

# FAR-RIGHT PARTIES AND DISCOURSE IN EUROPE: A challenge for our times



european network against racism

**Authors: Robin Wilson and Paul Hainsworth**

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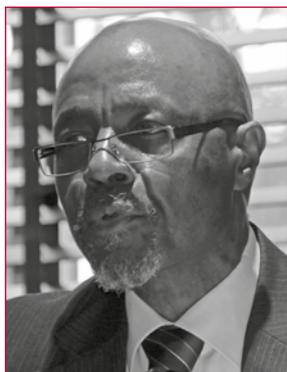


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## Foreword



The far right is spreading throughout Europe and influencing conservatives and political parties in government alike. Examples of this are the rise in popularity of the True Finns in Finland and of the Dutch Freedom Party of Geert Wilders, as well as the institutionalisation of far-right parties in European party politics in countries like Austria, Denmark and France.

Rather than develop innovative ideas and show political courage, many prefer to embrace far-right themes under the guise that ‘the far right asks the good questions but brings the wrong answers’. A number of political leaders have tended to respond to the many issues facing the European Union and its Member States in a reactionary way instead of being innovative. These issues, which demand not only innovative thinking but also the harnessing of the wealth of talents available in diverse Europe include ageing populations, migration, increasing income gaps between the rich and poor, the financial and economic crisis, unemployment, to name a few. When political leaders borrow from far-right narratives in order to win some of the far right’s electorate, this trivializes the heritage of democracy and indirectly contributes to far-right violence in Europe.

The victims of far-right movements are often from minority communities: Roma, Blacks, Muslims, Jews, gays and lesbians, among others. But the recent Oslo and Utøya killings demonstrate that far-right ideologies are a danger for the whole of society and not only for minorities. Anyone can become victim of the violence of far-right fanatics, intent on wiping out diversity from our societies. Since far-right discourse is constructed through the everyday experiences and the attitudes of its members and to some extent, the wider society, an analysis of the different aspects of this growing far-right movement is much needed.

This publication therefore aims to provide an analysis of contemporary far-right political parties in the European Union by reviewing the current political situation and examining the discourse and context of these parties. It examines the varying arguments used in far-right discourse, the reasons for its expansion and growing success throughout Europe, and further assesses differences between EU Member States. It also explores how other political parties, organisations and societies have responded to the challenges of far-right presence, and proposes some alternatives to the success of the far right in gaining popularity through simple messages.

The publication is part of ENAR’s conceptualisation of a ‘progressive narrative on equality and diversity for all’, which aims to create a new vision of society that recognises the benefits and the necessity of equality and diversity for creating a vibrant European society and economy. The idea is to counter the tendency of political systems to construct basic homogenous national identities by embracing and promoting the notion of a heterogeneous, inclusive society, which acknowledges and values diverse cultures, ethnicities, religions, genders, as well as many other distinguishing ‘characteristics of difference’. ENAR thus aims to change mindsets, policies and practices so that all members of society, whatever their skin colour, gender, religion, disability or sexual orientation, etc. can enjoy full participation and equality in European society.

Chibo Onyeji,  
ENAR Chair

## Executive summary

### Success and failure on the far right

#### Overview across the EU

The far right appears to be on the rise throughout Europe. As it spans its base across the EU, it has influenced conservatives and political parties in government alike. The far right in Europe has had mixed and varied successes in recent decades. Different (and the same) parties in different (and the same) countries have experienced ups and downs at the ballot boxes. In some EU countries, far-right parties have been more than one-off, protest parties but have enjoyed a de facto institutionalisation in European party politics (e.g. Austria, Italy, Denmark, Switzerland, and France). In contrast, a number of EU Member States have experienced quite sudden, recent and somewhat unexpected breakthroughs of far-right parties, thereby conveying the pan-European picture of an ever-broader and receptive electorate for this political family (e.g. Sweden, Finland, The Netherlands, and Hungary). There are also countries (Germany and Great Britain) where far-right parties have only secured small percentages of the vote and are seen as 'beyond the pale' by most voters and civil society. Even here, however, they have made significant gains in the past decade and enjoyed limited success at supranational, local and regional levels. In Mediterranean countries, far-right parties have emerged but with little electoral success and stature. Nevertheless, the far-right Popular Orthodox Rally (LAOS) increased its share of the vote in 2007 and entered the Greek national parliament.

#### Elections and voters

Elections have served as important markers of far-right success and failure. Often, landmark breakthroughs by far-right parties have put them on the map for wider audiences. Direct elections to the European Parliament, too, have provided useful occasions for far-right parties to make their mark. On the other hand, where far-right parties have participated in government, some legitimacy has been conferred to them and the far right in general, but this has also brought problems of incumbency for populist, anti-establishment parties.

Elections have enabled far-right parties to attract varying levels of support, often breaking out beyond the stereotypes of 'far-right voters'. Where far-right parties have been able to mark their distance from fascism and modernise and convince the voters, they have benefited accordingly. In particular, they have been fishing in the same pool of

uncertain and insecure 'losers of globalisation' as the left. Successful far-right political parties, in effect, have replaced the old communist parties as the 'workers' party in certain countries.

### The discourse of the far right

Far-right parties have three key features: 1) populism, i.e. plain speaking, anti-elitist and anti-establishment; 2) authoritarianism; and 3) 'nativism', i.e. the combination of nationalism and xenophobia.

Hostility to immigration has been a *Leitmotiv* of far-right discourse for many years. But this is not so much an issue of keeping immigrants out as of the interpretation and meaning of integration in public debates. The populist claim is that certain groups have a cultural identity, which cannot be integrated, being supposedly incompatible with liberal values.

Hostility to Islam has become another key element of far-right discourse in recent years. The most successful parties on the far right have come to externalise their intrinsic xenophobia: it is not a matter of 'us' being racist; rather Muslims, 'they/them', are the source of intolerance.

Although many western European far-right parties recognise that anti-Semitism cannot be expressed in the public sphere, it is salient among parties of the far right in Hungary, Poland, the Baltic States, Bulgaria and Romania. In addition, anti-Roma attitudes have been significant in far-right rhetoric and militancy - not just in Hungary with Jobbik but in Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Italy, France and beyond.

Euroscepticism is gaining prominence in far-right discourse and could be a factor for success in the future. The fear of 'lowering national boundaries' extends to Europeanisation and globalisation. The Eurozone crisis has spurred anti-EU stances on the far right, linking ideas of 'national sovereignty' with the dismissal of 'weaker' states, such as Greece. Crisis in the EU provides the far right with a political opportunity structure to be exploited. Another socio-economic aspect is the idea of 'welfare chauvinism', which emphasises a 'national preference' by denying 'foreigners' access or entitlement to the welfare state and further portraying them as parasitic.

## **Explanations of far-right emergence and success**

### **Context and reasons for far-right success**

Initial portrayals of far-right success and breakthrough in EU countries tend to put the emphasis upon broad societal change. As the mainstream parties failed to satisfy the voters, spaces opened up where new social movements could cut into the electorate on the one hand, with extreme-right parties doing the same on the other. However, agency matters too, and the attributes of the parties themselves are a key factor in ensuring their success. Successful far-right parties are those that have been able to organise and take opportunities to exploit the niches in their respective party-political systems.

Far-right parties have been seen to prosper when mainstream parties have converged in terms of policy and practice. Convergence enables far-right parties to portray mainstream left and right governments as basically ‘all the same’ and therefore in need of challenging by alternative perspectives on issues such as immigration and European integration. In addition, the adoption of the notions of a ‘third way’ between left and right by centre left parties betokened an acceptance of neo-liberal globalisation, which left the field open for far-right parties to present themselves as the only anti-establishment forces standing up for the popular will.

Far-right parties share common discursive elements across Europe. But in as much as they have been able to influence the political mainstream in any particular national context, they have done so in part by articulating these elements to other, more country-specific themes. For example, the PVV in the Netherlands has avoided the pitfalls of any association with the Holocaust by taking a strong pro-Israel, as well as pro-US stance.

### **The role of the media**

The far right discourse’s resonance depends on the intermediating role played by the media (including social media). Far-right parties and spokespeople have a particular media attraction because they can successfully re-present themselves as new political kids on the block and can press their core issues of ‘immigration’ and ‘Islam’, all too readily reported and sensationalised as ‘alien’ to the host society. In addition, popular media places the spotlight on the ‘charismatic’ party leader with a populist message, rather than on more unassuming and collegiate figures. The far

right has also sought to bypass the conventional media by using the internet to that effect.

## **Recommendations for contesting the far right**

Contesting the far right entails acknowledging and exploiting the far right’s two Achille’s Heels. The first is that while the far right presents itself as if it were the embodiment of democratic politics from the bottom up, it is deeply embedded in fixed ideas of ‘order’ which are very much top-down and intolerant of dissent. In addition, far-right parties have no positive alternative to offer to the deflationary economics of the centre-right, now dominant in an intergovernmental EU. So while the far right may whisper in the ear of the unemployed worker that an immigrant ‘stole’ his job, it has nothing to say as to how he (or she) might get another one.

As a result, progressives across Europe need to:

- ▶ Propose a cosmopolitan alternative to nationalism and an egalitarian alternative to hierarchy. This entails developing a common project, which unites rather than separates and would include genuinely European political parties and networks as well as a modern New Deal to offer hope and security to all.
- ▶ Focus on the local level and engage with local people and their concerns. This is linked to the need to draw upon the resources of civil society and to encourage all people to become more involved in political and civic life.
- ▶ Use intercultural dialogue, which recognises the reality of cultural diversity and the associated need for equality, but also the need for a commitment to universal norms. The goal should be to turn potentially explosive symbolic issues in the arena of ‘identity politics’ into practical problems to be solved.

# Introduction

The aim of this publication is to examine the discourse and context of contemporary far-right political parties in the European Union. Parties on the contemporary far right cannot simply be dismissed, nor the issues on which they play and the arguments that they advance be ignored. Parties from this political family have made an impact to varying degrees on European politics and society in recent times. Consequently, as well as examining discourse and addressing the context of far-right emergence, the publication also focuses on other key aspects of contemporary far-right political parties in Europe, notably on their success (or otherwise) in a contemporary setting and on the challenge of contesting such parties. By way of introduction, Chapter 1 provides a basis for the paper: it examines key developments concerning far-right political parties, focusing largely on their electoral success or otherwise across the EU. Elections are important occasions for registering the standing of such parties and the chapter underlines this point whilst also addressing some definitional issues. Chapter 2 draws upon a series of expert interviews, secondary analysis and party material in order to enhance understanding of the discourse of far-right parties. Chapter 3 focuses upon explaining the emergence and success of the far right. Chapter 4 explores how other political parties, organisations and society have responded to the challenge of far-right presence, success and discourse. What seems clear is that far-right parties are not going to ‘go away’ or implode as a phenomenon because the circumstances and contexts in which they emerge and prosper are not likely to dissipate in the immediate future. Chapter 5 makes some concluding remarks on the far right in the EU and briefly outlines a progressive discursive alternative to address the challenge it presents in troubling times.

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## Glossary of parties

AN	National Alliance (Italy)
Ataka	Attack (Bulgaria)
BNP	British National Party
DF	Danish People's Party
DPP	Danish Progress Party
DUP	Democratic Unionist Party (Northern Ireland)
FN	National Front (France)
FPÖ	Austrian Freedom Party
Jobbik	Movement for a Better Hungary
LAOS	Popular Orthodox Rally (Greece)
LN	Northern League (Italy)
LPF	List Pim Fortuyn (The Netherlands)
MS-FT	Social Movement – Tricolour Flame (Italy)
NDP	National Democratic Party (Germany)
NPP	Norwegian Progress Party
NVA	New Flemish Alliance
PS	True Finns
PVV	Freedom Party (Netherlands)
SD	Sweden Democrats
SVP	Swiss People's Party
VB	Flemish Interest

## Chapter 1: Success and failure on the far right

### Overview

The far right in western Europe has had mixed and varied success over recent decades. Different (and the same) parties in different (and the same) countries have experienced ups and downs at the ballot box over time. In one or two countries, notably Austria and Italy, far-right parties – the Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ) (26.9 per cent and 52 seats in the 1999 parliamentary election) and the Northern League (LN) (doubling up to 8.3 per cent and 60 seats in the 2008 parliamentary election), respectively – have managed to become part of the government, though never as the leading player. The FPÖ became the second largest party in the Austrian parliament and its leader, the late Jörg Haider, became the ‘broker’ in the formation of the incoming coalition government. Moreover, the 1999 election result was described by some observers as ‘the greatest success experienced by an extreme right-wing party in Europe for the past fifty years’ (Pedazhur and Brichta 2002: 31). Also of note in Italy is the evolution of the National Alliance (AN) under Gianfranco Fini’s leadership which, notwithstanding its neo-fascist origins as the Italian Social Movement (MSI), moderated its persona, disbanded formally and became part of the government led by Silvio Berlusconi (Tarchi, 2003; 2005). Meanwhile, over the past two decades, the LN has participated in several Berlusconi governments, albeit hastening the downfall of one and eventually calling for his resignation in 2011 (see Albertazzi and McDonnell, 2005; Wilson, 2009).

In other countries, such as Denmark and Switzerland, the far-right party (the Danish People’s Party, DF and the Swiss People’s Party, SVP) has respectively either propped up or enjoyed a place at the government table in recent years. Indeed, since 1999, the latter organisation – focusing increasingly on issues such as Europe, immigration, asylum seekers and Islam – has emerged as Switzerland’s largest political party, reaching a peak of 29 per cent and 62 seats (out of 200) in the 2007 federal parliamentary election. Elsewhere, as in France and Belgium, far-right parties – the Front National (FN) and Vlaams Belang (Flemish Interest – VB) (formerly, prior to 2004, Vlaams Blok) – have achieved impressive and enduring voting returns, but have largely been ostracised, cordoned and marginalised by mainstream political parties and coalitions. This is not to say that they have not made an impact but rather that their electoral and discursive successes have been achieved as ‘outsiders’ to the mainstream politics. As such, these parties have achieved top votes of 16.9 per cent for the FN (for leader Jean-Marie Le Pen

in the 2002 French presidential election) and 12 per cent for the VB (in 2007). In 2004, the VB was the largest party in the Flemish Parliament too, with 32 (out of 124) seats and 24.2 per cent of the vote.

The above parties are also largely examples of far-right parties that have won significant support quite persistently since making initial breakthroughs over past decades. The fact that these parties have been successful over several elections suggests that they are more than one-off, protest parties or fly-by-night phenomena but have enjoyed a *de facto* institutionalisation in European party politics (Pedazhur and Brichta, 2002). Mudde too warns against jumping simply to the role of *crisis* as an explanation of populist radical right party success since *inter alia* ‘although intuitively it may be easy to comprehend, it proves quite difficult to specify’ (Mudde 2007: 205).

In contrast to the above examples, a number of EU Member States have experienced quite sudden, recent and somewhat unexpected breakthroughs of far-right parties, thereby conveying the pan-European picture of an ever-broader and receptive electorate for this political family. In Sweden, for instance, apart from the fleeting success of New Democracy (6.7 per cent and 25 seats in the Riksdag in 1991), there had been little far-right post-war success of note until the Sweden Democrats (SD) achieved 5.7 per cent in the 2010 parliamentary election and entered the Riksdag for the first time. The party’s international secretary asserted: ‘We changed the debate. They can’t ignore us like they used to before’ (Biswas, 2011: 15). Other countries too, such as Finland, Hungary and the Netherlands, have exhibited not dissimilar patterns of voting behaviour and development in recent times.

In the 2011 Finnish general election, for example, the anti-immigrant and Eurosceptic leaning True Finns (PS) party came from a much lower previous return (4.1 per cent and five seats in 2007) to take 19 per cent of the vote and 39 (out of 200) seats, making it the third largest party in the national parliament (Arter, 2011). The election in Finland coincided with the continuing Eurozone crisis and the True Finns made capital out of the likelihood that the country would have to pay some of the cost of bailouts for other EU countries in distress. As one observer summed it up, rising support for the True Finns reflected ‘the temper of the times’ and put the country ‘firmly in line with the cardinal trend in politics across Europe in the past year – the emergence of a populist far right

combining nostalgia for disappearing values and traditions with anti-immigrant and anti-EU appeal'.<sup>1</sup>

Again, in Hungary in the 2010 parliamentary election, the far-right Movement for a Better Hungary (Jobbik) won an unprecedented 16.7 per cent of the vote and 47 seats, making it the country's third largest party. The party had won three seats in the 2009 European Parliament elections and was upwardly mobile, notwithstanding its reputation for anti-Semitism, anti-Roma sentiment and paramilitary links (Ország-Land, 2010). In the Netherlands, too, with the Freedom Party (PVV) in 2007 and more emphatically again in 2010, Geert Wilders picked up the anti-Islamic baton from the assassinated Pim Fortuyn, whose list (LPF) had made a spectacular breakthrough in the 2002 general election (Belanger and Aarts, 2006). Fortuyn had based his successful campaigning on the issue of containing Islam's influence in the Netherlands. The PVV increased its share of the vote from 5.9 per cent (2007) to 15.5 per cent (2010), improving on its number of seats from nine to 15, emerging in the eyes of many as the real winner of the election, and supporting the Christian Democrat/Labour coalition that eventually emerged from the post-election bargaining (Van Kessel, 2011b).

In the Nordic countries of western Europe, the Norwegian Progress Party (NPP) and the Danish Progress Party (DPP) evolved from their tax-populist, anti-bureaucracy, protest party status to become anti-establishment and anti-elitist radical right-wing populist parties, with immigration control becoming one of their main concerns. The NPP achieved 22 per cent and 38 seats in 2005, making it the leading party on the right and Norway's second party overall. The DPP performed well in the 1970s and 1980s, but was overtaken in the late 1980s by the Danish People's Party (DF), which secured around 12-13 per cent in elections (2001, 2005) and played a supportive role in the 2000s to the Liberal-Conservative coalition government, in return for acquiring some influence over policy making and some committee posts in parliament. Meanwhile in eastern and central European countries, the breakthrough of Jobbik has already been noted, but other countries too have thrown up populist far right parties with varying degrees of success, such as Ataka in Bulgaria, the Czech Republicans, the National Parties in Slovenia and Slovakia and the Greater Romania Party. It has been suggested that these parties are both less organised than west European counterparts and more anti-democratic and militant (Goodwin, 2011:3; Haughton *et al*, 2011; Minkenberg, 2011; Mudde 2005; 2007). Undoubtedly, one of the victims of the far right in eastern and central Europe are the Roma population, though western European countries are by no means immune to discrimination against Roma people.

Again, there are countries (Germany, Great Britain) where far-right parties have only secured small percentages of the vote and are seen as 'beyond the pale' by most voters and by civil society. Even here, however, parties such as the British National Party (BNP) and the National Democratic Party of Germany (NPD) have made significant gains in the past decade and enjoyed limited success at supranational, local and regional levels. Moreover, the media attention focused on them has been considerable and arguably it has been far beyond what a small party might reasonably expect (Ellinas, 2010).

In those Mediterranean countries which were exposed to long (Spain, Portugal) or shorter (Greece) periods of authoritarian rule in post-war western Europe, far-right parties have emerged thereafter but have failed to emulate their peers and predecessors in terms of electoral success and stature. There have been some relatively minor developments but the overall picture was summed up by one experienced observer as 'too late for nostalgia, too early for post-material protest' (Ignazi, 2003: 11). Nevertheless, at 3.8 per cent, the far-right Popular Orthodox Rally (LAOS) increased its share of the vote in 2007 (from 2.2 per cent in 2004) and entered the Greek national parliament with 10 (out of 300) seats. More recently, the eurozone crisis opened up a new space for LAOS to enter the non-elected coalition government in November 2011 – a 'first' since the ending of military rule in 1974. Undoubtedly, economic melt-down has provided the far right in Greece with a political opportunity structure to be exploited, courtesy of EU pressure.

Having summarised the above developments, it is important to note too that the emergence, consolidation and success of far-right parties in recent times has not all been one-way traffic. For instance, at the last parliamentary and at the 2009 European Parliament elections, the VB lost votes and seats, the FN vote in the 2007 elections was considerably down on Le Pen's 2002 heyday and the BNP, albeit winning two seats in the European Parliament in 2009, has lost many of the local council seats it gained throughout England in the 2000s. Again, in Denmark in the 2011 parliamentary election, the DF lost ground (three seats) and its bargaining position, as the coalition government changed from centre-right to centre-left control while in Italy the LN has not quite reproduced its electoral successes of the 1990s. In Switzerland too, in the federal parliamentary election of 2011, the SVP lost some ground (eight seats) in a swing to the centre – albeit still performing strongly at 26.6 per cent. Even greater percentage loss was suffered in Norway by the NPP in the local elections of September 2011, with the party going from 17.5 (2007) to 11.4 per cent – a far cry from the party's 22.9 per cent and 41 seats record high in the Norwegian national parliamentary elections of 2009.

1 Ian Traynor, 'Eurosceptic True Finns party surprise contender in Finnish election', *Guardian*, 15 April 2011 ([www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/apr/15/eurosceptic-true-finns-contender-finnish-election](http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/apr/15/eurosceptic-true-finns-contender-finnish-election)).

## Elections and voters

Without doubt then, elections have served as important markers of far-right success and failure. Often, landmark breakthroughs by far-right parties have put them on the map for wider audiences. As already intimated, recent parliamentary elections in Finland (2011), Hungary (2010) and the Netherlands (2010) would fit into this category. Presidential elections in France were important occasions for Jean-Marie Le Pen to achieve much publicity and millions of votes. In this context, Le Pen's sizeable vote in the 2002 French presidential election stands as one of the high-water marks of recent far-right success across western Europe, enabling the FN president to surpass the mainstream left-wing candidate (Lionel Jospin of the Socialist Party) and face the right-wing leader and incumbent president, Jacques Chirac, on the second ballot (Bell and Criddle, 2002).

Direct elections to the European Parliament, too, have provided useful occasions for far-right parties to make their mark, such as when the FN scored 11 per cent and won 10 seats in the EP in 1984, and went on to greater things, or when – in a smaller but significant breakthrough – the BNP achieved its first two European Parliament seats in 2009, following on from a string of local election successes in the 2000s after Nick Griffin became party leader (Goodwin, 2011b). The proportional-representation voting systems used for the EP polls in France and Britain respectively provided more scope for the far right: majority-voting systems in these countries (except for the brief, 1986-8 period of proportional representation in France's Fifth Republic) offer very little prospect of far-right success and seats. Elections though – with far-right parties gaining successes at local and regional polls, and able to exploit Euro-referendums too – have allowed such parties to enjoy media coverage and use their discourse to achieve *de facto* ownership of certain issues, notably immigration.

Elections have enabled the above parties to attract varying levels of support, often breaking out beyond the stereotypes of 'far-right voters' and reaching electoral parts that some observers might previously have thought to be out of bounds. Marginalised far-right parties in Britain and Germany have had some difficulty breaking the mould, but elsewhere, where far-right parties have been able to mark their distance from fascism and modernise and convince the voters, they have benefited accordingly. In particular, as Bert Klandermans puts it, they have been fishing in the same pool of uncertain and insecure 'losers of globalisation' as the left.<sup>2</sup>

For instance, in the 1988 French presidential election, Le Pen won 20 per cent of working-class voters; in the next election in 1995, he increased his share of the working-class vote to an impressive 30 per cent, only to slip back a little to 26 per

cent of this category in the historic 2002 presidential election, though securing a peak 17 per cent overall. Even so, in this election, his support from working-class voters was twice that of his rivals Chirac and Jospin (Hainsworth, 2004). In the 2007 presidential ballot, Le Pen's share of the poll dropped to 10 per cent but he still managed to garner 24 per cent of blue-collar endorsement (Shields, 2010). Le Pen's proletarian successes were summed up thus by one authoritative analyst (Mayer, 1998: 11): 'The FN president seems more successful among male blue-collar workers who are politically undecided and who live and work in urban surroundings where the themes of immigration and crime are more relevant.'

When Marine Le Pen was elected president of the FN in 2011, there were inevitably some doubts as to whether a new leader – and female at that, for a party and political family that always drew disproportionately on support from male voters – could reproduce the overall and working-class scores of her charismatic father. Significantly, however, less than a year ahead of the 2012 French presidential election, opinion polls were showing her to be at 20 per cent overall and a staggering 44 per cent among blue-collar voters, as well as polling way above her predecessor's shares of the vote among women (Goodwin, 2011a: 7).

A similar pattern of working-class attraction to the far right has been evident in Austria, with the Socialist Party (SPÖ) losing many of its voters, actual and potential, to its FPÖ rival. Thus, in 1979, the social democrats won 63 per cent of blue-collar voters and the FPÖ was a marginal, small party. Twenty years later the picture had changed dramatically, with the FPÖ winning a massive 47 per cent of blue-collar support (and 27 per cent overall) and the SPÖ taking 35 per cent in this category. These returns from the 1999 general election – which led to the FPÖ becoming part of a coalition government with the right-wing Austrian People's Party (ÖVP) – were not however permanent: the FPÖ plummeted to a 10 per cent vote in 2002, including only 16 per cent of blue-collar support, and the right and the left made massive inroads into the far right's blue-collar and overall shares of the vote (Luther, 2003a; 2003b).

A simple lesson here was that votes won could become votes lost and that although participating in government conferred some legitimacy on the far right it also brought problems of incumbency for a populist, anti-establishment party. One telling study of this scenario summed up the picture for the far right as 'success in opposition, failure in government' (Heinisch, 2003). As Luther (2011: 468) explains, much depends on how well far-right parties can make the transition from opposition politics and vote maximisation to high political office and responsibility for tough decisions – and so 'erstwhile outsider parties' likelihood of prospering once in office will owe much to their leadership's capacity to identify and implement strategies and behaviours consonant with the parties' new goal [of office bearing] and to deal

<sup>2</sup> Interview, 28 November 2011.

with the inescapable tensions caused by the transition to incumbency’.

The above examples from France and Austria focus on relatively successful cases of vote-winning by far-right parties as regards blue-collar voters. There is evidence too to suggest that, for the FN, success extended to those who were close to a trade union: a third of those who claimed to be close to the party also claimed to be close to a union organisation. This suggested then that trade unions were not so successful in resisting ‘penetration and mobilisation’ by the FN and that union members, to some extent, harboured negative views towards migrant workers (Schain, 2006: 281-282). In the UK, by contrast, the BNP – notwithstanding its strategy of modernisation and moderation over the recent decade – has been less convincing (Goodwin, 2011). Elsewhere though, there have been electoral occasions when blue-collar workers have been seen to support far-right parties in significant proportions. For instance, New Democracy’s flash success in the Swedish election of 1991 drew impressively from the ranks of disaffected Social Democrat voters (Widfeldt, 2000: 497). Again, the DF and the NPP increased their blue-collar vote election after election from the early 1970s until the 1990s and both parties were the first non-socialist parties in their respective countries that were not under-represented among manual workers (Andersen and Bjørklund, 2000: 216-218).

To sum up, blue-collar voting for, and electoral proletarianisation of, successful far-right parties is so well established and practised in various EU countries that it has become commonplace. Indeed the literature on this phenomenon is ever-increasing, pointing to an over-representation of blue-collar workers across far-right party electorates. Successful far-right political parties, in effect, have replaced the old communist parties as the ‘workers’ party’ in certain countries. Moreover, far-right parties have been able to cut into social-democratic parties’ broader electorates for various reasons. Van der Brug and Spanje (2009), notably, have contended that there is a part of the electorate who lean to the left on socio-economic matters and to the right on immigration. Accordingly, Van Kessel (2010: 13) explains how, in catch-all populist mode, in the 2010 Dutch election, Wilders’ PVV managed to ‘win over many former, presumably “left-wing”, Labour and Socialist Party supporters’, as well as many Liberal, Christian Democrat and non-voters.

Suffice here to say that the traditional link between national parties of the left and the working class has been severed at both ends. First of all, the parties have been vulnerable to the more general ‘hollowing out’ of the political system in developed – in this context, primarily western-European – democracies, as parties have become less the representative voices of diverse sections of the citizenry and more vehicles for members of a detached political class to insert themselves in government (Mair, 2006). Secondly, ‘national’ industrial

capitalisms, with previously relatively stable relationships of class and social welfare, have given way in the neo-liberal era to a globalising *informational* capitalism (Castells, 1996), in which the ‘classic industrial worker’ has found himself (as, in terms of recruitment of far-right support, it has mainly been) unable to compete with empowered ‘symbolic analysts’ and struggling to survive in the service, informal or even criminal economies left behind (Kaldor, 2004: 166). This has allowed far-right political entrepreneurs to represent themselves as the voice of the neglected ‘little man’ against the political ‘establishment’. And that, combined with ethnic scapegoating, has provided rich potential for ‘preachers of hate’ (Roxburgh, 2002) like Filip Dewinter, Geert Wilders, the late Jörg Haider and Christoph Blocher to emerge and capture broad support among *les couches populaires* (the working classes).

So, while far-right parties have achieved considerable support and audience – sometimes reaching the parts that might not perhaps be seen by some observers as the obvious reservoirs of support for these parties – there is still potential for further success. The thrust of some recent surveys supports this latter point *inter alia* (Bartlett et al, 2011; Goodwin, 2011; John and Margetts, 2009).

### Definitions

So far, we have utilised the terminology of ‘the far right’ to designate the parties and movements under the microscope. But different observers have adopted a range of concepts to depict the above-named political parties. As one of the leading authorities has pointed out (Mudde, 2007: 11), ‘Both in the media and in the scholarly community an unprecedented plethora of different terms has been put forward since the early 1980s.’ In this context, unsurprisingly, some authors have even questioned the application of the term ‘far right’ (Bartlett et al, 2011: 25): ‘Despite being referred to as “far right”, many of these groups are not easily placed according to traditional political categories, often combining elements of leftwing and rightwing philosophy, mixed with populist language and rhetoric.’ In this context, for example, the True Finns are ‘generally not regarded in Finland as an extreme right party’<sup>3</sup> and it has been suggested that, arguably, the party has a vocal, radical right-wing flank rather than a far-right core. Again, Jean-Yves Camus describes the SVP as typical of a government party that was not ideologically or historically on the far right ‘but to the agricultural right’ and, under Christoph Blocher’s leadership, it evolved ‘towards xenophobic populist positions reflected in speeches on the need to halt immigration and reduce the number of asylum seekers’ (Camus, 2005:15; see also Carter, 2005: 9). To take another case, Dutch observers have stressed that Pim Fortuyn’s LPF ‘mobilized electoral support by making the mix of immigration and crime [its] core campaign issue’, but it

<sup>3</sup> ‘True Finns real winners in Finnish ballot’, Searchlight, June 2011 ([www.searchlight-magazine.com/index.php?link=template&story=350](http://www.searchlight-magazine.com/index.php?link=template&story=350)).

should not be located in the extreme-right political family (Van der Brug, quoted in Carter, 2005: 9).

For reasons of space and focus, here is not the place to examine the parties at length in this regard. But it is worth noting that the following labels have been applied by various authors at various times in different contexts to different parties: extreme right, radical right, extreme right-wing populist, populist extreme parties, neo-populist, exclusionary populist, radical populist right, anti-immigrant, radical right-wing populist, neo-fascist and new populist (see Hainsworth, 2008: 5-23; Mudde, 2007: 11-12). Part of this conceptual indistinctness arises from the very diverse nature of the far right, as Nonna Mayer points out.<sup>4</sup> It includes parties (FN, VB) drawn from the old extreme right, others (FPÖ, SVP) where a parliamentary party of the right has been radicalised, the anti-state and anti-welfare Nordics (DF, NPP), separatists (LN), post-communist extreme-right parties (Ataka in Bulgaria, Jobbik in Hungary) and the more recent populist far rights (PVV, True Finns).

Given the plain speaking, anti-elitist and anti-establishment discourse of various far-right movements however, it is not surprising that populism figures high on the litany of descriptors used by different observers. Indeed the lettering of the Greek LAOS actually stands for populism (Wilson, 2009). Kitschelt (2002: 179) has defined populism as ‘an expression of dissatisfaction with existing modes of organised elite-mass political intermediation and the desire to abandon the intermediaries that stand between citizens and rulers’. In this respect, Betz (2003: 195) has claimed: ‘Radical right-wing parties have derived much of their appeal from their ability to market themselves as the advocates of the common people.’

A recent *Economist* article elaborated: ‘Europe has a dissonant new voice. Anti-Muslim, anti-elite, anti-globalisation and increasingly anti-Brussels, populists now count for something in the Nordic countries, among the Dutch and Flemish, in France, Italy and Austria, and in parts of eastern Europe. They come in many varieties, but all claim to represent what Pierre Poujade, France’s original post-war populist, called “the ripped-off, lied-to little people”.’<sup>5</sup> As such, far-right parties are seen to mobilise around local concerns such as supporting social housing and addressing violent crime or campaigning against the construction of local mosques or asylum centres. Accordingly, a special edition of *New Internationalist*, June 2011, contended that: ‘Far-right populist parties try to pitch themselves as the authentic voice of the people; representatives of “the silent majority” addressing issues they claim have been ignored by politicians’ (Bitwas, 2011: 17). In this respect, Ruth Wodak instances that the FPÖ complains

in Austria of what it calls the *Sprachpolizei* (language police), supposedly denying a hearing to the *vox populi*.<sup>6</sup>

As the late Italian political philosopher Norberto Bobbio (1996a: 90) remarked, ‘people’ is an ambiguous term which is attractive to dictators because democracy is premised on aggregating the votes of citizens, reflecting what Bobbio called ‘the individualistic concept of society’ from which human rights are also derived. One should therefore distrust, he argued, those who advocate an anti-individualistic concept – including practically all the ‘reactionary doctrines’. In his classic dissection of the left-right divide, Bobbio (1996b: 78-79) demonstrated that what differentiated left from right was their respective stances on equality but he also showed that a second political axis, of liberty versus authority, did not necessarily correspond with the former alignment. This generated the readily understandable set of party-political families:

- (a) the ‘Jacobin’ left, egalitarian but authoritarian;
- (b) the ‘liberal’ left, egalitarian and libertarian;
- (c) the centre right, inegalitarian and libertarian; and
- (d) the far right, anti-liberal and anti-egalitarian.

In and of itself, as Hans-Georg Betz contends, populism is ‘an empty signifier’.<sup>7</sup> But, without doubt, it is the populist discourse and appeal of many far-right movements that has helped to make them successful and feared by rival political forces and opponents. Indeed, their authoritarian-populist discourse with its search for scapegoats has diffused troublingly into broader conservative thinking, and even beyond. In an extreme form, Hungary under Viktor Orban, with Jobbik in the political wings, presented the European institutions in 2012 with a challenge to their post-war universal values, a challenge which they failed adequately to meet until it was weakened from within by Hungary’s deepening economic dependency under Orban’s leadership. ‘Communists’ provided the scapegoat for the ‘*Viktator*’, as with Silvio Berlusconi in Italy. And in the end it was the financial institutions that did for ‘*Il Cavaliere*’, responding to his cavalier economic management, rather than democratic European criticism.

Bobbio’s exegesis highlights an important distinction. Successful far-right parties may have pursued a politics of populism rather than the pugilism of the skinheads and the *squadristi*.<sup>8</sup> Yet that remains at variance with a genuine embrace of democratic norms. Such parties retain a fundamentally authoritarian *Weltanschauung* (worldview). And this is one Achilles Heel of the far right: while it presents itself as if it were the embodiment of a democratic politics from the bottom up, it is deeply embedded in fixed ideas of ‘order’ which are very much top-down and intolerant of dissent.

4 Personal communication, 16 November 2011.

5 ‘Beyond the fringe’, *Economist*, 12 November 2011 ([www.economist.com/node/21536873](http://www.economist.com/node/21536873)).

6 Interview, 24 November 2011.

7 Interview, 14 November 2011.

8 Fascist paramilitary groups in Italy active from the 1920s until the end of World War II.

## Chapter 2: The discourse of the far right

As regards the big picture, Carter has examined variations of extreme-right party success in western Europe in relation to reasons for their success and failure. Ideology or discourse is a factor here, but so are other variables, such as agency, relationship with mainstream parties and the impact of respective electoral institutions. As regards ideology (or discourse), she divides the parties up into a typology comprising five different types of extreme-right parties: neo-Nazi (e.g. the NPD in Germany); neo-fascist (e.g. the Italian Social Movement – Tricolour Flame in Italy, MS-FT); authoritarian xenophobic (e.g. the FN in France and the FPÖ in Austria); neo-liberal xenophobic (e.g. the DF in Denmark); and neo-liberal populist (e.g. the NPP in Norway, before the mid-1980s) (Carter, 2005: 13-63). Whilst the former two categories have had difficulty winning votes, the latter three have had more success. Of course, that success has not only depended on some parties having a less extremist discourse than others, but it is also related to other factors such as leadership, organisation, experiences of government inclusion and whether mainstream parties are successfully ‘stealing their clothes’ (e.g. on an issue such as immigration) or whether convergence of mainstream parties opens up spaces or niches wherein extreme-right parties might benefit. In short, discourse matters, but it is not the only thing that matters.

In his survey of the ‘populist radical right’ across Europe, Mudde (2007) identified three key features of this political family. As we have described in the last chapter, populism and authoritarianism are two. But a third is critical – ‘nativism’. By this, Mudde means the combination of nationalism and xenophobia. As Smith (1999) has argued, nationalism implies a belief that one’s own nationality (whichever it may be) has a status akin to a religious elect – a sense of special historical mission denied lesser mortals. As Kristina Boréus explains, nativism adds to this belief in national superiority a determination to exclude non-nationals living in the state and/or cultural practices deemed to be threatening to the ‘nation-state’.<sup>9</sup>

It is immediately clear that these substantive claims by the far right dovetail with its authoritarian-populist political style. For the politics of preference and exclusion is presented as if the party were the embodiment of the ‘people’ against an elite which has purportedly betrayed

the ‘nation’. And the latter is nostalgically idealised as a homogenous imagined community, both obscuring and buttressing the stretched social hierarchy of authority characteristic of contemporary capitalist societies (Wilkinson and Pickett, 2009).

It is essential for the far right to portray these themes as concerns of today’s ‘man in the street’ – to which it alone is honestly and openly responding – as its leaders well know that to be successfully painted by parties at other points on the political spectrum as tied irrevocably to a fascist history is fatal. Marine Le Pen, for example, claims she has ‘de-demonised’ the FN and that if her opponents represent her merely as ‘Jean-Marie mark two’ they will fail.<sup>10</sup> The former MEP Glyn Ford (Labour Party), who has long campaigned against the far right, recognises that the passage of generations and the transformation of the far right in response to the challenges it has faced has meant that the ‘Nazi’ association offers diminishing political returns for progressives. It is difficult in that sense, he argues, to maintain a cordon sanitaire against this ‘fascist-lite’ far right, particularly as it presents itself in stepping out from pariah status as merely more ‘patriotic’. And, meanwhile, lines have become ‘fuzzy at the edges’ as the mainstream right has competed for support with this enlarged electoral threat<sup>11</sup> – through such episodes as the infamous ‘*le bruit et l’odeur*’ speech, stigmatising immigrants and supporting welfare chauvinism, by the then mayor of Paris, Jacques Chirac, in 1991.<sup>12</sup>

A contribution to understanding the discourse of the far right has been provided by Swyngedouw and Ivaldi’s (2001) comparative analysis of the manifestos of key parties in France (FN) and Belgium (VB). These authors examine the core ideological beliefs of the two parties and discern an ethnocentrist view therein, which sees people as different on the basis of their cultural or ethnic origins. Within the parties’ belief systems, immigrants are portrayed as threatening social actors, a drain on state resources and a sign of national decay, detrimental to the utopian imagined far right picture of an organic national community. The authors’ analysis, mindful of the two parties’ commitment to representative democracy,

<sup>9</sup> Personal communication, 23 November 2011.

<sup>10</sup> Kim Wilsher, ‘France’s National Front enjoys renaissance under Marine Le Pen’, *Guardian*, 7 November 2011 ([www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/nov/06/france-front-national-le-pen](http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/nov/06/france-front-national-le-pen)).

<sup>11</sup> Interview, 9 December 2011.

<sup>12</sup> The key paragraph is at [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Le\\_bruit\\_et\\_l'odeur](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Le_bruit_et_l'odeur).

points to 'a set of ethnocentrist, authoritarian and anti-egalitarian values underpinning an essentially non-democratic ideology' (Swyngedouw and Ivaldi, 2001: 1).

Another useful contribution was made by Rydgren (2004), in his study of the emergence of the Danish DF. Rydgren argues that it should be seen as a member of a new party family of radical right-wing populist parties, along with the French FN and the Austrian FPÖ, which all share a fundamental core of ethno-national xenophobia and anti-political-establishment populism. Moreover, these parties were able to exploit the political opportunities that emerged, such as dealignment and realignment processes, deindustrialisation and the politicisation of the immigration issue. Welfare chauvinism has also helped the party to appeal to the discontented elements, unhappy with asylum seekers and migrant workers. Like other observers, Rydgren tracks back to the emergence of the French FN as a model for successful and re-imagined contemporary far-right parties – not least on the issue of immigration.

Hostility to immigration has clearly been a *Leitmotiv* of far-right discourse for many years. But, as Betz contends, this is now not so much an issue of keeping immigrants out as one of what integration means. The populist claim is then that certain groups have a cultural identity which cannot be integrated, being supposedly incompatible with liberal values.<sup>13</sup> In rephrasing and recasting its discourse, according to Piero Ignazi, the far right has successfully borrowed and perverted elements from liberal thinking and instrumentalised such values against Muslims.<sup>14</sup> It has perverted them in the sense that, as Kurt Wachter of the Vienna Institute for International Dialogue and Cooperation stresses, by integration the far right means *assimilation*.<sup>15</sup> Similarly, as Wodak points out, while the FPÖ presents itself as in favour of liberal feminism (against Islam) it also espouses conservative familialism at one and the same time.<sup>16</sup>

There are, in that sense, 'immigrants' and 'immigrants' when it comes to the far right. As Wachter puts it, the target is those immigrants against whom the perceived indigenous culture supposedly needs to be protected – in an Austria taken to be white and Catholic that means Muslims.<sup>17</sup> Nor have 'Muslims' always been labelled as 'Muslims', as Cas Mudde recognises, rather than, say, 'Turks': the events of '9/11' opened up the possibility of an 'acceptable' xenophobia – Islamophobia – especially in Denmark and the Netherlands.<sup>18</sup> And nor has the focus always been on immigrants from the Muslim world: in earlier times, southern Europeans were the target, as Marc

Helbling notes. Indeed, far-right parties may even profess not to be anti-foreigner *per se*, suggesting as in Germany that their target is merely 'criminal' Muslims.<sup>19</sup>

Like many others, Mayer identifies hostility to Islam as a key element of far-right discourse in recent years – although she points out that, as early as 1987, Carl Hagen of the NPP was warning that mosques would become as common as churches. While post-cold-war, far-right parties in eastern Europe may still adopt a language of open xenophobia and anti-Semitism as we will see, the most successful parties on the far right have come to externalise its intrinsic xenophobia: it is not a matter of 'us' being racist, Wilders will argue – Muslims, 'them', are the source of intolerance.<sup>20</sup> In his 'Ten Point Plan to Save the West' Wilders urged people to 'Stop pretending that Islam is a religion. Islam is a totalitarian ideology.' The BNP (2010) too, in its most recent general election manifesto, promised a 'Counter Jihad: Confronting the Islamic Colonisation of Britain'. Elsewhere, the SVP claims that Islam does not in itself require the construction of minarets, thereby offloading blame for the mosque-building controversy in Switzerland, as Helbling adds.<sup>21</sup> This plays with known social-psychological mechanisms of 'dehumanizing the Other' (Chrysochoou, 2004: 53), via the projection of unintegrated aspects of the identity of the Self (Volkan, 1997: 89).

The attack is not only cultural but also socio-economic, as Betz contends.<sup>22</sup> Mayer notes how the French far right coined the idea of 'national preference', which is associated, particularly in the Scandinavian and Dutch cases, with 'welfare chauvinism', denying entitlement to the welfare state on the part of Aliens represented as parasitic upon it.<sup>23</sup> Betz calls this the 'social turn' of the far right.<sup>24</sup> It helps explain the ability of the FPÖ, for instance, to attract middle-class support, according to Wachter. Running close to neck and neck in the polls with the SPÖ, FPÖ support is by no means confined to the 'losers of globalisation'.<sup>25</sup>

How far do these discursive appeals resonate with public opinion in Europe? A survey in eight European countries in 2008 found that around half of respondents agreed with such statements as that there were too many immigrants in their country, that jobs should be given to locals first when work was scarce and (contradictorily) that immigrants placed a strain on the welfare state. A majority of respondents agreed that their 'own culture' needed to be protected from the influence of others and that Islam was a 'religion of intolerance'. While the authors argue that intolerance is transferable from one object to another, they note that this

13 Interview, 14 November 2011.

14 Interview, 15 November 2011.

15 Interview, 1 December 2011.

16 Interview, 24 November 2011.

17 Interview, 1 December 2011.

18 Interview, 18 November 2011.

19 Interview, 24 November 2011.

20 Personal communication, 16 November 2011.

21 Interview, 24 November 2011.

22 Interview, 14 November 2011.

23 Personal communication, 16 November 2011.

24 Interview, 14 November 2011.

25 Interview, 1 December 2011.

rejection of immigrants and of Islam is not so consistently manifested *vis-à-vis* racism, anti-Semitism, sexism and homophobia across the survey countries (Germany, Great Britain, France, Netherlands, Italy, Portugal, Poland and Hungary) (Zick et al, 2011: 54-66). Similarly, a poll in France in 2011 found only minority support for most of the FN's themes, but more than half of respondents – and around two thirds of the working class – endorsed the claim that there were too many immigrants and Muslims had too many rights.<sup>26</sup>

The eight-country survey found levels of intolerance consistently much higher in Hungary and Poland. This is hardly surprising, because the Stalinist era until 1989 prevented the former members of the Soviet bloc participating in the fundamental transformation of political culture in democratic post-war Europe, as it said 'never again' to the anti-Semitism and aggressive nationalism which had brought the Holocaust and a continental civil war. Wodak links the 'moderate and subtle' approach of Le Pen to a recognition that anti-Semitism cannot be expressed in the public sphere in western Europe in the way it can in Hungary and Poland (and indeed Russia). In Hungary, moreover, as to an extent elsewhere in eastern Europe, an historical legacy of non-correspondence between the boundary of the state and that of the imagined community of the 'nation' has given the far right another cultural Other on to which to project hostility – members of national minorities – as Helbling points out.<sup>27</sup>

Anti-Semitism is also significant and salient for the parties of the far right in the Baltic states, Bulgaria and Romania, Wodak stresses – all parties with a fascist history. And, in the former 'west', that applies too to the FPÖ, she says.<sup>28</sup> Wachter links this to the failure in post-war Austria to confront its wartime past. The country had been represented as the first victim of Nazism, he pointed out, until the coalition installed in 1987 and led by the SPÖ chancellor Franz Vranitzky, who affirmed that Austria had also played an active agency role.

Hostility towards another community whose members can be misrepresented as national outcasts should also not be downplayed – particularly, though not only, beyond the former Iron Curtain. Anti-Roma attitudes have been significant in far-right rhetoric and militancy – not just in Hungary with Jobbik but in Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Italy, France and beyond. Yet this has not been given the attention it deserves, according to Valeriu Nicolae of the Policy Center for Roma and Minorities in Bucharest. He believes this is linked to widespread endorsement of such attitudes on the centre right and centre left. Wodak agrees,

complaining that the EU is doing nothing in the face of the Hungarian scenario,<sup>29</sup> which has included violent and even fatal attacks on members of Roma communities.

Particularly in eastern Europe, homophobia also plays a central role. This draws upon wider religiously conservative values, Mudde notes, in Latvia for example.<sup>30</sup> It is also a strong current in Northern Ireland's Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) – a rare case of a far-right party being in government in western Europe, with a strongly Protestant-evangelical membership (Mudde, 2007: 55). The then DUP chair of the Northern Ireland Assembly health committee, Iris Robinson, incurred international opprobrium in June 2008, when she described homosexuality as an 'abomination' in a radio interview.<sup>31</sup>

Nativism means far-right parties oppose any perceived 'intrusion' on their idealised *Gemeinschaft* (community), says Helbling, and this fear of 'lowering of national boundaries' extends to Europeanisation and globalisation. For Mayer, the eurozone crisis has spurred anti-EU stances on the far right, linking as this does to ideas of 'national sovereignty' and dismissal of 'weaker' states such as Greece.<sup>32</sup> Just as, within Italy itself, the LN has consistently campaigned against bailing out the supposedly feckless south, now, as Wachter notes on a European scale, the FPÖ complains that the 'decent Austrian taxpayer' is being ripped off.<sup>33</sup> In the 2011 Finnish general election, the True Finns leader even characterised the election as a referendum on the euro, insisting that his party would not back a bailout package for Portugal (Arter, 2011: 1285). Online supporters and respondents of the far right, in general, have also been found to have negative things to say about the EU: 'waste of money', 'not enough control over external borders', 'loss of our cultural identity', 'more crime' and 'bureaucracy' (Bartlett et al, 2011: 66-67).

In its mission statement / manifesto, the VB warns that 'we adopt a restrained and critical attitude towards the European Union with its bureaucracy and tendency to meddle where the sovereignty of the people should prevail' (Vlaams Belang, 2011). In a recent analysis of the VB's discourse on Europe, Adamson and Johns (2008) illustrate how the Flemish nationalist party ideologically produces 'Europe' in opposition to the EU. The EU is held responsible for excessive non-European immigration, whereas 'Europe' is imagined as a positive construct connected with the idea of Flanders as a 'European' nation. VB voters and potential voters, via opinion polls, are seen to buy into this narrative, positively viewing 'Europe' whilst remaining anti-EU. In

26 TNS-Sofres / Le Monde, Canal Plus and France Inter, 3-4 January 2011; we are indebted to Nonna Mayer for this reference.

27 Interview, 24 November 2011.

28 Interview, 24 November 2011.

29 Interview, 24 November 2011.

30 Interview, 18 November 2011.

31 Leslie-Ann Henry, 'Iris Robinson slammed for offering gay "cure"', Belfast Telegraph, 7 June 2008 ([www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/local-national/iris-robinson-slammed-for-offering-gay-lsquoocurersquo-13507748.html](http://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/local-national/iris-robinson-slammed-for-offering-gay-lsquoocurersquo-13507748.html)).

32 Personal communication, 16 November 2011.

33 Interview, 1 December 2011.

Britain, the BNP would like to take the UK out of the EU. Professing to love Europe but hate the European Union, the party demands ‘an immediate withdrawal’ from ‘an organisation dedicated to usurping British sovereignty and to destroying our nationhood and national identity’ (British National Party, 2010). With its country’s particular geo-location, as Betz highlights, the SVP has had an enduring anti-European stance, defending Switzerland’s wartime neutrality in the face of fascism and seeking to do away with its consensual politics in favour of a UK-style, us-versus-them alternative.<sup>34</sup> Firmly against EU accession, the party asks ‘who will bear the cost of Europe’s vast debts?’ if the elites and political class ‘drag us into the EU by the back door’ (SVP, 2011: 6).

Ignazi agrees that Euroscepticism is gaining prominence in far-right discourse and could be a factor for success in the future. He does stress however that there can be no relationship of automaticity between economic crisis and far-right progress: growth of these parties dates back to the 1980s and 1990s, well before the current crisis.<sup>35</sup> And, as Wodak notes, the particular strength of the far right in prosperous Austria and Switzerland can hardly be put down to the crisis.<sup>36</sup> Indeed, as already noted above, ‘crisis’ can be a slippery concept and explanation of far-right success. For instance, it can be used so generally that it loses meaning. Moreover, as Mudde (2007: 205) suggests, if periods or instances of crisis are predicated on the success of populist actors, then the relationship here becomes tautological.

Other researchers have also pointed out that ‘right-wing extremist parties mobilize feelings of national identity against European integration’ (De Vries and Edwards, 2009: 18). The difficulty here is that, as has long been argued in studies of European integration, the EU was from its conception an elite project – relying only on a ‘permissive consensus’ from European publics for its progress. Popular acquiescence in the European project was sustainable while citizens were more deferential than today but for the two decades since the Danish ‘no’ to the Maastricht treaty it has been increasingly evident that it is no longer so – as the Dutch and French referenda which binned the draft constitution reinforced. According to Marine Le Pen, the construction of Europe was largely done ‘without or even against the peoples of Europe’ (Le Pen, 2011). Ford detects here a shift on the far right in the last two decades from fighting for a different Europe to becoming anti-European as such.<sup>37</sup>

That scepticism towards the EU now targets the stricken euro. Wilders has talked of going back to the guilder for ‘more sovereignty and security’, a stance favourably

regarded by 58 per cent of the population.<sup>38</sup> Marine Le Pen has called for a ‘Plan B’ to prepare for a winding down of the euro, before ‘disaster and panic’ strike.<sup>39</sup> In her French presidential campaign document (*Projet pour la France, 2011*), Le Pen attacks the euro as an ‘economic aberration’, a failure despite the ‘blindness of the tenants of the Europe of Brussels and Frankfurt’ – who refuse to admit it. Yet the response from the EU, now increasingly manifesting itself as primarily a Franco-German intergovernmental partnership, has been in effect to bring about the replacement of democratically elected governments in Greece and Italy, the two most vulnerable euro members, by ‘technical’ governments acceptable to the financial institutions (‘the markets’). This opens a huge political space for what Heather Grabbe calls ‘the politics of resentment against elites’.<sup>40</sup> And there are no firmer exponents of such anti-elite *ressentiment* than the far right.

This does not exhaust the repertoire in the far-right discursive arsenal. As Mudde puts it, two other themes are crime and corruption.<sup>41</sup> But these are by no means disconnected from the wider far-right narrative. A political focus on ‘crime’ can be linked to minority scapegoating and often articulates a defence of traditional authority. Conversely, ‘corruption’ can be presented as yet another symptom of the degenerate character of a remote and enduring governing elite. In this context, Jobbik’s manifesto introduction called for ‘an end to criminality in politics’ (Jobbik, 2010: 1). Certain themes emerge then prominently in far-right narratives and help to define and identify parties belonging to this political family: immigration control, Euro-scepticism, national identity, security, Islam, cultural specificity and national decadence.

34 Interview, 14 November 2011.

35 Interview, 15 November 2011.

36 Interview, 24 November 2011.

37 Interview, 9 December 2011.

38 Peter Cluskey, ‘Right-wing party proposes returning to guilder’, Irish Times, 12 November 2011 ([www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/world/2011/11/12/1224307458708.html](http://www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/world/2011/11/12/1224307458708.html)).

39 Ruadhán MacCormaic and Derek Scally, ‘Sarkozy and Merkel prepare “to take all measures necessary”’, Irish Times, 2 November 2011. [www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/world/2011/11/02/1224306912694.html](http://www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/world/2011/11/02/1224306912694.html).

40 ‘Beyond the fringe’, Economist, 12 November 2011 ([www.economist.com/node/21536873](http://www.economist.com/node/21536873)).

41 Interview, 15 November 2011.

## Chapter 3: Explanations of far-right emergence and success

### Context and reasons for far-right success

Having examined the standing and discourse of the far right in Member States of the EU, this chapter focuses on the reasons and explanations for the phenomenon's success. A number of arguments have been put forward to explain far-right success in the post-war and contemporary setting. Indeed, as one recognised authority suggests (Mudde, 2007: 201), 'Given the explosion of literature on populist radical parties in the past two decades, it comes as no surprise that explanations for their success abound.' Similarly, Lloyd (2003) has suggested that the rise of populist parties in Europe over recent decades has no single cause. Initial portrayals of far-right success and breakthrough in EU countries tended to put the emphasis upon broad societal change. For example, Ignazi has claimed that as the mainstream parties failed to satisfy the voters, spaces opened up where new social movements and their partisan representatives cut into their electorate on the one hand and extreme-right parties did so on the other. Thus, declining party identification left the voters freer to switch their vote. In this context, parties emerged that were different from the old neo-fascist parties and capable of winning support. Again, Ignazi argued: 'They [were] the by-product of the conflicts of the post-industrial society where material interests [were] no longer central and bourgeoisie and working class [were] neither so neatly defined nor so radically confronted' (Ignazi, 1996: 560). In the evolving post-war world, class identification became less pronounced and traditional party and organisational loyalties became weakened, thus opening up the space for new developments.

However, notwithstanding the above scenario, it must be stressed that agency matters too and, on the supply side, the attributes of the parties themselves are a key factor in ensuring their success. Increasingly, therefore, in order to square the circles commentators have turned also to internalist and party-centred interpretations of far-right performance. As Williams (2006: 37) explains, party structure and organisational capacity count: 'The closer a group gets to sophisticated party organization, the more likely their prospects for effective policy impact will be.' In their comparative case study, too, Swyngedouw and Ivaldi (2001: 2) have illustrated how the VB and the FN 'were able to successfully organise highly centralised and powerful party machines'. Moreover, Pedazhur and Brichta's (2002: 47) analysis of the FPÖ and the FN points

to the institutionalisation and stabilisation of these two parties as a result of their strong charismatic leaders, substantial electoral support and continuous representation in national, European and local government structures. Indeed, as a result, these parties were seen therefore to have considerable influence and 'blackmail potential'. Again, De Lange and Art (2011), contrasting the ephemeral character of the LPF and the more sustained presence of the PVV in the Netherlands, argue that radical right parties need to build up their organisation (e.g. leadership, recruitment, training and socialisation of candidates) before electoral breakthrough rather than after if they are hoping to survive and institutionalise. In short then, far-right parties are not simply bystanders and passive recipients of political opportunities that come their way. They are key agents in the narrative about their success and failure (Carter, 2005; Goodwin, 2006; Hainsworth, 2008; Mudde, 2007; Norris, 2005; Rydgren, 2004). Basically, successful far-right parties are those that have been able to organise and take their opportunities and exploit the niches in their respective party-political systems. They have to 'design the appropriate appeal that seizes the moment and exploits the strategic weakness of the existing parties' (Kitschelt 2005: 14).

As regards seizing the moment, far-right parties have been seen to prosper – though not always – when mainstream parties have converged in terms of policy and practice. Kitschelt (2005) points to the experiences of Austria, the Netherlands, Switzerland and Belgium in this respect. Convergence enables far-right (and other) parties to portray mainstream left and right governments as basically 'all the same' and therefore in need of challenging by *alternative*, as opposed to *alternate*, perspectives on issues such as immigration and European integration. According to Ignazi (2003: 217), 'The post-industrial extreme right parties are the by-product of a dissatisfaction [with] government policies on issues such as immigration and crime and, at a more profound level, of growing uneasiness in a plural, conflicting, multicultural, and globalizing society.' Again, far-right parties can benefit if they are able to take ownership of the issue of immigration, as in Sweden of late, for instance (Odmalm, 2011).

One of the explanations for the success of the far right in recent years indeed lies in the evolution of the parties of the centre left in Europe in the 1990s. The adoption, led by 'New' Labour in Britain and the Social Democratic Party in Germany, of the notions of a 'third way' between left and

right or a centrist *Neue Mitte* betokened an acceptance of neo-liberal globalisation. While this proved electorally successful, with social-democratic parties in power alone or in coalition in most EU states in the latter part of the decade, the abandonment of the idea that the left faced an adversary in capitalism and that it was distinguished from the right by its pursuit of equality not only meant that such victories proved short-lived but also, according to Mouffe (2000: 116-17), left the field open for far-right parties to present themselves as the only anti-establishment forces standing up for the popular will, in what Ford calls 'anti-politics'.<sup>42</sup> For Mouffe the task of democratic politics is not to abolish conflict but to render it an 'agonistic' contest among adversaries, rather than mere antagonism between enemies – the latter being the friend-foe politics of identity, rooted in the ideas of Carl Schmitt, which Mudde (2007: 63) associates with today's far-right discourse of 'us' versus 'them'.

That legacy remains, with social democrats unable to articulate a powerful critique across Europe of the crisis of capitalism since 2008, as Ford contends.<sup>43</sup> That crisis has expressed itself most forcefully precisely in those states for decades ruled by fascist or military dictators – Portugal, Greece, Spain and Italy (and Ireland as an authoritarian democracy) – which had never enjoyed the stabilising social force provided by the universal welfare states and relative equality of those Nordic countries (Norway, Sweden, Denmark) where the crisis has been least in evidence. In Greece and Spain, social-democratic parties which presided over drastic austerity budgets have been unceremoniously ousted – if only in one case via the ballot box. That said, the far right has not, with the exception of its presence in the Greek 'technocratic' government, been a major beneficiary in those states on the European periphery where the crisis has been most intense. And this is a second Achilles Heel of the far right, in addition to the authoritarian implications of its populism – the conservative economic implications of its social Darwinism.

For in the end far-right parties have no positive alternative to offer to the deflationary economics of the centre-right, now dominant in an intergovernmental EU run from Berlin (and Paris) rather than Brussels. In Switzerland, for instance, as Helbling points out, the SVP is quite 'liberal' in the economic sense.<sup>44</sup> And in Belgium, according to Swyngedouw, Dewinter largely stays silent on the economy, except for populist remarks about the Greeks – the scapegoating agenda takes precedence.<sup>45</sup> So while the far right may whisper in the ear of the (archetypally male) unemployed worker that an immigrant 'stole' his job, it has nothing to say as to how he (or she) might get another one. Hence, as Ignazi points out, of note is the poor experience

of the far right in government, as evidenced by the FPÖ in Austria or the AN and LN in Italy.<sup>46</sup>

But social democrats remain exposed. For the far right can link both of these themes to its populist pitch by claiming, as Helbling puts it, that the elite comprises liberal-left supporters of multiculturalism who do not take seriously the problems the ordinary citizen faces.<sup>47</sup> And Mudde contends that whatever role greens and NGOs may play against the far right, social democrats have a key responsibility because of the profile of their support, yet they have in some cases given up core concepts of class and solidarity in favour of an ethnic discourse. In the Netherlands in particular, the Labour Party has become caught in clientelistic relationships with sections of the migrant population, he argues.<sup>48</sup>

Far-right parties undoubtedly share common discursive elements across Europe, notably hostility to immigration and Islamophobia as we have indicated. But in as much as they have been able to influence the political mainstream in any particular national context, they have done so in part by articulating these elements to other, more country-specific, themes. So, for example, the PVV in the Netherlands, personalised by the leadership of Wilders, has avoided the pitfalls of any association with the Holocaust by taking a strong pro-Israel, as well as pro-US stance. Equally, its rhetorical support for women's and gay rights has ensured it does not confront the liberal Dutch political culture (Vossen, 2011). This linking of themes works in a context where Israeli and US political discourses have swung markedly rightwards in recent years and Islam can be presented as the principal barrier to emancipation. According to Swyngedouw, in Belgium Dewinter of the VB has similarly sought to engage the Jewish community as an ally against Islam.<sup>49</sup> Again, Marine Le Pen in her 2012 presidential campaign has also made conspicuous overtures to Jewish opinion.

It is also important to recognise that the salience of the issues on which the far right mobilises may be uneven across Europe. Thus, for Klandermands, while some 30-40 per cent of people in the Netherlands adhere to xenophobic sentiments, providing a favourable climate for any charismatic populist to exploit, hostility to immigration/Islam appears to have become less salient in Denmark.<sup>50</sup> In September 2011 a 'red bloc' coalition led by the Social Democrats, pledging instead of austerity higher taxes on the rich to protect the welfare state, ended a decade of right-wing government, in which the DF had acted as the tail that wagged the dog of the centre-right administration.

42 interview, 9 December 2011.

43 interview, 9 December 2011.

44 interview, 24 November 2011.

45 interview, 16 November 2011.

46 interview, 15 November 2011.

47 interview, 24 November 2011.

48 interview, 18 November 2011.

49 interview, 16 November 2011.

50 Interview, 28 November 2011.

### The role of the media

Whatever the power of the far right's discourse, its resonance depends on the intermediating role played by the media (including social media). And there are at least two reasons why far-right spokespeople might have a particular media attraction – highlighting the need, as Wodak argues, for training of journalists in how to deal with the far right and for greater diversity among the staff of media organisations.<sup>51</sup>

First, the media represent the world on the basis of news values. The classic study of how the media could be part of a 'moral panic' about 'race' in a British midlands city at the height of the strength of the far right there in the 1970s (Hall et al, 1978: 53-7) highlighted that such values include a focus on the 'out of the ordinary' – embellishing just how 'abnormal' the object of attention may be, particularly in a competitive media market – against a background of readers/viewers interpellated as a presumed social 'we'. This gives far-right parties today a clear media *point d'appui* (pressure point): they can not only successfully re-present themselves as new (and certainly not old fascist) political kids on the block but they can press their core issues of 'immigration' and 'Islam', all too readily reported and sensationalised as 'alien' to the host society.

In that vein, as Ellinas (2004: 204) has pointed out, 'the media lower the barriers of entry into the electoral market by giving new parties the means to disseminate their message across a wider audience than their organizational or financial resources would allow'. Smaller far-right parties can benefit from media exposure and compensate for financial or organisational weaknesses. This factor, in addition to the personality attributes of Fortuyn, certainly helped explain his momentous success in the 2002 Dutch general election, where the LPF leader was calculated to have benefited from 24 per cent of all media coverage – a figure way ahead of his rivals (Belanger and Aarts, 2006). Again, without Jean-Marie Le Pen's groundbreaking performance and audience exposure on French TV's *L'Heure de Vérité* in February 1984, the FN would not have been so well placed to benefit from the European elections in 1984, which in effect announced the arrival of the party as a player of some significance in French and European politics and society.

The second, more specific, factor is the emphasis of the popular media on 'human interest', referring to both an object of interest and the human reader/viewer to be *interested*. In politics, this places the media spotlight on the 'charismatic' party leader with a populist message, rather than on more unassuming and collegiate figures and, particularly, on actual policy propositions in play.

51 Interview, 24 November 2011.

Klandermans describes Wilders in the Netherlands as 'a master in getting media attention'.<sup>52</sup> Swyngedouw similarly notes that Bart De Wever, leader of the New Flemish Alliance (NVA) which has eclipsed the VB, is very successful on TV, with his mixture of humour and populism.<sup>53</sup> From Jörg Haider and Pim Fortuyn to Pia Kjaersgaard ('Mama Pia') and Marine Le Pen ('Marine') and now Timo Soini of the True Finns, the far right has in this sense been able to deploy its authoritarian character to advantage, with the cult of the leader's personality chiming well with the media appetite for larger-than-life figures. One newspaper profile described the Finnish 'bear of a man' thus: 'With his lumbering build, baggy grey suits, football scarf and booming voice, Soini is a long way from the sober consensus politicians, who built Finland's welfare state.'<sup>54</sup>

Euronews recently produced a quality package on the far right, including an extensive interview with the director of ENAR.<sup>55</sup> The editor in chief of news at the station, Peter Barabas, wants to take the far right seriously and not to 'promote stereotypes': it is now more 'sophisticated' than in its flag-waving past, he argues, and spokespersons like Marine Le Pen or Wilders – if not the marginal Griffin in Britain – are 'very shrewd', applying 'measure' to their comments and operating like 'political animals'. But, on the other hand, Euronews does not want to exaggerate the challenge the far right poses and so contribute to a cycle of intolerance and defensiveness in which members of minority communities, faced with second-class citizenship, are concentrated in ghettos for mutual support. Euronews is confronted by 'freedom of speech' claims on behalf of far-right representatives but it takes the view that it has to report factually and responsibly, and in that context freedom of speech is never absolute. Barabas adds that this 'sophistication' of communications on the contemporary far right extends not only to its approach to the conventional media but also to the exploitation of social media.<sup>56</sup>

The far right has also, of course, sought to bypass the conventional media by using the internet to effect (Bartlett et al, 2011; Copsey, 2003; Jackson and Gable, 2011). While Jobbik has formally complained to Neelie Kroes, the EU commissioner for the digital agenda, that it receives too little coverage from the Hungarian media, it knows it can rely on a network of hundreds of sympathetic websites interlinked via platforms like Facebook or iWiW, a Hungarian social-networking service.<sup>57</sup> Betz points out how the anti-Islamic website Gates of Vienna shows many international

52 Interview, 28 November 2011.

53 Interview, 16 November 2011.

54 Richard Orange, 'Far-right Finnish politician Timo Soini bids for presidency', Observer, 13 November 2011 ([www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/nov/13/timo-soini-finnish-presidency](http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/nov/13/timo-soini-finnish-presidency)).

55 'Close up: the rise of Europe's far-right', 8 December 2011 ([www.euronews.net/2011/12/08/close-up-the-rise-of-the-far-right/](http://www.euronews.net/2011/12/08/close-up-the-rise-of-the-far-right/)).

56 Interview, 12 December 2011.

57 Keno Verseck, 'A revised portrait of Hungary's right-wing extremists', Spiegel Online, 3 February 2012 ([www.spiegel.de/international/europe/0,1518,813243,00.html](http://www.spiegel.de/international/europe/0,1518,813243,00.html)).

links to others on the far right.<sup>58</sup> This connects, he argues, into a perceived common 'Occidental culture' marked by 'Judaean-Christian values' deemed to be under threat.<sup>59</sup>

*Der Standard* was established in the wake of the 'Waldheim affair' – which saw the former UN secretary general elected as Austrian president in 1986 despite revelations about his wartime *Wehrmacht* role – to counter the nationalistic reporting which the episode evinced in Austria. For a long time, according to its columnist Hans Rauscher, *Der Standard* and *Kurier* were alone in the Austrian media in pointing out that the rising star Haider was using Nazi language. There was a debate among journalists as to whether they should pick up on his every saying or write about him so much, and even some of Rauscher's colleagues said: 'Easy, we have to live with him.' His personal view remains 'that you have to call a spade a spade' and that in the long run this earns respect. By contrast, Rauscher claims, if Haider's successor as FPÖ leader, Heinz-Christian Strache, says that the EU comprises 'a bunch of robbers' the populist, anti-immigrant and Eurosceptic *Kronen Zeitung*, which attracts 43 per cent of newspaper readers, will put the story on page one. He does, however, detect slight progress in that even *Kronen Zeitung* distanced itself from some of Haider's wilder remarks.<sup>60</sup>

John McLeod of the Institute for War and Peace Reporting, which has specialised in coverage of the former sphere of 'actually existing socialism', argues that the rapid rise of the far right in some countries since the change has retained a novelty value, and a party like Jobbik in Hungary, for example, is bound to attract more media attention than 'tedious' issues of financial mismanagement there. But he sees this as inflating the long-term threat from the far right in eastern Europe. While parties reprising intolerance against members of other, neighbouring nationalities were able particularly to resonate when the old regimes collapsed, cosmopolitanising trends in daily life and the pull of the European institutions threaten to leave such parties in the 'marginal, BNP-type' category, he contends.<sup>61</sup> Nevertheless, even if there is no guarantee that media coverage of the far right will change attitudes in its favour, Helbling suggests that it may make the issues it wants to foreground more salient to the public.<sup>62</sup>

58 See <http://gatesofvienna.blogspot.com/>.

59 Interview, 14 November 2011.

60 Interview, 9 December 2011.

61 Interview, 30 November 2011.

62 Interview, 24 November 2011.

## Chapter 4: Contesting the far right

In this chapter, the focus is upon how various organisations, parties and individuals have contested the emergence, success and discourse of the far right.

In a Chatham House<sup>63</sup> report, Goodwin identified six possible ways of responding to populist extremist parties (PEPs): exclude them, defuse their message, to some extent adopt their narrative and policies, face up to them in a principled manner, engage more with grassroots voters at community level and encourage interaction with different groups on an intercultural level (Goodwin, 2011: 23-28). On the one hand, he concludes that there is 'no uniform response to populist extremism' and much depends on the specific context. On the other, he suggests (Goodwin 2011: 95): 'The most effective responses will be those that focus on the local level, where engagement with voters and interaction between different communities is a realistic prospect and can be forged around shared experiences and conditions.'

The need to engage with local people and their concerns had been recognised by the then UK minister for communities and local government, the Labour Party's Hazel Blears, in response to the findings of a report for the Department for Communities and Local Government. The report was based on interviews with people living on estates in Birmingham, Milton Keynes, Thetford, Runcorn and Widnes. According to Blears, 'White working-class people living on estates sometimes just don't feel anyone is listening and speaking up for them ... While they might not be experiencing the direct impact of migration, their fear of it is acute.' As a result, Blears considered that far-right myths about immigration had found a fertile ground in such communities, especially with the lack of an 'open and honest discussion' about the issue among the local and national politicians.<sup>64</sup> However, this assessment can be read (even if not intended) as an in-house critique as much as an appeal for broader engagement across the board. And, arguably, Blears unwittingly highlighted a key contradiction in this regard: hostility to immigration tends to be lower in multi-ethnic neighbourhoods than in those where the immigrant presence is small.

In part, the above approaches dovetail with Minkenberg's call for a 'militant democracy', which holds that 'the fight against the radical right' should not be limited to official institutional approaches, but should draw upon the resources of civil

society (Minkenberg, 2006: 44; see also Eatwell, 2004: 11 and Hainsworth, 2008: 122-126). In a recent report from the London-based think tank Demos, examining the data on online Facebook supporters of populist parties, the authors (Bartlett *et al.* 2011: 22) conclude: 'Mainstream politicians need to respond: addressing concerns over immigration and cultural identity, without succumbing to xenophobic solutions.' At the same time, the report calls for restoration of confidence in civic institutions, given the low levels of trust therein, and encouragement of people to become more involved in political and civic life (Bartlett *et al.* 2011: 23).

Mainstream politicians have in many instances sought to limit the appeal of the far right by incorporating elements of their discourse into their own – at great risk, of course, of merely legitimising the far right and allowing the whole political spectrum to be shifted towards greater intolerance. Thus, for example, after the good showing by the BNP in the 2001 general election, the Labour home secretary David Blunkett suggested, in the run-up to subsequent local elections, that giant accommodation centres for asylum seekers would prevent them from 'swamping' local services. Blunkett thus echoed the claim by the then opposition Conservative leader, Margaret Thatcher, in 1978, that British people feared they might be 'swamped by people from a different culture'.<sup>65</sup> The BNP leader John Tyndall had protested: 'The Tories under Thatcher appeared to adopt a lot of our policies. She talked about Britain being swamped and a lot of people inferred that she would do something about it.'<sup>66</sup>

Interestingly, Blunkett's remark above came the same day that Jean-Marie Le Pen visited the European Parliament, fresh from his first-round success in the French presidential election. The (Asian) British MEP Claude Moraes complained that 'ideas once considered to be fringe and extreme are now at or near the heart of government' (Roxburgh, 2002: 240-2). As Bale has contended (in reference to Austria in particular), centre-right politicians 'have begun to inhabit the same discursive universe as their far right counterparts' (Bale 2003: 76-77). In this context, Rydgren (2004: 493-495) monitored how established parties in Denmark participated in an anti-immigration discourse as the far right gained ground in the country. For instance, between 1997 and 2001 the Liberals attacked the Social Democrat government for pursuing an allegedly generous policy towards immigrants and asylum seekers. In turn, the government tightened up its policies and

63 Chatham House is an organisation based in London which aims to be a world-leading source of independent analysis, informed debate and influential ideas on how to build a prosperous and secure world for all. See [www.chathamhouse.org](http://www.chathamhouse.org).

64 Deborah Summers, 'White working-class fears on immigration exposed in report', *Guardian*, 2 January 2009 ([www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2009/jan/02/immigration-working-class](http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2009/jan/02/immigration-working-class)).

65 See [www.margaretthatcher.org/document/103485](http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/103485).

66 *Independent*, 17 March 1990.

discourse and underwent some divisions as a result. Moreover, opinion polls in Denmark reflected increasing anti-immigrant sentiment throughout the 1990s and beyond (Rydgren, 2004; 2005). According to one particular assessment, in Norway and Denmark, the far right parties 'have played a very large part in the tightening of immigration rules and the treatment of asylum seekers within the country' (Lloyd, 2003: 89).

In France more recently, the revival and 'modernisation' of the FN following Marine Le Pen's assumption of the leadership baton from her father has encouraged the incumbent right-wing administration under Sarkozy's stewardship to chase its electorate. Indeed, the process of undercutting the FN potential vote, particularly in view of the 2012 French presidential elections, had commenced much prior to the party's change of leader (Mayer, 2007; Hainsworth, 2008: 121). Jean-Marie Le Pen's shock vote of 2002 had encouraged the right-wing mainstream to steal the clothes of the FN. This process was however greatly accelerated by Sarkozy as, successively, government minister, presidential candidate in 2007 and an under-fire president facing the challenge of re-election in 2012. In high office, he has pursued a number of initiatives that can be seen as attractive to far-right actual or potential voters: a debate on French national identity, expulsion of Roma families, the banning of the burqa in public places and wrestling with Marine Le Pen for the nativist heritage of Jeanne d'Arc. Nonetheless, it is on the immigration issue inter alia that the Le Pen presidential campaign is focusing leading up to the presidential election. According to Le Pen's *Projet pour la France* (Le Pen, 2011), 'It is in the field of immigration that Nicolas Sarkozy has perhaps the most harshly betrayed the French in general and his voters in particular, in conducting, contrary to his discourse and promises, the most lax immigration policy in the history of the Fifth Republic.'

A strategy of imitation-incorporation on the part of the centre right (and even the centre left) is misconceived. As Klandermans argues, it just makes the argument of the far right respectable.<sup>67</sup> And, as Jean-Marie Le Pen was fond of saying, 'the voters will prefer the original to the copy'. That was borne out, says Wachter, by the 2009 elections for the Vienna region, where the centre-right ÖVP took up in an assimilationist manner the issue of the high proportion of children in Viennese schools lacking German as a mother tongue – 'Let's talk about education, but in German' – only to find that the FPÖ outpolled it and denied the SPÖ a majority.<sup>68</sup> Indeed, Wodak adds, centre-right parties may deter some voters by such a dalliance with the far right. In countries where there is no strong far-right presence, however, like the UK and Germany, the centre right may profit from moving to the right, as Helbling points out.<sup>69</sup>

The eight-country survey mentioned in Chapter 3, while in many ways alarming, also showed that public opinion on the issues on

which the far right have mobilised does depend on how these are discursively framed. Thus a majority of respondents accept that immigrants are needed to keep the economy going and around seven in ten believe they 'enrich our culture'. A majority also agree that it is better for a country if there are many different religions (Zick *et al.*, 2011: 54, 76). So if the problem for progressives has been that the far right has taken ownership of the immigration issue, as Helbling contends,<sup>70</sup> then the alternative is to reframe the issue as the democratic management of cultural diversity.

If the project of the far right, with all its national variations, is an authoritarian-populist pursuit of an exclusionary nationalism, appealing particularly to those at the bottom of the (indigenous) social hierarchy while keeping that hierarchy firmly intact, then the strategy of progressives becomes logically evident. At base, Ignazi stresses, other parties must never forget the principles of democracy – liberty, equality and fraternity.<sup>71</sup> As Boréus contends, they and the NGOs must fight for a cosmopolitan alternative to nationalism and an egalitarian alternative to hierarchy.<sup>72</sup> Concretely, Mayer argues, progressives need to develop a common project, which unites rather than separates. This would include genuinely European political parties and networks and a modern New Deal to offer hope and security to all.<sup>73</sup> Mudde makes a back-to-basics call to social democrats in particular to abandon the term 'immigrant' and espouse a class-based, socio-economic, redistributive discourse.<sup>74</sup>

Part of the difficulty has lain in the manner in which many progressives have felt obliged to support the model of management of cultural diversity which has come to be known as 'multiculturalism'. This is partly explicable by the attachment of conservatives to discourses which deny the empirical reality of multi-ethnicity in contemporary society – for instance, the formerly dominant discourse that Germany was 'not an immigrant nation' – and/or which insist on assimilation on the part of members of minority communities, as in the classic French model defined by purportedly universal 'republican values'. Yet this progressive association with multiculturalism has obscured its conservative origins – rooted in an 'essentialist' conception of identity, as simple, fixed and communitarian. It is no coincidence that in Europe its main exponents were the UK and the Netherlands, former imperial powers for whom, as in British India, the idea that 'communities' were 'inescapably separate and mutually incompatible' (Khan, 2007: 20) befitted a superficial colonial gaze and was transplanted into the metropolitan context with post-colonial immigration.

In the 2000s, amid growing manifestations of conflict in Europe on fault-lines of ethnic tension – such as the bombs in Madrid and London in 2004 and 2005 respectively, the killing of the Dutch film-maker Theo Van Gogh in 2004 and the riots in the French

67 Interview, 28 November 2011.

68 Interview, 1 December 2011.

69 Interview, 24 November 2011.

70 Interview, 24 November 2011.

71 Interview, 15 November 2011.

72 Personal communication, 23 November 2011.

73 Personal communication, 16 November 2011.

74 Interview, 18 November 2011.

*banlieues* in 2005 – it became evident to governments across the political spectrum that the two conventional models for the management of diversity, assimilation and multiculturalism, had failed. In 2005 the member states of the Council of Europe called for a document to advise them on policy and good practice in this regard, and the White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue which emerged in 2008 (Council of Europe, 2008) outlined a new, intercultural, paradigm.<sup>75</sup> Unlike assimilation, this recognised the empirical reality of cultural diversity and the associated need for equality of citizenship and impartial public authority to prevent discrimination and alienation. But, unlike multiculturalism, it also appreciated mutual recognition across cultural dividing lines – a dialogue made possible by commitment to universal norms and essential for preventing the ghettoization of minority communities and the unwitting empowerment within them of culturally ‘traditional’ male figures. The White Paper set out a consequent agenda ranging over promoting human rights and social inclusion, ensuring gender equality, challenging nationalistic narratives of history, tackling stereotyped media reporting, encouraging multi-lingualism, promoting inter-faith dialogue, planning safe spaces for dialogue, supporting NGOs working for dialogue on the ground and so on.

The goal should be to turn potentially explosive symbolic issues in the arena of ‘identity politics’ into practical problems to be solved. For example, Finland consistently comes top in the international PISA tables for the best performing education system in Europe. And it is sustaining that position in part through intensive support for children whose first language is not Finnish, in the face of some pressures to withdraw Finnish pupils from diverse schools and for a cap on the proportion of non-Finnish pupils.<sup>76</sup>

Political parties can pursue simple changes to ensure they resemble more a mirror of the diverse societies they represent. Wachter points out that only one (Green) member out of 183 in the Austrian parliament is from the Turkish minority,<sup>77</sup> while Nicolae also urges parties to promote Roma participation.<sup>78</sup> This ‘normalises’ the idea of members of minority communities as fellow citizens, equally capable of advancing the public interest in the political arena, rather than embodying the alien Other. Useful work has been done recently in this regard by the European Roma Information Office (ERIO), in collaboration with the European Network Against Racism (ENAR), in debunking myths about the Roma, contesting Romaphobia and highlighting the reality that Roma are less free to move across the EU than are other European citizens (ENAR/ERIO, 2011).

75 One of the authors was commissioned to analyse the responses from the member states of the Council of Europe to its consultation leading to the White Paper and was then asked to write the first draft of the document.

76 Jessica Shepherd, ‘Immigrant children benefit from Finnish education’, *Guardian*, 21 November 2011 ([www.guardian.co.uk/education/2011/nov/21/finland-education-immigrant-children](http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2011/nov/21/finland-education-immigrant-children)).

77 Interview, 1 December 2011.

78 Interview, 28 November 2011.

Locally, also, there is much that can be done. The Council of Europe / European Commission network of Intercultural Cities, following on from the White Paper, comprises municipalities anxious to see their diverse demography as a challenge and potential competitive advantage, rather than a threat as the far right would wish.<sup>79</sup> This can establish a different dynamic between ‘self’ and ‘other’ – for instance, by involving migrant and non-migrant women in projects advancing a common agenda. A step-by-step guide has been produced by the network, building on the shared experience of its 21 members, east and west, to date.<sup>80</sup>

Betz points out that the process of intercultural dialogue is inevitably a long one. It took a century for Catholics to be accepted in some Protestant centres in Switzerland, he notes, instancing how the cathedral in Lausanne did not have a bell-tower until the 1900s and its bells could not be rung until the 1930s. Similarly, he argues, American Catholicism had to change to respond to the attacks of 19th-century populists and what it meant to be American had to change accordingly, leading to an eventual accommodation. He also argues that parties need to stop being geared towards the rich, as embodied in figures like Dominique Strauss-Kahn, and need to reinvest in the welfare state, to prevent those who feel themselves to be the losers from globalisation voting for politicians like Le Pen.<sup>81</sup>

The far-right threat, while uneven across Europe as we have stressed, is nevertheless continent-wide. Wodak complains of a lack of leadership in this regard. She calls for a stronger voice from the European Union, including the European Parliament and the European Fundamental Rights Agency, particularly on developments in Austria and Hungary. The credibility of the EU on human rights depends on it, she declares.<sup>82</sup>

And, says Swyngedouw, the progressive agenda must also be continent-wide. He calls for a democratisation of the EU and a deepening of its social aspect. In seeking a reinvestment too in the welfare state, he recognises that this is incompatible with the current dominance of a monetarist, deflationary economic policy.<sup>83</sup> Indeed, one of the huge ironies is that German-led orthodoxy derives from a misunderstanding of the origins of Nazism in Weimar hyper-inflation – rather than in the two deflationary Brüning budgets, and consequent mass unemployment, that preceded the rise of Hitler. Socialising the debt of the increasing number of EU Member States threatened by a strike of bond-holders, through the European Central Bank becoming a lender of last resort and the issuing of eurobonds, is thus not only essential to save the euro from potential collapse. It is also arguably critical to diminishing the rising tide of insecurity across Europe, which the far right seeks to translate into nationalistic resentment.

79 See [www.coe.int/t/dg4/cultureheritage/culture/cities/default\\_en.asp](http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/cultureheritage/culture/cities/default_en.asp).

80 Available at [www.coe.int/t/dg4/cultureheritage/culture/cities/ICCsteps\\_en.pdf](http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/cultureheritage/culture/cities/ICCsteps_en.pdf).

81 Interview, 14 November 2011.

82 Interview, 24 November 2011.

83 Interview, 16 November 2011.

## Chapter 5: Some concluding remarks

A spectre is haunting Europe. But far from it being the spectre of Communism, as Marx and Engels had hoped in publishing *The Communist Manifesto* in 1847, it is the spectre of a resurgent and revamped far right, recalling the nightmare of the 1930s.

There is a widespread concern among European progressives that, as during the Depression, a structural crisis of capitalism, far from automatically precipitating a radical shift in public opinion, risks being successfully exploited by the far right, with the centre-right echoing the latter in minor key. This would not only destroy what is left of the post-1945 social-democratic consensus but would redefine politics, in polarised Schmittian terms, against the immigrant/Islamist enemy 'other' while leaving the real author of the crisis, the banker in Keynes' capitalist casino, scot-free. There is a particular fear that social democrats who have spent decades catching up with the emancipating social movements of the 1960s now find themselves undercut, as their core proletarian support finds some reassurance in the slogan of 'security' – however illusory – in a labour market where many hard-won protections have been whittled away as a supposedly unavoidable response to globalisation.

Looking to the future, as we have noted here and elsewhere, far-right organisations have not simply functioned as opposition parties, sniping at governments from the exterior. Some of the more successful parties have become participants in government and policy-making. For mainstream parties, such power-sharing arrangements with the far right have secured working coalitions, albeit at some price in accepting policy influence from their partners. There is all likelihood that in some countries this practice will continue, thereby legitimising the far right, while at the same time pressurising it to manage the transition from opposition to insider – a process with consequences for the far right's voter retention and maximisation. Voter maximisation for far-right parties will be enhanced, to some extent at least, as long as the euro crisis persists and EU Member States resort to imposing austerity measures to help cut deficits. At time of writing too, the resort to (ex-EU) technocrat-led government (as in Italy) plays very much into the hands of largely Eurosceptic, anti-elitist, populist parties. So, for instance, in the 2012 French presidential campaign, Marine Le Pen has made the euro one of her main targets of attack. Undoubtedly, we recall, crisis in the EU has provided the far right with a political opportunity structure to be exploited.

This, however, is not a new challenge: in the earlier phase of globalisation, before World War I, immigration turned Vienna into a multinational city like so many across Europe today. It was in this context that the Austro-Marxists developed the idea of the 'personality principle', by which each resident could decide as to their nationality upon reaching voting age and which recognised the labile character of cultural identity (Bauer, 2000). The liberalisation of citizenship in Germany, effected in 2000 under the previous Socialist Party (SPD) / Green government, was based on this philosophy – with widely welcomed effects (including the high performance of the German World Cup team in South Africa a decade later).

This recognition of what Bobbio was to call the 'individualistic concept of society' was to be at the heart of the anti-fascist consensus, perhaps best embodied in Italy, following the Second World War. The norms which the Council of Europe was founded to embed in 1949 – democracy, human rights and the rule of law – are inconceivable unless the individual citizen is understood to represent the unit of politics, the bearer of rights and the subject of justice. They run fundamentally counter to the metaphorical – and, next, actual – rounding up of whole populations of individuals labelled and homogenised by a stigmatised group affiliation.

This normative golden thread can turn the political tables on the immigration issue, as was evident in 2010 over the hugely historical redolent issue of deportations of Roma from France. First, the right was isolated in the European Parliament on a Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats motion condemning the deportations. Then, albeit after some delay, came the remarkable dressing down for Sarkozy from the European justice commissioner, Viviane Reding – who had the temerity to allude to the transportation of Jews to the camps under Vichy.

We have already pointed to the Achilles Heel of the far right in the authoritarian nature of its populism. And part of the answer for European progressives is thus to be the most committed and consistent advocate of these universal norms, which coalesce in this context in the idea of non-discrimination. But further than that, in a globalised era they should espouse a cosmopolitan politics to manage diversity in a democratic and progressive manner.

This is not a politics of rootlessness as in the conventional understanding of the term but, as David Held (2003: 169)

has defined cosmopolitanism, is characterised by the triple requirement of equality of citizenship, reciprocal recognition of our common humanity and impartial public authority to arbitrate competing cultural claims. It implies, as Ulrich Beck (2005: 92) has argued, a political philosophy of ‘constitutional tolerance’ which ensures the neutral state can be home to individuals from a range of nationalities.

In recent times, there has been a tendency to counterpose cosmopolitanism and ‘traditional’ social democracy. Yet put this way it is clear that it speaks to two key social-democratic concerns: to ensure workers become equal citizens through the decommodification of labour and to maximise solidarity among citizens through a sense of common humanity. The call for employee ownership by Wilkinson and Pickett (2009) is germane in this regard, tackling the labour-market insecurity on which the far right plays while undermining the social hierarchy it buttresses.

A weakness of the 60s movements was not their individualism, still less their anti-authoritarianism, but the relativism and particularism which often accompanied the ‘identity politics’ representing one of the emergent strands. A naïve support for multiculturalism from the left often associated it in the public mind with an incoherent mix of minority cultural ghettos (Hollinger, 2005). This, in turn, facilitated the reappearance of the ‘integral’ nationalism favoured by conservatives in the previous period of globalisation, which assumed individuals from minority communities would assimilate to the prevailing national ‘ethos’ – or go elsewhere. Gordon Brown’s infamous call for ‘British jobs for British workers’ fell into this category, as did the recent futile debate on French ‘national identity’ – Sarkozy even hosted consultations with Jean-Marie Le Pen in the presidential palace as part of the struggle for votes and for ownership of the issue. This approach differed somewhat from the practice of boycotting the FN leader taken by his three French presidential predecessors (Ellinas, 2010: 196-7).

Instead of going down the above contestable paths, progressives should hold out a vision of a truly integrated society, which benefits economically from the cultural dynamism successive decades of immigration have brought to the US for instance, but which blocks the easy path for employers of a race to the bottom by exploiting migrant labour, formally or informally. The high road is one where strong employment protection and universal welfare based on progressive taxation – traditional social-democratic themes, particularly in the Nordic countries – can allow enterprises to maximise their human resources in the face of global competition while simultaneously progressively freeing labour from the insecurity of mere commodity status.

It is no accident that the xenophobic right has emerged as an electoral threat in Sweden in the context of a centre-right government which, while unable to dismantle the welfare state, has increased inequality through tax cuts for the wealthy. Now that progressives across the continent have been liberated from the ‘third way’ accommodation to a discredited neo-liberalism, they can best answer the cry for ‘security’ by pledging to refurbish ‘the people’s home’ with the proceeds of taxes on socially useless financial transactions, high incomes squandered on positional goods and sources of greenhouse-gas emissions. In so doing, they can exploit the other Achilles Heel of the far right – its absence of coherent prescriptions on the economy – to good effect.

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## **FAR-RIGHT PARTIES AND DISCOURSE IN EUROPE: A challenge for our times**

The far right appears to be on the rise throughout Europe. As it spans its base across the EU, it has influenced conservatives and political parties in government alike. Parties on the contemporary far right cannot simply be dismissed, nor the issues on which they play and the arguments that they advance be ignored. Parties from this political family have made an impact to varying degrees on European politics and society in recent times.

Since far-right discourse is constructed through the everyday experiences and the attitudes of its members and to some extent, of society at large, an analysis of the different aspects of this growing far-right movement is much needed.

This publication therefore aims to provide an analysis of contemporary far-right political parties in the European Union by reviewing the current political situation, examining the discourse of these parties and addressing the context of far-right emergence. It examines the varying arguments used in far-right discourse, the reasons for its expansion and growing success throughout Europe, and further assesses differences between EU Member States. It also explores how other political parties, organisations and societies have responded to the challenges of far-right presence, and proposes some alternatives to the success of the far right in gaining popularity through simple messages.

The European Network Against Racism (ENAR) consists of over 700 organisations working to combat racism in all EU member states and acts as the voice of the anti-racist movement in Europe. ENAR is determined to fight racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, to promote equality of treatment between European Union citizens and third country nationals, and to link local/regional/national and EU initiatives.



European Network Against Racism aisbl  
60 Rue Gallait, 3rd Floor  
B-1030 Brussels • Belgium  
Tel: +32 (0)2 229 3570 • Fax: +32 (0)2 229 3575  
E-mail: [info@enar-eu.org](mailto:info@enar-eu.org) • Web: [www.enar-eu.org](http://www.enar-eu.org)