



Paris Lodron University of Salzburg

Department of Political Science



University of Sarajevo

Faculty of Political Science

# **The effects of 2013-2015 migrant wave on the success of right-wing populism in the European Union**

Master's Degree Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for graduation in the  
Joint Master's Program in Political Science – Integration and Governance

Student name: Emina Kuhinja (Matrikel-Nr. 11834951)

Thesis mentors: Valida Repovac-Niksic (University of Sarajevo)

September, 2020.

Zoe Lefkofridi (University of Salzburg)

## *Acknowledgments and Dedication*

*I would like to express sincere gratitude and deepest appreciation to all my professors from the Political Science Department for their effort, understanding and valuable guidance throughout my studies.*

*The two years studying on this MA programme have been an incredible journey, helped me grow and understand my own path. I have learned to accept failures, hardships and rise from them. Thus, I would like to dedicate this thesis to myself.*

*A note of declaration*

I, Emina Kuhinja, hereby declare that the work entitled *The effects of 2013-2015 migrant wave on the success of right-wing populism in the European Union* is my original work, and that I have not copied from any other work or from any other sources except where reference or acknowledgement is made in the text. The expressed views are my own, and no one part of this work has been written for me by another person. I have cited all sources from which I have drawn information appropriately. This work has not been submitted toward any degree or award at any other university or place of learning.

Emina Kuhinja

---

## *Abstract*

This thesis explores the connection between the 2013-2015 migrant wave and the success of right-wing populism, by analyzing the most prominent remarks and policies of some of the leading populist figures from right-wing political parties, such as the Italian Northern League (LN), the Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ) and the Alternative for Germany (AfD), as well as the mainstream right Austrian New People's Party. These parties have generated public support in the aftermath of the migrant crisis, dealing with immigration issues and introducing new forms of nationalism and gender<sup>1</sup> perspectives. The reasons behind the right-wing rise will be explored on the lines of xenophobic, nativist narrative directed towards (1) migrants as the incoming population and (2) women as voters. The thesis will test the hypotheses using secondary data collection to analyze narrative elements assumed to have generated support for the right-wing populist parties. Within the context of a migrant crisis, the populist narratives contributed to shaping the perception of immigrants as “dangerous others” who threaten the Western culture and labor forces, whereas women are depicted as victims of incoming cultures (primarily Islamic) and are encouraged to preserve their traditional (patriarchal) roles as mothers and care-givers to preserve the nation.

---

<sup>1</sup> The term ‘sex’ refers to biological differences between men and women, whereas ‘gender’ denotes men’s and women’s behavioral, social and psychological characteristics, including their socially constructed roles, behaviors, activities and attributes within a cultural and social context (Nirel, 2017).

## *Table of Contents*

Introduction .....	6
Theoretical background: Undemocratic Liberalism .....	12
Research question and hypotheses .....	21
Argument .....	22
Methodology .....	25
Concept specification.....	27
Refugees or migrants? .....	27
The European migrant crisis .....	28
Perceptions of the migrant crisis.....	33
The Case of Italy.....	35
The Northern League .....	37
The Case of Germany.....	43
The Alternative for Germany (AfD) .....	44
The Case of Austria .....	51
The Austrian New People's Party (ÖVP) and the Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ) .....	53
Discussion of cases .....	61
Results of the elections: how much did the right-wing populist narrative achieve?.....	61
What about xenophobia, racism, nativism, Islamophobia and gender? .....	66
Democracies under threat? .....	72
Conclusion.....	76
Bibliography.....	81

## *Introduction*

This thesis addresses the differing ways in which refugees that were attempting to reach Europe from 2015 onwards have been represented in the European politics and media outlets. It will be shown how with the sharp increase in numbers, the European migrant crisis escalated into a turmoil, resulting in a number of human casualties and systematic difficulties to handle the situation. Such outcome will be analyzed through the narrative that was present during and after this period, taking into consideration all the policies delivered, targeting migrants and their rights in this context. Although the crisis is understood to be throughout and beyond 2015, this thesis takes into consideration a period with the first emergence of new migrants in 2013 and the period from 2015 onwards, when the large numbers of incoming migrants initiated that the crisis became a political concern. This is to explore and compare the narrative, as well as the transitions in politics concerning the question of migrations. As a concept, crisis presents an emerging event that challenges the existing order and as such, can result in a collapse of a current system, delivering new perceptions on social problems (Habermas, 1988, pp. 2-4). The very definition of the terms used in the context of a crisis indicate the understanding of different contextual positions and whether the refugees are included or excluded from Europe. These positions, however, tend to be analyzed through the lens of terrorism, based on territorial linkage between migrant origins and terrorist groups' (e.g. the so-called Islamic State of Syria and Iraq – ISIS, Al-Qaeda) activity location. This is likely to be assumed due to recent security breaches within the borders of the European Union (EU). In 2015, with the peak of the migrant crisis, Europe has been a target of terrorist attacks that continued in the following years; major ones being the Paris attacks (2015), Brussels bombing (2016), Nice truck attack (2016), Berlin Christmas market attack (2016), Manchester Arena bombing (2017) and Barcelona attacks (2017). Responsibility for these has been claimed by the Islamic State and Al-Qaeda, two broad-based militant Islamist organizations founded in the Middle East. On the other hand, the highest number of refugees to Europe in 2015 were Syrians (378,000), accounting to 29% of all

Europe's asylum seekers, which is the highest share of any nation, according to Pew Research Center (2016). The country of origin is placed in the Middle East and thus, involves population that may have been perceived as linked to the militant organizations that were engaging in terrorist activities at the time, evoking negative views of immigrants despite poor substantive evidence of this connection (Böhmelt, Bove and Nussio, 2019). This type of perception may have caused a disrupt between institutional mechanisms and the refugee population, making it difficult for authorities to handle the situation in a way that delivers satisfactory results for all parties involved. More, the public debate was sparked by some of the controversial comments made by some of the most influential EU politicians (e.g. This thesis is planning to analyze the narrative that emerged during this period and what consequences did it have on understanding the crisis. This type of narrative evoked certain ideologies that have had their fair share of presence in the past and were not welcome in a democratic union of states (such is the EU), which all are expected to share liberal values and norms. Furthermore, the thesis takes a look at the voting results in the aftermath of the migrant crisis, linking the narrative to the increase in support of right-wing populist parties.

This thesis understands as “far-right parties”, those parties and movements that are (1) nativist, advocating that states should only be inhabited by members of the native group and that any foreign elements are what threatens the homogenous nation-state, and (2) authoritarian, believing in strict social order where any complaints to the authority are sanctioned and punished (Mudde, 2007). On the other hand, far-left parties reject the existing socio-economic structure of contemporary capitalism, which they perceive as producing economic inequality, and thus, support alternative options for economic and power structures (March, 2012). The rise on both sides of the political spectrum can be linked to the wave in political populism (Bartholin, 2019) that has recently been gaining more attention in European democracies. This recent shift in the political spectrum indicates the rise of right-wing parties and extremist movements, which generally promote ideas such as nationalism, xenophobia and traditionalism

(a concept also supported by the center right parties). It is exactly these radical right-wing populist parties that have been enjoying large media presence over the last decade and that have experienced growth in electoral support in several European countries over the last twenty years.

Despite not being a recent phenomenon, right-wing and populism have new interpretations in the Western Europe. The notion of populism is often misinterpreted, standing as a term for criticizing unfavorable politicians instead of being the concept of describing a specific political style. The analysis of the term is crucial due to its relevant link with and influence on the electoral behavior of voters (Fenkart, 2018), and a more detailed discussion of the term will be available in the sections below. Nevertheless, the threats occurring together with populism have already been known of in 2010, when the EU leader Van Rompuy declared that “populism is the biggest danger of Europe.” What has to be noted here is the fact that populism does not have to be just right-wing, but this thesis focuses on right-wing populism in order to study the response to the 2015 European refugee crisis.

Nevertheless, connecting the electoral success of far-right parties and immigration has been a topic of research for many years, but recently, a large material of empirical literature (for example Barole et al, 2016; Halla et al, 2017; Harmon, 2017; Otto and Steinhardt, 2017;) has emerged, containing studies on European countries, which indicate that there is a positive effect of immigration on the support for far-right parties. On the other hand, studies by Steinmayr (2016) and Facchini et al (2017) did not confirm the impact of immigrant concentrations on the support for the right-wing populist vote shares. Of course, the cases in this study: Austria, Sweden, Italy, Denmark, Germany, are distinctive and the situation did not develop in the same manner among different EU Member States, leaving out more space for interpretation. This thesis follows up on the conclusion that the higher number of incoming refugees increased the vote share for parties with an anti-immigration agenda, as well as the center-right parties, where the link between immigration and rightward political shift is



confirmed (Otto, Steinhardt, 2017). With this, the anti-immigrant agenda is analyzed through the political rhetoric of right-wing populist parties in order to depict the effects of the European refugee crisis on the populist vote share.

Undoubtedly, the European Union began experiencing transformation with some of its Member States dropping the liberal from their democratic systems. The results of the federal German election in 2017 were the ones to raise controversial debates regarding the refugees and Germany's status as a "safe haven" (Otto and Steinhardt, 2017). These elections secured the seats in the federal parliament for the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) with 12.6 percent of the vote, making this party Germany's biggest opposition party. The Alternative for Germany pushed for strict anti-immigration policies, spread anti-Semitic and anti-Islamist messages, as well as raised old Nazi taboos, yet enjoyed popularity in Germany while over a million undocumented migrants were allowed in (BBC News, 2019). In the following year, the increased rise in success of populism started off with Hungary and the Orbán regime which is considered to be the leading example for all aspiring authoritarian politicians across Europe, Central and Eastern Europe in particular, for the countries like North Macedonia and Poland (Mudde, 2018). The European scene is changing through the normalization of the radical right, which is setting the political agenda in Europe centering around identity and controlling "what we talk about and how we talk about it" (Mudde, 2018). Furthermore, in his book *The Far Right Today*, Mudde (2019), talks about the consequences of this normalization stating that the far-right politics is no longer limited to far-right parties, but forms like authoritarianism, nativism (a mixture of xenophobia and nationalism) and populism, expressed by a number of mainstream political parties, raising the issue of how radical they have become, while introducing examples such as Hungary's Fidesz or Poland's Law and Justice party, the Belgian New Flemish Alliance (N-VA), the British Conservative Party, the French Republicans, the German Christian Social Union (CSU), as well as increasingly successful Spanish Popular Party (PP) in this regard. Kaltwasser and Mudde previously argued that "populism can be both, a corrective and a threat

to democracy” (2011). In this thesis, mainstream populist parties are understood as the parties that depend on the issue emphasis of rival parties, meaning that they can lose their status if another party decides to act on similar agenda (Meyer and Miller, 2015). Further, mainstream parties tend to adopt xenophobic ideas, originally linked to the right-wing parties; embracing nativism, populism-inspired and anti-rights policies, as well as their rhetoric on welfare and migration (Wear, 2015). The migrant crisis stands as a turning point for most of this rhetoric to intensify, as there was a direct threat to oppose. Despite most mainstream parties’ reluctance to discuss difficult political questions, they still managed to fall into a populist right parties’ agenda, whose main idea was to exploit the asylum crisis for national chauvinist and exclusionist intentions (Mudde, 2000; Gardberg, 1993). These radical-right parties place migration as their most exploited issue (Ivarsflaten, 2007). Moreover, besides anti-immigration rhetoric, radical-right populist parties place gender issues on the map, perceiving gender relations as repressive towards women among non-western culture, whereas a conservative and more family-oriented role of women is desired and encouraged (Akkerman, 2015). This element stands as one of the primal interests of this thesis and will be further elaborated in the context of migrations. Nevertheless, both mainstream and radical right-wing populist parties have developed their discourse on the same agenda during the recent migrant crisis, shifting the public stances into a more of a rightward direction.

This migration wave has demanded a review of the Europe’s asylum and immigration rules, yet countries had a difficult time agreeing on the common plan, as some countries wanted stricter external border controls, while others a fairer distribution of the incoming refugees. Nevertheless, there was an issue with countries like Hungary and Poland which placed their firm stand on the refugee crisis and pursued the decision not to accept any migrants at all. Since most migrants have come overseas and landed on the territories of Greece and Italy and moved their way from there towards Western Europe, the EU pushed for measures of limiting the number of refugees and migrants and making an agreement with Turkey in regulating the

number of incoming immigrants. What this deal, introduced was the rule that anyone who arrived in Greece without valid papers would be sent back to Turkey and in return, the EU would accept a certain number of refugees and handle them within its borders (Christophersen, 2019). This agreement reduced the migrant overflow in Greece and was supposed to guarantee for proportionate share of refugees. However, the initial plan failed under the pressure of anti-immigrant parties which affected the state governments to limit immigration to their country. The EU has placed great pressure on states who greatly opposed to receiving refugees, such as Hungary, Poland and other Eastern European countries, but the 2019 EU elections proved that extreme policies are supported by most of the countries' population and that the EU policies have no significant impact (Christophersen, 2019).

All in all, the migrant crisis has deeply affected the EU system, both internally within individual countries and between the EU Member States. Emerging disagreements on how to deal with the situation have separated the public opinion forming the support and opposition groups to receiving refugees, especially in Eastern European countries. Furthermore, in many Western European countries, the resistance has also increased in terms of anti-migration political narrative, as well as promotion of gender equality invested in populist campaigns for the purpose of attaining female voters and hiding the nativist agenda. The narratives on promoting national values and resentment towards "others" became more and more popular. However, besides rhetoric elements of racism, nationalism, xenophobia and Islamophobia, there are not many studies on gender with regard to refugees. Feminist research (for example Keskinen et al. 2016; Siim et al. 2016; Meret 2015) has described the gender equality discourse of right-wing populist parties as an instrument in their anti-immigration agenda. This aspect is underresearched and leaves an open space for a discussion; hence presents a new contribution to the literature that this thesis will attempt to deliver. This type of narrative generated populist support around many EU Members States, indicating that all mentioned events (terrorist

attacks, refugee crisis, changed policies and border controls) have certainly exerted influence on the general situation in Europe.

The remainder of this thesis is organized as follows. In the next chapter, it will discuss the context in which populism is developing in the European Union now, then define some of the most relevant concepts, which are necessary for understanding the environment in which populism emerged and prospered in modern day Western Europe. Second, it will introduce data and describe the analysis process. Then, research findings with selected quotes from the media will be presented, followed by a presentation of election results, for the purpose of identifying success of populist vote share. Lastly, final remarks will focus on the consequences and outcomes of the right-wing populist discourse, as well as summarize the main points of this thesis.

### *Theoretical background: Undemocratic Liberalism*

Despite being in the spotlight in the last few years, populism is not a recent major occurrence and it has been present in European politics in a similar form as today since 1990s. However, it is the ideological and political changes that were occurring since the late 1960s that shaped the West European politics in this manner: the collapse of the great modern ideologies, a rising awareness of the deficiency of natural resources, economic and social consequences of environmental destruction which affected the shift in values, as well as the population growth and divided stances on new technological developments delivering feelings of uneasiness and ambiguity (Betz, 1994). All these factors produced new social issues which stand as their direct outcomes. Yet, the left side of the spectrum is argued to have discovered a benefit from this, as its ideology course formed an environment of creating social communities that support and promote certain rights and values that aim to counter the fallouts of the previous systems.

On the other hand, the same issues allowed for the strengthening of the right part of the spectrum as well, resulting in right-wing populism in many Western democracies. The

established socio-cultural and socio-political system is firmly rejected by the majority of radical right-wing populist parties, in particular in terms of lacking support for political projects that seek to achieve individual and social equality. This is so because of their opposition to the social integration of marginalized groups, resulting in xenophobia, racism and anti-Islamism (Betz, 1994). These radical right-wing populist views have gained popularity in Western Europe, according to the results of recent European elections. Here, it must be noted that right-wing populist parties can be often regarded as “protest parties”, that voters choose in order to allow for representation based on preference of policy (e.g. opposition to immigration) what can further explain their electoral success (Ivarsflaten, 2008; Arzheimer, 2008; Roodujin, 2018). Also, these parties can present a populist critique of the current representative democracy (Mudde, 2004) in cases where the established political parties are neglecting the issues and not formulating clear positions on such.

The current set of right-wing populists and world scenarios shifted the public perception of populism to a distorted ideological picture, attaching the negative connotation to the term. In theory, populist movements are believed to occur in various forms to produce stability and safety through achieving collective action. Two core principles of populism involve people-centrism and anti-elitism, but leading to separate outcomes. The appeal to ordinary people, however, got the bad reputation primarily because of the cases of populism which appeared on the radical right of the political spectrum, often linked to ideology of authoritarianism and anti-immigration ideas (Ivarsflaten, 2007). First significant wave of far-right politics in Western Europe appeared in 1980s, incited by unemployment and mass immigration, but by the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the populist radical right had become the dominant ideology in the far-right spectrum (Mudde, 2019, pp. 17-22). Today, this form of a political scene where populist parties and narrative dominate the public debate setting, is referred to as a “populist Zeitgeist” (Mudde, 2014, pp. 541-563). Populists aim for various centers of power, including dominant political parties, mainstream media, big business and state institutions like the judiciary. Nevertheless,

defining populism has been a challenge for itself due to its perpetual emergence in diverse environmental settings. Defining populism is difficult and there are numerous scholarly and political disputes on what it means, as it is much more than it seems – “it is a crucial argument about what we expect from democracy” (Baker, 2019). Nevertheless, populism is portrayed as a threat to democracy, a destructive force people must fight against. Drawing on extensive scientific literature on populism as an ideology (Muller, 2016; Mounk, 2018; Mudde, Rovira, Kaltwasser, 2017), it can be concluded that populism rests on two pillars: (1) ‘true people’ of a country are always in conflict with the outsiders and (2) nothing should constrain the will of the ‘true people’. Moreover, populists perceive the political space as a moral battleground between right and wrong, that is the ‘true people’ (‘good people’) of one country against the elites (‘corrupt elite’) or other groups who are identified as ‘outsiders’ or ‘others’, such as ethnic and religious minorities, immigrants or criminals. This anti-elitism is what drives the populist rhetoric, often justifying the abuse of power among populist leaders, as it in the populist worldview, done in the name of the people. Here, it is important to note the typical features of this narrative, involving the double-speak strategy imposed by the ultraright leaders and their party propaganda, defined as “a rhetorical form of deception and political cunning intended to attack an enemy from within by aping the language of liberal democracy” (Jackson, Feldman, 2014, p.11). This strategy enabled for racist language to be pushed forward in the public while being justified behind “telling the truth to the people” attitude (Jackson, Feldman, 2014, p.11). Normalizing the use of openly racist language facilitated the implementation of “politics of fear”, involving the “rhetoric of exclusion” that was embodied in the ultraright ideal of a homogenous society based on nativist ideologies (Wodak, 2015). Nativist ideologies tend to promote traditional societal values and often reminisce of the past times, presenting conformity with patriarchal societal norms and idealizing one nation, while demonizing the other and perceiving them as a threat to everything that the ideology stands for. The transference of such

perception in today's modern world evokes patriarchal norms and a dichotomous<sup>2</sup> view of the world that oppose to multiculturalism, diversity and gender equality.

Schmitter (2019) places the emerging point of populism in the failure of existing political parties to provide credible representation for “neglected” groups of citizens. This struggle emerged in the attempts to manage the gap between parties’ governing and representative roles, providing the space for populist challengers to take over representation of citizens’ interests (Lefkofridi, Nezi, 2019; Mair, 2013; Kriesi, 2014). However, interpreting populism as the outcome of the failures of democracy, questions its very link to the democratic system and whether such is benevolent or malicious (Lefkofridi, 2019). The three possibilities of populism, reflected in the mode representation together with democracy, the opposite of democracy and a conflicting mode, contribute to a perception of populist as an internal periphery of liberal democratic politics (Arditi, 2005, p. 79). More specifically, recent empirical inquiries also explained the distinct modes of populism through contextual factors, such as democratic consolidation of a country, but also party-specific factors, including party ideology (left vs, right) and party status (governments vs opposition) (Huber, Ruth, 2017; Huber, Schimpf, 2017a, 2017b; Huber, Schimpf, 2016a, 2016b). Furthermore, Schmitter (2019) emphasized factors at different levels of analysis to explain the ways in which populism can be benevolent or malicious depending on a specific goal of contemporary European democracies. Here, the thesis will argue on human rights in terms of addressing the migrant crisis and providing asylum or conditions for respect of the rights of migrants, and gender equality including representation of women in and among populist parties.

When analyzing the far-right movement, it is important to note that there is a wide range of parties and groups that have their differences not only in agenda and policy, in particular economic and welfare policies, but also the extent to which they support and employ violence (Halikiopoulou, 2018). It is important to note that there is a certain level of plurality in the far

---

<sup>2</sup> A perception that entails two opposite sides, an *us vs them* view of the world

right, distinctive relationship between type of ideology and type of organization, including extreme right parties and radical right movements (Mudde, 2019, pp. 109-111). Here, however, the focus is on the populist radical right which has become mainstreamed in most western democracies, due to increasingly similar issues that emerged, as well as the similar issue positions among political parties and leaders.

Nevertheless, right-wing populism is not a uniform phenomenon and various parties and groups differ fundamentally in terms of their rhetoric and program agendas. With today's political parties and politicians, one can distinguish different types of narratives that promote populism, but not all belong to the same category. Mudde argues that ideologically "thin" populism is perceived in many forms as it always has to rely on a more substantial host ideology in order to survive and this ideology can be on either point along the left-right spectrum. Depending on their placement of attention, one can perceive a difference between parties who focus on the economic consequences of immigration (neoliberal populism) and parties that focus on the national identity issue (national populism). Nevertheless, the direction it goes to depends on the target social groups and if they are not focusing on one anti-agenda, they focus on the other. For Betz (1994), immigration and xenophobia present the main factors in explaining the rise of radical right-wing populism. Regardless of this negative connotation, a significant increase in support for far-right parties and groups has been noted across Europe in recent years, when they positioned themselves on second or third place in domestic elections and even joining governing coalitions.

Migrations present one of the main issues of almost every far-right group in Europe – for populist radical right parties migrations constitute an existential threat to their nation and state, whereas extreme right groups place the source of concern in race, stating that western countries are faced with a "white genocide" due to the mass migrations and state-sponsored multiculturalism (Mudde, 2019, p. 30). Furthermore, Mudde (2019) argues that populist radical right politicians do not perceive migrations as driven by economic factors, but organized by



progressive politicians in developed countries for two possible reasons: due to the hatred of one's own nation or for the purpose of compensating for their lost electorate which partly shifted to the populist radical right. Nevertheless, there is an argument that migration and the rise of right-wing populism do not necessarily entail a direct relation and an increase in immigration does not immediately sets to a populist, anti-immigration response, projecting fears and attitudes. Instead, the migrant crisis triggered and strengthened the pre-existing negative attitudes toward migration indicating that skepticism and opposition towards the migration remained unphased (Dennison, Geddes, 2018). Here applies the understanding that European right-wing populist parties rested their policies on what has previously existed among the EU population. This 'activation' of anti-immigrant attitudes was an outcome of the widespread dissatisfaction with how the states failed to effectively counter the migrant crisis, and ultimately reflected in an increased support for right-wing populist parties, which profited on immigration fears (Kaufmann, 2018, p. 97).

As for the mentioned views on gender equality, far-right populists apply the nativist theory reflected in the perception termed *familialism* "a form of biopolitics which views the traditional family as a foundation of the nation, and subjugates individual reproductive and self-determination rights [of women in particular] to the normative demand of the reproduction of the nation" (Kemper, 2016). In Western Europe, far-right groups hold a so-called "modern-traditional" perception on women, indicating that the women are allowed to engage in economic participation (to work), but preferably after they have fulfilled their purpose of giving birth, becoming mothers and raising a child. On the other hand, populist radical right parties in Northern Europe openly promote women's rights, claiming that gender equality has been achieved in the context of their countries, thereby shifting away from the conservative view on feminism (Mudde, 2019, p.100). Further, Mudde (2019) mentions the so-called *benevolent sexism*, employed by the far right in perceiving women as morally pure and physically weak, regarding the need for protection by the (real) men. Such perception is here linked to the

‘Fourteen Words’ of one of the founding members of the neo-Nazi terrorist group The Order, which advocated ensuring safety and future for white people and their children, “because the beauty of the White Aryan woman must not perish from the earth”. Here we can see the direct link with the right-wing ideologies and conceptualizations. Nevertheless, relating this perception to the definition provided by Schmitter – “populism as a process of mobilization of the disenfranchised and deprived citizens”, women are perceived as members of the marginalized, excluded social groups and populist leaders only pursue actions concerning gender in attempt to mobilize them (Lefkofridi, 2019). An interesting link to the concept of gender, and the one employed by populism, is the dichotomous world view, only in this case reflected in a perception of men vs women; but the outcome with gender is diversity, whereas populism tries to suppress it (Nirel, 2017). Due to such homogenous perception, populist parties tend not to make differences between genders, but they do conceptualize elitism with gendering in terms of having an educated, privileged, feminist elite to oppose (Lefkofridi, 2019). Furthermore, populists can link gender with foreigners and foreign power to protect and hide their own failures and weaken the opposing side (Lefkofridi, 2019): for example, the focus on gender issues in the context of anti-immigrant, xenophobic and Islamophobic discourse, where Muslim men are portrayed as oppressors and women (in particular the ones from the Western cultures) are threatened by their religious practices, (so perceived) discriminatory actions towards women and their irrespective ideology. In this way, protectionism is reflected in populist attempts to protect the European Union from “culturally incompatible” refugees on their territory (Lefkofridi, 2019). Increasingly successful populist parties focus on immigration in their electoral programmes, the context that enables for political gender stereotyping, where right-wing women and men are expected to perceive men as more competent in dealing with immigration policy, whereas with left-wing men and women, the situation is the opposite (Giger, Holli, Lefkofridi, 2019). Feminist studies argue that the narrative of radical right groups does not hide its anti-feminist, anti-LGBT, conservative, nationalist, racist, xenophobic,

Islamophobic and anti-democratic stances (Kötig et al. 2017; Spierings, Zaslove, 2015). Moreover, discourse on gender equality is believed to be instrumentalized against immigration (Keskinen et al, 2016), and thus, feminist politics is portrayed as a dangerous ‘gender ideology’ (Kuhar, Paternotte, 2017). This poses a question on how women are perceived in the role of decision-makers and leaders, in particular within the context of right-wing populism.

To explain gender relations in populism, one can analyze the position of women in the role of populist leaders, which is reflected in the requirements fit for a leader – toughness being the primary one, whereas women are assumed to be compassionate and soft. Further, as women tend to experience hardships in attaining the leadership role, they are often harshly judged for how they perform it, in particular if they do not conform to the gender stereotype of being gentle and kind, thus being obliged to constantly balance between images of masculinity and femininity (Lefkofridi, 2019). Right-wing populist supporters tend to take on the perception that only men are fit for positions in politics and perceives them as competent for decision making and policy areas, whereas women are more eligible for “compassionate” topics, such as health, elderly, children, family, environment, as well as women’s issues, women’s rights and gender equality (Giger, Holli, Lefkofridi, 2019). This perception puts women in a subordinate position, where “more important” issues are being placed in the hands of men who get to make a decision on how women’s lives play out. Right-wing ideology that populism tends to rely on, places its focus on the so called masculine topics (e.g. foreign affairs, security, defense and economics) and thus, entails a conservative view on women and their role in society and public affairs; while on the other side, left-wing ideologies are expected to do the opposite an focus on more “softer” topics and deal with “feminine” issues (such as social policy and equality policy) (Giger, Holli, Lefkofridi, 2019). Since the majority gives large advantage to the “masculine” topics, right-wing ideology have had their breakthrough in the times of crisis, pointing out the problems needed to be solved to ensure safety of the citizens, increasing their engagement through populist support and political participation. By presenting themselves as

deeply engaged and skilled, asking for public cooperation in delivering decisions that are best for them, populists gain trust of the citizens and increase their chances of winning in elections.

When transferring the defining factors of populism to the aspects of human rights and gender equality, it is easy to see how populism comes into conflict with the norms and values of liberal democracy. A homogenous group of people sharing a single interest is the idea that conflicts with pluralism which recognizes that the society is made up of multiple groups entailing distinct ideas and interests, thereby accepting the legitimacy of all different groups to express their own preferences and interests. The distortion of democracy is reflected in such views when there is only one recognized legitimate representative of the people diminishing the legitimacy of other parties who seek power, and thus, not contributing to the political debate (Urbinati, 2019, pp. 111-127). Taking into account Cas Mudde's definition of populism as a political and social phenomenon which responds to people's interests and is the expression of the general will of the people, the following understanding is that the narrative enjoys an important role in such politics, so as to present these populist ideas in the proper manner. Narrative is gradually imposed and depending on the type of leaders, certain groups of ideas prevail and end up as the governing ones. Today's populist narrative moves far beyond traditional political settings and with the emerging ideas, tends to often shift towards the right side of the political spectrum. The rightward shift certainly transformed the political climate in the European Union by entailing the following points in the populist narrative: politics of fear (in particular with the dichotomous worldview), introducing a powerful, shared vision of the future, building power around authoritarianism communications channels with continuous shift in stories and constant investments in the development of skills and tools to maintain narrative control and power over time (Fickes, 2019). The desired outcome is to attract and engage more people in political affairs by speaking to their current needs and problems. Populist leaders are perceived as persuasive storytellers and their narrative revolves around the typical populist portrayal of the world: good people reclaiming power from corrupt elites. In doing so, this

narrative often draws on “mythical pasts, crisis-driven presents and utopian features” (Taş, 2020). It employs the rule “love the insider, fear the outsider, and anger against corrupt elites”, linking it to specific events in time (Levinger, 2017, p.5), in particular the one of a crisis (Lorenz, 2014, p. 46).

Yet, arising speculations against populist narrative, that is reaching an all-time high in the EU of today, are invested into its far-right ideology and anti-rhetoric that limits certain democratic freedoms and rights. One can discuss the consequences of “free speech” turning into “hate speech” and the potential violation of human rights (in this case those of migrant population); how is this allowed under democracies and what elements contributed to the success of such narratives, resulting in increased support for right-wing political parties.

### *Research question and hypotheses*

In order to analyze the events following the 2013-2015 migration wave, this thesis will place focus on the right-wing populist parties and analyze their engagement in immigration issues, by attempting to provide the answers on the following research question:

*To what extent is the right-wing populist narrative successful?*

Now, it is important to explain the understanding of the term *success* in this context. This thesis suggests that the 2013-2015 migrant wave is one of the main drivers of right-wing populism in the EU, resulting in popularity and growing support for the right-wing populist parties. Further, these parties are considered successful due to their own actions, but also because the audience is irresponsible or manipulated by emotional stimuli (Adamson, 2019). Votes for extreme parties pursued out of fear, disappointment or a protest against the political class, are not supported by ideology or interest in policy positions, thus displaying low levels of congruence between these parties and their supporters (Lefkofridi, 2012). On the other hand, however, congruence is found in analysis that connects social class and ideology to the vote share

(Rydgren, 2003; Kitschelt and McGann, 2005; Arzheimer, 2009), hereby adding value to the vote share. However, the thesis will not test the congruence, but rather explore the elements of narrative in the aftermath of the migrant crisis. Added to this success is the realization of entering governing coalitions and an increase in populist vote share. The link between the narrative and this success is assumed and thus, the hypotheses are as follows:

*H1: Rightward narrative generated more support for the right-wing populist parties in the European Union, in the aftermath of 2013-2015 migrant wave, resulting in higher percentages of vote share for this type of parties.*

*H2: The post-2015 migrant wave political crisis could explain the success of right-wing populist narrative.*

This thesis will take into account only examples of successful populism (countries with high right-wing populist support, whose systems “benefited” from introduced anti-immigration policies), in order to analyze the narrative which political parties promoted. Here, population support is measured in terms of (1) populist vote share and (2) participation in government. Thus, the hypothesis (H1) is to be tested by presenting and analyzing the election data. The second hypothesis (H2) will take into account the conditions which allowed for some of the narrative elements to emerge and see how these affected the population.

### *Argument*

The rise of right-wing populist parties is significant to analyze, because it presents a shift from the normal politics of the EU political arena. The thesis argues that the high number of incoming refugees during the largest migrant wave from 2013 to 2015 has an affirmative effect on intensification of rightward narrative, resulting in the success of right-wing parties among Member States of the EU. The thesis will not aim at presenting solutions, but outline and test the hypotheses to see the contribution to the rise of right-wing populist parties. The migrant

crisis has transformed the social and political picture of Europe, affected its internal affairs, institutional operationalization, as well as raised questions on how to integrate foreigners into the society and how such are to be accepted. In line with this, contrasting views have appeared, causing a clash of interest between the opposing sides where one is gaining more attention than the other.

The number of immigrants has significantly increased in most European countries since the beginning of the century, initiating the need for major policy changes to meet the challenges of the situation. Many EU parties addressed the issue, but a significant rise in vote share consequently came for the right-wing political parties despite their anti-immigrant rhetoric (Davis, Deole, 2017). A number of scholars found the correlation between the increase in immigration and the success of right-wing parties in many European countries (i.e. Halla et al. (2017) for Austria; Otto and Steinhardt (2014) for Germany; Barone et al. (2016) for Italy), indicating that this is so because of cultural differences, affecting the increase in local ethnic diversity. The radical or extreme right interprets this situation as the need to recall the return of a strong nation state and act as a “protector” against the invasion of the foreigners, an idea vested in authoritarian or quasi-democratic practices (Ford, 2014). Furthermore, this type of parties is invested into promoting anti-European, anti-immigrant, Islamophobic and intolerant attitudes (ibid.). The increase in support for these parties comes from the claim that they are protecting the Western culture from immigrants and the spread of Islam, thus submitting to the wishes of the nation (Saul, 2013). Such narrative appeared as a potential solution to the crisis, thus resulting in a higher increase in population support.

This further implies that the right-wing populist parties perceive immigration as a direct threat to their national identity and project the internal state issues (e.g. economic stagnation, unemployment etc.) on the migrant crisis, linking one to the other. By speaking out on these issues, they gain population support from (1) those who feel fear or anxiety due to mainstream parties' inability to address and solve problems of economic stagnation or unemployment, (2)

people who are dissatisfied with their social status, employment etc. and (3) successful people who want to preserve their success and values (Flecker, Hentges and Balazs, 2007). In these cases, racist narrative blames the immigrants for the ongoing economic crisis, and stands as a tool that draws the support of people who do not want to lose their jobs to the incoming population.

With this kind of rhetoric, gender perceptions come into play and are unfairly used for the purpose of attracting more supports. Its promotion is linked to patriarchal, chauvinistic and racist perceptions. Right-wing parties portray women as highly important to the society for their ability to provide native-born children, which will outnumber the immigrants who are threatening the purity of the nation (Benton, 1998). But, when it comes to employment, right-wing parties argue the traditional notion of a woman, who is to sit at home and not work (Venner, 1997). However, the right-wing parties have found a way to “put a light” on this perception through glorification of women’s characteristics in a way that appeals to women: bringers of peace, nurturing mothers whose role as the bearers contributes to a future of ‘pure’ nation (Benton, 1998; Kofman, 1998). This portrayal appeals to women, stemming from the assumption that women are facing labor inequality and want to be valued as members of the society.

Nevertheless, despite their racist, xenophobic and chauvinistic sentiments, right-wing populist parties have managed to attract growing support with their rhetoric and achieve significant election results. The thesis argues that they did so by employing specific narrative elements, targeting current state issues and providing possible solutions, in contrast to other parties who seemed to fail in this aspect. The thesis will present and compare the narrative of three right-wing and one mainstream right political party in order to find common elements and discuss the ideological agenda.



## *Methodology*

Research will be conducted in a qualitative manner to deliver an answer to the research question and support the presented hypothesis. The qualitative method design includes a narrative research, an analysis of how politicians delivered their stories to the voters in relation to the refugee crisis. This will be done with the use of secondary sources, collecting existing data in the form of text and images, in order to analyze the right-wing narrative and its supporting elements. For the purpose of effective analysis, two sets of timeframes will be used: (a) the one from 2013 to 2015 in exploring the migrant wave and (b) the period from 2016 to 2019 (or 2020 where data is available), in order to discuss the aftermath of the migration wave, focusing on analyzing the success of right-wing political parties reflected in the increase in populist vote share and participation in government.

Literature review and content analysis will deliver to a process of comparing the rhetoric of some of the most prominent right-wing populist figures in the EU, analyzing it in the context of a narrative on: (1) migrants as an incoming population and (2) women as voters, encompassing the advocacy for human rights and gender equality under the umbrella of right-wing populism.

The selected political figures entail members of the right-wing populist parties in three EU Member States: Austria (Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ), Austrian New People's Party (ÖVP)), Germany (Alternative for Germany (AfD)) and Italy (The Northern League (LN)). This thesis takes into account the center-right Austrian New People's Party and categorizes it as a mainstream right party, as it began moving closer to the right-wing ideology of the FPÖ on matters regarding migration and mirroring its anti-Islamic agenda. The ÖVP leader Sebastian Kurz has made some controversial remarks regarding the crisis, which benefit the narrative analysis and help explore the status of a right-wing FPÖ as a part of its coalition with ÖVP. Furthermore, the turning point for this party to shift its ideology more to the right is the 2015 migrant crisis (Gady, 2017) when the party suggested more radical asylum policy options, and

thus, presents a relevant case in this thesis.

The selected three cases are chosen based on their post-fascist inheritance<sup>4</sup>, what can be perceived through the conditions of their establishment, as well as the history of their founding members. In addition, the Italy's Northern League and the Germany's Alternative for Germany are identified as European far-right ethno-nationalist groups, which have generated a significant support based on their anti-immigration agenda.<sup>5</sup>

Content analysis will involve the analysis of media (e.g. Deutsche Welle, BBC News, Reuters, The Guardian, Foreign Affairs, Euro News) reports on right-wing populist parties' actions amid the domestic and EU Parliament elections in the aftermath of the 2013-2015 migrant wave. These sources are used because of their comprehensive reporting style, providing sufficient amount of information on the narrative, public reaction and voter turnout. Media sources also include an online social platform Twitter in order to explore remarks posted by the right-wing leaders of the selected political parties. Twitter allows for faster generation of support, as it serves as a channel for open communication. More, posts (tweets) are easy to find and access; thus, a sample was created by performing a search based on a selection of hashtags (e.g. migrants, Islam, women, refugee crisis, EU etc.). Also, this part of analysis incorporates some international organizations' reports (e.g. Open Democracy), used as supporting evidence, to bring to light the ideological assumptions presented in the rhetoric.

Presentation of existing statistical analysis is used to examine whether the rise in populist vote share in parliament elections has been noted. This analysis focuses on the period between EU Parliament elections held in 2014 and 2019 with the intent to explore the support for right-wing nationalist parties in the aftermath of the largest European migrant wave, in comparison to the time before. Particular attention will be devoted to the period after the year of 2015, for the

---

<sup>4</sup> See for example: Mancosu and Ladini, 2018; Mudde, 2019

<sup>5</sup> Counter Extremism Project Report on European Ethno-Nationalist and White Supremacy Groups, Available on the following link: <https://www.counterextremism.com/european-white-supremacy-groups>

purpose of reflecting on whether the immigration wave could have been the potential trigger for the success of right-wing populism in the European Union.

### *Concept specification*

#### *Refugees or migrants?*

The public sphere often mentions the terms asylum seeker, refugee and migrant in a similar manner. However, it is relevant to specify a clear distinction between the three terms, although the immigration that took place in Europe entailed each category respectively. To start with, the term refugee describes an individual who has been forcibly displaced from his or her country due to persecution, war or violence. The person faces fear of persecution on the basis of race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership in a particular social group.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, this notion is also sometimes referred to as humanitarian migrant, identifying persons who have completed the asylum procedure and have been granted a form of protection - the refugee status, in particular (OECD, 2015). Humanitarian migrant encompasses all recipients of protection, whether temporary, subsidiary and other. Further, the term “refugee crisis” is related to situations involving forced flee from home countries and reception of large groups of displaced persons due to difficulties and threats they have been facing.<sup>7</sup> Another term linked to the refugee status is an asylum seeker, meaning that a person fleeing from a home country, on well-founded grounds, has the right to be recognized as a refugee and receive legal protection and material assistance.<sup>8</sup> These include candidates for humanitarian migrant status which dictates whether they stay or leave the foreign territory. In practice, all people who get denied the status, but still remain within a foreign country, become undocumented migrants (OECD, 2015). Nevertheless, both statuses are regulated under the realm of the 1951 Refugee Convention that acts as the main international instrument of refugee law.

---

<sup>6</sup> The UN Refugee Agency, See more at: <https://www.unrefugees.org/refugee-facts/what-is-a-refugee/>

<sup>7</sup> International Rescue Committee, See more at: <https://www.rescue.org/topic/refugee-crisis>

<sup>8</sup> The UN Refugee Agency

Here, it is relevant to introduce the explanation for yet another term – migrant. Although often used interchangeably by the general public, the difference between refugee and a migrant must be noted. There is no formal legal definition of an international migrant, but an expert understanding of the term indicates the status of an individual who changes his or her country of residence, regardless of the reason for migration or legal status. The distinction here is enlisted between short-term or temporary migration, including movements of a couple of months, long-term or permanent migration, involving the change country of residence as the desired outcome.<sup>9</sup> Not all migrants are refugees, but refugees can fall under the migrant umbrella (Martinez, 2015).

This thesis refers to the migrant wave, encompassing the whole process of migration within the European Union that occurred between years 2013 and 2015, including all individuals regardless of their status as a refugee or the one of a migrant. The migrant crisis in the European Union reached its highest point, as well as political recognition, in 2015, but the paper will provide an overview of the situation that led to it and then analyze the political situation in the aftermath. Moreover, for this generic term, the legality of the individual status is taken into consideration, as the flows are mixed and not all people entering the European Union will claim asylum and not all will be granted refugee status after the procedure. Also, it is important to note that the terms crisis and wave will be used interchangeably.

### *The European migrant crisis*

Recent European history has been characterized by the refugee and migrant crisis as one of the most important and most disruptive political issues resulting in economic and political contradictions, further destabilizing the European Union (Karolewski, Benedikter, 2018). Due to its initial start in the aftermath of the Arab Spring in 2011, the crisis is often identified as a refugee crisis. However, since its intensification in 2015, the crisis has been recognized as a

---

<sup>9</sup> United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, See more at: <https://refugeesmigrants.un.org/definitions>

“mixed” refugee and migrant crisis (Karolewski, Benedikter, 2018). All European Union states responded differently to the situation and hence, delivering a common solution was proven to be difficult.

Migrations are a continuous process that occurred in various parts of history and hence, the movement of people from one territory to another is considered a part of that process. However, it is the reason behind that dictates the course of the journey and identifies all potential obstacles. The latest large migration wave in Europe occurred due to the outbreak of wars in Syria, Iraq and Libya. The increase in numbers began with the refugees coming from Libya in 2013, but in 2015, the European migrant wave reached its peak with the income of Syrian refugees. For European Union, the crisis became a political concern in 2015, when Eurostat reports (2013, 2016a) pointed to a number of 1,2 million asylum seekers that came through Greece and Italy to countries like Hungary, Austria, Germany, France, Sweden, Denmark and Norway. Among these, Germany, Hungary, Sweden and Austria were the countries that received the majority of applications (Eurostat, 2016b). Identity checks in 2015 identified Syrians and Afghans as the largest migrant groups in Europe, followed by the migrants from Eritrea, Nigeria and Somalia (Peter, 2015). The crisis tested the capacities of these states to deal with the crisis highlighting the need to develop and implement a coherent strategy. However, the European Union Member States failed to find an agreement, exposing the weaknesses of the Schengen zone and introducing Germany as the main actor that determined the course of the crisis (Karolewski, Benedikter, 2018).

The rise in global refugee figures was mainly driven by the 4.8 million refugees registered as a result of the Syrian civil war that emerged in March 2011. The steady escalation in the number of Syrians seeking protection in Europe occurred in the spring and summer of 2015, challenging the Common European Asylum System (CEAS), as well as overwhelming the capacity of policymakers and publics to respond. The escalation of the crisis can be explaining with the intersection of push and pull factors which have been aggravated with time and other triggering

events (Banulescu-Bogdan, Fratzke, 2015). In this case, the push factors included (1) the ongoing violence and instability in countries of origin that both accelerated the mass movements of people and made return impossible; (2) the deterioration of conditions in countries of first asylum leading some (i.e. Jordan and Lebanon) to introduce limits on border controls and thereby making it more difficult for the displaced to reach nearby safe havens; (3) the continuous lack of opportunities for work and education for the majority of refugees; and (4) geopolitical changes that excluded alternative destinations, such as Libya (Banulescu-Bogdan, Fratzke, 2015). Moreover, geopolitical and economic changes over the years additionally put pressure on the migrants, choosing to cross to Europe in order to flee from the growing conflict and reach more stable regimes. Here, the pull factors get introduced, as they are created by exemplary regimes, more precisely through (1) policy announcements by European governments, as well as with (2) the use of social media (Banulescu-Bogdan, Fratzke, 2015). This includes reports on “success” stories of how the EU countries granted status to most Syrians who made it to their territory and the classic patterns of chain migration, both encouraging new flows, while the settled migrants reunify with family and friends once their claims are granted. Nevertheless, the reality makes this much more difficult, testing the capacities of EU Member States to handle the income of new migrants, find common grounds, develop and implement policies, introduce adequate measures, but support asylum claims and ensure the protection of basic human rights among everything else.

Based on the UN Refugee Agency UNHCR reports, over 75 per cent of those arriving in Europe had fled conflict zones in Syria, Afghanistan or Iraq (2015). For reaching the Europe, two routes were used: the Central Mediterranean (North Africa-Italy/Malta) and the East Mediterranean/Western Balkan passage, but the second route was the one to symbolize the crisis including the sudden shift in numbers arriving (Quinn, 2016). These numbers registering new applicants for asylum in the European Union have been rising steadily since 2008. The year 2015 presented a breaking point, as more than 487,000 people have arrived in Europe

through the Mediterranean shores in the first nine months of this year, increasing the previous year statistics by double (Banulescu-Bogdan, Fratzke, 2015). During 2015, this number continued to grow, reaching over 1.2 million people claiming the asylum in the EU.<sup>10</sup> According to the UN refugee agency UNHCR reports, Germany was the biggest recipient of asylum claims already in 2014 having this number reach 173,100 individual applications.<sup>11</sup> Despite having the highest number of applications, Germany was not the one to send most migrants back. Based on the Eurostat reports, Germany returned 21,895 migrants out of 34,255 ordered to leave, whereas those that returned the most were the United Kingdom and Greece.<sup>12</sup> In a period of two years (from August 2015 to October 2017), approximately 1,400,000 refugees arrived in Germany alone due to the opening of borders to refugees who were in Hungary since September 2015. Additional problems that occurred in the EU affairs is the violation of the Dublin conventions that declares that the first EU Member State in which refugees enter, is responsible for the processing of their asylum claims. At the end of August 2015, Germany's chancellor Angela Merkel came forward with her famous phrase "we can handle this", stating that there were no limits to the number of refugees Germany can accept, thereby effectively suspending the afore mentioned Dublin conventions (BBC, 2016; Der Spiegel, 2015; Delcker, 2015). The pressure was largely put on the Southern Europe, first in Italy and then also in Greece ever since the first flee period in the aftermath of the Arab Spring in 2011. Moreover, after suspending the Dublin conventions, Germany introduced border controls challenging the initial basis of the Schengen zone, as well as placing additional pressure on other Member States to implement refugee relocation mechanism at the EU level (Zaun, 2017). The relocation mechanism included 160,000 people in need of international protection, whose relocation was dictated from the Member States most affected (Italy and Greece) to other EU Member States over the course of

---

<sup>10</sup> Eurostat, *Asylum and New Asylum Applicants – Annual Aggregated Data*, See more at: <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/tgm/refreshTableAction.do?tab=table&plugin=1&pcode=tps00191&language=en>; Eurostat, *Asylum in the EU Member States: Record number of over 1.2 million first time asylum seekers registered in 2015*, Eurostat News Release, 44/2016 – 4 March 2016

<sup>11</sup> UN refugee agency UNHCR reports, See more at: <https://www.unhcr.org/uk/>

<sup>12</sup> Eurostat reports, See more at: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/asylum-and-managed-migration/data/database>

two years. Relocation within the European Union encompassed the states outside the EU as well, involving 22,000 recognized refugees from states neighboring Syria. Nevertheless, this all has been perceived to be a large step for the European Union, resulting in failure of the EU Agenda on Migration, leading to unilateral actions by a number of EU Member States (Quinn, 2016). Such actions led to the temporary suspension of the Schengen Agreement, which delegated the free movement of people across the EU. The introduction of border controls limited the movement of refugees and migrants, keeping them along the Western Balkan Route. Further restrictive measures on the movement of refugees and migrants were introduced on the 18<sup>th</sup> of March in 2016 by the European Council. This was made in compliance with the EU-Turkey agreement that aimed to end “irregular migration from Turkey to the EU”.<sup>13</sup> The main point of the agreement, however, was to deny refugees and migrants access to the territory (Quinn, 2016). All this points to an inadequate response by the European Union, displaying deep divisions in its approach and values. Despite large income of people seeking access to Europe, the response remained at the act of excluding entry, with EU Member States reintroducing internal border controls. Also, with the main thrust of the EU-Turkey agreement from March 2016, Member states remained ‘stemming the flow’ of people seeking refuge in Europe and denying their right to seek asylum by excluding them access to the territory (Quinn, 2016).

The fleeing routes, however, have turned out to be dangerous and life threatening for continuously growing number of incoming migrants. The UNHCR reports for 2015 noted a number of some 3,550 lives lost during the journey. The most highlighted incidents that led to a high rate of deaths include (1) the Mediterranean tragedy when over 600 people drowned in the sea, (2) the Austria refrigeration truck deaths with 71 dead bodies were found abandoned near the Austrian border with Hungary, (3) the death of Aylan Kurdi, a young Syrian boy whose body was found washed up on a Turkish beach after a failed attempt to reach Greece (UNHCR,

---

<sup>13</sup> European Council, EU-Turkey Statement from 18 March 2016



2015). These kinds of events produced different reactions from EU Member States. Some recognized the need to enhance their response and adjust their policies, while the others, such as Hungary, closed down their borders, reinstating border controls. What can be stated for sure is that the political narrative changed, intensifying the stories about immigrations and producing media backlash for some of the most controversial remarks made and policies introduced.

### *Perceptions of the migrant crisis*

The initial understanding is that the power and the purpose of political parties lies in maintaining democracy (their role as “gatekeepers”) (Levitsky, Ziblatt, 2019). However, the concern is the resistance to extremist appeals with regard to mass responses to such. Levitsky and Ziblatt (2019) call this process “filtering out” placing the political elites and parties in the role of “filters” whose capacity is measured with the ability to influence extremists and would-be autocrats, while still maintaining all freedoms that civil society is entitled to.

The new Right, however, forms a homogenous image of national culture, requiring devaluations of other nations, their cultural identities, as well as “enemies within”: those who are “other” racially, sexually, intellectually” (During, 1993). This depicts an understanding of radical right-wing populism in Western Europe as hostile in its essence, later moving further away in its extreme and reaching anti-policies towards immigrants and refugees as well. This way, racism, xenophobia and protectionism became tools used to respond to Western European challenges in a postindustrial individualized capitalism, the product of a multiethnic and multicultural world (Betz, 1994).

Since the aftermath of Cold War, Western Europe became the migration arena, where several forms of “mass migration” landed on the territory of the European Union. It is needless to say that this remains, because since the onset of the refugee crisis in 2013 and its peak in 2015, migrations have been a concern to the EU Member States and people living in it. For the selected case studies of Italy, Germany and Austria, immigrations have been a natural

phenomenon throughout the years, in particular with the acceptance of “guest workers” from different backgrounds, obtaining visas to work on the territory of these countries. However, with the migrant wave, these people have also been placed into a difficult position, as they have been targeted with xenophobic and racist remarks, together with the incoming immigrant population. Political affairs within these countries have faced a rightward shift in a political spectrum most visible in the narratives that specific populist parties and leaders promoted.

Populism reflected ideas of nationalism, xenophobia, anti-Islamism, while employing a story of protectionism towards preservation of one’s own nation, language and culture, on the one hand, while towards women on the other. Through protectionism, right-wing populists presented ideas on gender equality in a completely reverse way, introducing patriarchal norms and suppressing ideas of multiculturalism and integration as they are perceived as threatening to women’s position in the society. To support this claim, the following part discusses the cases of Italy, Germany and Austria in regard to the narrative which some of their most assertive populist right-wing parties promoted on the topics of immigration and gender equality.

### *The Case of Italy*

Within the context of the refugee crisis of 2015, Italy is argued to have become a country of immigration where different ways of identifying immigration in populist rhetoric can be analyzed. According to the Eurostat data, the Syrian civil war placed the Italy on the position of 2<sup>nd</sup> most affected country with first-time asylum seeker applications in 2016. The logical implications behind such placement is that immigrants, originating from Nigeria, Bangladesh, Pakistan, the Ivory Coast and Gambia, arrived in Italy by sea (Bulli, Soare, 2018). The increase in migrant flows is linked to 3 October 2013, when a boat transporting migrants from Lybia sank near the Italian islands of Lampedusa, resulting in over 360 human casualties (Bulli, Soare 2018). This is the point when refugee crisis marked the political debates across the European Union. In Italy, the governments led by Enrico Letta and then by Matteo Renzi (both from the

Democratic Party, PD) advocated for the investment in a common European strategy, so the refugee crisis becomes a joint responsibility of all EU Member States. However, the lack of success to place the migration on the European agenda only further intensified the politicization of the issue (Bauböck, 2017).

After the domestic political crisis, which occurred in 2016, a new government led by Paolo Gentiloni was appointed, changing the discourse of managing migration. Tighter border controls have been introduced, producing a considerable drop of 64 percent in the number of refugees and migrants arriving by sea compared to the period in 2016 (UNHCR, 2017).<sup>14</sup> Legal overview of the problem indicates that the laws addressed the issue throughout the years, displaying the shift in prevailing opinions between parties of different parts of the spectrum. With the 2001 legislative elections, the center-right coalition promoted the anti-immigration discourse parallel with the electoral campaign, where the Northern League dominated the discussion together with the National Alliance (Gattinara, 2016). After that, the law passed in 2002 introduced a more restrictive application of family reunification norms, as well as a longer period of permanence in centers to take on the process of identity verification. However, the legal framework did not entail a policy that concerned refugees and asylum seekers. This opened up a way for criticism to intensify, especially when a new center-right government was introduced.

Roberto Maroni, a leading figure of the Northern League and the Minister of Internal Affairs in 2002, was at the very front of leading an aggressive media discourse against migrants, openly targeting Roma people and placing concerns on the deployment of soldiers in cities. Moreover, the emerging legal texts introduced the crimes of illegal migration and illegal residence and it got condemned by the Italian Church, the third sector and European institutions (specifically the European Court of Justice) on the one hand, whereas the Italian Constitutional Court adjusted most restrictive measures (Gattinara, 2016). Nevertheless, it can be concluded

---

<sup>14</sup> UNHCR Europe monthly report 2017

that the political context of Italy remains characterized by a constant tension between pressure applied by NGOs, trade unions and the Church going in favor of protection of migrant rights on the one side, and the political elites who constructed their counter arguments on the limited capacity of the Italian labor market to absorb the migrants on the other (Bulli, Soare, 2018). This type of a political discourse took over the last two decades in Italy, linking immigration and insecurity in this region. Drawing on the theoretical overview, this type of discourse, involving the anti-immigration stances, appeals to the populist right-wing parties, entailing right-wing voters and left-wing blue-collars, both perceiving the threat in cultural and economic globalization (Bale et al, 2010; Kitschelt, McGann, 1995). Consequently, Italy entails two specific manifestations of populism: the Northern League (LN) and the Five Star Movement (M5S). The following part will analyze the populist discourse of the Northern League, due to the prominence of its leaders' remarks, focusing on the anti-immigration stances and gender equality in that very context.

### *The Northern League*

Formation of the Northern Leagues depicted the discontent with the current between political parties and economic interests (Tarchi, 2015; Lazar, 2013; Fabbrini, 2009). The Northern League was established in the 1980s within the arena where party relations were dominated by a coalition between the Christian Democrats, the Socialist Party and some minor parties on the one side and the Communist Party on the other (Cotta, Isernia, 1996). The League itself is initially argued to be an anti-political party (Mastropaolo, 2005), but its founder, Umberto Bossi, placed it in the context of a popular movement, rather than a party (Woods, 2014). However, Mudde (2007) positioned the League within the sub-group of radical right populism, due to its elements of nativism, authoritarianism and populism.

Furthermore, the Northern League entailed the opposition between the virtuous and homogenous people, the northern Italians and the corrupt elite living in Rome (McDonnell, 2006). As radical right-wing populism discourse prevailed, immigrants in Italy were portrayed

as the “reason for all of society’s ills”, including the failures in economic area, such as unemployment and the reduction of wages, leading all the way to issues of crime proliferation and decrease in security levels (Bulli, Soare, 2018). The anti-immigrant narrative has had larger media presence starting with the aftermath of 9/11, leading up to the recent migrant crisis in Europe, from 2013 onwards, imposing a perception of immigrants of not only a religious and cultural threat, but a security threat and an economic burden.

More, the Northern League promoted skepticism towards the European Union, criticizing its insufficient involvement in the migrant crisis and inability to ensure safety for its Member States. Certainly, such stances caught the attention of other radical right populist parties, such as the National Front in France, the Freedom Party in Austria and the Party for Freedom in the Netherlands, calling up for higher chances of national level resonance and reinforcing of the League’s alliance with these parties (Bulli, Soare, 2018). The populist discourse intensified in the post-2015 years, when the Northern League channeled its nativism towards immigrants, linking them to criminal networks and depicting a threat to the community of native Italians (Bulli, Soare, 2018). Namely, elections for the European Parliament were characterized with labeling the immigration as yet another mechanism for establishing national sovereign control over national laws and institutions, thereby portraying the European Union as an organization that prevents the development of a native community and genuine will of the people, as well as attempts to control its territory (Bulli, Soare, 2018). The anti-immigration ideas and narrative persisted among members and supporters of the Northern League and emerged more often in the media, in particular in a period before the European Parliament elections. The Northern League is the first political promoter of xenophobia in the Italian context, placing the topic of its political debates on the threats posed by immigration (Avanza, 2010). Immigration is perceived as a process of invasion of foreigners who want to take over the domestic territory and since the late 1990s, this threat was associated with that of an Islamic takeover (Padovani, 2018). Thus, the political campaigns were followed with flyers entailing silhouettes of women,

their faces covered by burkas<sup>15</sup>, to warn of an “Islamic invasion” and produce fear among the inhabitants (Avanza, 2010). The Northern League did this under the umbrella of a homogenous community myth which entailed sharing the same territory, ethnicity, languages, religions and cultural traditions, thereby enlisting the “others” (Albanians, Romanians, Moroccans and Muslims, in particular) and introducing various sarcastic remarks against them (Padovani, 2018).

Matteo Salvini, at the time the Deputy Prime Minister of Italy’s first populist government and the member of the Italian Senate of the Republic since 2018, labeled migrants as invaders (Ansa, 2017), the metaphor most often used among ultraright groups. This metaphor stands behind the fear of racial contamination linked to the assumption that immigrants will “overwhelm...the racial integrity of the nation” due to their race being different from the one of the host nation (O’Brien, 2003, p. 42). This particularly relates to Islam and Muslims, perceiving the refugee crisis as an Islamic invasion. References to Islam pursued the Islamophobic discourse among right-wing political groups, the Northern League in particular (Avanza, 2010; Caldiron, 2001). What this rhetoric contributes to is an idea that an enemy always exists (the migrants in this case) and with the use of modern technology and manipulation of images, right-wing groups are able to achieve this aim as “choices of visual elements and features do not just represent the world, but constitute it” (Machin, Mayr, 2012, p. 19). Media reporting on refugee crisis, as well as the occurring terrorist attacks on the territory of European Union, gave the space for right-wing groups to form a neo-orientalist discourse that “associates Islamic politics exclusively with violence, authoritarianism and terrorism” (Richardson, 2009, p.357), what ultimately tagged the refugee crisis as the act of “Islamic terrorism”. Further, immigrants are dehumanized through the perception of them only committing crimes, such as rape of young girls, reckless driving, assaults on unarmed citizens and politicians, drug consumption and smuggling: “For me, the problem is the thousands of

---

<sup>15</sup> Garment covering whole body from head to feet, often worn in public by women in many Muslim countries.

illegal immigrants stealing, raping and dealing drugs” (Salvini, 2015).

The most common word in narrative, that the Northern League projected on the migrant population that reached the Italian territory is “illegal”, claiming that they are not asylum seekers and not following the rule of law (Dazzi, 2017). In 2016, this political party produced posters which emphasized the term (ibid.), displaying them in the city of Saronno (where the shelter for refugees was supposed to be built) just to draw attention to the unjust treatment of citizens during the time of crisis. This treatment is argued to include the “sacrifice of the citizens of Saronno” in terms of cutting in their financial means and increase in taxes, just to support the “food, shelter and vices” of these “illegal immigrants” (Ibid.). Moreover, the mayor of Saronno, Alessandro Fagioli (also a member of the Northern League), refused to accept migrants in a female convent which was supposed to provide for shelter of 32 immigrants, because they would be near nuns and their female students. As the outcome, the narrative formed an atmosphere where immigrants are discriminated based on their “flee”, as well as created space for stereotypes and judgements. For such discriminatory actions, the Northern League has been legally fined for ten thousand euros in damages (Dazzi, 2017).

The 2017 pre-election period in Italy has certainly been characterized with anti-stances and in fact, a large part of the electoral campaign of the Northern League has been based on the anti-immigration agenda. The invasion of migrants was a prominent fear-inducing element in the League’s campaign. Moreover, they advocated the idea of introducing a special set of laws for the migrants. Based on the pre-election comments of a Northern League politician and the president of the Friuli-Venezia Giulia autonomous region, Massimiliano Fedriga, with the victory of the League, the privacy law would have been abolished including surveillance, controls of all immigrant activity, as well as harsh sanctions for the asylum seekers who commit crimes in Italy resulting in immediate deportation.

Additionally, Matteo Salvini intensified the promotion of an “us versus them” narrative on immigration and an emotional defense of an Italian national identity. Salvini succeeded in

pursuing promotional campaigns throughout social media platforms, such as Facebook, where he promoted his personal photos after each rally reaching a very high engagement on his page (Donadio, 2019). He also succeeded in winning the elections and entering the Italy's coalition government in June 2018, but just before the government crisis he himself provoked, Salvini introduced the changes in the criminal code, as he promised he would. The changes in Italian legislature entailed a vast of security measures directed towards the migrants and the people contributing to their arrival in terms of "smugglers", or to whom Salvini was actually referring to - the nongovernmental organization ships that patrol the Mediterranean Sea in order to find the damaged boats transporting refugees (Butini, 2019). Even after the government crisis, which Salvini invoked in August 2019 by cutting the ties with League's alliance - populist Five Star Movement, the anti-immigrant policies prevailed and Salvini said that he will "close ports all over again, if God and the Italian people give (him) the chance to be in government again".

In the context of migrations and immigration policies, Salvini developed a discourse on women's rights and gender equality as some of the concerns of his political party. What Salvini posted on his Twitter account in 2014, is that "not even a mosque will be built for those who do not recognize women's rights!"<sup>16</sup>, implicating that Islam is against women's rights and since the majority of migrants coming in are Muslim, he must be the one to take care of Italian women and protect them. Socially constructing migrants and their children as undesirable outsiders based on their radically different culture, is perceived to be highly gendered. This implies the portrayal of migrant men as patriarchal and violently misogynist, indicating that migrant women are vulnerable and oppressed (Scrinzi, 2013). This, furthermore, suggests that Italian women, as well, are in danger of falling under the regime that migrant ideologies allegedly promote. Wodak (2015) explains the occurrence of this type of discourse as in "many men have suddenly become concerned with women's liberties and ...rights" (p. 159), and finds it ironic that people like Salvini, belonging to ultraright side of the spectrum himself, decide to present

---

<sup>16</sup> Original tweet found on the following link: <https://twitter.com/matteosalvinimi/status/523532151581835264>



themselves as the cause of women's liberation. The irony in this remark lies in previous objectification of women perpetrated by Salvini himself. A prominent example of his sexist actions includes an inflated plastic doll, that represented Laura Boldrini (former president of the Chamber of Deputies), which appeared on stage and was taunted during rallies, as well as the spring 2018 political campaign of the Northern League. What Salvini wanted to portray with the doll is his opposition to Boldrini's remarks to the refugee crisis and immigration policies. Further, his Twitter account entails references to Boldrini in terms of hateful comments, where Salvini's tweets insinuate how Boldrini has a "sexual preference for black males"<sup>17</sup>, arguing that this is what explains her pro-immigration positions.

The sexist narrative of the Northern League goes far into its supporting ideology, emerging out of the idea about the Padania nation<sup>18</sup> who are the victims of a "wild immigration" and of "anti-white migrants" (Scrinzi, 2013). The term Padania nation was popularized during the period of 1990s, when the Northern League, at the time separatist political party in Italy, proposed a potential name for an independent state and since then, the term started being strongly associated with Padanian nationalism and North Italian separatism (Squires, 2011). The Northern League's 2016 Declaration of Independence and Sovereignty of Padania encompasses the term Padania and locates it to the territory beyond Northern Italy and includes the majority of Central Italy. Padania is relevant in understanding the rhetoric of the Northern League, as it stands for the nationalist and separatist movement in Italy, dictating specific perceptions of the world and the social communities. Here is where the key roles played by gender come from, relying on the existence of essential constructions of the Other to form hierarchical differences, based on gender, sexuality, culture, class or religion (Bacchetta, Power, 2002). With this ideological view, dominant constructions of femininity and masculinity

---

<sup>17</sup> Perception derived from the following tweets (among many):  
<https://twitter.com/matteosalvinimi/status/1112619989050294272>;  
<https://twitter.com/matteosalvinimi/status/901019318753865728>;  
<https://twitter.com/matteosalvinimi/status/843450913150918656>

<sup>18</sup> An alternative name for Northern Italy, derived from the name of the Po River (Latin Padus), indicating the region centered on the Po Valley (Pianura Padana).

are promoted by the radical right political parties who attract women and men who manage to relate with these hegemonic definitions of gender (Kimmel, 2007). Padanian nation is built on the gender roles across different spheres of activity across both private and public divide, where women are assigned the role of biologically reproducing and caring for the nation, whereas strength, resistance and toughness in politics are assigned to men or the Padanian masculinity (Avanza, 2008). In this regard, Padania is built as a masculine, ethnically homogenous community. These ideas are in vast reflected to the modern narrative of the Northern League, as the discourse reflects on traditional models of femininity when the ‘natural’ family coexists with the mobilization of women’s rights and gender equality for the purpose of legitimizing the party’s anti-immigration stances.

In their narrative and pursued actions, the Northern League associates immigration with sexual violence and gender conservatism, indicating a threat for women’s physical integrity and their rights (Scrinzi, 2012). However, the Northern League’s female activists are self-represented as ‘strong women’ (Peretti, 2012) drawing upon the reference of feminine models of rural societies what can be noted in the narratives and ideology of right-wing populists who argue that they are not satisfied with the current state of society and thus, they praise the past one (Klandermans, Mayer, 2006). Here, a woman is depicted as serving a purpose to the ideology promoted by the party and thus, enjoys a significant role in its promotion. The Northern League promotes the traditional patriarchal values in all social and political settings neglecting the emancipation and self-sustenance of women, nor treats them as equal to men in the community. Women are always portrayed as less rational, weak and in need of male protection, and the refugee crisis was the “perfect scenario” to incorporate the radical narrative to attract more public attention and present the idea of taking care of core values and women themselves, naturally perceiving them primarily as voters. In line with the comments on migrants and the refugee crisis in general, the context of gender equality steps into an aggressive, racist and xenophobic atmosphere.

Furthermore, the Northern League openly endorsed a Eurosceptic<sup>19</sup> narrative, defining itself as the opponent of community policies and integration, but remained open to compromises regarding EU affairs (Bartlett, Birdwell, McDonnell, 2012). In the 2013 Political elections, the political agenda of the Northern League addressed several EU issues, introducing an option of developing a “Europe of the peoples”, basing this proposition on a number of macro-regions (Dehousse, 2013). However, the Northern League lost over 1.5 million votes in these elections and reached only 4.1 percent of the votes in comparison to 2008 elections when the statistics showed 8 percent (Corbetta, 2010; Maggini, 2013). After this, the anti-EU campaigns grew progressively, spreading the rhetoric asking for territorial, monetary and budgetary sovereignty (Gattinara, Froio, 2014). In 2019, Salvini’s far-right party reached 34 percent share of vote in the EU Parliamentary election polls, positioning the Northern League as Italy’s biggest party with the popularity over immigration, Islamophobia and hatred of the EU (Giuffrida, 2019).

### *The Case of Germany*

Due to its turbulent history, from Holocaust to division, to recent reunification, and the inner battle with self-identity caused by it, Germany had never been considered a proper immigration country. Immigration for Germany was a concept often linked with the recruitment of labor from abroad, mainly guest workers from Turkey who were never recognized as a political issue and it was so until 2005 when the German government introduced a new legal migration framework (Gedmin, 2019). These amendments also introduced a new approach to integration, as German citizenship law was no longer linked to the “blood” citizenship rights. In the aftermath of the refugee crisis, in 2015, German Chancellor Angela Merkel delivered a decision that Germany is to open its borders to immigrants<sup>20</sup>, what caused a huge backlash in the political

---

<sup>19</sup> Euroscepticism entails parties that support the idea of contingent or qualified opposition, and oppose to the process of European integration. The term includes "hard Euroscepticism" (rejection of the entire project of European political and economic integration, and opposition to EU membership), and "soft Euroscepticism" (opposition to European integration) (Taggart, Sczerbiak, 2004)

<sup>20</sup> Angela Merkel’s decision from 2015 included letting in around 1.3 million undocumented migrants and refugees, mainly from the Middle East, on the territory of Germany

arena of not only Germany, but many EU Member States. The harshest opponent to this policy was the right-wing populist Alternative for Germany (AfD), a political party initially focused on economic issues and matters of German fiscal sovereignty. The party has been founded in the opposition to the government, employing simplistic anti-elite rhetoric, supported by ideas of nationalism, described as “for the imagined glorified past of the nation, against the political establishment.” (Lochocki, 2015). With the incoming refugees, it shifted its agenda to a far-right rhetoric, based on anti-immigration and Islamophobia, an act that attracted more attention and more supporters in the aftermath of the crisis, in particular. The right-wing in Germany argues to be protecting state’s interest, vested in the idea of anti-multiculturalism, as the Christian society in Germany is seen as threatened by immigrants of the Muslim faith (Lochocki, 2015). The appeal of such ideas can be perceived through the increase in vote share. The 2017 elections positioned the far-right Alternative for Germany as the 1<sup>st</sup> openly nationalist party to enter the German Parliament since the Second World War.<sup>21</sup>

### *The Alternative for Germany (AfD)*

The nationalist Alternative for Germany has been founded in 2013 and has grown to be the biggest opposition party in the national parliament with secured 89 seats. This political party openly promotes an anti-agenda on Islam and migration, perceiving migrants as foreigners that are unwelcome in Germany. It advocated the reintroduction of permanent border controls, contradicting the Schengen agreement which enabled the free movement zone within the European Union. Furthermore, the AfD advocated additional controls on the EU’s external borders, complicating the entire system of entering the EU zone. This agenda, together with its largest success is linked with the opposition status after the Angela Merkel’s decision on the migrants and refugees.

Besides the anti-immigration rhetoric, AfD adopted some of Pegida’s anti-establishment

---

<sup>21</sup> See election results: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/ng-interactive/2017/sep/24/german-elections-2017-latest-results-live-merkel-bundestag-afd>

rhetoric, such as the slogan “Lügenpresse” (“lying press”), a phrase that was used by the Nazis. Moreover, its leaders are prominent for their controversial statements, including one of the Frauke Petry, where she proclaimed that German police should “if necessary, shoot at migrants seeking to enter the country illegally” (BBC, 2020). An ironic statement made by the party officials is that multiculturalism is not possible, whereas the population of Germany is comprised out of 13 percent of foreigners, with Turkish people making the largest ethnic group of a non-German origin<sup>22</sup>, who came to the country primarily as guest workers, plus other ethnic groups that had achieved their asylum rights. Based on the data available on Statista, the group of people of Turkish origins amounts to an estimated three millions of people, most of them Muslim.

This far-right nationalist narrative reached the highest levels of racism and xenophobia, indicating some ideological tendencies, very often linked to Nazism. Nationalist type of ideas was embodied in the AfD’s party leaders, one of which is Björn Höcke, a leader in the eastern state of Thuringia. Thanks to him, the Alternative for Germany was the third place in state elections in October 2019, but he was also the trigger for a national crisis in February 2020, due to his delivered assistance to a liberal candidate to become a state premier in Thuringia. Such move was perceived as controversial, as the far-right did not affect the political affairs in Germany since the Second World War (BBC, 2020).

Nevertheless, when taking into account the context of the refugee crisis, the Alternative for Germany invested the majority of its efforts in pursuing the anti-immigration agenda, challenging Angela Merkel’s decision on accepting the income of migrants and refugees from 2015. The narrative that stood behind the agenda was found in staged weekly marches against what was called “the Islamization of the West”. AfD party members have repeatedly described refugees and asylum seekers as dangerous and violent. Beatrix von Storch, an AfD Member of the German Parliament since 2017, has contributed to a negative perception in in this regard

---

<sup>22</sup> See Statista total population 2014-2020 report for more.

with her tweet labeling Muslims as “the barbaric, Muslim, gang-raping hordes of men”, a statement reported as hate speech and removed from the site<sup>23</sup>. Another controversial remark came from Alice Weidel, head of the AfD’s parliamentary group, stating that German authorities were “submitting to imported mobs of marauding, groping immigrants who beat people up and attack them with knives”<sup>24</sup>. Portraying migrants as violent and threatening to Germany has been a part of AfD’s rhetoric throughout the years, investing efforts in proving the “disastrous” changes that Islam and the incoming population are making<sup>25</sup>.

Further, the recent AfD political campaign caused some more controversy with the campaign poster depicting a white, pregnant woman with the words: “New Germans? We will make them ourselves” (Staudenmaier, 2019). This poster clearly promotes a xenophobic perception and glorifies the nationalism of Germanic people. The 2015 migrant and refugee wave evidently changed the course of this political party’s plans, shifting away from the topics of economy and economic sovereignty to immigration and refugees and investing all efforts into developing a populist discourse. This gained more notice in the following year when changes were made in the German politics, in particular the attitudes towards the migrants switching from Willkommenskultur (culture of welcome) to a cap on refugees, where not only the 81 percent of AfD supporters strongly approved on the idea of a cap, but also the 64 percent supporters of Chancellor Merkel’s Christian Democratic Union of Germany (CDU), followed by the Free Democratic Party with 57 percent, the Left Party with 54 percent and the Social Democrats (SPD) with 53 percent (Deutsche Welle, 2016)<sup>26</sup>. The narrative intensified in 2017 with the party campaign slogans, such as “Islam does not belong in Germany”, placing

---

<sup>23</sup> For more information, see the following link: <https://www.ft.com/content/19f89fb2-efc7-11e7-b220-857e26d1aca4>

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> See the following tweets: [https://twitter.com/Beatrix\\_vStorch/status/997429334590836736](https://twitter.com/Beatrix_vStorch/status/997429334590836736);  
[https://twitter.com/Beatrix\\_vStorch/status/1293820980641574912](https://twitter.com/Beatrix_vStorch/status/1293820980641574912);  
[https://twitter.com/Beatrix\\_vStorch/status/925253997593849856](https://twitter.com/Beatrix_vStorch/status/925253997593849856);  
<https://twitter.com/AfD/status/1257625328597565443>

<sup>26</sup> Opinion poll conducted in 2016 indicating that 60 percent of Germans support a cap on refugees. See more on: <https://p.dw.com/p/1K3jc>

immigration as the primary thing in voters' minds, together with urging the tackling of issues, like social cohesion and identity. Here, it is important to note that the question of identity gets raised as Germany had its troublesome history regarding the perception of one. Specifically, some German words have had a different interpretation during the Second World War in comparison to the present times. For example, the German word Heimat stands for homeland – a place, feeling and/or tradition that leads to something that is familiar, cozy, trust worthy and reliable. However, this notion can, in another context, also be linked with an idea of exclusion and intolerance, primarily the national socialist concept of ein Volk, ein Reich, ein Führer (one nation (people), one empire, one leader), absorbed by the Nazi literature in the 1920s and 1930s. Thus, Germany has evidently dealt with defining its own identity and placing it in the context that provides a meaning and a connection to its initial values and ideas. This desire to connect to the German identity resulted in resentment towards 'others' and has only proved that the AfD political campaign was based on xenophobia and anti-Muslim sentiment in order to promote new attitudes not only in relation to the immigrants, but also the German society, work, women and social custom (Petry, 2017)<sup>27</sup>.

Further controversy has been introduced with some campaign slogans such as “Burka? We like bikinis” where women are, once again, sexualized, implicating that their bodies should not be covered. Nevertheless, the Alternative for Germany is, according to Open Democracy, an independent global media organization, perceived as the most explicitly anti-feminist party. The anti-feminist attitude is reflected in the AfD involvement in actual protest movements against gender equality, marriage equality legislation and the rights of LGBT+ groups. Furthermore, the party is perceived to contribute to the opposition activities directed towards gender mainstreaming<sup>28</sup>, as the AfD believes for it to undermine traditional gender roles and introduces the sexualization of society. To support this claim, one can observe the statement

---

<sup>27</sup> An interview for Brookings with Frauke Petry, conducted in Leipzig in November 2017.

<sup>28</sup> A public policy approach that aims to ensure gender equality in creation and implementation of planned policy actions, including legislation and programmes, in all areas and levels.

made in December 2013, by one of the AfD founders, Alexander Gauland: “The modern family structures in our country are too ‘colorful’ [...] gender mainstreaming is a fairy tale and a feminist bible. Marriage and family are the nucleus and germ cells of civil society and a cornerstone of social cohesion, and therefore deserve special protection from government”. Furthermore, Open Democracy finds that female employment is, according to the AfD attitudes, a “misconceived view of feminism, which favors women with a career above mothers and housewives (Gilloz, O., Hairy, N., Flemming, M., 2017). The latter often experience less recognition and are financially disadvantaged”. This also adds up a dose of irony into the whole story, as the chair of this German party in the period from 2015 to 2017 was a woman - Frauke Petry. Petry was often regarded to as ‘Adolfina’ in reference to Adolf Hitler, due to her far-right stances and labels as ‘the anti-immigrant, anti-Islam threat to Merkel’ (Daldorph, 2016). The critics of the Alternative for Germany analyzed her rhetoric to be similar to the Nazi regime, in particular after the AfD’s draft manifesto<sup>29</sup> got leaked containing policies that encouraged German women to give birth to more children, imprisonment of drug addicts and people with mental health issues, as well as imposing restrictions on the Muslim community, such as bans of minarets<sup>30</sup> and niqabs<sup>31</sup>, as they perceived Islam to be threatening women’s fundamental freedoms and thus, were considered as “a danger to [the] state, society and values” (Daldorph, 2016). In its 2017 Manifesto for Germany (p. 49)<sup>32</sup>, the far-right party defended the probation of the headscarf by declaring that “the headscarf as a political-religious symbol of Muslim women’s submission to men negates integration efforts, equal rights for women and girls, and the unimpeded development of the individual.” Clearly, in this case, feminist arguments have been used to present an Islamophobic agenda of the AfD.

---

<sup>29</sup> Information regarding the leaked AfD draft manifesto can be found on the following link: <https://www.dw.com/en/afd-softens-manifesto-following-leak/a-19146783>

<sup>30</sup> Typically a part of a mosque, a slender tower with a balcony from which an Islamic religious leader invites Muslims to prayer.

<sup>31</sup> A veil covering all parts of the face except from the eyes, worn by some Muslim women in public.

<sup>32</sup> See more at: [https://www.afd.de/wp-content/uploads/sites/111/2017/04/2017-04-12\\_afd-grundsatzprogramm-englisch\\_web.pdf](https://www.afd.de/wp-content/uploads/sites/111/2017/04/2017-04-12_afd-grundsatzprogramm-englisch_web.pdf)



Also, the AfD is placing a classist and racist demographic policy by supporting the narrative on women as “birth givers”, identifying the mass immigration as highly threatening for the German nation and the only long-term solution “is to attain a higher birth rate by the native population by stimulating family policies” (Gilloz, O., Hairy, N., Flemming, M., 2017). Moreover, its former party chair, Frauke Petry was portrayed as “the smiling face” (Daldorph, 2016) of the AfD party and as a woman, presented the rise of women in politics, particularly the right-wing political parties. Despite that, Alternative for Germany remains the most explicitly anti-feminist party, arguing the protection of traditional family values, gender roles and ending gender mainstreaming by investing their efforts in protest movements against gender equality, marriage equality legislation and LGBT+ rights (Flemming, Gilloz, Hairy, 2017). What Alexander Gauland stated in December 2013 regarding criticism of modern families (previously mentioned), proves exactly this point of enforcing traditionalism and spreading the anti-feminist agenda. Furthermore, he states that female employment is a “misconceived view of feminism, which favors women with a career above mothers and housewives. The latter often experience less recognition and are financially disadvantaged”. This party does not concern itself with the rights of women in its party election program, but among other German right-wing populist parties, the notion of gender equality is only mentioned to elaborate how public employees should not be allowed to wear a headscarf (Flemming, Gilloz, Hairy, 2017).

Moreover, the Alternative for Germany claims to want to end “discrimination against stay-at-home-mothers”. The program of this party follows up on the story of a traditional family that can contribute to increasing the birth rate and giving birth is an imposed decision to build up the “fatherland”, rather than a personal choice. This is presented in its deeply anti-liberal family policy of “welcoming culture for new and unborn children”<sup>33</sup>. By doing so, the Alternative for

---

<sup>33</sup> The official party program for the Alternative for Germany published on the official AfD website: <https://www.afd.de/grundsatzprogramm/>

Germany targets the immigrants as the threat for the German society and presents itself as the political party that is protecting the western culture and its values. Despite the lack of gender talks in the AfD agenda, Nicole Höchst, a member of the Alternative for Germany, stated that her party is “the only party in Germany who is really fighting for women’s rights, because we point out we’re in danger of losing the freedoms and rights of women for which we’ve fought for centuries”, only proving the point that the xenophobic and Islamophobic narrative hidden behind so-called feminist approach is interpreted in the way populists wanted it to be – opposing the unwanted and dangerous ‘other’.

In September 2017, when the elections took place in Germany, the AfD entered the national parliament obtaining 12.6 percent of the vote, as well as 92 seats in the Bundestag, while having a political campaign based on xenophobia and anti-Muslim sentiment (Gedmin, 2019). Initially, the party was founded due to dissatisfaction with the centrist direction of the CDU under Angela Merkel’s leadership (Franzman, 2016), but also under the impact of the period of the three European crises (economic and financial, migrant and the impact of Brexit). Drawing from this, one can conclude that the crises were what formed the narrative and policies in German politics in their aftermath.

The AfD manifesto from 2014 initially argued ‘for equal rights for the sexes, recognizing their different identities, social roles and life situations’, but their stances on immigration were opposing from the very beginning. The campaign slogans reminded of those of Conservatives from the 2015 UK General Elections, with the slogans like ‘Courage for Truth’, investing into a strategy on social media that used up the ‘vocabulary of right-wing politics, such as denial of multi-culturalism, the condemnation of non-heteronormative lifestyles such as same-sex unions or “political correctness”’ (Berbair et al., 2014). As for the 2017 Federal elections, the ideological profile of the Alternative for Germany continued to develop, first of all, with the change in the leadership of the party with Alexander Gauland and second of all, with the party’s decision to use the Harris Media agency to work on its campaign

(an agency that had previously worked with UKIP in Britain and the Trump campaign in the United States) (Lees, 2018). This only strengthened the direction that the party was headed to and that is a more orthodox right-wing populist area. The AfD's electoral programme for the 2017 Federal election entailed chapters devoted to Islam and the demographic picture of asylum seekers and their alleged incompatibility with the democratic system (Lees, 2018). What this has enabled is for the Alternative for Germany to become this country's third biggest party, reaching the success stage at the 2017 elections. This party has managed to radicalize its stances and the entire ideological policy setting and the largest contributor to the radicalization process was the migrant crisis of 2015 (Lees, 2018). The migrant crisis has evidently tightened up on the Euroscepticism attitudes and populism in the context of Germany, where this dimension fit into a right-wing populism.

### *The Case of Austria*

As many other European countries, Austria has a multi-party political system that prevents for any party to attain a legislative majority, but still has two dominant ones entailed into a succession of coalitions between the leftist Social Democratic Party and the "moderate" wing of the historically conservative People's Party (ÖVP). This internal setting has been disrupted with the emergence of Sebastian Kurz on the Austrian political scene and his traditionally center-right People's Party's (ÖVP) alliance with the "right-wing populist" Freedom Party (FPÖ). Despite being a part of the center-right party, Kurz built his 2017 national election campaign on discussing migration issues and Islam, a strategy that seemed to work in favor of the ÖVP resulting in growing support for this party.

With the success in 2017 domestic elections, when his party won more than 31 percent of the vote, Kurz stated: "We have built a movement. We have made the impossible possible...this is our chance for real change in this country." His controversial remarks, often aligning with the FPÖ rhetoric, have been attracting more attention and thus, the narrative of

the ÖVP is taken into consideration under the right-wing umbrella. The FPÖ, which dominated the right-wing trend in Austria for quite some time, was initially formed as a “national liberal” movement with a substantial fascist element, and then shifted to socialism in the late 1960s and then to “right-wing populism” in the mid-1980s (Barelesel, 2018). Nevertheless, the intense push towards the right side of the ideological spectrum came up with Kurz taking the position of a chancellor on December 17, 2017.

As with the previously mentioned political parties, the question of immigration and the refugee crisis was the trigger for the populist narrative and right-wing attitudes in Austrian politics. Kurz opposed to the results of a summit addressing migration led by Angela Merkel and Emmanuel Macron, as well as other publicly denounced liberal immigration policies, with some controversial statements, such as to launch military training near some of the most vulnerable points along Austrian’s border, as well as send out border controls personnel to the other side of the Mediterranean Sea (primarily the Balkan route and Greece) for the purpose of preventing illegal immigrants to even cross the part and enter Europe (Barelesel, 2018). Moreover, Austrian government as such has pursued good relationship with the Hungarian government with Viktor Orban as the head figure, altogether further linked with the Italian conservative political parties and individuals. An interesting remark for Austrian populist scene is the very background of Kurz’s success and popularity. Sebastian Kurz is argued to have a highly marketable public image due to his expertise in policy formation (detailed analysis of all aspects of logistics, training, international law etc. with the intention to convince people in what he perceives to be the best possible option), which he further combines with the political maneuvering and public debates. As one of his largest achievements, one can identify the improvements in Austrian economy due to his proven knowledge of economy as such. On the other side, Kurz is investing his efforts into “reviving” a sense of national pride among Austrians, young people in particular. Thus, his actions have shifted the perception of conservatives of “angry old men” into an image of fashionable young people, due to his position

of the youngest chancellor Austria has had, making himself more appealing to the general public (Barelesel, 2018). Moreover, the entire political campaign of the People's Party revolved around his image, with posters of his visage and slicked-back hair with the poster sign "The new People's Party" and a "Movement for Austria!", making it almost difficult to comprehend that it was a poster for the same People's party as before<sup>34</sup>. This campaign focused on solely his image was depicted by Cas Mudde<sup>35</sup> as "effective, but probably only in the short term". Moreover, Mudde argued that "while it liberates the candidate from an established structure and, therefore, legacy, it also means that their support base is looser and more contextual, based on personality and success rather than shared identity and interest." Nevertheless, Kurz is perceived as the leading figure of a Macron-esque political movement in Austria (Schultheis, 2017).

#### *The Austrian New People's Party (ÖVP) and the Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ)*

The Austrian People's Party (Österreichische Volkspartei, ÖVP) was founded in Vienna in 1945 by leaders of the former Christian Social Party (Christlichsoziale Partei, CSP), but ensuring that the relationship with the Roman Catholic Church remains limited (U.S. Library of Congress, n.d.). The party emerged as a conservative, democratic party, encompassing Christian values while including diverse interests. Within this period, the party advocated low taxes, reduced government expenditures, a balanced budget and low wage increases, but after losing the 1970 parliamentary elections, the Austrian People's Party entered the opposition for the first time by forming a minority government with the Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ) (U.S. Library of Congress, n.d.).

The Freedom Party of Austria was founded in 1956 by Anton Reinthaller, a former SS officer, who had served the national socialist government that was formed together with Hitler

---

<sup>34</sup> Jakob-Moritz Eberl, a researcher at the University of Vienna and a member of the Austrian National Election Study, for The Atlantic, 2017.

<sup>35</sup> Cas Mudde, an associate professor at the University of Georgia's School of Public and International Affairs, for The Atlantic, 2017

after the Anschluss in 1938, thus having it torn between liberal and nationalist wings, both often disputing over the party's strategy (U.S. Library Congress, n.d.). As the Freedom Party of Austria placed its focus on nationalism, attracting many former Nazis that advocated the idea that Austrians belong to a greater German cultural community, it presented an atypical liberal party. The party has had history of nationalist narrative and chairmen, even reaching the extreme and controversial remarks, such as the one of Haider who during a parliamentary debate in 1991 declared that "the Third Reich's employment policy was a positive model" (U.S. Library of Congress, n.d.). The right-wing narrative can be detected among some of its recent lead politicians, such as Heinz-Christian Strache, who was an elected FPÖ party chairman in 2005 who led the party to the right, resting his politics on anti-immigrant and anti-foreigner platform. The political position of the Freedom Party of Austria as a nationalist party, however, was overtaken by Sebastian Kurz and the Austrian People's Party, due to opposing attitudes in reference to the 2015 refugee crisis, when Austria received a large number of asylum application from migrants and refugees from Syria (Deutsche Welle, 2019). Moreover, the FPÖ party members introduced the anti-migrant comments, one controversial in particular came from Christian Schilcher, who wrote a poem for a party newspaper in which he compared migrants with rats, for the purpose of promoting the opposing attitude towards multiculturalism in Austria (Bathke, 2019). According to media reports, the poem was regarded as deeply racist and promoting a Nazi propaganda. Summarizing the party's activities and remarks up to now, it can be declared that both parties rest on nationalist, anti-immigration and anti-EU views.

However, the primary focus of this thesis section is Austrian People's Party's recent intensified promotion of right-wing populism and its rightwards shift in political spectrum. The party's campaign for the 2017 Austrian legislative election under the leadership of its young chairman Sebastian Kurz, was primarily based on illegal immigration and a fight against "political Islam", introducing a program more similar to one of the FPÖ, the right-wing party that became a coalition partner after the Austrian People's Party won the elections (Deutsche

Welle, 2017). When the refugee and migrant crisis became a political concern of the European Union in 2015, Sebastian Kurz used the Austrian voters' concerns regarding immigration and called for stricter external border controls, better integration and advocated control of "political Islam", thereby organizing the shutdown of the route which was taking place in the West Balkans region that was ought to limit the migrations (Deutsche Welle, 2017). These attitudes are common for both parties, the FPÖ and the ÖVP, both promoting equally right-wing populist narratives, portraying immigrants as a threat to the Austrian people and culture. What emerged out of this is that many Muslims already living in Austria, feel oppressed by their own government as the political party leaders "often tie Islamization to refugees alone, but Islamization is more often something having to do with people that have been there for a long time."<sup>36</sup> Sebastian Kurz managed to pass the law which prohibits the wearing of Muslim headscarves in primary schools, drawing on the party's ideology on social and political order rooted in Christianity. Furthermore, drawing from this ideology and following the migrant crisis of 2015, Kurz introduced a bill which prohibited mosques and imams in Austria from receiving foreign funding (Baresel, 2018). Also, the Austrian national elections of 2017 presented the highlight for the Austrian People's Party, as Sebastian Kurz, now a chairman, led the party to victory and headed a right-wing coalition government.

Amid European elections in May 2019, Austrian far-right leaders of both, the Austrian People's Party and the Freedom Party of Austria, intensified their anti-immigration rhetoric, Strache arguing that there is "a creeping Islamization, a population change, or a population displacement".<sup>37</sup> Government data on immigration from 2018, however, indicates that 16% of Austria's population holds a foreign citizenship in comparison to the 10% from a decade earlier. Furthermore, Strache claimed that "It is [our] goal to correct the legacy of the previous government's immigration policy and to stop immigration from Islamic countries and promote

---

<sup>36</sup> Mohammad Amini, an Iranian social worker in Vienna for Deutsche Welle, 2017

<sup>37</sup> Strache for Austrian newspaper OE.24, 2019

integration” (Reuters, 2019). In 2019, Kurz posted his interview on Twitter, addressing the migrant crisis from 2015 as the lesson to be learned, so that the Europe enlist reasons why Austria is not a compatible destination and thus, prevent the recent wave of refugees from coming to Central Europe<sup>38</sup>. Despite criticism, Strache persisted in referring to immigration with a far-right term of “population displacement”. Austria has taken great care of its border restrictions, collaborating with its neighbors Hungary and Croatia, ever since Sebastian Kurz enjoyed the position of a foreign minister in 2016, and now in 2020, when he is a chancellor, Austrian Interior Minister Karl Nehammer proclaimed that Austria is ready to do so again so that migrants could not reach Austrian territory (Reuters, 2020). Nehammer further stated: “Should, despite that, people reach us, then they must be stopped.”<sup>39</sup>

Also, the FPÖ and ÖVP coalition has agreed on efforts in promoting the opposition to deeper political integration among EU Member states, as well as ruling out a referendum on Austrian membership (Reuters, 2017). However, the FPÖ has been the one most critical of the EU, employing the term “Öxit” (combination of words: Österreich (German word for Austria) and exit, based on the example of “Brexit”), whereas the ÖVP leader Kurz argued that their coalition entails “a pro-European government that supports the Europe’s peace project” (Schultheis, 2019). Yet, they often use the EU as a ‘convenient scapegoat’ to blame for policies that are not as popular or successful, even if on a European level, were supported by Austria (Auel, 2018). The anti-EU remarks often came from the right-wing populist FPÖ, claiming that the government, immigrants and the EU are to blame for economic and political stagnation (Gady, 2017).

Furthermore, gender attitudes follow up on the populist intentions of portraying the women as weaker members of the society, in need of protection and saving. In reference to the headscarf ban, Sebastian Kurz stated that the whole reason behind such move is his duty to

---

<sup>38</sup> See the following link: <https://twitter.com/sebastiankurz/status/1159495739267080193>

<sup>39</sup> Karl Nehammer on a news conference in Vienna, Austria, 2020



‘protect young girls from effects of immigration’ (Gehrke, 2020). For the Freedom party and gendering, Strache’s takeover, together with his open, right-wing, populist attitudes, pushed for higher incentives of young individuals from the German nationalist student fraternities to join his political party (Löffler, 2020). These fraternities are relevant for the gender aspect due to their exclusivity of women and Jews and have been linked to the FPÖ throughout the years and have re-gained their influence with Heinz-Christian Strache, who himself enjoys a membership in one of the fraternities (Löffler, 2020). With their membership, the FPÖ became a rather ‘masculinist’ party, now advocating an anti-gender ideology that claimed to “fight for the rights of men who were discriminated by gender equality policies” (Löffler, 2020). Furthermore, actions and remarks directed towards attracting the women voters, were also pursued by the FPÖ candidate for presidency in the 2016 elections, Norbert Hofer, whose political style formed an image of the “nice guy next door”, presenting him as a responsible family man. On the other hand, Sebastian Kurz presented himself as a potentially strong leader, set to change the game of politics through the placement of masculinity in his speeches and gender policies. In contrast to other names mentioned above, Kurz’s politics supported a gender quota, that gave the conservative party a modernized approach to gender and women in politics (Löffler, 2020). However, the coalition agreement of Austrian New People’s Party and Freedom Party of Austria entails a phrase that argues to recognize the differences between men and women as such, directly targeting gender equality policies (Löffler, 2018, p. 125).

Both political parties have indeed promoted a similar ideology and populist narratives, introducing policies that tackle migrants and women in a racist, xenophobic and misogynist way, questioning the values that the democratic system in Austria has been promoting in recent years before the migrant and refugee crisis. Having Sebastian Kurz for the New People’s Party and Strache for Freedom Party of Austria dominate the party system in Austria, only pushed the dominant politics in this country to the right side of the spectrum.

## Discussion of cases

The following part entails a table used to depict the narrative elements of all the parties presented (The Northern League, Alternative for Germany, Freedom Party of Austria and the New People's Party), for the purpose of extracting the specific parts of rhetoric and identifying the similarities and differences. The table is divided into five sections, identified in the narrative of all four political parties: racism, islamophobia, traditionalism and nativism, Euroscepticism and protectionism. Each part entails a brief summary of the most repeated comments across the previously presented remarks. The discussion below takes into account that not all parties are right-wing – ÖVP stands as an interesting case of a mainstream party that has adopted a rightward ideology of its coalition partner, the far-right FPÖ, thus the table will present the remarks following up on this. Also, each section entails the gender element, as perceived within different narrative settings.

### NARRATIVE FEATURES

	RACISM	ISLAMOPHOBIA	TRADITIONALISM AND NATIVISM	EUROSCEPTICISM	PROTECTIONISM
The Northern League	Immigrants socially constructed as undesirable outsiders. Linked with crime, sexual violence and gender conservatism.	Migrants perceived as a religious threat, associated with tendencies of an Islamic takeover.	Support for traditional patriarchal values. Building narrative on historical concepts and ideas on creating a new nation (Padanian nation) of strong men and women constituting a masculine, ethnically homogenous community.	Opposition to community policies and integration. Growth in anti-EU rhetoric, promoting the idea of territorial, monetary and budgetary sovereignty.	Advocating the need for protection of Italian women from Muslim men. The role of a protector is to be found in male figures (party leader).
Alternative for Germany	Justifying violent attacks on migrants, as they are perceived as dangerous and violent. Glorifying nationalism of Germanic people.	Spread of fear due to "the Islamization of the West". Narrative directly targeting Muslim values and rules on the headscarves, thereby sexualizing women's appearance.	Stimulation of family policies, as migrations are there is a perceived threat of extinction of the German nation. Here, a patriarchal role of woman as "birth giver" is promoted for the purpose of building up the "fatherland".	Advocating the reintroduction of permanent border controls, that will disable the Schengen agreement.	Protesting for protection of the western culture and its values, as well as women who are in danger of losing their freedom and rights.

POLITICAL PARTY

Freedom Party of Austria	Migrant crisis as population change and displacement. Migrants described as "rats".	Advocating stricter immigration policies in order to stop immigration from Islamic countries.	Narrative recognizes elements of Nazi propaganda, opposing multiculturalism and evoking ideas of ethnically homogenous state.	EU depicted as a "scapegoat" to blame for the failures in solving the migrant crisis and delivering unpopular policies.	Perception of men as discriminated by gender equality policies.
The New People's Party	Support for preventing immigrants from entering Austria, arguing how they cannot integrate with the West.	Opposition to public display of Muslim customs and norms (e.g. a headscarf). Fight against "political Islam".	Reviving a sense of national pride among Austrians, relying on social and political order rooted in Christianity.	Supporting the EU and its values, promoting the role and positioning of Austria in EU affairs.	Advocating protection of young girls from effects of immigration.

Table 1: Narrative features of right-wing populist parties from Austria, Germany and Italy

The main concern of the thesis is the right-wing populist parties' narrative after the 2013-2015 migrant wave, that potentially led to their success in the elections. What can be perceived from the table, the narrative in all segments concerns immigrants, who are perceived as a threat. The leaders of the selected parties have addressed the issue of immigration, supporting their anti-arguments with nationalist and chauvinistic perceptions in order to portray themselves as the protectors of nation and women. The racism element entails discrimination based on the skin color, due to which migrants are presented as vicious criminals, sex offenders and women oppressors. In this situation, the domestic group is threatened and perceives itself as marginalized, thus xenophobia and racist discrimination contribute to their feeling of superiority (Castel, 2005, p. 73). The presented data indicates that this is similar for all, but the New People's Party. This party did not use such aggressive discourse, like other parties did and has focused mainly on the aspect of integration, disregarding the compatibility between the West and the incoming population. This probably stems from the fact that the party differs in its positioning on the political spectrum and thus, less aggressive discourse is expected. However, this cannot disregard the rightward perception of migration, as the party employed right-wing populist rhetoric of historical concepts and theories (e.g. state principles rooted in Christianity), as well as publicly opposed to Islam.

Alternative for Germany and Freedom Party of Austria supported the anti-integration argument by producing aggressive narrative based on Nazi propaganda on one single nationality and

glorifying the idea of an ethnically homogenous state (“fatherland”). Further, this can also be perceived with the Northern League and the so-called Padanian nation, with the intention to spark one’s sense of nationality by evoking the historic ideas of social and political order. Mobilizing the past in this case can evoke spiritual reawakening in the time of crisis (Keyler, 1975) and help build up the process of the creation and maintenance of ethnic or national solidarity (Coakley, 2004).

As for Euroscepticism, a sense of “heightened existential insecurity among large sections of society” is what produces anti-immigrant, anti-Islam, anti-establishment and anti-EU attitudes, where racism and critique of the EU end up falling under the same aspect (Kallis, 2014, pp. 7-8). The EU is often blamed for the failures of dealing with not only the migrant crisis, but also the economic and political ones. All three right-wing parties are very critical of the EU, whereas the New People’s Party presents itself as standing to EU values and promoting the need for strengthening the position of Austria in EU affairs.

An interesting part from the table is how the gender element can be perceived throughout the other features and can be found in the narrative in all aspects of opposition arguments. Right-wing populist parties have often incorporated the gender element when discussing unfitness of migrants’ profiles in the Western culture, narrowing down the role of a woman to a figure dependent on a man. This dependence reflects in the form of protectionism, where women are threatened by the migrant men and their conservative, radical religion and culture, while the right-wing populist leaders are the ones advocating for their safety. However, this role of a women is not always portrayed as vulnerable. The Northern League based their story of a Padanian nation on strong women and men, who are there to build up this idea.

There seems to be no significant differences across these cases. Overall, these European parties have great similarities in their rhetoric strategy than differences. In particular, gender perspectives are similar to all four parties, vested in traditional views of a woman’s role in the

society. The only party that stands out is the New People's Party, as expected, but the comparison contributed to a clearer recognition of its rightward rhetoric elements.

*Results of the elections: how much did the right-wing populist narrative achieve?*

The analysis of the populist narrative and some of the most remembered policies and remarks has taken into account both government and European parliamentary elections to argue the success and popularity levels of right-wing parties in the periods before and after the elections. These elements are notable by the percentage in vote share and the trend of its increase in comparison between the two election periods. Most right-wing populist parties that competed in different types of elections across Europe in 2017 managed to increase their support. In this thesis, a particular focus has been placed on the European Union Member States which had some of the harshest stances on immigration, as well as the ones whose political party leaders have been far more present in the media. These include the previously presented case studies of Italy, Germany and Austria. Of course, one must take note that not all Member States held elections at the same time, but two out of three presented case studies can be compared during the same period, in terms of having a right-wing party dominating within the same timeframe, during government elections in the same year: Austria and Germany in 2017. Clearly, these countries have experienced the growing popularity of populist narratives, in particular Austria, where after the migrant and refugee crisis in 2015, the right-wing populist party has succeeded in joining a governing coalition (Halikiopoulou, 2018). More specifically, the Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ) acquired access to office after entering a governing coalition with the center right People's Party (ÖVP). On the other hand, the Alternative for Germany (AfD) entered parliament for the first time after obtaining a much larger share of votes in comparison to the 2013 elections. According to Eurostat database on elections, the Alternative for Germany entered parliament with 12.6 per cent of the votes and 94 seats, placing itself on the third place

and managing to reach support from other major parties. Further, Austrian Freedom Party attained 51 seats in 2017 elections, with 26 per cent of the votes cast.

As for Italy in this period, the first general parliament elections took place in 2013 with the very start of the migrant wave, while the second elections happened in 2018. After the 2018 Italian general elections, the anti-immigration and EU-critical Northern League became a partner in the right-wing coalition, attaining 17.4 per cent of the votes cast<sup>40</sup>. This result has been an increase by 13 per cent in comparison to previous elections, but not enough for the League to control the government.

What is captivating in all this data is the fact that the rightward shift is not only holding the political climate, but is now reaching the seats in the government and despite still being “controlled” by the democratic parties, the system finds itself somewhat at risk of shifting its policies and values in the same direction. Certainly, this has been reflected on a larger scale as populist, Eurosceptic and various nationalist parties across Europe reached gains in 2019 European parliamentary elections as well, when more than 50 per cent of European voters turned out to vote, contributing to the highest turnout<sup>41</sup> in two decades and making a significant increase in comparison to the 2014 elections, according to European Parliament data. The following thesis section will present the graphs comparing the final results of 2014 and 2019 European Parliamentary elections for each of the selected countries respectively.

---

<sup>40</sup> Statista results on 2018 parliamentary elections in Italy, See more at: <https://www.statista.com/topics/4618/parliamentary-election-2018-in-italy/>

<sup>41</sup> 2019 European election results, See more at: <https://europarl.europa.eu/election-results-2019/en/turnout/>

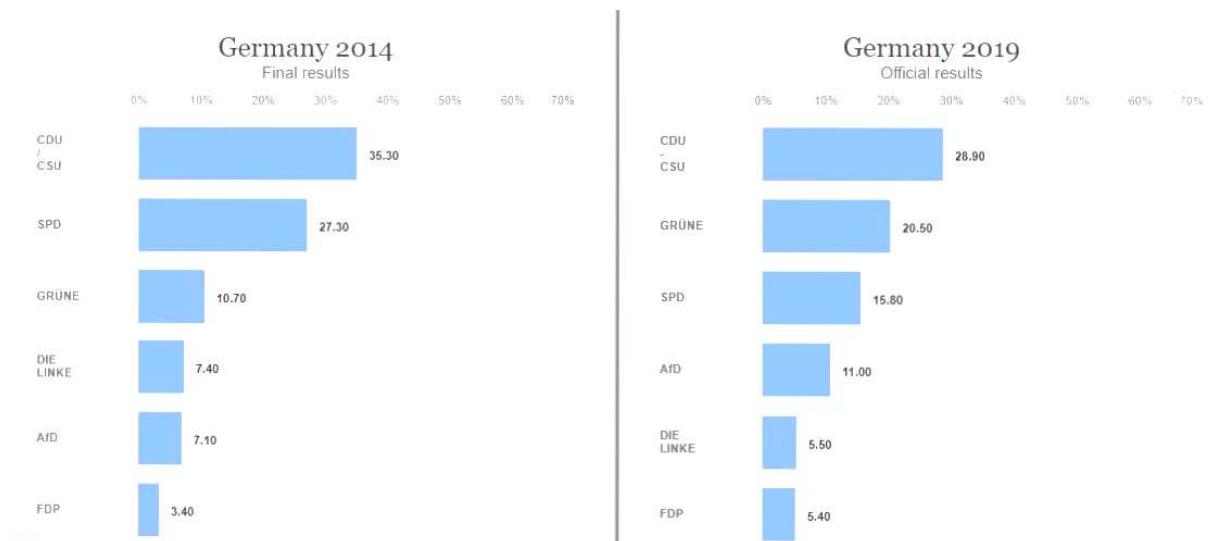


Figure 1: Comparison of German national results for the European Parliament: 2014 and 2019 EU Elections, Source: European Parliament<sup>42</sup>

As presented in the graph above (Figure 1), in 2014, the Alternative for Germany obtained 7.10 per cent of votes cast, whereas in 2019, this number increased to 11 per cent, climbing its way up for one position. This increase has positioned this political party on the fourth place on the list of leading parties in Germany, based on the percentage in vote share. The Christian Democratic Union of Germany still remains the leading political party, together with its sister party - the Christian Social Union in Bayern. The second place belongs to the Social Democratic Party of Germany. What is interesting in these graphs is that the Greens party has also increased its vote share cast since 2014, moving from 10.70 per cent to 15.80 per cent. All in all, it can be concluded that the right-wing populist parties in Germany are getting more support in comparison to previous years and this activity must not be neglected.

<sup>42</sup> See more at: <https://europarl.europa.eu/election-results-2019/en/tools/comparative-tool/>

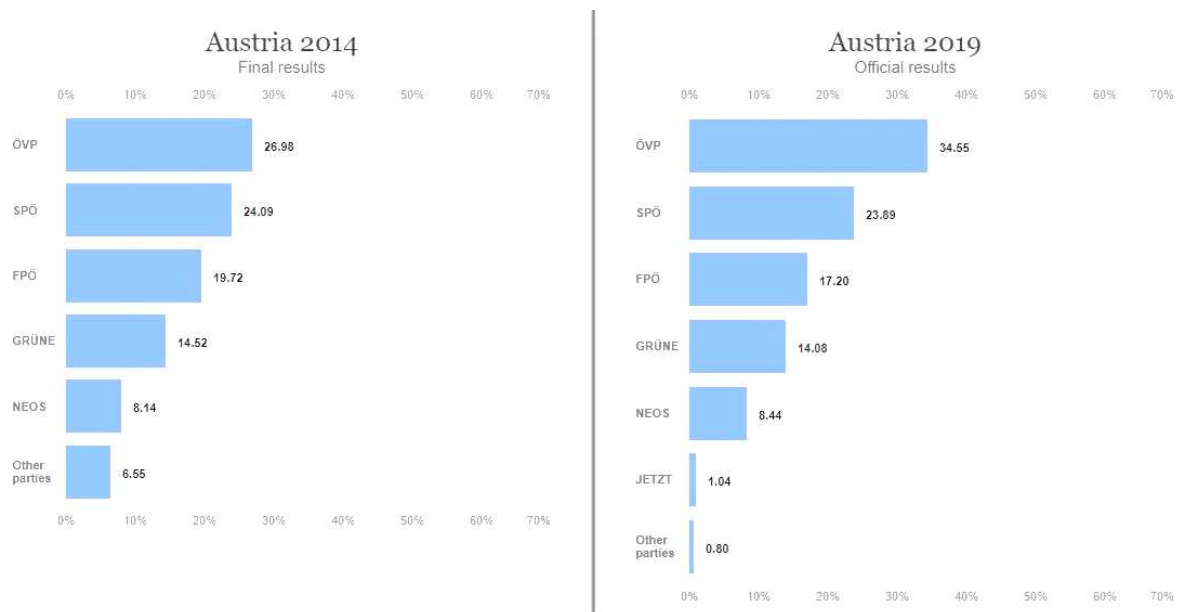


Figure 2: Comparison of Austrian national results for the European Parliament: 2014 and 2019 EU Elections, Source: European Parliament<sup>44</sup>

The graph above (Figure 2) entails Austrian election results for the European Parliament for 2014 and 2019. In Austria, the leading party is the one placed on the rightward side of the political spectrum - a populist Austrian New People's Party (ÖVP), enjoying a steady support, which persisted in 2019 as well. In 2014, the percentage of vote share cast amounted to 26.98 per cent, whereas in 2019 it increased to 34.55 per cent. Another right-wing populist party, relevant for this thesis, is the Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ), which positioned itself third on this graph's list. With the FPÖ, we can notice a slight decrease in vote shares in 2019. The 2019 EU Parliamentary elections brought 17.20 per cent of votes for this political party, what is lower in comparison to the 2014 elections, when the vote share amounted to 19.72 per cent. These percentages contradict the increase in support for the Freedom Party's coalition partner, the Austrian People's Party. The trend with the Greens party is also noticeable in Austria, but its vote share indicates a decreasing tendency in 2019 elections.

<sup>44</sup> See more at: <https://europarl.europa.eu/election-results-2019/en/tools/comparative-tool/>



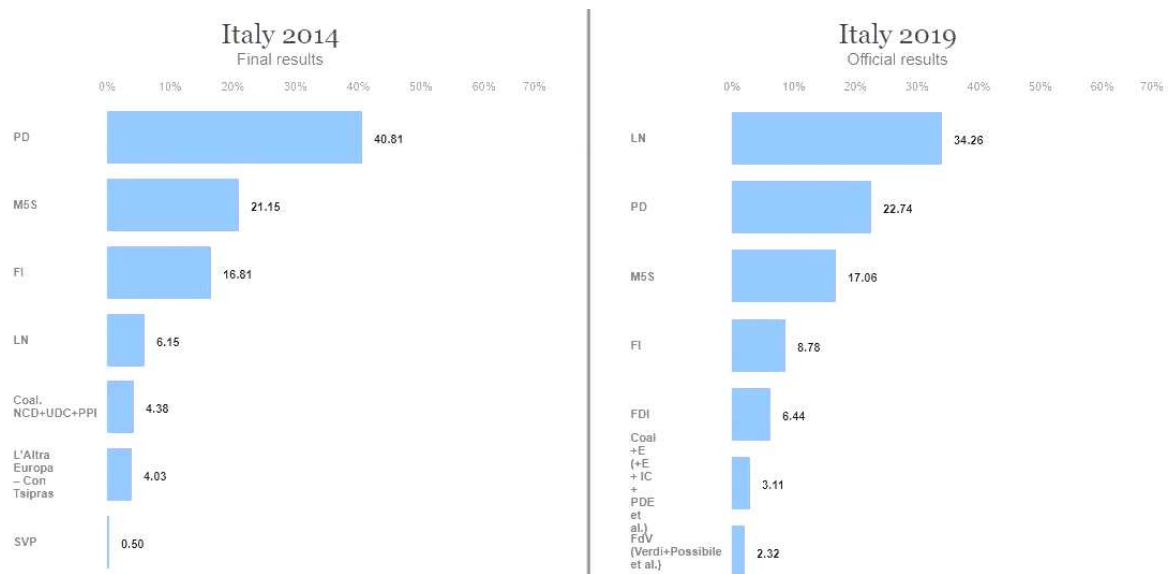


Figure 3: Comparison of Italian national results for the European Parliament: 2014 and 2019 EU Elections, Source: European Parliament<sup>45</sup>

The results of the Italian 2019 EU Parliamentary elections (Figure 3) have made significant changes for Italian politics, as the most supported party - the Democratic Party (with 40.81 per cent of vote share in 2014) got replaced by the right-wing populist Northern League in 2019. The Northern League won this position with 34.26 per cent of vote shares. This was a dramatic shift in positions, as the Northern League held 6.15 per cent of votes and was positioned fourth on the list of leading parties, whereas in 2019 it reached the very top. As for the Democratic party, it seems as if it has only stepped down one position, placing itself second, but it did so with almost a half decrease in vote shares (22.74 per cent in 2019). Another striking remark can be made in regard to the placement of other political parties in Italian Parliamentary elections. The populist Five Star Movement, with 21.15 per cent of vote shares in 2014, was keeping its position on the second place on the list, right below the Democratic Party, whereas in 2019, its vote share percentage dropped to 17.06. With this position drop, the Democratic Party ended up taking the third place. However, the final results presented in the graph indicate one populist

<sup>45</sup> See more at: <https://europarl.europa.eu/election-results-2019/en/tools/comparative-tool/>

right-wing party and one center left party as the two leading political parties in Italy, contributing to an interesting political atmosphere.

What can be concluded from the graphs is that a similar trend can be followed in all three EU Member States, with a minor exception for Germany. In this EU country, the Alternative for Germany did not succeed in reaching one of the leading positions. However, the percentage of vote shares has increased for this party since 2014 EU Parliamentary elections and thus, the trend of an increasing support for the right-wing populist parties can be confirmed. Moreover, an analysis of within-country variations and variations over time reveals a similar trend: in their majority, the parties that are most likely to gain public attention and support are the ones that have stressed ideological conceptualizations of national belonging in their agendas (Halikiopoulou, 2018). What this essentially means is that the parties still offer nationalist solutions to all socio-economic problems, but they also identify the out-group which is an external actor on the basis of not sharing the liberal values (e.g. democracy, multiculturalism, rule of law) of the in-group (Halikiopoulou et al., 2013). The following part will present and analyze these variations in order to deliver a conclusion on these emerging trends in the European Union.

### *What about xenophobia, racism, nativism, Islamophobia and gender?*

The presented analysis of case studies has taken into consideration populist remarks regarding gender in society and position of women in two contexts: women in leadership positions and women as voters. The following analysis (in this thesis section) is expected to link parties' political ideologies and leadership to the position of gender and women's rights in right-wing populist parties' discourses. However, before approaching the analysis, first we must go over what has been concluded from the presented case studies, then summarize the main points and place the conclusions into the context of gender and feminism. This way, a link to nativism, racism and xenophobia can be achieved, explaining the right-wing populist narrative in more

detail.

To begin with, all three case studies (Austria, Germany and Italy) entail a story of parties whose leaders (Alexander Gualand (AfD), Heinz-Christian Strache (FPÖ), Matteo Salvini (LN) and Sebastian Kurz (ÖVP)), are (in most part) masculine, heroic, self-confident and whose leadership prospered in the time of crisis and emergency. These right-wing party leaders succeeded in presenting themselves as being there for their followers, to support them in the time of need, ready to take all actions necessary to offer them safety and guidance, while investing into a narrative that promotes a dichotomous worldview. The discourse formed an environment where foreigners are obviously perceived as “others” – the people who pose threat to the whole society by stripping off their values, culture and language. Dichotomy can be further perceived in the perception of migrants as dehumanized intruders who are not welcomed in Europe, due to their alleged criminal tendencies. Migrants and refugees are portrayed as violent criminals and rapists who destroy society values and cultures and want to impose their own, as well as take over the Western territory. Moreover, as all migrants and refugees are largely perceived as having a Muslim background, much of populist narrative revolved around anti-Islamic stances and promotion and advocacy of bans against niqabs and burkas, as well as other public expressions of this particular religion. By doing so, the political leaders automatically discriminated massive groups of people, imposing restrictions on something that was not considered an issue long before these people came in. In Germany (a previously mentioned example), the majority of other nationalities are Turks, most of which practice Islam, and they have been living and working on this territory for years and now they are also faced with discriminatory and restrictive measures. Such is the case with Austria as well. With Italy, immigration has been a part of the process for decades, yet with the incoming migrants and refugees, this process started being perceived as a problem due to differences in culture and language. Moreover, migrants are represented as “reasons for all society ills”, such as economic failures (Bulli, Soare, 2018), what raises the story on labor protectionism and resentment

towards the incoming population regardless of their background. The transfer of such projection has led to a more intense rightwards shift in political direction in most of the countries of European Union. Since the migrant wave is the time of crisis, it provides for an environment within which political leaders can emerge as heroes and saviors of the people. They can do so by taking advantage of the disruption in the present social order, intensifying the feelings of helplessness and bewilderment (Willner, 1984, p. 43).

Moreover, Willner (1984, pp. 34-35), recognized the gender bias among populist political leaders, as most right-wing populist parties are led by men and women are to show their capabilities and receive recognition only on accident or indirectly, counting in the fact that men are the ones to give them the opportunity to do so in the first place. There is an academic debate on whether populist female leaders address gender issues differently than men, but the analysis of case studies of Italy, Austria and Germany, do not indicate that there is quite any change. For example, as mentioned in the case studies section above, The AfD's leader Frauke Petry was perceived as "Adolfina", a female reincarnation of Adolf Hitler (Daldorff, 2016), thus having male characteristics attached to her very presentation in public and political space. On the other hand, Petry was also given a soft side by being the face of the political party, often photographed with a smile on her face to appeal to the voters. However, despite being a woman, Petry did not invest much of her time in promoting gender policies and concerned herself more with the AfD party agenda focused around right-wing nationalist narratives. General perception is that right-wing nationalist parties and movements of today, are formed on the inclusion of universal principles, such as gender equality and LGBT+ rights. However, this primarily targets non-Western migrant groups and this type of narrative is in large strategically used to help mobilize population against Muslims and racially profile the incoming "others" (Puar, 2007). What this essentially means is that nationalist populist parties rest their agendas on old ideologies of nationalism, yet incorporate the elements of modern-day ideologies to introduce the level of modernity and attract more followers. The argument that goes in favor to this is that

these modern elements are perceived to belong to the Western culture and thus promotion of these values contributes to nationalist understandings of the populist narrative. Moreover, some parties, such as the Northern League in Italy, argue that gender equality presents a threat to social values and demographic sustainability (once taking the story about Padanian nationalism and the concept of Padanian women into consideration, as these women are portrayed as care givers and are there only to support and promote the nationalist ideology), whereas the Alternative for Germany perceives gender equality as dangerous due to its positive discrimination of women at the expense of men (hereby discussing the party's program that promotes traditional family and perceives women as obliged to give birth and raise the declining birth rate in Germany, rather than invest in their careers and be employed). However, when places in the context of the migrant crisis, the story about gender equality comes in the discourse about foreigners and culturalization of migration by "protecting the right women from unwanted invaders, migrants from primarily Muslim countries" (Sayan-Cengiz, Tekin, 2019). Here, women are not only portrayed weak in need of protection of foreign men that want to attack or rape them, but also from the threat of "Islamization" as Muslim migrant communities are portrayed as oppressive of women. In this regard, Sarrasin et al. (2015) conducted a research on how sexual threat cues shape attitudes toward immigrants and have included experiments to test the role of insecurity and benevolent sexism. This study analyzed reactions to political posters that portray male immigrants as a sexual danger, placing focus on women, testing the level of their support towards anti-immigrant stances. Tested individuals have expressed benevolent sexist beliefs in relation to these anti-immigrant stances in cases of exposure to a poster entailing a male immigrant as a sexual threat (Sarrasin et al., 2015). Taking upon this study, we can draw on Sarasin the politics of fear and employment of information and messages that dehumanize immigrants, both as a collective group and as individuals (emphasis on the males), for the purpose of reaching female sensitivity and call for protection. Based on this reasoning, this type of narrative is to influence a greater extent of attitudes that promote men's

duty of providing protection for women. When fear is triggered, individuals are believed to be easily persuaded (Brader, 2005). Thus, the populist discourse places focus on promoting opposing stances and emphasizing potential arising issues, such as inability of immigrants to integrate into the Western society, security risks, language and cultural barriers, economic sustainability, market overflow etc. Moreover, populists present these by giving nativist remarks which entail a hateful perception of others and a loving one of the host nation, reaching levels where such is portrayed as a superior. Evoking emotions is always a method that pushes for strong reactions, either positive or negative, but it is important for them to be there so one could make a choice on which party to support, what news to follow and what stances to take. Nevertheless, with the discourse on gender, the right-wing parties tend to promote gender equality and advocacy of women's freedom and choice on one side, but emphasize gender differences, present males as the dominant gender and impose reproductive and domestic duties on women on the other. When summarizing both of these approaches to the migrant and refugee crisis, it can be noted that the narrative among EU Member States is fueled by politics of resentment, which is highly promoted by the right-wing political parties and figures. These types of political parties have shaped the discourse that produced a "spill-over effect" among some of the European states impacting their policies, regulations and general public perception of the crisis, all moving in a single direction that only supported the rightward shift and enhanced the levels of opposing attitudes. This has only further contributed to an even hostile environment for the incoming population.

The second part of the story is that while populist discourse and actions call for restoration of unambiguous gender roles invested in patriarchy, they also invite women to participate in politics, become vocal and take part in leadership roles (Sofos, 2020). Aggressive sexism of populist politics is believed to be a push for a movement that will turn back to the rights gained with hardship by women, as well as other marginalized and discriminated parts of the population (Chemaly, 2017). The role of a woman in society, as perceived by the populists, is

the one of people who are at a social disadvantage and always in need of someone to take care of them. Despite such anachronistic image of women and femininity, studies show that right wing populist parties tend to appeal to women due to certain policies that they promise to impose to strengthen the welfare system (e.g. raising child benefit payments, allowances for promoting families etc.) (Taube, 2018). Also, in the times of crisis, women find themselves competing against refugees and migrants for the better position in the society. However, their support for far-right populist parties is still lower than the one of men. One possible explanation for that can be found in an argument that women feel less threatened by immigration and thus may have much weaker anti-immigrant attitudes (Immerzeel et al., 2015). Yet, this is not the only argument that exists among researchers. Despite large amounts of literature available on the topic of populism, the aspect on gender gap with right-wing populist parties is still under researched and no consistent assumption exists. Another proposed answer is that women are perceived as less aggressive, more consensus-seeking and friendlier (Ross, Sreberny, 2000), as well as more politically tolerant (Golebiowska, 1999) and that these gender differences with men, can serve to explain specific political behaviors, that is why men are more engaged in politics than women. Nevertheless, women are encouraged to actively engage and participate in politics in order to protect “traditional family values”, thus maintain the status of gender roles as imposed by patriarchy (Sofos, 2020). Many populist political campaigns entail anti-gender ideology elements, as they believe that women’s reproductive and social rights, as well as the rights of LGBT+ communities are what threatens the traditional family. Despite their opposing stances, women’s presence in the job market allowed the populist radical right to appeal to broader categories and target the potential issues that may trigger the support of a female part of the population (Sofos, 2020). To sum up, the concept of gender is largely intertwined with notions of xenophobia and nativism, allowing for racial profiling in terms of attaching the criminal tendencies that largely target women. Women and femininity are misinterpreted and linked to a “softer” emotions and actions, whereas men and masculinity are the “tough” ones,

fit for a leadership role and capable of decision making. Further, large emphasis is placed on traditionalism and nation nurturing, for which women are claimed to be in charge. The attachment of patriarchal norms is what continues to drive the right-wing populist rhetoric in discussing immigration issues, serving as a façade for xenophobic, racist and Islamophobic tendencies.

### *Democracies under threat?*

The latest indicated success of right-wing populist parties in obtaining government positions within EU Member States is questioned to have posed a threat to the democratic system and its governing institutions, placing some of its values and norms on the stand. When considering the presented case studies on Austria, Germany and Italy, one can notice a similar trend of the growing support for the right-wing populist parties and their entrance in coalitions and governments, promoting openly nationalist and xenophobic sentiments. The most recent Freedom House report<sup>46</sup> on these three European states have argued the threat posed by the right-wing parties and their supporters in terms of human rights advocacy, as well as asylum and migration policies. Since 2015, the European Union's regime was faced with challenges of regulating activities on its borders, economic and political investments and overwhelm of its members capacities for humanitarian care (Jurgens, 2019). Further, the understanding (not) shown towards the migrants rarely grasped the complexity of structural contexts which depict migrant's lives, thereby barely acknowledging the historical and cultural developments of different backgrounds, but making sure to emphasize the differences and "unfitness" of migrant and refugee groups with the Western culture. Furthermore, the concept of gender equality has been used in contexts which present the exact opposite of what this notion stands for, being a façade for nativism and sexism. Racial and sexual dimension of promoted narratives entail the right-wing conceptualization of a "nation" and pushes to further decrease the spectrum of

---

<sup>46</sup> 2019 Freedom House Report



democracy (Garbagnoli, 2018). Nativism not only poses a threat to “foreign” identities, but also to local ones, fueling inequality among different national, racial, religious or any other background. The way nationalism itself poses a threat is linked to the concept of belonging, and if progressives fail to provide for inclusive ideas of belonging, then the right tends to do so (Kapadia, 2020). This drawback to nationalism is evident among several EU Member States, such as Italy with the Northern League, despite the country being regarded as democratic. In Italy, the 2018 elections introduced a populist government which raised concerns about the rights of migrants, asylum seekers and ethnic minorities. At the end of 2018, Italy faced some legal changes regarding restrictions on citizenship and naturalization, introducing stricter measures which only prolonged the waiting period for document review and at times, required Italian language fluency (Freedom House, 2019). This has made asylum procedure more difficult for the immigrants. As for the women in Italy, according to the Freedom House 2019 report, equal political rights are guaranteed under the law, but their interests are not best represented in practice, whereas ethnic minorities are marginalized in national and local political agendas. Further, recent years in Austria have also been characterized by political pressures from a right-wing, populist Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ), which openly promotes nationalist and xenophobic sentiments. In 2017, this party has entered the Austrian government in coalition with Austrian New People’s Party (ÖVP). The government produces policies that negatively affect the situation of migrants and asylum seekers, introducing a draft legislation in November 2018 to reduce welfare benefits for people that are not fluent in speaking the German language (Freedom House, 2019). Austrian legislature entails a poor representation level for the minorities and based on the Freedom House report findings, the number of naturalized people has significantly decreased since more restrictions have been imposed with a national integration policy in 2009. The gender equality aspect, on the other hand, is included in political parties’ agendas and in the 2017 elections, women represented the 34 per cent of the members elected to the parliament. However, the most critical situation in terms of respect for democratic

values under the pressures of migrations, is noted in Germany. Tensions emerged with an increase in influx of asylum seekers and the rise of right-wing party – Alternative for Germany which directly opposes to migration process, publicly criticizes and insults the newcomers (Freedom House, 2019). Furthermore, the Freedom House Report notes that Germany’s political system has included historical facts in its development, such as country’s totalitarian system, by entailing constitutional safeguards created to prevent authoritarian rule. Also, Germany has faced violent anti-immigration protests in Chemnitz in 2018 when far right supporters physically attacked people that they identified as immigrants, whereas hate speech did not come out of the picture, in particular the one promoted by right-wing groups on social media platforms. When it comes to representation in politics, Germany’s constitution manifests no discriminatory practices, regardless of gender ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation or gender identity, yet evidently some groups are underrepresented in politics. With gender representation and women in politics, in contrast to Austria, the 2017 federal elections noted a significant decrease in the representation of women in the Bundestag, reaching the lowest level since 1998 with 30.9 per cent (Freedom House, 2019). Also, an important remark is that 8 per cent of members in the Bundestag are people with immigrant background, whose family members or at least one parent were born without German citizenship (Freedom House, 2019). The Freedom House reports evaluated levels of democracy among EU Member States based on the analysis of political rights and civil liberties, and all three mentioned states scored pretty high (almost a maximum of 100 points), thus remaining their status of free democracies. However, when looking deeper into the analysis, a number of events, actions and public statements that disrupted social environment and political affairs, can be noticed. These have mostly come from the far-right groups and leaders, regarding statements that directly offend certain groups of people (in this case, immigrants), thus posing a threat to practice of certain democratic liberties. The growing popularity of right-wing parties among EU Member States has certainly disrupted not only the context in which policies are made and introduced, but as

evident from the statements mentioned above in the case studies of three states, they shifted the public perception into perceiving immigrants as the violent “outsiders” who do not belong among the Western population and culture. Besides this exclusive attitude towards immigrants, another perspective related to nativist and populist agendas is the use of gender and women’s rights to mistreat the Muslim migrants. This includes employing feminist ideals in xenophobic politics (Sofos, 2020). Radical right-wing populism has showed a significant amount of effort to adapt to political systems and institutions of contemporary democracies, presenting a more suitable profile, detaching themselves from any extremist and anti-democratic features that could potentially mark them as a threat to democracy (Fernández-Garcia, 2018). By adopting this type of a profile, the parties of the far-right stepped away from the direct link to fascist and Nazi organizations. The parties’ success takes into account the changes that occurred in western societies in the last couple of decades, shifting the electorate’s attitudes due to a greater distrust towards the traditional parties and expressed leaning towards the populist ideas of the radical right (Fernández-Garcia, 2018). Thus, topics like immigration and multiculturalism became the threat to the (right-wing, populist) system that was presenting itself as only attempting to protect the national culture and the nation. By promoting protectionism, populists attack individual rights, such as freedom of the media, civil liberties and political rights (Kyle, Mounk, 2018). Here is where the questions regarding stability of liberal democracies come in and the opinions are divided. On the one hand, political scientists, journalists and many politicians argue that there are reasons for concern, as the democracies have already shifted and might even come to face the threat of the rise of a new type of fascism (Snyder, 2018). On the other hand, empirical and theoretical evidence implicates that democracies are not under a threat, as populism did not affect the overall scale on which democratic freedoms are today. According to the Freedom House report from 2007 (a year marking the highest percentage of democratic countries in the world), 48 per cent of countries were ‘free’, and the one in 2017 indicates that this percentage reaches 45. However, despite populists emerging channels that allow for political participation

(Mudde, Kaltwasser, 2012), the rise of right-wing populism has deteriorated democratic institutions which have excluded many minority groups from full participation in the political and economic system (Kyle, Mounk, 2018). Further, as populism entails an idea that they represent people and exist only to work in protection of their interests and requests, right-wing populists perceive existing rules and norms of democracy as defining only the interests of intellectuals and civil servants who allow for illegitimate advantages on ethnic or religious outsiders (Kyle, Mounk, 2018). The strength of populism lies in their attempt to mobilize people against established power structures (Laclau, 2005) and thus, enhance the probabilities of formerly disengaged citizens participating in political affairs (Mudde, Kaltwasser, 2012). By doing so, populists are set to ‘beat the opponent’ and decrease the level of support this specific ‘other’ may have been receiving. Democratic system, the way it is constructed, can be potentially threatened, unless over the long run, the populist rhetoric produces a negative impact where people detach themselves from formal politics due to distrust towards political parties, institutions and the system in whole (Kyle, Mounk, 2018). Affirmatively, populist rule is linked to less media freedom, fewer civil liberties and fewer political rights (all being entailed features of democratic quality) while the levels of these are indeed declining and weakening democratic institutions (Freedom House, 2018). In sum, all this analysis supports the argument that right-wing populism more damages the democratic system, rather than helps sustain it, as the populist narrative influences the public’s opinion and when put into action via policies and bans, contributes to violations of certain liberties and rights.

### *Conclusion*

The thesis argued that the most recent success of right-wing populist parties has been triggered by the 2013-2015 migrant wave, due to the failures of existing authorities to deal with the crisis and deliver efficient measures to tackle the arising issues. Notion of populism, however, is not a recent phenomenon and can be traced to years way back before the migrant and refugee crisis

that hit Europe only in the last decade. A major advantage of this period, though, is the availability of large amount of research and data produced to follow on the rapid development of political discourse on both global and European scale. This thesis followed on the definitions of populism by both Cas Mudde and Philippe C. Schmitter, to discuss understanding of the concept and grasp on its different manifestations and distinct channels.

From the analyzed situation in Europe, it can be perceived how populist leadership can be facilitated by a very different set of concerns, such as high unemployment rates, breached security levels after several terrorist attacks and tensions over the migrant and refugee crisis, all which in contrast did not contribute to an alleviation of dire inequality. Hence, populism entails a bad connotation due to the circumstances it arises from and outcomes it produces. As already discussed, it is not strange for populism to produce opposing ideas and manifestations under the excuse that it is the “will of the people”. This explains why many European Union Member States settled for a climate of resentment and alienation.

Once all the gathered data on this specific matter has been taken into account, it can be concluded that the latest success of right-wing populist parties in the European Union has been fueled by the narrative which entails elements of nativism, racism, xenophobia and Islamophobia. Furthermore, many of the right-wing populist leaders have used gender equality as a concept to attempt to mobilize or at least, get closer to the female voters. This has, however, not been proved by a consistent research argument. As argued, the appeal of the populists has certainly grown in recent years, in particular due to the public's discontent over the status quo. Societies in Europe have changed in the last couple of years and numerous events that took place generated different emotions and opinion. Recent acts of terrorism have produced fear, whereas newly generated ethnic, religious and racial diversity produced unease among some members of European social communities. People perceive themselves as ignored and not having their voices heard, the exact thing that populists have taken into their own advantage, profiting off of emerging events and public distress, as they thrive in a place of opposition.

These changes in political climate are largely visible in politicians' discourse and introduced policy reforms. The paper has taken into account three EU Member States: Italy, Germany and Austria and analyzed the populist discourse during and after the time of recognized crisis found in the 2013-2015 migrant wave. In all three Member States, a trend of right-wing populist parties entering governing coalitions can be noticed. Further, the results of EU Parliamentary elections have also indicated a trend of rising populist vote share and the largest increase was perceived in Italy, with the Northern League reaching the highest percentage of votes. For all three states, right-wing populist parties remain among the leading ones on the list, but still not influencing the governing bodies of the EU to develop their stances in the rightward course. Despite the lack of more significant advances in the 2019 European parliamentary elections, right-wing populist agendas succeeded in being perceived as normalized and mainstreamed.

The atmosphere in the European Union after experiencing these trends lacks reaffirmation of human rights, as the level of respect for these has decreased in the majority of problems dealt with in the aftermath of the migrant wave. Populist leaders have shown a lack of empathy and promoted nativism and intolerance for diversity, forming a hostile environment for immigrants entering the European Union. Retaining power as the main priority suppressed the voices of tolerance and the appeal of the strongman put human lives in jeopardy. The stories of distant times of perceived national ethnic purity have gotten a comeback with nativist rhetoric recognized in Italy, Germany and Austria, as well as through anti-refugee policies, introduced by some of the other EU Member States leaders (e.g. the president of Hungary Viktor Orbán). Chancellor of Austria, Sebastian Kurz, is no exception when it comes to bans and anti-refugee policies, including a direct opposition to visible manifestations of Muslim belief. As previously discussed, Kurz expressed Islamophobic perceptions of the situation and introduced bans on niqab, directly violating freedoms of expression and religious practice of not only immigrants, but some of the Austrian largest minority groups as well. The whole movement expressing far right concerns about the “Islamization” of Europe are argued to also be the result from

aggressive secularism rather than nativist populism (Raj, 2020). Nevertheless, the introduced measures risk producing alienation and stigmatization rather than integration of people in European communities. Furthermore, these have had an effect on democratic institutions, undermining some of its core values, which were initially argued to have been discredited by the incoming foreigners. This only depicts how fragile values are, in particular those of human rights, as they rest on principles of understanding others and empathizing with their struggles and needs. This shift in values and populist intentions inevitably pose an existential threat to the system of representative democracy and its institutions. Schmitter's definition of populism entails a common ground for the development of populism and it is vested in dysfunctional political institutions, and populism is thus one way of filling up the holes and "fixing" system failures. System failures are also perceived to be "fixed" by investing in the role of preserving one's nation. According to right-wing populists, this role has been "naturally" assigned to women, as mothers and care-givers, thus reinstating the anachronistic perception of gender. Gender itself, however, has been attached to anti-immigration, Islamophobic and xenophobic stances through introduction of politics of fear and perception of immigrants as a threat to Western women. This threat is largely conceived in religious and cultural differences, which are seen as an obstacle to immigrant's integration in the Western society. Also, Muslim religious practices are depicted as oppressive to women and thus, numerous bans and regulations have been introduced by the right-wing parties in that regard. The thesis encompassed three EU Member States – Germany, Austria and Italy in order to test the two hypotheses. Both hypotheses have been confirmed and further discussed with the approach of content and data analysis, thus answering the research questions. Also, the thesis has contributed to a broader understanding of gender in the populist narrative, leaving the space for further research, in particular within the area of female voters and the effect of populist narrative on the increase of female support for right-wing populist parties. The thesis has its limitations and possible shortcomings which could have probably been improved with a collection of new

data and the use of different variables to explain the hypotheses. Some of the suggestions for future may entail the analysis of position of women as leaders of right-wing populist parties and how such position reflects on both female and male support respectively. Of course, such analysis placed in the context of immigration could potentially answer the question on why women support opposition parties and in broaden the understanding of gender in the populist context. Nevertheless, the final discussion of the thesis related recent electoral success of right-wing populist parties to democracy and its institutions. Migrant crisis has shown that the European Union does not have a single stance and how its founding principles (unity, freedom of movement, human rights) have been brought into question. This uncertainty encourages distrust and outright hostility, leading to an open xenophobic and racist discourse. The question is how to find a solution to the crisis and will the EU Member states be able to deal with the situation that poses a challenge to accept living with different cultures; or will the discrepancy continue disrupting the liberal democracies and subject the EU to destabilization?



## *Bibliography*

Ansa (2017), *Migrant 'invasion funded by EU' – Salvini*. ANSA. Available at: [https://www.ansa.it/english/news/2017/05/29/migrant-invasion-funded-by-eu-salvini\\_43c9b38b-aba5-4818-9304-623378e38068.html](https://www.ansa.it/english/news/2017/05/29/migrant-invasion-funded-by-eu-salvini_43c9b38b-aba5-4818-9304-623378e38068.html) (Accessed on: March 7, 2020)

Arzheimer, K. (2008), *Protest, neo-liberalism or anti-immigrant sentiment: What motivates the voters of the extreme right in Western Europe?*. *Zeitschrift für Vergleichende Politikwissenschaft*, 2(2), pp. 173–197.

Arzheimer, K. (2009), *Contextual factors and the extreme right vote in Western Europe, 1980–2002*. *American Journal of Political Science* 53(2), pp. 259–275.

Auel, K. (2018), *The Champions of Euroscepticism? Austria's citizens and the EU*. Trans European Policy Studies Association. TEPSA Briefs. Available at: <http://www.tepsa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/TEPSA-brief-Austria-Auel-in-template.pdf> (Accessed on: 27.08.2020)

Avanza, M. (2010), *The Northern League and its "innocuous" xenophobia*. In A. Mammone & G. Veltri (Eds.), *Italy today*. pp. 131–142. London, UK: Routledge.

Banulescu-Bogdan, N., and Fratzke, S. (2015), *Europe's Migration Crisis in Context: Why Now and What Next?*, Migration Policy Institute. Available at: <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/europe's-migration-crisis-context-why-now-and-what-next> (Accessed on: February 12, 2020)

Baresel, J. (2018), *How "Right-Wing Populism" Succeeded in Austria*, Crisis Magazine, Available at: <https://www.crisismagazine.com/2018/how-right-wing-populism-succeeded-in-austria> (Accessed on: March 4, 2020)

Bartholin, K. (2019), Interview for the Euronews, *Why Europe is still fighting the war on terror*, Euronews, Available at: <https://www.euronews.com/2019/03/19/why-europe-is-still-fighting-the-war-on-terror> (Accessed on: February 12, 2020)

Bathke, B. (2019), *Austria's governing FPÖ party publishes anti-migrant poem comparing migrants with rats*. Info Migrants website. Available at: <https://www.infomigrants.net/en/post/16459/austria-s-governing-fpoe-party-publishes-anti-migrant-poem-comparing-migrants-with-rats>

BBC (2020), *Germany's AfD: How right-wing is nationalist Alternative for Germany?*. BBC News. Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-37274201> (Accessed on: March 5, 2020)

Benton, S. (1998), *Founding Fathers and Earth Mothers: Women's Place at the "Birth" of Nations*, in Charles, N. and Hintjens, H. (eds) *Gender, Ethnicity and Political Ideologies*. pp. 27–45. London: Routledge

Betz, H. (1994), *Radical Right-Wing Populism in Western Europe*. The Macmillan Press LTD. UK. DOI 10.1007/978-1-349-23547-6

Brader T. (2005), *Striking a responsive chord: how political ads motivate and persuade voters by appealing to emotions*. *American Journal of Political Science*. 49, pp. 338–405. DOI: 10.1111/j.0092-5853.2005.00130.x

Bohmelt, T., Bove, V., Nussio, E. (2019), *Can Terrorism Abroad Influence Migration Attitudes at Home?*. *American Journal of Political Science*. DOI: 10.1111/ajps.12494

Castel, R. (2005), *Die Stärkung des Sozialen. In Leben im neuen Wohlfahrtsstaat*. Hamburg: Hamburger Edition.

Chemaly, S. (2017), *Under Trump, we are all women*. Open Democracy. Available at: <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/5050/under-trump-we-are-all-women/> (Accessed on: March 14, 2020)

Coakley, J. (2004), *Mobilizing the Past: Nationalist Images of History*. *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics*, 10:4, 531-560, DOI: 10.1080/1353711049090900340

Corbetta, P. (2010), *Electoral Swings of the Northern League*, in R. D'Alimonte, and A. Chiaramonte (Eds.), *Proporzionale se vi pare. Le elezioni politiche del 2008*, Bologna: Il Mulino, pp. 107-128

Daldorph, B. (2016), *Frauke 'Adolfina' Petry: the anti-immigrant, anti-Islam threat to Merkel*. *France 24*. Available at: <https://www.france24.com/en/20160905-germany-afd-frauke-petry-right-immigrant-election-merkel> (Accessed on: March 15, 2020)

Davis, L., Deole, S. (2017), *Immigration and the Rise of Far-Right Parties in Europe*. Ifo DICE Report. Vol. 15. Available at: <https://www.ifo.de/DocDL/dice-report-2017-4-davis-deole-december.pdf>

Dazzi, Z. (2017), *Lega Nord condannata a Milano per discriminazione: "I profughi non sono clandestine"*. *La Repubblica*. Available at:

[https://milano.repubblica.it/cronaca/2017/02/23/news/clandestini\\_lega\\_condanna\\_discriminazione\\_profughi-158956059/](https://milano.repubblica.it/cronaca/2017/02/23/news/clandestini_lega_condanna_discriminazione_profughi-158956059/) (Accessed on: March 23, 2020)

Dennison, J., and Geddes, A. (2018), *A Rising Tide? The Salience of Immigration and the Rise of Anti-Immigration Political Parties in Western Europe*. *The Political Quarterly*

Deutsche Welle (2017), *Make Austria Great Again – the rapid rise of Sebastian Kurz*, Deutsche Welle. Available at: <https://www.dw.com/en/make-austria-great-again-the-rapid-rise-of-sebastian-kurz/a-40313720> (Accessed on: March 15, 2020)

Deutsche Welle (2019), *Austria's FPÖ Freedom Party: A turbulent history*. Deutsche Welle, Available at: <https://www.dw.com/en/austrias-fpö-freedom-party-a-turbulent-history/a-48789817> (Accessed on: March 15, 2020)

European Council (2016), *EU-Turkey Statement*, 18 March 2016. Available at: <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2016/03/18-eu-turkey-statement/> (Accessed on: February 12, 2020)

Fenkart, S. (2018), *The Rise of Populism in Europe*, International Institute for Peace. Available at:

[https://static1.squarespace.com/static/58a2c691b3db2b3c6990193a/t/5b56f2c02b6a282123c1595f/1532424900817/2018-07-+The+Rise+of+Populism\\_Stephanie+Fenkart.pdf](https://static1.squarespace.com/static/58a2c691b3db2b3c6990193a/t/5b56f2c02b6a282123c1595f/1532424900817/2018-07-+The+Rise+of+Populism_Stephanie+Fenkart.pdf)

Fernández-García, B. (2018), *Radical right-wing populism in Europe, a threat to democracy?*. Issue on Nationalism and Far-Right (I). *The Economy Journal*. Available at: <https://www.theeconomyjournal.eu/texto-diario/mostrar/1020665/radical-right-wing-populism-in-europe-threat-to-democracy>

Flecker J., Hentges G., Balazs G. (2007), *Potentials of Political Subjectivity and the Various Approaches to the Extreme Right: Findings in the Qualitative Research*. 60, in J. Flecker (ed.) *Changing Working Life and the Appeal of the Extreme Right*. Aldershot.

Flemming, M., Gilloz, O., Hairy, N. (2017), *Getting to know you: mapping the anti-feminist face of right-wing populism in Europe*. *Open Democracy*. Available at: <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/can-europe-make-it/mapping-anti-feminist-face-of-right-wing-populism-in-europe/>

Ford, G. (2014), *How can the European left deal with the threat posed by xenophobia?* Center for Labour and Social Studies. London, 7.

Freedom House (2019), *Country report: Austria, Freedom in the World 2019*. Available at: <https://freedomhouse.org/country/austria/freedom-world/2019>

Freedom House (2019), *Country report: Italy, Freedom in the World 2019*. Available at: <https://freedomhouse.org/country/italy/freedom-world/2019>

Freedom House (2019), *Country report: Germany, Freedom in the World 2019*. Available at: <https://freedomhouse.org/country/germany/freedom-world/2019>

Freedom House (2018), *Report: Freedom in the World 2018 - New Zealand*. Available at: <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2018/new-zealand>

Freedom House (2018), *Freedom in the World 2018: Democracy in Crisis*. Available at: <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/freedom-world-2018>.

Fickes, T. (2019), *Narrative Strategy in a Populist Moment*, Narrative Initiative. Available at: <https://narrativeinitiative.org/blog/narrative-strategy-populist-moment/>

Gady, F. (2017), *Austria Tilts to the Right: The “Respectable Populism” that brought Kurz and the OVP to Victory*. Foreign Affairs. Available at: <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/austria/2017-10-15/austria-tilts-right> (Accessed on: August 27, 2020)

Garbagnoli, S. (2018), *Matteo Salvini, renaturalizing the racial and sexual boundaries of democracy*. Open Democracy. Available at: <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/can-europe-make-it/matteo-salvini-renaturalizing-racial-and-sexual-boundaries-of-dem/>

Gardberg, A. (1993), *Against the Stranger, the Gangster and the Establishment: A Comparative Study of the Ideologies of the Swedish Ny Demokrati, the German Republikaner, the French Front National and the Belgian Vlaams Blok*. SSKH Research Report No. 27. Swedish School of Social Science, University of Helsinki.

Gattinara, P.C., Froio, C. (2014), *The Risk of growing Populism and the European Elections: Opposition in the EU and opposition to the EU: Soft and hard Euroscepticism in Italy in the time of austerity*. Institute of European Democrats. Available at: <https://www.iedonline.eu/download/2014/bratislava/IED-2014-Opposition-in-the-EU-and-opposition-to-the-EU-Pietro-Castelli-Gattinara-Caterina-Froio.pdf>

Gedmin, J. (2019), *Right-wing populism in Germany: Muslims and minorities after the 2015 refugee crisis*. Brookings Report. Available at: <https://www.brookings.edu/research/right-wing-populism-in-germany-muslims-and-minorities-after-the-2015-refugee-crisis/>

- Gehrke, L. (2020), *Sebastian Kurz aims to 'protect young girls' from effects of immigration with headscarf ban*. Available at: <https://www.politico.eu/article/sebastian-kurz-aims-to-protect-young-girls-from-effects-of-immigration-with-headscarf-ban/> (Accessed on: March 15, 2020)
- Giger, N., Holli, A. M., Lefkofridi, Z. (2019), *Left-Right Ideology and Political Gender Stereotypes in European Societies*, Paper presented at European Conference of Politics and Gender, Amsterdam 4-6 July 2019
- Gilloz, O., Hairy, N., Flemming, M. (2017), *Getting to know you: mapping the anti-feminist face of right-wing populism in Europe*. Open Democracy. Available at: <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/can-europe-make-it/mapping-anti-feminist-face-of-right-wing-populism-in-europe/>
- Graff, C. (2010), *Confronting Poverty Weak States and U.S. National Security – Chapter 3: Poverty, development and violent extremism in weak states*. Brookings Institution Press, Washington D.C. Available at: [https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/2010\\_confronting\\_poverty.pdf](https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/2010_confronting_poverty.pdf)
- Giuffrida, A. (2019), *Salvini's far-right party tops Italy's EU election polls*. The Guardian, Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2019/may/27/matteo-salvini-far-right-league-party-tops-italy-eu-election-polls> (Accessed on: March 24, 2020)
- Golebiowska, E.A. (1999), *Gender Gap in Political Tolerance*. Political Behavior. 21:1, pp. 43-66. DOI: 10.1023/A:1023396429500
- Habermas, J. (1988), *Legitimation crisis*. New Ed edition (25 Aug. 1988). Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Halla, M., A. F. Wagner and J. Zweimüller (2017), *Immigration and Voting for the Far Right*. Journal of the European Economic Association, forthcoming.
- Halikiopoulou, D. (2018), *A Right-wing Populist Momentum? A Review of 2017 Elections Across Europe*. JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies. DOI:10.1111/jcms.12769
- Halikiopoulou, D., Mock, S. and Vasilopoulou, S. (2013), *The Civic Zeitgeist: Nationalism and Liberal Values in the European Radical Right*. Nations and Nationalism. Vol. 19, No. 1, pp. 107–127.
- Huber, R. A., & Ruth, S. P. (2017), *Mind the Gap! Populism, Participation and Representation in Europe*. Swiss Political Science Review. 23(4), pp.462–484, DOI:10.1111/spsr.12280

Huber, R. A., & Schimpf, C. H. (2017a), *On the Distinct Effects of Left-Wing and Right-Wing Populism on Democratic Quality*. *Politics and Governance*. 5(4), pp. 146–165. DOI: 10.17645/pag.v5i4.919

Huber, R. A., & Schimpf, C. H. (2017b), *Populism and Democracy – Theoretical and Empirical Considerations*. In R. C. Heinisch, C. Holtz-Bacha, & O. Mazzoleni (Eds.). *Political Populism: A Handbook* (pp. 329–344). Baden-Baden: Nomos.

Huber, R. A., & Schimpf, C. H. (2016a), *A Drunken Guest in Europe? Zeitschrift für vergleichende Politikwissenschaft*. 10(2), pp. 103–129, DOI:10.1007/s12286-016-0302-0

Huber, R. A., & Schimpf, C. H. (2016b), *Friend or Foe? Testing the Influence of Populism on Democratic Quality in Latin America*. *Political Studies*. 64(4), pp. 872–889, DOI:10.1111/1467-9248.12219

Immerzeel, T. (2015), *Voting for a Change: The Democratic Lure of Populist Radical Right Parties in Voting Behaviour*, unpublished dissertation, Utrecht University, ICS

Ivarsflaten, E. (2007), *What unites right-wing populists in Western Europe? Re-examining grievance mobilization models in seven successful cases*. *Comparative Political Studies*, vol. 41 (1), 2008, pp. 3–23. DOI: 10.1177/0010414006294168

Ivarsflaten, E. (2008), *What unites right-wing populists in Western Europe? Re-examining grievance mobilization models in seven successful cases*. *Comparative Political Studies*, 41(1), pp. 3–23.

Jurgens, J. (2019), *Rethinking Europe through Refugees, Populism, and "Crisis"*. Council for European Studies. Available at: <https://www.europenowjournal.org/2019/03/04/rethinking-europe-through-refugees-populism-and-crisis/> (Accessed on: February 11, 2020)

Kallis, A. (2014), *The radical right in contemporary Europe*. Ankara: Seta. Available at: [https://file.setav.org/Files/Pdf/20150102163845\\_the-radical-right-in-contemporary-europe-pdf.pdf](https://file.setav.org/Files/Pdf/20150102163845_the-radical-right-in-contemporary-europe-pdf.pdf)

Kapadia, A. (2020). *Why progressive nationalism is losing out to an aggressive kind*. Live Mint. Available at: <https://www.livemint.com/opinion/online-views/why-progressive-nationalism-is-losing-out-to-an-aggressive-kind-11581527200339.html> (Accessed on: April 2, 2020)

Karolewski, I.P., Benedikter, R. (2018), *Europe's refugee and migrant crisis*. *Politique Européenne*. 60(2), p. 98. DOI: 10.3917/poeu.060.0098

- Kaufmann, E. (2018), *Whiteshift: Populism, Immigration and the Future of White Majorities*, pp. 97
- Kemper, A. (2016), *Foundation of the Nation: How Political Parties and Movements Are Radicalising Others in Favour of Conservative Family Values and Against Tolerance, Diversity, and Progressive Gender Politics in Europe*. Friedrich Ebert Stiftung
- Keskinen, S., Norocel, C. & Jørgensen, M. (2016), *The politics and policies of welfare chauvinism under the economic crisis*. *Critical Social Policy* 36(3), pp. 321–329
- Keyler, W. (1975), *Academy and Community: The Foundation of the French Historical Profession*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, p. 54
- Kuhar, R., Paternotte, D. (2017), *Anti-gender campaigns in Europe: Mobilizing against equality*, Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield
- Kitschelt, H. and McGann, A.J. (2005), *The radical right in the Alps: Evolution of support for the Swiss SVP and the Austrian FPÖ*. *Party Politics* 11(1), pp. 147–171
- Kofman, E. (1998), When Society Was Simple: Gender and Ethnic Divisions and the Far and New Right in France, in Charles, N. and Hintjens, H. (eds) *Gender, Ethnicity and Political Ideologies*, pp. 27–45. London: Routledge.
- Kyle, J., Mounk, Y. (2018), *The Populist Harm to Democracy: An Empirical Assessment*, The Tony Blair Institute for Global Change. Available at: <https://institute.global/policy/populist-harm-democracy-empirical-assessment>
- Köttig, M., Bitzan, R., Peto, M. (2017), *Gender and far right politics in Europe*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan
- Laclau, E. (2005), *On Populist Reason*, London: Verso
- Lees, C. (2018), *The “Alternative for Germany”: The rise of right-wing populism at the heart of Europe*. *Politics*, 38(3), pp. 295–310, DOI:10.1177/0263395718777718
- Lefkofridi, Z. (2019), *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly: Populisms and Gender Equality*, Symposium: On Populisms, Comments on Schmitter's „The Vices and Virtues of 'Populisms'“, *Sociologica*, 13 (1). DOI:10.6092/issn.1971-8853/9745
- Lehmann, A. (2019), *German Greens are on the rise, but the nation is divided*, *The Guardian*, Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/jun/24/german-greens-rise-nation-divided> (Accessed on: April 18, 2020)

- Levinger, M. (2017), *Love, Fear, Anger: The Emotional Arc of the Populist Rhetoric*. *Narrative and Conflict* 6 (1), pp. 1–21
- Lorenz, C. (2014), *Blurred Lines: History, Memory and the Experience of Time*. *International Journal for History, Culture and Modernity* 2 (1), pp. 43–62. DOI:10.18352/hcm.462
- Löffler, M. (2018), *Alles Retro? Die neu-konservative Wende in Österreich*, *Femina Politica*, 27(1), pp. 121–127. DOI:10.3224/feminapolitica.v27i1.12
- Löffler, M. (2020), *Populist attraction: the symbolic uses of masculinities in the Austrian general election campaign 2017*, *NORMA*, 15:1, pp. 10-25, DOI:10.1080/18902138.2020.1715118
- March, L. (2012). *Radical Left Parties in Europe*. London: Routledge
- Maggini, N. (2013), *La perdita di consenso dei partiti tradizionali e l'emergere di un nuovo attore politico*, In L. De Sio, M. Cataldi and F. De Lucia (Eds.), *Dossier CISE: Le Elezioni Politiche del 2013*, Roma: Centro Italiano Studi Elettorali
- Martinez, M. (2015), *Migrant vs. Refugee: What's the difference?*, CNN, Available at: <https://edition.cnn.com/2015/09/08/world/what-is-difference-migrants-refugees/index.html>
- Meret, S. (2015), *Charismatic female leadership and gender: Pia Kjærsgaard and the Danish People's Party*. *Patterns of Prejudice* 49(1–2), pp. 81–102.
- Meret, S., Siim, B. (2017), *A Janus-faced feminism: Gender in women-led right-wing populist parties*, University of Lausanne, Switzerland, European Conference on Politics and Gender (ECPG), Available at: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/332703804\\_A\\_Janus-faced\\_feminism\\_Gender\\_in\\_women-led\\_right-wing\\_populist\\_parties](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/332703804_A_Janus-faced_feminism_Gender_in_women-led_right-wing_populist_parties)
- Meyer, T., Miller, B. (2015). *The niche party concept and its measurement*. *Party Politics*, 21(2), pp. 259-271, DOI: 10.117/1354068812472582
- Mounk, Y. (2018), *The People vs. Democracy: Why Our Freedom is in Danger and How to Save It*, Harvard University Press
- Mudde, Cas (2000), *The Ideology of the Extreme Right*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Mudde, C. (2004), *The Populist Zeitgeist, Government and Opposition*, 39:4, pp. 541-563. DOI:10.1111/j.1477-7053.2004.00135.x



Mudde, C. (2007), *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Mudde, C., Kaltwasser, C.R. (2012), *Populism in Europe and the Americas: Threat or corrective for democracy?*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Mudde, C. (2018), *On Extremism and democracy in Europe: three years later*, opendemocracy.net, Available at: <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/can-europe-make-it/on-extremism-and-democracy-in-europe-three-years-later/>

Mudde, C. (2019), *The Far Right Today*, Polity Press

Mudde, C., and Kaltwasser, C. R. (2017), *Populism: A Very Brief Introduction*, Oxford University Press

Müller, J.W. (2016), *What Is Populism?*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press

Nirel, L.R. (2017), *Populism and Gender*, Cogito - Multidisciplinary Research Journal, 3, pp. 42-50

OECD Report (2015), *Is this humanitarian migration crisis different?*, Migration Policy Debates, Available at: <https://www.oecd.org/migration/Is-this-refugee-crisis-different.pdf>

Otto, A.H., and Steinhardt, M.F., (2017), *The Relationship between Immigration and the Success of Far-Right Political Parties in Germany*, ifo DICE Report, December, Volume 15, Available at: <https://www.ifo.de/DocDL/dice-report-2017-4-otto-steinhardt-december.pdf>

Pew Research Center (2016), *Number of Refugees to Europe Surges to Record 1.3 Million in 2015*, Available at: <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2016/08/02/number-of-refugees-to-europe-surges-to-record-1-3-million-in-2015/> (Accessed on April 6, 2020)

Peter, L. (2015), *Migrant crisis: Who does the EU send back?*, BBC News, Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-34190359> (Accessed on April 6, 2020)

Rydgren, J. (2003), *Meso level reasons for racism and xenophobia: Some converging and diverging effects of radical right populism in France and Sweden*. *European Journal of Social Theory* 6(1), pp. 45–68

Quinn, E. (2016), *The Refugee and Migrant Crisis: Europe's Challenge*, *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review*, Vol. 105, No. 419, Europe in Crisis, pp. 275-285, Messenger Publications, Available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24871398>

Raj, K. (2020), *Human rights are at stake in Europe fight against nativist populism going mainstream*, Euro News, Available at: <https://www.euronews.com/2020/02/20/human-rights-are-at-stake-in-europe-fight-against-nativist-populism-going-mainstream-view> (Accessed on: March 15, 2020)

Reuters (2017), *Factbox: Key policies of Austria's conservative/far-right coalition*, Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-austria-politics-coalition-policies-f/factbox-key-policies-of-austrias-conservative-far-right-coalition-idUSKBN1EC1CD> (Accessed on: August 27, 2020)

Reuters (2019), *Austria far-right leader ramps up anti-immigration rhetoric before European elections*, Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-austria-immigration/austria-far-right-leader-ramps-up-anti-immigration-rhetoric-before-european-elections-idUSKCN1SB0C2> (Accessed on: April 27, 2020)

Reuters (2020), *Austria says it will stop any migrants trying to rush its border*, Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-syria-security-austria/austria-says-it-will-stop-any-migrants-trying-to-rush-its-border-idUSKBN20O2CS> (Accessed on: April 27, 2020)

Rooduijn, M. (2018), *What unites the voter bases of populist parties? Comparing the electorates of 15 populist parties*. *European Political Science Review*, 10(3), pp. 351–368

Rooduijn, M., Van Kessel, S., Froio, C., Pirro, A., De Lange, S., Halikiopoulou, D., Lewis, P., Mudde, C. & Taggart, P. (2019), *The PopuList: An Overview of Populist, Far Right, Far Left and Eurosceptic Parties in Europe*, Available at: [www.popu-list.org](http://www.popu-list.org).

Ross, K., Sreberny, A. (2000), *Women in the House: Media Representation of British Politicians*, in Annabelle Sreberny and Liesbeth Van Zoonen (eds.), *Gender, Politics and Communication*, New York, NY: Hampton Press, pp. 79–99

Sarrasin, O., Fasel, N., Green, Eva G.T., Helbling, M. (2015), *When sexual threat cues shape attitudes toward immigrants: the role of insecurity and benevolent sexism*, *Front Psychol.* 2015; 6: 1033, DOI: 10.3389/fpsyg.2015.01033

Saull, R. (2013), *Capitalism, crisis and the far right in the neoliberal era*. *Journal of International Relations and Development*. 18/1, p. 7.

Sayan-Cengiz, F., Tekin, C. (2019), *The 'gender turn' of the populist radical right*, *Open Democracy*, Available at: <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/rethinking-populism/the-gender-turn-of-the-populist-radical-right/>

Schmitter, P. C. (2019), *The Vices and Virtues of “Populisms”*, *Sociologica*, 13(1), pp. 75–81, Available at: <https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.1971-8853/9391>

Schultheis, E. (2019), *The Far Right Wants to Gut the EU, Not Kill it*, *The Atlantic*, Available at: <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2019/05/far-right-politicians-euroskeptics-election-europe/588316/> (Accessed on: August 27, 2020)

Schultheis, E. (2017), *A New Right-Wing Movement Rises in Austria*, *The Atlantic*, Available at: <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2017/10/austria-immigration-sebastian-kurz/542964/> (Accessed on: April 26, 2020)

Scrinzi, F. (2013), *Women’s Activism and Gender Relations in the Northern League (Lega Nord) party*, 7<sup>th</sup> ECPR General Conference 4<sup>th</sup> September 2013 – 7<sup>th</sup> September 2013, Sciences Po Bordeaux, Bordeaux, France

Siim, B. et al. (2016), *D9.7 Report of case studies on gender equality as a focus point of national and nationalist discourses*. Available online at: <http://beucitizen.eu/wp-content/uploads/Report-9-7-Version-16-06-2016.pdf>

Snyder, T. (2017), *On Tyranny*, New York: Tim Duggan Books

Spierings, N., Zaslove, A. (2015), *Gendering the vote for populist radical-right parties*, *Patterns of Prejudice*, 49(1–2), pp. 135–162

Spindler, W. (2015), *2015: The year of Europe's refugee crisis*, UN Refugee Agency UNHCR, Available at: <https://www.unhcr.org/news/stories/2015/12/56ec1ebde/2015-year-europes-refugee-crisis.html> (Accessed on: February 6, 2020)

Staudenmaier, R. (2019), *'The New Germans': Far-right AfD forms immigrant supporters' group*, *Deutsche Welle*, Available at: <https://www.dw.com/en/the-new-germans-far-right-afd-forms-immigrant-supporters-group/a-47966799> (Accessed on: March 5, 2020)

Steinmayr, A. (2016), *Exposure to Refugees and Voting for the FarRight: (Unexpected) Results from Austria*, IZA Discussion Paper No. 9790

Sofos, S. (2020), *Charting the waters: populism as a gendered phenomenon*, *Open Democracy*, Available at: <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/rethinking-populism/charting-waters-populism-gendered-phenomenon/>

Taggart, P., Szczerbiak, A. (2004), *Contemporary Euroscepticism in the party systems of the European Union candidate states of Central and Eastern Europe*. *European Journal of Political Research*, 43(1), pp. 1-27

Taş, H. (2020), The chronopolitics of national populism. *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power*. DOI:10.1080/1070289X.2020.1735160

Taube, F. (2018), *Women increasingly drawn to right-wing populist parties, study shows*, Deutsche Welle, Available at: <https://www.dw.com/en/women-increasingly-drawn-to-right-wing-populist-parties-study-shows/a-45284465> (Accessed on: April 15, 2020)

UN Refugee Agency, (2015), *2015: The year of Europe's refugee crisis*, UNHCR Report, Available at: <https://www.unhcr.org/news/stories/2015/12/56ec1ebde/2015-year-europes-refugee-crisis.html> (Accessed on: February 6, 2020)

Urbinati, N. (2019), *Political theory of populism*, *Annual Review of Political Science* 22, pp. 111-127.

U.S. Library of Congress (n.d.), *The Austrian People's Party*, *Country Studies: Austria*. Available at: <http://countrystudies.us/austria/119.htm>

U.S. Library of Congress (n.d.), *The Freedom Party of Austria*, *Country Studies: Austria*. Available at: <http://countrystudies.us/austria/120.htm>

Venner, F. (1997), *Une Autre Manie`re d`etre Fe`ministe?*, in Lesselier, C. and Venner, F. (eds) *L`extre`me Droite et les Femmes*, pp. 133–51. Villeurbanne. France: Editions Golias.

Zaun, N. (2017), *EU Asylum Policies: The Power of Strong Regulating States*. Basingstoke. Palgrave MacMillan.

Zaun, N. (2017), *States as gatekeepers in EU Asylum Politics: Explaining the Non-Adoption of a Refugee Quota System*. *Journal of Common Market Studies*. DOI: 10.1111/jcms.12663

Wear, R. (eds.) (2015), Aurélian Mondon, *The mainstreaming of the extreme right in France and Australia: A populist hegemony?*. Ashgate: Farnham, 2013 (7), p. 229

Willner, A.R. (1984), *The Spellbinders, Charismatic Political Leadership*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.