

Ultranationalism in Europe

Analysis and Outlook with regard to the European Union

MARIELLA FRANZ

EU-Programme Manager Hanns Seidel Foundation Brussels

Abstract

Ultranasionalisme di Eropa yang telah berakar sekian lama tidak dapat dipandang hanya dari kondisi lingkungan yang di sekelilingnya maupun digeneralisasi. Hal ini disebabkan kondisi historis, sosiologis, politik, negara-negara di Eropa berbeda satu sama lain, sehingga diperlukan pendefinisian yang jelas. Tulisan ini memaparkan perbandingan ultranasionalisme di Eropa Barat, Tengah, dan Timur; yang antara lain disebabkan masih tidak jelasnya profil ideologi politik negara-negara Eropa Timur pasca Perang Dingin. Hal ini menunjukkan bahwa ultranasionalisme perlu untuk dipelajari lebih lanjut. Ketika kelompok ekstrimis sayap kanan memegang kekuasaan, kelompok masyarakat sipil perlu mempersiapkan diri untuk menghadapinya. Namun mengucilkan pandangan ultranasionalisme dan kelompok tersebut, dari perdebatan publik juga bukan tindakan yang tepat. Fenomena ini harus dipahami dan dikaji secara mendalam agar negara-negara Eropa dan Uni Eropa mampu menghadapinya dan menjaga Eropa untuk tetap berpegang teguh pada prinsip-prinsip demokrasi. Tulisan ini juga menyatakan bahwa generasi muda di Eropa perlu diyakinkan pada nilai-nilai dasar yang fundamental dalam sebuah masyarakat yang demokratis agar tidak terjadi persepsi dan mispersepsi terhadap dinamika ultranasionalisme itu sendiri di Eropa.

Keywords: constitution, European Union, international law

Introduction

"Ultra nationalism" is a term increasingly used in order to describe extreme national, far right-wing movements or right-wing extremism. One may observe increasing ultra national movements throughout nowadays' Europe encountering the process and values of European

integration as having been developing for 50 years. These changes are alarming and of special concern to, beyond the national context, defenders of the "European idea". Ultra nationalism has become a major challenge to democracy and European democratic societies.

It is hard to find a clear and all

encompassing definition for "ultra nationalism". In literature researchers and scholars use the terms "extreme right" parties and "right-wing populist" parties to express the same political movements. Thus, "right-wing extremism" can be equated with "right-wing populism". Moreover, in this article, "far right" shall mean "extreme right-wing political views". It shall not be unmentioned that "extremism" also exists in left-wing politics in Europe. Yet, one observes that the critical focus of public perception on "extremism" has been moving increasingly to right-wing parties in recent years. "Extremism" is now nearly automatically associated with "right-wing extremism" in public perception.

This article tries to address the "phenomenon" of ultra nationalism from an international, comparative perspective. In a first part, at the occasion of the recent 50th anniversary of European integration, a closer look shall be taken on the integration process as such and its values enshrined in the founding treaties. These values may be at stake when it comes to ultra national movements in Europe. In a second part the phenomenon of ultra nationalism in Europe will be scrutinized from a general perspective. What is ultra nationalism all about? What are the reasons for ultra national movements? Here, this article will try to offer an answer to the extreme right-wing

movements in Europe and to find out whether right-wing extremism in Central and Eastern Europe is different from the situation in Western Europe. In addition, having in mind the latest major challenge to the process of European integration, its enlargement to Bulgaria and Romania, the paper will look into these two EU member states with view to ultra national movements in political societies. In a third part the formation of the new far-right faction in the European Parliament shall be analysed. The author tries to give an outlook to the future but underlines the short time frame of only some weeks since this new parliamentary group actually took up activity in parliament.

1. Anniversary of "Europe": 50 years of integration in Europe

In March 2007 celebrations were undertaken all over Europe on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the Treaties of Rome launching the process of European integration. What started at first with an economic community developed successfully - as already in the mind of the founding fathers - to a political union enhancing solidarity between its member states and peoples (Art 1 TEU)¹.

In the light of this considerable time frame of integration amongst the member states and peoples of Europe one may wonder how it is still possible today to face ultra national, extreme

far-right movements in several member countries of the "European family".

The text of the Treaty establishing the European Union clearly displays the values, on which this community is based, "(1) *The Union is founded on the principles of liberty, democracy, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and the rule of law, principles which are common to the Member States;* (2) *The Union shall respect fundamental rights, as guaranteed by the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms signed in Rome on 4 November 1950 and as they result from the constitutional traditions common to the Member States, as general principles of Community law. [...]*"

In addition, the Charter of Fundamental Rights as proclaimed by the EU institutions in December 2000 at the European Council of Nice was enshrined in the text of the Constitutional Treaty². The inclusion and adoption of these fundamental rights as common values of the European Union stress that the history of European integration was trying to learn from the cruel experience of the

Second World War and to overcome the division of Europe in a democratic West and communist East. The guarantee of fundamental rights and freedoms shall avoid that extremism, racism and xenophobia are ever again given any lead in Europe. Thus, the history of European integration took an anti-ultra national development from the very beginning. The European Communities founded by the Treaties of Rome in 1957 were created to diminish the danger of war, instability and conflicts in Europe. It was primarily a peace project the founding fathers of the European Communities had envisaged.

The definite non-acceptance of racism and xenophobia was again underlined just recently in the "Berlin Declaration", adopted under the German EU-Presidency on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the signature of the Treaties of Rome.

*"We will fight terrorism, organised crime and illegal immigration together. We stand up for liberties and civil rights also in the struggle against those who oppose them. Racism and xenophobia must never again be given any rein."*³

¹ Treaty establishing the European Union.

² The Constitutional Treaty is still under ratification; the process was put on a hold after negative referenda on the text in France and the Netherlands in 2005; the German EU-Presidency is currently making efforts to re-launch the process.

³ http://www.eu2007.de/de/News/download_docs/Maerz/0324-RAA/English.pdf; the EU set up a European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia which was only recently converted into a Fundamental Rights Agency.

How can ultra nationalism still exist in the European Union after 50 years of European integration? Why is it winning ground in recent years? Could this have to do with a general "crisis of Europe"? The following lines shall attempt to give an answer.

2. Ultra nationalism in the European Union: reasons and challenges

"Diversity in Unity" is a general "slogan" to promote the value of diversity within the European Union. When it comes to political analysis undertaken in this article the diversity of countries and their peoples is reflected in the diverse faces of ultra nationalism throughout the continent.

Firstly, policy making and political societies differ in the various countries. There can only be parallel lines drawn from one national context to the other.

Secondly, one should draw the line between Central and Eastern European Countries (CEEC) on the one hand and Western European countries on the other.

Regarding "policy making" the core question arises in whether ultra nationalists throughout Europe do have a common agenda? Here, a comparative look inside selected EU member states will be useful. Hereby, the specific local context is also always studied on the basis of general theoretical models and cross-national

case studies.⁴ But first of all one has to look into the field of right-wing extremism as such.

Researchers in various European countries focus on selected parts of the phenomenon such as finding out whether there is a link between parties and party structures on the one hand and right-wing extremism and populism on the other.⁵ Does a populist type of parties exist as a common European model? What are similarities and what are the main differences when scrutinizing far-right parties in different European countries? Whilst the phenomenon shows a surprising high degree of continuity of programmatic core issues over the years, analysts deny a "common world view" of right-wing extremists.⁶

⁴ cf. research team "Extremism and Democracy" of the University of Antwerp, Belgium at <http://www.ua.ac.be/main.aspx?c=ONDERZKDBE&n=40312&id=UA033&tid=21155>.

⁵ e.g. Florian Hartleb, *Rechts- und Linkspopulismus im westeuropäischen Vergleich – Zur strukturellen und inhaltlichen Bestimmung eines eigenständigen Parteientypus*, in: Uwe Backes/Eckhard Jesse (eds.): *Gefährdungen der Freiheit. Extremistische Ideologien im Vergleich 2006* (Göttingen), Schriften des Hannah-Arendt-Instituts für Totalitarismusforschung, 105.

⁶ cf. Kurt Lenk, *Rechtsextreme "Argumentationsmuster"*, Aus *Politik und Zeitgeschichte (APuZ)*, Beilage zur Wochenzeitung *Das Parlament*, Nr. 42/2005, 17 (20, 21).

2.1 Right wing populism and extremism in Western Europe

Throughout Western Europe diverse socio-political country contexts can be found. Yet, as explained above, parallels can be drawn from one right-wing extremist party to another. In the following, very short and selected examples of right-wing extremism views shall be given with regard to selected European countries.

Taking the topic of nationality and cultural identity which usually ranks high on populist agendas, one can observe that the issue seems to have moved from an "anti-minorities" to an "anti-Muslim community" attitude. This has certainly to do with the terrorist attacks of 9/11, followed by attacks in Madrid in 2004, the bombings of London in 2005, as well as by the internationally declared fight against "Islamist terrorism". Fears are always a welcome target to build on by extremists. France may be taken into consideration where the Muslim community forms a considerable part of society; same conditions do occur in the United Kingdom. Yet, if we look at the political discourse by populist parties, we find out that debates might differ widely. Whilst for the French right-wing extremist party "Front National" the anti-Muslim debate touches on cultural ground due to the French "integration model" of assimilation (adaptation to

the French culture), in the UK "multiculturalism" is part of the British culture.⁷ That is why the "anti-Muslim" issue is not taken up that much by political discourse. Considering Poland, in contrast, the ultra national League of Polish Families would rather show an anti-Jewish attitude than opposing to "Islamic influences". In Denmark the populist People's Party blames immigrants nearly for every problem; more than that, they believe that immigration was caused by the EU, thus by the process of European integration. In Denmark political mainstream is very strict on the issue; tough reforms on immigration policy have been adopted recently. Other countries, like the Netherlands or Austria, followed in a less tough way. This shows that far-right parties do have in common to be anti-immigrant and to blame the EU for everything. That is why they adopt mostly an anti-European integration attitude, to keep "uncontrollable, secret forces" (a typical concern of ultra nationalists) out. Why? The EU is an easy target. Brussels and EU institutions are "far"

⁷ Both integration models were not successful, given the development of parallel communities in France and the "failure of multi-culturalism" in the UK regarding the bombings of 2005 committed by British "integrated" UK born citizens with a Pakistan background.

from EU citizens; and the EU is very often blamed by national politicians for negative and unpopular news which in reality stem from political decisions at national level.

The German Context⁸

Right wing extremism in Germany has been marked by tradition and modernisation for the last 15 years. Yet, right-wing extremism undergoes rapid changes that one can now talk about "modern" right-wing extremism. In some regions this extremism seems to have developed to a social movement, addressing local affairs and involving young people as core target group.⁹ New developments with regard to this phenomenon seem to be the following: right-wing extremist attitudes (mainly with regard to xenophobia) are now

increasingly found also amongst high level educated people; the economic crisis in Germany of some years ago as well as the necessary reforms of the social state might be the reasons for it.¹⁰ A second recent observation shows that mainly in Eastern Germany young people are increasingly addressed via internet and targeted events in "leisure time"¹¹. "Modern"¹² extremism is thus taking up "modern" ways of disperse.

When it comes to right-wing extremist attitudes one fourth of the German population agrees with xenophobic statements (followed by chauvinist ones). But extreme attitudes differ in parts of society: East-West, gender, level of education and social standing play a considerable role. In conclusion, East Germany does not seem to be of a more extreme attitude than the West. Regarding differences in gender, women catch up with men only in the case of supporting

⁸ See recent publications: *Andreas Klärner/Michael Kohlstruck* (eds.), *Moderner Rechtsextremismus in Deutschland*, Schriftenreihe, Band 555, 2006 (Bonn); *Frank Decker/Viola Neu* (Eds.), *Handbuch der deutschen Parteien 2007*; for NPD as example for an extremist party see e.g. *Eckhard Jesse*, *Das Auf und Ab der NPD*, *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte (APuZ)*, Beilage zur Wochenzeitung *Das Parlament*, Nr. 42/2005, 31.

⁹ *Andreas Klärner/Michael Kohlstruck*, *Rechtsextremismus – Thema der Öffentlichkeit und Gegenstand der Forschung*, in *Andreas Klärner/Michael Kohlstruck* (eds); *Moderner Rechtsextremismus in Deutschland*, Schriftenreihe, Band 555, 2006 (Bonn), 7 (28).

¹⁰ *Oliver Decker/Elmar Brähler*, *Rechtsextreme Einstellungen in Deutschland*, *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte (APuZ)*, Beilage zur Wochenzeitung *Das Parlament*, Nr. 42/2005, 8 (17).

¹¹ This „leisure time“ is primarily due to high youth unemployment, insufficient recreational facilities and the lack of future perspectives in the Eastern Laender of Germany.

¹² *Hans-Georg Goltz*, Editorial, *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte (APuZ)*, Beilage zur Wochenzeitung *Das Parlament*, Nr. 42/2005, 2.

xenophobic statements. Most acceptances of extremist views are shared by unemployed and persons over 60.¹³

What conclusions can we draw from these observations? Firstly, far right extremist views seem to be most successful when it comes to xenophobia. Secondly, analysts prove that the so called "Modernisierungs-verlierer"¹⁴, people in economic and social descent due to modern reforms and globalisation, are increasingly adopting extremist views. This is quite alarming. On the one hand, still the more than 60 years-old show this tendency, but on the other side, it was explained that extremist groups focus increasingly on the young generation. Now, taking into consideration that in nowadays' Europe it is young people who are facing economic decline, lack secure job perspectives and wonder about the advantages of this Europe, we become aware that it is mainly the young generation who we have to address and convince of basic, fundamental values in a democratic society.

This development is unfortunately valid not only in selected European countries but comes up to a rather

international, European problem: wherever core institutions of democratic societies such as parties, parliaments or media are not convincing anymore, extremism will take ground in our societies. The "erosion" of European integration and acute "symptoms of weakness" of some European governments put the phenomenon on an international European scale.¹⁵

2.2 Right-wing populism and extremism in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE)

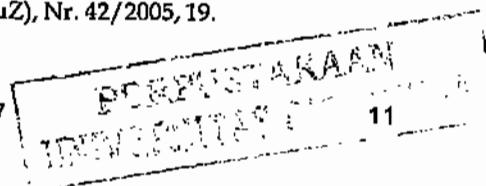
Whilst researchers have shed considerable light on populist political parties and societies in Western Europe, parallel research on the situation in Central and Eastern European countries – "transformation countries" is still rather scarce. Yet, some scholars have been trying to undertake a comparison between East and West with regard to ultra national movements in selected countries.

First of all, introductory remarks shall explain about the term "populism" as used mainly in recent literature on the extreme-right. Populism has become a more "modern" term to describe ultra national movements since the 1980s; different "faces" of ultra nationalism seem to

¹³ Decker/Brähler, *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte (APuZ)*, Nr. 42/2005, 15, 16.

¹⁴ Cf. Decker/Brähler, *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte (APuZ)*, Nr. 42/2005, 16.

¹⁵ See Lenk, *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte (APuZ)*, Nr. 42/2005, 19.



have increased in a more "flexible" framework. In comparison to the older terms of "right-wing extremism" and "radicalism", these can be more easily conceived from an ideological point of view; but when it comes to populism scholars search for a certain ideology and do not agree whether populism can be also judged as "ideology" (with a clear determination in content) or simply as a political stylistic device.¹⁶ Political scientists have not found a final answer to this question yet. What is of importance for this research, however, is how to recognize populism. Here two main characters appear: the discursive (technique of speech) and the organisational form (way or functioning of a populist party).¹⁷

In the following, one shall take a closer look at these core elements of populism, trying to highlight any differences between Eastern and Western European countries.

First of all, what does populism or right-wing extremism have in common in both parts of Europe?

The parameters characterising a populist party are the following:¹⁸

It has a charismatic leader with which the party maintains close ties (examples: Jean Marie Le Pen – "Front National" in France; Filip Dewinter – "Vlaams Belang" in Belgium; Jörg Haider, now HC Strache – "Freedom Party" in Austria; István Csurka – "Hungarian Justice and Life Party" in Hungary; Roman Giertych – "League of Polish Families" in Poland; Dimitar Stojanov – "Ataka" in Bulgaria; Corneliu Vadim Tudor – "Greater Romania Party"); it claims direct democracy; it sees a clear contrast between "normal people" and the "elites in power" and stands next to the "ruled", mistrusting the "rulers"; it also underpins a contrast between ethnic nationals and foreigners; it offers easy, mostly repressive solutions to complex problems (e.g. that unemployment would decrease, if a preference for nationals was introduced on the labour market; criminality would decrease due to tougher penalties); anti-globalisation, thus also very critical towards European Integration (it stands for protectionist market measures and is

¹⁶ Franz Decker, Die populistische Herausforderung, in Franz Decker (ed.), Populismus in Europa. Gefahr für die Demokratie oder nützliches Korrektiv?, Schriftenreihe, Band 547, 2006 (Bonn), 9 (11).

¹⁷ Decker in Decker, Populismus 11.

¹⁸ see Klaus Bachmann, Populistische Parteien und Bewegungen in Mitteleuropa, in Franz Decker (ed.), Populismus in Europa. Gefahr für die Demokratie oder nützliches Korrektiv?, Schriftenreihe, Band 547, 2006 (Bonn), 216 (218, 219).

afraid of a loss of national identity); it comprises in general mainly men, with low educational backgrounds, workers or middle class people who face economic and social descent. One has to bear in mind that these parameters are indicators; not all of them are given in every case of a party classified as "populist" (the Dutch "List Pim Fortuyn", for example, applied a cultural¹⁹ definition for "nationals", not an ethnic one; it did not demand protectionist measures in market economy and did not rank anti-EU criticism high on its political programme). In conclusion, the content of the political agenda of a populist party strongly depends on the respective political culture of the given country which makes an international comparison of the phenomenon quite cumbersome. Not surprisingly, this holds true even more in the comparison of Eastern to Western European countries. In fact, populism with regard to contents, arguments and views could be characterised as a "changing animal" adapting flexibly to new, applicable "concerns".

In the special context of Central and Eastern European countries²⁰ the so called "one leader parties" often differ from Western European

counterparts when it come to "foreigners". While in the West the term "foreigner" means immigrants, mostly from outside the EU-15 old member states, in CEE populists draw dividing lines vis-à-vis foreign investors (also from the EU) in the first and foreigners in the second place. Moreover, the "contrast group" to differ from is mainly represented not by immigrants but ethnic or national minorities or Jews (like by the "League of Polish Families" in Poland). The fear of foreign investors leads to the objective in party programmes to keep land and real estate in national hands.

Poland actually shows the highest populist potential; in addition its populist parties ("League of Polish Families", "Farmers' Self Defence" and Law and Justice") are the most agriculturally affected throughout CEE. Here *Bachmann*²¹ starts from an "agriculturally affected populism" as meaningful character for ultra nationalism in CEE, while *Mudde*²² (as explained in the following) gives populism in CEE a chance either in rural or in urban areas, but what plays a significant role is the contrast between the two possible electorate groups.

¹⁹ Cultural definitions for „nationality“ then lead to a strong exclusion of and opposition to Muslim communities.

²⁰ cf. *Bachmann in Decker, Populismus* 229.

²¹ *Bachmann in Decker, Populismus* 230.

²² *Cas Mudde, EU accession and a new populist center-periphery cleavage in Central and Eastern Europe*, Central and Eastern Europe working paper 62, 2005 (Harvard University).

The phenomenon's differences between East and West do exist with view to the historic, sociological development of the transforming states in ex-communist Central and Eastern Europe: After the Second World War Western Europe underwent a process of individualisation and of post material ideals, while CEE countries were busy with planned economy, collectivisation of land and centralized political systems. Populism came up in the West as protest against "power cartels of paralysed consensual democracies" in order to encounter post-materialist, post-national societies and "demoralizing" influences by post-material liberalism – in the East after 1989, a process marked by decreasing influence by the state, societies stayed materialist without having run through this post-material change of ideals and values.²³

Another difference can be seen in a possible populist division of societies in CEE into centre and periphery; one or the other of a populist, anti-EU attitude. Scholars may argue that this centre-periphery cleavage could be the effect of the impact of EU-accession on party competition in the new EU member states.²⁴ *Mudde*²⁵ proves this by outcomes of recent parliamentary

elections in the Visegrád²⁶ countries; he argues that populists in CEE take up an existent social division, give the target group a collective identity, express the divide also in organisational terms and like this increase the division to become a cleavage. Summing up, these countries in which the topic of "EU integration" is used by far right-wing politicians to identify their electorate by a clear division of centre and periphery, it is rather the periphery where anti-EU populism gains ground; this is not surprising since the man on the street wondering what Europe brings to the people will easily find out that on a short-term it is the centres benefiting from foreign direct investment due to EU accession in the first place.²⁷ Thus, only by strengthening border regions in CEE countries, we can bring the EU to the peripheries.

Actually, a major difference between East and West can be drawn by deliberating more on the topic of EU integration. Many political parties in CEE still have not found their clear ideological profiles yet, that is why they would use more "non-ideological" arguments than political parties in Western Europe.²⁸ In

²³ *Bachmann in Decker, Populismus* 220.

²⁴ see *Mudde, CEE working paper* 62.

²⁵ *Mudde, CEE working paper* 62, 5.

²⁶ Visegrád group: Hungary, Czech Republic, Slovak Republic, Poland.

²⁷ *Mudde, CEE working paper* 62, 4.

²⁸ *Mudde, CEE working paper* 62, 3.

addition, Euroscepticism delivers good ground for a flexible usage of the term "foreigners": once they are national minorities, then they are foreign investors or some mean EU civil servants or just "the institutions in Brussels".²⁹ We are dealing here with "moving targets", and EU accession is bringing some new creations.

Finally, in the context of post-communist states the "cleavage" could be built upon the contrast of free market liberalism and an anti-liberal, economic populism. In the end, the centre-periphery division combined with a national populist anti-EU position could serve as a perfect new target for ultra national political actors in CEE.³⁰

In CEE populist parties will be successful given the following conditions: a low trust in institutions, still developing social structures accompanied by changing voters, a majority of population in CEE holding on to materialistic ideals and a growing contrast of centres and peripheries. In the end, it can be taken for granted that also in CEE ultra national movements will not disappear but on a long term basis will form an inherent part of CEE democracies.³¹

²⁹ cf. e.g. *Bachmann in Decker, Populismus* 230.

³⁰ *Mudde, CEE working paper* 62, 7.

³¹ *Bachmann in Decker, Populismus* 230, 231.

In the context of CEE, research on the new EU member states Bulgaria and Romania with view to parties and party structures, political actors and societies is still very limited. Yet, the following paragraphs try to inform about the ultra national parties both in Romania and Bulgaria which are members of the new extreme right-wing political group in the European Parliament.

2.2.1 Bulgaria³²

In Bulgaria the political landscape is marked by a sudden appearance of the ultra national movement "Ataka" on the political scene. This extremist party, led by Dimitar Stojanov, was formed in Mai 2005, associating several small nationalist, right-wing radical associations and parties. In the parliamentary elections of 25 June 2005 which took place only some weeks after its creation, Ataka won 8% of the votes ranking on the fourth place behind the socialists "Coalition for Bulgaria" (BSP) with 31%, the NBS II. - the "Tsar's Movement" - with 20% and DPS - the Turkish Party - with

³² see Hanns Seidel Foundation (HSF) Monthly Reports on Bulgaria, June 05, October 06, March 07 and newspaper articles: "Siderov does not have the making of a Fuehrer", *Standard* 30.10.2006; "Paranov is the glue that Bulgaria needs", *Sunday Herald*, 29.10.2006; "Volen Siderov - The Big Mouth", *Standard*, 24.10.2006, "The Attack of the Attack", *Standard*, 26.6.2005; "Siderov's Platoon", *Standard*, 27.6.2005.

13%. The turnout of voters was at only 55,8%. This relative election victory of Ataka was a huge surprise, given that the only recently founded party had not undertaken any major election campaign.

Now, what made those 300.000 Bulgarians to vote for Ataka?

The actual government is set up by a coalition of the socialists, the Tsar's Movement and the party of the Turkish minority. Due to various scandals and mistrust analysts believe that the victory of 8% entering the parliament was due to disillusioned voters expressing their protest against the acting coalition in government. In addition, they demonstrated their frustration over the breaking-up and increasing weakening of the traditional conservative parties. Moreover, Ataka positions itself clearly against the Turks' party. It is not clear who Ataka-voters exactly are; analysts speak both of ultra leftist and rightists, different age, income and backgrounds; whilst others mainly see social outcasts and residents of small villages as adherents to Ataka. Bulgarians wanted to vote for something "new". Another explanation for the sudden success by ultra nationalists is also explained by the lack of real political, economical and intellectual elites. In any case, the Bulgarian state should take the message seriously.

The reactions by all other parties in parliament were strong; they

declared in a binding manner never to co-operate with Ataka.

Presidential elections in 2006 brought the second success story. In the second round 25% voted for the nationalistic euro sceptic Volen Siderov in direct elections. Georgi Parvanov kept his position as president.

Ataka, which holds one member of European Parliament (EP) since accession of Bulgaria to the EU in January 2007, helped to set up the new faction "ITS" - "Identity, Tradition, Sovereignty" in the EP. Elections to the EP in Bulgaria are scheduled for 20 Mai 2007. Bulgaria is entitled to 18 seats in parliament, the barring clause being 5,56%. Polls of March 07 predict 6-7% of votes for Ataka, which would enable them to have one to two members of European Parliament (MEPs) in Brussels. BSP (socialists) are predicted to gain 22-24%, the new party "GERB" (conservatives) 16-18%.³³ The turnout will be most probably very low, only 30% which contrasts enormously to the Bulgarians' increasing endorsement of the European Union.

Now, with regard to ultra nationalistic views and hatred speeches Ataka leader Volen Siderov,

³³ DPS (Turks' party) and UDK (conservatives) would be supported by 6-7% of votes; NBSII (tsar's movement) and DSB (conservatives) only 2% which would not enable them to be represented in the EP.

who is accused in several cases of racist statements, has attracted major public attention. He promises to render Bulgaria to Bulgarians by "de-gypsization" and "de-turkization". Prior to 2007 Ataka was strongly against EU-accession, it denies the existence of minorities and speaks of "ethnic groups", stands for a withdrawal of Bulgaria from NATO and wishes to prohibit land to be sold to foreigners.

GERB, founded in December 2006, lead by Sofia's major Boiko Borissov, actually is said to have the power to take a considerable amount of votes from Ataka. Polls predict a high score for GERB in upcoming elections; GERB could take up the role of a "new conservative power" reducing ultra nationalist influences by Ataka.

With view to the success gained by ultra nationalism in Bulgaria, Hanns Seidel Foundation considers a strong political counter-actor as crucial for the future of the democratic society in the country and thus supports GERB in its future endeavours.

Elections to the EP in May 2007 will give more signs on the way Bulgaria's political society is moving towards.

2.2.2 Romania³⁴

In Romania the situation is different. Political instability is caused

³⁴ HSF Monthly Report on Romania March 2007; Wikipedia Online Encyclopaedia.

by ongoing disputes between the two parties of alliance, PNL - the National Liberal Party - and PD - Democratic Party (conservative). In parallel, Romania's Prime Minister Popescu-Tariceanu and President Basescu are in constant confrontation recently.

The ultra national Greater Romania Party (PRM), lead by Corneliu Vadim Tudor, had an important, electoral success in the presidential elections of November in 2000. Tudor received more than a third of votes; the social democrat candidate Ion Iliescu (PSD) became president of Romania. Following opinion polls held by INSOMAR in March 2007 on who to vote for in the case of parliamentary elections now, PRM would gain 11% of votes - in comparison to 42% for the Alliance (PD and PNL) and 22% for the PSD (socialists).

Now, who are Tudor and the party he presides? His aims are said to be anti-democratic and extremist, characterized by an expansive nationalism (the idea of a Greater Romania together with the Republic of Moldova), critics on EU and NATO, anti-Semitism and a harsh hand on minorities (especially Hungarians). In his speeches he supports a reintroduction of the death penalty. Prior to the execution of Ceausescu, Tudor as a lyric poet celebrated dictatorship; after communism had been torn down, he changed from communist to extreme

right-wing.

The five MEPs of the Greater Romanian Party form part of the ultra national faction "ITS". The elections to the EP in Romania have been postponed to autumn this year. Also in the case of Romania one will observe the outcome of these elections with accurateness. In comparison to Bulgaria the ultra national party in Romania seems to have had already a longer and more stable success in political landscape.

2.3 How to encounter right-wing extremism in Europe?

The key question is what challenge does populism pose to democracy? It is hard to find a final answer to this question; yet, democratic actors should feel responsible for disclosing the phenomenon in order to have a better understanding of challenges of populism to our democratic societies.³⁵

The role of media is pivotal when it comes to the perception of the phenomenon. Media can inform about extremism, enhance discourse and encounter it or else, media may also serve as multiplier for views and statements of right-wing extremism. The important role of media here is to face and explain in a competent and differentiated way about the phenomena of right-wing extremism and xenophobia; concerted training in

the field of political journalism is indispensable. With regard to xenophobia media shall broach the issue of migration and foreigners in an objective, open and sensitive way.³⁶

Responding to extremist challenges to liberal democracies today has become a major task of the 21st century. *Mudde*³⁷ argues that responses by various European democracies differ according to the type of the challenge. He classifies "extreme right" and "right-wing populist" political parties under a specific category. This consists of groups with non-democratic ideas but taking only democratic actions³⁸ to reach their aims. The success of extremist parties differs considerably throughout Europe, and the ways in which

³⁶ See *Britta Schellenberg*, *Rechtsextremismus und Medien, Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte (APuZ), Beilage zur Wochenzeitung Das Parlament, Nr. 42/2005, 39 (39, 42, 44, 45).*

³⁷ *Cas Mudde*, *Liberal democracies and the extremist challenges of the Early 21st Century* 2003, <http://www.extremismus.com/texte/demo2.htm>.

³⁸ Democratic ways consist in standing for elections, entering parliaments in a democratic way; especially when applying the proportional representation (voting) system, passing the electoral threshold, a certain percentage of votes, to enter parliament. By contrast, one could talk of "preventing" extreme parties from entering parliament in "majority voting systems" like in the UK where the "winner (of elections) takes all".

³⁵ See *Decker in Decker*, *Populismus* 30.

European countries have reacted to this vary as well. These reactions differ from co-opting these parties into the governments (Austria, Slovakia), or keeping them out (Denmark, Hungary) to agreeing formally on an absolute non-cooperation with an extremist party at any level (Flemish part of Belgium) or applying rules on party bans. Obviously, some European countries introduced rules with the inherent aim of blocking extremist parties.³⁹ But these measures could be disadvantageous for they are also affecting democratic parties.⁴⁰

As a future model one can think of the following suggestions: Tackling the underlying problems to extremism by democratic means; including extreme parties and addressing their legitimate complaints by democratic solutions instead of excluding them from political responsibility.

In the Central and Eastern European context, if one believes in the possible growing divide between centres and peripheries coupled with

anti-EU politics, the response to modern right-wing populism is two-levelled: first and foremost national governments have to guarantee an equal division of positive and negative effects of EU membership between the centres and the peripheries; second, the EU has to observe and guarantee for an effective implementation of structural funds and may serve as pressure group on the national governments to actually diminish the demand for populist anti-EU politics by CEE societies.⁴¹

3. The new far-right parliamentary group in the European Parliament⁴²

With the enlargement of the European Union to Romania and Bulgaria the number of Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) was increased. The European Parliament (EP) now comprises 785 members of parliament representing 500 million citizens.

The following background information⁴³ on the far-right political

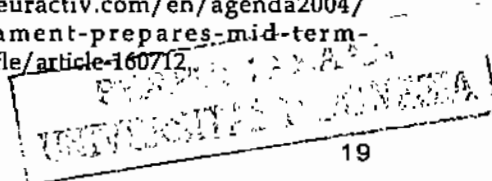
³⁹ such as in the case of Belgium where eligibility for state funding requests the adherence to the principles of the European Convention of Human Rights, thus blocking the Flemish Vlams Belang.

⁴⁰ Cas *Mudde*, Liberal democracies and the extremist challenges of the Early 21st Century 2003, <http://www.extremismus.com/texte/demo2.htm>.

⁴¹ *Mudde*, working paper 62.

⁴² Assessments and evaluations are mainly based on briefings conducted in the EP.

⁴³ see Article Euractiv "parliament prepares for mid-term reshuffle", published Monday 8 January 2007 - updated Monday 15 January 2007, <http://www.euractiv.com/en/agenda2004/parliament-prepares-mid-term-reshuffle/article-160712>.



group in the EP serves for a better understanding on the recent "ultra national" move in parliament.

Following Parliament Rules⁴⁴ a political group may be formed by a minimum of 20 members elected in at least one-fifth of the member states. Every political group has rights and duties to fulfil. The most important rights gained by the creation of a parliamentary group are the claim of speaking time, financial support from the Parliament's budget and a voice in the Conference of Presidents who is responsible for setting the agenda for plenary sessions of the EP.

The new parliamentary group named "Identity, Tradition, Sovereignty (ITS)", established with the support of one Bulgarian and five new members from the Greater Romania Party, was announced on 12 January 2007. ITS comprises 20 extreme-right MEPs from seven countries:

Seven MEPs from the *French Front National* (including Jean-Marie Le Pen), five MEPs from the *Greater Romania Party*, three from the Belgian-Flemish *Vlaams Belang*, two Italian MEPs from the neo-fascist parties *Lista Mussolini* and *Fiamma Tricolore*, one from *Austria's Freedom Party* (the former Party of Jörg Haider), MEP

Dimitar Stoyanov of the far right nationalist Bulgarian party *Ataka* and Independent British MEP Ashley Mote. The group is chaired by French MEP Bruno Gollnisch. As far as funding is concerned ITS will now receive 1 million € funding from Parliament.

In terms of numbers of members belonging to a faction, the parliamentary groups in the European Parliament rank as follows:

- European People's Party (Christian Democrats) and European Democrats
- Socialist Group
- Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe
- Union for Europe of the Nations (UEN)
- Group of the Greens / European Free Alliance
- Confederal Group of the European United Left - Nordic Green Left
- Independence/Democracy Group (ID)
- Identity, Tradition and Sovereignty Group (ITS).

Now, what are the objectives of ITS? What does its EU policy look like?

Speculations on ITS seem to be rising in this field. One can read in first reactions to the creation of the group about their advocacy for national interests taking precedence over interests at EU level and their opposition to adopt an EU constitution or even that they disagree with

⁴⁴ Rule 29 of the Rules of Procedure of the European Parliament.

enlargement, taking new members on board (even if only due to the Bulgarian and Romanian members coming in with enlargement ITS could be set up).⁴⁵ In addition, typical concerns to build a debate upon could be immigration, integration, and globalization.

Right-wing leaders in ITS represent about 23 million voters; they have two main goals: respectability - to distance them from neo-Nazis and skinheads - and to get the message of more respectability more broadly transmitted. They underline the trend in Europe toward the far right, that "identity" has become the core issue and that by addressing this core issue the group represents a deeper sentiment in Europe for which the time had come now to be better heard.⁴⁶ The proposed slogan for ITS is "Patriots of all countries, unite!"⁴⁷.

With regard to this new political group different voices could be heard on the occasion of its formation.

For MEP *Martine Roure* (Socialist, French) a now stronger voice for the extreme right is endangering democracy and human rights.⁴⁸ *Daniel Cohn-Bendit*, leader of the Greens in the assembly, calls upon a "sad reflection of reality" of today's Europe, but does not foresee any boost to the extreme right's marginal role in the EP.⁴⁹ To alter the EP's criteria for the formation of political groups would, following *Iñigo Méndez de Vigo* (European People's Party, Spain), not achieve any relief since this would be a clear undemocratic solution.⁵⁰

The German EU Presidency in 2007 tries to address the trend of extremism in Europe,⁵¹ condemning

⁴⁵ Article in the Associated Press, EU lawmakers doubt new far-right group will have impact, published 14 January 2007, <http://www.iht.com/articles/ap/2007/01/14/europe/EU-GEN-EU-Parliament-Far-Right.php>.

⁴⁶ Article by Robert Marquand, Staff writer of The Christian Science Monitor, Europe 'ripe' for our ideas, says far right, published 6 February 2007, <http://forum.newspaperindex.com/viewtopic.php?p=51753&sid=d40283fa38a1c839fa107e7aaf8d4538>.

⁴⁷ Article, EU-Parlament: Fraktionsbildung am rechten Rand, <http://www.cafebabel.com/de/article.asp?T=T&Id=10021>.

⁴⁸ EU Business Article, Far-right close to forming group in European Parliament, 08 January 2007, http://www.eubusiness.com/news_live/1168279202.08.

⁴⁹ Article in the Associated Press, EU lawmakers doubt new far-right group will have impact, published 14 January 2007, <http://www.iht.com/articles/ap/2007/01/14/europe/EU-GEN-EU-Parliament-Far-Right.php>.

⁵⁰ Article, EU-Parlament: Fraktionsbildung am rechten Rand, <http://www.cafebabel.com/de/article.asp?T=T&Id=10021>.

⁵¹ Quoting German Chancellor Angela Merkel, Article in the Associated Press, EU lawmakers doubt new far-right group will have impact, published 14 January 2007, <http://www.iht.com/articles/ap/2007/01/14/europe/EU-GEN-EU-Parliament-Far-Right.php>.

racism and xenophobia only recently in the Berlin Declaration.⁵²

With regard to the before mentioned trend towards the far right, Professor *Pascal Perrineau* argues that today's European democracies are "under the influence of an ultranationalist current" whereby the development "is given a boost by East European groups".⁵³

Policy analyst *Guillaume Durand* from the Brussels based well known think tank European Policy Centre (EPC) attaches a minor value to the whole story when judging it rather as "publicity stunt" than as a real change in political terms.⁵⁴

At European level various movements are active to encounter right-wing extremism.

The European Network against Racism, for example, urged MEPs not to collaborate with the members of

ITS.⁵⁵ Indeed, the European Parliament in the mid-term reshuffle of positions in the EP allegedly blocked ITS members from vice-chair positions of two committees which was condemned by *Philip Claeys*, vice president of ITS, as an act of discrimination.⁵⁶

Summing up, on the one hand various MEPs regret the formation of ITS and find it quite alarming – in first reactions a discussion was launched in the EP on how this was possible and whether to change the rules of procedure (parliaments rules). On the other hand, some say that rules cannot be changed ex-post and respect the democratic formation of the far-right faction. In general, MEPs are of the opinion that ITS will not change the EP's political agenda and do not see a real influential power in parliament.

It seems like all members of parliament in opposition are now in a "wait and see position", observing upcoming reports to be drawn up by ITS members and listening carefully to the debates "in house" whenever ITS members are participating. One

⁵² See above under part 1.

⁵³ Article by Robert Marquand, Staff writer of The Christian Science Monitor, Europe 'ripe' for our ideas, says far right, published 6 February 2007, <http://forum.newspaperindex.com/viewtopic.php?p=51753&sid=d40283fa38a1c839fa107e7aaf8d4538>.

⁵⁴ Article in the Associated Press, EU lawmakers doubt new far-right group will have impact, published 14 January 2007, <http://www.ihf.com/articles/ap/2007/01/14/europe/EU-GEN-EU-Parliament-Far-Right.php>.

⁵⁵ EU Business Article, Far-right close to forming group in European Parliament, 08 January 2007, http://www.eubusiness.com/news_live/1168279202.08.

⁵⁶ Article by Robert Marquand, Staff writer of The Christian Science Monitor, Europe 'ripe' for our ideas, says far right, published 6 February 2007, <http://forum.newspaperindex.com/viewtopic.php?p=51753&sid=d40283fa38a1c839fa107e7aaf8d4538>.

may not forget that now also extreme right politicians will be EU lawmakers like all other MEPs. Here one may respond that daily life in the EP is about finding majorities; political groups will not need ITS to ensure majorities. ITS, in contrast, will not gain any majorities since others will avoid them. Thus, ITS will not exert any influence on major amendments in the law making process.

EU law makers and political analysts doubt that the new group will have much impact on mainstream policies nor to amass any significant influence. Finally, following experts' views ITS is unlikely to alter the balance of power in EP.⁵⁷

Apart from all these speculations, elections to the European Parliament are still under way. In Bulgaria elections will take place in May 07, whilst in Romania the date has been postponed to later this year. It has to be seen what the faction ITS will look like following these elections.

With view to a possible impact of ITS in the European Parliament it is clearly too early to judge on this, but one should follow the outcome of the following questions closely:

- What does their programme tell us?
- What do their speeches look like?

⁵⁷ Article in the Associated Press, EU lawmakers doubt new far-right group will have impact, published 14 January 2007, <http://www.iht.com/articles/ap/2007/01/14/europe/EU-GEN-EU-Parliament-Far-Right.php>.

- Do they speak "collectively", as a united group?
- Will they in a next step try to set up also a "transnational party" (alliance of parties) and like this become eligible for further funding by the EP?⁵⁸
- Are they getting together outside of Parliament?
- Are their new members coming in?
- Finally, how long will ITS last?

With view to the new far-right faction "ITS" we can conclude that minor or no influence is predicted for this group on the law making process or on changing ideology within the EP; the group is simply too small and too much "at the edge", fulfilling only minimum criteria and not receiving any support from any other political group in parliament.

Outlook

EU politicians are called upon to take recent success by ultra nationalism seriously; it is a message from the "bottom" knocking at the EU's doors in Brussels. In the future, politics shall apply more caution to the communication of European integration and the values of democracy and freedom. This major task lies in hands of shared responsibility; the right policy making, both in Brussels and in the 27 EU member states, is now demanded.

⁵⁸ They might have actually come for money and not for ideology.

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