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ePaper

December 2019

Dr. Nicolas Bechter

„Europe of Nations“

A Study on Extreme Right Parties and the EU integration

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

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ROSA LUXEMBURG STIFTUNG

In cooperation with Rosa Luxemburg Foundation, Brussels office.
Funded by German Federal Foreign Office

IMPRINT

2019

transform! european network for alternative thinking and political dialogue
Square de Meeûs 25
1000 Brussels, Belgium

transform! europe is partially financed through a subsidy from the European Parliament.

Layout: sanja.at e.U.

Cover: Euraktiv – flickr CC 2-0

Introduction

Between May 23rd and May 26th the elections to the 9th European Parliament are held throughout the 28 member states of the European Union to select 751 MEPs, which represent almost half a billion people[1]. The Brexit-situation will certainly make this election special, but another aspect is at the center of this analysis: an expected strengthening of extreme right parties and subsequently a closer collaboration of these parties in the form of a new parliamentary group called *European Alliance of Peoples and Nations* (EAPN), which was presented by Matteo Salvini and others on April 4th in Milan. Given that one defining aspect of the extreme right is nationalism, one could assume that the possibilities of collaboration are rather limited due to chauvinism and petty self interests. But there has been considerable effort in the recent years to unite the various parties: On the level of the European Parliament by forming common parliamentary groups, but also on other institutional and personal levels[2]. This paper takes a closer look at the party manifestos for the elections to the European Parliament of five of those extreme-right parties by comparing their positions towards the EU and „Europe“ in general.

THE SELECTED PARTIES

Five parties of the extreme-right were selected for this study:

- The „Dansk Folkeparti“ (Danish People's Party – DPP).
- The Dutch „Partij voor de Vrijheid“ (PVV).
- The German „Alternative für Deutschland“ (AfD).
- The Italian „Lega“.
- The French „Rassemblement National“ (RN).

As this selection seems arbitrary on first sight, it is necessary to make some comments on the selection. First of all, the study does not claim to give a comprehensive or complete overview over extreme-right parties in Europe. There is a lot of literature from political science that covers this field. Furthermore, the study does not claim to give a full picture of the ideology of the parties in question. The study focuses only on the ideological positions of the parties towards Europe, European integration, the EU etc. The sources for the study will be the manifestos for the elections to the European Parliament, general party manifestos, if the former are not available, or programmatic speeches if neither exists. The party programs vary enormously in terms of scope and detail: The AfD's party program for example has 190 pages and the party additionally adopted a 88 page special campaign manifesto for the EU-elections. The PVV on the other hand has a party manifesto of half a page and no special campaign manifesto. This makes it necessary to include programmatic speeches in the study, as otherwise comparisons would hardly be possible.

This is just one aspect of different traditions and different political cultures that have to be considered when analyzing the manifestos along with the characteristics of the respective political systems and political and cultural traditions.

Furthermore, it has to be noted, that the idea of Europe can be filled with different meanings. The EU itself and most of the big mainstream parties tend to equate Europe and the EU. This includes a commitment to western democratic systems, a (neo-)liberal economic and social order and an ever deeper integration of the states into the Union. Thus most parties of the extreme right, simply rejected this idea of Europe. But, recently a change can be observed. Following Matteo Salvinis efforts to create a new right-wing parliamentary group after the elections, the rhetoric shifted from being anti-European to a change from within. In this sense in the eyes of the extreme right the EU becomes the usurper of the idea of Europe and the right-wing parties are the true defenders of Europe. This understanding of Europe is however not completely new, but builds on intellectual traditions from fascist and national socialist ideologies, that allegedly defended Europe against the "Jewish-bolshevist hordes of the east". Ideas of Europe often included anti-semitism, colonialism and nationalism. Also in the late 1960s French neo-fascist Nouvelle Droite circles developed ideas of a "new order for Europe", that can now be found in extreme right propaganda narratives as the allegedly necessary defense of Europe.

1 The United Kingdom is scheduled to leave the European Union on October 31st. This means, that the United Kingdom will take part in the elections. It is not yet clear, what will happen with the vacated seats after the UK finally leaves the Union.

2 One rather new actor in this collaboration is Stephen Bannon. The former chairman of the successful election campaign of Donald Trump announced that he will focus his efforts to strengthen the extreme right in Europe by establishing a think tank. Scale and effectiveness of this effort is not clear yet.

EXTREME RIGHT, NEO-FASCIST, RADICAL RIGHT, POPULIST RIGHT

Especially in recent years the academic and journalistic publications on the contemporary extreme right exploded, yet no commonly accepted term of the phenomenon was found and further more no single definition of what constitutes the extreme right emerged. Among the used labels are extreme right, neo-fascist, radical right or populist right. There are good reasons for each of these terms, and in the academic literature there are many texts about this labeling, but as this study is not about whether or not to characterize a party as extreme right or rather as populist right, I will not engage in these discussions in this study. For this study it is important to note, that the best label to describe these parties might be contested, but it is not contested, that these parties have many characteristics in common and can therefore be categorized and analyzed together.

THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

The European Parliament (EP) differs significantly from its historic predecessors. It started in 1952 as the Common Assembly of the *European Coal and Steel Community*, in which 78 members of the national parliaments of the member states (Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg, Italy, France and West Germany) were delegated to. In the 1960s as part of the developing European integration and the emergence of the European Community the Common Assembly was renamed European Parliament. However, its power was limited and it was considered to be not much more than a talking shop. In 1979 the members of the EP were for the first time elected directly in a common vote in all member states. This brought not just a higher legitimacy for the institution, but also raised the independence and self-consciousness of the MEPs, which in turn led to a strengthening of the EP within the institutional framework of the European Community and later the European Union.

The role of the EP in the political system is rather peculiar compared to national assemblies, which is largely due to the peculiarity of the political system of the European Union in general, which takes into account the interests of the Union as well as the interests of its member states[3]. This results in three institutions that are involved in the political process rather than the usual two (the government and the parliament) in most western liberal democracies[4]. So, the EP is part of a rather complex decision-making and legislative process, but nevertheless resembles more and more a sovereign national parliament, as it was able to continuously strengthen its institutional weight and its legal powers, such as approving the EUs budget and approving the president of the European Commission.

Even though the MEPs are elected nationally and the overall number of MEPs is based on a formula that is mostly influenced by the population of the nation states, the MEPs organize themselves primarily not along national lines, but rather along ideological lines in so called parliamentary groups. The role of the parliamentary groups are laid down in the proceedings of the EP. Currently for a group to be officially recognized it needs at least 25 MEPs from seven different countries. Once a group is established, it receives financial subsidies and guaranteed seats on committees. In the day to day business of the EP the parliamentary groups play a vital role as the leaders of the parliamentary groups set the agenda for the plenary sessions and parliamentary groups are permitted to table motions and amendments.

I will now briefly introduce the groups of the 8th European parliament. Below these paragraphs is a table with the number of MEPs of each group in the current EP.

The European People's Party

The EPP is the biggest parliamentary group in the EP and comprises of the large center-right parties such as the German CDU/CSU, the French *Les Républicains*, the Spanish *Partido Popular* or the Austrian ÖVP. A special case is the Hungarian *Fidesz* of prime minister Victor Orban. It is considerably more to the right than most of the other parties in this group and is currently suspended due to an anti-semitic smear campaign against Jean-Claude Juncker, president of the European Commission and a leading figure in the EPP.

3 One such pecularity is certainly, that the EP has two meeting places: One in Strasbourg and one in Brussels.

4 *The European Commission* has to implement and uphold European law and manages the day-to-day business of the Union. In the *European Council* the heads of state and/or government provide the overall strategic orientation of the Union.

Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats

The S&D-group is the second largest parliamentary group in the EP. Its members are the various social democratic or socialist parties of the center left such as the German SPD, the Italian *Partito Democratico*, the British *Labour Party* and the Austrian SPÖ.

Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe

ALDE is the group of the liberal parties. In contrast to the former two groups no single national party contributes a large amount of MEPs to the group. ALDE is however strong in the Benelux states and also in some eastern European countries.

European United Left/Nordic Green Left

The GUE/NGL group is the parliamentary group of left-wing and/or communist parties such as the German *Die Linke*, the Spanish *Podemos* or the Greek SYRIZA.

Greens/European Free Alliance

The Greens/EFA group includes the various green, other left/progressive parties and some regionalist parties. The biggest national parties are the German *Bündnis '90/Die Grünen* and the French *Europe Écologie Les Verts*. The Austrian *Die Grünen* are also a member of the group.

The parties of the extreme right currently form three different parliamentary groups, that will be introduced in this separate section.

European Conservatives and Reformists

The ECR is a eurosceptic group considerably to the right of the EPP. Its two main parties are the British *Conservative Party* and the Polish PiS. The Danish *Dansk Folkeparti*, which will be analyzed in detail in this study, is also a member of the ECR group.

Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy

The EFDD is the group for very eurosceptic and/or populist parties. The biggest members are the Italian *Movimento 5 Stelle* and various MEPs from the United Kingdom that are or used to be members of the UKIP. Jörg Meuthen from the German AfD also caucuses with the EFDD.

Europe of Nations and Freedom

The ENF is the group, in which the most notorious and most successful parties of the extreme right are united, is the most right-wing group of the EP. Some of the parties even want to abandon the EU. All of them are however anti-immigrant and very nationalist parties. This is also the group, in which most of the parties of this study caucus. The biggest national party is the french *Rassemblement National*, the Italian *Lega*, the Dutch PVV and the Austrian FPÖ. The second MEP of the AfD also caucuses with the ENF, as he was thrown out of the ECR group for being too far to the right.

European Alliance of Peoples and Nations

Matteo Salvini, leader of the *Lega* and Interior minister of Italy, invited to a press conference on April 4th 2019, in which he announced, that after the elections to the EP a new far-right political group will be established in the European Parliament called *European Alliance of Peoples and Nations* (EAPN)[5]. Present at the press conference were Jörg Meuthen from the AfD, Anders Vistisen from the DPP and Olli Kotro of the *Finns Party*. Other heavy weight parties of the extreme right such as the RN and the FPÖ also pledged allegiance in the days after the press conference. It is however striking, that no party – with the exception of Salvini's – sent their party bosses. There is not yet much information on the new alliance. In fact not even a homepage exists. At the press conference a manifesto was mentioned, that is about to be written and published. So for now, the press conference is the only source for official statements on the ideological orientation of the group. By analyzing the statements at the press conference, it is rather obvious, that the ideological core elements are the same as those of the ENF group: national sovereignty, no more immigration, strong national borders, weak European institutions, Defending national identities, threat of Islam; Matteo Salvini however differed from the others in emphasizing a European identity and by drawing a vision of a different European Union. In this sense

5 Jörg Meuthen declared, that the alliance will give itself a new name after the elections. Which one is not yet clear. Furthermore Meuthen demanded in a meeting ahead of the press conference, that the official name was changed from *European Alliance of People and Nations* to *European Alliance of Peoples and Nations*. The difference is, that the German translation of the former would have been *Europäische Allianz der Menschen und Nationen*. Meuthen however wanted the translation to be *Europäische Allianz der Völker und Nationen*.

the the EU must be salvaged from the bureaucrats, the EPP and the S&D, in order to live the „European dream". Strikingly absent from the press conference were parties from Eastern Europe – especially the Visegrad states. Salvini announced that there will be a big event on Mai 18th, where presumably the manifesto will be presented. As for now, there is however little evidence, as to expect something completely different from the current ENF-manifesto. Therefore the research design does not need to be adopted at this point.

COMPOSITION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

Parliamentary Group	MEPs	%
EPP	217	28,9
S&D	189	25,2
ECR	74	9,9
ALDE	68	9,1
GUE-NGL	52	6,9
Greens – EFA	51	6,8
EFDD	45	6,0
ENF	37	4,9
Non-Inscrits	18	2,4
Total	**751**	**100**

The ENF Group's Manifesto

The ENF group has to overcome an obvious problem: all its members are fierce nationalists, but should nevertheless work together in a supra-national group. Obviously, the ENF is well aware of this and thus the program of the ENF is a list of rather abstract principles and lacks any detail or any policy proposal[6]. The program consists of a couple of short paragraphs, that easily fit on a single page[7]. The initial position of this study is, that the smallest common denominator of the members of the ENF is anti-Europeanism. By analyzing the ENF program four aspects were found to be constitutive for this anti-Europeanism:

1. Hypostasis of the sovereignty of nation states. This expresses itself for example in contrasting „naturally" grown national states to the „artificial" European Union.
2. Opposition to any transfer of national sovereignty to European institutions
3. Restrictive migration regime
4. Essentialist national identity – denial of European identity

Case studies of each of the five parties in question will compare their respective programs with these four items and will thus check whether these parties can be considered to be anti-European. This will be done by doing a qualitative text analysis of the party programs, manifestos or speeches – whatever is available.

DANSK FOLKEPARTI (DANISH PEOPLE'S PARTY – DPP)

I will start with the DPP as it is a bit of an outlier among the selected parties, as the DPP does not caucus with the ENF group in the EP, but with the ECR group (European Conservatives and Reformists). It was however selected, as it is in many aspects a typical extreme right party sharing many characteristics of such parties. Furthermore, the DPP, though not part of the coalition government, has strong influence in Danish politics and managed to considerably shape government policies in certain areas. The DPP took part in all elections to the European Parliament since 1999 and could raise the number of MEPs from one in 1999 and 2004 to two in 2009 and four out of 13 Danish MEPs in 2014.

In Denmark it is not unusual to form minority governments, that are supported by parties, which are not part of the coalition. Since the parliamentary elections of 2001 until 2011 the DPP played a crucial role in forming a government as their parliamentary support would bring a parliamentary majority for the political right for the first time since the beginning of modern Danish parliamentarianism. The DPP finally supported a center-right coalition consisting of the *Conservative People's Party* (part of the EPP) and the neoliberal *Venstre* (part of ALDE group). The price for the support for this government was a very restrictive immigration law, that was in large parts written by the DPP. The DPP prided itself on having established the strictest immigration law of Europe. Between 2011 and 2015 the

6 On the updated homepage of the ENF the program is no longer available as a single document. The text is however available on the starting page, divided into six columns.

7 The EPP in contrast has a 53 page platform and a 9 page manifesto.

left block formed a government coalition without the support of the DPP. Since 2015 the DPP again supports a *Venstre* minority government in parliament.

The DPP is a very influential party in Danish politics and is thus part of this study. The basis for the analysis is the current party program of the DPP, which was established in October 2002. It is a rather compact program covering only four pages. There is an English translation available on the DPP's website[8]. The program was coded with regard to the four criteria of anti-Europeanism.

In the program all four aspects were found. The second and third aspect (opposition to EU institutions and restrictive migration regime) were mentioned only once respectively twice. But nevertheless these few mentions are very clear in its language and goal. The program states, that „the Danish People's Party opposes the European Union“. So, for the DPP it is just about stoping a further EU integration by transferring further powers to the EU, but to oppose it in general. Consequently, there is no further need to mention any concrete policies towards the EU in the program.

Also on migration the program is clear. In the preamble the then and now party leader Kristian Thulesen Dahl already mentions „secure and safe national borders“ and later the program states, that „Denmark is not an immigrant-country“, „Denmark belongs to the Danes“ and a „transformation to a multiethnic society“ will not be accepted by the DPP. The program is very clear in this aspect and it was also the most important policy of the DPP in the government forming process of 2001 resulting in the already mentioned strict immigration law.

The first aspect (national sovereignty) was mentioned most often and is the ideological core of the program. Compared to the afore mentioned aspects this one is a bit less clean cut. It is usually not mentioned as clear policy, but rather a basic principle, that is often expressed in emotional and lofty wordings. The first sentence in the preamble is a good example for this: „the essence of the party program is a warm and strong love of our country“. Other such phrases are for example „freedom of the Danish people in their own country“ or the Danish citizens „decide their own fate“. In two occasions the loftiness gives way to straight formulations concerning the sovereignty of nation states: „[we] oppose any attempt to curtail the free rights of our government and citizens“ and „we will not allow Denmark to surrender its sovereignty“.

Whereas this first aspect is mostly set on a legal level, the fourth aspect of a national or European identity is on a rather different level, that could be described as emotional or affective. As the DPP is clear in its fundamental opposition to the EU, it is not surprising, that there is no mention of a European Identity in its program, but only of a Danish identity or culture, which is mentioned several times without lining out in detail what this culture includes. Prominently mentioned is only Christianity and especially the *Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church* as the „church of the Danish people“, which should be actively supported by the government. Other aspects of the Danish culture are the family of husband, wife and children as the „heart of the Danish society“ and Denmark's constitutional monarchy.

As a conclusion, it can be said, that the DPP covers all four aspects of the ENF-program: The sovereignty of the Danish nation is the key aspect in the DPPs ideology and the EU is opposed in general. This includes its institution and a European identity. Furthermore the DPP demands and also executes a restrictive migration regime. So the verdict is clear: The DPP is a deeply anti-European party.

PARTIJ VOOR DE VRIJHEID – PVV

The PVV is a very peculiar case of a party. In fact, it can be doubted whether it is a party after all. The party was founded by Geert Wilders, after he left the liberal-conservative VVD party due to differing opinions towards a possible EU-membership of Turkey in 2004. In the 2006 general election the PVV received 5,9 % of the votes[9]. The breakthrough came with the general elections of 2010, when the PVV won 15,5 % of the votes, which resulted in 24 out of 150 MPs. In this legislative period the PVV, similar to the DPP, supported the government of Prime Minister Rutte in parliament, without being part of the government. At snap elections of 2012 the PVV lost 9 MPs. The party could however rebound to 20 MPs after the 2017 elections and came in second after the VVD.

8 https://danskfolkeparti.dk/politik/in-another-languages-politics/1757-2/

9 The Netherlands have a very fragmented party and parliamentary system. In the current parliament are MPs of 13 parties with the smallest one only gathering 1,8 % of the votes. The VVD with 21,3 % is clearly the strongest party. Following the VVD are five parties within only 4 percentage points (13,1 to 9,1).

The PVV took part in the elections to the European Parliament in 2009 and 2014 and won 4 out of the 25 Dutch MEPs both times. The PVV caucuses with the ENF group.

The party is highly concentrated on its founder and party boss Geert Wilders. Inasmuch as Wilders is even the only party member of the PVV and it is not possible to join the party at all. This is also the reason, why the PVV does not qualify for state subsidies under Dutch law. Similarly reduced is the party program of the PVV. As already mentioned it easily fits on a single page and the most prominent issue is to „de-islamize" the Netherlands. Even though anti-muslim racism is a common feature of rightwing extreme parties, the PVV is even more extreme than most others, as it does not even try to mask this racism behind the the rule of law and freedom of religion. For the PVV Islam is not protected by these basic liberal principles. The program states, that all mosques should be closed and that the Quran should be prohibited.

As for the EU, the PVV is also clear. The Netherlands should leave the EU immediately and the EU should be abolished. Until this happens, the PVV wants to re-introduce the Gulden and to restrict the free movements of people from Poland, Rumania and Bulgaria. As a consequence of the total refusal of the EU, the PVV demands to have strict border controls and strict immigration laws. The antimuslim racism also shapes this policy-field, as the PVV wants to forbid immigration from muslim countries.

In a programatic speech from September 2017[10] Wilders talks more detailed on the role of the Netherlands in Europe. The speech mentions sovereignty nine times usually in combination with words like „national" or „own". The second ideological cornerstone of the speech is the Dutch identity or rather the threat of losing this identity due to the actions taken by European elites in Brussels. The Dutch identity is not determined in detail, but remains a rather abstract idea, that has its roots in „Jerusalem, Athens and Rome". Nevertheless, identity – for Wilders – is only possible as a national identity and not as a European identity.

All in all, it is very obvious that the PVV is an anti-European party. All four aspects are clearly and explicitly mentioned in the program or in the speech: The hypostasis of the sovereignty of nation states, the complete rejection of the EU, a restricitive immigration regime and a nationalist understanding of identity, that includes the denial of a possibility of a European identity.

In the case of the PVV it seems fair to conclude, that being anti-European is not just a mere element of the party ideology, but rather one of only two aspects of the party ideology (with the other being anti-muslim racism).

ALTERNATIVE FÜR DEUTSCHLAND – AFD

The AfD is a very young party, which was only founded in 2013. Though the party got its final ideological shape only after some AfD-heavyweights (around AfD founding member Bernd Lucke), who wanted a more neoliberal and a more center right profile, rather than the eurosceptic and extreme right profile it got right now.

The party was founded by some economy professors and backbenchers of the FDP and the CSU mainly as an anti-Euro-party, arguing that the Euro is not useful to the German economy. The party name hints at this founding principle: there is an alternative to the Euro. From this center right starting point the party turned more and more to the extreme right and profited from the emergence of the extreme right PEGIDA protests in many cities of Germany – especially in the former communist states of eastern Germany.

In the general elections to the *Bundestag* in 2013 the AfD did not yet manage to pass the threshold of 5 % to gain MPs. In 2014 however the AfD gained 7,1 % of the votes to the European Parliament resulting in seven MEPs. In the following years the party could establish itself in all the state parliaments, that stood for reelection. Not unimportant in a highly decentralized political system as the German one. In the general elections of 2017 the AfD became the third largest party overtaking well established parties as the *Greens*, the neoliberal FDP and the left *Linke*.

The AfD is the other extreme to the PVV in terms of party programs. The general party program has 190 pages and the manifesto for the elections to the EP has 88 pages. It covers general ideological principles as well as detailed policies from 13 policy fields such as Europe, foreign policy, economics, borders, social policies or education.

Of special interest for this study are the foreword, which include the basic ideological principles, and the first chapter called „A Europe of nations". These chapters contain the central statements that are necessary to check with our four aspects to qualify as anti-European.

10 The speech was held at the „Ambrosetti Forum" in Villa d'Este in Italy on September 2nd 2017. https://www.pvv.nl/36-fj-related/geert-wilders/9601-heteuropadatwijwillen.html.

Hypostasis of the sovereignty of nation states

In the very first sentence of the foreword the AfD states that it commits itself to a „Europe of the fatherlands as a community of sovereign states“. Furthermore the program states, that the European integration has undermined the „sovereignty of the people“ and tried to „dissolve the nation states“. National sovereignty is also the reason, why the AfD rejects a whole bunch of institutions and processes of and in the EU or demands changes in many areas. Among the demands are:

- Strengthening the majority principle of decision making in the council
- Abolishing the supremacy of the European Court of Justice
- National plebiscites on all major issues
- Respect Brexit as a sovereign decision of the people
- Rejection of the Common Foreign and Security Policy
- More money for national armies
- No private arbitration courts in commerce conflicts
- No EU-taxes
- Rejection of the Euro – return to national currencies
- Rejection of common asylum or migration policies.
- Rejection of the freedom of movement and the Schengen regime

Opposition to EU institutions

The AfD wants cooperation between nation states and no „European super state“. In this sense the program demands to „fundamentally reconsider the EU“ and to reform it accordingly. If this reform does not happen, the EU should be dissolved and refounded as a purely economic union or Germany should leave the EU (Dexit) after holding a referendum about it. It is thus no surprise, that the AfD is opposed to any strengthening of European institutions and advocates the dismantling of those EU institutions, that undermine national sovereignty such as the EU-Parliament, the EU civil service and the European Court of Justice. As for the EP the AfD demands its complete abolishment without substitution. The civil service should become considerably smaller and the ECJ should be downsized to a mere arbitration court. In turn, the Council of Europe should be strengthened and the majority principle should be abandoned in favor of unanimous decision making[11]. This is however solely a procedural strengthening. In general the AfD leaves no doubt, that EU authority and thus EU institutions should be reduced in the name of subsidiarity.

Restrictive migration regime

The AfD demands, that „immigration to Europe must be limited and managed, in order to preserve the identities of European cultural nations.“ Not surprisingly, this can and may only be done by national parliaments. Furthermore remigration should be encouraged and deportations have to be conducted „immediately, without exception and unbureaucratic“[12]. The question of migration is linked to apocalyptic scenarios of an „existential threat to the European civilisation“. The arrival of a great number of refugees in 2015 is for example described as a „rupture in culture of historic proportions“[13]. At this point the strict immigration regime is connected to a general racism prevalent in the AfD and in its anti-muslim variety in particular. The program warns, that there are only „4 million men of German descent in the age of 20 to 35“ living in Germany.

This demonstrates that being German has nothing to do with citizenship, but with cultural descent, that is of course not more than a mask for a biological or racial understanding of being German. This racial understandings of citizenship is combined with equally apocalyptical warnings of an allegedly warning of an „aggressively advancing“ or an „imperialist“ Islam and the „high birthrates“ of Muslims. The AfD thus pledges to defend Europe against an Islam, „that is not compatible with law, freedom and democracy“. In this sense freedom of religion should be limited in the case of Islam. Concrete policies mentioned in the program are a prohibition of foreign funding of mosques, a minarette ban, a ban of the muezzin's call, a prohibition of public Friday prayers, burqas and niqabs.

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11 Strangely enough the European Commission in its current or future form are not mentioned in the program.

12 This strict migration regime is not limited to asylum seekers or refugees. The freedom of movement of EU citizens should be limited to persons, „who can take care of themselves“ and who don't immigrate into the welfare system.

13 The German word used is *Zivilisationsbruch*. A term coined by the historian Dan Diner in trying to adequately describe the historic proportions of the Shoah. It is striking for the problematic relationship of the AfD to the German Nazi past, that the AfD uses this term to refer to refugees.

National and/or European identity

The AfD clearly states, that something as a common European identity or a European people is substantially impossible to achieve. It is even a contradiction, as identity and culture, in the essentialist understanding of the AfD, is only possible on a national level[14]. In this sense the nation states are understood as naturally and historically grown states, whereas the EU is an „artificial state". As in such an „artifical" state „people's sovereignty" is impossible, the EU is undemocratic in a fundamental sense regardless of its procedures and decision making processes.

THE LEGA

The *Lega* was founded in the early 1990s as the Lega Nord, a separatist party, that wanted independence of Italy's northern regions from the Italian state[15]. Umberto Bossi was the first party leader and was for decades the face of the party. The party had its activist roots in various separatist movements and was ideologically influenced by Italian thinkers of the *Nouvelle Droite* such as Gianfranco Miglio. The party soon abandoned the independence efforts and opted for a strong federalist system with autonomous provinces. The party was originally pro-European, but with a strong focus on subsidiarity, not as xenophobic as it is right now and even included some left wing regionalist groups. The current party line was shaped after Matteo Salvini[16] defeated Umberto Bossi clearly in a leadership bid in 2013. Salvini adopted a very eurosceptic position and turned to a very aggressive and racist rhetoric towards Roma/Sinti, foreigners and especially immigrants and refugees from African and/or muslim countries. Salvini also largely dropped the chauvinist attitudes towards Italy's south, which found expression in changing the party name to *Lega*.

Starting in the mid-1990s the party cooperated with other parties of the center right and became a part of the governing coalitions under Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi. The *Lega* was also very succesful in regional elections and could appoint several regional presidents in large northern regions such as Lombardia or Veneto. In the general elections of 2018 the *Lega* emerged as the biggest party and formed a controversial coalition government with the populist Movimento 5 Stelle (M5S) under the independent Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte. Matteo Salvini became Minister of the Interior and deputy Prime Minister. Nevertheless, Salvini is the de-facto Prime Minister and largely sets the agenda of the government.

To analyze the *Lega's* position on Europe became a bit tricky since the announcement of the intention to form the new right-wing group in the EP, as Salvini changed the tune on some points concerning Europe compared to the *Lega's* party program. The main difference is, that the program clearly demanded a path to an exit of the EU, whereas the essential idea of the EAPN group is to fundamentally changing the EU from within. A fundamental change however means, that the new EU has nothing in common with the current political union, but is merely an economic union. It can thus be qualified as just a change in strategy to achieve the goal of destroying or at least significantly weakening the EU in the wake of the rise of extreme right forces in polls in many European countries.

In the electoral program for Italy's general election of 2018 the main theme towards the EU is to restore national sovereignty in economic, territorial and legislative matters.

Economic sovereignty

This means, that the Euro should be abolished and that all decisions concerning trade can only be taken by national governments.

Territorial sovereignty

The program demands the end of the principle of free movements of people, services and capital, an end of the CFSP and the European External Action Service (EEAS: the diplomatic service of the EU) and the abolition of the Schengen regime and the Dublin regulations concerning asylum seekers.

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14 The AfD obviously does not see the contradiction to the section „European cooperation" in which the program says: „We support the efforts of the Visegrád states of preserving a European identity".

15 The Lega politicized the geological term „Padania" (from the Latin word of the river Po: Padus) as the name for their new state. The party „officially" declared independence in 1996 and parliamentary elections were held in 1997.

16 Salvini was a longtime party member and activist. From 2004 to 2018 he was an MEP for the *Lega (Nord)*.

Legislative sovereignty

Legislative sovereignty means that national law should be superior to union law and not the other way round. Consequently the ECJ should not be allowed to overrule verdicts of the supreme courts of the member states. Furthermore the EU should loose its legal personality and would thus be unable to sign international treaties on behalf of the member states.

In accordance with the other right-wing parties the *Lega* demands a strong implementation of the principle of subsidiarity to the nation states and to stop any further shifts of power to EU institutions. The *Lega* however has a slightly different point of view than the other parties of this study, which is due to its ideological roots of separatism and regionalism. The subsidiarity does not stop at the national level, but should be applied further to the regional level. The *Lega* – other than the other parties – also demands a strengthening of the EP by handing the EP the power to initiate legislation. However the EP should be transformed, so that the regions are better represented. This should be accomplished by electing the MEPs on a regional basis.

The topic of immigration takes a prominent place at the beginning of the program. It is a detailed list with restrictive rules for immigration in general, but mostly for asylum seekers. The rhetoric is very aggressive and at least some points collide with the rule of law – for example the detention of asylum seekers until their legal status is decided or the demand to prohibit ships, that saved refugees from distress at sea, to enter Italian ports and bring the refugees to safety[17].

The matter of identity is addressed in the program, but it is not as extensively dealt with as the other parties do. The program however states in typical lofty language that identity is crucial for the current and future society and that it should be the first task of the state to conserve the national and especially regional identity.

As a conclusion it can be stated, that the Lega fulfills all the aspects of anti-Europeanism: Hypostasis of national sovereignty, opposition to transfer power to Brussels and to tighten the European migration regime. The sole difference to the other parties of the study is the strong emphasis on regions. In institutional terms, but also in matters of identity. Salvini's „charme offensive“ towards Europe in the form of the EAPN does not alter the assessment, as it is in the end only a change of strategy of achieving the goal of significantly weakening or even destroying the European Union: From destruction by leaving to destruction from within.

RASSEMBLEMENT NATIONAL – RN

The RN was founded as *Front national* (FN) in 1972 as a unifying organization for various right-wing and neo-fascist groups. These early years were dominated by rivalries among the different groups[18] and the party did poorly at elections at various levels. In the early 1980s Jean-Marie Le Pen could consolidate his leadership of the party and soon gained first successes in provincial and municipal elections. A change in the electoral system brought the FN more than 30 MPs in the general elections of 1986. In the presidential elections of 1988 Le Pen gained a shocking 14,4 % of the votes. In the 2002 presidential elections Le Pen surprisingly managed to come in second (ahead of the socialist candidate) in the first round of the elections and thus became a candidate in the run-off elections against Jaques Chirac. Due to a broad national reaction Chirac won the second round with a record 82,2 % of the votes.

After this success the elections results became worse again and in 2011 Marine Le Pen, daughter of Jean-Marie, became the party boss. She tried to slightly mainstream the party by adopting a couple of liberal social issues, such as a civil union for homosexual couples or speaking out against open anti-semitism. In the 2017 presidential elections Marine Le Pen made it to the run-off elections against Emmanuel Macron, but lost clearly with a 30 point margin. In 2018 Le Pen proposed to rename the party *Rassemblement National* (RN). Nevertheless, the RN is still a fiercely nationalist and anti-immigrant party, that is a prominent party in the European extreme right.

The basis for this study are the comprehensive party program of the RN from the presidential elections in 2017 and a programmatic speech Marine Le Pen held at the kick-off event to the campaign for the EP elections in January 2019[19].

17 This last demand is however established practice since Salvini became Minister of the Interior.

18 Among them veterans from the war in Algeria, (neo-)fascist groups including persons from *Nouvelle Droite*-circles.

19 A video of the event and a transcript of Le Pen's speech can be found here: https://rassemblementnational.fr/videos/convention-du-rassemblementpour-les-elections-europeennes-13-01-2019/.

The main difference between the RN and the other parties of this study, is that France is in diplomacy, defense and self-understanding an international player. France is one of the P5 nations, that hold a permanent seat in the UN security council, is diplomatically engaged in many African countries (especially former colonies) and has a big and comprehensive military, that is openly or covertly engaged in various countries – many of them again in Africa. Furthermore, France maintains an arsenal of nuclear weapons, that includes almost 300 warheads, that can be launched from submarines and airplanes.

This results in much more emphasis on defense and military matters in the party program, but also in a sense of entitlement of leadership in Europe, that is absent, for example, in German politics, even though it is by far the biggest economy of Europe and has by far the biggest population of all European countries.

This sense of historic entitlement to a leading role in Europe combined with the intellectual tradition of the *Nouvelle Droite*, that included a „New Order", i.e. a fascist one, for Europe and the world, results in a very emphatic understanding towards Europe. Of course, not the current Europe, but a Europe to come, that can now be established, as the „patriotic forces" (i.e. neo-fascist forces) in Europe get stronger. Le Pen distinguishes between two blocks: the Europeanists and the patriots, whereas the latter are the „true Europeans, who are the defenders of a Europe of the peoples". In this sense the EU is not Europe, but the biggest threat to Europe. The EU merely usurped the idea of Europe. Furthermore, the Brussels bureaucrats are „globalists" who allegedly don't act in the best interest of the people.

Even though Le Pen distances herself from open anti-semitism she refers to anti-semitic tropes several times in her speech. The differentiation between globalists and nationalists echoes the anti-semitic allegation against Jews, that they are cosmopolites and don't have a national home. Le Pen continues in her speech, that „in contrary to the citizens of the world [i.e. the globalists, NB], who are citizens of nowhere, i.e. of nothing, contrary to the globalists, who understand the world as nomades, we are not just in France, but from France"[20]. Additionally to the image of the nationless cosmopolite, Le Pen uses the image of the rootless „wandering Jew", to demarcate the globalists from the „patriots". Le Pen's division of the society in two blocks is underpinned with antisemitic images.

Towards the EU Le Pen proposes to radically reform the Union into a „European Alliance of Nations", a cooperation between free nation states, that brings back sovereignty to the national capitals. The speech or the program do not mention many concrete policies towards this reform. However, it becomes clear, that the council should be strengthened and the commission should be downsized to a mere coordination office of the council's affairs.

In her program for the presidential elections of 2017 immigration features prominently and several concrete policies are mentioned.

- National borders should be reestablished and the Schengen regime should be abolished.
- Naturalization should be made more difficult
- Prohibition of family reunifications
- Prohibition of naturalization by marriage
- Ending the principle of ius soli
- Prohibition of extra-European double citizenships
- Restrict asylum possibilities

In short, the RN demands many restricitions on immigration including changing fundamental principles of French political and constitutional traditions such as ius soli[21]. It is the expression of a culturalist, i.e. racist, understanding of French national identity, that stands in contrast to the longstanding republican identity of France.

The *„Rassemblement National"* shows all the characteristics of anti-Europeanism. It emphasizes and essentializes national sovereignty, it opposes further transfers of power to the EU and wants a much stricter migration regime. The difference to the other parties of this study is, that the RN recognizes something like a European identity, that can be the basis of a new European Alliance of Nations. The catch is, that the RN clearly demands a leading role for France in this Alliance and that this European identity is rooted in the neo-fascist ideologies of the *Nouvelle Droite*. It would mean a transformation of the EU from a (neo-)liberal supranational union to a cooperation of authoritarian and chauvinist nation states.

20 Contrairement au citoyen du monde qui n'est citoyen de nulle part c'est-à-dire de rien, contrairement aux mondialistes qui pensent le monde en nomades, nous ne sommes pas en France, mais de France.

21 It has to be noted however, that during the last decades there have already been changes in the nationality law, that restricted access to the French nationality.

Conclusion

The idea of the study was to take a look at party programs, platforms or programmatic speeches and analyze them towards their understanding of Europe and the European Union. The starting point of the study was the program of the ENF parliamentary group in the European Parliament, in which most of the MEPs of the eurosceptic parties of the extreme right caucus. From the program four characteristics of anti-Europeanism were condensed and were compared to the political programs of the national parties. It could be shown, that all five parties (*DPP, PVV, AfD, Lega*, RN) can be considered as being anti-European. The announcement of Matteo Salvini and others on April 4th to form a new parliamentary group after the elections did not made it necessary to change the research design. As of May 13th there is still no platform or manifesto available, but by judging from the mentioned press conference it can be assumed, that the program won't be much more than the one-page-manifesto of the ENF, that does not include much more than the four characteristics of anti-Europeanism (Hypostasis of national sovereignty, opposition to transfers of power to Brussels, restrictive migration regime and an essentialist understanding of identity). Too big are the differences between the national parties (e.g. relationship to Russia, refugee resettlement etc) as that a comprehensive manifesto with concrete policies can be expected.

There is nevertheless the threat, that electoral success pushes these differences aside (for a while) and a common parliamentary group can actually be formed, that could then have significant influence[22] on the business of the EP, the election of the new president of the EC and the EU budget.

Further Reading

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- Schröder, Ilka (Ed, 2004): Weltmacht Europa – Hauptstadt Berlin? Ein EU-Handbuch. Hamburg: Konkret Verlag.
- Traverso, Enzo (2019): The new Faces of Fascism. Populism and the Far Right. London/New York: Verso.
- Mudde, Cas (Ed, 2017): The Populist Radical Right. A Reader. London/New York: Routledge.
- Lelieveldt, Herman & Princen, Sebastiaan (2015): The Politics of the European Union. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

22 Especially if the MEPs of Nigel Farage's new *Brexit party* are also included. Current polls show the Brexit party as the strongest party, that would translate to a significant number of MEPs.

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