# The Risks of growing Populism and the European elections:

# An Examination of the 'far right' and populist politics' in contemporary Ireland

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# An Examination of the 'far right' and 'populist politics' in contemporary Ireland

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*The recent rise of the radical-right in contemporary Europe has sparked increased interest from the academic world. Where once it was an underdeveloped area, it is now well-researched and offers detailed theoretical approaches to explain the phenomenon, one being the 'populist' style of the radical-right parties. However, the theories have failed to explain the case of Ireland, a country who has amenable conditions for a radical-right party. This paper has tried to explain why the radical-right has not emerged in Ireland by looking at a number of key features. Specifically, focusing on the lack of social cleavages within Irish society, how Sinn Fein occupy the space in which a radical-right party would normally occupy and how radical-right policies are in fact dispersed through different actors in society. Also, this paper has tried to debunk the myth that populism can be equated with the radical right and that it is incompatible with democracy. To demonstrate this, I have borrowed from some authors like Ernesto Laclau to highlight how populism is in fact a constructive style of politics, which articulates social demands for segments of society who lack a voice.*

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## 1. Introduction

For many people around the world, and particularly in Europe, the memory of Fascist and Nazi regimes in Italy and Germany are still quite fresh. They represent a dark past, one which witnessed 'total war', 'the holocaust', 'ethnic cleansing', 'authoritarian governance' and the rise of 'ultra-nationalism'.[2] These horrifying events in the last century have been so often followed by the words "never again". However, in the final decades of the previous century there has been a reemergence of some of these ideologies of the 'radical right', which have advocated 'ethnic purity', 'nativism', 'authoritarianism', and most notably 'populism'.[3]The most obvious examples for these are Jen Marie Le Pen's Front National Party in France, Jorg Haider's Austrian Freedom Party, as well as the Netherlands List Pim Fortuyn, and most recently the Golden Dawn Party in Greece.[4]

The re-occurrence of this 'type' of party and their electoral success is quiet worrying, especially considering the upcoming European elections and the prospect of these parties gaining greater control within the European Parliament.  As Hans-George Betz argues, this "explosive growth in a number of countries has made them the most significant political challenge to the political establishment and consensus of Western Europe".[5] The crux of this problem is, that there exists a tension within the 'liberal democratic' framework of Europe between competing ideologies on 'how the world ought to be'. This antagonism between the 'radical right' and the center or mainstream parties is often seen as a conflict between the 'elites'-who control the political arena, and the 'virtuous sovereign people', who are repressed at the hands of these elites.[6] To address this conflict these parties often use a style of 'populist politics', which aims to return sovereignty to the people through electoral victories. But does this threaten our democratic order and undermine it? And can democracies function with this

2   Hainsworth, P. (2000) *The Politics of the Extreme Right: From the Margins to the Mainstream,* London: Pinter, p1.

3   Betz, H. G. (1993) "The Two Faces of Radical Right-Wing Populism in Western Europe", *The Review of Politics,* Vol 55, No 4, p664.

4   Eatwell, R. (2004), Hainsworth, P. (2000), Hainsworth, P. (2008), Ignazi, P. (2010), Mudde, C. (2007) Banteka, N. (2013).

5   Betz, H. G. (1993), p664.

6   Albertazzi, D. and Mc Donnell, D. (2008) "Introduction: The Sceptre and the Spectre" in *Twenty First Century Populism: The Spectre of Western European Democracy*, edited by Albertazzi, D. and Mc Donnell, D. Chippenham and Eastbourne: Palgrave Macmillan, p1.

style of politics or should democracies use a heavy hand against such movements in order to preserve itself? This raises the question, to what extent is 'populism' compatible with democracy? While it also asks the question, why do 'radical-right' parties exist? However, a country where the radical-right has not emerged but where 'populism' can be frequently found is Ireland. This dilemma raises the issue of how 'populism' and the 'radical-right' should be viewed?

Bearing this in mind, the aim of this paper is to examine why the 'radical-right' has not emerged in Ireland compared to other European countries[7] and to discuss how 'populism' should be viewed within democracy. I will argue, that the reason there does not exist a 'radical-right' party in Ireland is because of the lack of political space and because all Irish parties were born out of the issue of self-determination and essentially have similar political ideologies.[8] While I will also argue, that Ireland has no significant history of 'radical-right' parties or class cleavages, which might act as a catalyst for the reemergence of a radical-right party. Instead, I suggest that the mainstream Irish parties have tried to be 'vote maximizing' and thus, they already hold policy positions which would be held by 'radical-right' parties.[9] Nonetheless, this examination shows that populism is used by all political parties to 'tell the people what they want to hear' but that it also highlights antagonisms between the 'elites' and the parties on the fringes. Finally, this article will outline what this author believes to be the future for the 'radical-right' and 'populism' in Ireland and the EU.

To begin, this paper will firstly outline the theoretical concept of 'populism' and the 'radical-right', and then it will examine the case of Ireland though these theoretical positions and finally outline the future developments of each.

## 2. Theoretical Aspects of the Radical Right and Populism

### 2.1 Definitional Issues

Since the rise of the 'radical-right' in the 1980's there has been an increase in academic

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7   O' Malley, E. (2008), Garner, S. (2007), Mc Donnell, D. (2008), Weeks, L. (2012).

8   O' Malley, E. (2008), Garner, S. (2007).

9   Deze, A. (2004) "Between Adaption, Differentiation and Distinction: Extreme Right-Wing Parties within Democratic Political System", in *Western Democracies and the New Extreme Right,* edited by Eatwell, R and Mudde, London: Routledge.  C. p20.

research on the topic in Europe.[10] This has led to widespread debate on what exactly is the 'radical-right'? This research has at times been conflictual and has not produced concrete agreement on definitions, rather there has only been cordial acceptance on basic features and structures.[11] This has led to terms such as 'radical-right' and 'populism' taking on the same meaning. As well as that, there seems to be a plethora of different phrases which attach themselves to all of the above parties. These titles vary from 'extreme-right', 'right-wing', 'radical-right', 'right-wing populism', to 'national populism'.[12] In sum, there lies much terminological confusion around this political phenomenon, which in-turn causes certain analytical problems. The most obvious of these is trying to achieve a consensus on a definition which fits all cases with relative ease. This is almost impossible considering each case is country specific and no two parties are identical. Nonetheless, to study any phenomenon a working definition is essential in order to guide the research and to draw any conclusions.

## 2.2 Defining the Radical Right

For this examination I will use the term radical right when referring to parties like the Front National. The definition that I have decided to use draws from some established authors like Mudde and Rydgren, who claim that radical right parties are ethno-nationalist or nativist, authoritarian, and populist.[13]

Firstly, the emphasis on ethno-nationalism and nativism is a desire for the nation to be comprised of a homogenous group which share the same bloodline and inhabit the same territory.[14] For the radical right they associate citizen rights not as a political act between the state and a citizen, rather citizen rights are granted through bloodline, ius sanguinis. In short you have to be born a citizen.[15] This ideology is represented by a 'closed society', who is against pluralism or outside intervention. The case of the Republican Party in Germany is a

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10  Betz, H.G. (1993), Betz, H.G. and Imerfal (1998), Hainsworth, P. (2000), Ignazi, P. (2010), Mudde, C. (2007).
11  Ignazi, P. (2010), p4, Mudde, C. (2007), p12.
12  Mudde, C. (2007) *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p12.
13  Ignazi, P. (2010) *Extreme Right Parties in Western Europe,* New York: Oxford University Press, p27.
14  Pasquino, G. (2008) "Populism and Democracy" in *Twenty First Century Populism: The Spectre of Western European Democracy*, edited by Albertazzi, D. and Mc Donnell, D. Chippenham and Eastbourne: Palgrave Macmillan, p16.
15  Mc Crone, D. and Kiely, R. (2000) "Nationalism and Citizenship", *Sociology*, Vol 34, No 1, p26.

reminder of the 'radical-rights' fears from immigrants and Muslims. As Betz notes, they promoted slogans such as "save the welfare state: expel false refugees!" and called on German citizens to "meet the Muslim challenge" in order to prevent the Muslim religion from achieving word domination".[16] From this, the radical-right sees immigration and integration as a threat to the identity of the 'group'. Thus, they tend to be "exclusionary" hoping to hold on to what they have. An example of this type of ideology can be seen in the anti EU policies of the Font National Party during the EU treaty campaign, [17]or under the terms 'Irish jobs for Irish citizens'. In this sense, the radical right espouses an egalitarian ideology, where only the members of the 'in-group' will benefit. [18]

Secondly, these parties are very authoritarian in structure and tend to have a charismatic leader (although this is not a prerequisite). Jen Marie Le Pen in France is an obvious example of this. He is a charismatic leader, who shapes the Front Nationals ideology around his own personal beliefs. Meanwhile O' Malley notes, that this tight party structure enables the party to respond quickly and effectively to any problem that might arise,[19] in comparison, to 'liberal democracies' that have large inefficient bureaucracies. In this way, the radical right is strong supporters of the rule of law, which can only be policed through effective authority, which Mudde sees as an element that can protect the state from any external threats from immigrants or supranational entities and thus protects the purity of the nation.[20]

Finally and most notably, populism is fundamental to the radical-right's structure. This quiet often means that the radical-right dichotomizes things, into black and white, good and evil.[21] This leads to a separation of society into "two homogenous and antagonistic groups, the poor people versus the corrupt elite"[22]. In this way, they tend to see the governing parties as a "clique of professional politicians who pretend to represent and serve common citizens, but in

16  Betz, H.G. (1993), p681.
17  Minkenberg, M. and Perrineau, P. (2007) "The Radical Right in the European Elections 2004", *International Political Science Review,* Vol 28, No 1, p51.
18  Imerfall, S. (1998) "The Neo-Populist Agenda" in *The New Politics of the Right: Neo-Populist Parties and Movements in Established Democracies,* edited by Betz, H. G and Immerfall, S. London: Macmillan. p255.
19  O'Malley, E. (2008), p5.
20  Mudde, C (2007) *Populist radical right parties in Europe*, New York: Cambridge University Press, p155.
21  Eatwell, R. (2000) "Introduction: The New Extreme Right Challenge", in *Western Democracies and the New Extreme Right,* edited by Eatwell, R. and Mudde, C. London: Routledge. p12.
22  Rydgren, J. (2007) "The Sociology of the Radical Right", *Annual Review of Sociology,* Vol 33, p245.

reality only serve their own narrow interests".[23] Thus, all other parties are seen as colluding in order to maintain the power of the "clique" over the majority of the population. [24] By acting in such a way, the radical-right sees themselves as the voice of the "common people" and the champion of "true democracy".[25] This leads the party to interpret an idealized version of the "people", who are whatever the party claims them to be.[26] As Ignazi explains, the "people" can mean a sociological interpretation which might be directed at a lower socio-economic group of society or a cultural or representative version, which might focus on the ethnicity or sovereignty of a 'people'.[27] This type of representation has been often used by the radical-right to display their 'oneness' with the 'common people' and to portray the elite as 'corrupt'. By constructing this image, the radical-right invokes a sense of crisis into voters to emphasize the need for action, in order to solve the current dilemma. By acting in this way, the radical right adapt to any situation to further their agenda.[28] This is seen to give populism the function of creating "narratives, myths and symbols" which relate to its idealized vision of society, or as Taggart calls it, the heartland".[29] In short, this aspect of populism allows the radical-right to shape situations in favor of the parties interests at any time without conflicting with any ideological beliefs.

In addition, populism has a strong conviction of seeing the people as sovereign, this makes them very supportive of 'direct democracy' and very anti-establishment.[30] This anti-establishment sentiment is achieved for the radical-right by adapting to the system of representative democracy and then differentiating themselves within the system.[31] In sum, the radical-right parties' use of populism appeals to "the people against both the established structure of the power and the dominant ideas and values of society".[32]

In conclusion, these three characteristics are what most scholars see as being

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23  Betz Quoted in Minkenberg, M. and Perrineau, P. (2007),  p42.
24  Rydgren, J. (2007), P246.
25  ibid.
26  Taggart, P. (2000) *Populism*, Buckingham University Press, p3.
27  Ignazi, P. (2010), p30.
28  Hainsworth, P. (2008), *The Extreme Right in Western Europe*, Oxon: Routledge, p22.
29  Tagarrt, P. (2000), p4.
30  Eatwell, R. (2000), p13.
31  Deze, A. (2004), p20.
32  Panizza, F. (2005) "Introduction: Populism and the Mirror of Democracy", in *Populism and the Mirror of Democracy,* edited by Panizza, F. London: Verso, p5.

fundamental to the makeup of the radical-right. However, with many of the features of populism one could easily locate them in many of the mainstream parties. Thus as I have stated previous, populism is not exclusive to the radical-right, rather it is a style that radical-right parties adapt, in order to, distinguish themselves from the mainstream parties and resonate with the majority of the citizens. Therefore, the aim now is to analyze the features which make populism common to both the right and the left, and to argue that yes populism is compatible with democracy.

## 2.3 How is populism compatible with democracy?

Populism, like the term the 'radical-right' has had very little agreement on what exactly is meant by it and it has become cliché to write about its conceptual slipperiness.[33] Nonetheless, it seems to have an intimate and antagonistic relationship with democracy, Panizza argues, that this    relationship is here to stay and will remain so long into the future.[34] If this is the case, what makes this possible? Moreover, the concept is not solely confined to any space on the left-right continuum rather populism has been adopted and regularly used by politicians on the left like Hugo Chavez and from the center like Tony Blair.[35] One could claim that this malleability of the concept is due to the fact that populism is not ideological and holds no core beliefs. Instead it is chameleonic and can be adapted to fit any situation. As Tagarrt notes, its lack of tangibility makes it "quintessentially mercurial".[36]

Nonetheless, populism has a close relationship with many of democracies core elements. If we look at some of Abraham Lincoln's famous quotes we can see a great deal of overlap between populist rhetoric and democratic principle. For example, the "government of the people, by the people, and for the people" could easily be said to contain much of the language of the 'heartland', which Taggart speaks about. [37] But it also draws the two concepts intimately together around the notion of the 'people' and gives the 'people' some identity i.e. a majority of the population or a minority. As Panizza argues, the act of populism does not just remove people from an old identity to a new one; rather it begins a process of representation, to people

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33  Tagarrt, P. (2000), p1.
34  Panizza, F. (2005), p1.
35  Hainsworth, P, (2008), p21.
36  Taggart, P. (2000), p2.
37  Quoted in Pasquino, G. (2008), p15.

who might never have been represented before.[38] In this very act, populism is conducive and complementary towards democracy because it is concerned with the way people are represented. As Worsley puts it:

"There is always a tension in our conception of a just society between the rights of minorities and the rights of the majority. Insofar as populism plumps for the rights of majorities to make sure – by 'intervening'- that they are not ignored (as they commonly are) populism is profoundly compatible with democracy".[39]

Likewise, these actions make populism a very political act, because it involves being submissive to democracy in order to convey tensions and misgivings about a political situation.

As Ernesto Laclau demonstrates, the political practice of populism is a reaction to an 'organic crisis'[40] within society. For him this 'crisis' is between the social demands of one element of society towards another, i.e. between the elites and the common man.[41] In this instance, populism is a political and social action between antagonistic elements in society. This is formed not by an ideology but via a logical articulation of social demands. Thus, populism as an action is ontological for Laclau and is used whenever there is a break down in the 'organic' make-up of society. In this way, populism does not define any organization, but instead is a way of "articulating their themes – whatever those themes may be".[42]

Similarly, this type of representation has often been constructed by the mainstream parties as well. They generally refer to the 'people' in ambiguous terms similar to the populist parties. One only has to look at the Presidential campaign rhetoric of Barack Obama to understand this method of articulation. His slogans featured the ideas of real 'change' for Americans and more specifically 'middle America'- a socio-economic and geographical location like the 'heartland'. Therefore, Obama tried to portray himself as 'one of the people' and not an 'elite', thus he, like many populists adapted to the system while simultaneously

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38  Panizza, F. (2005), p11.
39  Worsley quoted in ibid, p30.
40  See Laclau, E. (2005).
41  Laclau, E. (2005) "Populism: What's in a Name?", in *Populism and the Mirror of Democracy*, edited by Panizza, G. London: Verso, p44.
42  ibid.

differentiated themselves from the system.[43] This underlines my message that 'populism' is not exclusive to the radical right rather it is open to anyone who wishes to avail of it.

This corresponds to the idea that politicians and political parties must be vote maximizing in order to enter office. This competitive nature which representative democracy encourages can be considered as a catalyst to the 'populist' style, because when voters become disengaged with the mainstream parties an alternative to the status quo seems attractive. This alternative message is mediated through populist rhetoric who on one level tries to disassociate themselves from the mainstream parties, while also trying to appeal to the population. Therefore, populism can be considered a product of democratic politics and must be considered compatible when it articulates antagonisms of the populace. Thus, as Canovan, Worsley and Hayward note, any inquiry into "populism is an inquiry into democracy".[44] Likewise as Laclau astutely remarked, "if populism consists of postulating a radical alternative within the communitarian space, a choice in the crossroads on which the future of a given society hinges, does not populism become synonymous with politics? The answer can only be affirmative".[45]

These examples demonstrate that democracy cannot exist without populism because of the fact that politics is not impartial and conflict and antagonisms will always exist. Thus, to say that populism is incompatible with democracy because of its antagonistic nature, its appeal to the sovereignty of the people or its uneasiness to compromise with the status quo is a failure to recognize that populism exists because of the lack of effective debate within society. By populism operating as a critique of the mainstream parties, it begins to play a central role in democracy by offering alternatives. Thus, populism measures to what extent mainstream parties have converged upon similar ideologies.[46] This is profoundly necessary in democracy because without scrutinizing or questioning beliefs and actions of the governing parties, politics becomes static and the possibility of change becomes redundant. In this instance, politics becomes the ideology of the governing elites and effectively an administration.

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43 Deze, A. (2004), p35.
44 Arditi, B. (2005) "Populism as an Internal Periphery of Democratic Politics", in *Populism and the Mirror of Democracy,* edited by Panizza, G. London: Verso, p98.
45 Laclau quoted in Arditi, (2005), p76.
46 Mouffe, C. (2005) "The End of Politics' and the Challenge of Right-Wing Populism" in *Populism and the Mirror of Democracy*, edited by Panizza, G. London: Verso, p51.

In conclusion, both populism and democracy are compatible with one another because populism, although antagonistic, contributes to offering alternative beliefs about how democracy should function, while it also tries to be a voice to 'people' who do not have a voice in society. However, this is not to argue that 'populism' as a concept is free from any destructive features. As it is well documented many parties of the 'radical-right' who advocate anti-immigrant and racist policies use 'populism' to exploit the political space. Thus, populism should be considered as the other-side of the same coin as democracy and as Arditi notes, "populism can be conceived both as a mirror in which democracy can scrutinize its more unsavory traits, and as an experience that can become (or not) its underside". [47]

In order to demonstrate this compatibility I will examine the case of Ireland to show how populism has played an instrumental role in recent years, while at the same time a radical-right party had failed to emerge.

## 3. The Case of Ireland

### 3.1 Irelands Political Conditions

Firstly, in order to explain why a 'radical-right' party has not emerged in Ireland I will briefly outline what academics claim to be the conditions amenable for their emergence. O'

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47  Arditi, B. (2005), P95.

Malley in his analysis of the 'radical-right' in Ireland noted six main conditions, which were, the change from an industrial society to a postindustrial society, high levels of immigration into a country and popular intolerance towards them, increased importance of the cultural cleavage, the convergence of political parties and the de-alignment of party attachments, openness of the political system to new entrants – a proportional electoral system, and partyocracy- where the parties are closely linked with the state. This includes activities such as clientelism, patronage and corruption.[48] Other scholars have also pointed to the historical ties which exist between 'radical-right' parties and the previous fascist parties of the inter war period. [49]

Firstly, Ireland cannot be categorized as an industrial country compared to Britain or Germany however, it has witnessed rapid changes since the post-war period. In the early years of the Irish State, the economy was mostly agriculturally based and the economic policies of De Valera and co were protectionist in orientation.[50] This changed with Ireland's succession into the European Economic Community and the government's new polices of outward growth and transnational investment. As Denis O' Hearn put it, a "country which had virtually clothed and shod itself in 1960 imported more than seventy-one percent of its clothing in 1980".[51] These figures would seem to suggest that in fact Ireland had undergone an industrial shift away from traditional industry towards new methods of economic growth. These new methods mainly centered on software development, pharmaceutical production, the construction sector, and the financial services sector. During this rapid change of the economy there had been job displacement away from the old industrial sectors, which were much more labor-intensive towards the new individualized economy, which emphasized autonomy and flexible manufacturing.[52] The data from Ireland suggests that the country was subject to rising unemployment levels and was in a transitional period. In 1967 the unemployment rate was under sixty thousand but by 1987 the figure had rapidly grown to a height of two hundred and

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48 O'Malley, E. (2008), p6.
49 Merkel, P. H. (1993) "Why Are They So Strong Now? Comparative Reflections on the Revival of the Radical Right in Europe" in *The Revival of Right-Wing Extremism in the Nineties,* edited by Merkel, P. H. and Weinberg, L. London: Frank Cass, p24.
50 Fagan, C.H. (2003) "Globalised Ireland, or, Contemporary Transformations of National Identity?" in Unspecified, Manchester University Press, p114.
51 Quoted in ibid.
52 Betz, H. G. (1998) "Introduction" in *The New Politics of the Right: Neo-Populist Parties and Movements in Established Democracies,* edited by Betz, H. G. and Immerfall, S. London: Macmillan, p7.

fifty thousand. [53] This evidence clearly shows that Ireland was in a poor economic situation which could have been a catalyst for the emergence of a "radical-right" party.

In addition, Ireland could also be categorized under the second criteria- ethnic competition thesis.[54] This suggests that large scale immigration into a country could ferment popular reaction against immigrants in the form of a 'radical-right' party out of the increase competition for resources such as the labor market, social welfare and housing. The data from the Central Statistics Office confirms that large scale immigration into Ireland occurred in the recent past. In 1987, immigration into Ireland was just over seventeen thousand but over the coming decades Ireland seen an enormous influx of immigrants, which peaked at one hundred and fifty thousand in 2007.[55] Also, in 2006 the allocation of PPS numbers to non-nationals working in Ireland jumped to a record high of just under two hundred and four thousand,[56] while a recent study by European Commission has also noted that the percentage of non-nationals living in Ireland rose from 3.9 percent in 2001 to 8.1 percent in 2011.[57] It should also be noted that this trend in immigration has been closely followed by an economic crisis, which occurred in Ireland in 2008, that has further compounded the issues of immigration and resource competition.

The crux of problem for Ireland was the collapse of a housing bubble which caused severe losses for the Irish banking system.[58] Soon after this economic downturn, the government enforced tough austerity measures which focused on raising taxes and cutting expenditure- mainly in the areas of social welfare. During this time period the number of people who became unemployed jumped from an average of 4.5 percent in 2006 to 14.7 percent in 2012. Likewise, a study done by the United Nations found that Ireland was among one of the

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53  CSO (2014) "Persons on the Live Register by Month, Sex Age Group and Static" 8 January 2014, Available at:http://www.cso.ie/px/pxeirestat/Database/eirestat/Live%20Register/Live%20Register_statbank.asp?SP=Live%20Register&Planguage=0  [Acessed on 21 January 2014].
54  Rydgren, J. (2007), p250.
55  CSO (2014) "Persons on the Live Register by Month, Sex Age Group and Static" 8 January 2014, Available at:http://www.cso.ie/px/pxeirestat/Database/eirestat/Live%20Register/Live%20Register_statbank.asp?SP=Live%20Register&Planguage=0  [Acessed on 21 January 2014].
56  ibid.
57  Vasileva, K. (2012) "Population and Social Conditions", *Eurostat,* 21 June 2012, p2, Available at: http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/cache/ITY_OFFPUB/KS-SF-12-031/EN/KS-SF-12-031-EN.PDF
58  Lane, P.R. "The Irish Crisis", *The World Financial Review,* Available at: http://www.worldfinancialreview.com/?p=874

most unequal countries in the world.[59] While O'Malley noted, that Irish people's perceptions towards immigrants were quiet negative.[60] This point was reinforced by Collins' study on populism in Ireland, which examined a series of focus groups on multiculturalism in three economically different Dublin areas, and found that within the poorer economic areas there was a higher negative attitude towards immigrants.[61] A reading of these figures would seem to suggest that the possibility of a radical-right party emerging in Ireland is quiet high. However, no such party has emerged and a recent survey done by Eurobarometer found that Ireland ranks among the highest countries that are optimistic about the future of the European Union.[62]

It also seems that the high levels of immigration coupled with economic decline have not left any major cultural antagonisms. Historically Ireland has been culturally homogenous and its Gaelic identity has been maintained through the strong structures of the Gaelic Athletic Association. Their localized emphasis and strong historical ties with the Irish nationalist cause and the Catholic Church has been essential to maintaining the traditional culture. Likewise, the identity of the Irish nation has been preserved by the infusion of the Catholic religion with the Irish people. It has become synonymous to refer to the Irish as a Catholic country, although these strong ties are declining and recent CSO figures from the 2011 census found that the percentage of Catholics was at its lowest since records began, they now only account for 84.2 percent of the population.[63] This decrease is down to the rise of both atheists and other religions in Ireland.[64] However, it must also be noted that the total number of people who claimed to be Catholic was at its highest since records began.[65] It must also be stressed, that although Ireland has witnessed an increase of inward migration, the percentage of non-nationals in the country is low compared to many European counterparts. Also, Garner, and Harrington have noted that

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59  Quoted in Mc Donnell, D. (2008) "The Republic of Ireland: The Dog That Hasn't Barked in the Night?" in *Twenty First Century Populism: The Spectre of Western European Democracy*, edited by Albertazzi, D. and Mc Donnell, D. Palgrave Macmillian, p205.

60  O'Malley, E. (2008), p8.

61  O' Connell, M. (2003) *Right-wing Ireland: The Rise of Populism in Europe and Ireland*, Dublin: Liffey Press, p93.

62  Eurobarometer, (2013) Autumn, "Public Opinion in the European Union", p10, Available at: http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb80/eb80_first_en.pdf

63  CSO. (2011) "Census Results 2011, Profile 7, Religion Ethnicity and Irish Travelers", 18 October 2012, Available                                                                                                                              at: http://www.cso.ie/en/newsandevents/pressreleases/2012pressreleases/pressreleasecensus2011profile7religion ethnicityandirishtravellers/  [Accessed on 21/01/2014].

64  ibid.

65  ibid.

the Irish Citizen referendum in 2004 ensured the homogeneity of the nation against the threat of a culture cleavage emerging.[66] In sum, the cultural cleavage has been protected against through government policies and the lack of significant immigration.

Looking at the convergence of political parties and the realignment of party attachments, one would have to argue that yes Ireland's political parties have occupied similar locations on the left-right continuum, with the two main parties, Fianna Fail (FF) and Fine Gael (FG) both being center parties with the first being more to the left and the second being more to the right.[67] While the Labor party, Sinn Fein, and many independent candidates drift slightly from the orbit of the mainstream parties. This convergence of political ideology can be explained by analyzing Ireland's political landscape, which was born out of a colonial past which emphasized nationalism and self-determination.[68] This experience of struggle for self-determination garnered similar political ideals across Ireland and only dispersed when conflict arose concerning the notion of partition.[69] In this regard, all the major Irish parties were born out of old Sinn Fein and have not been subject to social cleavages compared to other European countries.[70] These similarities in ideology and policy of the two main parties and the strength of FF has led to an increase in the need for coalition partners, because of this, all other parties have moved closer to the center.[71] When this occurs, the electorate can get a feeling that all of the parties "are the same" and therefore will look for an alternative. Accordingly, there becomes a space on the political scale which a radical-right party could fill.[72] As Mouffe states, "when democratic politics has lost its capacity to mobilize people around distinct political projects…, the conditions are ripe for political demagogues to articulate popular frustration".[73] As Mc Donnell recently illustrated, the percentage of first preference votes towards the traditional parties has gradually fallen with the rise in new parties, where once FF and FG held 84.4 per cent of the vote now it has decreased to 64 per cent.[74] The reason for this has been the

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66  Garner, S. (2007), Harington, J. (2005).
67  Mair, P. (2001) "Party Competition and the Changing Party System", in *Politics in the Republic of Ireland,* edited by Coakley, J. and Gallagher, M. London: PSAI Press, p129.
68  Garner, S. (2007) "Ireland and Immigration: Explaining the Absence of the radical-right", *Patterns of Prejudice,* Vol 41, Issue 2, p109.
69  ibid.
70  ibid, p3.
71  Mc Donnell, D. (2008), p202.
72  Rydgren, J, (2007), p253.
73  Quoted in O' Malley, E. (2008), p9.
74  Mc Donnell, D. (2008), p202.

easy access for new parties which many see as the result of the PR-STV model.[75] This would therefore suggest that Ireland also meets the requirements of easy accessibility.

Recently, there has been much more attention paid to charges of corruption within Ireland and partyocracy. O'Malley and Mc Donnell have both highlighted the dominance of FF as displaying a close relationship between party and government, while they also argue that many tribunals set up to look into corruption has given the impression that Irish politics is essentially corrupt.[76] The most recent election results in 2011 would seem to suggest that voters have become dissatisfied with the FF's handling of the economic crash and their perceived hand in creating the housing bubble. However, the charge of corruption has not caused a radical-right party to emerge but it does prove that within Ireland there are fertile conditions for such a party.

### 3.2 Why is there No Radical-Right Party?

Examining the above conditions we can say that Ireland meets many of these requirements yet a radical-right party has not emerged, why is that? Many scholars offer different explanations for this, some argue like Kitchelt and say that Ireland is a special case and cannot be explained using the normal theories. Whereas, Garner, O' Malley, and Mc Donnell all put forward their own theories to explain this phenomenon. In my opinion there is not one simple answer to explain why a radical-right party has not emerged, rather there are many different chains to this non-event.

To begin, Ireland is a relatively new country and as stated above, the country was born out of a struggle for self-determination over their colonial rulers, Britain. The Irish people were mainly united and in agreement over gaining independence from the British. Generically speaking the struggle was between an Irish, Catholic people and a British, Protestant people. Therefore, there was no social cleavage within the society, which was seen as a main catalyst for the radical-right in other European Countries.[77] It was only later when the state developed that political antagonisms occurred. The most obvious and crucial was the split in old Sinn Fein

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75 Sinnott, R. (2001) "The Electoral System" in *Politics in the Republic of Ireland,* edited by Coakley, J. and Gallagher, M. London: PSAI Press, p99
76 O'Malley, E. (2008), p9. and Mc Donnell, D. (2008), p208.
77 Garner, S. (2007b), p109.

over partition. This group dispersed into two opposing sides, one supporting the treaty for a twenty six county independent Ireland and one opposing such a move.[78] Out of this split emerged Fianna Fail and Fine Gael, who to this day are the two largest parties in Ireland and who are still seen as opposing over this issue. As Mair noted, the ideological division in Ireland is slight, and both main parties are seen as similar, however everything has been "frozen" over the issue of the treaty. "In this sense it is not the legacy of history per se, but rather the legacy of a particular history-that of the 1920's and 1930's".[79] Therefore, for many observers Ireland's political system is seen as lacking ideological difference, while the politics and voters are seen mainly as both parochial and divided between the two main parties. Although party attachment has been declining the two main parties still gain the most shares of the votes. Likewise, many of the minor parties have been born out conflict within these larger parties. The Progressive Democrats emerged after a dispute between some members of Fianna Fail, while the Labor Party and Democratic Left have had similar histories.

The emergence of new parties from the old parties has restrained radical ideology from becoming significant and the electoral dominance of the two main parties has kept voters from seeking radical alternatives. In this sense, the Irish political system has a "pivotal center party", usually FF, whose ideology and policies influence other parties to become coalitional. When this occurs political parties loose ideological difference and tend to convergence closer to the status quo in order to enter Government.[80] This convergence is said to open up the space for a radical-right party but in Ireland it has lead the parties closer together in an attempt for them to become "catch all" parties.

However O'Malley has rightly noted that in addition to the minor parties' convergence, Sinn Fein has occupied the space which usually a radical-right party would locate.[81] He points to their anti-establishment and populist rhetoric as a way in which they achieve success from the socially disadvantaged areas and from dissatisfied voters who see the main parties as 'all the same'. His analysis has shown that many of the voters who would fall under the "losers of

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78  ibid
79  Mair, P. (1987) *The Changing Irish Party System: Organisation, Ideology, and Electoral Competition*, London: Frances Pinter, p139.
80  Mc Donnell, D. (2008), p202.
81  O'Malley, E. (2008).

modernization theory" tend to vote for Sinn Fein.[82] This is quite a valid point considering Sinn Fein's similarities with a radical-right party. Firstly they are populist, authoritarian in structure and nativist-concerning the EU expansion and British rule in Northern Ireland.[83] However, they are strongly pro-immigration. This is a slight contradiction considering their nativist appeal but it does exclude them from being labeled a radical-right party. Nonetheless, O'Malley has noted that voters are not too concerned with ideology. He states that many of the votes transferred from Immigration Control Platform's candidate, Áine Ní Chonnaill went to Sinn Fein. Likewise, he demonstrated that many of Sinn Fein voters voted in favor of the 2004 Citizenship Referendum, which Sinn Fein canvassed against.[84]

It must also be emphasized, that the space for policies of the radical-right is limited within Ireland. In 2004 the Citizenship Referendum, which won by a large majority, 'racialised' what it is to be a citizen.[85] No longer can citizenship be conferred upon anyone who is born in the country, rather citizenship is now deemed to be given through one's cultural ties with a nation.[86] In this way, the notions of citizenship and nationhood have become merged. The reason given for the change was to stop 'citizenship tourists' arriving to Ireland to give birth in order to obtain citizenship for the child and rights for the mother. By changing the laws for citizenship, the state has occupied a position on immigration which a radical-right party might take up. Thus, they have taken the mantle off the voter who might feel under economic threat from immigration. Additionally, the Government has re-drawn the borders of the state, to protect against the internal threat from non-nationals by maintaining the purity and ethnicity of the Irish state.[87] By implementing these policies, the state has in fact attempted to securitize what it is to be Irish. Likewise, the state has acted in a bio-political way by enforcing their power over the people with the aim to develop the nation. As Harrington states, the development of a nation has become an assessment of what type of condition the state is in. Therefore, the Government is concerned with the mortality, morbidity and even the ethnicity of

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82  ibid, p13.
83  Clark, A. (2010), p670.
84  O'Malley, E. (2008), p15.
85  Garner, S. (2007b), p116.
86  ibid, p11.
87  Harrington, J. A. (2005) "Citizenship and the Biopolitics of Post-Nationalist Ireland", *Journal of Law and Society,* Vol 32, No 3, p438.

the state.[88] "Where earlier battles for self-assertion and self-preservation were fought at the frontier, the new struggle is within: a 'race war' against internal threats to national progress."[89] Through these actions the Government have once again redefined the concept of the border, no longer is the north-south division the main concern for the Government but instead it is the threat from those who are not European.

This is not the only way in which extreme policies of the radical-right is mitigated. It must be noted, that throughout Irish society there has been a dispersion of ideologies which in another country would be taken up by the radical-right. The most recent, has been the case of "The Protection of Life during Pregnancy Act",[90] which split many members of the political parties into two opposing camps, one in favor of legalizing abortion in certain circumstances and the other defiantly opposing it. This difference of opinion has forced some members of the main political parties to leave their organizations. In turn, there has been a quasi-political party set up by these dissenting voices, which comes under the name of "The Reform Alliance."[91] This group has organized "A National Conversation on Ireland's Future" and seems to be in the process of forming an alternative party. However it must be noted, that this make shift party does not hold any radical-right views, rather their anti-abortion outlook should be categorized as conservative. Moreover, the formation of this group has enabled political dissent to be shifted away from a radical-right party and into a group which is made up of mainstream dissenters. Like Sinn Fein, The Reform Alliance coalition can attract voters who might otherwise vote for a radical-right party. Also, this confirms what I have argued above, that is, that the emergence of new parties in Ireland are formed out of conflicts within mainstream political parties and the new parties tend not to drift too far from the policies of the major parties, because of the need to present themselves as coalitional. In addition, there are other organizations which are concerned with matters which have historically been occupied by the radical-right. In relation to social matters such as abortion, the Catholic Church has been influential, along with other Catholic organizations such as Youth Defense,[92] while Sinn Fein

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88  ibid, p429.
89  ibid.
90  RT News, (2014) "Controversial Irish Abortion Law comes into effect", 1 January 2014, Available at: http://rt.com/news/ireland-abortion-law-force-060/ [accessed on: 28/01/2014].
91  RTE, (2014), "Reform Alliance Holds first Public Meeting", 27 January 2014, Available at: http://www.rte.ie/news/2014/0125/500090-hundreds-to-attend-reform-alliance-conference/
92  Garner, S. (2007a) "Babies Bodies and Entitlement: Gendered Aspects to Citizenship in the Republic of

and for a while the Greens, offered the anti-establishment voters an alternative. Most recently the EU skeptic position was taken up by Libertas who canvassed against both the Nice and Lisbon treaties.[93]

Another point which needs to be stressed is the lack of any historical party attachment to a radical-right or fascist ideology. Although, some claim that FG's ties with the quasi-fascist 'Blue Shirts' qualifies them as having some connection with the radical-right, in my opinion this claim lacks any substance considering FG's centrist position and their very liberal social policies.[94] Also, "The Blue Shirts" were not a typical fascist organization compared to the Italian fascists rather they were more nationalists opposed to FF republican methods. As Garner states, "The majority of its followers were interested in domestic issues; the economic war, freedom of speech and agricultural reforms."[95] It is also worth mentioning that Ireland's only ever solely anti-immigration party, Immigration Control Platform, failed to achieve any success in 2002 or 2007 when they ran candidates in the general election.[96]

Bearing in mind, the failure of many minor parties to stay in existence we must conclude that the Irish party system does not favor small parties. Although Ireland's two party system and PR-STV voting mechanism allows for easy access to the political arena it does not translate into attaching voters.

We can see from Irish voting data that small parties have done extremely well in some circumstances, most notably, the PD's won 11.8% in the 1987 general election.[97] However, it has been a trend in Irish politics that whenever a minor party does well or goes into Government they soon collapse. The PD's and the Greens are prime examples, these two parties emerged as alternatives to the status quo of FF and FG but after they served in Government the electorate soon lost confidence in their ability to change politics and reverted back to either FF

Ireland", *Parliamentary Affairs,* Vol 60, No 3, p445.

93  Weeks, L. (2012) "The Dog that Failed to Bark: Why Did No New Party Emerge in 2011", in *Radical or Redundant? Minor Parties in Irish Politics,* edited by Weeks, L. and Clark, A. Dublin: The History Press of Ireland, p23.

94  Smith, J. (2008) "Towards Consensus? Centre Right Parties and Immigration Policy in the UK and Ireland", *Journal of European Public Policy,* Vol 15, No 3, p419.

95  Garner, S. (2007b), p4.

96  Weeks, L. (2012), p23.

97  Clark, A. (2010), p666.

or FG. As O'Malley has noted, small parties are often seen as similar to the main parties and are "all the same" after they fail to radically change politics. It's often the case that these minor parties emerge during times of crisis, like the radical-right but they lose voters' attention when they fail to deliver on election promises. This reverts back to the problem that radical or minor party's face, which is, their need to conform to the system but stay differentiated within it. This as we have seen in Ireland, is a tricky act to do and is so often the case that voters become just as dissatisfied with the new parties that they revert back to the old ones. As the Irish saying goes, "it's better the devil you know than the devil you don't".

In addition, it is worth mentioning that for a party to "break the mould" they must be well organized, funded and have in their midst a charismatic leader. These three are very difficult to achieve. It has been argued that this was the failure of the PD's and The Greens, who were confined to urban areas and lacked accessibility to rural voters compared to FF and FG who were able to capitalize on this weakness.

To sum up, the radical-right has failed to emerge in Ireland because of a number of different issues. Firstly, Ireland's political parties were all born out of old Sinn Fein after independence and because of this, there was not any social cleavages apparent to create a radical-right. Likewise, the Irish parties had similar ideological views. Whereas in recent years, the emergence of Sinn Fein and their anti-establishment rhetoric have occupied the space in which a radical-right party might operate in. Also, the Government of 2004 has successfully "racialised" Irish citizenship, which has acted as a shield against any radical-right party taking up this issue. Similarly, the absence of any historical party link to fascism or the radical-right has helped not to conjure up any nostalgic feelings of Ireland's rebirth. Finally, the difficulties of sustaining and organizing a minor party have led to this non-event.

## 3.3 **Where does "Populism" fit in?**

From the analysis thus far, it is evident that Ireland has the necessary conditions for a radical-right party but one has failed to emerge because of numerous different reasons. Although this is the case, it has not stopped populism from flourishing, instead the case of Ireland demonstrates how both populism and democracy are compatible, and while it also

confirms that to equate populism with the radical-right is a dangerous error and one which should be avoided. As I have argued throughout this paper, populism is compatible with democracy and can act in a positive way to scrutinize and critique the Government of a nation, while it is also a style that any party or politician can use to articulate a theme.

To begin, I think it is worth restating that populism's core features is it's anti-establishment rhetoric and it's intrinsic relationship to the 'people' and the 'heartland'. All of these features have been key to all political parties in Ireland in one way or another. Firstly, the anti-establishment political discourse has been vital to all of the parties on the periphery of the mainstream. Sinn Fein has undoubtedly been the strongest proponent of this style. As O'Malley illustrated in his analysis, Sinn Fein occupy the space where normally a radical-right party would be situated.[98] They tend to see themselves as the champions of "true democracy" and a party of the "people". This corresponds to their grassroots structure which Rydgren noted as a characteristic of a populist party. Also, their use of ideology is quite consistent with Taggarts chameleonic quality, of adapting to any environment. As Mc Donnell argues, they often use ideology to fit any particular situation.[99] In addition, the party is often very skeptical towards the EU and has canvassed against previous EU treaties, seeing them as an erosion of the Irish people's sovereignty and a "power grab" from the elites in Brussels.[100] Thus, they present "a discourse which conceives of the common and virtuous people as being exploited by the untrustworthy political and economic elites".[101] However, it is also worth noting that they do scrutinize the ruling parties' policies and have raised concerns over social and economic issues. They have been very conscientious of Ireland's growing inequality, and the high rate of unemployment which they have actively highlighted through their elected officials and their policy papers.[102] Likewise, they have been extremely critical of the austerity measures which both previous governments have implemented, especially concerning the cuts to social welfare and recent introduction of a property tax and water charges.[103] Through these actions Sinn Fein are articulating social concerns, albeit through an idealized vision of the Irish peoples best

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98  O'Malley, E. (2008).
99  Mc Donnell, D. (2008), p212.
100 Clark, A. (2010), p670.
101 Mc Donnell, D. (2008), p212.
102 ibid.
103 Sinn Fein, "Economic Plan for Recovery: There is a Better Way", Available at: http://www.sinnfein.ie/economy [Accessed on 30/01/2014].

interests, but nonetheless, they are doing it in a manner which presents challenges the status quo politics. Thus, Sinn Fein acts as a representative of the people and fulfill Laclau's concept of the benefits of populism. However, it must be added that other minor parties also contribute to raising key issues in Irish society. The Green Party who was in opposition for most of their political life has orchestrated 'populist' and anti-establishment attacks in the past mainly around environmental issues. After these concerns generated enough publicity the mainstream parties were quick to adopt "green" policies albeit for self-preservation. Nonetheless, the Green's populist style around the issue of the environment did help to critique and alter Irish environmental policies.

On the other hand, the traditional Irish parties have also adopted populist rhetoric in order to be vote maximizing. The recent election victory in 2011 by Fine Gael was deeply populist in tone and very often they dichotomized issues into 'black and white'. An obvious example of this style can be seen within their election manifesto, which attributes the economic collapse solely to the previous FF government who they see as promoting "cronyism" and putting the "interests of citizens behind those of powerful elites".[104] In light of this, we can conclude that FG tried to associate themselves with the "common people" and remove any doubt that they themselves are an elite group. Although they did use populism to highlight the structural deficiency in the Irish model, it must be added that they did this in order to win the election. This is what Alexander Deze notes about the competitive nature of democracy and the importance of parties to use strategic differentiation in order to attract voters.[105] In this way, populism, because of its malleability and lack of ideology, is ideal for democratic politics because it "can tell people what they want to hear".

A party who has often exemplified this "tell them what they want to hear" attitude has been FF. They often consider their own party as a "nationalist movement" and in the past has invoked images of an idealized Ireland. More recently, their former leader Beartie Ahern was very adept at using common language and considering himself an ordinary man with no great aspirations, in fact he stated that if he had "enough money for a few pints" and if he could look after his family he would be quiet happy, he claimed that "I have no desire to have a big house,

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104Fine      Gael,      (2011)      "Election      Manifesto",      p2,      Available      at:
    http://www.rte.ie/news/2011/0215/finegaelmanifesto.pdf [Accessed on 30'01/2014].
105Deze, A. (2004), p20.

no desire to have land. I'd consider it a nuisance, actually".[106] Such remarks from Ahern clearly illustrates the depth of populism in Irish politics but it also shows how populism is not a sole element of the radical-right rather it is a style there to be used by any astute political party.

## 4. **Future Developments**

It is always hard to predict future political events but I think it is fair to assume from this analysis, that the Irish political system will have at its core a great deal of populism. No doubt this populism will act as a critiquing of Governing parties and as a method to attract voters. I think that with the de-alignment of voters from parties and the emphasis of candidate appeal will ultimately lead to more populist politics. This culture has been fostered by the increased role which the media play in political life.[107] Likewise, I believe that Ireland will avoid a radical-right party emerging because of the positioning of Sinn Fein, the lack of ideology within the Irish political system and the already present radical-right policies which some governments have already implemented. It is also my opinion from analyzing this topic, that the lack of historical ties with any fascist party and the maintaining of a homogenous nation will protect against any future development. It is worth noting, that Ireland does not have the same social or ethnic cleavages present compared to other European nations. However, I do envisage that further voter de-alignment from the two main parties will occur and that new parties will emerge in the political system. An obvious example is the recent formation of The Reform Alliance which I do see developing into a formal political party. As with previous minor parties, it will not 'radicalize' Irish politics, which needs minor parties to appear coalitional in order for them to enter government. It is on this point, which can comfort our European counterparts, who feel worried about the radical-rights development. They, like Ireland, have witnessed the rise of populism from the mainstream parties, and more prominently from the radical-right, however the radical-right as a movement is very much constrained within liberal democracies because of the competitive nature of politics, and the need for these parties to conform to democracy in order to enter government. As we can see from the Front National, or the Austrian Freedom Party, their ability to win votes was dependent on them conforming to 'liberal democracy'. In this way, the radical-right parties use

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106 Ahern quoted in Mc Donnell, D. (2008), p211.
107 Pasquino, G. (2008), p26.

strategic differentiation like the minor parties in Ireland, but this leads quiet often to the radical-right reconciling their extreme ideology.[108] This 'adaption dilemma', thus protects 'liberal democracy' while simultaneously allowing alternative parties to scrutinize the prevailing politics of a given time. Therefore, as the Irish case demonstrates party convergence does not only lead to political space opening up but it also leads to radical-right parties converging themselves. Due to this, I believe that 'liberal democracy' within the EU will be protected and secured. Even if radical-right parties do win substantial number of seats their appeal quickly wears off after they fail to deliver on their pre-election promises. Similarly, if the parties do not decide to conform to the principle of compromise, they often walk out of government and retreat to a peripheral position. This will maintain their support from grassroot followers but it will fail to convince the middle and upper class voter that their ideology is beneficial, which is necessary to enter into government. Thus, I feel that the radical-right within the EU has reached their upper limit and that they only have a certain shelf life before voters become dissatisfied with them and return to the mainstream or less radical parties.

However, it must be stressed, that populism as a style of politics will continue to be used in both the EU and Ireland. As I have argued throughout, this essentially questions democracy regarding the policies and actions of the mainstream parties. By acting as judge and jury, populism provides an essential critique of ruling parties and is thus necessary and compatible with democracy. It acts in a very positive way by highlighting the flawed consensus that we now live in a 'post-political' age, where antagonisms are a thing of the past.[109] By stressing certain antagonisms 'populism' brings politics back to debating issues, rather than presenting an illusion that all politics are represented by mainstream parties. However, I am aware that within some European countries this opens up the space for radical-right demagogues, but as I stated above these parties are constrained within the democratic framework. Therefore, both the EU and National governments have a responsibility to protect against the rise of the radical-right and I believe that this can only be done through effective debate within the democratic system. Thus, populism represents a way to articulate problems within society. As Meny and Surel have brilliantly pinpointed, populism does not entail, a priori, anti-democratic standings: it is strictly related to democracy, it is the other side of the same coin, and it should therefore be

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108 Deze, A. (2004), p20.
109 Mouffe, C. (2005), p51.

disentangled from its right wing location".[110]

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110Quoted in Ignazi, P. (2010), p30.

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