criticised both within the Left Party and in the German media, especially after her joint media performance with AfD co-chair Frauke Petry, and she was accused of propagating positions that were close to those endorsed by the AfD. See: *Ärger um Sahra Wagenknecht, Tagesspiegel.de,* 14 January 2016, http://www.tagesspiegel.de/politik/linke-und-fluechtlinge-aerger-um-sahra-wagenknecht/12833340.html and *Wagenknecht sorgt wieder für Ärger, Frankfurter Rundschau*, 4 October 2016, http://www.fr.de/politik/interview-mit-petry-wagenknecht-sorgt-wieder-fuer-aerger-a-303331

121 F. Decker, *Die Alternative für Deutschland aus der vergleichenden Sicht der Parteiforschung*, In. A. Häusler (ed.), Die *Alternative für Deutschland, Programmatik, Entwicklung und politische Verortung*, Springer, 2016, p. 12.

Results of regional elections

Bearing Germany's federal structure in mind, regional/state level parliamentary elections (*Landtagswahlen*) are not considered second tier elections A total of four state-level parliamentary elections were held in Germany in 2017, three (Saarland, Schleswig-Holstein, North Rhine-Westphalia) before, and one (Lower-Saxony) after the Bundestag elections. The following table shows the regional election results of the AfD and Die Linke compared to the outcomes of the state-level parliamentary elections in 2016.[122]

German state-level elections in 2017					
	Saarland 26 March 2017	Schleswig-Holstein 7 May 2017	North Rhine-Westphalia 14 May 2017	Lower Saxony 15 October 2017	
AfD	6.17%	5.87%	12.55%	6.2%	
Die Linke	12.85%	3.8%	4.9%	4.6%	
German state-level elections in 2016					
	Baden-Württemberg 13 March 2016	Rhinland-Palatinate 13 March 2016	Saxony-Anhalt 13 March 2016	Mecklenburg-Vorpommern 4 September 2016	Berlin 18 September 2016
AfD	15.1%	12.57%	24.21%	20.81%	14.15%
Die Linke	2.91%	2.82%	16.32%	13.18%	15.64%

As a result of the party's unbroken success series, AfD entered nine state parliaments during 2016 and 2017. At the end of 2017, AfD lacked a presence in only two out of the sixteen federal states, in Bavaria and Hesse. However, these states did not have any elections since the AfD's inexorable rise began, and parliamentary elections are scheduled for 2018 in both states.

122 All following election results refer to the proportional party list results (*Zweitstimmen*), both at the federal and state levels. Source of the data is the Federal Returning Officer (*Bundeswahlleiter*), www.bundeswahlleiter.de

Although the mediocre results of the regional elections in Saarland and Schleswig-Holstein were rather disappointing for the AfD, they were the consequences of unique factors. Both federal states are traditional strongholds of other opposition parties, Saarland of the Left Party due to the outsize popularity in the state of former state prime minister, SPD chairman and party renegade Oskar Lafontaine, who became one of the founders of Die Linke after he quit the Social Democrats, and of the liberal FDP in Schleswig-Holstein, where the regional party is led by the popular and nationally well-known Wolfgang Kubicki. Hence both Die Linke and FDP were mostly able to draw potential protest votes, thus definitely limiting the AfD's appeal as a protest party. Furthermore, in Saarland the regional AfD party organisation was plagued by serious political scandals due to its ties to extremist right circles. Even the AfD's federal executive committee called for the dissolution of the regional organisation in Saarland at the end of 2016. These developments effectively halved the AfD's electoral support in one of Germany's smallest federal states.

The state parliamentary elections held in Lower Saxony just three weeks after the AfD entered the Bundestag also resulted in a negative surprise for the right-wing populist party. Once again, the weak regional party structures and open internal power struggles of the regional party leadership were among the possible reasons. The volatile performance of the AfD at the regional level in 2017 revealed the party's ongoing organisational weaknesses, and the clear distinction between federal and state-level politics in Germany requiring solid party structures and capable, professional political leadership at both levels, and in every single federal state to be successful.

Considering the figures presented above, as along with the party's results in the Bundestag elections, the allegedly low performance

of Die Linke – a frequent subject of discussion even within the party itself[123] – needs a more cautious analysis. The Left Party only lost votes in the former East German federal states (Saxony, Brandenburg, Saxony-Anhalt, Thuringia and Mecklenburg-Vorpommern), where previously Die Linke used to be the second biggest party and effectively simultaneously operated as a people's party and the main protest party. In all of these states, the Left Party clearly lost both its position as the second strongest party and its role as the biggest protest party; both roles have now been effectively taken over by the AfD. In the western and city states, by contrast, the party was able to increase its electoral support in all regional parliamentary elections held in 2016-2017, as well as in the Bundestag elections. The Left Party definitely lost its role as the main systemic challenger and protest party in Germany, and was not able to exploit the growing dissatisfaction with the grand coalition led by Angela Merkel. Nevertheless, bearing in mind the fact that the refugee crisis constituted a true "populist moment" and a window of opportunity for a xenophobic radical right-wing populist party such as the AfD, rather than for a left populist party, these developments hardly seem surprising. From this perspective, the Left Party's performance seems to be rather stable, and its contribution to containing the AfD by binding an important share of the protest votes in Germany is not negligible.

123 Gregor Gysi, the party's long-year parliamentary speaker, criticized the Left Party's politics in light of the 2016 election results as "devoid of content and power". *Gysi nennt Linkspartei "saft-und kraftlos",* Spiegel Online, 26 May 2016, http://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/gregor-gysi-nennt-linkspartei-saft-und-kraftlos-a-1094221.html

AfD's PR strategies in the Bundestag election campaign

AfD's leadership deficiency and the party's internal diversity in terms of the views held by its members were clearly reflected in the fact that the party institutions were unable to agree on a single PR strategy.[124] Hence AfD practically had two different PR campaigns and all state-level party organisation could choose which one they intended to use in the election campaign.

To counter AfD's negative perception in the society, the campaign of the federal party leadership consciously used positive messages, emphasizing Germany's inherent pluralism and colourful and positive German way of life – even without immigration – interlaced with some hidden eroticism. The visual elements of the campaign resembled the popular television show "Farmer seeks Maid" (*Bauer sucht Frau*). Among others, the key messages included "New Germans? We can make them ourselves" as a caption on the top of a photo of a naked baby belly, and "Burka? We prefer Burgundy wine" or "Burka? We prefer bikinis" above the photos of three young women.

In strong contrast to this, the other campaign developed by the Bavarian party organisation focused on AfD's classical negative messages concerning immigration, Islam, and the eurozone, built around the catchwords "Protecting the borders!" and "Get out of the euro".

124 *Burgunder statt Burka und Bikini-Models. Wahlkampagne entzweit AfD,* Die Stern, 6 June 2017, https://www.stern.de/politik/deutschland/afd-wahlkampagne-entzweit-die-partei-7483008.html

Although the state-level party organisations could opt for one of the two campaigns, the billboards were more often used in a combination than not. This again allowed the party to forge a substantial advantage from its structural weakness and target different audiences with different messages and PR strategies that could be a significant contribution to the party's electoral success.

Results of the Bundestag elections

In the Bundestag elections held on 24 September 2017, the right-wing populist party AfD received 11.5% of single-member constituency votes (*Erststimmen*) and 12.6% of the proportional party-list votes (*Zweitstimmen*), resulting in 94 seats out of the total 709 for the party. AfD won three single-member constituencies in Saxony, and with 27% of the party-list votes in the state it became the strongest political power in Saxony. The left-populist party Die Linke won 8.6% of the single-member constituency votes and 9.2% of the party-list votes, resulting in 69 Bundestag seats. The party won five constituencies, four in Berlin and one in Leipzig.

Results of the 2017 Bundestag elections at the level of federal states

	Baden-Württemberg	Bavaria	Berlin	Brandenburg	Bremen	Hamburg	Hesse	Mecklenburg-Vorpommern
AfD	12.2%	12.4%	12.0%	20.2%	10.0%	7.8%	11.9%	18.6%
Die Linke	6.4%	6.1%	18.8%	17.2%	13.4%	12.2%	8.1%	17.8%

	Lower-Saxony	North Rhine-Westphalia	Rhineland-Palatinate	Saarland	Saxony	Saxony-Anhalt	Schleswig-Holstein	Thuringia
AfD	9.1%	9.4%	11.2%	10.1%	27.0%	19.6%	8.2%	22.7%
Die Linke	7.0%	7.5%	6.8%	12.9%	10.5%	17.7%	7.3%	16.9%

The 2017 Bundestag elections stand for an important symbolic change in the political history of post-World War German democ-

racy. For the first time since the existence of the *Bundesrepublik*, a right-wing radical populist party entered the German federal parliament and established itself as a stable member of the German party system.[125] As shocking as this development may be, it was anything but surprising. A mere half year after the party was founded in February 2013, AfD missed the 5 percent electoral threshold in the 2013 Bundestag elections by only 0.3 percentage points and has been constantly above that threshold in the federal opinion polls since September 2015.[126] In the light of conquering one Landtag after the other, the trend that the AfD would also establish itself at the federal level was quite obvious. Considering that the party's electoral support peaked in the late summer of 2016 at a level of roughly 17%, it is fair to say that the AfD's electoral success in 2017 was only modest. The party's drop in the polls mirrored both the relatively effective handling of the refugee crisis by the grand coalition, which resulted in a marked drop in the number of asylum seekers after the EU-Turkey Refugee Deal of March 2016, and the gradual dissipation of the "populist moment" stemming from the crisis. Nevertheless, bearing in mind the possibility that after the failure of the Jamaica coalition talks (a potential coalition between the centre-right CDU/CSU (with the colour black), the liberal FDP (yellow) and the Green Party (green)) there may be a replay of the previous grand coalition between the CDU/CSU and the SPD, the AfD can successfully exploit its position as the biggest opposition party in the Bundestag and enhance its profile as a successful anti-system protest party. As challenging as it will be for the moderate German parties to confront the infiltration

125 Being represented in the Bundestag and in fourteen out of the sixteen state-level parliaments, the stable institutionalization of AfD in the German political system can hardly be questioned anymore.
126 For the longitudinal opinion poll results of German parties see: https://www.infratest-dimap.de/umfragen-analysen/bundesweit/sonntagsfrage/

of populist discourse in the work of parliament, as easy it will be for the AfD to exploit the opportunities available to parliamentary parties in enhancing the party's public outreach and stabilising its electoral base.

Furthermore, it would be a mistake to underestimate the AfD's impact on agenda setting or on government formation. Some of the asylum policy and security issues on the public agenda stem from the AfD, including the reestablishment of national border controls, a maximum annual threshold on the number of asylum seekers accepted in Germany, stricter rules of repatriation, etc. These dominated the German political agenda in 2016 and 2017, and they were even expropriated by other parties, like the Bavarian CSU. These issues are both the results of and proof of the existence of the phenomenon called "populist contagion", the assumption of populist discourse elements and political issues by mainstream parties. Nevertheless, the AfD was never able to fully hijack or dominate the German political agenda, and outside the refugee issue their influence remains negligible. Therefore, at least in comparison with other eastern European right-wing radical populist parties, like FN, PVV, FPÖ or SVP, AfD's agenda setting power seems rather limited.

By entering the Bundestag, the AfD has contributed significantly to the fragmentation of the German party system. With six relevant political groups (and seven parties) being represented in the federal parliament, there is no chance of a two-party coalition providing a reliable governing majority, with the sole exception of a CDU/CSU-SPD grand coalition. Considering the fact that no real three-party coalition has existed at federal level in Germany since the fifties, the complexity of such coalition talks, and the strategy of certain parties in parliament to avoid governmental responsibility, a grand coalition still seems to be the most stable, reliable

and most evident form of coalition governance in Germany. With ever decreasing chances of providing stable governing majorities without grand coalitions, the German party system will continue its gradual transformation into the Austrian model. Unfortunately, the grand coalition of conservatives and social democrats, coupled with the concomitant lack of real political alternatives, were crucial factors contributing to the surge in the number of protest votes, in both Austria and Germany. Another unfortunate aspect of this trend is that the AfD will be both a cause and a beneficiary of this development. With the radical right-wing populist party in the Bundestag, from a structural perspective the grand coalition appears more necessary than ever. But the future protest votes cast against the grand coalition will be mostly won by the AfD itself.

AfD's gradual institutionalisation in the German political system was also reflected in the attitudes of the party's electorate. In contrast to early concerns about pollsters' ability to accurately forecast the AfD's performance, public opinion surveys were able to predict the AfD's level of electoral support rather accurately.[127] It is therefore fair to argue that AfD voters are no longer hiding their allegiance to the party. This development eliminates an important factor of uncertainty in the analysis of populist politics, and it also makes it possible to formulate more precise counter-strategies against the AfD.

127 For the last opinion polls before the Bundestag elections, see: https://www.wahlrecht.de/umfragen/archiv/2017.htm

Sociological background of the electorate

Regarding the question of what social groups voted for populist parties in the Bundestag elections, the analysis of opinion poll data provides the following results.[128]

While other German right-wing radical and extremist parties used to have stronger support among younger voters, in the case of the AfD there was a shift towards the middle of the age tree. The party enjoyed its highest level of support in the generational cohorts of voters between the ages of 35 and 44 (16%), followed by the age groups between 25-34 and 45-59 years (14% of voters in both cases). AfD received the fewest votes at the top and the bottom of the age tree. Only 10% of the age group between 18 and 24 supported the party, while only 7% of the generation of voters over 70 cast their ballot for the AfD. The situation is exactly the opposite in the case of the Left Party. Die Linke performed rather well in the younger cohorts, the age groups between 18-24 and 25-34 each supported the party with 11% of their votes, and also among people in their sixties (10%). Its support was weakest among voters in their middle-ages (35-44 – 8%, 45-59 – 9%).

Considering the key issues that determined the voting behaviour of the two parties' electorates, the majority of Left voters (54%) indicated that they supported Die Linke out of conviction, because it was the party that fought most openly for social justice,

128 For party specific data on the Bundestag elections, see: http://wahl.tagesschau.de/wahlen/2017-09-24-BT-DE/umfrage-afd.shtml http://wahl.tagesschau.de/wahlen/2017-09-24-BT-DE/umfrage-linkspartei.shtml For the social structure of the AfD electorate at the regional parliamentary elections in 2017, see: A. Pfahl-Traughber, *Wer wählt warum die AfD? Eine Analyse der Daten zu den Landtagswahlen 2017*, Bundeszentrale für Politische Bildung, 2017, http://www.bpb.de/politik/extremismus/rechtspopulismus/248916/wer-waehlt-warum-die-afd

with a solid and consistent program. By comparison, 61% of AfD voters cast their ballot for the party because they were disappointed with the mainstream parties. The party's supporters saw AfD as the most competent in the area of fighting crime (82%), asylum/immigration policy (78%), the fight against terror (62%), and social justice (53%). This clearly shows that the AfD is mostly perceived by its own electorate as a "law and order" and identitarian protest party that offers voters little in the area of social policy. In an interesting contrast the to AfD's permanent radicalisation and the ever-increasing influence of the party's ethno-nationalist wing, 55% of AfD voters found that the party should distance itself more clearly from extremist right-wing positions.

Taking a look at the professional background of the two parties' electorate, AfD definitely seems to be more successful in reaching out to blue-collar workers and unemployed persons than Die Linke. Although the AfD failed to secure the support of the majority of either blue-collar workers or of unemployed persons, these two groups are massively overrepresented among AfD voters. The party enjoyed the support of 21% in both groups, compared to its overall level of support, which stood at 12.6%. In strong contrast to this, Die Linke was only slightly overrepresented in both groups, enjoying the support of 10% of blue-collar workers and 11% of unemployed persons compared the party's overall support of 9.2%. Based on these figures, it certainly appears that the Left Party's support is more balanced across various demographics, while the AfD looks more like a true workers' party. The contradiction between the social programmes of the two parties, which is rather neoliberal in the case of the AfD, and the social composition of their respective electorates is apparent. The contradiction can be resolved by the explanation that the right-wing populist discourse of the AfD embraces a wider spectrum of diffuse protest attitudes in German society than the progressive-leftist narrative

offered by Die Linke. Moreover, identitarian issues seem to have a primacy over conflicts involving redistribution. Under these circumstances, "working class authoritarianism", a forgotten phenomenon in German politics, should receive much more attention in the future.

The overrepresentation of traditional blue-collar workers goes hand in hand with the overrepresentation of men in the AfD's electorate. Unlike the age distribution of its voters, this gender gap meshes with the general characteristics of right-wing radical parties. In Germany, 15% of the male and 9% of the female electorate cast their ballot for the AfD, but in the eastern federal states the proportion was 25% and 16%,[129] respectively, revealing a large gender gap in the case of AfD. Only ten out of the 94 AfD MPs in the Bundestag are women (10.6%). This has contributed to the worst gender balance in the German federal parliament (30.7%) in the last fifteen years.[130] By contrast, the gender distribution of the Left Party's electorate was completely balanced, with the party enjoying the support of 9% of both men and women, while the proportion of female members in the party's parliamentary group in the Bundestag stands at 54%.

129 Considering the East-West cleavage of German society, the overall support of AfD in the eastern federal states totalled up to 21.9%, compared to 10.7% in the west. The similar results of Die Linke laid by 17.8% and 7.4%, https://wahltool.zdf.de/wahlergebnisse/2017-09-24-BT-DE.html?i=7

130 *Diese Fraktionen haben den geringsten Frauenanteil*, Welt.de, 27 September.2017, https://www.welt.de/politik/deutschland/article169078778/Diese-Fraktionen-haben-den-geringsten-Frauenanteil.html

Ideological and institutional developments of the Alternative for Germany

The past year saw important changes in the leadership of the AfD, which had a significant impact on the party's ideological and political orientation. Since founding father Bernd Lucke left the party after the congress in Essen in July 2015, the AfD was led by the co-chairs Frauke Petry and Jörg Meuthen. Petry, the party's speaker since 2013, was elected in Essen with the support of the ethno-nationalist wing led by Björn Höcke and Alexander Gauland, signatories of the so-called "Erfurt Resolution", the founding document of their party platform. Due to Petry's intention to reshape the AfD into a party that is ready to take governmental responsibilities, she soon saw herself confronted with the circles around Höcke and Gauland, which intend to align the AfD as a right-wing protest party in strong alliance with related movements.

In April 2017, the party congress held in Cologne rejected Petry's "future initiative" about a moderate course for the AfD, which would have allowed and enabled the party to participate in government. The rejection was widely interpreted as a further sign of the AfD's continuous radicalization. Petry, who once assisted in the political neutralisation of Lucke, now found herself in the same situation as her predecessor. She had to withdraw her candidacy to lead the party list in the Bundestag elections, and her relationship with the rest of the party leadership, especially with the new leaders of the party list, Alice Weidel and Alexander Gauland, was seriously damaged, resulting in practically no real communication between Petry and the leaders of the party list. On 25 September 2017, just one day after Petry won her single-member constituency in Saxon-Switzerland, Saxony, she declared that she would not join the AfD's parliamentary group in the Bundestag. She left the party at the end of September, together with her husband, Marcus Pretzell, former head of the AfD's

state party organisation in North-Rhine Westphalia, and a couple of other party functionaries. Just as it happened in 2015 with Lucke, the renegades were unsuccessful once again. Only a few members followed Petry, and thus far she has not even been successful in establishing her new party, the "Blaue Partei" (Blue Party).[131] Just as in 2015, at the end of the day all that happened was that the moderate wing of the AfD became significantly weaker.

These changes in the party leadership structure highlighted several important ideological and institutional developments within the AfD as well.

First, it is fair to say that the radicalization of the party has been constantly ongoing since 2015. With the ethno-nationalist wing obviously expanding its influence at the party congress in December 2017, and with Alexander Gauland being elected as co-chairman alongside Jörg Meuthen, the classic debate about the categorisation of AfD, whether it is a right-wing radical populist party, is completely outdated.

Second, the programmatic radicalisation has not gone hand in hand with a decrease in the party's internal democracy. On the contrary, the concentration of leadership power was a political project pursued by AfD chairpersons who were associated with the moderate-pragmatic wing of the party, to wit Bernd Lucke and Frauke Petry. One reason of the ethno-nationalist wing's success may be their insistence on sticking to the party's high internal standards of grassroots democracy.

131 ALFA, the party established by Lucke after he left the AfD in July 2015, remained a small party without any parliamentary representation. Frauke Petry even was not successful with the founding of her party "Die Blauen", even though it was allegedly planned well in advance.

Third, although Alexander Gauland's possible future political rise may contradict this argument, the AfD has mastered its political rise without strong charismatic leaders in the party. These two latter points contradict the argument that charismatic leadership is an essential feature of populism.[132] Instead, they prove the research results of Takis Pappas, which suggest that charismatic leadership may provide an essential contribution to the success of populist parties, but the linkage between charismatic leadership and populism is nevertheless not constitutive and rather weak.[133]

Hence, arguments that the AfD cannot be considered a right-wing radical populist party due to the lack of strong, centralised and charismatic leadership are definitely ill-founded.

Conclusion

After having entered the German Bundestag with 12.6% of votes and winning representation in fourteen regional parliaments, the AfD can now obviously be considered a stable part of the German party system. However, comparing its electoral performance to key radical right-wing populist parties in Europe, like the FPÖ in Austria, which won 26% of the votes at the National Council elections in 2017, or the SVP in Switzerland, with its 29.4% of support in 2015, both the electoral support and the political influence of radical right-wing populism seem to be far more limited in Germany. AfD's success story definitely has a negative impact on the quality

132 D. Albertazzi & D. McDonnell, *Twenty-First Century Populism: The Spectre of Western European Democracy*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2008, p. 7.
133 T. S. Pappas, *Are Populist Leaders "Charismatic"? The Evidence from Europe*, Constellations, Volume 00, No. 0, 2016, doi: 10.1111/1467-8675.12233.

of public discourse, and through the fragmentation of the party system and the more complicated government-formation process it also exerts a negative impact on the stability of the political system. Nevertheless, it definitely did not bring German democracy to the brink of a crisis. With the populist moment of the refugee crisis slowly fading, and the protest votes being split between the AfD and the left-populist party Die Linke, the AfD will likely need all the advantages offered by its new parliamentary position to maintain its current level of electoral support. Nevertheless, the populist party's parliamentary presence definitely narrows the potential range of coalitions that can yield reliable government majorities, even as a continuation of the grand coalition may serve to keep alive protest attitudes in society and may thus end up strengthening the AfD's popular support as well.

SPECIAL FOCUS: THE NETHERLANDS IN 2017

Populism Defeated by Populism?

BY RENÉ CUPERUS

SUMMARY

The 15th of March 2017 was the start of the anti-climax of national-populism on the European continent. On that day, Geert Wilders' right-wing populist Freedom Party (PVV) was defeated in the Dutch parliamentary elections. After having led the polls for a long time, Wilders came in second, lagging substantially behind the conservative-liberal VVD, led by Prime Minister Mark Rutte. The dual strategy of inclusion and exclusion (that is copying populist discourse while excluding populist politicians) by the centre-right mainstream parties had worked. But at what cost?

A crucial development in the final week of the election campaign was also a serious political and diplomatic incident between Turkey and the Netherlands. One might even say that Turkish president Erdogan handed PM Mark Rutte the election victory against Geert Wilders.

KEYWORDS: National-populist tsunami; flavours of populism; Geert Wilders; Netherlands; Erdogan

Introduction: Dutch Laboratory of Populism

The Netherlands might be called the laboratory of populism. During the last decades, all flavours of populism have emerged as ingredients in Dutch politics: left-wing populism, right-wing populism, governmental populism and postmodern populism.

Populism defined as *the revolt by those "left behind" against the post-war establishment* can be traced back in the Netherlands to the late 1990s and early 2000s. It started with the rise of a left-wing populist party, the former Maoist Socialist Party (SP), which became rather successful in the early 1990s. Under the leadership of Jan Marijnissen, it criticised the "neoliberal" Third Way policies pursued by the centre-left social democratic party, the PvdA, when the latter was in government. The PvdA's terms in government included a coalition with the Christian Democrats of the CDA, and subsequently a coalition with the conservative-liberal VVD and the social-liberal D66, the so-called Purple Coalitions led by Prime Minister Wim Kok (PvdA) between 1994 and 2002.

The SP, a European sister party of *Syriza*, *Podemos* and *Die Linke*, was able to mobilise electorally against the PvdA and against neoliberal austerity policies and 'anti-social' welfare state reform. The party started as an activist, populist-authoritarian fringe-party, but over time it transformed into a mostly orthodox, pre-Third Way social democratic party, with the exception of its anti-EU and anti-NATO stance.

After 9/11, the anti-establishment revolt shifted from left-wing populism to right-wing populism. In the Netherlands, this shift manifested itself in the rise of Pim Fortuyn. Fortuyn, a charismatic professor, mixed left-wing and right-wing issues in a postmodern populist critique of established politics. He criticises the traditional

established parties of the post-World War II period for their failure to represent the mood of a changing country. He was very critical about the impact of Islam on the progressive Dutch society. Pim Fortuyn was killed by an animal rights activist after he triumphed in the local elections in the city of Rotterdam. After his murder, his party, List Pim Fortuyn (LPF), became part of a government coalition on account of its successful electoral performance. However, as a result of internal struggles it made a mess of this opportunity. The party left government quickly and imploded after that.

The void it left behind was filled by Geert Wilders and his Freedom Party (PVV). Geert Wilders' programme overlaps with Pim Fortuyn's platform in terms of their anti-establishment, anti-Islam and anti-EU positions, but Wilders is much more aggressive and vulgar in expressing these views. Geert Wilders' PVV was also included in the Dutch government, though not as a full coalition partner but only as an outside co-operator. It supported the VVD and CDA government policies outside of government. This was not a great success, either. The first cabinet Rutte collapsed after just two years in office (2010-2012).

For the 2017 elections, Wilders had hoped to return into government, preferably as the biggest governing party or at least as a real coalition partner. This hope was crushed by the election results of March 2017, when the Freedom Party received 13.1% of the votes.

The Elections of 2017

The Dutch elections of 15 March 2017 played an important role in the Big Anti-Climax of national populism in 2017. At the end of 2016, the overall expectation – especially in the international media – was that after the spectacular Brexit and Donald Trump's victory in the US presidential elections, the national-populist tsunami would conquer the European Continent next.

First, at the end of 2016, there was a crucial election in Austria. The direct election of the Austrian federal president, which took place over several rounds, emerged as a very hard-fought battle between populism and the establishment, ending with a very narrow victory of the mainstream candidate.

This was followed by the start of the 2017 election season in Europe, with elections scheduled in the Netherlands, France and Germany. The Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte once compared this situation with a Champions League Tournament: a tough game between the establishment defending the post-War liberal order on the one hand, and their right-wing populist challengers on the other side. Rutte called the Dutch parliamentary elections *the quarter finals*, the French presidential election *the semi-final* and the German Bundestag elections *the final*.[134]

In these early days of 2017, the self-confidence of right-wing populists was exceedingly robust. This was expressed in outstanding polling figures in 2016 for Marine Le Pen's *Front National* (28%)

134 *Rutte: verkiezingen zijn 'kwartfinales' in strijd tegen verkeerde populisme*, [in]: Elsevier Weekblad, 13 March 2017, https://www.elsevierweekblad.nl/nederland/achtergrond/2017/03/rutte-verkiezingen-zijn-kwartfinales-in-strijd-tegen-populisme-468873/

and Geert Wilders' PVV (19%),[135] and was also on display at a joint meeting of the "Right-Wing Populist International" in Koblenz on 21 January 2017, where the parties involved proclaimed a *Patriotic Spring* for Europe, following up on the successes of Brexit and Trump.

The Dutch elections delivered the first blow to this patriotic-populist tsunami. Although Geert Wilders' PVV managed to become the second largest party in parliament (13.1%, 20 seats in the 150-seat parliament), they lagged significantly behind the winning VVD, the conservative-liberal government party of Mark Rutte. The VVD took 21.3 % and 33 seats. (Incidentally, the Dutch Labour Party, the PvdA, imploded and received only 5%, falling from 38 to a mere 9 seats. This was a historical low for the party). Wilders' party not only scored much lower than the polls had long suggested, but on top of that already before the election all established parties agreed to marginalise the PVV. They stated during the election campaign that they wanted to exclude Geert Wilders from any coalition government because of a radically xenophobic speech he had given against Dutch-Moroccan Muslims, for which he was even prosecuted in a Dutch court.

Excluding the PVV from any potential coalition was part of a broader strategy. Especially the Dutch centre-right parties, the VVD and the CDA, which have suffered most from the electoral competition that the PPV had engendered, used a two-pronged campaign strategy against Wilders: a mix of inclusion and exclusion. On the one hand, they portrayed the PVV as radical, irrational and irresponsible (an anti-government party on account of its endorsement of "Nexit" and the extreme islamophobia it espouses), while

135 See: Populism Tracker, http://progressivepost.eu/spotlights/populism/graph/

at the same time they adopted large parts of the right-wing populist discourse. In terms of winning votes, this turned out to be a successful electoral strategy, especially for the centre right.

It can also be seen as an emergency strategy because for a long time it had indeed seemed conceivable that Geert Wilders' PVV might become the biggest party in the Netherlands. As with other right-wing populist parties, the Party for Freedom (PVV) surged enormously in the polls during the so-called European Refugee Crisis, with the party leading the polls between September 2015 and February 2017.

Due to campaign dynamics and some unplanned events, Geert Wilders' party did not hold on to its lead in the polls during the elections, and instead performed less well than expected. Consequently, it found itself marginalised in the coalition negotiations. This became the first building block of the overall Anti-Climax of National Populism in 2017 (which later found its apotheosis in the victory of Emmanuel Macron against Marine Le Pen in the French presidential election in spring 2017).

Campaign: Program and Performance

As was pointed out above, the right-wing populist Wilders party led the polls for many months in the run-up to the Dutch parliamentary elections. Ivan Krastev has referred to the Refugee Crisis

of 2015 as "Europe's 9/11",[136] and this is true in that sense that nearly everywhere in Europe there was a strong political backlash on the right and the populist right against refugees or what were perceived to be refugee-friendly policies. This was apparent in both poll results (France, the Netherlands, Austria, Scandinavia) as well as in actual election results. Especially in Germany it was possible to observe a more or less linear correlation between the number of refugees arriving in Germany and the election results of the *Alternative für Deutschland*, the tabooed right-wing populist. At the regional level, the so-called *Bundesland* elections, the AfD performed unexpectedly well, not only in the eastern parts of Germany (Mecklenburg-Vorpommern), but also in the West (Rheinland-Pfalz). The refugee crisis produced political momentum for right-wing populism.

For a long time, the same applied to the position in the polls of Geert Wilders' PVV, but ultimately the momentum for the right-wing populist surge was undermined. A very important development in that process was the controversial but effective Turkey-EU refugee deal concluded by the German Chancellor Angela Merkel and the Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, which also featured the involvement of leading Dutch politicians – especially Mark Rutte and Diederik Samsom (PvdA) –, since the Netherlands held the EU's rotating presidency at the time.

Another key development was the increasing backlash of Brexit and of the Trump presidency. The more it became clear that Brexit engendered political chaos in Westminster, and that President

136 I. Krastev, *Die Flüchtlingskrise hat Europa so verändert wie 9/11 die USA*, interview in Süddeutsche Zeitung, 23 December 2017

Trump's government policies were limited to tweets rather than wise and balanced decision-making, the more one could see the pendulum swing back to support for the establishment and for the EU. Electorates are not stupid. They want change, but not political chaos.

More specifically in the Dutch case, Geert Wilders performed poorly in the election campaign, even by his own standards. Many observers questioned whether he was even serious in aspiring to turn the PVV into the biggest party and to become a potential candidate for the position of prime minister. Thus, for example, the programme introduced by the PVV for the election campaign lacked in seriousness. The PVV published a one-page manifesto, which stood in total contrast to a responsible government party platform. It also contrasted sharply with the prevailing Calvinist political culture in the Netherlands, in which party programmes are treated almost as seriously as the Bible itself. There is even a strong tradition in place (which is morally obligatory for the established parties): an independent agency, the Central Planning Bureau (CPB), reviews and analyses the budgetary impact of election manifestos and the policy proposals therein, in order to assess their compatibility with sustainable budget policies. Thus, the PVV's 2017 manifesto was a total outlier, it stood in stark relief to what is considered "normal" and "accepted" in Dutch politics.

We will copy the PVV's manifesto in full below because it is such a telling reflection of the party's general populist character and specifically its obsessively anti-Islam outlook. The PVV's election manifesto is clearly a match for the characterisation of populism provided in the earlier FEPS/Policy Solutions book on Populism:

The State of Populism in the European Union 2016.[137]

> *(...) powers that engage in politics in the name of "the people" and against "the elites" are growing stronger across Europe. These actors prefer to use "the wisdom of the people" to accomplish their goals, often by using referenda as a tool to enhance their legitimacy in a direct way. These parties and politicians exploit and foment disappointment with liberal democracy, campaigning with a focus on the perceived interests of the nation as opposed to European integration and international cooperation. These politicians transcend the division between the left and right of the political spectrum. They are constantly searching for new enemies to fight and thereby create new and emotionally charged cleavages in societies. They are the populists.*

Election Program PVV[138]

The Netherlands Must Be Ours Again!

Millions of Dutch citizens have simply had enough of the Islamization of our country. Enough of mass immigration and asylum, terror, violence and insecurity.

Here is our plan: instead of financing the entire world and people we don't want here, we'll spend the money on ordinary Dutch citizens.

137 E. Stetter & T. Boros (Eds.) *The State of Populism in the European Union 2016*. FEPS/Policy Solutions 2017, pp. 6-7.
138 Source: The weblog of Geert Wilders, text originally in English: https://www.geertwilders.nl/94-english/2007-preliminary-election-program-pvv-2017-2021.

This is what the PVV will do:

1. De-Islamise the Netherlands

- *Zero asylum seekers and no immigrants anymore from Islamic countries: close the borders*
- *Withdraw all asylum residence permits which have already been granted for specific periods, close the asylum centres*
- *No Islamic headscarves in public functions*
- *Prohibition of other Islamic expressions which violate public order*
- *Preventive detention of radical Muslims*
- *Denaturalization and expulsion of criminals with a dual nationality*
- *Jihadists who went to Syria will not be allowed to return to the Netherlands*
- *Close all mosques and Islamic schools, ban the Koran*

2. The Netherlands independent again. Leave the EU
3. Direct democracy: a binding referendum, power to the citizens
4. Completely abolish health care deductibles
5. Lower housing fees
6. Retirement age at 65, indexation of supplementary pensions
7. No public money for development aid, windmills, art, innovation, broadcasting, etc.
8. Rollback cuts in home care and elderly care, more hands on the bed
9. A lot of extra money for defence and police
10. Lower income taxes
11. Halving of car taxes

It might be clear that this official party programme did not add much to the respectability of the PVV in the Netherlands and abroad. Closing mosques? Banning the Koran? These are perceived to be extreme and unimplementable measures based on the Dutch rule of law and the principles of liberal democracy. They clash with the freedom of belief and religion. For Wilders and the PVV, however, Islam is not considered to be a religion like Christianity or Buddhism. They conceive of Islam as a political ideology, as a fascist, violent belief system comparable to Nazism. And on these "grounds", they argue that Islam ought to be banned.

The PVV's position towards Europe is also too extreme for the Dutch electorate. The PVV argues for a NEXIT, a departure of the Netherlands from the EU. This is not supported by the wider electorate in the Netherlands, which may be quite Eurosceptic but is ultimately also lukewarm towards the EU and pragmatic in its approach towards the latter.[139]

There were also other, even more substantial reasons than the flaws in the manifesto that ultimately led to Wilders' failure to capitalise on the party's previous high in the polls. To the astonishment of many observers, he was rather absent in the final "hot weeks" of the election campaign. He did not participate much in crucial TV debates and preferred to debate only with Prime Minister Mark Rutte, seemingly as a potential PM alternative. He lost momentum in the campaign and received less attention, also because especially the candidates of the centre-right parties (VVD and CDA) campaigned on populist issues, as was mentioned before. These parties took over large parts

139 See: *Eurobarometer* 87, European Commission 2017, http://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/Survey/getSurveyDetail/instruments/STANDARD/surveyKy/2142

of what was supposed to be Wilders' terrain and were much more visible in the campaign. This led to a strong comeback of especially Mark Rutte's VVD in the polls in the last phase of the campaign.

An especially notorious episode in the campaign was a newspaper advertisement by Mark Rutte's People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD), an open letter to the Dutch published in the middle of the campaign. In this letter, Rutte demonstrated that he had entered the realm of identity politics previously monopolised by Geert Wilders, drawing a clear nativist distinction between "the normal Dutchman" and the "not so normal Dutchman". His open letter to the Dutch, published in all dailies, told immigrants *to get with it or leave*. His party's campaign slogan was *Act Normal*, reflecting the increasingly normative perception many Dutch people have of what does and does not count as "Dutch". Immigration and security were the key topics of the election campaign.

A crucial development in the final week of the election campaign was a serious political and diplomatic incident between Turkey and the Netherlands. One might even say that Turkish president Erdogan handed PM Mark Rutte the election victory against Geert Wilders. What happened? In the weekend before election day, Turkey intervened in the Dutch election campaign by sending a Turkish cabinet minister to the Turkish Consulate in Rotterdam. There she was to give a speech to the Turkish diaspora community in the Netherlands to ask them to vote in a referendum in Turkey a few weeks later, supporting the expansion of Erdogan's authoritarian rule. The Dutch government and Rotterdam mayor Aboutaleb declared this minister a persona non-grata. They did not want the Turkish government to campaign in the Netherlands for the votes of Turkish-Dutch citizens on behalf of an authoritarian cause that runs afoul of the rule of law, nota bene in the middle of the Dutch election campaign itself. This led to a very tense

situation in Rotterdam, where the Turkish minister was ultimately expelled from the Netherlands, which resulted in violent riots between Turkish-Dutch citizens and the Rotterdam police.

The political fallout of this scandal was very positive for the incumbent government, and especially the sitting prime minister, who was able to present himself as a solid leader of the Netherlands, not giving in to authoritarian strongmen abroad nor to the extended "arm of Erdogan" in the Netherlands. The VVD rose even higher in the polls, to the detriment of Wilders' PVV. In a way, Erdogan helped in defeating right-wing populism in the Netherlands.

Populist Discourse

As mentioned before, the polls were previously affected by the "overall populist tone of voice" of the campaign. Especially PM Mark Rutte and CDA leader Sybrand Buma appeared to deliberately use right-wing populist discourse to appeal to Wilders' voters. This highlights the possibilities of different strategies for established parties to deal with the rise of right-wing populist parties. This includes Emmanuel Macron's strategy of "open confrontation" or the Sebastian Kurz strategy of "triumphant cloning".

According to some observers, centre-right leaders went way too far in addressing the right-wing populist danger, and in the process they transformed themselves into right-wing populists. Cas Mudde, who is both an expert on and an activist against populism, stated that the centre-right campaign in the Netherlands was populist itself: *In the Dutch election, the campaigns of the two mainstream right-wing parties, the Christian Democratic CDA and the conservative VVD, were both increasingly informed by author-*

itarianism and nativism. The leaders of both parties pretended to defend "Dutch" and even "Christian" values against an alleged threat of Islam and Muslims as well as their secular, left-wing fellow travellers. (...). Moreover, Rutte suggested that there were real Dutch people and probationary Dutch people, i.e. those with (Muslim) immigrant roots, and called on the latter to "act normal" or "sod off" (where to remained unclear).[140]

And it is true, Premier Mark Rutte coined the term "good populism", contrasting it with the bad populism of Geert Wilders. The Dutch PM acted as if he were the only politician who could keep Wilders from power. On election night, Rutte declared in his victory speech that the Netherlands had put a halt to "the wrong kind of populism". This suggests that he himself represents the "good kind of populism".

The Proof of the Pudding

There are, to conclude, two possible views on what happened in the Dutch election of 2017. With *FT*'s Tony Barber one could say that the *Dutch election result holds back populist tide*.[141] In this rendering, the story is about the beginning of the anti-climax of national populism on the European continent after Brexit and Trump. However, one could also say: *The Dutch election results were not a rejection of populism. Instead, the Netherlands is the first European country in which populism has engulfed the entire political landscape* as

140 C. Mudde, *"Good" populism beat "bad" in Dutch election*, The Guardian, 19 March 2017
141 T. Barber: Dutch election result holds back populist tide in Europe, The Irish Times, 16 March 2017, https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/dutch-election-result-holds-back-populist-tide-in-europe-1.3012893

was argued by Nikki Ikani, King's College London, in response to Tony Barber.[142]

The proof of the pudding might be in what happened after the elections. At this point, following the extremely long process whereby the new Dutch government was formed, we are in a better position to judge to what extent the centre-right used "good populism" mainly as an election campaign weapon to beat the Islamophobic populism of Geert Wilders, or whether the government agenda of the new Dutch government itself is infected by right-wing populist discourse.

The assessment here is complex and mixed. The new Rutte Government is made up of four parties, two major centre-right parties (the VVD and the CDA) and two smaller parties, the social liberal D66 and the socially-oriented Christian Union. Without any doubt, the government programme, which the parties negotiated about for a long time because of the distance between them, does include right-wing populist discourse. There is a strong emphasis on national identity (people should learn and sing the national anthem again and school pupils are obliged to visit the National Rijksmuseum). There is also a strong pressure on the integration of migrants and the blocking of irregular migrants from Africa. On the other hand, the program is set in a very positive pro-EU tone (the Netherlands is inseparably intertwined with the EU) and the freedom of religion for all faiths is respected and defended.

142 N. Ikani: *Populism has engulfed the Netherlands' entire political landscape,* [in:] Financial Times, 27 March 2017, www.ft.com/content/91a61a0c-0a72-11e7-ac5a-903b21361b43

So, the results are mixed. Right-wing populism in the extreme and vulgar fashion à la Wilders has been defeated in the Dutch elections, but the Netherlands, like nearly all other western societies, are deeply influenced and affected by the populist backlash against globalisation, migration and the Euro crisis. And this is true for the entire political spectrum in the Netherlands.

And what about Geert Wilders himself? The breaking news about Wilders and his PVV is that at the moment his party is becoming increasingly supplanted by another party, the *Forum for Democracy*. This new party, which won two parliamentary seats in the last election, is led by a charismatic young nationalist-conservative intellectual, Thierry Baudet. Baudet campaigns successfully against the "cartel" of established parties in the Netherlands, the conglomerate of established parties and interests, and is an eloquent opponent of the European Union, which he sees as the imperialist and anti-democratic enemy of the nation state.

In recent polls, Forum for Democracy has taken over the positions of the PVV. Geert Wilders looks exhausted and old in comparison to the energetic Baudet, who is fairly popular among right-wing students at the universities. National populism is no longer a sociological phenomenon limited to those who are "left behind" in society, but is turning into an ideology, a belief system, rather than a protest attitude.

Some people call Thierry Baudet "the new Pim Fortuyn". He is by no means uncontroversial, however. He has made several odd, proto-racist remarks, he has met with racist intellectuals from the US and has spoken at meetings of far-right parties. Some left-wing journalists portray him as the new kind of fascist. Nevertheless, his critique of the "party cartel" resonates quite successfully in a country where the post-War political party system is in a huge

transformational crisis. This crisis is manifest in the rise of all kinds of new parties, in the long government formation process, and in the breakdown and implosion of the traditional social democratic and Christian democratic people's parties.

Populism, in all kinds of flavours and colours, seems to profit substantially from this transformative crisis of established politics. The Dutch elections in 2017 were an illustration of this broader European story.

APPENDIX

The support for populist parties in the 28 EU countries

	Ideology	Abbreviation	EP Group
Austria			
Freedom Party of Austria	right-wing	FPÖ	ENF
Belgium			
Flemish Interest	right-wing	VB	ENF
Bulgaria			
Attack	right-wing	Ataka	
Bulgaria without Censorship	right-wing	BBC	
Patriotic Front	right-wing	NFSD	EFD
United Patriots	right-wing	UP	ECR
Volya	right-wing	Volya	
Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria	right-wing	GERB	EPP
Croatia			
Croatian Labourists – Labour Party	left-wing	HL	GUE/NGL
Human Blockade	left-wing	Zivi Zid	
Croatian Democratic Alliance of Slavonia and Baranja	right-wing	HDSSB	
Milan Bandić 365 - The Party of Labour and Solidarity	right-wing	Milan Bandić 365	NA

EP election results in 2014	Support among likely voters in Q4 2016 (based on opinion polls)	Support among likely voters in Q4 2017 (based on opinion polls)	Change in support between Q4 2016 and Q4 2017
19,50%	**35%**	**28%**	**-7%**
19,50%	35%	28%	-7%
4,16%	**12%**	**10%**	**-2%**
4,16%	12%	10%	-2%
47,05%	**49%**	**36%**	**-13%**
2,96%	0%	0%	0%
10,64%	0%	0%	0%
3,05%	9%	0%	-9%
-	-	6%	6%
-	-	2%	2%
30,40%	40%	28%	-12%
3,40%	**10%**	**16%**	**6%**
3,40%	0%	0%	0%
-	8%	12%	4%
-	1%	1%	0%
-	1%	3%	2%

	Ideology	Abbreviation	EP Group
Cyprus			
Progressive Party of the Working People	left-wing	AKEL	GUE/NGL
Citizens' Alliance	left-wing	Συμμαχία Πολιτών	
National Popular Front	right-wing	ELAM	NA
Czech Republic			
Czech Communist Party	left-wing	KSČM	GUE/NGL
Party of Free Citizens	right-wing	Svobodni	EFD
Dawn - National Coalition	right-wing	Úsvit	NA
Freedom and Direct Democracy	right-wing	SPD	
ANO		ANO	ALDE
Denmark			
Danish People's Party	right-wing	O	ECR
People's Party Against the EU		N	GUE/NGL
Estonia			
Conservative People's Party of Estonia	right-wing	EKRE	
Estonian Centre Party	right-wing	KESK	ALDE

EP election results in 2014	Support among likely voters in Q4 2016 (based on opinion polls)	Support among likely voters in Q4 2017 (based on opinion polls)	Change in support between Q4 2016 and Q4 2017
33,68%	**40%**	**35%**	**-5%**
26,90%	30%	25%	-5%
6,78%	8%	3%	-5%
-	2%	7%	5%
35,47%	**54%**	**51%**	**-3%**
10,98%	15%	8%	-7%
5,24%	3%	0%	-3%
3,12%	1%	0%	-1%
-	5%	7%	2%
16,13%	30%	36%	6%
34,60%	**16%**	**18%**	**2%**
26,60%	16%	18%	2%
8,00%	0%	0%	0%
26,40%	**34%**	**39%**	**5%**
4%	10%	17%	7%
22,40%	24%	22%	-2%

	Ideology	Abbreviation	EP Group
Finland			
Finns Party	right-wing	PS	ECR
Left Alliance	left-wing	VAS	GUE/NGL
France			
National Front	right-wing	FN	ENF
Libertas (Movement for France)	right-wing	Libertas (MPF-CPNT)	EFD
Left Front	left-wing	FG	GUE/NGL
French Communist Party	left-wing	PCF	GUE/NGL
France Unbowed / La France Insoumise	left-wing	FI	GUE/NGL
France Arise	right-wing	DLF	EFD
Germany			
The Left	left-wing	DIE LINKE	GUE/NGL
Alternative for Germany	right-wing	AFD	ECR
National Democratic Party of Germany	right-wing	NPD	NA

EP election results in 2014	Support among likely voters in Q4 2016 (based on opinion polls)	Support among likely voters in Q4 2017 (based on opinion polls)	Change in support between Q4 2016 and Q4 2017
22,20%	**17%**	**18%**	**1%**
12,90%	9%	9%	0%
9,30%	8%	9%	1%
35,11%	**45%**	**40%**	**-5%**
24,95%	28%	17%	-11%
-	0%	0%	0%
6,34%	12%	1%	-11%
-	-	2%	2%
-	-	14%	14%
3,82%	5%	6%	1%
15,50%	**22%**	**21%**	**-1%**
7,40%	10%	9%	-1%
7,10%	12%	12%	0%
1,00%	-	0%	0%

	Ideology	Abbreviation	EP Group
Greece			
Communist Party of Greece	left-wing	KKE	GUE/NGL
Coalition of the Radical Left	left-wing	SYRIZA	GUE/NGL
Golden Dawn	right-wing	XA	NA
Independent Greeks	right-wing	ANEL	EFD
Popular Unity	left-wing	LAE	GUE/NGL
Hungary			
Jobbik – Movement for a Better Hungary	right-wing	Jobbik	NA
Fidesz	right-wing	Fidesz	EPP
Ireland			
Sinn Féin	left-wing	SF	GUE/NGL
Anti-Austerity Alliance–People Before Profit	left-wing	AAA-PBP	NA
Italy			
League	right-wing	LN	ENF
Five Star Movement		M5S	EFD
For Another Europe - With Tsipras	left-wing	-	GUE/NGL

EP election results in 2014	Support among likely voters in Q4 2016 (based on opinion polls)	Support among likely voters in Q4 2017 (based on opinion polls)	Change in support between Q4 2016 and Q4 2017
45,47%	**42%**	**40%**	**-2%**
6,07%	6%	6%	0%
26,57%	24%	24%	0%
9,38%	9%	7%	-2%
3,45%	2%	3%	1%
-	1%	0%	-1%
66,16%	**69%**	**66%**	**-3%**
14,68%	16%	14%	-2%
51,48%	53%	52%	-1%
17,00%	**22%**	**20%**	**-2%**
17,00%	17%	19%	2%
-	5%	1%	-4%
31,33%	**41%**	**41%**	**0%**
6,15%	13%	12%	-1%
21,15%	28%	29%	1%
4,03%	0%	0%	0%

	Ideology	Abbreviation	EP Group
Latvia			
National Alliance (Previously: For Fatherland and Freedom/LNNK)	right-wing	NA-LNNK	ECR
For Latvia from the Heart	right-wing	NSL	ECR
Who Owns the State?	right-wing	KPV LV	
Lithuania			
Order and Justice	right-wing	TT	EFD
Labour Party	left-wing	DP	ALDE
Luxembourg			
The Left	left-wing	Déi Lénk	NA
Malta			
The Netherlands			
Party for Freedom	right-wing	PVV	ENF
Socialist Party	left-wing	SP	GUE/NGL
Forum for Democracy	right-wing	FvD	
Poland			
Law and Justice	right-wing	PiS	ECR
Congress of the New Right	right-wing	KNP	ENF
Kukiz'15	liberal	K'15	

EP election results in 2014	Support among likely voters in Q4 2016 (based on opinion polls)	Support among likely voters in Q4 2017 (based on opinion polls)	Change in support between Q4 2016 and Q4 2017
14,25%	**24%**	**11%**	**-13%**
14,25%	13%	7%	-6%
-	5%	2%	-3%
-	6%	2%	-4%
14,27%	**11%**	**9%**	**-2%**
14,27%	6%	6%	0%
-	5%	3%	-2%
5,76%	**5%**	**3%**	**-2%**
5,76%	5%	3%	-2%
0%	**0%**	**0%**	**0%**
29,80%	**27%**	**28%**	**1%**
13,20%	19%	12%	-7%
9,60%	8%	8%	0%
-	-	8%	8%
39,39%	**43%**	**48%**	**5%**
32,33%	36%	41%	5%
7,06%	0%	0%	0%
-	7%	7%	0%

	Ideology	Abbreviation	EP Group
Portugal			
Left Block	left-wing	BE	GUE/NGL
Unitary Democratic Coalition	left-wing	CDU	GUE/NGL
Workers' Communist Party	left-wing	PCTP	NA
Romania			
Greater Romania Party	right-wing	PRM	NA
Save Romania Union	right-wing	USR	
Slovakia			
Kotleba – People's Party Our Slovakia	right-wing	ĽSNS	NA
Ordinary People	right-wing	OĽaNO	ECR
Slovak National Party	right-wing	SNS	EFD
We Are Family	right-wing	Sme Rodina	NA
Slovenia			
Slovenian National Party	right-wing	SNS	NA
The Left (Former United Left)	left-wing	Levica	GUE/NGL

EP election results in 2014	Support among likely voters in Q4 2016 (based on opinion polls)	Support among likely voters in Q4 2017 (based on opinion polls)	Change in support between Q4 2016 and Q4 2017
19,29%	**18%**	**16%**	**-2%**
4,93%	10%	9%	-1%
12,69%	8%	7%	-1%
1,67%	0%	0%	0%
2,70%	**10%**	**5%**	**-5%**
2,70%	1%	0%	-1%
-	9%	5%	-4%
12,80%	**36%**	**39%**	**3%**
1,73%	8%	8%	0%
7,46%	8%	13%	5%
3,61%	13%	9%	-4%
-	7%	9%	2%
9,51%	**12%**	**5%**	**-7%**
4,04%	0%	0%	0%
5,47%	12%	5%	-7%

	Ideology	Abbreviation	EP Group
Spain			
United Left- Initiative for Catalonia Greens-United and Alternative Left-Bloc for Asturias	left-wing	IU-ICV-EUIA-BA	G/EFA, GUE/NGL
(Unidos) Podemos	left-wing	UP	GUE/NGL
Sweden			
Sweden Democrats	right-wing	SD	EFD
Left Party	left-wing	V	GUE/NGL
United Kingdom			
UK Independence Party	right-wing	UKIP	EFD

Sources for the polls:
CBOS - http://www.cbos.pl/EN/home/home.php; CVVM - http://cvvm.soc.cas.cz/en/ ; EMNID – https://www.tns-emnid.com/ ; Eurosondagem - http://www.eurosondagem.pt/inform/barometro.htm ; Fakti - http://www.latvianfacts.lv/ ; Gallup Austria - http://www.gallup.at/de/
Dedicated - http://www.dedicated.be/ ; GPO - http://gpo.gr/en/ ; ICM - https://www.icmunlimited.com/polls/; Ifop - http://www.ifop.com/ ; INSCOP - http://www.inscop.ro/ ; Ipsos MRBI - http://ipsosmrbi.com/ ; Ipsos Netherlands - http://www.ipsos-nederland.nl/ ;; Ipsos Sweden - http://ipsos.se/ ; Ixé - http://www.istitutoixe.it/ ; Malta Today - http://www.maltatoday.com.mt/news/data_and_surveys/ ; Medián - http://www.median.hu/; Median SK - http://www.median.sk/uvod_en.htm ; Mediana - http://www.mediana.bg/en/ ; Metron – http://www.metronanalysis.gr/en/ ; Promjica Plus - http://www.promocija-plus.com/eng/ ; Taloustutkimus - http://www.taloustutkimus.fi/in-english/ ; TNS Emor - http://www.emor.ee/ ; TNS Spain - http://www.tnsglobal.es/servicios/Political/Barometro-Electoral ; TNS-Gallup, Denmark - http://www.tns-gallup.dk/ ; TNS-Ilres - https://www.tns-ilres.com/cms ; Vilmorus - http://www.vilmorus.lt/en

EP election results in 2014	Support among likely voters in Q4 2016 (based on opinion polls)	Support among likely voters in Q4 2017 (based on opinion polls)	Change in support between Q4 2016 and Q4 2017
17,96%	**23%**	**16%**	**-7%**
9,99%	0%	0%	0%
7,97%	23%	16%	-7%
16,00%	**24%**	**23%**	**-1%**
9,70%	17%	16%	-1%
6,30%	7%	7%	0%
27,50%	**14%**	**4%**	**-10%**
27,50%	14%	4%	-10%

CONTRIBUTORS

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FRIEDRICH EBERT STIFTUNG

The State of Populism in Europe 2017

With special focus on the populists in Austria, the Czech Republic, France, Germany and the Netherlands

The "Populism Tracker" monitoring system was jointly developed by FEPS and Policy Solutions in 2015 under the auspices of The Progressive Post's Populism Tracker research project. The objective of this system is to analyse the changes in the popularity of approximately 80 parties that are labelled as populists in academic literature.

This current book surveys the popularity and influence of populist parties in the EU's 28 Member States in 2017. Readers can also learn in more detail about the state of populism in five EU countries where elections were held this year, namely Austria, the Czech Republic, France, Germany and the Netherlands.

Contributors :

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