

Populism in the Front National and the Partij voor de Vrijheid

To what extent can populist rhetoric act as a barrier to the successful formation and operation of a new Eurosceptic group after the European elections 2014?

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June, 3 2014

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Abstract

The dissertation at hand is embedded in the context of the 2014 European elections that have brought to light a strong Eurosceptic sentiment throughout Europe. It picks up on the intention to create a new Eurosceptic group in the European Parliament as brought forward by right-wing populists Geert Wilders and Marine Le Pen. Both politicians are representatives of Euroscepticism and share an enthusiasm for the “fight against the monster in Brussels”. These common traits initially suggest a certain kinship and compatibility and thus seem make the proposed new group a tangible aim. Instead of following this line of thought, the dissertation rather dares a closer examination of possible hindrances to this proposal by researching the meaning behind populism, Euroscepticism and the processes of political group formation and operation and discloses that a new Eurosceptic group will be subject to a number of barriers posed by right-wing populist rhetoric. In the subsequent context, it is determined that the enthusiastic populist rhetoric is superficial and covers substantial programmatic and ideological differences, in this case between Le Pen’s party Front National and Geert Wilders’ Partij voor de Vrijheid. These discrepancies are identified by a comparison of Dutch and French populism and revolve around societal, political and economic perceptions as well as opinions about immigration and the European Union. With the help of a conceptual frame consisting of rationalist and constructivist argumentation, it can be argued that to a certain extent, the Dutch and French right-wing populist rhetoric does not represent a substantial barrier when it comes to the future formation of the aspired group, but that it is likely to act as a barrier in actual political practices of group operation, as here political actors cannot rely on superficially connecting rhetoric.

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Introduction

“During the next five years, the European government will spend a lot of time defending itself”

– J.I. Torreblanca, February 19, 2014

The European elections in May 2014 have disclosed a broad Eurosceptic sentiment throughout the European Union. While the election campaign slogan “This time, it’s different” originally referred to structural changes that were about to be firstly introduced after the Lisbon treaty, it most evidently covered the new rise of right-wing populist parties. However, this development was barely a surprise: The past years had been overshadowed by an omnipresent economic crisis, by contested responsibilities and interdependencies that gave space for uncertainty and insecurity about the fundamental meaning of the European Union.

Suspicious feelings towards the European Union and its continuous striving for integration can be traced back as far as to Charles de Gaulle and the empty chair crisis in the 1960s and Thatcher’s reluctance to a centralized European Union in the 1980s. It can be followed up by the Danish, French and British difficulties in the ratification of the Maastricht Treaty and the prevalent refusal of a European constitution. The occurrence of this public mainstream Euroscepticism, however, can be considered a present day phenomenon; and a gold vein for right-wing populists. Two salient representatives of this inevitable populism, though certainly not the only ones, are the French and Dutch politicians Marine Le Pen and Geert Wilders that, after joining forces to “fight the monster of Brussels” by creating a new Eurosceptic alliance in the European Parliament, have received international attention.

The following pages pick up on this aspired new Eurosceptic group. Though the common line of thought suggests a right-wing populist kinship and infers Dutch and French compatibility, this dissertation chooses a different approach by thoroughly carving out possible barriers to the realization of a trans-European alliance. For that purpose, the first chapters will clarify the variables of the overarching research topicality. It will sketch out the notions of populism and Euroscepticism and clarify the unavoidably complex processes of political group formation and operation. Once having established the variables, the dissertation will apply the theory by examining populism in France and in the Netherlands and by ultimately testing the two case studies in the light of group formation and operation conditions. As the research is marked by a certain complexity, as shape-giving framework identified by rationalism and constructivism will serve as orientation and will enable an educated answer to the question of the extent to which right-wing populism can act as a barrier to the successful formation and operation of a new Eurosceptic group in the European Parliament after the 2014 European elections.

Methodology

Researching the introduced context has been an undertaking of considerable extent. The investigation made use of both theoretical and empirical means of information gathering. Only by ensuring the wide scope of possibilities and broad range of sources an educated answer to the research question could be formulated.

Due to the political brisance of the populist content under discussion, a high amount of biased information was expected. This bias did have the potential to constitute a threat to the objectivity of this paper, while at the same time it was needed to be examined in the process of reporting on the actor-subjective Eurosceptic sentiment. Being aware of these circumstances, all data was collected consciously, carefully and critically.

The research at hand made use of both theoretical and empirical means, though a concentration on the theoretical approach can be observed. The examination builds up on secondary data collected from various sources. Firstly, academic literature in form of books was consulted in order to clarify the different variables of this research. These books were of advantage in their multitude, as they were comprehensively informing either by presenting a particular angle to an issue or by functioning as a collection of different inputs on the topic. The written theoretical works of acknowledged authors were perceived as objective and reliable and therefore constituted a valuable contribution to the research. Secondly, and to a larger extent, the research draws upon academic journal articles that were assessed especially useful due to their compaction of expansive information. Also the consultation of working papers proved to be adjuvant in the identification of further academic sources and inspirations. As many published articles and papers can be found online and open up a wide range and profoundness of information, the internet was the main means of auxiliary. At the same time, online research also represented a threat to the objectivity of the research, as it was perceived a much-used platform for biased argumentation. Naturally, this subjectivity could be explicitly observed on the websites of Marine Le Pen and Geert Wilders, their parties Front National and Partij voor de Vrijheid, respectively. Considering the content, nevertheless, their online presentation was valuable to the research, as it caught the exact sentiment and emotions that this research targets. Certainly, newspapers and newsfeeds were observed in the course of the research, as the topic is highly current. Thereby, the European Parliament media monitoring constituted a much appreciated channel for information gathering.

The empirical part of this work consists of first-hand observations that were made in the Parliamentary environment, including information gained by attending press conferences.

Being able to join European Parliament internal events was an asset that led to a close identification with the research. Moreover, a telephone interview was conducted with Yannis Gounaris, holder of a PhD in law and author of books and other written works on European and legal matters published in Greece. The interview was conducted in a semi-structured manner, i.e. (open) key questions were identified, while leaving space for follow-up questions for in-depth engagement and the discovery of additional important aspects and recommendations that could be added to the findings. Mr. Gounaris was identified as suitable interviewee due to his observational knowledge on European matters and his self-evaluation as “decently Eurosceptic”. The exchange of information with Mr. Gounaris was helpful and enriching in that it brought into play new arguments, but also confirmed some of the established assumptions. Though cautious about bias, his contribution can be considered a valuable addition to the research as it adds a certain subjectivity into the theoretical frame.

The dissertation’s main objective is the examination of current developments and the embracing of complex processes in the European Parliament. In the discourse of strong Euroscepticism and the establishment of right-wing populism in the European Parliament after the 2014 elections, it is aimed to provide a different angle to the discussions by purposely not picking up the much feared congruence of right-wing populist parties, but rather concentrating on those traits that might lead to the failure of their cooperation on the European level. The research underlies the hypothesis that populism as well as Euroscepticism vary considerably in their constituency and that a new Eurosceptic group will eventually break under these differences. Concentrating on the initiators of this alliance, French Marine Le Pen and Dutch Geert Wilders are identified as particularly interesting and challenging examples, as a French and Dutch national suspicion towards the European Union, visible in the 2009 EU constitution opposing referenda, suggests the basis for a certain right-wing populist congruence and public support at first impression. The dissertation at hand aims to test this first impression. It has to be underlined, however, that the Dutch and French case study is representative, but cannot possibly give an absolute evaluation to the question, as for a formation of a political group more five additional members are needed.

Conceptual framework

The overall question posed by this dissertation provides a particular perspective on the topicalities by spotlighting possible barriers deriving from right-wing populism and to what extent they could act obstructive to possible trans-European, Eurosceptic group formation and functioning. Whereas these possible barriers can be empirically identified, it remains a complexity to measure the degree to which they constitute a hindrance.

The analysis and argumentation of the following pages are, therefore, orientated at a confining and shape-giving conceptual construct that assists in grasping this complexity. Thorough research has classified components of both political and behavioral theory to be essentially relevant for an explanation of political alliance creation and operation. In that regard, rationalism and constructivism are extracted as most adequate representatives of both disciplines, since both are employed in the context of European political theory while resting on independent observations of individual social behavioral patterns. In their fundamental interrelation, as will be introduced subsequently, both concepts are adequate representatives of the intertwined and interdependent international political sphere.

Applying rationalism and constructivism will, thus, assist the research on political processes in the European Parliament by providing an orientation and, at a later stage, by determining the extent to which right-wing populism can act as a barrier to the formation and operation of a new Eurosceptic group in the European Parliament.

Rationalism

Referring to political theorist John Elster, Jupille et al. conclude that theorizing rationalism and its components leads to one simple formulation: "When faced with several courses of action, people usually do what they believe is likely to have the best overall outcome." (Jupille et al., 2003). Therein, rationalism leans on several assumptions. Numerous scholars have introduced their approaches and have constituted a set of assumptions that in summary derives from the concepts of methodological individualism, optimality, egocentrism and strategic constraints (Jupille et al., 2003, Pollack, 2006), with methodological individualism creating the base to rationalist theorization (Scott, 2000). The approach places individual actors' behavior in the center of examination of not only individual but also collective action while anticipating that actors are subject to exogenous, i.e. fixed, preferences as well as their beliefs about the connection between their action and the eventual outcome (Jupille, 2003). Optimality, as second component, contributes to the theorization by adding a "consequentialist logic of action" (as opposed to appropriateness and arguing logic) to actors' behavior. This suggests that actors have calculative intentions meant to ensure the most profitable way of action to maximize their utility (Jupille et al., 2003). The third component of rationalism is the concept of self-regard which holds that actors are essentially egoistic in their behavior, occupied with their own well-being first before taking into account other individuals (Jupille, 2003). A last assumption to rationalism is the dependence of actors' decision-making behavior on their physical and social surroundings that are defined as limitations or constraints. According to Pollack, individuals critically evaluate their most profitable actions in the frame of the environment they find themselves in (Pollack, 2006).

Constructivism

In combination with this calculative rational approach, one has to mention the rational theory's complimenting theorization around constructivism. Constructivism contradicts the rational, actor-centered methodological individualism by stressing the essential interdependence between actors and the structures that surround them. As Risse underlines, both are not only co-determined, but most importantly actors underlie a "constitutiveness", meaning that the environment that they shape create their identity as social beings (Risse, 2004). This assumption further includes that actors' preferences are not exogenously given, as argued by rationalists, but rather subject to informal influences and the interaction within the structures they find themselves in. In addition, contesting the concept of optimality through consequential logic, constructivist conceptualization argues that individuals act according to a logic based on appropriateness or arguments, the former relating to behavior influence by factors that are perceived as adequate in a certain context, the latter taking into account other actors' perspectives and their possible influence (Jupille et al., 2003). In constructivist opinion, thus, agents underlie argumentation and learning processes of social relationships that will impact their behavior. When looking at the common argumentation, it can be argued that the European Union is one important subject of this discussion. When looked at from a constructivist viewpoint, the European institutions represent and promote certain values that "constitute" the actors around it.

It is important to note that though rational choice and constructivism at first glance seem to be conflicting, both concepts rather complement each other. This means, that an agent can act rationally to a certain extent while his rational behavior underlies constructivist criteria. This transition is, for instance visible in the argument that rational actors logically calculate their behavior in the context of the social environment that surrounds them. The actor in that sense is constituted, restricted, by this reciprocal effect. This argument will be employed in the final discussion of the research where it has proven to be of high importance in the interpretation of the findings and in the predictions to what extent group formation and functioning in the European Parliament will be hindered by right-wing populist rhetoric.

In order to gain a deeper understanding of this right-wing populism, the following pages provide a theoretical approach.

Sketching out Populism

The examination of populism is central to this work, as it establishes the fundament of further analysis. Though the past has seen various types of populism, for one in the left-wing

movements in the 1960s, it is necessary to understand populism, or populist rhetoric respectively, in the focus of this dissertation as tool of the political right-wing spectrum.

Commencing a conceptualization of populism proves to be comparatively difficult, as it is well-known for its rather vague nature. Interestingly, academic literature argues that populism cannot be considered an independent concept in itself, but that it is much rather dependent on other notions, considerations or sentiments that provide it with meaning. Priester (2012) describes populism as a “concept of relations”, a concept without its own central value system. Consequentially, it misses the substance that would provide it with characteristic content and has to be understood as “inherently incomplete” and “empty-hearted” (Priester in 2012 referring to Taggart, 2004). Due to its consequential varied appearance, populism is therefore also simply referred to as “strategy of power acquisition” (Priester, 2012). In addition to these descriptions, Mudde (referring in 2004 to Freeden, 1998) speaks of populism as “thin-centred ideology [that] can be easily combined with very different other ideologies”, being quasi a “host-ideology” (Priester in 2012 referring to Freeden, 1998).

Notwithstanding the inconsistency in conceptualization, the existing literature agrees to a large extent on certain populist character traits. If one aims to follow political right-wing populist argumentation, it needs to be understood that its fundamental sentiment divides society into two homogenous, antagonist groups that are “the people” and “the elite”; the former being considered unquestionably “pure” and the latter essentially “corrupt” (Mudde, 2004). Again, there is a certain disaccord among scholars when it comes to the nature of “the people”. While some refer to it as “only a tool of populist rhetoric”, others define it as one part of the population illustrated in a class model. Taggart introduces the notion of “heartland” for the “people” referring to “a neither real nor all-inclusive” (Mudde, 2004) population, but instead a “romanticized, unhistorical, ideal world” (Priester, 2012). In opposition to “the people” stands the “elite” that in the liberal democratic context necessarily finds its identification in political parties (Mudde 2014). It is argued that “the elite” creates “artificial divisions within the homogenous people” and that it “put[s] [its] own interest above those of the people” (Mudde, 2004). Populism sees a vertical relation between the “people” and the “elite”, whereby the latter allegedly overrules the former by depriving it of its “ultimate democratic sovereignty” (Frölich-Steffen, Rensmann, 2007). This might suggest a populist aversion of democracy. It is important to understand, however, that it militates against established political parties and that populists strive for - or see themselves as - a new political party in the democratic context that gains its legitimation from being the “advocate of the common man”, the “voice of the people”. It allegedly communicates and represents its *volonté general*, the will of the imagined collective, eventually giving it back their democratic sovereignty (Frölich-Steffen, Rensmann, 2007) that is blocked by the “elite”. Though not

rejecting democracy per se, populist establishment cannot be identified as democratic party politics, but rather shows a movement character. This argument will be picked up and explained at a later stage.

As Mudde importantly points out, populism is not only identified by its opposition towards elitism, but also by its aversion against pluralism. It rejects the heterogeneous perception of society represented by differing opinions and visions (Mudde, 2004), as it contradicts the characteristic simplified concept of homogeneity of a national identity (Rydgren, 2007). In contrast to anti-elitism, anti-pluralism is of horizontal concern to populism (Frölich-Steffen, Rensmann, 2007). In conformity with the rigid Manichean distinction of “the people” and any other element surrounding it, other sentiments are perceived as essentially “evil”. Contemporary populism, as Rydgren argues, constructs the “other” around immigration, the European Union and increasingly multinational corporations and economic globalization (Rydgren, 2007).

Modern day right-wing populist rhetoric distinguishes itself by an “ethno-nationalism rooted in myths about the distant past” and a “xenophobic, antiestablishment populist” core that is embedded in socio-cultural authoritarianism (Rydgren, 2007). Distinctive starting points for the “threat to national identity” are represented, for one, in immigrants from Muslim countries. This group of migrants is “singled-out [as being] particularly threatening to European values, allegedly because they are [...] least inclined to assimilation” (Rydgren, 2007). Immigrants in populist rhetoric are presented as backward, as examples for domestic violence, anti-homosexuality and anti-Semitism. Additionally, populists perceive immigrants as source of criminality and other kinds of social insecurity, as reason for unemployment and as profiteers that take advantage of Western social welfare systems (Rydgren, 2007). Along with this argument comes the conviction of “national preference” that suggests the priority of nationals over immigrants, among other things on the job market.

Deepening the understanding of populist occurrence, another level can be added to the above, namely populism’s organizational aspects. Though Mudde argues that its stylistics cannot be considered essential to the theorization, but rather constitute additional facilitators to populism (Mudde, 2004), it would be fatal for the further investigation of French and Dutch populism to exclude populist features from the research.

Rhetorical and political scientists Frölich-Steffen and Rensmann particularly note populism’s character of a movement headed by a “charismatic leader” (Frölich-Steffen 2007) that claims to bring forward the unheard voice of the common man. The scholars infer from this also a party-internal top-down structure that stands in sharp contrast to the bottom-up organization practiced in the majority of other political parties and that suggests a lack of internally applied

democracy (Frölich-Steffen 2007) taking on the character of a movement. With the figurehead of the party-leading person, the populist political style and policy making often proofs to be personalized. Specifically, it can be observed that populism follows theatric schemes to put itself in scene; stylistics that Dutch historian Koen Vossen calls “flavor enhancers” (Vossen, 2012, p.7). The charismatic leader and his or her claims are affronting and provocative in front of the national flags and anthems that constitute the populist coulisse.

Another important feature of populist rhetoric is its colloquial, ordinary speech and the simplification of comprehensive political issues for which it provides answers in ostensibly facile solutions. Corresponding with this is the argument that populism makes use of polarization and stereotyping, essentially to create a Manichean world of black and white simple assumptions. Populism, furthermore, appeals to the common sense meaning that it equals individual and collective moral, for instance in the demand for economical politics (Decker, Lewandowsky, 2009).

Adding yet another factor to the disputed theorization on populism, the literature presents a variety of arguments on its causality. A large part of scholars stresses the so-called demand-side of politics that looks at certain circumstances resulting in change of interest, emotion, perceptions and preferences in a society (among others Rydgren, 2007, Spier, 2006, Frölich-Steffen, Rensmann, 2007). Commonly, in this context, any types of crises and the subsequent social breakdown and modernization processes are perceived as pivotal for the emergence of and the support for populism, as they usually create societal tensions and distress. From those situations derive self- perceived positions of “winners” and “losers” in a society in which the latter ones are likely to be most responsive to populist rhetoric. The support for populism is further aggravated by a widely anxious sentiment, best described as “disturbing normative insecurity” (Arzheimer, Falter, 2002). Arzheimer and Falter explain in this context the “normal pathology” model established by the scholars Scheuch and Klingemann in 1967. The authors of the normal pathology model claim that in response to the perceived insecurity a “pathological adaptation” to the situation takes place in which individuals strive for the dissolution of this ambiguity (Arzheimer, Falter referring in 2002 to Scheuch and Klingemann, 1967). This results in sensitivity for the above mentioned simplification of extensive political content, a Manichean black and white perspective as well as the reluctance to scrutinize the political reality, as it could bring about a threat to the newly gained security (Arzheimer, Falter, 2002). Though it needs to be clarified that this work originally relates to right-wing extremism rather than right-wing populism, the model is more than suitable for the further investigations.

By means of pathological, clinical terms, and sometimes highly psychologically charged notions, for instance in descriptions of paranoid and conspiratorial behavior, it is aimed at a clear disassociation of populism from mainstream politics. While populism in common theory is presumed to be abnormal, supported by only a very small fraction of society, and standing “outside the frame of normal democratic politics” (Hofstadter, 1964), practice has proven otherwise.

Pathological Normalcy

Challenging this emphasize on a marginal, pathological radical right-wing, Cas Mudde tests in his “pathological normalcy” thesis the soundness of the abnormality argumentation. By examining and comparing the main attributes of the radical right - namely nativism, authoritarianism and populism - with mainstream politics, Mudde finds out that the notion should not be researched in complete isolation from “normal” politics, as the characteristic attitudes and ideologies are “fairly widespread in contemporary European societies” (Mudde, 2010).

Mudde empirically assesses the bases of Scheuch and Klingemann’s thesis. Firstly, the *nativist* feature is examined. Nativism holds that a nation should be exclusively inhabited by the people that “belong to” a state, and that any other influence constitutes a threat to the nation, a distortion of its homogeneity and unique characteristics. Thereby, nativism is seen as closely connected to the concept of the nation-state, a geographical and political entity that inhabits a sovereign people, the nation. This thought can be found in many European constitutions, for one under title 1 on sovereignty of the French constitution: “The principle of the Republic shall be: government of the people, by the people and for the people” (French Constitution, Title 1, Article 2). This example does not claim France to be nativist in the radical sense. Much rather the constitution states clearly the equality of all persons before the law: “It shall ensure the equality of all citizens before the law, without distinction of origin, race or religion” (French Constitution, Article 1). A certain degree of nativism is true for any European country. Next, Mudde examines *authoritarianism*, the belief in a strict (political) order with severe punishment when violated (Mudde, 2010, p.6). Authoritarianism is seen as crucial attribute to populism, as it illustrates both the striving for a homogenous, controllable society and the populist-internal unquestionable authority of the ‘charismatic leader’. Nevertheless, a certain degree of populism, euphemistically the “love and respect of the authority” (Mudde, 2010, p.6) is considered one of the core standpoints of conservatism and can, moreover, be found both in secular and religious thinking from Thomas Hobbes and Lenin to the Catholic and Orthodox Christianity (Mudde, 2010, p.6). The third feature examined in the light of mainstream politics is *populism*. As Mudde argues, it is a common tool of the government’s opposition to use a rhetoric that includes the accusation of the

“corrupt, metropolitan, urban elite” and the defense of the “pure, indigenous people” (Mudde, 2004).

Though the use of nativism, authoritarianism and populism of “normal”, common oppositional political rhetoric is not as extreme as the radical expressions of the right-wing opposition, or for this exact reason, Mudde draws the conclusion that right-wing populist rhetoric is to be seen as the radicalization of mainstream views. Thereby, he contradicts the normal pathology thesis and states that contemporary right-wing populism needs to be examined embedded in the mainstream political context, rather than an outside phenomenon.

To conclude, this section has focused on a conceptualization of populism. Scholars have various understandings of its nature. In some cases, populism is sketched out as thin-centered ideology that needs other concepts and values to provide it with meaning. In other cases it is described as a strategy for gaining power. However, it is common opinion that populism is identified by its rigid separation of the “corrupt elite” and the “pure people”. In populist perception, “the people” is an ideal, homogenous entity that is distorted by elitism as well as pluralism, through influences of immigration, globalization and the European Union. Populism makes use of theatric stylistics usually recognizable in one “charismatic leader”, in the usage of provocation, stereotyping and dramatizing and in the simplification of comprehensive issues. Associated with abnormality and pathology, the theorization of right-wing populism mainly takes place outside the political mainstream. Some scholars are convinced that the emergence of populism needs to be seen in connection with abnormal situations and crises. Others, such as Mudde in his pathological normalcy thesis, argue that populism is in fact wide spread and visible in contemporary mainstream politics and necessarily a part of democracy, and that it needs to be examined in the ‘normal’ context, rather than treating populism as outside phenomenon.

The following pages will take a look at another variable that is introduced by the overall question and that is closely connected to right-wing populism.

Euroscepticism

Similarly to populism, the term Euroscepticism is difficult to capture in its complexity. As political author Topaloff notes in his conceptualization, Euroscepticism “reveals itself to be a socially constructed and politically exploited but inherently vague and encompassing concept” (Topaloff, 2012). This dilemma might be explained by the concept's derivation from journalistic discourse, rather than from political science (Szczerbiak, Taggart, 2008) making it an all-embracing phrase referring to a wide range of opposing sentiments toward EU

integration in general and the nature of the EU in specific. If one takes the notion by its literal meaning, “sceptic” from its Greek original translates into “deeply thinking” and “having doubts” about something (Gounaris, 2014, see Appendix 2). In fact, Euroscepticism in the past has been a healthy counterforce to the European Union, questioning the status quo and so far having led to more transparency or the raising of the issue of possible limits to integration (Leconte, 2010). It is therefore not far-fetched to classify Euroscepticism, similarly to populism, to a certain extent as mainstream concept. Nevertheless, Euroscepticism, too, is mainly treated as an abnormal attitude reserved for the extreme sides of the political spectrum.

Theoretically, the sceptic “submits the issue of European integration to a skeptical examination” (Leconte, 2010). Based on this definition, and with regard to a “political exploitation”, one has to distinguish Euroscepticism from the Anti-European meaning it is usually attributed with. In the particular frame of French and Dutch Euroscepticism, the subsequent paragraphs refer foremost to the party-based Euroscepticism, as opposed to Euroscepticism in national or public opinion.

Aiming for a more precise theorization that can be applied to political parties for a consequential measurement of their Eurosceptic degree, scholars have introduced various schemes and variables. The scholars Szczerbiak and Taggart define Eurosceptic extent by means of political parties’ opposition of European integration. They provide a basic theoretical construct of either “principled” and “hard” Euroscepticism that alludes to the general reluctance to delegate power to the European institutions, or “soft” Euroscepticism that opposes any *further* integration (Szczerbiak, Taggart, 2008). Szczerbiak and Taggart’s model refers to the right-wing political spectrum, although Euroscepticism also exists on the left, in that case expressing a feeling of too little integration.

Sceptic sentiment toward the European Union can firstly be detected in the context of the proposed European constitution drafted in 2002 that many feared would turn the EU into a “super-state” (Leconte, 2010). France and the Netherlands have shown their scepticism by voting against the constitution in their national referenda. Evidently, the argument of the “super-state” continues to constitute the main critique of right-wing Eurosceptic representatives, especially in the realm of populism. Generally, Euroscepticism corresponds with the populist criteria, for instance in the pinpointing of the “Eurocratic elite” in comparison to the “average citizen” (Leconte, 2010). Furthermore, Euroscepticism, too, has not one characteristic identity. It is dependent on, in this case, political parties’ subjective outlook on the European Union and individual causality for their criticism.

The European elections 2014

The 2014 European elections have unsheathed a strong right-wing Eurosceptic base throughout Europe. The elections are an appropriate representative of the variety that the term Euroscepticism embraces. The spectrum entails on the one hand the German Alternative für Deutschland, a relatively new party that merely opposes EU economic policies and the Eurozone and that gained seven seats (European Parliament, 2014) and on the other hand the Greek Golden Dawn, an “openly neo-Nazi Greek phenomenon” (Gounaris, 2014). The Golden Dawn became third strongest force in Greece with three seats and finds a like-minded equivalent in the Hungarian Jobbik, second in the national elections and three seats in the European Parliament (European Parliament, 2014). In the broad “middle” of the Eurosceptic spectrum, one can find the big winners: The British UKIP, led by Nigel Farage and the French Front National that both became first in their respective countries, each gaining 24 seats (European Parliament, 2014). Also the Danish People’s Party became national first with four seats in the EP. Other national right-wing parties could note successes, too. Third biggest parties in their countries were Geert Wilders’ Partij voor de Vrijheid and the Austrian Freedom Party that both obtained four seats in the EP as well as the True Fins with two seats in the EP. Moreover, the Polish New Right won with seven seats, the Italian Lega Nord with five, the Sweden Democrats with two and the Belgian Vlaams Belang with one seat (European Parliament, 2014).

These results have fueled the discussions and predictions about a new Eurosceptic political alliance in the European Parliament initialized by Marine Le Pen and Geert Wilders. It is a complex play between the actors, as some are already part of an established Eurosceptic group: The Freedom and Democracy group led inter alia by Nigel Farage. National parties that are members of the EFD include UKIP, Lega Nord, the True Fins, the Vlaamse Belang and the Danish People’s Party.

Currently, however, the Vlaams Belang and the Lega Nord sit at the table of negotiations with Front National and Partij voor de Vrijheid as well as with the Austrian Freedom Party. At a press conference in the European Parliament on May 28 2014, three days after the European elections, the five party representatives informed the public about their intentions. It became obvious that, though under the Eurosceptic umbrella, each of them had different perspectives. Thus, each of them acted as an example of Euroscepticism theory: While the FN, PVV, Lega Nord and Vlaams Belang represented their aim of their countries’ exit of the EU, Harald Vilimsky from the Austrian Freedom Party, declared that “in principle it would not be a bad idea to test, if the Austrian backs the [European Union] or not. [It] is a big club with rules. And these rules can be changed”. Despite exemplary differences, the five representatives showed themselves confident to find more allies for the “Alliance of hope” as

Lega Nord leader Matteo Salvini formulated it, and as Geert Wilders concluded: “Maybe not tomorrow, but in the next weeks”.

The 2014 European elections have seen high news coverage on Euroscepticism and its rise in Europe. The notion served and still serves as catch-all term to suggest the political affinity, the common denominator, of different right-wing populist national parties. Surely, a certain convergence is needed to form a group, but even the five parties in negotiations have different perspectives. To gain a better understanding of group formation processes, the following chapters will examine in more detail how and why cooperative groups are created and what internal conditions need to be fulfilled in order to operate successfully.

A Political Group and its formation in the European Parliament

“Political Parties on European level contribute to forming political awareness and to expressing the will of the citizens” TEU, Art.10 (4)

Directly elected by its citizens, political parties constitute the democratic core of the European Union. After Lisbon, the European Parliament and its actors have gained new powers and responsibilities that firstly come into play after the elections in May 2014. These new powers are represented in an increased number of legislation fields, including the areas of agriculture and health, but also immigration and justice that under the Nice treaty had been reserved for the Commission and the member states. In these fields the European Parliament now has co-decision power together with the Council. Additionally, the Parliament’s agreement is needed for the Council to determine and pass the annual budget. Moreover, it has a greater say in international agreements negotiated by the European Union. What the Lisbon Treaty, moreover, states is that the outcome of the Parliamentary elections has to be taken into account by the Council when proposing the new President of the European Commission (European Parliament, n.d.). It is, thus, likely that a candidate of the political group with the most votes will provide this office.

With regard to the formalities of a political group in the EP, the Rules of Procedure of the European Parliament state under rule 30 that “[a] political group shall comprise Members elected in at least one-quarter of the Member States” and that “[t]he minimum number of Members required to form a political group shall be 25” (Status 2014, European Parliament, 2010). Once established as a political group, its members can benefit from a range of supporting measures. Firstly, political parties on a European level receive material benefits: In contrast to the individual non-attached status, a group has more staff at its disposal, more office space and can especially make use of funding (European Commission, 2013). The financial means are meant to ensure for instance the organization of meetings and

conferences and the distribution of informative material. Additionally, members of a political group have more speaking time in sessions, can chair committees, and will have a greater say in agenda setting (Benedetto, 2008).

The nature of political groups is varied. This is not only represented in a multi-colored hemicycle, but also in the group-internal consistency. It needs to be stressed that the research on political groups in the European Parliament differs significantly from the examination of political parties on the national level. Political scientists Hix et al. argue that the EU is “more a supranational institution than a federal state, [with] considerable heterogeneity between cultures, histories, economic conditions and national institutions of member states” (Hix et al., 2005, Dimensions of politics in the European Parliament). Following this argument, the theoretical investigation of the daily political life within political groups in the European Parliament can be considered to be rather comprehensive, as will be experienced in the course of this dissertation. Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) are, in comparison to their national parliaments, not only agents of their specific political disposition in a party of like-minded politicians. Additionally, they are representatives of their country and faced with the challenge of being part of a political group environment whose surface is made up of compatible transnational ethos, but whose detailed politics are very much dependent on nation-distinct variables. In this regard, it is most interesting to look at the circumstances and reasons under which political actors decide to combine forces on the European level. Surprisingly little demonstration of this process can be found in the academic literature. This might be due to the fact that reasons for entering into political cooperation, especially in the context of the EP elections, seem rather banal. Actors are much more likely to be noticed and taken seriously when part of a political group. This also increases their chances of getting elected (Hix et al., 2009), as they are part of a party “label” that suggests a certain harmony. This aspect can be considered important for political actors positioned in the extreme margin of the political spectrum, as the unusual cooperative representation can have a positive influence on votes.

The Rules of Procedure of the European Parliament state in chapter 4, rule 30 that: “Members may form themselves into groups according to their political affinity”. There are, however, much more subliminal variables involved that build the foundation for cooperation, as has been observed in the realm of Euroscepticism theory. In fact, Bressanelli, scholar of political institutions, adds to the ideological factor the determinant of pragmatism (Bressanelli, 2012). As otherwise theorization of political group formation is relatively lean, further argumentation for the latent reasons of cooperating can be inferred from theorization of coalition behavior. Naturally, the distinction between the formation of coalitions and factions, political groups respectively, has to be underlined. Nevertheless, coalition

theorization bears observations that are applicable for this dissertation, as they explain the reasons for the cooperation of different political groups in both rational and constructivist terms.

Constructivist observations

The first observation that can be made about political group formation is evidently a certain “political affinity”, the pre-condition for cooperation. This congruence can be based on two different components established by the political scientists Kaeding and Selck, namely ideology-based and culture-based cooperation. The former is the subject of Hix et al.’s conceptualization of European Parliamentary ideology. The authors establish two prominent ideological dimensions in the European Parliament that can be seen in a left-right division of the political spectrum as well as in an increasingly important more-less integration discrepancy (Hix et al., 2005, *Dimensions of Politics in the European Parliament*, Hix et al., 2005, *Power to the Parties*, Kaeding and Selck, 2005). Especially the latter corresponds with contemporary right-wing Euroscepticism. The argumentation about ideological causality for cooperation is supported by empirical testing which found that “party groups at the transnational level not only operate in a similar policy space as do national parties, but also tend to be formed mainly as coalition of parties who are like-minded on matters of policy (Mc Elroy, Benoit, 2008). Ideology-based explanations for group formation are perceived as continuous fundament of cooperation. In addition to the ideological component, Kaeding and Selck suggest culture-based reasons for entering into coalition. Culture is here constituted in “similar languages, history or general cultural characteristics” (Kaeding and Selck, 2005). This argument is closely connected to a geographical categorization, as cultural proximity usually follows distinctions especially in North/South and East/West divisions. The ideological and cultural dimensions are of particular importance in the context of right-wing populism, as it claims its fundamental legitimacy to be based on national cultural heritage and its defense.

Rational choice observations

Interpreting the striving for cooperation in a rational choice manner, the political scientists Kaeding and Selck argue that there are two behavioral observations: power-based and interest-based group formation. The power-based pattern thereby relates to the striving of political actors to enter into cooperation with the most powerful actors (Kaeding, Selck, 2005). Although Kaeding and Selck present this pattern in terms of coalition formation and define the most powerful actors in terms of voting strength, power-based pursuits can be applied in the case of group formation to the extent that political actors search for the highest probability to realize their policy preferences. Certainly, the chances to realize this are higher if a political party combines forces with a well-established party in the European Parliament. This has the advantage to additionally reflect credibility and respectability to the electorate.

As mentioned above, political group formation in the European Parliament brings with it a range of benefits. The rational choice perspective suggests that “national parties might decide to associate with other parties only to enjoy [these] procedural and organizational advantages” (Bressanelli, 2012). The second rational choice observation describes interest-based cooperation. As Kaeding and Selck state, interest-based ambitions for cooperation are mostly issue-related and short-term in nature. Again, it needs to be noted that the authors write about coalition formation. However, also the political group formation can be considered as the striving for liaison with political parties of the same interest. Hix et al, too, explain that “[...] national parties who expect to have similar preferences and ambitions on a range of future policy issues can reduce the transactions costs [of vote-by-vote coalitions] by establishing a transnational political party organization” (Hix et al. 2005).

Political groups in the European Parliament are formed in the first weeks of the new legislature. Regarding the topic of this dissertation, it is interesting to know that the past has seen a number of right-wing alliances in the European Parliament that, however, were not durable. One representative example would be the formation in 2007 of the Eurosceptic Group Identity, Tradition, Sovereignty. Consisting of, back then only necessary, 23 MEPs of the French Front National, the Rumanian Partidul Romania Mare, the Belgian Vlaams Belang, the Bulgarian Ataka, of the two Italian parties Alternative Sociale and Fiamma Tricolore and the Austrian FPÖ, the faction only lasted eleven months (Strømmen, 2012). It split over a comment by Alessandra Mussolini, Italian MEP of the ITS and grand-daughter of the dictator Mussolini. Alessandra Mussolini was reported to declare after the murder of an Italian woman by a Romanian Roma: “Breaking the law became the way of life for Romanians. However, it is not about petty crimes, but horrifying crimes that gives one goose bumps” (Spiegel online, 2007). This statement was unacceptable for Mussolini’s Romanian colleagues in the ITS who strongly accused her of unconsciousness and generalization (Spiegel online, 2007). The incongruity eventually led to the dissolution of the ITS. Another Eurosceptic example is the Group for Freedom and Democracy formed after the 2009 European elections and led, inter alia, by populist Nigel Farage of the UK Independence Party. After the 2014 EP elections, the EFD has gained seats and can benefit from the strong Eurosceptic sentiment throughout Europe. If a new Eurosceptic political group will be formed, it will be interesting to observe the further actions, as the possible transition from the Vlaams Belang and the Lega Nord do not pose a threat to the existence of the EFD. “We can expect competition about who is louder and more openly Anti-European”, predicts as the Greek lawyer and political scientist Yannis Gounaris.

Before being able to enter a confrontation, however, the new alliance must ensure a sound group-internal functioning. The following chapter will look at the conditions that need to be

fulfilled for the successful operation of a political party, or, in this case, a political group on European level.

Political group operation

Researching the conditions for political group success in the European Parliament comprises the investigation of its overall cohesion that builds the fundament for its effective functioning. As established above, group cohesion on a European level is especially challenging, as politicians to a certain extent underlie ideological and programmatic differences and are prone to act loyal to their domestic strivings. In that sense, political parties are faced with a multitude of possibilities for coalition and/ or conflict.

Various scholars have undertaken empirical measurement of group cohesion and discipline by evaluating the degree of “Fraktionsgeschlossenheit”, best described as party entity (inter alia Kailitz, 2008, Thiem, 2009), through voting behavior (Hix et al. 2005). As this dissertation addresses a political group that has not yet been formed, the reference to voting behavior of all actors is rather intangible, though not impossible. The organization votewatch, for instance evaluates individual voting in past legislatures and can predict certain behavior. Hix et al. suggest that cohesion is, however, not only dependent on ideological closeness (Hix et al., 2005, Bressanelli, 2012), but also on coalition effectiveness. This dissertation, therefore, introduces a focus on the future group-internal organizational structures that, at this stage, constitute a more tangible frame than the suggested predictions of voting behavior.

Taking as a reference the existing literature on coalitions and the preconditions for coalitions' success, it becomes evident that political parties are faced with challenging organizational tasks when entering into cooperation. Brown et al. introduce a model of indicators for coalition success in communities in which six components are considered: leadership, interpersonal relationships, task focus, participation in costs and benefits, sustainability planning and community support (Brown et al, 2011). As this model refers to community coalitions, though in the public health sector, it represents on micro-level what this dissertation addresses on the European macro-level. The variable community support, therefore, will be substituted by the support of the electorate.

According to Brown et al., effective leadership in a coalition construct is crucial for the development of cohesion, a “dynamic collective force” that is capable of achieving its objectives (Brown et al., 2011). The term leadership can be understood either as an individual political actor or simply as “analytical and interactional skill” (Mizrahi, Rosenthal, 2001). The leadership follows the tasks of maintaining internal relations, the striving for party-

objectives and creating trust, accountability and contribution of the membership base (Mizrahi, Rosenthal, 2001). Thus, the importance of leadership is not only allegeable for internal group functioning, but also for the group promotion externally to convince the electorate of the group's credibility and qualities.

Also interpersonal, in this case both inter-party, relationships determine the success of political party cooperation. One can refer to rational and constructivist criteria that can adequately describe the interaction and interrelation between the political parties that form an alliance. On the one hand, parties behave calculative and strategic; on the other hand, inter-party relationships are built on ideological and cultural similarities. Brown et al. suggest in the explanation of their model that "communication, conflict and cohesion" are crucial indicators for a mutual relation and therefore for coalition functioning (Brown et al., 2011). An additional factor to interpersonal relationships can be defined as party-internal. It is important to recall here that coalitions consist of distinct political agents; in the context of this research these are represented in different national parties. In order to cooperate efficiently as a coalition, national party-internal cohesion is a precondition.

Important for the determination of political group cohesion is the research on common objectives and task focus. In the evaluation of coalition effectiveness, it is not only necessary that the cooperating agents are like-minded and have common goals, but also that they concentrate on and give priority to the same issues. Regarding the fact that alliances in the European Parliament embrace national political parties presents the high chance that these national actors, "whenever possible, will attempt to steer EP group policy on issues of the greatest domestic importance" in the context of the national party's preferred outcome (Mc Elroy, Benoit, 2008). This phenomenon can be referred to as diverging "demand weights" (Mc Elroy, Benoit 2008, Hearl, 1981), or more strongly "political clout" (Hearl, 1981). Thus, task focus seems of especially high importance in the frame of European Parliament political group partnership.

Furthermore, the clear communication of membership costs and benefits is a condition for the effective functioning of a political group. The supporting benefits for cooperating agents on the European level have been made evident in the previous chapter. Naturally, it is also important to look at the relative costs that come with cooperation. Being part of an overall political group with actors of different priority settings means that compromises must be made; in situations of decision-making this is likely to result in a conflict between actors' loyalty for domestic politics and the commitment to the European group, as sometimes "the [group] takes a position that may be unpopular with the particular constituencies of [the actor]" (Hix et al., 2005). In this case, costs appear in both possibilities for solution of the dilemma: Either the individual actor turns against the European group and might cause

incredibility of the European group, or the actor turns against the national electorate and risks losses in the domestic support.

In order to maintain the alliance and the accompanying influence on the European level, group cohesion not only needs to be created, but also continuously practiced. The partnership can be held up by assessing internal processes and mobilizing the stakeholders both internally and externally (Di Clemente et al. 2002). The former aims at the national political parties entangled in the European group, the latter refers to the external electorate they depend on. Only by preserving credibility, the European group can count on the voters' support.

What the model introduced by Brown et al. is missing for its application in the context of right-wing populist group creation is a variable that suggests the evaluation of individual actors' ambitions and expectations within the trans-national partnership. Certainly, their relative compatibility in substance suggests common targets on the European level. Nevertheless, there exist, mostly latent to the overall group, individual politicians' aims on the domestic level. This factor comes into play especially in French and Dutch populism and will be explained in more detail at a later stage.

In the event that a new Eurosceptic group, aspired by the French and Dutch populist right-wing, can establish itself in the European Parliament, the above demonstrated criteria for effective group operation leads to certain doubts about the successful operation of this group. First and foremost, a trans-national cooperation in the European Parliament between nationalistic opponents of the European Union suggests a certain inconsistency in itself. Also, the first variable raises the critical question of how leadership will be distributed in this group composed of populist parties in which the characteristic "boundless egos" (Pels, 2012, p.50), as Gounaris predicts, "definitely would like to have the first word and present themselves as the leaders of this new pan-European alliance" (Gounaris, 2014, see Appendix 2, p. 4). Moreover, *inter*-party relationships could emerge as a harmful variable to the group operation, as the reasons for entering the alliance naturally differ per party. Most prominently, this can be seen in the – at first common - rational opportunistic striving for the Eurosceptic establishment that, however, ignores the underlying constructivist cultural and ideological differences. Also *intra*-party relationships have, in the course of the past months, proved difficult especially on the Dutch side, as will be explained at a later stage. Closely connected to rational opportunistic behavior, chance-enhancing adjustments in political programs lead to "structural dilemmas" (Frölich-Steffen, Rensmann, 2007) that not only have a negative influence on the projected credibility of the party in the electorate, but also internally between its members. Thereby, a certain convergence of party programs has also to be understood as costs of participation in a trans-European political group. Nevertheless,

the adjustment it is likely to constitute yet another barrier to the effective functioning, not least because of various task focuses, especially in the different “weighting” and interpretations of matters such as immigration. While the right “might share certain European dreams, the national goals stay the same” (Strømme, 2012, p.85). Additionally, the maintenance of the political group might play a key role as a barrier to the operation, as sustainable communication and planning is not of obvious importance yet, but requires long-term consideration (Brown et al., 2011). Lastly, as Gounaris identifies, the national political agents in question might have “far greater ambitions than forming a Eurosceptic alliance in the [European] Parliament” (Gounaris, 2014), referring to certain domestic strivings, for instance in the wish to participate or even provide the national government. Obviously, these arguments are sketching out the possible barriers to successful group operation and will be explained in more detail.

To conclude, the successful operation of a political group in the European Parliament is not only dependent on internal entity with regards to content, but more pressingly on structural and organizational accordance. These are identified around the variables of leadership, *inter*- and *intra*- party relationships, task focus, the clear communication of partnership benefits and costs as well as sustainability planning, support of the electorate and consolidation of ambitions and expectations. Looking at these conditions for success reversely, one can pre-define the difficulties for cooperation in the right-wing populist spectrum.

In order to determine possible barriers to the Eurosceptic group with more precision, the following pages will examine populism in the Netherlands and in France by applying the existing theory and clearly identifying Geert Wilders and Marine Le Pen as populist key figures. It is with regard to the complex theorization surrounding populism, that one can describe the explanations of and the outlook on the populist phenomenon in the Netherlands and France as rather abundant.

Populism in the Netherlands

Contemporary populism, or neo-populism, as political author Pels names it (Pels, 2012), emerged in the Netherlands at the turn of this century, rather late in comparison to other European countries, such as France, Belgium or Italy, where populist parties were established in the 1970s and 1990s respectively (Pels, 2012). Neo-populism in the Netherlands was heralded by Pim Fortuyn’s appearance on the political stage in 2001, where he challenged the ever-stable political construct of the “ideological triangle” of conservative, social and liberal politics (Pels, 2012, de Mul, 2011). Populism had long been condemned in

the psychological processing of the Second World War (te Velde, 2010). The public, “guilt-ridden about the Holocaust”, was not responsive to or ignored any right-wing, extreme and xenophobic hints (Eissens, Bronkhorst, 2011).

Fortuyn offered the public an eccentric character, “flamboyant, dandyish [...] and provocative [...]” (Lucardie, 2008), and political demands that embraced most prominently the restoration of traditional values before the background of the government-precipitated internationalization, equality in gender and sexual orientation (Lucardie, 2008) as well as stricter immigration policy. Especially his fierce accusations of the political elite and his animosity against a “backward” Islam (Fortuyn, 2002, p.154) and Muslim immigrants that, according to Fortuyn, did not integrate and consequentially created a threat to Dutch society (Fortuyn, 2002, p.160) were the basis for the “meteoric rise” (Becker, Cuperus, 2007) of his party Lijst Pim Fortuyn (LPF). In the national elections 2002, the LPF obtained 17 percent of the votes; only one year after its establishment and nine days after Pim Fortuyn had been assassinated by an environmental activist. Lacking its charismatic leader and a coherent program (Lucardie, 2008), the party eventually fell apart in 2005. Nevertheless, Pim Fortuyn had paved the way for the neo-populism that had now “come to Dutch politics to stay” (Lucardie, 2008).

In the 2006 elections, the vast majority of the former Fortuyn electorate leveraged its votes for another populist who had appeared in the spotlight of politics: Geert Wilders and his Partij voor de Vrijheid (PVV) (Reuter, 2009). Similar to the LFP, the PVV experienced a remarkable rise becoming the fifth largest party in 2006, one year after its establishment. The course of time has seen the PVV as second biggest party in the European elections in 2009 as well as third largest party in national elections of the following year (Vossen, 2011). Wilders, in fact, was not the only politician taking advantage of the new populist wave.

In 2007, Rita Verdonk introduced the right-wing populist movement “Trots op Nederland”, “Proud of the Netherlands”, describing it herself as “decently right” and taking the attributed populist perception as a compliment: “I am for the people. Populist? I am proud of it.” (Lucardie, 2007). In the frame of this movement, Verdonk advocated direct democracy in a typically populist “government elite” and “Dutch people” separation and opted for a liberal approach to socio-economic issues, such as a small government, lower taxes and fewer regulations. She defended restrictions on immigration, but did not mention the Islam or Muslim immigrants in her manifesto (Trots op Nederland Program, 2010) which distinguished her significantly from her predecessor Fortuyn and her colleague Wilders. All in all, Verdonk and her movement can be defined as “populist, liberal-conservative and moderately nationalist” (Lucardie, 2007). In stark contrast to the PVV, however, the Trots op Nederland movement did not succeed in the 2010 national elections, a development that is likely to be

due to a missing charismatic, populist leading figure. Not having obtained a single seat in parliament Rita Verdonk left politics. Though not as successful as Wilders, both politicians have in common their background in the liberal-conservative party VVD.

Wilders had begun his political development during the 1990s in the ranks of the conservative liberal party VVD where he was a “studious pupil” of VVD party leader Frits Bolkestein. Bolkestein was “among the first in the Netherlands to criticize multiculturalism and progressive cultural relativism of the Dutch minority policy” (Vossen, 2011, p.181). The time in the VVD taught Wilders a “confrontational political style” in his rhetoric, and an active “conservative liberal ideology” that referred to the neo-liberal economic orientation and conservative perceptions of traditional values (Vossen, 2011, p.181). Wilders’ animosity against the Islam appeared openly in the late 1990s. In parliament he represented a strong Anti-Islam and pro-Israel position (Vossen, 2011, p.181). This outlook led him to the support of the United States’ war on terror in the early 2000s and the personal ideological adaptation from conservative liberal to neo-conservative (Vossen, 2011, p.182). To a large extent, his new focus corresponded with the former values, but was complemented by a stronger “Feindmarkierung” (Vossen, 2011, p.182), the branding of the enemy that was to be countered by all means. The following years were marked by fierce criticism of the political elite, increasing antagonism against “those who could threaten Dutch security” (Vossen, 2011, p.183), with particular concentration on the Islam that Wilders identified as “totalitarian ideology” that he wanted to combat in a “liberal jihad” (Vossen, 2011, p.183). The ideological shift eventually led to the break with the VVD and Bolkestein, who had complied with the possible accession of Turkey to the EU. Having exited the VVD in 2004, Wilders kept his seat in the parliament forming a one-man group called “Groep Wilders” (Hovens, n.d.) that was in 2006 renamed and established as Partij voor de Vrijheid. Historian Koen Vossen argues that Wilders can only from 2006 be identified as true populist (Vossen, 2011, p.165). In the following, this statement is pursued by analyzing Geert Wilders and his political demands under the magnifying glass of populist theory.

Predominantly noticeable in PVV politics is a certain party-internal democratic deficit. Geert Wilders is up until today the party’s only official member. He determines the party’s direction and passes decisions. Wilders justifies: “Members can hijack the party. I don’t want LPF-like situations” (Fennema, 2010, p.252). In that sense, Geert Wilders is a picture book example for the self-centered populist leader. In addition he practices the often-mentioned charismatic rhetoric and public appearance that is appealing to the “common people”. The PVV Party manifestos are composed in entertaining statements, his speeches are brought forward in a mobilizing manner, giving it a movement character rather than that of a party. The lack of internal democracy and Wilders’ recently radical statements in the context of his European

election campaigning has led to the break of a number of PVV representatives with the party, for instance by Laurence Stassen, former head of the PVV delegation in the European Parliament. As Geert Wilders can practically be equated with his party, the following paragraphs will make references without a distinction between the party and the person.

Regarding the content of PVV politics, the characteristic distinction between the “people” and the “elite” is noticeable. Wilders clearly draws a line between the “left elite” (PVV Program, 2010, p. 6) and the allegedly intuitive Dutch people “born from resistance into a State of Freedom” (PVV Program, 2010, p. 5), a typical populist statement that leans on the “myths of the distant past”, as alluded by sociologist Rydgren earlier in this dissertation (Rydgren, 2007). Referring to differences of “world-dimension” between the “elite” and the “people”, a “radical democratization” needs to take place to “break the domination of the elite” (PVV Program, 2010, p. 17). The PVV advocates direct democracy in which citizens can elect their mayors and prime minister and have their say in politics through referendums. The “elite” is not necessarily depicted as “evil”, but certainly as incompetent and an ignorant “self-serving caste” that has stolen democracy from the people through a “policy of subsidizing progressive indoctrination” (Vossen, 2012, p.183).

It is, however, not only the aversion against the “elite” that defines the PVV’s populism, but also, and more prominently, its counteracting against multiculturalism, the actual “evil” that supposedly threatens the security, the traditional values of “freedom and patriotism” (PVV Program, 2010, p. 6) and the Jewish-Christian, humanistic ideal of a homogenous Dutch “people”. Wilders’ aversion, thereby, firstly refers to the above mentioned progressive, internationally orientated politics of the government and the matter of immigration in particular. Wilders demands a stricter immigration policy in the Netherlands. Among other things, he advocates a “work or be banished” policy (PVV Program, 2010, p.13), declaring that foreigners moving to the Netherlands must be employed or otherwise should be sent away and that a “zero tolerance” should be applied to criminal foreigners by expelling them from the country. Contradictory to a certain extent, he simultaneously demands the rescission of working rights for Polish, Bulgarian and Romanian citizens (PVV Program, 2010, p.15). Moreover, social support should only be accessible for the Dutch people and only those that “speak good Dutch and do not wear a burka” (PVV Program, 2010, p.37).

As can already be derived from this last statement, Wilders’ main focus in the immigration debate, and in his overall political striving for that matter, is directed at the abatement of the Islam. While the PVV calls for the active integration of foreigners from non-Muslim countries into Dutch society, it demands the “complete immigration-stop” for Muslim immigrants (PVV Program, 2010, p.15). Wilders declares to see an “establishment of non-Western immigrants in social support” while he sees “anti-Semitism, hate for homosexuals, discrimination of

women [and] crime, [...]” as alleged proof to call the Muslim culture “backward” (PVV, 2012, p.35); the argument that had controversially been introduced by Pim Fortuyn. His continuous and climactic hatred against the Islam throughout the years of his ideological development, has led to Wilders’ present day Manichean presentation of the Islam as one “totalitarian doctrine of domination, violence and oppression” (PVV, 2012, p. 13) that does not exist in a moderate form. In the PVV Program for the European elections 2014 “Hún Brussel, óns Nederland”, the PVV adds further that the Islam is not a religion, but rather “a political ideology with religious dots here and there” (PVV Program, 2012, p.35). This argument is enough for Wilders to demand the ban of “their terrible, holy book, the Koran” (Wilders, 2014) as well as the closing of Muslim schools and mosques. Additionally, his 2008 short movie “Fitna”, in which the alleged threat deriving from the Islam is illustrated in excerpts of the Koran and complemented by pictures and video sequences of violent acts committed by Muslims, caused an international dispute (Eissens, Bronkhorst, 2011). Recently, in the context of the European elections, Wilders’ anti-Islamic campaigning is triggered especially by the controversy that set in after one of his public appearances where he provoked a crowd for enthusiastic “minder, minder, minder” (“less, less, less”) shouting after asking whether they wanted “more or less Moroccans in [their city Den Haag] and in the Netherlands” (Boon, 2014). In his program “Wilders weekly” on the internet channel of Christian-Arabic broadcaster Al Hayat, he expresses the above mentioned demands while stressing that he is “not a racist, [...] not a bigot, not an extremist” and does not have “anything against any person from any background, any race, or any religion or ideology”, but that he is fighting “against totalitarian ideologies like the Islam” (Wilders, 2014). At the same time Wilders declares to “abhor anything that has to do with violence, discrimination or extremism” (Wilders, 2014).

In fact, as early as in the beginning of his political career, Wilders “denied any association” with the extreme right (Fennema, 2010, p. 257, Eissens and Bronkhorst, 2011), claiming that he sees himself as “friend of the Jewish people” (Eissens and Bronkhorst, 2011), his pro-Israel stance allegedly deriving from his personal sympathy with Israel that had developed from a one-year stay in an Israeli kibbutz as a teenager (Vossen in 2011 referring to Wilders, 2005). Generally, Wilders maintains political connections with both Israel and America; a trait that can be seen as rather unusual for populism (Vossen, 2011, p.186), as a considerable part of the right-wing spectrum firstly is built on an anti-Semitic past, thus generally opposing Israel and secondly strongly dismisses ostensible “Americanization” of society (Bamat, 2012). In other matters of foreign policy, Wilders shows a seemingly weighing evaluation. Thus, he declares the crisis in the Ukraine to be due to (ir)responsibilities of both the EU that “should never have intervened” and Russia that “interfered the Ukrainian sovereign state” (Wilders, 2014).

As is mentioned in populism theory, the “evil” usually not only applies to the issue of immigration, but also appears in the economic realm. Theory suggests the rather centric economic protectionist tendency of populism in which national capitalism is supported, globalization is opposed and “welfare chauvinism” is practiced (Rydgren, 2007). Without contradicting the theory, the Dutch case study shows, however, that Wilders makes use of the neo-liberal variables of “a small state, low taxes and as less regulations as possible” (PVV Program, 2012, p.18). International trade itself is not depicted as “evil”. Much rather it is the strict EU framework that is strongly opposed, although Wilders concedes that European Economic Community had been an “excellent idea” creating the opportunity for countries with a “similar culture” to work together (PVV Program, 2012, p.10). The resistance against the European Union frame becomes evident in the underlined striving to “manage the open market with other countries on our own” and to re-introduce the Dutch guilder (PVV Program, 2012, p. 19). Socio-economically, Wilders opts for a rather left-wing approach, for instance in opposition to the raise of retirement age or more investment in health care though applying the xenophobic characteristics of “economic chauvinism” (Vossen, 2011, p.186).

Another influence perceived as “evil” is based on the European Union. In the context of this dissertation, naturally this is of crucial importance. When in May 2014, shortly before the European elections, Geert Wilders symbolically cut out a star of the European flag in front of the European Parliament in Brussels, he made his stance clear. The PVV wants the exit of the European Union (PVV Program, 2012, p. 14). Wilders’ Euroscepticism can, therefore, be classified as principled, hard Euroscepticism that opposes the delegation of power to the European institutions. In his clear position to desire the exit from the EU, he is moreover a representative of Anti-Europeanism, rather than a he is a Eurosceptic.

Similarly to the ideology applied on the national level, a distinct “elite” is identified in the “monster of Europe”, the “European super-state” (PVV Program, 2012, p. 13) that has “enslaved our various peoples” (The Economist, 2013). A noticeable shift is taking place from the micro- to the macro-level, though with comparable arguments. The “blind inhabitants of the ivory tower of Brussels” have “stolen” the peoples’ freedom and self-determination (PVV Program, 2012, p.11). A democratic deficit is stressed in statements about the “unelected multiculti-Eurocrats” (PVV Program, 2012, p.11) in which also resonate the typical xenophobic sentiments. Naturally, the personal fight against the Islam is visible also here. One of the main arguments used in the discussion is the possible accession of Turkey to the EU, the “nightmare” (PVV Program, 2012, p.12) that led to the break with Bolkestein ten years ago. The aversion against the European Union derives from the perceived danger that the institutions have too much power over the European peoples, an argument that has been

triggered by the new powers and the greater reach into domestic politics of the European Parliament after the elections in 2014, particularly with regard to immigration policy.

That the PVV has responded and continues to respond to the EU-sceptic perceptions of the Dutch people was made clear firstly in the 2005 referendum about the introduction of an EU constitution in which 61.7 percent of the Dutch and 54.7 percent of the French voted against this constitution (Borchardt, 2010). Also, it was made clear by the outstanding result of 17 percent for the PVV in the European elections 2009 that made it the second strongest Dutch party in the European Parliament with 4 of 25 seats (European Parliament, 2009). The campaigning for the European elections 2014 was highly discussed due to Geert Wilders and Marine Le Pen's intention to form a trans-Eurosceptic alliance on EU level and the calling for like-minded parties all over Europe to participate (Escritt, Deutsch, 2013). In the course of the elections, the PVV seems to have suffered internal tensions, as representatives left the party over Wilders' "reckless" xenophobic statements that "even for him "surpassed a certain line" (Vrijssen, 2014). While opinion polls in the months before the elections predicted the PVV to come ahead strong, the party won less seats than expected, though still staying the third strongest Dutch party in the European Parliament with 4 of 26 seats (European Parliament, 2014).

In conclusion it can be said that it is a rather difficult undertaking to classify Geert Wilders and his PVV into one specific populist category. Certainly, Wilders' charismatic, self-centered appearance, his entertaining expressions and the PVV's movement character fulfill the right-wing populist criteria. Moreover, the distinction between the "left elite" and the Dutch people are obvious, as are the focus on an alleged democratic deficit of "world-dimensions" and the plea for direct democracy. The populist-typical "evil" that threatens the "heartland" revolves in the PVV case study especially around Muslim immigrants and in particular the "totalitarian political ideology" of the Islam, globalization and especially Europeanization. Geert Wilders demands the exit of the Netherlands from the EU and has declared his striving for a trans-European Eurosceptic political group after the European elections of May 2014. These variables correspond with populism theory. Nevertheless, various scholars have found their own definition of the particular type of populism represented by Wilders. Thus, it is for instance referred to as "neo-populism" (Pels, 2012), "xenophobic populism" (Eissens, Bronkhorst, 2011), "national populism" and "radical right-wing populism" (Vossen, 2011) or simply "national democratic" or "national individualist" (Pels, 2012).

It is not the aim at this stage to contribute to the comprehensive academic discussions as to how to name Wilders' populism or if it is strictly populist at all. This dissertation much rather relies on the proposition made by scholar Sarah de Lange who distinguishes populism in two generations. Dutch populism is thereby counted into the second, relatively more "civilized",

with a liberal-democratic face, mostly because of its deriving from liberal political parties (Pels, 2012). The first “older” generation is predicted to orientate itself more at its radical, anti-Semitic, xenophobic past (Pels, 2012). The latter is represented for instance in political parties such as the FPÖ in Austria, the Italian Lega Nord, the Flemish Vlaams Belang and the French Front National.

Populism in France

Compared to the Dutch case study, where right-wing populism retrospectively appeared in waves rather than in a linear development, the French history has experienced a populist tradition, a continuous presence of right-wing representatives in the country’s political life. Although some scholars mark the beginning of right-wing populist sentiment as the electoral successes of the Front National (FN) in the 1980s (Camus, 2011, Pels 2008), populist tendencies with public support can be traced back to the poujadist movement as early as in the mid-1950s (Rydgren, 2008).

The movement had been formed in 1954 in Saint-Céré, a small town in the South of France. Founder Pierre Poujard was a local merchant who opposed the taxation policy of the government in Paris. The poujadist movement was initially a reaction against the visit of a taxation delegation to the town, referred to, among others, as “mafia des inspecteurs finances”, “mafia of financial inspectors” (Touchard in 1956, p.22 referring to Nicolas, n.d.). The merchants’ anger about the increasing pressure of taxation and the stricter methods of administrative controls had provided Poujard with an indefatigable stage (Fache et al, 2010) from which the movement soon augmented to become the organization *Union de Défense des Commerçants et Atrisans* (Udca) that within a year counted more than 200,000 members (Johnson, 2003). In addition to the fiscal-policy, the union now also opposed modernization that found its way into the French economy (Rydgren, 2007). The Udca combated supermarkets and large-scale cooperatives, as they constituted a threat to the trades people who feared the return to being a clerical worker, rather than staying an independent merchant (Touchard, 1956, p.27). The poujadists found support across the country which was reflected in the 1956 national elections, where the movement surprisingly for all, mostly itself, obtained 11.6 percent of the votes (Touchard, 1956, Fache et al., 2010). Thus, a large part of the 52 deputies that, in the following, were delegated to the National Assembly were “hoteliers and partisans”, unexperienced novices in politics (Fache et al., 2010, Deleersnijder, 2006). The lack of a political program and the decreasing support of the people led to the decomposition of the Udca in 1958 with the apparition of Charles de Gaulles (Deleersnijder, 2006).

It is his rhetoric that made Pierre Poujard one of the first representatives of French populism. The word poujadisme is today often used as synonym for demagogic or populist practices. Its characteristics appear in his anti-elitist references to the “small merchant”, the “good and honorable French people”, against the “big” politicians, industrials, technocrats and intellectuals (Fache et al., 2010). In the light of the Algerian war from 1954-1962 which was supported by Poujard: “The province of Algeria is a province of France and its departments are French departments” (Deleersnijder, 2006), the poujardist rhetoric was from now on complemented by anti-Semitic tendencies that represented a strong counter reaction to Pierre Mendès, left-liberal French politician of jewish-portuguese origin, who opposed the French colonialism. The contemporary witness and author Jean Touchard describes the content of Poujard’s politics to be xenophobic and anti-Semitic to a certain degree and that ultra-poujardism could be equated with fascism (Touchard, 1956, p.30). It is remarkable that populist sentiment could flourish in that form, although the aftermath of the Second World War was still present in the French minds, not least in the form of the French region Vichy that had served as a stronghold of German Anti-Semitism from 1940 to 1944. In consequence, many comparisons were drawn between Poujard and Hitler. During Poujard’s political campaign, his opponents of the communist party called him “the hitlerian Poujard” or “Poujardolf” (Deleersnijder, 2006). At the same time, political observer Touchard contradicted the comparison of “Mein Kampf” to Poujard’s book “Je choisis le combat”, “I chose the battle”, as Poujard “does not act to create a new order, but to fight against an evolution, to undertake a fight of retardation” (Touchard, 1956, p.29).

During the 1960s, right-wing extremists occasionally appeared in connection with the war in Algeria, but remained fragmented and marginalized until the establishment of the Front National, an association of various neo-fascist splinter groups, by Jean-Marie Le Pen in 1972. (Deleersnijder, 2006). Le Pen had been one of the poujardist deputies that entered the National Assembly in 1956 as former leader of the poujardist youth movement.

During the first ten years of its existence, the Front National could not break through the marginalization. Eventually, in 1983, the party experienced its first success in the local elections, where it obtained 16.7 percent of the peoples’ votes. In 1984, it could note a percentage of 11.2 percent in the European elections. Since that moment, the Front National has usually always received around then percent of votes (Camus, 2011). Despite its success or even because of it, the party split in 1998, because of “internal rivalries” between Jean-Marie Le Pen and “party number two” Bruno Mégret, who later established the *Front National – Mouvement National* (Rydgren, 2008). Though many observers had predicted the decline of the Front National, the contrary was the case: Le Pen profited from the aftermath of September 11, 2001, and his focus on the issues of security, law and order, and the

connected immigration policy, led to a percentage of 17.8 percent in the Presidential election in 2002 for Jean-Marie Le Pen against Jacques Chirac's 82 percent (Rydgren, 2008).

Between the 1980s and Le Pen's success in 2002, the Front National had been condemned in a "cordon sanitaire", a tactics of cooperation in the political mainstream, to keep the party out of the government (Camus, 2011). Opinion polls show that the Front National had not been popular among the French people during this period in time, as the "cordon sanitaire" resulted in a decrease in credibility and trust for the Front National. As the party has never been part of the government, it is inevitably defined as a "sole opposition movement" (Brussels Economic Review, 2008). This being said, it is noteworthy, however, that though the Front National was never part of the French government, its contents to a certain extent were. In reaction to the 2002 electoral success, Nicolas Sarkozy, aspirant for the presidential office, strategically took on some of the Front National's central aspects and used it in his program for his campaign in 2007. By picking up issues such as immigration, multi-cultural society, law and order and moral values he won the presidential elections with 31 percent against Le Pen's 10.4 percent (Camus, 2011). At that point in time, the reputation of the Front National was distorted by an ageing Le Pen and a high fractionalization within the party.

Notwithstanding the predictions, however, the party managed a comeback in 2010, when both Jean-Marie and his daughter Marine could note an electoral success of 11.4 percent of votes in the national elections (Camus, 2011). Among other factors, this can be explained by the decreasing popularity of Sarkozy, whose politics brought about high unemployment rates, economic recession and tax-cuts (Camus, 2011), the contrary of what he had promised in his 2007 campaign. Another factor was also the economic crises that caused feelings of insecurity with the public. The context of the economic crisis, but also a certain societal confrontation constituted fertile soil for right-wing populism to emerge again under the guidance of Jean-Marie Le Pen.

Le Pen is in this context, and in correspondence with the familiar theory, the charismatic leading figure, the popular representative of the party who sees himself as the "man of the people", coming from a working class family and therefore being able to understand what the people wants and needs (Mayer, 2005). This self-perception becomes especially visible in his 2002 speech after the Front National's electoral success : "Don't be afraid to dream, you the little ones, the ordinary people [...] beware that I will always be on the side of those who suffer, because I have experienced what coldness, hunger, poverty means" (Mayer in 2005 referring to Le Pen in 2002). Le Pen's *poujadist* background is hereby apparent in the use of the word "little", as well as in the personification of politics; Jean-Marie Le Pen is a public figure, a frequent guest on television.

In addition to that, the Front National led by Jean-Marie Le Pen represented the various points of populist content, firstly in the defense of the people against the “university in Paris” (Le Pen, 2002). Moreover, a high degree of ethno-nationalism can be detected in its content, determining the importance of ethnic origin. This ethno-nationalism was especially noticeable in the 1970s and -80s. The fact that immigrants from Algeria had the right to obtain French citizenship triggered a Front National-led critique of the legislation that “turn[ed] foreigners into Frenchmen on paper without making sure that they were French at heart” (Rydgren, 2008). Ethno-nationalism, further, determines the priority of national rights and equilibrium over the individual’s strivings (Rydgren, 2008). The Front National at the time defined the term nation as “community of language, interest, race, memories and culture where man blossoms” (Rydgren in 2008 referring to Front National Program, 1985). These traits of the nation were allegedly threatened by political, economic and social openness, practiced by the government. Certainly, also the European Union was included in the claims of threats to the national identity. The Front National of Jean-Marie Le Pen represented welfare chauvinism, among other factors by the principle of “national preference” (Rydgren, 2008) against foreigners. Jean-Marie Le Pen had contributed to the politicization of immigration and to the establishing of immigration as a “problem”. In the course of time, the Front National could be classified as extreme right. Le Pen emphasized his xenophobia and anti-Semitism in public statements, in one of which he degraded the Holocaust to a “detail of history”: “I don’t say that the gas chambers did not exist [...], I did not specifically study this question. But I think that they are a detail in the history of the Second World War” (Deleersnijder, 2006). In 2002, Le Pen requested “transit camps” and “special trains” for those immigrants that he would have “deported” (Sims, 2002). The extremism represented by the Front National was, moreover, the reason for the split between Le Pen and Bruno Mégret in 1998, as Mégret requested a more moderate position on foreigners.

Since 2011, Jean-Marie Le Pen’s daughter Marine leads the Front National, whose image she wanted to change from the beginning. In the striving to distance herself from her father’s party politics, Marine Le Pen has undertaken adjustments, not only party-internal by the renewal of personnel, but also in the party’s program. She aimed for a politically more acceptable version of the Front National, for instance by softening the party principles on gender parity, abortion and same-sex partnerships, though remaining opposed to same-sex marriage and adoption by same-sex couples (Shields, 2013). Marine Le Pen aimed for the coalitionability of the Front National. As opposed to her father who had led the party under the principle of isolationism, Marine Le Pen wanted to position the party in the political mainstream. In doing so, she appealed to the Declaration of the Right of Man and Citizen of 1798, that so far had been a thorn in the side of the far right, as it defended the individual freedom of ideas, opinions and religious views. Also, Marine Le Pen approximated the

French conservative party UMP, whose leader Nicolas Sarkozy had again adopted a considerable amount of Front National rhetoric, foremost in the immigration discourse, using expressions such as the “broken” integration of foreigners in France and judging of “anti-French racism” (Shields, 2013). In 2012, Marine Le Pen obtained 17.9 percent of the votes in the presidential elections, the best result of the Front National in presidential elections so far (Mayer, 2013). As political scholar Shields correctly points out, it is questionable whether Marine Le Pen’s approach to the people via the political mainstream was “real or merely rhetorical” (Shields, 2006). It is certain, however, that it is this rhetoric that contributes to the Front National’s contemporary success. The following paragraphs will examine Marine Le Pen and her party in the light of populist rhetoric.

Marine Le Pen is a politician of strong public appearance. She certainly continues the highly personalized politics of her father, which, among other examples, abounded in the 2012 presidential campaigning against the far-left leader Jean-Luc Melenchon, another dominant figure that had received much attention and support of the public in his opposition towards bankers and capitalism (Hewitt, 2012). Marine Le Pen’s leadership appears in a mobilizing and aggressive manner. When speaking publicly in front of large crowds, she creates a rousing atmosphere hosting a “flag-waving, foot-stamping” audience (Hewitt, 2012), while she shouts from the stage: “Yes, France – shout your rage and scream your hope” (Hewitt, 2012). She knows how to put herself in scene: With pride and fighting spirit through expressions such as “Dear friends, mobilize! [...] Vive le Front National, vive la Republique, vive la France” (Le Pen, 2012, Le Pen, 2014). As her father, she appeals to the people as being “one of them”, while certainly benefiting from Jean-Marie’s established working-class credibility among the public.

While Marine Le Pen in the beginning of her party leadership, in conformity with the poujadiste past of the Front National, still referred to the “Parisian elite”, the “big” against the “small people” (Shields, 2013), the course of time has adjusted the rhetoric into the opposition against the “global” and “administrative elites” and the support for “our people” (Front National Program, n.d.). In comparison to her father, who had represented ethno-nationalism before his background of the Second World War, Marine switched to a cultural dimension in defining the “people”. Thus, she distances the Front National from the racial expressions of Jean-Marie Le Pen and creates the populist heartland around a nation that is “more than other nations inseparable from its history and the charisma of France” (Front National, n.d., p.24). Moreover, she underlines that “being French is an honor” (Front National Program, n.d., p.12).

The Front National appears as the defendant of this French culture and national values and fulfills populism theory by identifying alleged threats to “the republic”, foremost in

immigration, but also in economic, political and cultural openness (Rydgren, 2013). Attempting again to create a new Front National party image, Marine Le Pen distances herself from Jean-Marie's extreme stands on immigration by trying to reach out to the communities opposed by her father, thus using Aljazeera as a channel of communication to the people of Arab origin in France and asking the Jewish community to "dispel the [party's] image as a racist and Anti-Semitic party" (Shields, 2013). Nevertheless, the Front National party program and Marine Le Pen's public statements still suggest the old tendency: In 2011, Marine Le Pen compared the Muslims praying in the streets in France to "a Nazi occupation" (BBC, 2013). In the party program, Muslim immigrants are depicted as a bad and dangerous influence to the nation, as it supposedly brings with it an increasingly visible islamization "with its cortege and demands" (Front National Program, n.d., p.12). The Front National therefore calls for the "fight against the Islamic communautarism and fundamentalism" (Front National Program, n.d., p.105). When asked by journalists, whether her statements could not be perceived as racist, Marine Le Pen replies to be a patriot, not a racist (Al Jazeera, 2014).

It is not only the Islam that presents a threat to the Front National's picture of a homogenous, French people and its security. In general, multiculturalism is seen as "poison" for the aspired national cohesion. It aims to forbid multiculturalism in schools, for instance by banning religious clothing, such as the burka, and intends to amend the French Constitution by the sentence: "The republic does not recognize any other community" (Front National Program, n.d., p.13). Thus, measures are aspired on constitutional, legislative and regulatory level as quickly as possible "to stop both legal and clandestine immigration" (Front National Program, n.d., p.12). Thereby, the Front National argues that particularly professional immigration is condemnable, as it is embedded in the context of already "exploding" unemployment in France (Front National Program, p. 11).

This argument is closely connected to the Front National's socio-economic politics. As can be observed in many right-wing populist examples, the Front National also practices the principle of economic- or welfare chauvinism. In its program, the party demands "national priority" on the job market and the right to the "most beneficial social advantages in Europe" only for the French people (Front National Party Program, n.d., p.11). Economically, the Front National opposes free trade and opts for a regulated globalization, meaning the introduction of an "intelligent protectionism" that includes the "re-establishment of fair competition with those countries whose competitive advantage derives from less allegedly social and manipulative monetary policies" (Mestre, 2014). With this stance, the Front National corresponds with the populist theory around a rather centric economic protectionist tendency. Marine Le Pen used this economic agenda in the 2012 presidential elections to direct the Front National out of its xenophobic light into a more representative mainstream

spectrum (Rydgren, 2008), which brought her the admission of a broad public. Nonetheless, Le Pen returned to the promotion of traditional values and the aversion of immigration in the last weeks of the campaign, proving the fundamentality of the xenophobic ideology and at the same time an opportunistic strategy.

Naturally, the European Union is the representation of another 'evil' influence on the French people. In the context of this dissertation, it is again important to underline the accusations that are made about the European Union as a whole and its allegedly bad impact on the national level. Marine Le Pen stresses a democratic deficit in claiming that the European Union's actions happen "without the people" and "against the people" (Front National Program, n.d., p. 47), distinguishing clearly between the French people and the "technocratic elite in Brussels". In the opinion of the Front National, the European Union represents "ultra-liberal" politics that also financially do not make sense for France, the "country that is punished the most by the European Union" (Front National Program, n.d., p.48). Thus, Marine Le Pen declares the objective to return to the national currency and the exit of France from the European Union, the "paternalism of the eurocratique Super-State that from Brussels and Frankfurt, pretends to reign all the aspects of the political, financial, economic, social and cultural life of 450 million Europeans" (Front National Program, n.d., p.49). Certainly, EU- immigration policy plays an important role in these statements that have been reinforced by the increase of power for the European Parliament that, according to the Lisbon treaty of 2009, will have a say in domestic immigration politics. Naturally, Marine Le Pen takes the stance against the European Union in the Ukraine crisis, making solely Brussels responsible for a "new Cold War against Russia" and seeing the solution in giving more independence from Kiev to the Eastern Ukrainian regions (Prentice, 2014). Le Pen knows that in the course of EU sanctions against Russia, a lucrative French-Russian relationship is at stake that is built on an arms deal signed by Nicolas Sarkozy in 2011 (Willsher, 2014). A further point on the Front National's foreign-policy agenda is the defense of Palestine as a state in its own right. Marine Le Pen adjudges the right of security for the Israeli people that in her view, however, react disproportionate to Hamas actions (Le Pen, 2014).

Referring to the theory, the Euroscepticism represented by the Front National can, similarly to the Dutch version, be classified as principled, hard Euroscepticism in which the delegation of power to the supranational institutions is disapproved. Looking closely at the definition, the Front National's aversion is rather an Anti-Europeanism that opposes the Union in itself.

What the academic literature often refers to as "de-demonization" (Rydgren, 2008) of the Front National under Marine Le Pen is in the context of these claims not justifiable. Though some scholars see a "modernization" of the party by Marine (Camus, 2011), the basic

principles of Jean-Marie have not changed much. The Front National centers on xenophobia and tendencies to Anti-Semitism, on the strong defense of traditional values, on socio-economic chauvinism and a protectionist, anti-liberal economy.

The Front National, after the 2005 referendum on a European constitution with 54.7 percent negative votes, continues to foster and cater to French suspicion towards the European Union. Whereas in the European elections in 2009, the Front National experienced a break-in of 6.2 percent of the national votes, it is in 2014 one of the biggest winners, with 25 percent of the votes and 24 seats, one of which will be assigned to Jean-Marie Le Pen, the largest French party in the European Parliament (European Parliament, 2014). After the results, Marine Le Pen called immediately for new national elections, declaring that “the people have spoken. Our people [...] want French politics led by the French, for the French and with the French” (Willsher, 2014).

One of Le Pen’s first congratulators was Geert Wilders, who expressed his enthusiasm in the call for a “big Eurosceptic faction in the European Parliament with the next President of France, Marine Le Pen” (Wilders, 2014). Having regarded the Dutch and French political and ideological details, one can rightly question the likelihood of such political group. There are similarities between the Front National and the Partij voor de Vrijheid, but there are also considerable discrepancies in substance that both would have to bridge. The following pages will discuss both angles and subsequently propose to what extent the right-wing rhetoric can act as a barrier to a new Eurosceptic group formation and operation.

Comparing PVV and FN populism

The Dutch and French case studies have confirmed the theory: A single definition of populism is nonexistent. Populism is essentially a thin-centered concept, dependent on a host ideology to provide it with meaning. When comparing the appearance of populism in the Netherlands and in France, the former represents a, in the country-context relatively new, right-wing populism that is orientated at conservative liberal values and extreme anti-Islamism, while the latter holds a radical right-wing populism and Anti-Islamism that is rooted in fascism.

These overarching unequal determinants subsequently influence the political content of the parties. If one firstly has a close look at the central “people” that is defended against the government “elite” in populist rhetoric, then the Dutch people’s praised attributes are Jewish-Christian, liberal and tolerant; a society in which gender equality is important and homosexuality is accepted. Next to this perception stands the French people, a glorified

nation of conservative traditional morals. Abortion, gender parity and homosexuality are reluctantly accepted, and only to a certain extent.

PVV and FN not only defend the “people” against the government, but also against the alleged threat posed by immigrants. Hereby, both accord in the “necessity” to fight the Islam, and represent extreme viewpoints in their demands for immigration-stop for Muslims, the ban of Muslim culture in their countries and the immediate deportation of criminal Muslim immigrants. Still, there are differences in the intention of this aspired fight. On the one hand, Wilders claims to lead a ‘liberal jihad’ against the ostensibly backward, violent, intolerant and Anti-Semitic Islam. On the other hand, Le Pen, too, declares the Islam to be a totalitarian and dangerous ideology, though it seems, much more than in the Netherlands, that the alleged Islamization of France constitutes only one component of a much broader xenophobic picture. The FN wants to stop any kind of immigration immediately, ban multiculturalism from schools, make jobs and welfare only accessible for the French, and amend the French constitution to declare the refusal of any other community in society. That does not mean that Geert Wilders is less xenophobic. He, likewise, advocates socio-economic chauvinism and a strict immigration policy in the context of internationalization. Nevertheless, being married to a Hungarian woman himself, Wilders’ attention is aimed foremost at his fight against the Islam.

In this context, Wilders’ personal sympathy toward Israel plays an important role. In his combat against the Islam he orientates himself at the American war on terror. Marine Le Pen for her part opposes America for its modernist influences. Moreover, before the background of her father’s Anti-Semitism, Le Pen expresses sympathy for the Palestine state and denounces Israeli violent actions. Le Pen and Wilders’ opinions do not only differ on the Israel and Palestine conflict, but also on the current Ukraine issue. Though both plead for granting rights to the Russian minority in the Ukrainian East, the cause of the crisis is in Geert Wilders’ view the (ir)responsibility of both EU and Russia, while Marine Le Pen solely accuses the EU, which is likely to be due to a lucrative Franco-Russian relationship.

The main alleged common denominator, Euroscepticism, embraces all above mentioned variables and is therefore not a uniform opposition, as it underlies different causalities. Nevertheless, their Anti-European agenda is similar: Both Marine Le Pen and Geert Wilders want to lead their countries out of the European Union and out the Eurozone. The EU, in their view, is illegitimate, as it “steals” democracy from the people. It furthermore equates insecurity through the principle of free movement of people, the Schengen agreement and the resulting “mass immigration”. Both FN and PVV desire the exit from the European Union for economic reasons that refer back to their individually differing ideologies, the former opposing the “ultra-liberal” practices of the EU, the latter condemning its strict regulations

and declaring that the Economic community would be an “excellent idea”. Whereas the Front National advocates a protectionist economy, the PVV pleads for a liberal economy attributed by as less regulations as possible.

Adding to the barriers in political content, the independent organization votewatch reports that the “Fraktionsgeschlossenheit”, the in the context of party operation mentioned notion of party entity, between Front National and Partij voor de Vrijheid is relatively weak. Votewatch published this report in the run-up to the European elections 2014. It compares the previous voting behavior of right-wing populist parties in the European Parliament during the 2009 – 2014 legislature (see Appendix 1). Among these parties are also the FN and the PVV that on average voted together only 51 percent of all cases. Votewatch interprets this as a “small match” in comparison to the average of 80-90 percent of vote conformity in the mainstream parties (Votewatch, 2014). The report looks at three key policy areas. In the category civil liberties, justice and home affairs, FN and PVV voted against each other in 34 percent of the votes, on issues of internal market and consumer protection they even differed in 57 percent and on economic and monetary affairs only agreed on 51 percent of all votes.

To sum it up, It certainly is a temptation to provide the FN and the PVV with the Eurosceptic label and declare their common crusade against the European Union a sufficient fundament for their alliance formation and successful functioning. The analysis of their respective populism and the evaluation of previous votes suggest otherwise. The main cooperation hindrances in programmatic content can be identified in the fundamentally different definition of society and the people. They can further be observed in differing stances on immigration, on the economy and on foreign policy, most notably on Israel and the Ukraine. A summary of these differences embrace the respective individually opposing position of the EU. A probability of conflicting interests is suggested by the report on voting behavior in the previous legislature 2009-2014.

Although the differences in Dutch and French populism are disclosed at this stage, the question to what extent these differences can act as barriers has not yet been answered. With the help of rationalist and constructivist conceptual framework, an educated overall picture shall be given.

Barriers to the formation of a Eurosceptic group

It is of importance to underline yet again that this dissertation looks at two examples in the wide spectrum of Eurosceptic political parties in Europe. The Front National and the Partij voor de Vrijheid are representative, but on their own not sufficient to form the desired

Eurosceptic group. Although the previous pages have identified the Dutch and French argumentation to be in the strict sense Anti-European rather than Eurosceptic, the reference to the Eurosceptic group will be held, in order to ensure the clarity of FN and PVV argumentation.

With the help of the rational and constructivist conceptualization about political group formation processes in the European Parliament, this dissertation at an earlier stage referred to the underlying indicators for interest and power as well as in ideology and culture.

With regard to firstly the rational side and in interest-terms, it can be said that it seems rather likely for Marine Le Pen and Geert Wilders to form a group considering the benefits that this undertaking entails. Having so far been marginalized in the Non-Attached Member status, the expected Parliamentary funding and the assignment of more speaking time, staff and administrative space constitute a considerable incentive for cooperation. It is, moreover referring to power-based argumentation, of high advantage to enter an alliance with a powerful player such as the Front National. Although the right-wing is not comparable to the strength of EPP or S&D in the center of the political spectrum, it can be established that, especially after the 2014 European elections, the Front National is the most dominant political force in France, while also the Partij voor de Vrijheid is third in Dutch national politics. Allying with, in these terms, established and evidently nationally supported players would firstly reflect a respectable, credible and attractable image to the national electorate, and secondly, as part of a large group in the European Parliament, would increase the individual chances to realize the aspired policies.

In terms of constructivist argumentation, FN and PVV do share a populist Eurosceptic tendency. This observation needs to be interpreted carefully. As has been established by now, both parties differ significantly in their individual populism as well as in their Euroscepticism. Although there are similarities, such as the defense of the “people” and the reference to the national culture, both have essentially different definitions, one Jewish-Christian and liberal conservative, the other traditional conservative. Thus, the constructivist reference to cultural proximity in the explanation of coalition formation has no validity in the case of Dutch and French right-wing populism, as it is the exact opposite, the cultural *distinction*, that is central and that is fought for. It is certainly not of interest to Marine Le Pen and Geert Wilders to explain their cooperation on the basis of shared cultural characteristics.

Nevertheless, Marine Le Pen and Geert Wilders accentuate their allegedly common Euroscepticism, their joint “fight against the monster in Brussels”. This seemingly constructivist, ideological argumentation, much rather, is subject to calculative behavior. Making use of the common striving to attract not only the electorate, but also future allies in

the Eurosceptic group, Marine Le Pen and Geert Wilders prove to be politically opportunistic with only little effort.

This is comprehensible, as the political and societal environment in their countries gives them the fundament to do so: The pathological outlawing and the connected underlining of crucial differences of populism are overcome, as has been explained by Mudde in his pathological normalcy theory. Populism and the reference to nativism can be found in any national constitution, the authoritarian thought is part of conservative political program and, most importantly, populist diction is frequently used in mainstream central politics, be it Nicolas Sarkozy in France or Frits Bolkestein in the Netherlands. This pathological normalcy argumentation is also true for the term Euroscepticism which initially refers to thorough thinking and an unjudging skepticism and has developed to be a catch-all phrase. Both populism and Euroscepticism are fundamentally existent in European societies and parties such as the Front National and the Partij voor de Vrijheid are embedded in this mainstream, though naturally to a more radical extent. Nevertheless, the mainstream seems to make both Euroscepticism and populism easier to justify and vital differences in populism on the national, much less the trans-national level, do not necessarily appear important enough for thorough scrutiny.

Looking at the formation of a new Eurosceptic group in organizational matters, the alliance fulfills with 24 FN and 4 PVV members the numerical requirements. The Lega Nord, the Vlaams Belang and the Austrian Freedom Party have declared their future membership in the Eurosceptic party. Nevertheless, two more national political parties are needed for its realization.

Thus, populist rhetoric in the Dutch and French case study proves to be rather unlikely to be harmful for the *formation* of a political group, as the processes take place on the rhetorical level, the populist hobby, that allows superficiality and has a certain attraction to it. Things look different, however, for the actual *functioning* of this Eurosceptic group in the future.

Barriers to the operation of a Eurosceptic group

While populist Euroscepticism serves as attractive rhetoric in the alliance formation process, it seals the fate for its future operation. By now, it is known that both populism and Euroscepticism are thin-centered, to a certain extent empty-hearted, concepts dependent on individual political party ideologies, thus resembling rather a porous membrane than a solid fundament for argumentation. The course of time, in which politics will have to be practiced rather than being talked about, is likely to bring to light all individual backgrounds and

discrepancies that have been disclosed in the frame of this dissertation already for the Dutch and French case study, not only in ideological, but also in structural terms.

With reference to the theory on successful political party operation that points out the structural need for leadership, inter- and intra- party relationships, task focus, clear communication of costs and benefits, sustainability planning and electorate support, doubts can be raised about all necessary conditions. As has been sketched out earlier, first and foremost, a trans-national cooperation in the European Parliament between nationalistic populist opponents of the European Union suggests a certain inconsistency. These are accompanied by the critical question of how leadership will take place. Marine Le Pen and Geert Wilders are both strong characters, populist charismatic leaders, that represent highly personalized politics and are used to public attention. A capitulation of the leadership would be seen as a sign of weakness that would be projected to the domestic electorate. One possibility would be a joint leadership. This would, however, entail two ideological identities that together are likely to neither create the needed dynamic, collective force, nor the maintenance of group internal motivation, trust and credibility.

This argument leads to the doubt about inter- (national) party relationships. As not only the FN and PVV will be involved in the alliance, it is likely that the various interests will clash at a certain point. Again, this will be dependent on the extent to which their basic ideologies differ from each other on respective policies. It is interesting to note that *intra*- (national) party relationships have proven to suffer from the strategic convergence between FN and PVV, at least on the Dutch side, as members of the PVV turned against Wilders in the context of his “minder, minder”, “less, less”-speech, leading to the party-exit of numerous PVV representatives on national and European level, who declared that they could no longer identify with the party program. A big dilemma in the PVV case is the fact that Geert Wilders is still the only official member and that the increasing success of the party also increases the discontent of PVV representatives about the lack of party-internal democracy.

Moreover, it is obvious that FN and PVV have different task focuses, though under the cloak of Anti-Europeanism. When it comes to the relative priority of policies, it can be argued that Marine Le Pen is rather concentrated on a general immigration stop for France, while Geert Wilders' focus lies on the combat against the alleged Islamization of the Netherlands. Naturally, domestic political intentions are still at the heart of politics made on European level and will hinder the necessary group cohesion. Proof of this disaccord is the results of the Votewatch evaluation that report the cooperation of FN and PVV in only 51 percent of the votes.

Also, it can be argued that with high probability a cost-benefit weighing will take place at a certain point, as it is likely that there will be actors suffering losses in political preference or in the distrust of the domestic electorate through compromise with other parties on the European level. In an extreme situation, where the costs exceed the benefits, this can lead to an actors' decision for leaving the political group. In the case, however, that the new Eurosceptic group is composed of only seven national parties, this would be fatal, as the loss of already one member would equate the dissolution of the alliance.

Concerning the sustainability of the party, it is likely that at this stage neither FN nor PVV have established a plan for cooperation maintenance, as both are concerned with keeping their domestic electorate first, before making sure to maintain the alliance. In this self-centeredness, individual actors' ambitions come to light. Whereas Geert Wilders, after the 2014 European elections has to accept the third rank of the PVV and the dominance of a liberal conservative government, a political direction that he is not absolutely opposed to, Marine Le Pen will commence a combat against the current government by claiming her victory in the EP elections and will follow her ambition to become French President in 2017.

Daring a glance at the other parties around the current table of cooperation in a new Eurosceptic group, it is obvious that the Vlaams Belang, the Austrian Freedom Party and the Lega Nord follow the same scheme as established above. The five parties rely on the allegedly supportive Eurosceptic fundament that will break sooner the more diverging ideologies are involved. In the press conference in the end of May 2014, The Austrian Freedom Party, for instance, did not show the same principled Eurosceptic sentiment as the other candidates, as it sees the European Union as a big club whose rules can be changed. Also, it makes the Austrian exit of the Eurozone dependent on Euro's stabilization in the future. In another comparison, the main goal of the Lega Nord is to separate the North of Italy and make it an independent state.

To sum it up, the French and Dutch case study shows that there is not much hindrance evoked by right-wing populism in the undertaking of political group formation. This is, however, different for political group operation. The formerly sound common Eurosceptic fundament promoted by supportive right-wing rhetoric is likely to turn out to be a porous, instable argumentation. As populism, and to a certain extent also Euroscepticism, are necessarily dependent on political ideology to provide it with meaning, the gathering of at least seven different actors with seven different ideologies will not build on a homogenous and strong platform and is likely to face difficulties in the successful operation of the alliance. It is, additionally, not only the ideological content that plays a role in the successful functioning, but also structural variables such as leadership, internal relationships and cost-benefit calculations.

Having regarded its multiple traits and appearances, it can be concluded that populist rhetoric is a barrier to the successful operation of a new Eurosceptic alliance to the extent that its self-centeredness and egoism are not compatible with compromise-based cooperation.

Conclusion

The previous pages have given an overview of the Eurosceptic reality in the context of the European elections 2014. The dissertation has focused on the representative populists Marine Le Pen and Geert Wilders in their intention to form a trans-European alliance. In this context, it has defined populism as an essentially vague concept that gains meaning only when embedded in an ideology. It was found out that populism, despite its common treatment as pathological, isolated notion, is an essential part of democracy that has to be interpreted within the political mainstream. The same is true for the relatively newly evolved term Euroscepticism, a popular catch-all phrase in fact for a wide range of sceptic perspectives towards the European Union, which has to be considered in the light of individual contexts. Moreover, the previous pages have had a close theoretical look at the processes behind the formation of a political group that in addition to the organizational requirements also underlies rational interest- and power-based as well as constructivist ideological- and cultural-based argumentation for coalition-building. The theorization around the successful operation of a political group in the European Parliament rests on mainly structural conditions, among others leadership, cost-and-benefit calculations and sustainability planning. The research was hereby kept in a confining construct made up of rationalism and constructivism that proved to be valuable in the evaluation of the interrelation between political and social behavior. By examining Dutch and French populism in this context, it was found out that populism practiced by Geert Wilders and his Partij voor de Vrijheid differs significantly from the populism of Marine Le Pen and the Front National. Discrepancies were discovered around matters of political, economic, social and cultural matters. When applied to the conceptual rational and constructivist framework and the theory of political group formation and functioning, these differences are likely to initially not act as barriers to the alliance formation, as this stage does not yet require a large amount of ideological representation and can be overcome by rational calculative behavior and attracting rhetoric. This is, however, different for the operation of a political group in the European level that is likely to face barriers in the challenges around leadership, internal communication and relation, the cost of compromise and individual ambitions. The by actors as solid perceived populist Eurosceptic fundament will in the course of political practices turn out to be porous over the heterogeneity of diverging constructivist ideologies and interests.

The Front National and the Partij voor de Vrijheid are in this research, however, only representative examples, as they are not able to create a sole alliance. Nevertheless, it can be argued that the essentiality of populism and Euroscepticism that all future members will underlie, applies the same measures. Naturally, the backgrounds differ and discrepancies are likely to be discovered in different matters than in the Dutch and French case study.

Glancing at the recent processes of group formation, the FN and the PVV will be accompanied by the Italian Lega Nord, the Belgian Vlaams Belang and the Austrian Freedom Party. The observations remain compelling with regard to the two missing members. The German Alternative für Deutschland and the seemingly compatible UKIP have ruled out the alliance due to the FN and PVV xenophobic tendencies. Reversely, Marine Le Pen and Geert Wilders oppose the cooperation with the nazist parties Golden Dawn and Jobbik. Much of the membership negotiations are taking place in competition with the established EFD group.

A final decision is due in the end of June 2014. Until then, many negotiations can be expected. Should a Eurosceptic group be successful in its formation, the European government will in fact not need to “spend the next five years defending itself”, but come up with a pro-active strategy to tackle right-wing exploited Euroscepticism and restore the trust of European citizens.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Eurosceptic/ far-right parties voting match (2009-2014)

Retrieved from Votewatch Europe May 2014: End-of-term scorecard, part 3: How often have Euro-sceptic/ far-right parties voted together in 2009-2014?

Overall roll-call votes

	PVV	UKIP	FN	FPÖ	LN	SNS	VB
PVV		67%	51%	48%	43%	37%	55%
UKIP	67%		47%	43%	37%	33%	48%
FN	51%	47%		86%	54%	45%	64%
FPÖ	48%	43%	86%		53%	45%	62%
LN	43%	37%	54%	53%		57%	54%
SNS	37%	33%	45%	45%	57%		47%
VB	55%	48%	64%	62%	54%	47%	
Average match: 51%							

Roll-call votes on civil liberties, justice and home affairs

	PVV	UKIP	FN	FPÖ	LN	SNS	VB
PVV		68%	63%	64%	57%	38%	68%
UKIP	68%		47%	43%	37%	33%	48%
FN	63%	47%		92%	54%	48%	74%
FPÖ	64%	43%	92%		54%	46%	74%
LN	57%	37%	54%	54%		54%	57%
SNS	38%	33%	48%	46%	54%		42%
VB	68%	48%	74%	74%	57%	42%	
Average match: 55%							

Roll-call votes on internal market and consumer protection

	PVV	UKIP	FN	FPÖ	LN	SNS	VB
PVV		68%	43%	37%	27%	26%	36%
UKIP	68%		32%	23%	16%	12%	32%
FN	43%	32%		89%	47%	36%	77%
FPÖ	37%	23%	89%		53%	45%	72%
LN	27%	16%	47%	53%		57%	54%
SNS	26%	12%	36%	45%	57%		50%
VB	36%	32%	77%	72%	54%	50%	
Average match: 44%							

Roll-call votes on economic and monetary affairs

	PVV	UKIP	FN	FPÖ	LN	SNS	VB
PVV		67%	51%	48%	43%	37%	55%
UKIP	67%		47%	43%	37%	33%	48%
FN	51%	47%		86%	54%	45%	64%
FPÖ	48%	43%	86%		53%	45%	62%
LN	43%	37%	54%	53%		57%	54%
SNS	37%	33%	45%	45%	57%		47%
VB	55%	48%	64%	62%	54%	47%	
Average match: 51%							

Votewatch Europe. (2014, May). End-of-term scorecard, part 3: How often have Euro-sceptic/ far-right parties voted together in 2009-2014? Retrieved from [Votewatch Europe website: http://www.votewatch.eu/blog/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/votewatch-europe-end-of-term-scorecard-part-3-far-right-parties-final.pdf](http://www.votewatch.eu/blog/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/votewatch-europe-end-of-term-scorecard-part-3-far-right-parties-final.pdf)

Appendix 2: Interview transcript

The following interview was conducted by the author of this dissertation with Yannis Gounaris on April 17 2014. Gounaris has authored a number of books, essays, articles and papers on European and legal matters, published in Greece. He is a member of the Greek Society of International Law and International Relations and active in various scientific associations and civil society organizations.

[...]

C.S.: It can be argued that right-wing populist rhetoric is the driving force behind Le Pen and Wilders in their aspiration to form a Eurosceptic alliance. What other chances are there for a group formation?

Y.G.: If I may express my personal opinion here, unfortunately I think that they [Anm.: right-wing populists] will do rather well; and I say unfortunately, because in my personal political opinion it is not a very good thing for Europe, a very good development. If the right-wing populist forces in Europe manage to score big electoral success, I see that they will sort the game by forming an alliance in the European Parliament. So that will be the main factor: How good they will do in the elections.

C.S.: And do you think that, if an alliance gets to form itself, this will have an impact on the functioning or the processes of the European Union?

Y.G.: Well, to answer that question, I think we should focus on what they wish to accomplish. It does not seem to me that they really want to change or have a major impact on how the EU is formed or how it functions. It seems to me that they are far more interested in taking political advantage of certain shortcomings and failures of the European Union in its present form in order to push their own political agenda which maybe has even very little to do with the EU itself.

C.S. Do you think that, if it does not have much to do with the European Union itself, it could be their aim to – if I put it rather drastically – destroy the European Union from within?

Y.G.: I don't have that impression. I don't think so. I mean certain elements of those parties definitely would like to see the European Union dissolve and for every country to return to its national sovereignty in the more strict they work. But it seems to me that the leadership of those parties would take advantage of the EU in order to boost their own political agenda. So in fact they need the EU in order to cover a political meaning.

C.S. Let's take one step back, as I think we have come a little bit off topic, off track of the actual possibility of a formation of a Eurosceptic group. So you say it is dependent on the election's results and I agree with that. But is it possible, I mean it is an undeniable fact that right wing is on the rise in more or less every member state, but that does not mean necessarily that they are all the same. Is it possible that even if they do receive a big vote in the next elections, or get into the Parliament that they will not be part of a Eurosceptic alliance, as they are essentially too different in their politics?

Y.G. That is actually a very good point. Yes, I think it is a very big possibility. If not immediately, because they may form an alliance which will not be able to function very well in

the future, that is also a possibility. It depends on the internal dynamics, the internal political dynamics of each country. For example, it seems to me that Le Pen has far greater ambitions than forming a Eurosceptic alliance in the Parliament. It seems to me that she wants to run for the French presidency. So if that means that she has to go a step back from the very strong anti-EU or anti-immigrant rhetoric in order to attract the voters from the mainstream right-wing political spectrum then this means that she has different political priorities than someone else from another country.

C.S. That is what I was thinking, too, because it seems to me that right now everyone has adopted, in a sense, a rather mild rhetoric towards these issues, well, if you look at Wilders in the Netherlands or the Austrian right-wing party, that they adopted, that they took a step back in their politics or rhetoric in order to get a broader votership, a broader audience.

Y.G. Yes, that is exactly what I mean. And I think that this is a reason why they are even more dangerous.

C.S. Exactly, yes. But isn't it then a point to say that they are actually not that dangerous, because they might have a broad audience now, but once they get together in Parliament they have to get down to business, so it is not enough for them to be superficially connected to their mild populist rhetoric, but they all have their own ambitions, as you said, Le Pen and Wilders being very different from each other...isn't it then a proof that they might not be that dangerous, because essentially they won't function together?

Y.G.: Well, yes, I am using the term 'dangerous' not as much to describe their political impact, because basically I agree with you that in the long term I don't think that they will be able to, sort of, destroy the EU or create such an impact to really impose a threat for the European project or indeed for democracy, as some of them would definitely like. When I use the term I use it in order to describe a sort of disguising.

C.S.: Disguise?

Y.G.: They disguise their real ideas and their real agendas which is definitely ultra-far right, maybe one could go so far as to call it fascist in certain aspects, and in order to attract political gains they hide this. This is very obvious with Le Pen especially in France.

C.S. Can you give me an example for that?

Y.G.: Well, in the past, the party of Le Pen before, when her father was in charge, it was far more activist and far more openly anti-immigrants, racist, as one would describe it. I don't think that in its core it has really changed its viewpoint of the world or its basic political agenda. I think that Le Pen, Marine Le Pen, the daughter of Jean-Marie Le Pen, is using a far more delicate approach in order to promote this agenda.

C.S.: She took the party over in, when was that, in 2007...I don't remember...I have to formulate it differently. She took the party over and from the beginning, she said, she changed, she wanted to distance herself from the anti and racist sentiment of her father. Do you think she had that planned from the beginning, is that an approach?

Y.G.: Let's just say that I don't really trust her. I don't really trust her or her party. They say they want to distance themselves from the practices of the past, but I don't really trust them,

no. I cannot say that I see a really different approach. I think she is much smarter than her father, but apart from that, no, not really.

C.S. Ok. And where, if I may ask, where do you see those...why are you suspicious about it? Where do you see that the party might now not be that different from what it was with Jean-Marie Le Pen?

Y.G. If you scratch the surface and if you push them, not just Marine Le Pen, because she is not alone, but other elements in her party, if you dig deeper, you will find that it is all still there: The racist remarks the far-right notion of things...it's all still there. It's very well hidden, but it's all still there.

C.S. Moving over to the Dutch populist party, the Party for the Freedom, because I'm arguing, or I'm seeing that the rhetoric are rather mild, as introduced before, that they find a kind of common denominator where they also meet, well, among themselves, the right-wing parties among themselves, find this mild populism to be connecting, but it's also connecting to the audience. So that's the perfect situation for them. But now I am in a little bit of an insecurity, because I feel that, if they have that mild populism and you scratch their surfaces, it's not only Marina Le Pen's Party but also Geert Wilder's party, that if you scratch the surface that it turns out to be rather racist. But if that is the same for both parties, it doesn't really change anything in the Parliament, if they get together, right? They would still have the same aims, although not that mild anymore, but then in their ideology they are essentially the same. So my question is: Are there still, under the surface of this populism that they employ right now, are there differences?

Y.G.: I think I know what you mean. Well, that will depend on how they will choose or wish to present themselves to their respective national audiences, for example the Dutch or someone else or the Hungarians, or I don't know who else, or even the Greeks, I don't know...in the future they might have or they might be more radical or less radical to accept or to more openly ultra-right wing rhetoric than the French or someone, or the Germans or the Austrians, I don't know who else. It depends on what they want to achieve in their own respective national audiences. I think that under the surface they are, if not the same, they share many common elements. If they didn't, they wouldn't cooperate. But, they are also very opportunistic in my view. So they will each have a strategy on how to present themselves in their own national constituencies and if this means that Wilders needs to be more right-wing to present himself, more right-wing than Le Pen or vice versa, then they will do that.

C.S.: Ok, but then, once they are in Parliament that doesn't really matter anymore, does it?

Y.G.: You mean inside the European Parliament?

C.S.: Yes, once they get elected, do you think that matters still how they present themselves to the public?

Y.G. Depends on what they want to do afterwards. If Le Pen, for example wants to run for the French presidency, then this will be number one priority.

C.S. I feel that populist politicians are very self-centered. With this ambition of Marine Le Pen, would that come into the way of cooperating internally in a Eurosceptic alliance?

Y.G. Exactly, I agree with this point. And this is my main point. If eventually they fail, it will be for two reasons. The one that you just mentioned: Their own personal political agenda, self-centered. And the other will be: If they lose the tools to promote their message and their rhetoric, for example, let's not forget that the European Union is in a very big crisis, economic, political crisis, not just in Greece, everywhere, and the European Union itself has not, in my view, been very successful, to put it mildly, in dealing with these shortcomings and this crisis. So this creates a good environment for that sort of right-wing populism. People are more willing to this kind of rhetoric than they would be if the European Union was functioning perfectly. So the other element that will ultimately lead to their failure is if the democratic forces of Europe, the real pro-Europeans which is not necessarily the same as Brussels, let's make this clear, if they manage to offer a democratic alternative to today's problems then this will mean that they no longer have the political ground in order to exist. I think that is very important.

C.S. Ok, I think that's a very good point that you made. But that includes that the functioning, if a European alliance comes into force, then this is a rather long-term view on things.

Y.G.: Yes, it certainly is.

C.S.: So the personalities, in a sense aren't they short term? Will they not find out over a short period of time that they won't function, because they are too stubborn?

Y.G. I think this is a possibility. It not the first time that we see these kind of problems in opportunistic populist right-wing movements. We have seen it, maybe not on the European level, but we have certainly seen it on a national level. Sooner or later the personal political ambition of the players leads to internal struggles. It is very possible that we see that too in this case.

C.S. Well, I was thinking: If they get together and you have Marine Le Pen and Geert Wilders sitting there, that they have rather big egos, so it doesn't really take that long for them to figure out that it is not really possible for them to do commitments.

Y.G.: It's possible and we might see that even before the elections or immediately after the elections. But I am afraid I wouldn't, well if you ask me, I would like that, I would prefer in my personal opinion that such an alliance does not come into existence in the European Parliament for democracy. But I am afraid that, because they see both of them, both of the two big players see that they will have in all probability electoral gains in the European Parliament. I don't think that they will be willing to, even if they already have internal problems, I don't think that they would like to break and burn their bridges before the elections, because this will have an impact on their electoral success. They need at least to present a united front to make this impression "we're coming, we're strong, we change everything" that sort of rhetoric that they use.

C.S.: Exactly. Do you think that also the internal problems will eventually lead to the possibility that the alliance might break. What we saw in Austria with one of the politicians of the Freedom party being excluded from the party, being thrown out, because he expressed racist sentiment. Do you think that this internal fraction will also cause fraction in a European alliance?

Y.G.: This is also a major point, because I think that we will see those kinds of issues arriving more and more. Especially the closer they come to their national elections, the more we will

see them. For example, well I don't know that for a fact, but I am certain that there are already elements inside the party of Marine Le Pen in France, Front National, that they are not very happy with the turn the leadership is making towards a more so-called moderate position. I think we are going to see these kind of internal struggle.

C.S.: Yes, and we also saw it in Geert Wilders' party already. That's a very good point.

Y.G.: I am coming back to Le Pen, because I am more familiar with French politics than Dutch politics.

C.S.: That is no problem. It is very handy, thank you very much! Going to the organizational matters of formation of the alliance, who would we see in this alliance? We would see Marine Le Pen, Wilders,...

Y.G.: That's a very good point. I don't really know. But that might be also a reason for some internal arguments among them, because, as mentioned, they both have big egos and would definitely like to have the first word and present themselves as the leader of this pan-European alliance. I don't know, I have no idea. Maybe they will choose a third party that will suit them both.

C.S. They will need seven parties to get established as a party in the beginning. That is why I was asking who they would cooperate with, because we have right-wing parties in more or less every member state right now, but they are very different from each other. As, for instance, the Golden Dawn, I experience as very openly racist.

Y.G.: Yes, Golden Dawn is a very interesting case study. Unfortunately, it is a very unique Greek phenomenon. So openly neo-Nazi, occupying divisions in Greek Parliament and in all probability they will manage to elect at least one member into the European Parliament, so we should have a very sad development for Greek democracy. But, I mean, you see that neither Le Pen nor Wilders wants to have anything to do with Golden Dawn.

C.S. Exactly, yes. So that's why I am thinking, that's very very exciting what will happen after the elections. Who they decide to cooperate with. For instance, UKIP also expressed that they will not be part of a Eurosceptic alliance. So the organizational matters will be very interesting and I'm wondering who they will cooperate with.

Y.G.: Exactly. Now that you mention UKIP: UKIP is a very interesting case study as well, as they have a different agenda than Wilders and Le Pen. They are not really, I mean, obviously they are very British, a very British phenomenon UKIP. I don't think that you can put it more into a European perspective. It's a very British thing.

C.S.: The skepticism towards the continent, or what do you mean?

Y.G.: Yea, the queen, tee, the empire, that sort of thing.

C.S. Yes, and also with the German right-wing, well, it's not right-wing, it is rather Eurosceptic, not essentially right wing, the Alternative für Deutschland, it's a very wide spectrum that they could choose from. Because they need seven parties in total and 25 members.

Y.G. Let's see. If they manage to come up with that. It's interesting. Let's see.

C.S. The wide range of Eurosceptic parties brings me to the next question, question number eight actually already, which is asking for the explanation or a definition of Euroscepticism. Are you familiar with Euroscepticism, with the term and how many varieties there are?

Y.G.: Yes, I am. And it is interesting, because Euroscepticism happens to have Greek roots. So I have an opinion about the meaning of this word. To be skeptical about something is to think about something. That's the root of the word. The word 'sceptis' in Greek means to think deeply about something. To think and to have doubts about something. So it seems to me that today we need to make a distinction between someone who is Eurosceptic and someone who is Anti-European. This is not always the same thing.

C.S.: Exactly, this is also what I think.

Y.G.: For instance, if someone who thinks deeply about European affairs, who is deeply interested in European affairs and even criticize the European Union as it is today in its policies might even be, for example, a federalist. Someone who wants to re-create the European Union to a more democratic and federalist model; it is not necessarily Anti-European. Wilders, Le Pen and the rest of them are mostly Anti-European. They don't really think, they don't really bother to think about the idea of Europe and the idea of European unification and how we could accomplish that, what's the best way, what's wrong with the European Union and what should we do to fix it. They don't really care. They want to use the wrong-doing of the European Union to promote their own agenda which is Anti-European.

C.S. I agree with that and it seems to me that Euroscepticism as a total term is used as a term for so many varieties of sentiment towards the EU so it is very difficult.

Y.G.: Exactly. We need to elaborate and make the distinction. It's not always the same thing.

C.S.: Thank you for your evaluation of things. If this Eurosceptic group in the European Parliament will come into force, which impact would that have on the existing Eurosceptic parties in the Parliament right now in terms of the group for European Freedom and Democracy, for instance?

Y.G.: I think that will depend on how well both of those political groups will do in the European elections. But it seems to me that we are going to have a sort of competition in the European Parliament between those two as to who will be more openly and more loudly Anti-European or Eurosceptic or however you want to express it. So in that way, we will have a competition. But it seems to me that precisely because we have already a Eurosceptic group in the European Parliament, if Wilders, Le Pen and the rest will manage to create a distinct group, I think that ultimately they will have to focus on a more Anti-immigrant or Anti-Islam, or that sort of agenda, to distinguish themselves on those issues. Because the agenda of, you know, how we "fight the monster in Brussels", the Freedom and Democracy Group already has that rhetoric. They won't need another group with the same agenda, they already have it.

C.S.: That is essentially the problem, because some of the members of the Freedom and Democracy Group right now would probably transfer into this new Eurosceptic alliance. But then you have of course UKIP sitting in the Freedom and Democracy Group and then it gets interesting, indeed.

Y.G.: It is difficult to predict how the dynamics between those groups, if they manage at all, I mean distinctly, will play out in the coming European Parliament, because we would have a competition, definitely, but you might also see a sort of seizing or less-seizing alliance between those two on certain issues; you know, fighting Brussels. That will be a very easy common denominator between the two. It's all about political opportunism. If they think it will help their agenda, then they will do that. If they feel that it is better for them to distance themselves from each other, to say that we are two different things, then they will do that and we will see a competition.

C.S.: I am very grateful that you bring the political opportunism up, because that gives me a theoretical frame for this whole process. My research involved so far the term Euroscepticism and the theory behind coalition formation. And political opportunism is a big factor of that, so I am happy that you bring that up. Let's see, I will quickly go through the questions and see, if we have covered all of them. Yes, ok, thank you very much.

Y.G.: Thank you, Christina, it was very nice talking to you and I hope that we will have the chance to communicate again.

[...]