Pushing towards Exit: Euro-rejection as a 'Populist Common Denominator'?[+]

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Abstract
Populist radical right (PRR) parties are often critical of the process of European integration. These parties present themselves as the ultimate advocates of popular sovereignty and tend to associate the EU with elitist and shady decision-making procedures. In practice, PRR parties' position on the EU has been far from consistent. This paper aims to show how the European economic crisis may have, directly or indirectly, prompted a radicalisation of the Eurosceptic discourse of PRR parties across Europe, laying ground for ideological convergence within this party family. This argument is illustrated by means of four cases: Hungary, the Netherlands, Slovakia, and the UK. Through the analysis of the discourse of PRR parties in these countries, this paper shows that the PRR parties examined are now found sharing a 'common denominator' of Euro-rejection, concomitantly placing the EU issue at the core of their agendas. However, the motives of these ideological changes are different and may lie in the (non-)membership in the Eurozone.

Introduction

Political parties' attitudes to European integration are manifold and often inconsistent. Despite these inconsistencies, populist radical right (PRR) parties have generally been identified as carriers of Eurosceptic views (Mudde, 2007). In recent years, a number of EU member states have seen the emergence of rather successful parties belonging to this party family. This paper starts out from the assumption that PRR parties in Western and Central-Eastern Europe now have reasons to oppose European integration more strongly than before, mostly in reaction to the European economic crisis (and related bailouts) and calls for deeper integration. In view of the increased salience of issues related to European integration, moreover, we also hypothesise that EU-related themes play a more central role in the discourse of PRR parties across Europe.

Contributions on national parties' positions on the EU and European

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integration abound (e.g. Hooghe et al., 2002; Marks and Steenbergen, 2004; Marks et al., 2006; Szczerbiak and Taggart, 2008, 2013; De Vries and Edwards, 2009; Arnold et al., 2012), with a body of literature focusing on Euroscepticism both in Western Europe (Taggart, 1998) and Central-Eastern Europe (Kopecký and Mudde, 2002; Taggart and Szczerbiak, 2004). It is worth noting that most of the literature acknowledges the existence of different degrees of scepticism towards the EU, as well as the context-sensitive nature of party-based Euroscepticism, which is for instance apparent when Eastern and Western Europe are compared (Marks et al., 2006). After the Eastern enlargements of 2004 and 2007, however, the focus of attention has progressively moved from 'accession' to 'integration' for all EU member states; we believe that this shift may have prompted a standardisation of attitudes towards Europe across the PRR party family.

Moreover, we expect that the current Eurozone crisis may be responsible for an increasing salience and radicalisation of the EU discourse. As the ultimate bearers of national interests against supranational elites, PRR parties across Europe are likely to be the most prominent political actors presenting positions ranging from the 'Eurosceptic' to 'Euroreject' (Kopecký and Mudde, 2002). It has previously been argued that, despite their Eurosceptic attitudes, most PRR parties lend diffuse support to European cooperation, and that some of these parties even used to be proponents of European integration in the past (Mudde, 2007). In recent years, however, PRR parties have had an incentive to harden their opposition to Europe in response to the crisis and the proposed ways to deal with it. In addition, a critical attitude to Europe may have become more central to the appeal of these parties, and opposition to 'Europe' may have grown out to be more than a mere 'ideological appendage' used by PRR parties to put distance between themselves and the political establishment (Taggart, 1998: 373).

The aim of this paper is both theoretical and empirical. On the one hand, we aspire to evaluate whether PRR parties across Europe have converged with regard to their attitudes towards Europe; on the other, we seek to assess whether the EU, and in particular its role in the financial and economic crises, has come to play a greater role in shaping the discourse of these parties. The paper is divided into two main sections. In the first section, we define our theoretical framework by drawing on different streams of literature. The second section proceeds with the analysis of

the EU-related discourse of PRR parties in four countries: Hungary, the Netherlands, Slovakia, and the United Kingdom. On a preliminary basis, our cases should help assess whether PRR parties across the EU have indeed radicalised their position on 'Europe', placed more emphasis on the issue, and enhance our understanding of the motives behind these hypothesised changes. The paper concludes ascertaining a progressive clustering of PRR parties on Euroreject positions as well as qualitative differences in their motives, which are not based on regional differences, but more so on their membership in the Eurozone.

Theoretical Framework

Starting from the 1980s a populist radical right party family has come into view, progressively spreading across Europe. The growing interest prompted by this phenomenon resulted in a vast body of literature and, more recently, also consensus on the common ground for the study of these parties. Indeed, parties belonging to this family are generally believed to share a common core of nativism, authoritarianism, and populism (Mudde, 2007) – conceptual tools employed in the analysis of their ideology and policy priorities.

As far as the broader ideology of these parties is concerned, it has been argued that the different contexts on the two sides of the former Iron Curtain prompt a different framing of the PRR ideology (Pirro, 2013). As a result, PRR parties on the two sides of the continent are likely to emphasise different aspects of this ideology depending on their context of belonging. For instance, PRR parties in Western Europe prioritise policies related to immigration and social integration of migrants. Conversely, Central and East European countries are not (yet) destinations of immigration; here, the enemy for the PRR remains within the state and outside the nation, taking the form of indigenous ethnic minorities (Mudde, 2007: 69-73).

In outlining these idiosyncrasies, we argue that the key ideological feature of these parties (nativism) is context-sensitive and, thus, declined in different ways in different places. In spite of cross-national differences, however, most of these parties can be expected to be sceptical of the process of European integration (Mudde, 2007). European integration is likely to be portrayed as an elitist project which threatens the sovereignty of the native people and cultural homogeneity (Halikiopoulou et al., 2012), and the EU associated with a complex and opaque form

of representative politics which populists despise (Taggart, 2004).

In our view, the current economic crisis is likely to have led, directly or indirectly, to an increase in salience of the EU issue (see Werts et al., 2012) and offered scope for PRR parties to become more markedly hostile towards 'Europe'. We expect PRR parties to have an electoral incentive to capitalise on, and further promote, popular dissatisfaction with the European integration process (Krouwel and Abts, 2007), in the face of the adverse financial situation and proposals to pool more sovereignty to the European level in response to the crisis. Although it is far from clear whether the European crisis has truly spurred a wave of anti-European sentiments amongst European publics, there is at least the perception that citizens have become increasingly sceptical of the EU (De Vries, 2013). For the PRR, taking a more pronounced anti-EU stance would be a logical response to the alleged trend of national parties and their electorates growing apart from each other over the EU issue (Mattila and Raunio, 2012).

If PRR parties in Europe have indeed taken a more radical stance on EU issues, this would have a number of theoretical and practical implications for the study of party-based Euroscepticism. The policy positions and strategies of these parties matter, as the PRR has become a significant electoral force in many European countries. Due to their increased relevance, PRR parties can be assumed to now have a prominent role in setting domestic political agendas. As such, studying positions of PRR parties on Europe is not only relevant for its own sake, but also in view of these parties' influence on public opinion, as well as on the position of mainstream rivals.

Besides implications for party competition in national party systems, a European-wide radicalisation of the PRR *vis-à-vis* European integration would also have consequences for the comparative study of Euroscepticism across the divide of long-established democracies and post-communist countries. Much of the contingent and qualified opposition to the EU up until the late 2000s was dictated by the accession of new member-states. The eventual accession of Central and East European countries allowed parties in both old and new EU member states to 'move on' and focus on European integration instead of enlargement, offering a possible condition for the homogenisation of the EU (or, for that matter, anti-EU) discourse on the two sides of the former Iron Curtain. This paper provides a preliminary

attempt to judge whether we can indeed observe such a homogenisation amongst PRR parties in particular. In view of the European crisis, we expect PRR parties, which are the most obvious carriers of Eurosceptic attitudes, to be converging on systematic opposition to the EU, irrespective of their idiosyncratic framing of the PRR ideology.

To sum up, we hypothesise that, following the debate on austerity measures and in the face of questions concerning national sovereignty, PRR parties in Europe have become more critical of European integration, started prioritising this issue, and converged on more unambiguous anti-EU positions than in the past. In order to assess the potential for a standardisation of the European discourse across the continent, we adopt an analytical framework originally applied to an analysis of party-based Euroscepticism in Central and Eastern Europe (Kopecký and Mudde, 2002). In line with this framework, we subscribe to a differentiation of party positions on the basis of diffuse and specific support for European integration (Table 1).

Table 1. *Typology of party positions on Europe*

		SUPPORT FOR EUROPEAN INTEGRATION	
		Europhile	Europhobe
SUPPORT FOR THE EU	EU-optimists	*Euroenthusiasts*	*Europragmatists*
	EU-pessimists	*Eurosceptics*	*Eurorejects*

Source: Kopecký and Mudde, 2002: 303.

For the purposes of this work, we are interested in *Eurosceptic* and *Eurореject* ideal-types, for radical parties are naturally expected to cluster around these positions. PRR parties are regarded as 'EU-pessimists', for they "do not support the EU as it is at the moment, or are pessimistic about the direction of its development" (Kopecký and Mudde, 2002: 302). Following Kopecký and Mudde, EU-pessimists do not necessarily oppose EU membership. As Table 1 shows, EU-pessimists can still be 'Europhile' in that they "believe in the key ideas of European integration underlying the EU: institutionalized cooperation on the basis of pooled sovereignty (the political element) and an integrated liberal market economy (the economic element)" (Kopecký and Mudde, 2002: 301). Those parties combining EU-pessimism and Europhilia can be labelled as 'Eurosceptics'. 'Eurorejects' on the other hand, combine

EU-pessimism with Europhobia, as they "fail to support one or more of the ideas underlying European integration" (Kopecký and Mudde, 2002: 301).

Mudde (2007: 164) has previously argued that, at least in recent decades, most PRR parties in Europe would fall into the Eurosceptic category, as they generally "believe in the basic tenets of European integration", despite a critical attitude towards the current process of integration. As outlined above, we suspect that the critical attitude of PRR parties has radicalised during the past few years and that their anti-EU discourse moved to the top of their agendas in response to the European sovereign debt crisis. We consider a change in a PRR party's position *vis-à-vis* EU membership (i.e. from original support for continuing membership to calls for country's 'exit') to be the ultimate expression of this radicalisation as well as a plausible territory for ideological convergence. With the help of four explorative case studies, the following section examines whether, and on what premises, such a radicalisation has materialised in practice within the PRR milieu.

Populist Radical Right Parties and the EU: Four Cases

Case Selection and Methodology

In this section we assess whether we can observe a concomitant radicalisation and homogenisation of the PRR on the EU issue in four European countries. In order to highlight the potential for a pan-European shift towards Euro-rejection amongst PRR parties, this paper strikes a balance between breadth and depth of investigation and compares cases drawing both from Western and Central-Eastern Europe. At the same time, the cases analysed assure variance with regard to other factors as well: traditional national attitudes towards European integration, membership of the Eurozone, traditional 'scapegoats' of the nativist discourse of the PRR, and recent electoral performance of these parties.

Differences in contextual background factors such as public attitudes to Europe and electoral performances of the PRR provide reasons to assume that these parties may vary in the intensity and radicalism of their anti-EU discourse. At the same time, their ideological idiosyncrasies and their (non-)membership in the Eurozone may lead PRR parties to place selective emphasis on different EU-related issues in different EU countries. Ascertaining a convergence of the PRR EU-related discourse and observing references to the economic crisis in all those cases, despite

their contextual differences, would lend support to the assumption that there is scope for a pan-European trend amongst PRR parties. On the basis of these considerations, we draw on the following cases: Hungary, the Netherlands, Slovakia, and the UK (see Table 2).

Table 2. *Contextual background of the PRR in the four cases*

	HUNGARY	NETHERLANDS	SLOVAKIA	UK
REGION	Central-Eastern	Western	Central-Eastern	Western
PRO-EU ATTITUDES	No	Yes	Yes	No
EUROZONE	No	Yes	Yes	No
TARGET NATIVISM	Minorities	Immigrants	Minorities	Immigrants
ELECTORAL SUCCESS	Yes	Yes	No	No

A qualitative line of enquiry suits the explorative purposes of this study. As we aim not only at mapping changing party positions, but also at discovering and understanding the intensity and motives of change in PRR parties' stand, we conduct an in-depth analysis of their discourses. More specifically, we aim to find out whether it has been the European crisis in particular that has led to a radicalisation of positions and prioritisation of EU issues. In order to capture the different stances on the EU adopted by the PRR in the four countries, we mainly recur to qualitative content analysis of party manifestos.[1] In order to gauge party positions outside of election periods, we also draw on other appropriate sources, such as party leaders' statements, personal interviews, and party websites. Considering that the radicalisation of these parties is assumed to have taken place with the unfolding of the European financial crisis of the late 2000s, we start monitoring changes in the positions and salience of PRR parties from the mid-2000s onwards. By focusing on three different time points, the analysis should accord confidence to our final results.

Hungary

The Hungarian accession to the EU is part of a series of systematic transformations undertaken after the collapse of the Eastern Bloc. Although Hungary has generally been marked by a pro-European consensus before its accession in 2004, European

[1] We limit our analysis to party programmes issued for national elections, as our focus is on domestic party competition.

integration never quite reached the same salience of domestic issues (Navracsics, 1997). Survey data however show that the Hungarian public has swiftly turned to hold negative views of EU membership (Pew Research Center, 2009). As far as party-based EU-pessimism is concerned, the marginal *Magyar Igazság és Élet Pártja* (Hungarian Justice and Life Party, MIÉP) of István Csurka maintained during the 1990s the same Euroreject stand that distinguished many PRR parties in Central and Eastern Europe before accession (Kopecký and Mudde, 2002; Batory, 2008). However, after crossing the 5 per cent threshold in 1998, the MIÉP underwent an irreversible decline and failed to gain representation again. Thus, all-out EU-pessimist positions have found no substantial representation in the Hungarian Parliament during the 2000s.

Another PRR organisation, the *Jobbik Magyarországért Mozgalom* (Movement for a Better Hungary, Jobbik) formed as a party in 2003 and contested its first elections in 2006. Jobbik initially ventured in an electoral alliance with the MIÉP, which won 2.2 per cent of the popular vote and no seats (2006); as of 2008, the alliance was *de facto* dissolved and Jobbik decided to run independently in the following elections. At the 2009 European elections the party secured 14.8 per cent of votes; at the legislative elections of the following year, the party further improved its performance and gained 16.7 per cent of the vote.

The party has emphasised a broad palette of issues including clericalism and irredentism, ethnic minorities, corruption, and the EU, as well as a leftist economic agenda somewhat indebted to the legacy of state socialism. Thus, historical legacies and contextual idiosyncrasies largely shaped the ideology of the party (Pirro, 2013). As a case in point, the electoral performance of Jobbik is very much related to minority issues and the party has presented itself as the staunchest critic of the transformation process undertaken in 1989.

Similar to other PRR parties, Jobbik's attitude to Europe has been erratic, yet driven by scepticism throughout. In addition, the intensity and scope of this scepticism varied over time. In 2006, the party associated EU membership to a treacherous loss of national sovereignty. Jobbik's position was grounded in the perception that the Hungarian accession was agreed on unfair and unfavourable terms, with the only consequence of endangering vital national assets (Jobbik, 2006). Despite the party's appeal to withdrawal from the EU by means of referendum, the

EU was first and foremost depicted as one of the multiple facets of globalisation. In other words, the EU was criticised, yet the main focus of criticism remained the perverse process of post-communist transformation, which had allegedly favoured the interests of liberal and cosmopolitan elites. At this stage, the party's emphasis was very much on national identity and Christianity ('inseparable concepts') and the principal objective countering economic liberalisation, deregulation, and privatisation (Jobbik, 2006). Hence, in terms of salience, the EU issue appeared only secondary in the party agenda and, in light of its general objection to the EU and European integration, the party qualified as Euroreject in 2006.

In the year 2009, the party had gained representation in the European Parliament (three seats) and, despite on-going criticism, Jobbik seemed to abide by Hungarian membership in the EU in its 2010 electoral programme. Most importantly, the electoral breakthrough at the European elections prompted the party to define itself as the only exponent of a 'radical change', not only within national politics, but now also in the EU arena (Jobbik, 2010). The EU issue accordingly gained in salience, with an articulated section of the party manifesto devoted to it (Jobbik, 2010: 75-77). Jobbik's EU-pessimism somewhat curbed to contingent opposition to the process of integration; the Euroreject rhetoric was toned down and the EU was appraised as a platform for the resolution of questions of national interest such as national minorities living abroad (Jobbik, 2010: 55). Thus, the party position for the year 2010 should qualify as Eurosceptic and the EU issue as one of primary importance.

Hungary has been on the verge of bankruptcy ever since 2010 and the country has largely depended on loan guarantees by the IMF and EU to roll over its foreign debt (Jenne and Mudde, 2012: 149). More recently, the EU has come to play an ever growing role in Hungarian affairs following the controversial constitutional reforms enacted by the *Fidesz – Magyar Polgári Szövetség* (Fidesz – Hungarian Civic Union) government.[2] Starting from the year 2012, Jobbik engaged in a fierce anti-EU rhetoric and greater emphasis has been placed on the issue ever since. Using an interrelated series of political and economic circumstances (i.e. EU criticism on the new constitution and Hungary's bailout) as a catalyst for dissent, the party held a

[2] Whilst in government, Fidesz drafted and adopted a new constitution that entered into force on 1 January 2012. The new constitution received widespread criticism from the international community and resulted in the launch of legal proceedings by the European Commission, following concerns over reforms to the central bank, judiciary, and data protection.

number of demonstrations centring on (opposition to) the EU. These demonstrations initially concerned the EU's interference in Hungarian internal affairs and called on Hungarian exit from the Union (Jobbik, 2012). Accordingly, the deputy-leader of Jobbik's parliamentary fraction, Márton Gyöngyösi, urged to renegotiate and rethink the Hungarian membership in the EU.

> "Our problem is that we are faced with a political elite that does not want to hear about any criticism or scepticism towards the EU. The EU is unsustainable and is, sooner or later, going to collapse, and I would love to hear Hungarian people's opinion about it – we want a referendum on leaving the EU. Our opinion is that the EU is working against our benefits: when you look at what we gained from European membership and what we lost, our analysis is completely negative, and not only in monetary terms. We lose and the prospects are even darker." (Márton Gyöngyösi, personal interview, 23 January 2013)

More recently, Jobbik dissociated itself from the ideas underlying the process of European integration and the EU as a whole. This radicalisation virtually brought the party back to the positions adopted at its first stages of political activity, yet with new impetus and on the basis of a broader range of arguments elaborated during the past years of Hungarian membership in the EU. Although the Eurozone crisis displayed severe effects on the Hungarian economy, the motives of Jobbik's radicalisation could be only indirectly linked to the European sovereign debt crisis. Therefore, whilst the financial crisis has been used as a pretext, Jobbik primarily placed emphasis on the broader interference of the EU in Hungarian political affairs. Jobbik's opposition to the EU is *all-encompassing* and not limited to monetary issues; that is why the party generally preferred to lament a loss of national sovereignty and point out its negative assessment of Hungarian membership. In light of this, the party's position on Europe would qualify as Eurorejject in 2012, with the EU coming across as a primary issue in the party agenda.

The Netherlands

The Netherlands, a founding member of the EEC, has long been marked by a pro-European consensus amongst the mainstream parties and an ostensibly pro-European population (e.g. Aarts and Van der Kolk, 2005). Perhaps unexpectedly, therefore, the Dutch public rejected the EU Constitutional Treaty in the June 2005

referendum. One of the parties playing a dominant role in the campaign for the 'no' vote was the *Partij voor de Vrijheid* (Party for Freedom, PVV). Since its entrance into parliament in 2006 (with 5.9 per cent of the vote), the PVV has been the dominant PRR party in the Netherlands. Founded and ever since tightly controlled by Geert Wilders, a former MP for the liberal *Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie* (People's Party for Freedom and Democracy, VVD), the PVV has been known for its criticism of the ('left-wing') political establishment, its hostile stance towards immigration, and its crusade against the alleged 'Islamisation' of society (see Vossen 2011). The PVV's socio-economic programme had a neo-liberal character from the outset, but became more eclectic since 2010; most notably, the party introduced and emphasised several welfare chauvinist policies.

In the election of June 2010 the PVV almost tripled its seat share, winning 15.5 per cent of the vote. The PVV subsequently provided parliamentary support to a governing minority coalition made up of the *Christen Democratisch Appel* (Christian Democratic Appeal, CDA) and the VVD, in exchange for the implementation of some of its key policies. The government lasted until April 2012, when Wilders, refusing to sign up to newly drafted austerity measures, withdrew his support. The party received 10.1 per cent of the vote in the early election of September 2012, yet still remained the third largest party in parliament, at par with the radical left-wing *Socialistische Partij* (Socialist Party, SP).

Geert Wilders has always taken a critical stance with regard to the process of European integration. In his 'Declaration of Independence' from the VVD, a document dated March 2005, Wilders criticised 'Brussels bureaucrats' and voiced opposition against Turkish EU accession and the eventually rejected Constitutional Treaty (Wilders, 2005: 1). The document further spoke of the loss of sovereignty and the erosion of the Dutch identity as a result of European integration, as well as the EU's undemocratic character and the (allegedly too large) Dutch contribution to the EU budget (Wilders, 2005: 6-7). In the PVV's first, very short, manifesto of 2006, European integration did not play a prominent role; yet, in the few paragraphs devoted to the issue, the PVV made clear that it opposed further EU enlargements, favoured abolishing the European Parliament and Schengen-visa, and stressed that European cooperation should primarily have an economic character (PVV, 2006). The manifesto spoke of a Dutch 'exit', but only when Turkey was to join the EU. A

similar line of reasoning was found in the much more elaborate manifesto of 2010, where the EU was described as a 'multicultural superstate' and an "empire which aims to impose even more Islam on us" (PVV, 2010: 6). Remarkably, however, there was no section devoted specifically to European integration.

As the previous examples indicated, Wilders's criticism of the European Union was multifaceted and related to matters of identity, national sovereignty, as well as financial contributions. The PVV even linked its trademark issue of Islamisation to European integration by pointing at the loss of sovereignty over immigration policy. However, Wilders's party never favoured an unconditional Dutch withdrawal from the EU. Although Wilders questioned the purpose of pooling sovereignty, he shied away from translating this into an all-out opposition to *any* form of political integration. What is more, the PVV was defined more by its anti-Islam character than by its opposition to the EU. Also in the election campaign of 2010, Wilders criticised the decision to contribute to bailouts for crisis-riven Greece, but made little effort to turn the campaign into a battle over European integration (see Van Kessel, 2010). We can conclude, then, that Wilders's Party for Freedom was a Eurosceptic party, which essentially treated European integration as a secondary issue at the time of the 2006 and 2010 parliamentary elections.

This changed in the subsequent parliamentary election campaign of 2012. After the Wilders-initiated breakup of the government, the PVV leader vowed that 'Europe' would be the central theme of the campaign. The PVV would indeed focus on the EU issue as never before in the run-up to the 2012 election, and both in its manifesto and in election debates Wilders's party explicitly linked the economic crisis to the theme of European integration (Van Kessel and Hollander, 2012). Notably, the manifesto was titled '*Their* Brussels, *Our* Netherlands' and the amount of paragraphs including derogatory references to the European Union and EU actors had clearly increased in comparison with previous manifestos (Van Kessel and Castelein, 2013). Criticism of EU actors was also much more pronounced in Geert Wilders's Twitter messages – a means of communication used frequently by the PVV leader – in the months before and after the election of 2012. National-level politicians, in turn, were blamed for their submissive compliance with the 'dictates from Brussels', and for wasting tax-payer money by handing out money to (corrupt) South and East European countries.

Wilders's party also radicalised its position towards European integration. The criticism of the unelected Brussels bureaucrats, and now also the mendacious Southern and Eastern Europeans, was quite consistent with Wilders's previous Eurosceptic position, but for the first time the PVV favoured a Dutch withdrawal from the EU. The PVV continued to express support for economic cooperation within Europe (PVV, 2012: 11), yet it is clear that by 2012 the PVV was not willing to surrender *any* political sovereignty to the EU. Wilders motivated the radical position of his party's position by referring to the effects and the management of the financial and economic crises. In view of its fundamental opposition to the pooling of sovereignty and its unambiguous support for a Dutch 'exit', the PVV can be classified as a Eurorejject party since the parliamentary election campaign of 2012; at the same time, the issue of European integration would qualify as one of primary importance.

Slovakia

After the uncertain prospects of accession of the 1990s, Slovakia was eventually able to join the EU as part of the first wave of Eastern enlargement in 2004 and join the Eurozone in 2009. The Slovak public has come across as one of the most pro-European in Central and Eastern Europe: questions concerning the membership, influence, and economic effects of the EU have generally received favourable views in Slovakia (Pew Research Center, 2009). This is believed to influence parties' positions on the issue, as also demonstrated by the fact that no Eurorejject party in Slovakia has garnered more than 10 per cent of the vote (Henderson, 2008: 281).

The *Slovenská Národná Strana* (Slovak National Party, SNS) was founded in December 1989 and claims descent from the party of the same name – the first Slovak political party to be founded in 1871. The SNS contested elections since 1990 and has been the only PRR party to gain representation in the Slovak National Council. Following internal disputes and a party split, the SNS re-emerged as a unitary force with Ján Slota as chairman, gaining 11.7 per cent of the vote in 2006. As a result, the party joined the government coalition led by *Smer – Sociálna Demokracia* (Direction – Social Democracy, Smer-SD). The party halved its share of votes in 2010 (5.1 per cent) and, with just 4.6 per cent at the 2012 elections, fell short of parliamentary representation.

After the dissolution of Czechoslovakia in 1993, the party abandoned its anti-Czech and anti-federal platform in favour of an anti-minorities agenda targeting Hungarians and Roma (Cibulka, 1999: 116-118). Especially through its participations in government, the SNS was effective in orienting the political discourse towards nativism. For instance, the SNS was the initiator of the Slovak language law and the main driver behind the toughening of its provisions in 2009; the new formulations of the law came across as a hard thrust at the rights of ethnic minorities.

The SNS started out as a Euroreject party, "deeply distrustful of both the ideas underlying European integration and the EU itself" (Kopecký and Mudde, 2002: 314). Similarly to the MIÉP in Hungary, the party sought to freeze negotiation talks and postpone the question of EU membership indefinitely – at least, until Slovakia had been in the position to discuss accession on an equal footing with other EU members. By the mid-2000s, the SNS had re-emerged as a unitary political force and toned down much of its anti-EU rhetoric. Slovakia's accession to the EU in 2004 has certainly contributed to this transformation as the party showed evident signs of pragmatism within its Eurosceptic framework of action. The SNS has systematically opposed the project of a 'United States of Europe' and reinstated the EU's responsibility for respecting and protecting the sovereignty of its member states. Especially in the sphere of culture, the party asserted that the EU "must be the Europe of national cultures" (SNS, 2006: 40). At the same time, the party aspired to take advantage of the EU structural funds for the strengthening of the regional cohesiveness of Slovakia and the development of the national economy (SNS, 2006: 3). In the year 2006, the SNS qualified as a Eurosceptic party, though placing only moderate emphasis on the issue.

The party maintained an analogous Eurosceptic stand in the run-up to following elections. In the 2010 programme, the SNS denounced a progressive loss of national sovereignty on a number of policy fields. This notwithstanding, the document generally served as an account for the SNS' achievements as a junior coalition partner; the party then included pragmatic considerations, taking credit for the allocation of over 99 per cent of the EU structural funds (SNS, 2010: 3) and the adoption of the euro (SNS, 2010: 6). During the 2006-2010 term, however, the party had been involved in major corruption scandals concerning the allocation of EU funds, severely undermining its credibility and electoral performance.

The political and financial scenario had changed by the time that early elections were called for 2012. The political debate started focusing on corruption scandals (the so-called 'Gorilla scandal') and the bailout of Eurozone countries. The fall of the government coalition led by Iveta Radičová of the *Slovenská Demokratická a Kresťanská Únia – Demokratická Strana* (Slovak Democratic and Christian Union – Democratic Party, SDKÚ-DS) was indeed triggered by a vote of no confidence over support for the European Financial Stability Fund. Accordingly, the Eurozone crisis had taken centre stage also in the 2012 memorandum of the SNS. For the first time since EU accession, the party explicitly appealed to withdrawal from the EU and the end of the common currency (SNS, 2012: 1). The party document is permeated with calls for Slovak sovereignty, self-sufficiency, and patriotism, but this time placed in the context of the EU's financial and structural failure. The SNS has rejected the principles of EU solidarity as they are seen to sustain a monetary system which is based on debt and loss (SNS, 2012: 2). Moreover, the EU leadership has been interpreted as an unaccountable elite which serves the interests of multinational financial groups, monopolies, and globalists (SNS, 2012: 10).

To sum up, after EU accession, the SNS adapted to the relatively pro-European attitudes of the Slovak public and abandoned the Euroreject positions of the 1990s. This strategy seems to demonstrate that, when appraised in context, the potential benefits deriving from a moderate anti-EU rhetoric should not be underestimated. On the brink of electoral failure, the party decided to adopt an uncompromising stand on the EU. The motives of this radicalisation have been circumstantial and very much tied to the Eurozone crisis. In October 2011, Radičová's government fell over the decision to bail out (comparatively) richer countries such as Greece and the SNS decided to turn on the issue. From this perspective, in 2012 the SNS placed EU-related issues at the core of its agenda, adopting an unequivocal Euroreject stand.

United Kingdom

The British public has been known for its reservation about the process of European integration and Euroscepticism has become embedded in the mainstream political debate (Gifford, 2006). While the two largest mainstream parties (Labour and the Conservatives) have traditionally been internally divided about the issue, recent

years have seen the strengthening of the Eurosceptic wing of the Conservative Party (Webb, 2008), which is often related to electoral pressure from the UK Independence Party (UKIP) in particular (*Economist*, 2013). Although this party did not manage to set foot in the national lower house (House of Commons), opinion polls after the 2010 general election indicated UKIP's growing popularity.[3]

UKIP was founded in 1993, as the successor of the Anti-Federalist League. From the outset, the main aim of UKIP has been to end British EU membership, although the party expanded its policy palette in more recent years, for instance by adopting a hard line on immigration (Ford et al., 2012). The history of UKIP has been marked by infighting and leadership changes, yet over the years the party has made an impact in elections for the European Parliament; in 2010, the UKIP finished second behind the Conservatives with 16.5 per cent of the vote. As mentioned, however, UKIP never won seats in national elections.

Another notable, more radical, populist right party in contemporary Britain is the British National Party (BNP), which was founded in 1982 by the extreme right hardliner John Tyndall. After Nick Griffin seized the leadership in 1999, the BNP took inspiration from the more successful radical right-wing parties in Europe: the party explicitly rejected fascist totalitarianism and, in its aim to cultivate a 'legitimate' image, moved away from a narrow focus on immigration (Goodwin, 2011). Although it can be argued that the developments in the BNP's discourse constituted a "recalibration of fascism rather than a fundamental break in ideological continuity" (Copsey, 2007: 61), the renewed public discourse of the party substantiates classifying the BNP as a PRR party. Despite its ostensible moderation and some success in local elections and winning two seats in the EP in 2010, however, the BNP has failed to come even close to winning seats in the House of Commons.

UKIP has always considered the EU to be costly, corrupt, undemocratic, and harmful to British sovereignty. It is clear that, from the start, the party has been a Euroreject party which treated the issue as one of primary importance. This also seems to apply to the BNP when its manifestos after its ideological (or rhetorical) makeover are considered; the party has consistently called for a British withdrawal from the EU. In 2005, the wording in the BNP manifesto was crystal clear: the EU

[3] UKIP's electoral misfortune on the national level can partly be explained by the Single Member Plurality electoral system, which is unkind to smaller parties lacking a strong regional concentration of support.

was considered to be an unaccountable "aspiring super state", which would "bring about the eventual liquidation of Britain as a nation and a people" (BNP, 2005: 5). Leaving the EU was "the *sine qua non*" for the BNP, and was the first theme discussed in the party's programme. In its subsequent election manifesto, the party struck to its Euroreject course, likening the EU to an "Orwellian Super-State" (BNP, 2010: 27). That said, whereas European integration has always been the primary issue for UKIP, the emphasis placed on the theme by the BNP can be interpreted primarily as the party's attempt to move beyond its single-issue (racist) anti-immigration image (Goodwin, 2011).

In the past decade, in any case, there has been little room for the British PRR parties to further radicalise with regard to the EU issue, in view of their already unambiguous rejection of European integration. For our analysis, however, it is equally important to consider whether the European economic crisis has had an impact on the EU-related discourse of the two parties. The parties' election manifestos from 2010 suggest that this has not been the case (BNP, 2010; UKIP, 2010). While both parties (again) spoke about the threats to national sovereignty and negative financial consequences of EU membership, neither the BNP nor UKIP explicitly identified the European Union as the cause of the 'Great Recession', or criticised EU elites for mishandling the crisis.

After the election, the European crisis was briefly referred to by party leader Nigel Farage in his 2011 and 2012 annual UKIP conference speeches. In his view, the crisis signalled the failure of the Eurozone project and, at the same time, provided an excuse for the European Commission in its aim to turn Europe into a federal state. UKIP also noted on its website that the EU was now "seeking to pull away the props of our national economy – control of taxation and spending" in order to "shore up the collapsing Euro" (UKIP, 2013). In the same vein, a BNP website article stated that the EU demanded another £6 billion from the UK for an EU bailout fund. 'EU lackeys', the BNP argued, were "planning that if the banksters foul up again or if an EU country mucks up its economy in the future, you the British taxpayer will bail them out, again and again and again" (BNP, 2013).

In general, however, the British PRR's anti-EU rhetoric did not change fundamentally due to the crisis; direct references to the European crisis such as the ones outlined above remained infrequent and at the margins of the parties' public

discourse. Bearing in mind also that the UK, similar to Hungary as a fellow non-Eurozone member, did not directly contribute to bailout packages to stabilise the Euro, UKIP and the BNP had less reason to rail against these financial transfers as fanatically as, for instance, the Dutch PVV and the Slovak SNS had done.

A comparative analysis of EU-pessimism

Table 3. *Evolution of party attitudes to the EU*

	PARTIES									
	Jobbik		PVV		SNS		BNP		UKIP	
2006	II	ER	II	ES	II	ES	I	ER	I	ER
2010	I	ES	II	ES	II	ES	I	ER	I	ER
2012	**I**	**ER**	**I**	**ER**	**I**	**ER**	**I**	**ER**	**I**	**ER**

Note: Salience: I = primary issue; II = secondary issue.
Position: ES = Euro-sceptic; ER = Euro-reject.

Table 3 summarises the evolution of PRR party-based attitudes to European integration in Hungary, the Netherlands, Slovakia, and the UK. The analysis of party literatures and discourses confirms that EU-pessimism did not figure as a primary issue for all PRR parties up until very recently. Those who placed a critical attitude towards the EU at the core of their discourse from the outset have preserved this emphasis over time; those who had not, placed greater emphasis on the issue after the European economic crisis broke out.

Where a prioritisation of the EU issue has taken place, it has been matched by a concomitant radicalisation of PRR parties' positions on European integration. Jobbik in Hungary, the PVV in the Netherlands, and the SNS in Slovakia started pushing towards exit from the EU, presenting themselves as full-fledged Euroreject parties. The BNP and UKIP in the UK consistently delivered Euroreject positions and have had no incentive to tone down their rhetoric amidst the European financial crisis. Despite their different contexts and idiosyncratic framing of the PRR ideology, all five parties turned out to reject EU membership and prioritised the issue of European integration, giving Euro-rejection scope to qualify as a common ideological denominator for the PRR across Europe.

Most interestingly, however, the analysis of the motives behind these changes

in the agenda of the PRR presented us with new potential lines of demarcation. In Hungary and the UK, questions relative to the European financial crisis are used as a pretext; here, the Euroreject discourse of PRR parties is a diffuse political affair, denouncing a progressive loss of national sovereignty. In the Netherlands and Slovakia the reasons are firmly grounded in the bailout of other Eurozone countries and the unwillingness to support irresponsible EU member states. This brings attention to two crucial aspects of these changes, at least in the observed cases. First, the homogenisation of these positions transcends traditional regional divisions, applies to electorally weak and strong parties alike, and is visible in countries with positive as well as negative traditional attitudes towards European integration; second, PRR parties in countries part of the Eurozone tend to substantiate their rejection not only on the basis of political arguments, but also use as a motive their assessment of the EU's role in dealing with the crisis.

Discussion and Conclusions

The populist radical right permeated European politics in the past decades. PRR parties continued to exert their influence in Western Europe and recently thrived also in Central and Eastern Europe. The distinguishing trait of this party family remains its emphasis on nativism, an ideological feature that stands for a homogenous nation-state by juxtaposing the native group ('the nation') to non-native elements (Mudde, 2007: 22). However, nativism (and the PRR ideology in general) is 'context-sensitive' and framed differently in different contexts. In Western Europe, the accent is placed on anti-immigration and anti-Islamisation; in Central and Eastern Europe, the most pressing issue for the PRR is that of ethnic minorities.

Despite important contextual idiosyncrasies, there seems to be scope for PRR parties across Europe to converge on a common ideological denominator of Eurorejection. Drawing on the cases of Hungary, the Netherlands, Slovakia, and the UK, our study highlighted a process of homogenisation of the anti-EU agenda of PRR parties. Jobbik in Hungary, the PVV in the Netherlands, the SNS in Slovakia, and the BNP and UKIP in the UK were found placing 'Europe' at the centre of their appeals and rejecting the process of European integration as a whole – urging exit from the EU. We identified the recent economic and political crises as the principal (direct or indirect) catalyst for dissent: the EU is claimed responsible for the austerity

measures implemented by national governments and systematically comes across as a target of delegitimisation by PRR parties. In essence, however, the PRR's Eurorejection boils down to a broader opposition to a loss of national sovereignty in favour of supranational elites. It is primarily amongst the members of the Eurozone that we can expect the economic crisis to play a truly significant role in the formation of the PRR's Euroreject discourse.

The PRR's trajectory towards Eurorejection may well be driven by patterns of party competition. Indeed, we do not exclude that PRR parties may have taken advantage of the financial crisis to further differentiate their agenda from that of their nearby competitors (Taggart, 1998), especially if issues such as anti-immigration or ethnic minorities have been mainstreamed by the competitors of the centre-right (e.g. Bale, 2003). The emphasis recently placed on nativist issue by the mainstream Fidesz in Hungary and Smer-SD in Slovakia may be a good illustration of this. It is a moot point, however, whether Euro-rejection turns out to be electorally profitable to the PRR. After all, the PVV and the SNS lost out in the election of 2012 and respective party leaders may have overestimated the hostility towards the European project amongst the Dutch and Slovak populations (see De Vries, 2013). It thus remains to be seen whether Euro-rejection is a viable and durable strategy in all cases.

Nonetheless, the EU is facing an unprecedented crisis of legitimisation. Whereas the financial crisis could be deemed responsible for the increasing salience of the EU issue, the anti-EU discourse is often driven by PRR parties. The process of radicalisation observed in three of our cases took place irrespective of their location on either side of the former Iron Curtain and their (non-)membership in the euro area, displaying the pervasive effects of the current crisis and the scapegoating potential at hand for EU-pessimist organisations. This has serious implications for the working of national politics as well as the future of the EU. Further research should reveal whether we can indeed observe a European-wide shift towards Euro-rejection amongst members of the PRR family, and also whether such a shift actually has any electoral consequences (see Werts et al., 2012; Gómez-Reino and Llamazares, 2013). Our analysis has concentrated on the 'supply-side' of political party competition. It is equally important to gauge how voters are influenced by, or react to, the strategic or ideological choices made by the populist radical right.

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