

The Risks of growing Populism and the European elections:

Populism in France: 2014 European elections at stake?

Author: Mathieu Camescasse



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Mathieu Camescasse ¹

After demonstrating strategies of populist political parties of only answering people's personal beliefs and ideological preferences, historical circumstances will be analysed to explain the development of populist political parties in France and their particular progress during each European election, with a focus on Extreme-Right and Extreme-Left parties. Nevertheless, despite the media attention on a possible uprising risk of populism within the European Union, populist political parties will not have the capacity of blocking the European Union decision-making procedures and modifying the European Union structure. The French example of the Front National becoming the first political party at the upcoming European elections will not therefore have major consequences at the European level. Dissimilarities between populist political parties are therefore an obstacle for having greater influential roles and lower their ability to promote their aims and visions on Europe.

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¹ Politicist
m.c.camescasse@alumni.lse.ac.uk

1. Introduction

The lack of knowledge of the European institutions and Union – especially amongst young generations, linked to the democratic deficit and an important shift in European integration during the 1990s, could provide an explanation for the emergence of Euro-scepticism and populist political parties. At the European level, the development of a political identity and democratic infrastructures could be seen as key elements to understanding the emergence of extreme political parties – political parties struggling against the current political system and their desire for a fundamental renewal. Since the 1990s, the rise of extreme political parties has been an important issue; recent development in the European Union and the results of the last elections in different European countries, such as in France, emphasise the importance of a study on this particular issue.

This will also be one of the most important problems we will have to face in the 2014 European elections. Nonetheless, we need to understand the concept of populism and its consequences.

The question of populism is particularly important nowadays and more especially in the coming months before the European elections. Nevertheless, this word is in fact polysemous. A first general introduction to this political term could be given by this double definition: “the belief that the instincts of the masses are the only legitimate guide to political action; or a movement that appeals to popular instincts, resentments or aspirations².”

However, nowadays, we need to go further for being able to define populism by using a more historical approach and employ this term for our analysis during this research: “The term takes its name from a US 19th-century movement when farmers expressed their disillusion that they had been let down by false political promises and left to drift into debt³.” This political approach is not only reserved for non-mainstream political parties such as Extreme-Right or Extreme-Left political parties. We can therefore see with the example of the United-Kingdom that mainstream parties are also prone to using this political strategy: “British politicians often allow their policies or their rhetoric to become populist – the

² Heywood, A., 2007. *Politics*. 3rd ed. Basingstoke and New-York: Palgrave Macmillan, p. 456.

³ Jones, B., 2004. *Dictionary of British Politics*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Thatcherite championing of capital punishment in the 1980s, for example – but they usually fall in line behind more responsible policies eventually, as in the case of home secretary Douglas Hurd’s firm rejection of the death penalty during the key 1980s debates⁴.” Populism is therefore not only limited to populist political parties.

Nevertheless, I will analyse in greater depth the problem posed by populism with the Extreme-Right parties. Mainstream political parties are less keen on only using a populist strategy and they have internal checks-and-balances to control this particular use due to their participation in local, national and European governing institutions. In France, or within the European Union, Extreme-Left parties such as *Nouveau Parti anticapitaliste*⁵ (New Anticapitalist Party in English) and *Lutte Ouvrière*⁶ (Workers' Struggle in English) are virtually non-existent⁷. Some journalists considered Front de Gauche as a populist coalition, but taking into account Andrew Heywood’s definition of populism, as follows: “Movements or parties described as populist have been characterized by their claim to support the common people in the face of ‘corrupt’ economic or political elites. [...] Populist politicians therefore make a direct appeal to the people and claim to give expression to their deepest hopes and fears, all intermediary institutions being distrusted. Although populism may be linked, with any cause or ideology, it is often seen to be implicitly authoritarian, ‘populist’ democracy being the enemy of ‘pluralist’ democracy⁸”, we cannot consider this coalition of parties as populist. This alliance and its elected Members of Parliament (henceforth MPs) or Members of European Parliament (henceforth MEPs) have not an entire anti-system approach: at the European Parliament, its MEPs are part of the group European United Left-Nordic Green Left and participate in European Parliament committees legislative work; and at local and regional levels, this coalition shares power with Left mainstream political parties.

For this study, we may therefore only consider Extreme-Right parties as populist political parties. Giving a clear definition of Extreme-Right political parties is in fact quite difficult. This differs across authors and is not unanimously recognised by scholars, and even the concept differs from author to author who variously define this stream of political parties as being either Extreme-Right, far-right or radical right. Herbert Kitschelt therefore defines

⁴ *Idem*

⁵ This political party has any Member of national parliaments or European Parliament. This party was created in 2009 and only received 4.88% nationally of votes at the 2009 European elections.

⁶ This political party only received 1.2% nationally at the 2009 European elections.

⁷ The threshold for the European elections in France is 5%.

⁸ Heywood, A., 2007. *Politics. op. cit.*, p. 378.

this stream of political parties with the following characteristics and visions on democracy: “Radical right parties either explicitly reject democracy (regardless of their stance on xenophobia and racism), or they embrace democracy, but make xenophobic mobilisation against immigrants and insistence on a dominant national cultural paradigm obligatory for all residents the central planks of their policies⁹.” More precisely, according to Steven Lukes’ definition¹⁰, Extreme-Right political parties are against the Left and conservative-centre political parties, and more especially with regard to political issues; they are nationalists or localists, anti-immigrationists and racists, but he makes a difference between the Extreme-Right political parties and radical Right political parties, which I will not be considering for this research.

The French Extreme-Right could therefore be defined by different ideologies encountered during the last two centuries: “Since then, it has resurfaced many times under different forms such as Boulangism, *fin de siècle* Nationalism, 1930s Leagues, IV Republic Gaullism, Poujadism, and finally National-populism¹¹.” Therefore, nowadays, French Extreme-Right is based on a national-populist ideology; as a focus against the European Union.

In France, several Extreme-Right political parties exist but, only one can really compete in national, local and European elections: the *Front National*. This political party’s ideology is based on: “Both on nationalist appeal, veined with authoritarianism, racism, and anti-Semitism, and on an anti-system/anti-establishment appeal¹².” Nevertheless, as Piero Ignazi explains “the equation immigration + security = FN vote does not hold as such¹³” and his first explanation placed the ethnocentrism as one of the most important reasons for voting *Front National* in France, significantly more than racism¹⁴.

More historically, Piero Ignazi explains the change of ideology and a redefinition of values within the *Front National* during the second half of the 1990s; this political party had

⁹ Kitschelt, H., 2007. Growth and Persistence of the Radical Right in Postindustrial Democracies: Advances and Challenges in Comparative Research. *West European Politics*, 30(5), p. 1181.

¹⁰ Lukes, S., 2003. Epilogue: The Grand Dichotomy of the Twentieth Century. In: T. Ball & R. Bellamy, eds. *The Cambridge History of Twentieth Century Political Thought*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

¹¹ Ignazi, P., 2005. France: Prototype of the New Extreme Right. In: E. Carter, ed. *The Extreme Right In Western Europe*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, p. 99.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 121.

¹³ *Idem.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 122.

gradually become more populist: “After the 1995 presidential election success the FN accentuated its extremeness by declaring the ‘right of insurrection’ in the name of a ‘system alternative’. The FN denied any value or legitimacy to the democratic system by defining it false, formal, antipopular, anti-national, and so on. The populist reference became more and more pervasive in 1990s FN discourse¹⁵” and after the 1995 presidential election and just before the 1997 General elections, the *Front National* emphasised its populist attributes: “This dynamic touched its zenith in the Tenth party Congress held in Strasbourg in early 1997. The party showed off its organizational strength with a grandiose setting and reinstated its national-popular (and populist) standing¹⁶.”

We will question the capacity of populist political parties to blocking the European Union decision-making procedures. My hypothesis is that despite a potential high score of the *Front National*, which could become the first political party in France at the upcoming European elections, and of other populist political parties in other countries, these kinds of political parties will therefore face obstacles for gaining a greater influential role.

In order to respond to the growing concern about risks of populism at both national and European levels, we will therefore analyse the current situation at both European and French levels with a historical research on votes for populist political parties at presidential and European elections in France. Secondly, we will consider the possible development of a populist vote at the next 2014 European elections in France and within the European Union, and the reasons behind it. Eventually, we will question political objectives of these populist political parties and their relative strategies at the European and national level.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 119.

¹⁶ *Idem.*

2. Current situation both at the European and national level

At the European level, Extreme-Right political parties have known a slow but continuous development from the first direct European elections in 1979: “The number of Western European extreme right parties which had entered the national or European parliament had passed from 6 at the beginning of the 1980s to 10 by the end of 1980s, then arriving at 15 in the mid-1990s. Their share of votes more than doubled by rising from 4.75 per cent in the decade 1980–9 to 9.73 per cent in 1990–9¹⁷.” This slight increase is not homogeneous within the European Union.

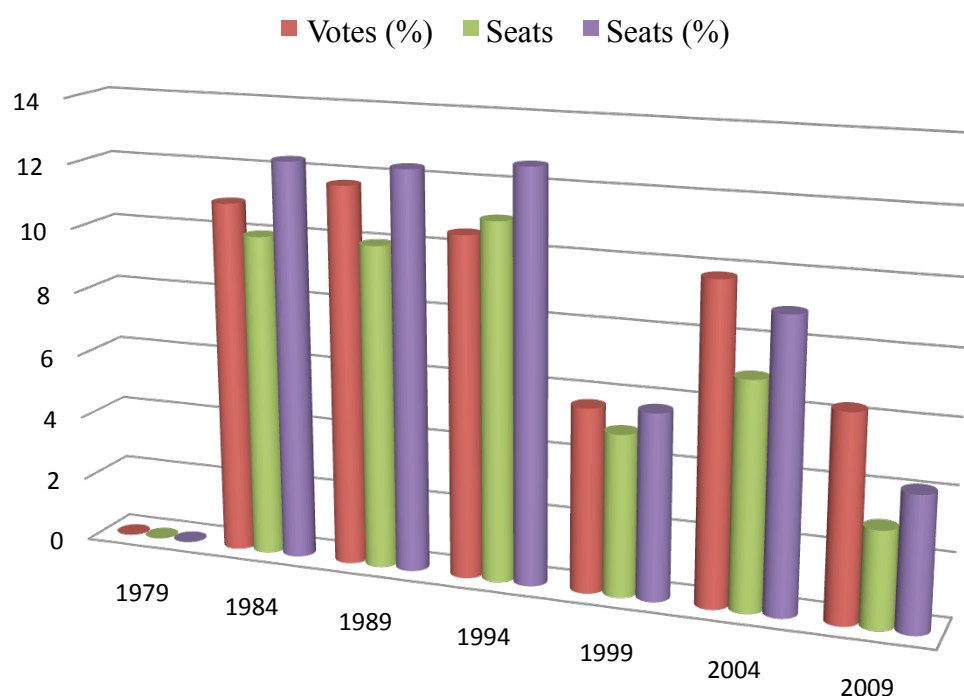
¹⁷ Ignazi, P., 2005. Introduction. In: E. Carter, ed. *The Extreme Right In Western Europe*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, p. 8.

At the French level, Extreme-Right political parties and more especially the *Front National* have known two prosperous decades throughout the 1980s and the 1990s with around ten MEPs elected at each European election; however, Extreme-Right political parties have known a decline in the 2000s, as we can see in Table 1 and Graph 1¹⁸

Table 1 Results of *Front National* at European elections since 1979^{19, 20}

Year	1979	1984	1989	1994	1999	2004	2009
Votes (%)	0	10.95	11.73	10.52	5.69	9.81	6.34

Graph 1 Results of *Front National* at European elections since 1979



We can observe, by comparing results from European and presidential elections, that there is no correlation between these results. Its popularity at national and local elections does

¹⁸ This graph represents the figures presented in table 1

¹⁹ Ministère de l'Intérieur, 2011. *Européennes / Les résultats / Elections*. [Online] Available at: <http://www.interieur.gouv.fr/Elections/Les-resultats/Europeennes> [Accessed 24 January 2014].

²⁰ De Boissieu, L., 2011. *Élection européenne 1979 1984 1989 1994 1999 2004 2009*. [Online] Available at: <http://www.france-politique.fr/elections-europeennes.htm> [Accessed 24 January 2014].

not have a direct effect on votes at the European elections. This effect is also a counter-example of the European elections being seen as second-order elections²¹, where electors are more prone to voting for anti-establishment and protest political parties, which are seen as being outside the political system.

Table 2 Results of *Front National* at French presidential elections since 1979²²

Year	1981	1988	1995	2002	2007	2012
Votes (%)	0	14.38	15	16.86	10.44	17.90

The *Front National* has therefore only three seats and this delegation represents less than 5% of the French delegation at the European Parliament. This is the sixth delegation after *Union pour un Mouvement Populaire* (European People’s Party), *Parti Socialiste* (Party of European Socialists), *Europe Ecologie-Les Verts* (European Green Party), *Mouvement Démocrate* (European Democratic Party) and *Front de Gauche* (Party of European Left). Their MEPs are not seated with a European political group. Their influence is therefore quite insignificant: no committees or delegation positions have been gained and their MEPs are often absent: based on participation²³, they ranked 536th, 727th and 731st.

After analysing at the national level, Extreme-Right political parties, we will observe how Extreme-Right political parties have organised themselves and analyse their political influences from the first European elections in 1979 to the present.

An important issue with the presence of Extreme-Right political parties at the European level is the absence of a political group at the European Parliament. A European political group could be defined as follows: “In the European Parliament (EP), national political parties also form into party groups, groupings of like-minded national parties at the transnational level, fulfilling many of the legislative and representative functions of their

²¹ Bertoincini, Y. & Chopin, T., 2010. *Politique européenne : Etats, pouvoirs et citoyens de l'Union européenne*. Paris: Presses de la Fondation nationale des Sciences Politiques et Dalloz, p. 330.

²² De Boissieu, L., 2012. *Résultats électoraux du Front National FN*. [Online] Available at: <http://www.france-politique.fr/elections-fn.htm> [Accessed 24 January 2014].

²³ VoteWatch Europe, 2014. *VoteWatch Europe: European Parliament, Council of the EU*. [Online] Available at: <http://www.votewatch.eu/> [Accessed 28 January 2014].

national counterparts²⁴.” For their choice between different European Parliament groups, national political parties are mostly driven by “a concern to minimize policy incongruence between national and transnational levels²⁵.” Formally, a political group at the European Parliament must be composed of at least twenty-five MEPs coming from at least one-quarter of the Member-States – i.e. in 2014, from at least seven countries and shared political affinities²⁶.

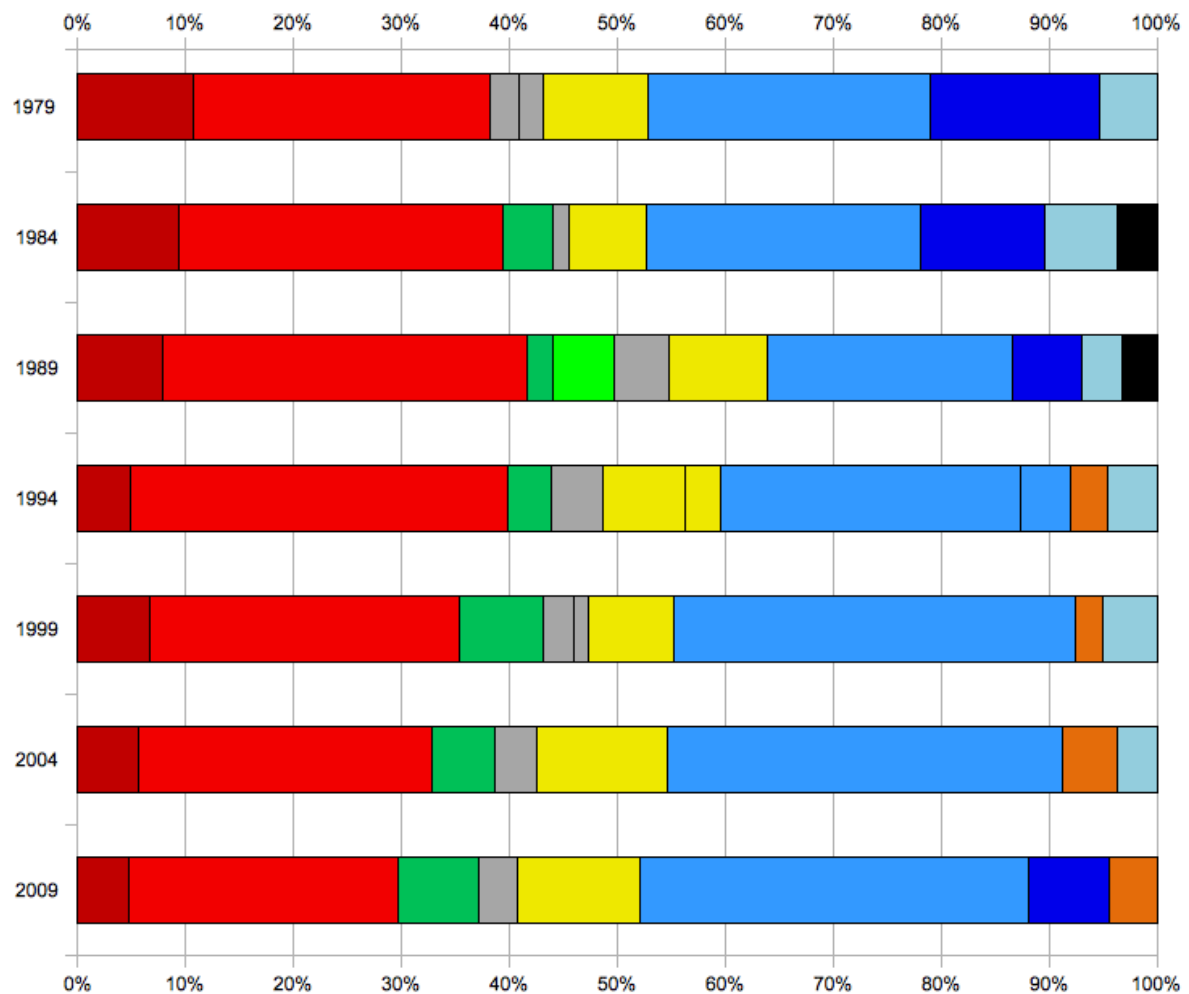
Three Extreme-Right political groups were created at the European Parliament: the first one – Group of the European Right –was created after the 1984 European election with French *Front National*, Italian *Movimento Sociale Italiano* (Italian Social Movement in English), Greek EPEN (*Εθνική Πολιτική Ένωσις* or National Political Union in English) and later rejoined by Northern-Irish Ulster Unionist Party, and ceased in 1989. A second group – Technical Group of the European Right – followed the previous group with the *Front National* as main political party but with German *Republikaner* and Belgian *Vlaams Blok*, and ended in 1994. These groups had between 3.3% and 3.7% of seats at the European Parliament as we can see in Chart 1.

²⁴ Benoit, K. & McElroy, G., 2010. Party Policy and Group Affiliation in the European Parliament. *British Journal of Political Science*, 40(02), p. 377.

²⁵ *Idem*.

²⁶ Corbett, R., Jacobs, F. & Shackleton, M., 2011. *The European Parliament*. 8th ed. London: John Harper Publishing, p 78

Chart 1 Results of each European election by their group in Parliament²⁷



- Conservative/Christian Democrat (CD, EPP (79-92), EPP (92-99), FE, EPP-ED)
- Conservatives only (C, ED, ECR)
- Communist/Far-Left (COM, LU, EUL, EUL/NGL)
- National Conservatives (UDE, EPD, EDA, UFE, UEN)
- Green/Regionalist (RBW (84-89), RBW (89-94), G/EFA)
- Independents (NI)
- Far-Right Nationalist (ER, DR, ITS)
- Social Democrats (S, SOC, PES, S&D)
- Liberal/Centrist (L, LD, LDR, ERA, ELDR, ALDE)
- Greens only (G)
- Heterogeneous (CDI, TGI)
- Eurosceptics (EN, I-, EN, EDD IND/DEM, EFD)

Between the second group and the third group, some Extreme-Right political parties participated in a mixed and technical group between 1999 and 2001; this European political group was not however based on a common ideology. This group was composed of MEPs from French *Front National*, Belgian *Vlaams Blok*, Italian *Lega Nord* (Northern League in English), neo-fascist *Fiamma Tricolore* (Tricolour Flame in English) and a third Italian

²⁷ This chart represents the results of each European election by their group in Parliament and comes from Wikimedia (URL: http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:EP_Groups_1979-2009.png). It was accessed on the 25th of January 2014.

electoral list *Lista Bonino* (Bonino List in English) which was Radical and pro-European. This group was dissolved after the decision by the European Parliament to disable the possibility for political parties and MEPs without common values and ideologies to create a mixed group.

A third political group Identity, Tradition, Sovereignty was created in 2007 with Extreme-Right and nationalist MEPs from French *Front National*, Romanian *Partidul România Mare* (Great Romania Party in English) and a Romanian independent MEP, Belgian *Vlaams Belang* (Flemish Interest in English), Bulgarian *Amaka* (Attack in English), Italian *Alternativa Sociale* (Social Alternative in English) and *Fiamma Tricolore*, an English Independent MEP and Austrian *Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs* (Freedom Party of Austria in English). This political group, representing less than 3% of the European Parliament, was dissolved less than eleven months after its creation due to internal struggles and an attack on the Romanian people by an Italian MEP.

In 2009, the *Front National* lost more than half of its MEPs (from 7 to 3) and it therefore became difficult to create a political group. A few months after the June 2009 European elections, the *Front National* was not able even to reach the requirements for forming a European political party recognised by the European Parliament. A recognised European political party needs to have members seating in regional, national or European parliaments or tree percent cast at the last European elections from at least one quarter of the Member States²⁸. Nevertheless, the *Front National* created a European political party called *Alliance européenne des mouvements nationaux* (The Alliance of European National Movements in English) with amongst its members the Hungarian political party *Jobbik* and the British National Party²⁹.

To conclude, we can observe that even when Extreme-Right parties are able to form a political group, they remain to have low influence. They are not able to secure positions at the European Parliament such as chair of delegation or parliamentary committees. Their

²⁸ Corbett, R., Jacobs, F. & Shackleton, M., 2011. *The European Parliament. op. cit.*, pp. 125-7.

²⁹ Mestre, A. & Monnot, C., 2012. *Les relations ambiguës du FN et du Jobbik hongrois*. [Online] Available at: <http://droites-extremes.blog.lemonde.fr/2012/01/04/les-relations-ambigues-du-fn-et-du-jobbik/> [Accessed 01 February 2014].

importance in decision-making procedures was insignificant due to an absence of cohesion³⁰ and obtaining only a small role at the committee level: “Their protests are rarer in committee and non-attached members are rarely allocated the more significant rapporteurships³¹”.

³⁰ Bertoncini, Y., 2013. *European Elections: Less Abstention, More "Populism"?*, Brussels: Notre Europe - Jacques Delors Institute, p. 6.

³¹ Corbett, R., Jacobs, F. & Shackleton, M., 2011. *The European Parliament*. 8th ed., *op.cit.*, p 111.

3. Future development

Despite the low-risk situation during the last three decades, the next European elections could turn out to be risky. Since the 2009 European elections, populist political parties have tried to be less perceived as Extreme-Right political parties and more as only Eurosceptic political parties at both the left and right of the political system. Lastly, the Norwegian Extreme-Right political party The Progress Party entered in the government's coalition; and in Slovakia, an Extreme-Right political party gained a provincial election and one of its members became governor. This trend is therefore perceived by some journalists as a larger support on Extreme-Right than on Extreme-Left political parties: "Count insurgents on the left, such as Syriza in Greece and the Five Star movement in Italy, and mainstream parties in Europe are weaker than at any time since the second world war³²." Extreme-Right political parties are therefore the coming-together of anti-system voters, acting as populist parties.

Firstly, before analysing the possible development of populist parties at the next European elections, we will try to understand some of the reasons for a support on Extreme-Right and Eurosceptic political parties. France has known one of the biggest falls on support for EU membership in the last two decades (i.e. percentage of people saying membership was 'a good thing'): support has decreased from 75% in 1990-91 to 43% in 2004 whereas the United-Kingdom, Germany and Italy has faced a decrease of - 29 points³³. This could be explained by a change of values and identification towards the European Union and what EU membership means. The French Maastricht Treaty referendum in 1992 was an important swing point with a strong campaign against this treaty³⁴. The French referendum on the Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe in 2005 was also an important momentum. These two referenda gave different results: positive (51% for) for the former and negative (55% against) for the latter, but public opinion was divided with about 50% for each possible reply. The *Front National* was opposed to both referenda and strongly campaigned for their rejection.

³² —, 2014. Europe's Tea Parties. *The Economist*, 04 January.

³³ Taylor, P., 2008. *The End of European Integration: Anti-Europeanism Examined*. Abingdon: Routledge, p. 126.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 62.

The *Front National* is thus driven by an ideology focussing itself on national sovereignty. According to its president and future head of list in the Northern euro-constituency, Marine Le Pen: “The European Union has neutered the sovereignty of member states and muzzled the French people’s say in policy decisions³⁵” and her motto is: “A Europe of “free nations.”³⁶” Front National agenda at the European level is therefore aimed at destabilizing the decision making procedures at the European level: “She [Marine Le Pen] promised to work with far-right parties from other countries to create a “crisis” in the Parliament with the goal of destabilizing the institutions of the European Union³⁷” and therefore repatriating the power to the nation-state.

Moreover, European elections in France are different from other local and national elections: most French elections are based on a majoritarian system whereas European elections are proportional with a low threshold (5%)³⁸. They are seen as second-order elections as they: “lower[s] the threshold of access and eliminate[s] any considerations³⁹.” Nevertheless, as we can see in tables 1 and 2, in the last decade, the *Front National* obtained important scores at presidential elections but not at European elections. The electoral system is not the only explanation for greater support on Extreme-Right political parties. Due to the French specificities, for example with the presidential elections, European elections do not entirely eliminate voters’ consideration as in other countries such as the United-Kingdom.

On the other hand, as we have seen in the past with different nationalities of MEPs having joined different Extreme-Right or nationalist political groups at the European Parliament, Extreme-Right political parties do not have a solid presence in all the member states. Moreover, as Cas Mudde points out, these political parties have gained a relevant percentage of votes in national elections: “Only 19 of the 28 EU member states have a far-right party that has gained over 1 percent of the vote in national elections in the period 2005-2013. The far-right has gained votes in ten countries since the beginning of the economic crisis, although in only four was the difference relatively large, i.e. more than 5 percent

³⁵ Rubin, A. J. & Sayare, S., 2014. French Far-Right Leader Aims for E.U. Parliament. *The New York Times*, 10 January, p. A9.

³⁶ *Idem.*

³⁷ *Idem.*

³⁸ I compared this threshold with other thresholds at French elections; for example, in order to compete in the second round, a candidate must have a score higher than 12.5% of registered voters or become one of the two first candidates at the general elections; or, as well, a candidate must obtain a score higher than 10% at local elections.

³⁹ Ignazi, P., 2005. France: Prototype of the New Extreme Right. *op. cit.*, p. 112.

(Austria, France, Hungary and Latvia). Against that stand nine countries with losses, of which three larger than 5 percent (Belgium, Italy and Slovakia). In other words, in only ten of the 28 EU member states (35 percent) did the far-right actually gain during the economic crisis and in a mere four (14 percent) were the gains relatively large, i.e. over 5 percent⁴⁰.” The causal relationship between the economic crisis and the uprising support for Extreme-Right political parties is counterbalanced by the following observation in Europe: populist right political parties are stronger in the Scandinavian countries and in Austria where the effects of the economic crisis are lower than in the Iberian Peninsula: Spain and Portugal were two countries the most hit by the crisis⁴¹. Following, as we can see in Figure 1 “Trust towards the European Union and one’s own country”, Extreme-Right political parties are growing in countries which are on the top-tier in Europe concerning the “Trust towards the European Union”, and even with a higher percentage of “Trust on the democratic functioning of the European Union”. These two factors could explain a differentiation of political objectives between Extreme-Right political parties that we can find in France, Austria or Latvia; and Eurosceptic political parties such as in the United-Kingdom. At the European level, the risk is low of having a strong Extreme-Right presence with the economic crisis as being the sole cause.

The latest observations and polls give us therefore a possible win or a two-digit result of Extreme-Right or Eurosceptic political parties in only three countries: France with the *Front National*⁴², United-Kingdom with United Kingdom Independence Party and the Netherlands with the *Partij voor de Vrijheid* (Party for Freedom in English)⁴³. Consequently, these gains and wins are not sufficient at the European level: hypothetically Extreme-Right and Eurosceptic MEPs will represent about 10% of the European Parliament: “With the FN at ca. 24 percent, the Dutch Party for Freedom (PVV) at 15 percent, and the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) at 10 percent, the total of far-right seats would go up to 50, or 6.5 percent of the European Parliament⁴⁴.” As we will see in this chapter, these three parties do not share the same values and ideologies, and do not want to be part of the same political group following the next European elections, even if the *Front National* is employing a

⁴⁰ Mudde, C., 2013. A European shutdown? The 2014 European elections and the great recession. *Washington Post*, 4 November.

⁴¹ —, 2014. Turning right. *The Economist*, 04 January.

⁴² —, 2014. Elections européennes : les listes du FN en tête selon un sondage. *Le Monde*, 26 January.

⁴³ —, 2014. Europe’s Tea Parties. *op. cit.*

⁴⁴ Mudde, C., 2013. A European shutdown? The 2014 European elections and the great recession. *op. cit.*

strategy for creating a coalition with the Dutch Party for Freedom. We will analyse in greater depth in the following chapter.

Despite disastrous prophecies in some media⁴⁵, with the next European elections described as “Europe’s Tea Party moment⁴⁶”, the Extreme Right in Europe will not be able to have enough importance for transforming the European Union and its institutions. These prophecies are based on this causal explanation: “(1) The far right is gaining (strong) support because of the economic crisis; (2) “Anti-Europeans” are going to win big in the upcoming European elections; and (3) This could lead to a European “shutdown,” similar to the one recently experienced in the United States⁴⁷.” We have already explained that the two first aforementioned reasons are not completely true and we will thus analyse in the last chapter whether or not the third explanation is false.

⁴⁵ Newspapers such as The Economist or The New York Times with the different articles quoted in this paper.

⁴⁶ Higgins, A., 2013. Right Wing’s Surge in Europe Has the Establishment Rattled. *The New York Times*, 9 November, p. A1.

⁴⁷ Mudde, C., 2013. A European shutdown? *op. cit.*

4 - EUROBAROMETRO



4. Political objectives and relative strategies at the European and national level

As we have seen previously, populist political parties may obtain more support and as a consequence, they may gain more seats at the next 2014 European elections. Consequently, they may therefore have a stronger presence at the European Parliament. Nevertheless, these political parties' objectives are different from each other and their relative strategies will not follow the same paths. These dissimilarities could trouble the final outcome of the 2014 European elections and, as we will observe in this chapter, prevent these populist political parties from playing a greater role at the European level and in the decision-making procedures.

An additional problem, after the lack of common ideologies and opinions on European policies, is the impossibility for Eurosceptic and Extreme-Right political parties to form a political group at the European Parliament. As we have seen previously, European Extreme-Right political groups were formed in the past, but they were not able to last due to internal struggles and ideological conflicts. These same problems will occur when discussing the prospect of forming a political group after the next European elections. The incompatibility between French *Front national* and the Danish *Dansk Folkeparti* (Danish People's Party in English) is a relevant example: "But a whiff of extremism still lingers, and the Danish People's Party wants nothing to do with Ms. Le Pen and her followers⁴⁸" and between other political parties: "Norway's Progress Party is a world away from Hungary's thuggish Jobbik. Nigel Farage and the saloon-bar bores of the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) look askance at Marine Le Pen and her Front National (FN) across the Channel⁴⁹." Eurosceptic, nationalist and Extreme-Right political parties will face important problems for forming a unique political group: the last announcement indicates a possible group with French *Front National*, Austrian Freedom Party of Austria, Belgian *Vlaams Belang* and possibly Dutch Party for Freedom and Italian *Lega Nord*⁵⁰ but not with other important populist political parties such as the United Kingdom Independence Party or Danish People's Party.

⁴⁸ Higgins, A., 2013. Right Wing's Surge in Europe Has the Establishment Rattled. *op. cit.*.

⁴⁹ –, 2014. Europe's Tea Parties. *op. cit.*.

⁵⁰ Barbière, C., 2014. Le Front National poursuit le regroupement des populistes européens. *Euractiv.fr*, 23 January.

These problems are not only based on personal issues but also on values and could, consequently, cause problems for creating a common manifesto or policy despite the different announcements made by the media, with the example of French *Front National* (FN in the following quote) and Dutch Party for Freedom (PVV in the following quote) on societal values and relations with religions: “the PVV is ardent in its support for Israel, while the FN has an anti-Semitic past. The PVV is in favour of gay marriage; the FN marches against it. The PVV sees Islam as a totalitarian danger around the world; the FN frets not over the religion’s basic tenets but only about the “Islamification” of France⁵¹”; and even on the concept of the relationship between a nation and the European Union: “Belgium’s Vlaams Belang, Italy’s Northern League—want regional autonomy within the EU while others—UKIP and the Finns Party—reject EU membership outright⁵².” A pre-election agreement is therefore not a proof of an existing group and more especially a European political group, which lasts five years until the next 2019 European elections.

We can therefore observe three different groups of political parties: Eurosceptic political parties with for example with the United Kingdom Independence Party, Extreme-Right political parties with French *Front National* and Austrian Freedom Party of Austria and neo-fascist political parties with the Greek neo-Nazi Golden Dawn or the Hungarian openly racist *Jobbik*⁵³. These three ideological groups can cooperate but with strong difficulties, and moreover, they do not want to be perceived as a unique ideological group for electoral reasons, more especially after rebranding operations of the Danish People’s Party under Pia Kjaersgaard’s presidency from 1995 to 2012 in Denmark and of the *Front National* under Marine Le Pen’s presidency in France. Despite this rebranding, other political parties still analyse the *Front National* as a nationalist and neo-fascist political party due to historical reasons⁵⁴. Realistically, these three groups of political parties are not able to cooperate and form a unique political group at the European Parliament.

Later, in 2009, MEPs from populist political parties, who are presently in new discussions, were divided into different political groups : “roughly thirty of whom are in the Europe of Freedom and Democracy group and another thirty or so are “Non-Attached

⁵¹ —, 2014. Turning right. *op. cit.*.

⁵² *Idem.*

⁵³ Higgins, A., 2013. Right Wing’s Surge in Europe Has the Establishment Rattled. *op. cit.*

⁵⁴ Mammone, A., 2014. Europeans United, in Hating Europe. *The International New York Times*, 02 January.

Members”, which makes about sixty MEPs for the “far right” and “autonomistic right”⁵⁵” The *Front National* created, after the 2009 European elections, a European political party with racist or neo-fascist political parties such as the British National Party, Hungarian *Jobbik*, Swedish *Nationaldemokraterna* (National Democrats in English), Italian *Movimento Sociale Italiano* and the Belgian *Front National*. However, in 2011, Marine Le Pen became president of the *Front National* and started a rebranding of the party. At the European level, she decided to move from an agreement with neo-fascist and racist political parties to partnerships with more moderate Extreme-Right or Eurosceptic political parties. This strategy will therefore have negative consequences for forming a single Extreme-Right and Eurosceptic political group: the *Front National* and Marine Le Pen do not want to mix their image with their former allies^{56,57}.

Secondly, studies have shown that Extreme-Right political parties do not work at the European Parliament and are perceived as using vindictive political approaches. They do not have a common policy platform, which shows therefore a direct consequence of the ideological incompatibility analysed previously, because: “As an illuminating study by Marley Morris has shown, anti-Europeans do little real work in the legislature, preferring to grandstand in plenary sessions – Ukip is a champion of this approach⁵⁸.” The risk of a European shutdown is therefore not possible. The European Union decision-making procedures are different from those of the United-States and more especially, when you are dealing with budget issues⁵⁹. As some political commentators stress: “almost all Europe’s Tea Parties are likely to reveal themselves as incompetent and factional⁶⁰.”

Finally, possibilities for populist political parties at the next European elections are not clear; this will depend on compromising between the different types of populist, Eurosceptic,

⁵⁵ Bertoncini, Y., 2013. *European Elections: Less Abstention, More "Populism"?*, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

⁵⁶ Euractiv, 2009. *Le FN et ses homologues européens s’allient pour faire front contre l’UE*. [Online] Available at: <http://www.euractiv.fr/institutions/priorites-de-lue-electionsarticlele-fn-et-ses-homologues-europeens-sallient-pour-faire-front-contre-lue-002143-2094.html> [Accessed 01 February 2014]. (Mestre & Monnot, 2012).

⁵⁷ Mestre, A. & Monnot, C., 2012. *Les relations ambiguës du FN et du Jobbik hongrois*. [Online] Available at: <http://droites-extremes.blog.lemonde.fr/2012/01/04/les-relations-ambigues-du-fn-et-du-jobbik/> [Accessed 01 February 2014].

⁵⁸ Mueller, J.-W., 2013. How Europe could face its own shutdown. *The Guardian*, 09 October

⁵⁹ Mudde, C., 2013. A European shutdown? The 2014 European elections and the great recession. *op. cit.*.

⁶⁰ –, 2014. Europe’s Tea Parties. *op. cit.*.

Extreme-Right and nationalist political parties. Even if they are able to form a political group at the European Parliament, there could be a risk of dismantlement like in 2007.

5. Conclusion

We have seen in the first chapter a historical background of populist political parties in France and within the European Union. In a second and third chapter, we were able to analyse and understand the future developments of populist political parties at the 2014 European elections and if there is a risk of an uprising populism at the European level.

Support for populist political parties is therefore a growing risk at the upcoming 2014 European elections, but this threat is in fact reduced by the uncertainty of possible coalitions and political groups emerging following the European elections. Moreover, in this study, we have focussed on the risk of populism in France and its possible consequences at the European level. Nevertheless, other populist political parties still exist and are not based on Extreme-Right values such as *MoVimento Cinque Stelle* (Five Star Movement in English) in Italy or *Alternative für Deutschland* (Alternative for Germany in English) in Germany. These political parties could not form a political group at the European Parliament with the presence of Extreme-Right and Eurosceptic political parties. We have therefore observed that populist political parties will not be able to have an influential role or even be king-makers as the four main political groups⁶¹ at the European Parliament may be able to obtain a majority without a Eurosceptic and Extreme-Right political group.

Nevertheless, there remain risks of populism on the political campaigns during the European elections and of Euroscepticism influencing mainstream political parties. Even with a single political group at the European Parliament, the shutdown threat is not significant and the European Parliament is only one of the two legislators at the European level. Populist parties are not present at the second legislator, the Council of ministers.

To conclude, confronting populist parties can be quite difficult. The simple and most common path used by mainstream political parties – painting these political parties as fascists or racists – is not effective, as: “Attacking the insurgents as fascists worked when Hitler’s memory was fresh, but many of today’s voters rightly see it as mostly a scare tactic⁶².”

⁶¹ These four political groups are the European People's Party group, the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats, the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe and The Greens–European Free Alliance.

⁶² –, 2014. Europe’s Tea Parties. *op. cit.*.

Having a negative approach is not the best solution. Lessons⁶³ could be learnt for example from the current situation in the United States with the Tea Party; therefore, mainstream political parties should adopt a more positive approach and explain the advantages and positive consequences of EU integration, and equally aim at increasing participation in order not to have a small minority of Eurosceptic voters achieving their goals. Besides, even if populist parties gain dozens of seats and become the first political parties in certain EU countries such as France, they will not become the first European political group of parties after the 2009 European elections; and consequently, they will be in minority at the European Parliament⁶⁴.

⁶³ *Idem.*

⁶⁴ Leparmentier, A., 2013. Le pire n'aura pas lieu. *Le Monde*, 11 December.

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