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**"From the margins to the mainstream:
'Europe' as an issue for the Radical Right"**

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The background to the debate

One of the most significant and controversial developments in European politics in recent years has been the electoral rise of Radical Right parties. This phenomenon has been prevalent across EU member states and beyond, as from Scandinavia to the Mediterranean and from the Benelux countries to the post-communist nations. The Radical Right has made advances in national, local and European electoral settings. Parties such as the French Front National, the Danish People's Party, the Austrian Freedom Party, the Party for Freedom in the Netherlands, the Vlaams Belang in Belgium, Golden Dawn in Greece and Jobbik in Hungary have all become significant players within their party systems, both in terms of votes cast and in terms of the impact and influence within their respective countries. As a result, a burgeoning amount of academic literature which has sought to explain this phenomenon has emerged. Inevitably, the historic legacy of fascism and Nazism in the 1930s and 40s linked to the potential danger of a resurgence of such movements has been a major motivation for certain scholars in this area. The general consensus among political scientists, however, is that linking these parties to the historical context, as a means of explaining their increased prominence in recent years, is only of limited value in an era of globalisation and mass immigration.

While most explanations for the rise of the Radical Right have traditionally focused on a combination of 'supply-side' and 'demand-side' variables, an area that has received little academic discussion within this broader debate is the way that Radical Right parties have, in an effort to widen their domestic appeal beyond their traditional 'bread and butter' anti-immigrant discourse, tactically exploited opposition to the EU in an attempt to broaden their electoral base. Thus, for those Radical Right parties that made significant progress in the 2014 European elections (see table 1) such as the Danish People's Party, the Front National (both of which polled around a quarter of the popular vote) and the Austrian Freedom Party (which gained the support of one in five voters). Opposition to the EU has developed as a central policy plank within their broader programmes.

Table 1 The Radical Right and the 2014 European Election Results

Party	% of vote (No. of seats)	Election Ranking (within Country)
Dansk Folkeparti (DF) (Danish People's Party) (DPP)	26.6% (4 seats)	1st
Front National (FN)	24.85% (24 seats)	1st
Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs (FPÖ) (Austrian Freedom Party)	19.7% (4 seats)	3rd
Jobbik (Magyarországért Mozgalom) (Movement for a Better Hungary)	14.68% (3 seats)	2 nd
Coalition Nacionālā apvienība (National Alliance 'All for Latvia!' (VL) / For Fatherland and Freedom/LNNK)	14.3% (1 seat)	2nd
Partij voor de Vrijheid (PVV) (Party for Freedom)	13.2% (4 seats)	3rd
Perussuomalaiset (True Finns)	12.9% (2 seats)	3rd
Sverigedemokraterna (SD) (Sweden Democrats)	9.7% (2 seats):	5th
Golden Dawn (Chrysi Avyi)	9.38% (3 seats)	3rd
Lega Nord (LN) (Northern League)	6.15% (5 seats):	4th
Vlaams Belang (VB) (Flemish Interest)	4.14% (2 seats)	10th
Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschland (NPD) (National Democratic Party of Germany)	1% (1 seat)	12th

The evolution with regard to the position of such Radical Right parties to a 'hard' Eurosceptic' position is a turn-around from the 1980s where Euro-ambivalence rather than Euroscepticism was prevalent in terms of discourse and policy. In France for instance, the 1980s was a decade where the Front National's political elites saw the country's destiny as one firmly embedded within the European Community structure. The initial 1985 Schengen agreement (Schengen 1) did not lead to a significant reaction among the party's elites and a year later in 1986 the entire cohort of Front National *Députés* abstained in the vote on the parliamentary ratification of the Single European Act (SEA), with the party appearing to tolerate the concept of the Single Market. This is in stark contrast to the position of the Front National today which now adopts a 'hard' Eurosceptic position one which is increasingly combined with opposition to economic and cultural globalisation.

Europe as a strategic driver for the Radical Right

On the surface, Radical Right parties' changing discourse towards a 'hard' Eurosceptic position can be portrayed as a logical process in terms of their ideological profile as Hainsworth (2007) identifies, stating that 'European integration serves to undermine constructs and values, such as the nation state, national identity, state sovereignty, deeply embedded roots and national belonging.' However, the transition of parties like the Front National and the Austrian Freedom Party towards a hard brand of Euroscepticism, as posited in this paper, has been primarily influenced by tactical and strategic considerations rather than being driven by ideological concerns. Thus, the more 'reconstructed' Radical Right parties with media-savvy leaders like the Front National and Austrian Freedom Party have been very effective in seizing upon watershed moments in the European integration process

to differentiate themselves from the largely pro-EU consensus of the mainstream political elites. In short, they have profited from the 'Political Opportunity Structure' created by an increasingly hostile citizenry to the European integration process.

In this respect three watershed moments stand out. Firstly, the debate surrounding Maastricht at the beginning of the 1990s which served to galvanize the Radical Right and to provide new tactical ammunition, as the Maastricht Treaty in effect signalled a new politicisation of European integration as epitomised by the name-change from 'Community' to 'Union'. Maastricht contributed to a step-change in public awareness and increased Euroscepticism across the member states as it challenged the hitherto held assumption that the EU was solely a trading block of like-minded nations built around the notion of a Single European Market. Radical Right leaders like Jean-Marie Le Pen and the late Jörg Haider were quick to exploit Maastricht as a way of differentiating themselves from the mainstream.

The second major watershed moment in terms of contributing to the evolution of the Radical Right towards a 'hard' Eurosceptic position was the process of EU Enlargement and in particular the 2004 'big-bang' enlargement where ten new states, including eight from Central and Eastern Europe, joined. While for many the fall of the Berlin wall and the end of communism in Central and Eastern Europe was an historic and moral opportunity to re-unite Europe, for the Radical Right (certainly in Western Europe) the subsequent 2004 and 2007 enlargements (when Bulgaria and Romania joined) enabled them to link their emerging anti-EU rhetoric to concerns about unemployment and job security as a result of migration flows from the Central and Eastern European states, as well as raising concerns about immigration and asylum and the perceived insecurity of the enlarged EU's Eastern borders. Thus, the notion of the 'Freedom of Movement' enshrined in the Maastricht Treaty has come under increasing pressure as a consequence of EU enlargement.

This situation has intensified as a result of our third watershed moment, namely the economic 'crisis'. Although the origins of the crisis emanated from outside the Eurozone, the Euro quickly became the scapegoat for all of the socio-economic inequalities endured from 2008 onwards – the spiralling cost of living, rising unemployment (in particular amongst the young in the Mediterranean states), the austerity cuts and the bail outs in Greece, Ireland, Portugal, Spain and Cyprus. The crisis has certainly contributed to a deepening of Euroscepticism across the EU with a loss of trust in the EU (and the Euro), and a potentially lost generation of EU first time voters (particularly in the Mediterranean states). Unsurprisingly such developments have been something of an electoral gift for media-savvy leaders like Marine Le Pen and Heinz-Christian Strache serving to re-enforce their populist differences from the mainstream consensus.

In sum, galvanized by the aforementioned watershed moments in the European integration process, Radical Right parties have increasingly used opposition to the EU as a tactical lever to help move them beyond their traditional anti-immigrant/single-issue labelling. Put very simply, being 'Eurosceptic' is less contentious than being 'anti-immigrant'! It helps the parties to gain legitimisation, to become mainstreamed and to assist in the process of 'detoxification' in terms of their outward image. In this respect Radical Right parties such as the Front National increasingly portray the EU as an 'agent' of globalisation rather than a 'counterbalance' to some of its perceived negative cultural and economic consequences, what Lecoœur (2007) labels *Euromondialisme* which 'emphasises the clear link between global capitalism and European integration'. Thus, with regard to the French case, recent developments such as Marine Le Pen's launch of the pro-sovereignty/anti EU *Rassemblement Bleu Marine* alliance in 2012, her declaration the following year that 2013 would be the 'year of the struggle against globalisation' and her 2014 European election manifesto (which was primarily focused on the perceived, negative economic consequences of EU membership) should be viewed within this strategic context.

Where do the UK Independence Party fit into this debate?

This evolution towards a high-salience, 'hard' Eurosceptic position on 'Europe' is in contrast to 'single-issue'/anti-EU parties like the UK Independence party (UKIP) – the other big winners in the 2014 European elections – where opposition to the EU acts as their *raison d'être* and is in short a part of their ideological DNA. UKIP was formed in 1993 by former London School of Economics professor Alan Sked with the twin aims of securing a referendum on the issue of UK membership of the EU and of campaigning for UK withdrawal. Although UKIP's dramatic electoral rise under Nigel Farage's leadership has been built around an increased flirtation with anti-immigrant rhetoric (all-be-it with a focus on EU migration and in particular the economic effects of migration from the Central and Eastern European states) campaigning for a UK exit from the EU remains the cornerstone of the party's ideology much in the same way that immigration still does for the Radical Right, despite's its strategic prioritisation of 'hard' Euroscepticism. Unlike UKIP, for parties like the Front National and the Austrian Freedom Party opposing Europe is part of a wider, strategic package in the quest for what Kitschelt (1995) once labelled the elusive electoral 'winning formula', although anti-EU sentiment was not part of his original theory. Despite their different origins and motivations, Radical Right parties like the Front National and Single-issue/anti-EU parties like UKIP have, to all intents and purposes, reached a common position with regard to their hard brand of Euroscepticism. Their different legacies, however, will most likely ensure that their ability to cooperate on the transnational level will continue to remain problematic. Nevertheless, the rise of Euroscepticism as a major lever deployed by 'populist' parties in general raises important questions about how citizenship education should respond to such agendas, particularly in the context of the economic crisis and a general rise in anti-immigrant sentiment and xenophobia.

How can citizenship education respond to these developments?

The advent of the crisis has ensured that the EU has increasingly become the scapegoat for European nation states' socio-economic and political woes such as rising unemployment (in particular youth unemployment), stagnant economic growth and increased hostility towards EU migration. While much discussion of the sources of Euroscepticism centre on the so-called 'democratic deficit' (which continues to tarnish the EU's image), there is no doubt that the EU 'knowledge deficit' is an equally important driver of Eurosceptic attitudes. What is becoming increasingly clear is that academic provision in schools about the EU varies enormously from country to country and within countries and sometimes even from region to region. In countries like the UK and Hungary for example, where generally there is very little formal teaching about the EU in the curriculum, noticeably opposition to the EU (as measured by sources such as the Eurobarometer biannual data sets) has become increasingly pronounced at the popular level. In other countries such as Germany, where learning about the EU is a more central feature of citizenship education, Eurosceptic sentiment is less engrained. While to suggest that there is a correlation between levels of citizenship education on the EU, the 'knowledge deficit' and youth Euroscepticism might be overstating the case, there is no doubt that this lack of consistency with regard to education on EU related matters certainly enables proponents of populist arguments in some countries, re-enforced by the press in some cases (notably in the UK), to remain largely unchallenged. The EU is a complex and often misunderstood entity and if the next generation of Europe's citizens are to engage with it positively, addressing the 'knowledge gap' as part of the wider citizenship education process is crucial. Teaching about the EU needs to be developed in a coherent and consistent fashion across the member states so that what is taught in schools, regardless of whether it is in Helsinki, Athens, Budapest or London enables young citizens to make a 'rational choice' about the EU's various merits and shortcomings.

In 2012 former European Commissioner for Education, Culture, Multilingualism and Youth, Androulla Vassiliou described the role of the Citizenship Education in Europe initiative as endowing 'pupils with the necessary knowledge, skills and values to actively engage in our society' as 'active participation is at the root of our democratic values in Europe'. Until a 'light-touch' curriculum exists in all member states which addresses the fundamentals about the EU – 'What it is, why it was founded, how it works, how it could be reformed, what direction it should go in' – populist parties will continue to profit from the 'knowledge gap' and to take advantage of the simple premise that if you don't understand something it is easier to oppose it. This is not about some pan-European drive towards a Federal Europe, nor is it an attempt to suppress national identity. It is about overcoming the 'knowledge gap' and as such it should be a part of every young citizen's educational opportunity in every school across the member states. Until it is European election campaign slogans like those of the Radical Right, such as 'More Denmark, Less EU', 'No to Brussels, yes to France' and 'Austria First and then the EU', are likely to continue to strike a chord with many young voters. Overcoming the 'knowledge deficit' is perhaps the major challenge facing the EU and ought to be one of the overarching priorities of Jean-Claude Juncker's new European Commission.

Sources:

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