

# The Far Right in Western Europe: “From the Margins to the Mainstream” And Back?\*

*La extrema derecha en Europa occidental:  
¿“De los márgenes al centro” y vuelta a la marginalidad?*

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**Abstract:** This paper analyses the rise of the Far Right in Western Europe and the widespread political, social and scholarly concern due to the extremist parties’ recent electoral performances. It holds that, already since the late 1980s, we are witnessing a new (third) “wave” of right-wing extremism in several European countries —with some of these parties having already undergone electoral and political consolidation— and joins other contributions that approach the issue of their “mainstreaming” process. It presents some data on the Far Right’s electoral and political evolution, which seem to confirm that some mainstreaming did take place in the decades between the 1980s and the 2000s. However, more recently the immigration issue and the “refugees’ crisis” seem to have prompted the radicalisation of many (if not all) of these parties, and even of some parties which were not thought to be extremist. The paper reflects on this process of alleged radicalisation of the Far Right. The conclusion speculates on its future evolution and highlights future avenues for research.

**Keywords:** Far Right, mainstreaming process, migration, radicalisation.

**Resumen:** *Este artículo analiza el auge de la ultraderecha en Europa occidental y la creciente preocupación política, social y académica ante los recientes resultados electorales de partidos políticos extremistas. Desde finales de los años ochenta asistimos a una nueva (tercera) “ola” de radicalismo de la ultra derecha en diversos países europeos, con algunos de estos partidos habiéndose consolidado electoral y políticamente; el artículo sigue así la estela de otros análisis*

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*sis que han abordado la cuestión de si éstos se han vuelto “mainstream” o menos radicales. El artículo incluye algunos datos de la evolución política y electoral de la ultraderecha que parecen confirmar que ese proceso de “mainstreaming” tuvo lugar entre la década de los ochenta y los dos mil. Sin embargo, la cuestión de la inmigración, relacionada con la llamada “crisis de los refugiados”, parece haber acelerado la radicalización de muchos (cuando no todos) los partidos de ultraderecha, así como algunos partidos que no eran considerados extremistas. El artículo aborda ese proceso de supuesta radicalización de la ultraderecha. La conclusión especula sobre su futura evolución y plantea posibles vías para la investigación ulterior del fenómeno.*

**Palabras clave:** ultraderecha, proceso de normalización, migración, radicalización.

## I. Introduction

With the exception of Spain, Portugal, Ireland and Luxemburg, where no right-wing extremist party has made its entrance into the National Parliament, the Far Right seems to have been extremely successful in Western Europe lately<sup>1</sup>. Their impressive electoral performance has raised widespread political, social and scholarly concern; it comes as no surprise that the family of right-wing extremist parties has become the most intensely studied in the last decades in political science<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Some right-wing extremist parties have also reached striking electoral results in several Eastern European countries like Hungary, Romania, Poland, Bulgaria and Latvia. Although some scholars claim to consider (and study) them as members of the family of the Far Right (see for example Cas Mudde, *The Study of Populist Radical Right Parties: Towards a Fourth Wave* (Oslo: Center for Research on Extremism, The Extreme Right, Hate Crime and Political Violence, University of Oslo, C-Rex Working Paper Series, 2016)), others have emphasized the distinctiveness of the cleavage structures of Western and Eastern European countries (Simon Borschier, *Cleavage Politics and the Populist Right. The New Cultural Conflict in Western Europe* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2010)). Differences with regard to the impact of the crisis on the stability of the party systems in the West and in the East (Enrique Hernandez and Hanspeter Kriesi, “The Electoral Consequences of the Financial and Economic Crisis in Europe”. *European Journal of Political Research* 55-2 (2016)) and with regard to the profiles of right-wing extremist voters (Trevor J. Allen, “All in the party family? Comparing far right voters in Western and Post-Communist Europe”. *Party Politics* 23-3 (2017)) have also been noted: Westerners are more hostile to immigration, less religious, and economically less left-wing than extremist voters from the Eastern part of Europe. Following this logic and the principles of the analysis based on a *meaningful comparison*, I will concentrate on the EU-15 countries plus Switzerland and Norway, both of which have joined the Schengen area and are members of the EFTA.

Already in the late 1980s, the academic literature started to analyse the extremist upsurge, signalling the beginning of a new (third) “wave” of right-wing extremism in several European countries<sup>3</sup>. Only two decades later, some extremist parties had already undergone electoral and political consolidation, and several contributions started approaching the issue of their “mainstreaming” process<sup>4</sup>. More recently, however, we might be witnessing a different phase in the Far Right’s political evolution, since the immigration issue—the Far Right’s topic par excellence—is again at the forefront of the political debate in Europe; the “refugee crisis” has prompted the radicalization of many (if not all) the Far Right parties (and even of some parties which were not thought to be extremist). This article reflects on this process of alleged radicalization of the Far Right. It first presents some data on its electoral and political evolution, which seem to confirm that some mainstreaming did actually take place in the decades between the 1980s and the 2000s. The following section aims at showing some evidence of the reverse process: the radicalization of the Far Right’s discourse. The conclusion speculates on the future evolution of the Far Right and highlights future avenues for research.

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<sup>2</sup> Mudde, *The Study of Populist Radical Right Parties: Towards a Fourth Wave*, 2016.

<sup>3</sup> Klaus Von Beyme, “Right-Wing Extremism in Post-War Europe”. *West European Politics* 11-2 (1988).

According to several experts, the first wave took place after the Second World War (Piero Ignazi, “The Silent Counter Revolution: Hypotheses on the Emergence of the Extreme Right-Wing Parties in Europe”. *European Journal of Political Research* 22 (1992); Von Beyme, “Right-Wing Extremism in Post-War Europe”, 1988; Ekkart Zimmermann and Thomas Saalfeld, “The Three Waves of Right-Wing Extremism”. In *Encounters with the Contemporary Radical Right*, edited by Peter Merkl and Leonard Weinberg (Boulder: Westview Press, 1993)), whereas the second one entailed the rise of new phenomena like *poujadism* in France and the survival of the neo-fascist *Movimento Sociale Italiano*, which served as a reference for all other extremists until the breakthrough of the French National Front in the eighties. In his 2016 work, Mudde suggests a new (fourth) wave of scholarship may be gaining ground.

<sup>4</sup> Paul Hainsworth (ed.), *The Politics of the Extreme Right: From the Margins to the Mainstream*. (London-New York: Pinter, 2000).

## II. The electoral evolution of the Far Right: no longer marginal?

The rise of the new Far Right parties<sup>5</sup> has resulted in an expanded field of study which has eagerly devoted itself to the study of the variables accounting for this phenomenon. The reason for this concern is clear: in recent decades, some of these parties have managed to obtain impressive electoral results (both in terms of votes and seats), as the table below shows. Which parties are they? Can they be regarded as similar? Furthermore, what makes them belong to the same family? The definition of the Far Right family is a rather controversial issue in the contemporary literature. For the sake of brevity, I have included here the “usual suspects”<sup>6</sup>, the best known—and currently most electorally successful—parties in each country, which are rather unanimously considered as members of this new party family, namely: the *Front National* in France; the *Dansk Folkeparti* (Danish People’s Party) in Denmark; *Perussuomalaiset* (The Finns, formerly the True Finns) in Finland; *Sverigedemokraterna* (the Sweden Democrats); the Norwegian *Fremskrittspartiet* or Progress Party; the Austrian *Freiheitlicher Partei Österreichs* (FPÖ, Freedom Party); the *Schweizerische Volkspartei* (Swiss Popular Party); the Italian *Lega Nord*; the *Vlaams Belang* in Belgium (Flanders), formerly *Vlaams Blok* (Flemish Interest-Flemish Bloque); the *Partij Voor der Vrijheid* (Party of Freedom) in the Netherlands; the Greek *Chrysí Avgí* or Golden Dawn; and the last ones to become established in the extremist landscape: the British *United Kingdom*

<sup>5</sup> The issue of how to name these parties is rather controversial in the academic literature. Two decades ago, a reputed scholar even talked of the “war of words” defining the extreme right party family (Cas Mudde, “The War of Words Defining the Extreme Right Party Family”. *West European Politics*, 19-2 (1996)) and found more than 25 different approaches to it (see also Peter Mair and Cas Mudde, “The Party Family and its Study”. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 1 (1998)). Even nowadays, various different terms are still used (and contested): Far Right, right-wing extremist, radical right, right-wing populist, xenophobic, anti-immigrant ... among many others. Each one emphasizes different aspects of the phenomenon: whereas “radical right” and “right-wing extremist” focus on the ideological side, labels which incorporate some variants of the term “populism” approach it from the perspective of the *style* or *attitude* these parties use (although more voices are increasingly being heard in favour of considering populism an ideology in itself). The debate has not yet come to an end, for it entails contrasting views on the kind of menace these parties represent for democratic systems (if any at all) and, eventually, what is to be understood under “democracy”: Mudde (Cas Mudde, “Three decades of populist radical right in Western Europe: So what?”. *European Journal of Political Research* 52 (2013)), for instance, holds that radicalism accepts procedural (liberal) democracy, whereas extremism does not, hence opting for the label “populist radical right”. Given the space limitations, I will use the term “Far Right” (which includes both radical and extremist parties) as the most inclusive of all, although I may, for stylistic reasons, change to “extreme right” sometimes.

<sup>6</sup> Mudde, *The Study of Populist Radical Right Parties: Towards a Fourth Wave*, 2016.

*Independence Party* (UKIP) and the German *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD)<sup>7</sup>. Although there is hardly a consensus about the common ideological and programmatic characteristics of these parties, the following are usually referred to as features that all Far Right parties share: a form of extreme, *antidemocratic ultra-nationalism* which extols the value of the national community based on the ethnically homogeneous in-group; stemming from this, a strong *anti-immigration, xenophobic* stance (what Mudde calls *nativism*<sup>8</sup>) and a profound critique of the European Union, which can adopt the form of either soft or hard Euroscepticism; this goes hand in hand with a populist style and rhetoric which emphasize the virtues of the common people vis-à-vis the corrupt elite and claims to represent only the formers' interests<sup>9</sup>. Last but not least, most scholars have emphasized the Far Right's authoritarianism and their position at the far end of the political spectrum, in the "rightest-right" spatial location<sup>10</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> This short list is obviously not an exhaustive account of all Far Right / extremist / radical right-wing parties in Western Europe. Furthermore, it may as well include some disputed cases, such as the Norwegian Progress Party (which some scholars consider a neo-liberal right-wing party) and the UKIP (see, for different opinions, Cas Mudde, *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Elisabeth Carter, *The Extreme Right in Western Europe* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005); Pippa Norris, *Radical Right. Voters and Parties in the Electoral Market*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Herbert Kitschelt (in collaboration with Anthony J. McGann), *The Radical Right in Western Europe: A Comparative Analysis* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995); Tjitske Akkerman, Sarah L. de Lange and Matthijs Rooduijn, *Radical Right-Wing Populist Parties in Western Europe: Into the Mainstream?* (New York: Routledge, 2016)). This selection of cases simply aims at highlighting the good overall performance of some of the (usual) members of this family.

<sup>8</sup> Cas Mudde, "The Populist Radical Right: A Pathological Normalcy". *West European Politics* 33-6 (2010).

<sup>9</sup> On the ideology of the Far Right, see specially Mudde, "The War of Words Defining the Extreme Right Party Family", 1996; Mudde, *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe*, 2007; Kitschelt (in collaboration with McGann), *The Radical Right in Western Europe: A Comparative Analysis*, 1995; Carter, *The Extreme Right in Western Europe*, 2005; Jens Rydgren, *The Populist Challenge: Political Protest and Ethno-Nationalist Mobilization in France* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2004); Jens Rydgren, *Class politics and the radical right* (New York: Routledge, 2012); Hans-Georg Betz, *Radical Right-Wing Populism in Western Europe* (London: Macmillan, 1994); Roger Eatwell, "The Rebirth of the 'Extreme Right' in Western Europe?". *Parliamentary Affairs* 53 (2000); Roger Eatwell, "Introduction. The New Extreme Right Challenge". In *Western Democracies and the New Extreme Right Challenge*, edited by Roger Eatwell and Cas Mudde (London-New York: Routledge, 2004).

<sup>10</sup> Ignazi, "The Silent Counter Revolution: Hypotheses on the Emergence of the Extreme Right-Wing Parties in Europe", 1992.

**Table 1**  
Highest vote percentage of some Far Right parties (1990-2017)

	Type of elections	% vote	seats	% seats
FPÖ (Austria)	European 1996	27.50	6	28.60%
VB (Belgium)	European 2004	14.34	3	12.50%
SVP/UDC (Switzerland)	Parliamentary 2015	29.40	65	32.50%
DF (Denmark)	European 2014	26.60	4	30.80%
PS (Finland)	Parliamentary 2011	19.05	39	19.50%
FN (France)	European 2014	24.90	24	32.40%
UKIP (United Kingdom)	European 2014	26.60	24	32.88%
LN (Italy)	European 2009	10.21	9	12.50%
PVV (the Netherlands)	European 2009	17.00	4	16.00%
FRP (Noruega)	Parliamentary 2009	22.90	41	24.30%
SD (Suecia)	Parliamentary 2014	12.86	49	14.04%
AfD	Parliamentary 2017	12.60	92*	13.26%

(\*) AfD received 94 seats in September 2017 but lost two of them when the former president of the party, Frauke Petry, alongside another member of the newly elected group, left the party the day after the elections.

Sources: European Election Database; Political Data Yearbook ; PARLINE database on national parliaments; www.parties-and-elections.eu; www.parlgov.org

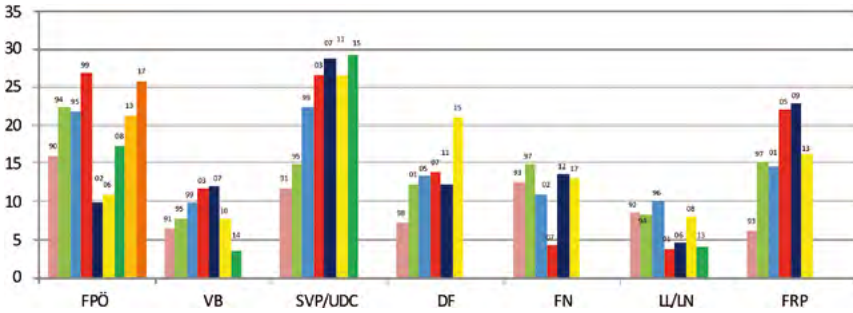
The data above show that, with the exception of the Finns Party and the Dutch PVV, Far Right parties have achieved their highest scores in elections to the European Parliament. The European level of contest has, paradoxically, constituted the best scenario for political formations with a strong anti-European stance, with results in the domestic arena not always being so impressive<sup>11</sup>. Indeed, the data for elections to the national Parliaments (see

<sup>11</sup> See, however, Mudde, *The Study of Populist Radical Right Parties: Towards a Fourth Wave*, 2016; Alexandre Afonso, "The far right vote in the European elections: It's not the economy, stupid" (2014); and Daphne Halikiopoulou and Sofia Vasilopoulou, "Support for the Far Right in the 2014 European Parliament Elections: A Comparative Perspective". *Political Quarterly* 85-3 (2014) for a discussion on the relative success of the Far Right in the 2014 elections, which were expected to be an *earthquake* election.

See also Daphne Halikiopoulou and Tim Vlandas "The Rise of the Far Right in Debtor and Creditor European Countries: The Case of European Parliament Elections". *Political Quarterly* 86-2 (2015); Daphne Halikiopoulou and Tim Vlandas, "Risks, Costs and Labour Markets: Explaining Cross-national Patterns of Far Right Party Success in European Parliament Elections". *Journal of Common Market Studies JCMS* 54-3 (2016) on the Far Right and European elections, and Catherine Fieschi, "European institutions: the far-right and illiberal politics in a liberal context". *Parliamentary Affairs* 53-3 (2000); and Margarita Gómez-Reino and Iván Llamazares, "The Populist Radical Right and European Integration: A Comparative Analysis of Party-Voter Links". *West European Politics* 36-4 (2013) on the anti-European-ism of the Far Right.

Graphs 2 and 3 below) reveal that the upsurge of the extreme right cannot be simply depicted as a steady process from complete irrelevance and/or marginalisation to resounding, unstoppable success. Quite the opposite is true: to start with, individual trajectories of most Far Right parties have suffered from typical ups and downs; secondly, there are big differences in their level of performance in national elections. For the sake of clarity, I have divided the group of successful Far Right parties (those which have achieved parliamentary representation) into two sub-groups: one with the “oldest new” Far Right parties (Graph 1) and one with the “newest new” ones (Graph 2). The “oldest new” parties were created in the seventies and eighties (or even earlier) and started being successful in the nineties. This group includes the French *Front National* (1972); the Austrian Freedom Party (1956); the Danish People’s Party (created in 1995 but heir to the Danish Progress Party, which was formed in 1972); the Norwegian Progress Party (1973); the Swiss Popular Party (1971); the Italian *Lega Nord* (1991) and the *Vlaams Belang* (successor to the *Vlaams Blok*, formed in 1978 and disbanded in 2004). By contrast, the “newest-new” Far Right parties were either born very recently, like the Dutch Party of Freedom (2006) or the German AfD (2013) and/or have enjoyed a meteoric rise since the beginning of this century, like the Finns Party (whose rise did not take place until 2011), the Sweden Democrats (from 2010 onwards), the Greek Golden Dawn (with seats in the National Parliament first achieved in 2012), and the famous British UKIP (which, although formed in 1993, began its take-off in 2010)<sup>12</sup>.

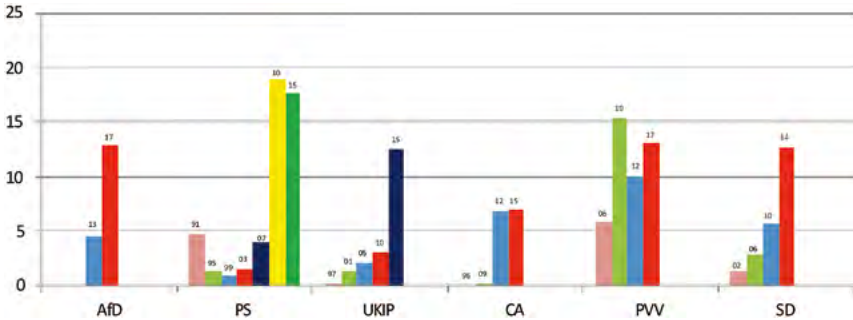
<sup>12</sup> In several countries, some other (usually minor) Far Right parties have coexisted alongside the above mentioned. This has been the case at least: in Austria, where Haider left the FPÖ and founded the Alliance for the Future of Austria (BZÖ-*Bundnis Zukunft Österreichs*), which eventually adopted a liberal profile and became a minor party in the system; in France, where the former right-hand of Jean-Marie Le Pen, Megret, defected from the Front National and founded a short-lived initiative called the *Mouvement National Républicain*; in Italy, where the Lega Nord had coexisted with the old *Movimento Sociale Italiano*, and later with its transformation into *Alleanza Nazionale*; in Sweden, where a singular protest and flash-party, New Democracy, paved the way for the Sweden Democrats; in Denmark, home to one of the earliest anti-tax, ultra-liberal parties, the Progress Party, founded in 1973 and which later split and gave birth to the successful *Dansk Folkeparti*; in the Netherlands, which saw the phenomenon of the ephemeral *List Pim Fortuyn*, named after its assassinated leader, shortly before Wilders founded his PVV; in Greece, a country where there have been plenty of Far Right organizations like EPEN and LAOS which have eventually converged towards Golden Dawn and its leader Michaloliakos; and in Switzerland, which has also attested to the launching of several anti-immigration campaigns and platforms, and where a small protest, xenophobic and anti-ecological movement called the *Auto Partei* was able to break through the system in the nineties. Overall, however, competition in the Far Right has diminished and only some of the formations have managed to survive. Again, the selection of cases turns out to be of key importance here: had other successful—but now defunct—Far Right parties been included in this description, this process of *concentration* which has taken place in the last decades in the extremist camp would have become visible.



**Graph 1**

The “oldest-new” Far Right parties’ electoral trajectories (elections to the National Parliament)

Sources: European Election Database ([www.nsd.uib.no](http://www.nsd.uib.no)); Political Data Yearbook ([www.politicaldatayearbook.com](http://www.politicaldatayearbook.com)); PARLINE database on national parliaments ([www.ipu.org/parline-e/parlinesearch.asp](http://www.ipu.org/parline-e/parlinesearch.asp)); [www.parties-and-elections.eu](http://www.parties-and-elections.eu)



**Graph 2**

The “newest-new” Far Right parties’ electoral trajectories (elections to the National Parliament)

Sources: European Election Database ([www.nsd.uib.no](http://www.nsd.uib.no)); Political Data Yearbook ([www.politicaldatayearbook.com](http://www.politicaldatayearbook.com)); PARLINE database on national parliaments ([www.ipu.org/parline-e/parlinesearch.asp](http://www.ipu.org/parline-e/parlinesearch.asp)); [www.parties-and-elections.eu](http://www.parties-and-elections.eu)

Electoral data show that the performance of the various Far Right parties varies greatly, both in terms of length (the differences being most visible, for obvious reasons, between the longest- and shortest-lived parties) and degree of success. It is therefore hardly surprising that a growing num-



ber of comparative contributions on the Far Right have long aimed at explaining this *varying degree of success* of the Far Right<sup>13</sup>. Indeed, this so-called third wave of right-wing extremism has had a distinctive resonance in each Western European country, although some commonalities may also be discernible. Among the parties cited, nearly half of them achieve an average percentage of votes under 10% in the period under research, 1990 to the present. Although usually amplified by the media, the average electoral results in national elections of parties like the *Vlaams Belang*, *Chrisy Agvi*, *Lega Nord* and *Perussuomalaiset* do not exceed 10% of the total number of votes. There is another group of parties with a better performance: the mean percentage achieved by the FN, PVV, DF, FPÖ and FRP lies somewhere between 10 and 17.5% (still well under a fifth of the total votes cast by the electorates). And finally, there is a clear outlier: the most successful party of all, the Swiss SVP, which since its transformation in the nineties under the leadership of Christoph Blocher, has managed to receive the support of practically a quarter of Swiss voters. As a whole, therefore, the family of Far Right parties has done only *moderately well* at the polls since the beginning of the third wave of right-wing extremism. Furthermore, despite some resounding electoral results, the Far Right family's overall electoral evolution should be best described—both individually and as a group—as following uneven (if not utterly erratic) patterns, as the figures above show. However, the fact that some of the members of this family (especially the “oldest new”) have accumulated a rather long trajectory of decades attests to their long-term electoral consolidation and lends support to the idea that they are here to stay, since they have been able to accomplish both electoral breakthrough *and* survival. In this sense, they are behaving quite like the other, mainstream parties, which also experience advances and setbacks

<sup>13</sup> Several scholars have emphasized the diverse performance of Far Right parties and recommend the analysis of their trajectories from a truly comparative perspective, adopting a “cross-national, cross-temporal, and cross-party” approach (Sarah L. De Lange, “From Pariah to Power: Explanations for the Government Participation of Radical Right-wing Populist Parties in West European Parliamentary Democracies”. *Doctoral Dissertation. University of Antwerp* (2008):17; see Carter, *The Extreme Right in Western Europe*, 2005; Norris, *Radical Right. Voters and Parties in the Electoral Market*, 2005; Michael Minkenberg, “The Radical Right in Europe: Challenges for Comparative Research”. In *Strategies for Combating Right-Wing Extremism in Europe*, Bielefeld: Verlag Bertelsmann Stiftung (2010); Kai Arzheimer and Elisabeth Carter, “Political Opportunity Structures and Right-Wing Extremist Party Success”. *European Journal of Political Research* 45 (2006); David Art, “Why 2013 Is Not 1933: The Radical Right in Europe”. *Current History* 112-752 (2013):88; Terri E. Givens, *Voting Radical Right in Western Europe* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Matt Golder, “Explaining Variation in the Success of Extreme Right Parties in Western Europe”. *Comparative Political Studies* 36-4 (2003); Matt Golder, “Far Right Parties in Europe”. *Annual Review of Political Science* 19-1 (2016).

at the polls. And, in so doing, they are *mainstreaming*<sup>14</sup> as well: “Extreme right ideas, movements and parties are a significant feature of post-war and millennium politics. In national electoral terms, they have made an uneven but appreciable impact, stretching from the margins to the mainstream of power”<sup>15</sup>. This impression is further confirmed by the analysis of a related, complementary aspect in the Far Right’s political development, to which I now turn.

### III. Political evolution: from the margins to the mainstream?

In order to fully assess the relevance and strength of the new Far Right parties and their ability to resemble other established, mainstream parties<sup>16</sup>, not only their electoral results but also additional information on their *coalitionability* should be taken into account (see Table 4 below). Apart from gaining a considerable number of votes and seats for an extended period of time, some extremist parties have reached power positions, either entering coalition governments or supporting other parties in their effort to build one. In doing so, they have abandoned their status as *pariah*<sup>17</sup>, thus becoming *salonfähig*, “respectable” coalition partners<sup>18</sup>. The ability to es-

<sup>14</sup> The concept of “mainstreaming” is rather new. Scarce research has been devoted to this process of *convergence between mainstream and radical parties*, which involves both changes of mainstream parties toward radical parties and changes of radical parties towards mainstream parties (Akkerman, de Lange and Rooduijn, *Radical Right-Wing Populist Parties in Western Europe: Into the Mainstream?*, 2016: 6). Here, I will only refer to the latter.

<sup>15</sup> Hainsworth, Paul (ed.), *The Politics of the Extreme Right: From the Margins to the Mainstream*, 2000:14.

<sup>16</sup> The term “mainstream” is an umbrella term, referring, on the one hand, to centre left and centre right and/or conventional parties and, on the other hand, to established parties which are loyal to the political system (Akkerman, de Lange and Rooduijn, *Radical Right-Wing Populist Parties in Western Europe: Into the Mainstream?*, 2016). Here I will use both “mainstream” and “established” as synonyms.

<sup>17</sup> Sarah L. De Lange, “From Pariah to Power: Explanations for the Government Participation of Radical Right-wing Populist Parties in West European Parliamentary Democracies”, *Doctoral Dissertation. University of Antwerp*, 2008.

<sup>18</sup> The study of cabinet coalitions among mainstream and extremists (or, for that matter, niche) parties is connected with a fairly new body of research devoted to the analysis of the reactions of (both right- and left-wing) mainstream parties to the Far Right. See Tim Bale, “Cinderella and Her Ugly Sisters: The Mainstream and Extreme Right in Europe’s Bipolarising Party Systems”. *West European Politics* 26-3 (2003): 67-90; Tim Bale, Christoffer Green-Pedersen, André Krouwel, Kurt Richard Luther and Nick Sitter, “If You Can’t Beat Them, Join Them? Explaining Social Democratic Responses to the Challenge from the Populist Radical Right in Western Europe”. *Political Studies* 58-3 (2010); Bonnie M. Meguid, *Party Competition Between Unequals: Strategies and Electoral Fortunes in*

establish coalitions and/or forge alliances with other parties could be considered a function of their endurance/electoral persistence: longer-lived Far Right parties ought to be preferred as coalition partners over younger ones (*ceteris paribus*). For instance, the long presence of the FPÖ in the Austrian political system may have contributed to its consideration as a possible coalition partner. The same would apply to the Swiss SVP or, for that matter, the Norwegian Progress Party. However, this does not hold true for other cases: the French *Front National*, created in 1972, has always been excluded from any coalition at the national level of government, whereas the *Vlaams Belang* (and its predecessor the *Vlaams Blok*) have been systematically isolated and marginalised in the Belgian political system, subject to the so called *cordon sanitaire* imposed by all other parties. Furthermore, some very new Far Right parties were called into government, like *The Finns* after the Parliamentary elections in 2011, even though these were really their *breakthrough* elections. Eventually, they joined the cabinet in 2015<sup>19</sup>. This means that some Far Right parties may be able to skip some phases of the traditional lifespan followed by most political parties, moving on from (practically) mere breakthrough to outright acceptance as a legitimate partner by the other parties<sup>20</sup>.

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*Western Europe* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Joost Van Spanje, “Contagious parties. Anti-immigration parties and their impact on other parties’ immigration stances in contemporary Western Europe”. *Party Politics* 16-5 (2010); David Art, “Reacting to the Radical Right: Lessons from Germany and Austria”. *Party Politics* 13-3 (2007); William M. Downs, “Pariahs in their Midst: Belgian and Norwegian Parties React to Extremist Threats”. *West European Politics* 24-3 (2001); Sjoerdje Van Heerden, Sarah L de Lange, Wouter Van Der Brug and Meindert Fennema, “The Immigration and Integration Debate in the Netherlands: Discursive and Programmatic Reactions to the Rise of Anti-Immigration Parties”. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 40-1 (2014); Gijs Schumacher and Kees van Kersbergen, “Do Mainstream Parties Adapt To the Welfare Chauvinism of Populist Parties?”. *Party Politics* 22-3 (2016). Furthermore, the arrival of Far Right parties into office has prompted an even broader area of research focused on the impact of these new competitors in different realms.

<sup>19</sup> The Finns were granted four portfolios in the new cabinet, which included the controversial appointment of their leader Timo Soini as Head of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. After a change in leadership in June 2017, all ministers and 19 (out of 38) MPs left the party and founded a new one called Blue Reform (initially New Alternative). The cabinet continued with the same ministers (plus one more granted to the three partners in the coalition), but former members of The Finns now rally under the new party, whereas The Finns have gone into opposition.

<sup>20</sup> The case of the List Pim Fortuyn was even more extreme in this respect: it was invited to join the Dutch government right after its first candidacy to the Parliament. It was precisely the demands posed by this new situation that boosted internal breakdown, already acute after its leader was assassinated on the eve of the 2002 general elections.

**Table 2**  
Far Right parties in government

Political Party	Country	Period	Status	
			in government	support party
FPÖ	Austria	1999-2002	x	
		2003-2005	x	
		2017-	x	
SVP/UDC	Switzerland	1959-2003	x	
		2003 (*)-	x	
DF	Denmark	2001-2005		x
		2005-2007		x
		2007-2011		x
		2015-		x
PS (The Finns)	Finland	2015-	x	
LN	Italy	1994-1995	x	
		2001-2006	x	
		2008-2011	x	
FRP	Norway	2013-	x	
PVV	Netherlands	2010-2012		x

(\*) Starting in 2003, the spectacular electoral rise of the SVP enabled a change in the composition of the Swiss cabinet. The SVP now appointed two Federal Counsellors instead of one.

Source: own elaboration; de Lange (2012).

As the above table shows, the government participation of Far Right parties is neither a novel phenomenon, nor a recent one. Quite the contrary: it is rather ordinary, the total exclusion of the French FN and the VB being rather the exception—among the “oldest-new” group of parties—rather than the rule. The inability of some members of the family to be regarded as potential coalition partners has been tackled already: “Radical right-wing populist parties that are systematically excluded from government coalitions lack legislative strength, either as a consequence of their limited electoral support or of the distortions created by the electoral system. They also have policy positions that are markedly different from those of mainstream parties, which makes it virtually impossible for these two types of parties to

reach policy compromises”<sup>21</sup>. This means the participation in government of these parties is to be understood as a mere consequence of their political growth and impact on the respective party systems; furthermore, it means it can be explained with the same variables which account for other parties’ analogous situation<sup>22</sup>. Hence, it can also be interpreted as another sign of the mainstreaming process these parties are undertaking.

This impression is further reinforced by the analysis of the reasons which have led some other mainstream parties to coalesce with the Far Right, and more importantly, by the analysis of their consequences<sup>23</sup>. Several studies have emphasized the idea that the extremists’ inclusion into governmental responsibilities could have the effect of watering down their

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<sup>21</sup> De Lange, “From Pariah to Power: Explanations for the Government Participation of Radical Right-wing Populist Parties in West European Parliamentary Democracies”, 2008: 221.

<sup>22</sup> In later contributions, Sarah L. De Lange, “New Alliances: Why Mainstream Parties Govern with Radical Right-Wing Populist Parties”, *Political Studies* 60-4 (2012) has specified that the establishment of new alliances among the far and the mainstream right has been helped by their programmatic convergence and by the general shift to the right.

<sup>23</sup> There is extensive literature on the *reactions* of mainstream (both right- and left-wing) parties to the Far Right. For interesting conclusions, see Bale, Green-Pedersen, Krouwel, Richard Luther and Sitter, “If You Can’t Beat Them, Join Them? Explaining Social Democratic Responses to the Challenge from the Populist Radical Right in Western Europe”, 2010; Meguid, *Party Competition Between Unequals: Strategies and Electoral Fortunes in Western Europe* (2008); Bale, “Cinderella and Her Ugly Sisters: The Mainstream and Extreme Right in Europe’s Bipolarising Party Systems”, 2003; Van Spanje, “Contagious parties. Anti-immigration parties and their impact on other parties’ immigration stances in contemporary Western Europe”, 2010; Art, “Reacting to the Radical Right: Lessons from Germany and Austria”, 2007; William M. Downs, “Pariahs in their Midst: Belgian and Norwegian Parties React to Extremist Threats”. *West European Politics* 24-3 (2001); Ted Perlmutter, “The Politics of Restriction: The Effect of Xenophobic Parties on Italian Immigration Policy and German Asylum Policy”, in *Shadows over Europe: The Development and Impact of the Extreme Right in Western Europe*, edited by Martin Schain, Aristide Zolberg and Patrick Hossay (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002); Roger Karapin, “Far-Right Parties and the Construction of Immigration Issues in Germany”, in *Shadows over Europe: The Development and Impact of the Extreme Right in Europe*, edited by Martin Schain, Aristide Zolberg and Patrick Hossay (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002); Dietrich Thränhardt, “The Political Uses of Xenophobia in England, France and Germany”. *Party Politics*, 1-3 (1995); Van Heerden, de Lange, Van Der Brug and Fennema, “The Immigration and Integration Debate in the Netherlands: Discursive and Programmatic Reactions to the Rise of Anti-Immigration Parties”, 2014; Gijs Schumacher and Kees van Kersbergen, “Do Mainstream Parties Adapt To the Welfare Chauvinism of Populist Parties?”. *Party Politics* 22-3 (2016); Ted Perlmutter, “The Politics of Restriction: The Effect of Xenophobic Parties on Italian Immigration Policy and German Asylum Policy”, in *Shadows over Europe: The Development and Impact of the Extreme Right in Western Europe*, edited by Martin Schain, Aristide Zolberg and Patrick Hossay (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002).

most extreme political stances<sup>24</sup>. Once in government, Far Right parties would suffer from the “taming effect”<sup>25</sup>. In a similar vein, van Spanje and van der Brug conclude that when parties are not ostracised they become more moderate, whereas those treated as outcasts continue to be extremist<sup>26</sup>. This is what has been called “the inclusion-moderation thesis, which holds that participation in democratic institutions and procedures will amend the radical nature and ideology of political parties”<sup>27</sup>. Several studies have concluded that, for instance, the entrance of the FPÖ into the Austrian government was regarded by its partner, the conservative ÖVP, as the only way of deterring its continuous growth, on the belief that the responsibility of holding office would create internal problems in the party and prompt its moderation<sup>28</sup>. What have been the effects of the Far Right’s inclusion into office? Can we ascertain whether any softening of their positions has taken place, and, if so, if this has been provoked by their new status? Again, research on this area is scarce and provides inconclusive evidence: some scholars claim holding office may be compatible with upholding a radical profile<sup>29</sup>. Moreover, are there any signs that the Far Right — whether in office or not — has toned down its programmatic stance in the last years as a result of its sustained electoral growth? The following section approaches the issue of the programmatic mainstreaming of the Far Right.

<sup>24</sup> See, for instance, Joost Van Spanje and Wouter Van Der Brug, “The Party as Pariah: The Exclusion of Anti-Immigration Parties and its Effect on their Ideological Positions”. *West European Politics* 30-5 (2007); Fraser Duncan, “Immigration and integration policy and the Austrian radical right in office: the FPÖ/BZÖ, 2000-2006”. *Contemporary Politics* 16-4 (2010); Franz Fallend and Reinhard Heinisch, “Collaboration as Successful Strategy Against Right-wing Populism? The Case of the Centre-right Coalition in Austria, 2000-2007”. *Democratization* 23-2 (2016).

<sup>25</sup> Michael Minkenberg, “The Radical Right in Public Office: Agenda-Setting and Policy Effects”. *West European Politics* 24-4 (2001).

<sup>26</sup> Van Spanje and Van Der Brug. “The Party as Pariah: The Exclusion of Anti-Immigration Parties and its Effect on their Ideological Positions”, 2007.

<sup>27</sup> Tjitske Akkerman, Sarah L. de Lange and Matthijs Rooduijn, *Radical Right-Wing Populist Parties in Western Europe: Into the Mainstream?* (New York: Routledge, 2016): 3

<sup>28</sup> De Lange, “From Pariah to Power: Explanations for the Government Participation of Radical Right-wing Populist Parties in West European Parliamentary Democracies”, 2008; De Lange, “New Alliances: Why Mainstream Parties Govern with Radical Right-Wing Populist Parties”, 2012.

<sup>29</sup> Daniele Albertazzi and Duncan McDonnell, “The Lega Nord Back in Government”. *West European Politics* 33-6 (2010)

The inclusion-moderation thesis is mirrored by the exclusion-radicalisation thesis: parties systematically isolated and excluded from the political system (and from government) will tend to radicalise (Akkerman, de Lange and Rooduijn, *Radical Right-Wing Populist Parties in Western Europe: Into the Mainstream?* (2016)). There is, however, no consensus on this (see William M. Downs, “Pariahs in their Midst: Belgian and Norwegian Parties React to Extremist Threats”, *West European Politics* 24-3 (2001)).

#### IV. Radicalisation: the discourse on refugees and others. From the mainstream and back.

As Akkerman, de Lange and Rooduijn have argued<sup>30</sup>, there may be different dimensions of non-mainstreamness, which can be measured by assessing the parties' positions (over time) on the core issues of immigration (and the integration of immigrants), and European integration and authoritarianism, in line with the definition above. Their analysis has concluded that there is no trend towards the mainstream when it comes to radical positions on these topics between 1995 and 2012, therefore lending little support to the inclusion-moderation thesis<sup>31</sup>.

This may not seem astonishing if we recall how, in the last couple of years, public debate in the European Union has been dominated by the *omnibus issue* of immigration, prompted by the so-called refugee crisis. Starting in 2015, the arrival of increasing numbers of migrants has forced the EU to provide the member states with a solution to relocate asylum seekers and resettle refugees<sup>32</sup>. As a consequence, Far Right parties have taken on the issue and pushed for tougher measures against the arrival of more migrants. The *Front National* specifically addresses the topic as the first key word on its web page, clearly linking it to the rise in delinquency figures: “*Chiffres de la délinquance: la surreprésentation des étrangers doit alerter les pouvoirs publics!*”; and presents itself as the only solution *contre l’immigration* (FN 2018); in Italy, the Northern League has recently caused major uproar with declarations on immigration and the problem of “race”. The new leader Salvini seems determined to exploit the issue for the upcoming general elections in March 2018. The party officially claims that “numbers” demonstrate an *invasion* is taking place which must be stopped and endorses the traditional Far Right slogan *Italians first*. As for the ostracised Flemish *Vlaams Belang* and its counterpart in Holland, Wilders’ Party

<sup>30</sup> Akkerman, de Lange and Rooduijn, *Radical Right-Wing Populist Parties in Western Europe: Into the Mainstream?* (2016).

<sup>31</sup> According to Akkerman, de Lange and Rooduijn, *Radical Right-Wing Populist Parties in Western Europe: Into the Mainstream?* (2016), there are at least two other dimensions of mainstreaming which may be measured together with the moderation of core programmatic positions of radical parties: the expansion of their issue agenda and a stronger emphasis on socioeconomic issues (typical of niche parties) and the moderation of their populist positions (characteristic of anti-establishment parties).

<sup>32</sup> The issue has proven highly divisive: some European countries have reintroduced border controls and refused to accept their quota of refugees, whereas Germany’s plans of accepting more migrants have been curtailed, facing severe international and internal opposition.

for Freedom, they have strengthened their anti-immigrant stance in the last years (and months), and emphasized their anti-Islamic discourse<sup>33</sup>.

A rather similar impression stems from the analysis of the more coalitionable Far Right parties. The allegedly moderate Norwegian Progress Party claims the “asylum system needs reform to ensure that those who get their application accepted have a real safety need, and have not skirted the system. Immigrants who come to Norway and break the law should face expulsion”, and it is proud to declare that “After passing necessary legislation and revision of our laws, we can now see that immigration numbers are falling, while our neighbouring countries experience increased asylum numbers every year. By strengthening the police’s capabilities, illegal immigrants who break Norwegian laws are now facing expulsion” (FRP 2018). As for the Dansk Folkeparty, the official party program (established in 2002) reads as follows: “Denmark is not an immigrant-country and never has been. Thus we will not accept transformation to a multiethnic society. Denmark belongs to the Danes and its citizens must be able to live in a secure community founded on the rule of law, which develops along the lines of Danish culture” (DF 2018). For its part, the FPÖ, now in the Austrian government, defines itself as a patriotic party and stresses “The language, history and culture of Austria are German. The vast majority of Austrians are part of the German peoples’, linguistic and cultural community (...) Austria is not a country of immigration. This is why we pursue a family policy centred around births” (FPÖ 2011).

Additional analyses based on individual case studies also suggest some mixed evidence in favour of the inclusion-moderation thesis and the more general process of convergence between Far Right and established parties: “On all three dimensions—radical positions on core issues, salience of cultural issues and anti-establishment positions—the average trends do not indicate that radical right-wing populist parties have mainstreamed”<sup>34</sup>. If the analysis of official party programmes does not lend support to the argument in favour of a programmatic moderation/convergence of Far Right and mainstream parties, data based on experts surveys confirm they are perceived to take extremist positions on the issue of immigration (more than 9 on a ten-point scale), also showing extreme values on a scale which measures the relevance of the immigration issue for this family of parties: experts have assigned a value of 9.0 to the FPÖ on this scale (relevance of immigration), 9.9 to the VB, 9.9 to the *Dansk Folkeparty*, 9.1 to the Finns, 9.6

<sup>33</sup> Wilders actually urges the Netherlands to de-Islamize: see the party’s official webpage <https://www.pvv.nl/images/Conceptverkiezingsprogramma.pdf>

<sup>34</sup> Akkerman, de Lange and Rooduijn, *Radical Right-Wing Populist Parties in Western Europe: Into the Mainstream?* (2016).



to the FN and the Lega Nord and even 9.3 (out of ten) to the governmental FRP in Norway and to the Swiss SVP<sup>35</sup>. It seems electoral consolidation and the evolution from marginalisation to political and governmental involvement has not yet led to a programmatic convergence (or mainstreaming) of the Far Right.

## V. Conclusion

The phenomenon of the Far Right has already undergone several phases of growth, and there is ample evidence to believe that, all in all, extremist parties are now a force to be reckoned with in European politics<sup>36</sup>. Their new status as established, consolidated forces remains undisputed due to both their sustained electoral development and their new status as government supporters or even cabinet member parties. Allegedly, this should have come hand in hand with a process of moderation and/or mainstreaming. At least from an ideological perspective, this process seems not to have taken place yet, although more research is to be undertaken in alternative, complementary realms of mainstreaming. More in-depth study is also advisable in order to fully ascertain the extent of their impact on other parties (not only on immigration policy)<sup>37</sup>. This is by no means a way of over-em-

<sup>35</sup> Joost Van Spanje, "Contagious parties. Anti-immigration parties and their impact on other parties' immigration stances in contemporary Western Europe". *Party Politics* 16-5 (2010).

<sup>36</sup> Akkerman, de Lange and Rooduijn, *Radical Right-Wing Populist Parties in Western Europe: Into the Mainstream?* (2016).

<sup>37</sup> See Matthew Goodwin, Vidhya Ramalingam and Rachel Briggs, *The New Radical Right: violent and non-violent movements in Europe* (London: Institute for Strategic Dialogue, 2012) for alternative, complementary measures of impact. On the topic of the Far Right's impact, see especially Martin A. Schain, "The Impact of the French National Front on the French Political System", in Martin Schain, Aristide Zolberg and Patrick Hossay, *Shadows over Europe: The Development and Impact of the Extreme Right in Western Europe* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002); Martin A. Schain, "The Extreme-Right and Immigration Policy-Making: Measuring Direct and Indirect Effects". *West European Politics* 29-2 (2006); Martin Schain, Aristide Zolberg and Patrick Hossay, *Shadows over Europe: The Development and Impact of the Extreme Right in Western Europe* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002); Ted Perlmutter, "The Politics of Restriction: The Effect of Xenophobic Parties on Italian Immigration Policy and German Asylum Policy", in *Shadows over Europe: The Development and Impact of the Extreme Right in Western Europe*, edited by Martin Schain, Aristide Zolberg and Patrick Hossay (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002); Kyung Joon Han, "The Impact of Radical Right-Wing Parties on the Positions of Mainstream Parties Regarding Multiculturalism". *West European Politics* 38-3 (2015); Michael Minkenberg, "Context and Consequence. The Impact of the New Radical Right on the Political Process in France and Germany". *German Politics and Society* 16-3 (1998); Michael. Minkenberg, "The

phasizing their relevance. As a matter of fact, there is an increasing number of contributions claiming that these parties receive more academic attention than they deserve<sup>38</sup>. Rather, what is meant here is that we should definitely start considering them as a *pathological normalcy*<sup>39</sup> instead of a *normal pathology*<sup>40</sup>. This implies not only a different analytical approach to the topic (Far Right parties are best understood and studied with the same analytical and research tools as any other family of parties), but also a consideration that they represent a radicalisation of mainstream values widely spread among Western electorates. Their *mainstreaming* process may ultimately not be necessary if the mainstream continues to radicalise.

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<sup>38</sup> Tim Bale, “Supplying the Insatiable Demand: Europe’s Populist Radical Right”. *Government and Opposition* 47 (2012); David Art, “Why 2013 Is Not 1933: The Radical Right in Europe”. *Current History* 112 (2013); Goodwin, Ramalingam and Briggs, *The New Radical Right: violent and non-violent movements in Europe*, 2012; Mudde, *The Study of Populist Radical Right Parties: Towards a Fourth Wave*, 2016.

<sup>39</sup> De Lange, “From Pariah to Power: Explanations for the Government Participation of Radical Right-wing Populist Parties in West European Parliamentary Democracies”, 2008; Mudde, “The Populist Radical Right: A Pathological Normalcy”, 2010.

<sup>40</sup> Scheuch, Erwin K. and Hans D. Klingemann, “Theorie des Rechtsradikalismus in westlichen Industriegesellschaften”. *Hamburger Jahrbuch für Wirtschafts und Gesellschaft* 12 (1967): 11-29.

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