Exclusionary Populism in Western Europe in the 1990s and Beyond

A Threat to Democracy and Civil Rights?

Hans-Georg Betz

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Acronyms

AUNS	Aktion für eine unabhängige und neutrale Schweiz (*Campaign for an Independent and Neutral Switzerland*)
BNP	British National Party
DF	Dansk Folkeparti (*Danish People's Party*)
DVU	Deutsche Volksunion (*German People's Union*)
EU	European Union
FN	Front National (*National Front*, France)
FP	Fremskridtspartie (*Progress Party*, Denmark)
FPÖ	Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs (*Austrian Freedom Party*)
FPS	Freiheits-Partei der Schweiz (*Swiss Freedom Party*)
FrP	Fremskrittspartiet (*Progress Party*, Norway)
LN	Lega Nord (*Northern League*, Italy)
MP	member of Parliament
MRN	Mouvement National Republicain (*Republican National Movement*, France)
MSI	Movimento Sociale Italiano (*Italian Social Movement*)
NPD	Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands (*National Democratic Party of Germany*)
ÖVP	Österreichiscshe Volksparte (*Austrian People's Party*)
REP	Die Republikaner (*The Republicans*, Germany)
SORA	Institute for Social Research and Analysis
SVP	Schweizerische Volkspartei (*Swiss People's Party*)
VB	Vlaams Blok (*Flemish Block*, Belgium)

Glossary

Ausländerkonzept	political position on foreigners, immigration and integration
Bundesrat	coalition government, Switzerland
gaucho-lepénisme	the appeal of Jean-Marie Le Pen to former left-wing voters
Heimat	the place where one feels at home
jihad	holy war
Mezzogiorno	southern Italy and particularly Sicily
ouvriéro-lepénisme	the appeal of Jean-Marie Le Pen to working-class voters
préférence nationale	national preference
Überfremdung	foreignization

Summary/Résumé/Resumen

Summary

Since the late 1980s, a new breed of right-wing parties and movements has gained considerable political ground in a number of liberal democracies, particularly—but not exclusively—in Europe. Among the most successful of these parties have been the Schweizerische Volkspartei (Swiss People's Party), Fremskrittspartiet (Norwegian Progress Party), Freiheitliche Partei Österreich (Austrian Freedom Party) and the Front National (National Front) in France.

Several characteristics distinguish these parties and movements from the more traditional parties: reliance on charismatic leadership; the pursuit of a populist strategy of political marketing with a pronounced customer (that is, voter) orientation; and the appeal to and mobilization of popular anxieties, prejudices and resentments, the main target of which has been the political establishment. The goal has been to discredit the "political class" in order to bring about radical political change. Typically, new populist parties and movements have marketed themselves as uncompromising defenders of the rights and fearless advocates of the interests of the common people, as well as the only true representatives and promoters of "genuine democracy".

At the same time, they espouse an ideology that is perhaps best described as a type of exclusionary populism. The core of this political doctrine consists of a restrictive notion of citizenship, which holds that genuine democracy is based on a culturally, if not ethnically, homogeneous community; that only long-standing citizens are full members of civil society; and that society's benefits should only accrue to those who have made a substantial contribution to it. In its more extreme cases, exclusionary populism has taken the form of cultural nativism which, rather than promoting notions of ethno-cultural superiority, aims at the protection of cultural identity and idiosyncratic values and ways of life against alien intrusion and contamination. In the contemporary populist right, this means, above all, safeguarding and defending the achievements and gains of European culture and civilization.

Although expressed hostility toward foreigners, strong opposition to immigration and vocal objection to the building of multicultural societies are central characteristics of all new right-wing populist parties in Europe and elsewhere, the majority of these parties are not single-issue protest parties. In many cases, these parties promote a comprehensive programme of socio-economic, sociocultural and sociopolitical change, the implementation of which would have far-reaching consequences. At the same time, the new right-wing populist parties have used a range of diverse issues in their attempts to mobilize popular resentments, whose appeal can only be explained within the specific national context, and among which immigration and multiculturalism have only been one—albeit very important—issue. It is the appeal to these issues, as much as the appeal to latent and diffuse xenophobic sentiments, that has gained the new right-wing populist parties of Europe an audience and political support.

There are several reasons for their political success: widespread popular disaffection and disenchantment with the established political parties, politicians and the political process (and perhaps even democracy) in general; diffuse feelings of anxiety in the face of rapid and profound socioeconomic and sociostructural change associated with globalization and the information technology revolution; and a general unease with respect to the cultural challenges posed by the inflow and presence of a growing number of non-European immigrants. While unwanted by the majority of Europeans, such immigrants are increasingly needed to compensate for falling birth rates, prevent labour shortages, and provide some of the funds necessary to pay for the welfare state.

Given these disparate motivations for right-wing populist support, it is perhaps not surprising that the electoral base of new right-wing populist parties cannot be reduced to one single group, such as the petty bourgeoisie. In a number of cases, there has been a significant "proletarization" of the social basis of their support (that is, the number of blue-collar workers voting for them has increased rather dramatically). This does not necessarily mean, however, that these parties appeal

only to those groups who feel most threatened by technological and economic change. Approaches that focus on attitudes and value dispositions might help more to understand support for the new populist right than more traditional class-based analysis. Similar caution might be appropriate with respect to sociostructural variables such as gender, education and age.

Given the current confluence of increasing competitive pressures stemming from globalization, growing demographic pressures stemming from the rapid greying of European societies and a persistently high level of political disaffection, it is rather unlikely that the appeal of right-wing parties espousing an ideology of exclusionary populism will significantly diminish in the foreseeable future. Undoubtedly, their success represents a serious challenge to liberal democracy in Europe. Whether or not it will become a genuine threat to democracy will ultimately depend on the strength of the democratic institutions and political culture that Europe has developed during the past 50 years.

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Résumé

Depuis la fin des années 80, des partis et des mouvements de droite d'une espèce nouvelle ont gagné beaucoup de terrain sur le plan politique dans nombre de démocraties libérales, d'Europe en particulier mais aussi d'ailleurs. L'Union démocratique du centre en Suisse, le Fremskritts-partiet (Parti du progrès norvégien), le Freiheitliche Partei Österreich (Parti libéral autrichien) et le Front national en France sont parmi ceux qui ont remporté le plus de succès.

Plusieurs caractéristiques distinguent ces partis et mouvements des partis plus traditionnels: le rôle joué par des dirigeants charismatiques, la poursuite d'une stratégie populiste de marketing politique fortement axée sur le client (l'électeur en l'occurrence) et les angoisses, préjugés et ressentiments populaires sur lesquels ils jouent et qu'ils mobilisent pour attaquer essentiellement l'establishment politique. L'objectif a été de discréditer la "classe politique" afin de changer radicalement la donne. Typiquement, les nouveaux partis et mouvements populiste se sont "vendus" comme les défenseurs intransigeants et intrépides des droits et des intérêts des citoyens ordinaires et comme les seuls tenants et représentants de la "vraie démocratie".

En même temps, ils embrassent une idéologie qui trouve sans doute dans l'expression de populisme d'exclusion sa traduction la plus exacte. Cette doctrine politique tient essentiellement à une conception restrictive de la citoyenneté, qui consiste à penser qu'une vraie démocratie repose sur une communauté homogène d'un point de vue culturel, sinon ethnique, et que les bienfaits de la société ne devraient revenir qu'à ceux qui y ont largement contribué car seuls les citoyens de "longue date" font partie intégrante de la société civile. Sous sa forme la plus extrême, le populisme d'exclusion devient un nativisme culturel qui, plutôt que de diffuser l'idée de la supériorité ethnoculturelle, vise à protéger l'identité culturelle et les valeurs et modes de vie idiosyncrasiques de l'intrusion et de la contamination étrangères. Ceci, dans la droite populiste contemporaine, signifie avant tout préserver et défendre les réalisations et les acquis de la culture et de la civilisation européennes.

Bien que tous les nouveaux partis populistes de droite en Europe et ailleurs se caractérisent essentiellement par une hostilité déclarée aux étrangers, une forte opposition à l'immigration et des objections explicites à la construction de sociétés multiculturelles, la majorité de ces partis ne sont pas des partis de contestation obsédés par cette seule question. Dans bien des cas, ils présentent un programme complet de réformes socio-économiques, socioculturelles et socio-politiques, dont la mise en œuvre aurait de profondes répercussions. En même temps, ils se sont servis d'une variété très diverse de questions, certaines fort importantes comme l'immigration et le multiculturalisme, dans leurs tentatives de mobiliser le ressentiment populaire, ressentiment qui ne peut s'expliquer que dans le contexte national. C'est en jouant sur ces questions,

autant que sur les sentiments xénophobes latents et diffus, que les nouveaux partis populistes de droite ont gagné une audience et des appuis politiques.

Leur succès politique s'explique par plusieurs raisons: large désaffection et désenchantement des populations à l'égard des partis établis, des hommes et femmes politiques et du processus politique (et peut-être même de la démocratie) en général, sentiments diffus d'angoisse face aux changements socio-économiques et sociostructurels liés à la mondialisation et à la révolution de la technologie de l'information, et malaise général devant les problèmes culturels posés par l'afflux et la présence d'un nombre croissant d'immigrants non européens. Bien que la majorité des Européens n'en veuillent pas, ces immigrants sont de plus en plus nécessaires pour compenser des taux de natalité en chute libre, prévenir une pénurie de main-d'œuvre et assurer une partie du financement de l'Etat providence.

Etant donné l'hétérogénéité des motivations de leurs sympathisants, il n'y a sans doute rien d'étonnant que la base électorale de ces nouveaux partis populistes de droite ne puisse se réduire à un seul groupe, tel que la petite bourgeoisie. Dans bien des cas, leur base sociale s'est nettement "prolétarisée" (autrement dit, le nombre des "cols-bleus" à voter pour eux a augmenté de manière assez spectaculaire). Cela ne signifie pas nécessairement que ces partis n'attirent que les groupes qui se sentent le plus menacés par la révolution technologique et l'orientation de l'économie. Plus que l'analyse de classe traditionnelle, une plus grande attention portée aux attitudes et aux prédispositions aux valeurs pourrait aider à comprendre l'appui dont jouit la nouvelle droite populiste. La même prudence pourrait être de mise à l'égard de variables sociostructurelles telles que le sexe, l'éducation et l'âge.

Etant donné la confluence actuelle des pressions de la concurrence qui, avec la mondialisation, se font de plus en plus fortes, de la pression démographique due au vieillissement rapide des sociétés européennes et d'une désaffection politique toujours très marquée, il est peu probable que les partis de droite embrassant une idéologie de populisme d'exclusion perdent de leur attrait dans un avenir prévisible. A n'en pas douter, leur succès fait peser une lourde hypothèque sur la démocratie libérale en Europe occidentale. Le danger qu'ils représenteront pour la démocratie sera en dernière analyse inversement proportionnel à la solidité des institutions démocratiques et de la culture politique dont l'Europe s'est dotée depuis 50 ans.

Au moment de la rédaction, Hans-Georg Betz enseignait les sciences politiques en qualité de maître de conférences au Centre canadien des études allemandes et européennes à l'Université York, Toronto, Canada.

Resumen

Hacia fines de los 1980, un nuevo tipo de partidos y movimientos de derecha empezó a ganar terreno en varias democracias liberales, en particular—aunque no exclusivamente—en Europa. Entre los más exitosos de estos partidos están los Schweizerische Volkspartei (Partido Popular Suizo), Fremskrittspartiet (Partido del Progreso Noruego), Freiheitliche Partei Österreich (Partido Austríaco de la Libertad) y, en Francia, el Front National (Frente Nacional).

Entre las características que distinguen estos movimientos y partidos de los partidos más tradicionales están el rol del liderazgo carismático, una estrategia populista de mercadotecnia política con una marcada orientación hacia el cliente (es decir, el votante), y una notable capacidad de atracción y movilización basada en una gama de inquietudes, prejuicios y resentimientos populares que han tenido como blanco principal el sistema político establecido. El objetivo de los nuevos partidos y movimientos ha sido el desacreditar a la "clase política" para generar transformaciones políticas radicales. Dichos partidos y movimientos se han promovido como defensores incondicionales de los derechos del pueblo, promotores intrépidos de sus intereses, y como los únicos representantes de la "verdadera democracia".

Al mismo tiempo, adoptan una ideología que tal vez se podría describir mejor como un tipo de populismo excluyente. La esencia de la doctrina política en cuestión consiste en un concepto restringido de la ciudadanía, según el cual la verdadera democracia está basada en una comunidad si no étnica, por lo menos culturalmente homogénea, donde sólo los ciudadanos de mucha antigüedad son miembros plenos de la sociedad civil, y donde sólo los que han contribuido en forma sustancial a la sociedad tienen derecho a gozar de los beneficios de ésta. En los casos más extremos, el populismo excluyente ha tomado la forma de un "nacionalismo cultural" que, en vez de promover nociones de superioridad étnica o cultural, pretende proteger la identidad cultural, los valores idiosincrásicos y las costumbres propias, contra la "contaminación" o la intrusión de lo extranjero. En la derecha populista contemporánea esto significa, ante todo, proteger y defender los logros y avances de la cultura y civilización europeas.

Aunque una hostilidad explícita hacia los extranjeros, una fuerte oposición a la inmigración y una vehemente resistencia a la construcción de una sociedad multicultural son características centrales de todos los nuevos partidos populistas de derecha en Europa y en otras partes del mundo, estos partidos no son mayoritariamente partidos de protesta basados en un sólo tema político, sino que promueven, en muchos casos, un programa integral de cambio socioeconómico, sociocultural y sociopolítico cuya implementación acarrearía consecuencias extensas. En sus esfuerzos para encauzar los resentimientos populares, los partidos han utilizado una diversa gama de temas políticos cuyo atractivo sólo se puede entender en cada contexto nacional. La inmigración y el multiculturalismo han sido sólo un componente de los temas (aunque, por cierto, uno importante). Si los partidos han logrado conseguir un público y un apoyo político, es por la utilización de estos temas, junto con un esfuerzo por encauzar los sentimientos de xenofobia latentes y difusos en la población.

Las razones del éxito político de estos partidos y movimientos incluyen un extenso desencantamiento, y rechazo de los partidos, los políticos y el proceso político en general (incluyendo, quizá, la misma democracia); sentimientos difusos de ansiedad en el actual contexto de acelerado cambio socioeconómico y socioestructural asociado con la mundialización y la revolución en la tecnología de la informática; y una incomodidad general respecto de los desafíos culturales implícitos en la afluencia y presencia de un creciente número de inmigrantes no-europeos. Aunque una mayoría de europeos preferiría no tener a estos inmigrantes entre ellos, los inmigrantes son cada vez más necesarios. Por un lado compensan las tasas de nacimiento cada vez más reducidas, previniendo una eventual escasez de mano de obra, y por el otro sirven como una fuente de fondos parcial para financiar el estado de bienestar.

Dadas estas diversas motivaciones detrás del apoyo que tiene el populismo de derecha, quizá no sea sorprendente que la base electoral de los partidos en cuestión no sea reducible a un grupo determinado, como, por ejemplo, la pequeña burguesía. En varios casos se ha manifestado una "proletarización" significativa de la base social de apoyo de estos partidos (o sea, un aumento bastante dramático en el número de obreros que votan por ellos). Esto no necesariamente significa, sin embargo, que los partidos tengan atractivo exclusivamente para los grupos que más amenazados se sienten por el cambio tecnológico y económico. Para entender el apoyo que suscita la nueva derecha populista, podrían ser más útiles los enfoques que se centran en las actitudes y valores que apoyarse en un enfoque analítico más tradicional basado en los fenómenos de clase. Una advertencia similar se podría hacer con respecto a las variables socioestructurales como el género, la educación y la edad.

Dada la actual confluencia de presiones de competencia cada vez mayores asociadas con la mundialización y las presiones demográficas debidas al envejecimiento acelerado de las sociedades europeas, junto con un alto nivel de descontento con el proceso político, es poco probable que disminuya significativamente el atractivo de los partidos de derecha de ideología populista excluyente en el futuro previsible. Su éxito sin duda plantea un desafío considerable a la democracia liberal en Europa. El que se convierta, o no, en una amenaza real a la democracia dependerá, a fin de cuentas, en la fortaleza de las instituciones democráticas y la cultura política desarrolladas en Europa durante los últimos 50 años.

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Introduction

Since the late 1980s, a new breed of right-wing parties and movements has made considerable electoral gains in a number of liberal democracies in Western Europe. Among the most successful of these parties have been the Austrian Freedom Party (Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs/ FPÖ); the Swiss People's Party (Schweizerische Volkspartei/SVP); the Belgian Flemish Block (Vlaams Blok/VB); and the Norwegian Progress Party (Fremskrittspartie/FrP). Other significant parties are the Italian Northern League (Lega Nord/LN); the Danish People's Party (Dansk Folkeparti/DF), and Jean-Marie Le Pen's National Front (Front National/FN). Finally, there are several marginal parties such as Bruno Mégret's National Republican Movement (Mouvement National Republicain/MNR), the German Republicans (Die Republikaner/REP), the German People's Union (Deutsche Volksunion/DVU), the Danish Progress Party (Fremskridtspartiet/FP), and the Swiss Freedom Party (Freiheits-Partei der Schweiz/FPS, formerly known as Autopartei, or the Automobile Party).[1]

Several characteristics distinguish these parties and movements from the more traditional parties: reliance on charismatic leadership, and centralized and hierarchical party structure; the scrupulous pursuit of a populist strategy of political marketing; and, perhaps most importantly, a style of political mobilization that appeals primarily to popular anxieties, prejudices and resentments, particularly against the political establishment. Ideologically, these parties and movements espouse a political doctrine of exclusionary populism. Their principal characteristic is a restrictive notion of citizenship, which holds that genuine democracy is based on a culturally, if not ethnically, homogeneous community; that only long-standing citizens are full members of civil society; and that society's benefits should accrue only to those members of society who, either as citizens, or at least as taxpayers, have made a substantial contribution to society. The spirit of this doctrine is reflected in the notion of "their own people first" and the call for "national preference", which are core demands of right-wing populist parties in the current debate on immigration in Western Europe. In recent years, exclusionary populism has gone beyond xenophobia, turning into a new form of cultural nativism, which seeks to distance itself from and disavow traditional forms of racism. The new populist cultural nativism, rather than promoting notions of ethno-cultural superiority, aims at protecting its own "indigenous" (in the sense of French, German, Norwegian or even European) society, culture and way of life against what is seen as alien intrusion, contamination and subversion, whether under the guise of American popular culture or Islamic religious practices and religiously inspired lifestyle.

Despite the re-emergence of blatantly nativist ideas in Western Europe, openly neo-nazi and neo-fascist parties have seen themselves even more marginalized than they already were before the rise of the populist right. Although they still exist on the fringes of the political system—the most prominent examples are the National Democratic Party of Germany (Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands/NPD); the re-founded Italian Social Movement (Movimento Sociale Italiano/MSI), and, until recently, the British National Party (BNP)—these parties have neither a large social base nor much success at the polls (Eatwell 2004). At the same time, however, their importance as way stations for neo-nazis and skinheads, as well as disseminators of racist, anti-Semitic, and Holocaust negationist literature, should not be underestimated. However, compared to exclusionary populism, their impact has been relatively limited, in part because of their insistence on holding on to an ideology that has been totally discredited in Western Europe. As a result, the extreme right has largely failed to capitalize on the emergence of immigration as an important political issue and has had to leave the field to the right-wing populist parties.

Unlike the radical and extreme right during much of the postwar period in Western Europe, the contemporary populist right is no longer confined to the margins of the democratic system. In fact, in a growing number of cases, right-wing populist parties have assumed positions of significant political influence, whether at the local, regional or even national levels. The most recent example has been the inclusion of the LN in the Silvio Berlusconi government, where it

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[1]   See Hainsworth (2000); Ignazi 2003; Betz 2004.

holds three portfolios, among them the Ministry of Justice. Other parties holding positions of national responsibility are the FPÖ in the Austrian coalition government, and the SVP, which has been part of Switzerland's grand-coalition government (Bundesrat) since before the Second World War. With these developments, exclusionary populism has moved to centre stage, much to the consternation of the established parties, which all too often have been at a loss as to how to respond to the populist challenge.

Electoral Progress in the 1990s

For a relative newcomer to the political scene trying to establish itself firmly in the Western European party system, the 1990s proved to be an exceptional decade for the populist right. Electorally, the radical right made dramatic gains in a number of countries, in the process launching a serious challenge to the established parties. Programmatically, the radical right has increasingly set part of the agenda, forcing the traditional parties to adopt not only its exclusionary populist rhetoric but also much of its xenophobic platform. Strategically, the radical right has made great strides in its attempts to be taken seriously as a potential coalition partner.

The radical right's electoral gains in the 1990s were particularly dramatic in Austria and Switzerland. They were considerable in France, Belgium, Norway and northern Italy, and quite significant in Denmark. However, in Germany and Sweden, the populists remained marginal, and other democracies, such as Britain and the Netherlands, never experienced the emergence of a genuinely populist radical right.

In Austria, under the leadership of Jörg Haider, the FPÖ's electoral gains went from 9.7 per cent of the vote in 1986 to 22.5 per cent in only eight years. In 1999, the party gained 26.9 per cent of the vote, enough to surpass the conservative Austrian People's Party (Österreichiscshe Volksparte/ÖVP) as the second-largest party in the country, albeit by only a handful of votes. In Austria's parliament, the FPÖ increased its representation from 18 seats in 1986 to 52 seats and even entered into a coalition with the ÖVP. However, growing internal divisions in the FPÖ, open power struggles, and a series of resignations and defections of key personnel led to the collapse of the centre-right coalition. The public reaction to the chaotic image presented by the FPÖ was quite predictable: in the parliamentary election of 2002, made necessary by the collapse of the coalition government, the FPÖ experienced losses unprecedented in postwar Austrian history, garnering a mere 10.2 per cent of the vote, which was barely above the level of 1986, when the party had started its dramatic rise in the polls.

In Switzerland, in the 1990s, the SVP more than doubled its electoral support, which had traditionally been around 10 per cent in the national elections. In 1991, the SVP received 11.9 per cent of the vote. Four years later, this had risen to 14.9 per cent—which at the time was considered a political earthquake—rising even higher in 1999 to 22.5 per cent. This meant that within less than a decade, the SVP had moved from being the smallest to being the largest of the major political parties in Switzerland, increasing its number of seats in Parliament from 25 in 1991 to 44 in 1999. In the process, the SVP had all but destroyed its main competitor on the populist right, the Swiss Freedom Party (Freiheits-Partei der Schweiz/FPS), which in 1999 lost all of its seats in parliament (it had gained seven seats in 1995) and most of its constituency to the SVP. In the most recent parliamentary election of 2003, the SVP managed once again to increase its gains, garnering 26.6 per cent of the vote, largely because of a dramatic rise in its support in the French-speaking areas of the country. As a result of the party's rise in the polls, the SVP received an additional seat in the federal government (which is composed of seven portfolios, one of them traditionally reserved for a member of the SVP).

In France, the FN saw a slight gain in its electoral support between the two parliamentary elections of 1993 and 1997. In 1993, the party gained 12.4 per cent of the vote; in 1997, 14.9 per cent. This almost matched Jean-Marie Le Pen's record in the 1995 presidential election, in which he won 15 per cent of the vote, indicating that the FN had solidified its support. Because of

France's electoral system, the party managed to fill only one seat in the National Assembly in 1997. At the same time, however, because of its progression in a considerable number of electoral districts, which allowed many of its candidates to advance to the decisive second round, the party played a significant role in determining the outcome of the election. However, the defection of Bruno Mégret in 1999, taking with him a significant number of party cadres, appeared to spell the end of the FN's dominant position on the far right of the French political system. The result of the first round of the presidential election of 2002 was therefore all the more shocking. With 17 per cent of the vote, Jean-Marie Le Pen not only made a spectacular political comeback, but also managed to qualify for the run-off election where, however, he lost overwhelmingly to Jacques Chirac.

In Belgium, in the 1990s, the VB established itself as a major political force in Flemish politics. In national elections, the VB's gains increased from 6.6 per cent of the vote (10.3 per cent in Flanders) in 1991, to 7.8 per cent (12.2 in Flanders) in 1995, and 9.9 per cent (15.4 in Flanders) in 1999. By the end of the 1990s, the VB had become the third-largest political party in Flanders, with 15 seats in the national parliament and 22 in the Flemish parliament. However, the party's progress was most dramatic in Antwerp, the second-largest and most prosperous city in Belgium, where the VB gained 33 per cent of the vote in the 2000 local elections, up five per cent from 1994. Strong efforts by other key political parties to marginalize the VB failed to undermine the party's appeal. In the 2003 parliamentary election, the VB gained almost 12 per cent of the overall vote (18 per cent in Flanders and 24 per cent in Antwerp).

In Norway, the FrP—after experiencing a significant decline in the early 1990s, which saw its level of support drop from 13 per cent in 1989 to 6.3 per cent in the general election of 1993— made a dramatic comeback in the late 1990s. In the 1997 parliamentary election, the FrP obtained its best result ever. With 15.3 per cent of the vote, which translated into 25 seats in parliament, it emerged as the second-largest party in the country. Despite a series of internal problems, the FrP went on to consolidate its pivotal position in the Norwegian party system in the parliamentary election of 2001, where it received 14.6 per cent of the vote.

In northern Italy, the LN rose within a few years to become the region's most prominent party. Although the party campaigned almost exclusively in the northern part of the country, and its strongholds were concentrated in a relatively small area along the base of the Alps, the LN managed to gain 8.4 per cent of the vote in 1994 and a little over 10 per cent of the vote in 1996. Because of the idiosyncrasies of the Italian electoral rules, the party gained 118 seats in 1994, but only 59 seats in 1996. Despite its strong position in northern Italy, the LN failed to have a significant impact on the course of Italian politics in the 1990s. As a result, the party lost a major portion of its electorate to Silvio Berlusconi's Forza Italia, which established itself as the major new party on the centre-right. In the parliamentary election of 2001, the LN gained less than 4 per cent of the vote and retained its seats only because Forza Italia agreed to support LN candidates in the party's few remaining strongholds. As part of the deal, the LN agreed to join a coalition government headed by Berlusconi.

Finally, in Denmark, the DF gained 7.4 per cent of the vote in the general election of 1998, which translated into 13 seats in Parliament. The DF is the main successor to the FP which, under the leadership of Pia Kjærsgaard in the early 1990s, had won around 6 per cent of the vote. The FP split in the mid-1990s. Subsequently, Kjærsgaard founded the DF and turned it into a major force in Danish politics. In the face of that victory, the FP, after winning 2.4 per cent (or four seats) in 1998, virtually collapsed after its four members of Parliament (MPs) decided to leave the party in the fall of 1999. At the time of the parliamentary election of 2002, the DF was the only serious political force on the far right of the party system. With 12 per cent of the vote, the DF made the centre-right (which having failed to attain a majority formed a minority government) dependant on its support in Parliament.

Given the extent of electoral mobilization by radical right-wing populist parties in recent years, it is hardly surprising that the literature on these parties has focused mainly on their success.

However, this is only half of the story. The reversal of electoral fortunes experienced by the LN, the FPÖ and some minor parties such as the FPS in recent years suggests that radical right-wing populist parties are subject to the very same political conditions that have largely determined the electoral fortunes of the mainstream parties. The cases of Sweden and Germany illustrate this point. In Sweden, the New Democracy party (Ny Demokrati) gained 6.7 per cent of the vote in the first election it contested in 1991, and all but disappeared from the political scene after its two leaders resigned from politics before the 1994 election. In 1994, the party garnered a mere 1.2 per cent of the vote, and 0.2 per cent in 1998. In Germany, the radical right fared little better. In the 1990s, it did not win enough votes in any of the national elections to overcome Germany's "five–per cent hurdle", which prevents parties that gain less than five per cent of the national vote from entering parliament. In the first all-German election of 1990, the REP attracted 2.1 per cent of the vote, 1.9 per cent in 1994, and 1.8 per cent in 1998. In the 2002 election, the DVU gained an additional 1.2 per cent of the vote, which brought the united right-wing support (including 0.3 per cent for the NPD) to a total of 3.3 per cent. The German radical right did make significant gains in some regional elections. Thus in Baden-Württemberg, the REP won 10.9 per cent in 1992 and 9.1 per cent in 1996. The DVU won 12.9 per cent in 1998 in Sachsen-Anhalt, and 5.3 per cent in 1999 in Brandenburg. But despite these limited and sporadic successes, the radical right in post-unification Germany has remained largely a marginal political factor. The same has been true in the United Kingdom, despite the BNP's recent attempts to moderate its rhetoric and present itself as a radical right-wing populist alternative to the established parties; in the Netherlands, where Pim Fortuyn's successors abysmally failed to live up to his legacy; and in Wallonia (the French-speaking part of Belgium), where the Belgian National Front has consistently failed to match even closely its success in Flanders (in 2003, the National Front gained 2 per cent of the national vote, with 5.6 per cent in Wallonia) or by its counterpart in France.

Resentment Amidst Affluence

Although open hostility toward foreigners, strong opposition to immigration and vocal objection to the emergence of multiculturalism in general are central characteristics of all new right-wing populist parties in Europe, most of these parties are not single-issue protest parties. On the contrary, in the majority of cases, they promote a more or less comprehensive programme of socioeconomic, sociocultural and sociopolitical change, the implementation of which can have far-reaching consequences. Thus, both the LN in Italy and the VB in Belgium have, on occasion, been vocal proponents of a break-up of their respective nation-states; the FPÖ has marketed itself as an anti-system party working toward the creation of a Third Republic (after the First Republic, which lasted from 1918 to 1938, and the Second Republic, which began in 1945, after the reconstitution of democracy in Austria), and the SVP has called for an end to Switzerland's consociational institutional system.

In general, the new right-wing populist parties have rarely hesitated to adopt new issues, as long as these have promised to mobilize popular resentments. Often the choice and appeal of these issues can only be explained in the individual national context. Examples include the vocal defence of Switzerland's role during the Second World War by Christoph Blocher, leader of the SVP's influential Zurich branch; the LN's appeal to Northern Italian resentments against the *mezzogiorno* (southern Italy and particularly Sicily) and the Italian capital, "Rome, the Big Thief" (the caption of a well-known LN poster); the VB's attempts to exploit diffuse Flemish resentments against the Walloons (French-speaking Belgians), and particularly the transfer of funds from the affluent north to the struggling south; Jörg Haider's assault on the pillars of Austria's postwar national identity and self-understanding; and calls by Carl Hagen, the leader of the FrP in Norway, for the government to spend some of the huge oil surplus funds to improve the socioeconomic situation of the elderly, and especially their health care. This suggests that in many cases, the electoral appeal of right-wing populist parties in Western Europe has been as much a result of their ability to appeal to country-specific issues and

problems, as a result of their readiness to exploit popular misgivings and resentments on issues related to immigration and multiculturalism.

A case in point was the dramatic upsurge of the SVP under the leadership of Christoph Blocher in the mid-1990s. It is hardly a coincidence that Blocher's rise to national and international prominence occurred at a time when Switzerland came under increasing pressure to deal with its less than unblemished record during the Second World War. As soon as Switzerland's wartime role came under closer scrutiny in the mid-1990s, Blocher stood up in defence of his country, defiantly expressing his sympathies for those of his fellow citizens whose patriotic feelings had been offended and whose achievements had been questioned (Blocher 1997a, 1997b). Charging that the Swiss were neither ashamed of their history nor could be blackmailed, Blocher launched a fierce attack against Switzerland's domestic and foreign critics, focusing particularly on the role of the World Jewish Congress as "the leader of the campaign against Switzerland of the past and the present", as well as other Jewish organizations, "which are demanding money" while pretending that they were not interested in money. Blocher went so far as to compare the call made by some Jewish organizations of a boycott of Swiss products with the Nazi boycott of Jewish businesses in the 1930s, which "initiated the atrocious extermination of the Jewish people".[2] To guarantee a broad dissemination of his views, Blocher had copies of his major speech on Switzerland and the Second World War distributed to several hundred thousand Swiss households and also made it available on his Web site.

Blocher, with his interventions, established himself as a strong defender of Swiss national interests and an advocate of the ordinary Swiss citizen. This impression was strengthened even more when, a few days before the 1999 election, his detractors published a letter in a widely read newspaper, which Blocher had sent to Jürgen Graf, the author of a pamphlet deploring the "demise of Swiss freedom", in which Blocher stated that the author was right.[3] While in the letter Blocher expressed agreement with the general premise of the argument, nothing suggested that he had actually read the pamphlet. As it so happened, the author was a notorious Holocaust denier, who used this pamphlet to rant about how "political correctness, Holocaust ideology, Jewish Terror, a corrupt justice system, left wing politics, a close connection to the EU [European Union] and Maastricht can and will ruin a country".[4] The publication of the letter so close to the election was clearly designed to discredit Blocher as a right-wing extremist and thus diminish the SVP's chances. Blocher immediately rejected the charge and swiftly went on the counterattack, accusing the media of conspiring against him in a blatant attempt to influence the outcome of the election (see *Neue Züricher Zeitung* 1999). In this way, Blocher presented himself not only as a victim of a campaign of character assassination, but also as a tough fighter against media bias and political correctness.

Blocher's style reminded many observers of Jörg Haider, who marketed himself very successfully in the 1990s under the motto, "He says what you think". More than any other right-wing populist leader in Western Europe, Haider owes his rise to political prominence to a calculated strategy of assaulting elite values, political conventions and the tenets of Western European political correctness. According to one of Austria's most astute political observers, Haider is "the personified antithesis to political correctness", who constantly breaks with Austria's postwar language code, challenging its taboos. As a result, for many voters Haider represented "a symbolic liberation" (Burger 2000b:8, 2000a:391). The most notorious examples of this strategy—and also the ones that have cost him most dearly—were his provocative references to the Nazi period, the older generation's role in the Nazi dictatorship and the atrocities committed by the regime. In the process, Haider not only sought to exonerate his parents and their generation for their involvement with a genocidal regime, but also consciously assaulted the hypocrisy of the official version of Austria's

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[2] "Demands made under threat of boycott must be rejected with utmost determination. Let us not forget: It was the boycott of Jewish business in Germany that initiated the atrocious extermination of the Jewish people. Whoever averts boycotts by complying with demands, whoever gives in to blackmail, will be repeatedly exposed to blackmail and subject to new boycotts" (Blocher 1996).

[3] Graf 1997; for an account of the affair by Graf, see www.ety.com/tell/books/jglife/01.htm (accessed in June 1999).

[4] See www.ostara.org/graf (accessed in April 2001).

postwar identity, grounded in the victimology of "Austria—Hitler's first victim", which had very little to do with historical reality. In the process he implicitly attacked the established parties, which tarnished Haider with the Nazi brush while conveniently forgetting that they had allowed many former Nazis "to recycle themselves and become prominent postwar Austrian politicians" (Cohen 2000:57). Thus Haider not only publicly dismissed the notion of the Austrian nation as a failed ideological construct propagated by those hostile to Austria's German cultural heritage, he was also one of the first major politicians to reject the idea of Austria as Hitler's first victim. At the same time, he went so far as to state that the Third Reich was "the most horrible criminal regime", responsible for "mass extermination", and that there was no justification for these crimes.[5] Ironically enough, given Austrian unwillingness to confront its past, even these statements represented a provocation of the official language code, characterized by silence.[6]

The extent to which Haider's political strategy was dominated by appeal to resentment became obvious once again shortly before the recent regional election in Vienna. A few days before the election, in which the FPÖ was expected to incur major losses, Haider made a short pun during a speech at the party's traditional Ash Wednesday meeting. Referring to Ariel Muzikant, the president of the Jewish cultural community in Vienna, Haider remarked that he did not understand how somebody whose name is Ariel (the brand name of a popular detergent) "can have so much dirt sticking to him". Haider's "joke" immediately drew charges of anti-Semitism, which allowed Haider to counter-attack, lashing out against political correctness and hypocrisy and those among the intellectual elite promoting them. Asking who decided what was permissible criticism of "a member of the Jewish religious community", he charged Muzikant with having tried to discredit the newly formed coalition government at home and, particularly, abroad. Reminding his audience that Muzikant and his family had come to Austria as immigrants, he concluded: "From an Austrian citizen one can expect patriotism and decency when his country is being slandered from abroad. For Mr. Muzikant, the applause of Austria's enemies was more important" (Haider 2001).

These two examples suggest that the appeal of the radical populist right could not be reduced to their focus on the question of immigration and multiculturalism. The success of Blocher, Haider and other prominent right-wing populist politicians revealed that it was because they convincingly promoted themselves as advocates of ordinary citizens, as spokesmen for their unarticulated opinions and sentiments ("what most people really think"), who are capable of giving them voice and, in the words of a well-known FN slogan, of "rendering the word to the people". This suggests that right-wing populist mobilization in Western Europe in the 1990s was primarily based upon opposition to the political and intellectual establishment and its values, similar to populist mobilization elsewhere.[7] From this perspective, the gains of the populist right in the 1990s were, above all, a reflection and expression of growing voter disenchantment with the political establishment, a feeling of alienation from the political process, and rising dissatisfaction with representative democracy.

A number of empirical studies have demonstrated that there is a strong association between political disenchantment and support for the populist right. Nonna Mayer, in her analysis of the 1995 presidential election in France, characterized the typical FN voter as someone highly dissatisfied with the functioning of democracy and highly critical of the political establishment. In fact, at the time of the election, more than 60 per cent of Le Pen's supporters thought that at that moment in time democracy in France was dysfunctional (Mayer 1996a:210, 212). Similarly, in Austria, Peter Ulram and Fritz Plasser have shown that the rise in support for Haider and the

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[5]   See, for instance, Michael Wolffsohn's interview with Haider (1995:114).

[6]   There are good reasons to believe that Haider's strategy was motivated in part by his own personal grievances and resentments. For a detailed discussion of these questions see Betz (2002b). What John Keegan has written about David Irving holds equally true for Haider: like Irving, Haider "lets insecurities, imagined slights and youthful resentments bubble up from within him to cloud his mind. It is as if he becomes possessed by the desire to shock and confound the respectable ranks of academe, to write the unprintable and to speak the unutterable" (Keegan 2000).

[7]   Murray Goot and Ian Watson have recently suggested that One Nation's success in Australia was largely a result of the party's mobilization against "new class" values (Goot and Watson 2001).

FPÖ in the late 1980s and throughout the 1990s was driven largely by anti-establishment motives, namely the desire on the part of a growing number of voters to exact revenge on the two major parties via the ballot box (Plasser and Ulram 2000). Marc Swyngedouw has suggested that anti-political sentiments and feelings of political powerlessness are important motivating factors in support for the VB. A growing number of voters, who "object to the political methods of the established parties, clientelism and ideological blurring and the corruption (scandals) in which they are involved" hope, by voting VB, to bring about a renewal of the Belgian political system (Swyngedouw 2001:238).

Finally, Jørgen Goul Andersen and Tor Bjørklund have argued that disenchantment with the established parties and political cynicism account, to a large degree, for the success of the Scandinavian Progress Parties in the 1980s and 1990s. In the mid-1990s, the voters of the two Progress Parties—the FP in Denmark and the FrP in Norway—displayed the highest levels of political distrust among all the voters in the two countries. The same was true for supporters of the short-lived New Democracy party in Sweden in the early 1990s (Andersen and Bjørklund 2000:207–209). Comparative studies based on aggregate survey data have arrived at similar results, suggesting that the voters of right-wing populist parties generally tend to display a significant level of dissatisfaction with democracy and the political process, and this dissatisfaction, in turn, tends to increase the likelihood of support for right-wing populist parties.[8]

What these studies suggest is that the populist right's appeal in the 1990s was primarily a result of widespread political disaffection and disenchantment—symptoms of a larger crisis of the democratic process and of political legitimacy in general. Right-wing populist parties have derived much of their success from their ability to present themselves as representatives of a new "politics of anti-politics"—direct, close to the people and their interests and, above all, outside of the mechanisms of traditional parliamentary politics (Ivaldi 1999:226–229). Surveys suggest that right-wing populist voters in the 1990s were not only deeply disenchanted with the established political parties, but also increasingly dissatisfied with representative democracy. Thus in the mid-1990s in France, 85 per cent of voters sympathizing with Jean-Marie Le Pen and his ideas, and in Italy, 71 per cent of those who supported the LN, thought that their country needed a strong man who would put things in order (Mayer 1996b; Diamanti 1997). This suggests that the radical right had attained at least one of its main objectives: to discredit and delegitimize the political establishment in the eyes of a growing segment of the electorate as a first step toward a more fundamental transformation of the existing system.[9]

Exclusionary Populism

Within the populist right's strategy of delegitimation in the 1990s, the issues of migration and multiculturalism gradually assumed a central position, both in terms of political marketing and political programmes. As a result, right-wing populist parties have increasingly marketed themselves as—and have been seen as—primarily anti-foreigner, or, perhaps more precisely, "anti-foreignization" parties. Although all right-wing populist parties object to the continued influx of non-Western European migrants to Western Europe, migration by itself is only one among a range of issues related to the presence of foreigners on the exclusionary populist agenda. Others include questions of internal security, national and cultural identity, the allocation of social benefits, public education and, last but not least, citizenship. In general, these parties have promoted a panoply of policy demands, ranging from calls to reduce the number of immigrants to zero while gradually expelling and repatriating the resident non-European foreign population to their countries of origin, to calls for a halt to all new immigration, together with the introduction of strong state-sponsored measures to integrate the resident foreigners into society in a process of more or less forced assimilation.

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[8] Falter and Klein 1996:55–59; Knigge 1998:1, 271; Ivaldi 2001:57–59.

[9] Surveys suggest that the LN was particularly successful in shaping the (negative) attitudes of its supporters toward Italy's institutional structure (Diamanti 1996:102–108).

The populist right's exclusionary agenda is informed by notions of ethnopluralism, adopted from the French New Right (Nouvelle droite). This is a new form of cultural nativism, whose central characteristics are its insistence on the preservation of (mainly cultural) identity and difference, and its appeal to the right to defend them against those who threaten their survival. In the process, the populist right has abandoned the traditional right-wing extremist recourse to notions of inherent inequality and natural hierarchy, asserting instead "the incommensurability of different cultures" (meaning certain cultures—for example, Islam—are incompatible with others—for example, western liberal values) as justification for their attempt "to preserve collective identities" and the differences that exist between various cultures at all costs (Taguieff 1993–1994:101). At the same time, the populist right started to promote a language of rights— rights of the indigenous people, rights to the preservation of one's own culture and language, and a right to individual safety—designed, as Roger Griffin has put it, to respond to "deep-seated and understandable fears about the erosion of identity and tradition by the globalizing (but only partially homogenizing) forces of modernity" (Griffin 2000:173).

As a result, right-wing populist opposition to immigration and multiculturalism was increasingly driven as much by questions of national and cultural identity as by more practical, interest-based considerations, although the latter continued to figure more prominently in the parties' programmes and policy statements. The essence of these considerations found expression in the well-known FN call for "national preference" (*préférence nationale*), which the party tried to put into effect in the four cities in which the FN gained control in the late 1990s. As Paul Hainsworth put it, national preference means, in practice, "propagating the idea of reserving or prioritizing state-provided goods and benefits (such as jobs, housing and social payments) for nationals, on the basis of a distinctly restrictive citizenship, rather than to the population at large, on the basis of equity" (Hainsworth 2000:10). In most cases, calls for national preference have been advanced particularly to discourage the influx of refugees seeking asylum in the affluent welfare states of Western Europe, which became the central issue on the exclusionary populist agenda in the 1990s.

In Austria, the FPÖ has appealed to a range of aversions and resentments against new labour migrants, refugees and non-Western European foreigners residing in the country. As early as 1993, Haider wrote in his programmatic book, *Die Freiheit, die ich meine*, that there was "a fundamental right to *Heimat* [the German word for the place where one feels at home], but none whatsoever to immigration". At the same time, he charged that the "experiment of multicultural society" had failed to "work anywhere" and had become a nightmare for many citizens, warning that with increasing numbers of immigrants there was a growing threat to society as a result of "incompatible norms" clashing in a narrow space (Haider 1993:89–94). While initially adopting the call for "zero-immigration", the party modified its position for the 1996 election by adding that this policy would be in force as long as there were Austrian citizens without work and/or homes. Finally, for the 1999 election the party used the country's already high population density, topography and limited resources to justify its anti-immigration stance. At the same time, however, the party tried to use the question of immigration in support of its strategy to discredit the left-wing parties. Thus, in 1999, the FPÖ distributed leaflets in Vienna that charged the left with spending its time worrying about thousands of foreign families waiting on Austria's borders, while it did nothing to prevent "black-African asylum seekers" from dealing in drugs and systematically ignored the needs of Austrian families.

Similarly, for the 2001 regional election in Vienna, the party made "foreigners" the central issue of its campaign strategy, which was consciously designed to appeal to people's grievances and anxieties. The party's list was headed by Helene Partik-Pablé, a member of parliament and the party's expert on immigration issues, who had gained notoriety in 1999 when she remarked during a parliamentary debate that "black-African drug dealers are particularly aggressive, which obviously lies in the nature of these people".[10] With views like this widespread in the

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[10] Stenographisches Protokoll, 168. Sitzung des Nationalrates der Republik Österreich, Gesetzgebungsperiode (Official transcript of the parliamentary proceedings), 10 May 1999. www.parlinkom.gv.at, accessed on 14 June 1999.

party, it was hardly surprising that the FPÖ's anti-foreigner campaign focused almost exclusively on problems increasingly seen as being associated with immigrants, such as drug trafficking and crime in general. Most of the party's policy proposals focused on halting the influx of migrants, expelling illegal immigrants, and making it easier to identify foreigners. At the same time, the party once again emphasized its rejection of multiculturalism, calling instead for the complete integration of foreigners into Austrian society, and particularly their adoption of Austria's western liberal values, the "indigenous value catalogue" (FPÖ 2001:8–13).

Like the FPÖ, the SVP in Switzerland began increasingly to present itself in the late 1990s as a defender of Swiss culture and identity against the threat of "foreignization". This was in part an attempt to attract the supporters of smaller far-right parties like the Swiss Democrats and particularly the FPS, which in the early 1990s had made the "struggle against Überfremdung (foreignization)" the centre of its marketing campaigns. In part it also reflected the growing importance of Christoph Blocher, who, at the beginning of the 1990s, as head of the Campaign for an Independent and Neutral Switzerland (Aktion für eine unabhängige und neutrale Schweiz/AUNS), had gained political prominence by leading the—ultimately successful—opposition to Switzerland's membership in the European Economic Area. Before the two most recent national elections in 1999 and 2003, the SVP spent a great deal of energy on questions of immigration and especially asylum. In 1998, it issued a voluminous position paper on migration policy. This was followed, in 2001, by a detailed paper on integration policy.[11] Both papers strongly emphasized a reduction in the influx of migrants and the integration of foreign residents in Swiss society, although the SVP, unlike the FPÖ, acknowledged that foreigners could not be expected to abandon their own culture and traditions in order to assimilate completely. At the same time, the SVP launched a signature campaign against "the abuse of the right to asylum". By the end of 2000, the campaign had secured more than 100,000 signatures, the required number for a popular initiative.[12] However, when far-right parties launched their own initiative campaigns, designed to reduce the number of foreign residents in Switzerland from 25 to 18 per cent of the entire population, most of the party leadership, including Blocher, came out against the initiative, obviously fearing economic repercussions. This, however, did not prevent the party's grassroots representatives, at a stormy party meeting intended to override the leadership, from voting overwhelmingly in favour of the initiative.

Like other right-wing populist parties, the SVP was particularly adamant in its rejection of multiculturalism. As Thomas Meier, an SVP cantonal councillor from Zurich, put it in a leading right-wing paper, multiculturalism is a "dangerous experiment, doomed to failure", and which, in the final analysis, means nothing less than "the demise of culture" (Meier 2000). Not surprisingly, the SVP in Zurich, the city in Switzerland with the highest proportion of foreign residents, made its stand against the evolution of a multicultural society the focal point of its *Ausländerkonzept* (its political position on foreigners, immigration and integration). Arguing that multiculturalism threatened Swiss culture with destruction while furthering hostility toward foreigners, the Zurich branch of the SVP concluded that "the model of the 'multicultural society' is an ideal, which cannot be squared with reality".[13]

The preservation of cultural identity, reflected in the strict rejection of multiculturalism, is central to the cultural nativism and "reactionary tribalism" represented by the contemporary populist right. This can be illustrated by a political development in Italy in the late 1990s. As the LN started to lose support in the polls, it adopted an increasingly shrill language of difference and cultural preservation in the face of what the party considered "uncontrolled immigration". Initially, the party's rhetoric focused on the growing problem of illegal immigration and particularly rising crime rates, which it associated with illegal immigrants. Thus, in the late 1990s, the party's official daily newspaper, *La Padania*, published a series of articles on northern Italian

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[11] SVP 1998, 2001. Both papers can be ordered as email attachments from the party's Web site.

[12] See www.admin.ch/ch/d/pore/vi/vi296.html (accessed in April 2001); www.svp.ch/Deutsch/Asylinitiative/zustandegekommen.htm (accessed in April 2001).

[13] SVP Stadt Zürich 1998.

cities allegedly overrun and besieged by immigrants. At the same time, the party came out strongly against the evolution of a "multiracial society". Umberto Bossi, in a speech in 2000, declared not only that the LN stood above all "for the diversity of the peoples, starting from our own peoples, and from their right to freedom"[14] and defined racism as "the denial of difference". This allowed Bossi to promote himself not only as the defender of northern Italian identity, but also as a fighter against racism.

In recent years, right-wing populist cultural nativism and reactionary tribalism have increasingly focused on the challenge posed by the growing presence of Muslims in Western Europe. For the radical right, the social and cultural order promoted by Islam is fundamentally opposed to Western values. As Haider put it in the early 1990s: "Human rights and democracy are as incompatible with the Muslim religious doctrine as is the equality of women. In Islam, the individual and his free will count for nothing, faith and religious struggle—*jihad*, the holy war—everything" (Haider 1993:93). Germany's REP—the main, and largely unsuccessful, party of the populist right—was even stronger in its criticism of Islam, charging that it represented "the greatest threat to the Western world and its values".[15] By the late 1990s, most right-wing populist parties habitually promoted anti-Muslim sentiments to appeal for votes. Hostility toward Muslims was particularly pronounced in large parts of the FN and especially in Bruno Mégret's MRN after it broke away from the FN, as well as in the REP and the VB. The latter produced some of the most vicious, openly racist cartoons explicitly directed against Muslims. The central charges were always the same: Islam was a religion of intolerance, its culture fundamentally incompatible with the values and secular laws of Europe. The growing presence of Muslims in Western Europe was nothing short of an invasion with the objective of taking advantage of Western Europe's liberal and democratic laws in order to establish an Islamic order. This was a new colonialism in reverse, which would inevitably lead to a fundamental clash of civilizations and identities, with terrible consequences.[16]

In the late 1990s, anti-Islamic sentiments were increasingly also expressed—albeit less overtly—by the more moderately xenophobic parties, such as the Scandinavian Progress Parties and the SVP. Thus, in its statement on foreigners, the Zurich section of the SVP charged "certain immigrant groups" with "cultural intolerance" which made "living together with them on a multicultural basis simply unthinkable". Further on in the text, the party made it clear which groups it meant:

> Islam is increasingly becoming the main obstacle to integration. And yet, the proportion of immigrants from Islamic countries is continuously increasing. In Europe, we fought for centuries for liberal and democratic values, for the separation of state and church and gender equality. It is a particular irony of history that the same left-wing and liberal forces, who led this fight, are today the most eager advocates of generous immigration policies—policies which threaten the basic Occidental values (SPV Zürich Stadt 1998).

Even the LN tried to regain its position by promoting itself as the defender of Western values and Christianity (Guolo 2000). The most spectacular action was a demonstration against the planned construction of a mosque in the outskirts of the city of Lodi, which featured slogans such as "Padania Christian, never Muslim". At the same time the party used its official newspaper to warn its readers of the fundamental danger posed by Islam, which was hanging over Europe like a "Damocles sword" (del Valle 1999).

In the 1990s, the populist right in Western Europe made the issues of immigration and multiculturalism the centre of its electoral appeal. Even those parties that had initially promoted themselves primarily as a force for fundamental political renewal increasingly focused on immigration (Andersen and Bjørklund 2000). There are a number of reasons for this turn of events:

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[14] Umberto Bossi, Pontida Ispeech, 2000. www.leganord.org/politica/comunicati/2000/giugno/pontida.htm, accessed on 15 July 2000.

[15] Republikaner Fraktion Garbsener Bürgerschaft, *Morgenland contra Abendland: Zwei Welten prallen aufeinander*. www.garbsener-buergerschaft/de/islam.htm, accessed in October 2000.

[16] See, for example, Bruno Mégret's speech, 16 November 1999, www.m-n-r.com/discourswagram.htm (accessed on 15 July 2000).

first, immigration promised to remain a major political problem for which there was no easy solution. In addition, immigration, more than most other issues, could be used against the political establishment, whose ambiguous and often contradictory positions and actions were prone to provoke public anger and resentments, given the widespread negative sentiments with regard to this issue among Western Europeans. This was particularly the case with respect to questions of cultural diversity and integration. This might partly explain the radical right's increasing focus on identity politics in the late 1990s, which could easily be framed in the larger context of globalization, thus appealing to diffuse anxieties and resentments generated by global change. This, at least, was the advice given by Franz Schönhuber, a former REP leader and still a highly influential figure in the radical right with strong ties, especially to the FN, who suggested that the radical right focus more on the religious and cultural aspects of globalization, which, in his view, were of "essential importance for the whole European right" (Schönhuber 1999). Finally, immigration was a concrete enough experience for many Western Europeans, and could therefore be easily used as an explanation for a number of societal ills, ranging from rising crime rates to the growing fiscal crisis of Western Europe's comprehensive welfare state.

Immigration has also been the one issue on which the populist right has had the most significant impact on the official political discourse. In the 1990s, virtually all of the major centre-right and centre-left parties in Western Europe adopted a more or less restrictive posture on immigration, residence and citizenship. The most recent example was Tony Blair, who, a few weeks before the national election, reminded the British voters that during the past three years, "Britain's asylum rules [had] been significantly strengthened not weakened" to the point that some criticized them as "unnecessarily draconian" (Blair 2001). As a result, right-wing populist parties ran the danger of being outflanked by the established parties. This might partly explain the declining appeal of some of these parties. It might also be an additional reason why the radical right in the late 1990s turned to the relatively new issues of culture and identity, although even with respect to identity politics, the radical right hardly had a monopoly on the issue.[17] However, this argument does not explain why other right-wing parties have done well despite the increasingly restrictive official line on immigration. One explanation might be that voters, seeing the impact of the populist right on the established parties, continue voting for the radical right to prevent the established parties from once again relaxing immigration policies. A second possible explanation might be that the voters of the populist right support far more stringent policies on immigration than the established parties have so far adopted—for example, a complete stop to transfer payments to asylum seekers, or severe benefit cuts for aliens (see Betz 2002a).

Whatever the motives, there can be no doubt that a large proportion of those supporting the radical right in the 1990s did so particularly because of the restrictive position of these parties with regard to immigration. This is hardly surprising in the case of overtly nativist parties such as the FN, the REP and the VB; but it has also been increasingly true of the initially less overly xenophobic parties. Andersen and Bjørklund, for instance, have demonstrated that even the voters of the Scandinavian Progress parties "are strongly opposed to immigration, which is seen as a threat to national identity, and a huge majority favour cuts in foreign aid" (Andersen and Bjørklund 2000:211). These results are compounded by studies based on an analysis of comparative survey data, which generally show a high correlation between support for right-wing populist parties and highly negative attitudes toward various aspects of immigration and multiculturalism (Knigge 1998:262–267).

The Social Basis of Exclusionary Populism

Right-wing radical and extremist parties have traditionally been most successful during periods when social and economic turmoil gives rise to popular insecurities, dissatisfaction and resent-

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[17]   In Italy, for instance, the Muslim threat was evoked by some high-ranking figures in the Catholic Church, as well as the well-known political scientist, Giovanni Sartori. See Biffi 2000; and the interview with Giovanni Sartori (*El Pais.es* 2001).

ment. Not surprisingly, the radical right's rhetoric resonated particularly among those social groups that were, objectively, the most affected by socioeconomic problems and change or, at least subjectively, felt their future prospects to be affected negatively by them. In the current debate on right-wing radicalism, this argument is captured by the "modernization loser" thesis. The thesis holds that the rise of right-wing populism in the 1980s and 1990s has to be seen in the context of a combination of large-scale socioeconomic changes, captured by notions of the end of mass production, the transition to postindustrialism, the information (technology) revolution and globalization. Each of these developments contributed to the undermining of the postwar Western European model of "organized (welfare) capitalism" while furthering tendencies of individualization and—potentially—"de-solidarization".

The modernization loser thesis is informed by the idea that large-scale socioeconomic and sociostructural change induced by the impact of the information revolution, globalization and the end of organized capitalism produces winners and losers, and affects different groups differently, depending on the individual's ability to adjust to, and take advantage of, the new situation. In the current environment, an individual's ability to cope with large-scale change depends critically on the amount of his or her cultural capital, that is, education and skills. The argument is that those groups that have relatively low amounts of cultural capital are most likely to see significant diminutions of their life chances, giving rise to anxiety and resentment, which, in turn, makes them particularly receptive to the radical right's resentment-based appeal (Betz 2001:413–418). Therefore, the individuals and groups most likely to support the radical right are persons with low levels of education, below-average skills, and particularly those who are unemployed or facing the threat of unemployment.

One important trend that seems to support the modernization loser theory is the increasing proletarianization of the social base of right-wing populist parties in Western Europe in the 1990s. In fact, during the 1990s, many of these parties turned into a new type of working-class party. This was particularly true in the case of the most pronounced xenophobic parties, such as the REP, the VB, and, particularly, the FN (resulting in what Nonna Mayer has called *ouvriéro-lepénisme*, focusing on Jean-Marie Le Pen's appeal to working-class voters, and what Pascal Perrineau has termed *gaucho-lepénisme*, focusing on the appeal to former left-wing voters) (Mayer 1999:85–91; Perrineau 1995). Thus, in 1995, VB support among blue-collar voters was twice as high (about 17 per cent) than among other occupational groups (about 9 per cent) (Swyngedouw 1998:71; see also Lubbers et al. 2000). One example is the LN, which in the early 1990s had attracted a cross-section of the northern Italian electorate. By the mid-1990s, its core constituency had:

> shifted to a group primarily composed of workers and artisans living in small towns and working for the myriad small and medium-sized factories located throughout Lombardy and the northeast. In fact, during the 1996 elections the League became [northern] Italy's largest working class party given the characteristics of its supporters (Beirich and Woods 2000:132).

Whereas in the early 1990s, only one out of six northern Italian workers had voted LN (16.6 per cent), by 1996, the party attracted almost a third (31.2 per cent) (Biorcio 2001:255–256). The majority of these workers were industrial workers from the private sector.[18] The FPÖ experienced a similar development. Between 1990 and 1999, the percentage of Austrian workers voting for FPÖ increased from 21 to 47 per cent. Among younger male workers, the FPÖ gained an absolute majority (57 per cent) in 1999 (Plasser and Ulram 2000:232–234; Ulram 2001:217). The same was true for the Scandinavian Progress Parties, which in the 1990s had also become working-class parties. In fact, in the 1990s, the two Progress Parties "obtained a higher proportion of workers among their electorate than any other party, including the Social Democrats" (Andersen and Bjørklund 2000:216–218).

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[18] In 1996, the proportion of private sector industrial workers among its electorate was twice as high (20 per cent on a national basis) as its overall result (10 per cent) (Maraffi and Segatti 1997:40).

It would be tempting to interpret the proletarianization of the right-wing populist electoral base as revolt against globalization and modernity in general. However, this is not entirely persuasive. In the 1990s, the radical right did particularly well in countries and regions that had high levels of affluence and relatively low levels of unemployment. In fact, Austria, northern Italy, Norway and Switzerland have some of the lowest levels of unemployment in Western Europe. Equally significant, a number of studies show that unemployment is much less directly associated with support for the radical right than might be expected (Knigge 1998:266–267), and with good reason, given the combination of high levels of unemployment compensation and the growing importance of active labour market measures characteristic of most Western European welfare states. This suggests that the dramatic increase in working class support for right-wing radical parties in the 1990s might have been less a direct response to structural change than an indirect response to the established (especially left-wing) parties' political response to structural change, in particular, the traditional left's gradual adoption of free-market doctrines, programmes and policies in the course of the 1990s, which appear to have left many working-class voters disenchanted.

While right-wing radical parties have increasingly turned into predominantly working-class parties, workers are hardly the only significant social group supporting these parties. Generally, the radical right has been particularly attractive to younger, particularly first-time, voters. At the same time, there has been a significant gender dimension, with women across all age groups much less likely to vote for the radical right than male voters. Although the gender gap has been one of the most fascinating aspects of the right-wing populist vote, little effort has been made to advance a detailed and convincing explanation that goes beyond the speculative and anecdotal (Givens 2004). Finally, the radical right has also attracted a significant number of white-collar voters, professionals and other segments of the self-employed—groups that generally are more likely to profit than to suffer from structural change. In the 1999 election in Switzerland, for instance, the SPV did disproportionately well among these groups. The same was true for the FPÖ, despite growing proletarization tendencies (Plasser and Ulram 2000:232; Longchamp 2000:406). Again, this suggests that support for the radical right has primarily political reasons; in this case perhaps disenchantment with the relative slowness with which governments have responded to global change, thus raising fears of loss of competitiveness or of falling behind.

The Right-Wing Populist Dilemma and Its Challenge

Contemporary right-wing populist parties have presented themselves as a new political force, beyond the antagonisms and cleavages that have traditionally defined left and right. Appealing to, and promoting, popular resentments, they have pretended that traditional conflicts, such as conflicts over the just distribution of resources, are no longer politically relevant. Instead, they try to push questions of community, and particularly identity, to the centre of political debates. However, the composition of their electoral base suggests that the radical right is faced with fundamentally contradictory and potentially irreconcilable interests and expectations, which are likely to become increasingly virulent. The FPÖ's recent dramatic losses in local, national and European elections are a strong indication of the likely consequences of this process. As the party has itself repeatedly acknowledged, the FPÖ's losses reflect widespread voter disaffection with a party that had promoted itself as the advocate of the interests of the "ordinary person on the street", while pursuing a policy of fiscal austerity once it came to power. Ironically, the most recent election results were above all an expression of protest against the FPÖ. This was reflected in the fact that the party lost a considerable number of its former voters to a growing pool of non-voters.[19] As one observer put it in 2001, frustration over the government's consolidation measures weighed more heavily with the "ordinary person on the street" than anti-foreigner slogans (Linsinger 2001).

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[19] According to one analysis by the Institute for Social Research and Analysis (SORA) in Vienna, more than a quarter of those who voted for it in 1999 did not vote in 2001. The results were published in *Der Standard*, 26 March 2001.

More generally, the recent dramatic losses incurred by the populist right in Austria, and to a lesser degree in northern Italy, suggest that the radical right is hardly less politically vulnerable than the traditional parties. On the contrary, unlike the traditional parties, populist parties derive much of their success both from the skills of charismatic leaders to appeal to a wide range of voters and from their ability to convince voters that a vote for them will force the established parties to pursue policies they would not have pursued otherwise (especially with regard to immigration). This might explain, in part, the hierarchical organizational structure and highly authoritarian internal climate characteristic of most of these parties, which guarantee a measure of cohesion. At the same time, hierarchical structures and an authoritarian climate tend to provoke dissent resulting in defection and splits, which, in turn, severely threaten the image these parties seek to portray of themselves. The drastic decline in support for the French radical right following the FN's split into two rival parties is a case in point—even if, in Denmark, the gains of the DF after its split from the FP show that decline is not always inevitable.

Finally, the radical right, like other new parties such as environmental/Green parties, are always faced with the problem of "issue theft" by the established parties. One reason the radical right in Germany (and also in United Kingdom) remained marginalized was that the traditional centre-right adopted a highly restrictive line on immigration. However, this argument should not be pushed too far. In most cases, this strategy failed to significantly reverse the radical right's electoral fortunes, especially when the radical right managed to present itself as relatively flexible with respect to new issues while at the same time maintaining a strong anti-establishment posture.

Despite the existence of a number of obstacles to new political parties in Western European democracies, the radical right has become a significant and relatively influential political force. Against expectations, most right-wing populist parties have remained a viable political factor that represents a major challenge to democracy and its fundamental values. This is not to say that the radical right poses a threat to the rules of the game of democracy, which all of the relevant parties discussed in this essay have accepted. Unlike in the past, what is at stake in contemporary Western Europe, is not the democratic consensus. Rather, it is something even more fundamental: the future of Western European identity and basic values. It is hardly a coincidence that the rise of the populist right has occurred at a time when Western Europe is trying to define itself in terms of a community of values "formed by the spiritual and political history of the continent", which can legitimately claim to have universal appeal (see Havel 2001:61–62). The populist right, with its aggressive promotion of ethnocentric nationalism, cultural nativism and exclusionary populism advances a notion of Western European identity that is diametrically opposed to the moral foundations of a community of values based upon the achievements of the European historical experience. With the populist right's gains in recent years, there is a danger that European identity might become little more than "a white bourgeois populism defined in opposition to the Muslim world and the Third World" instead of a basis for diversity and integration (Delanty 1995:155). Although there is no reason for alarm at present, it certainly is necessary to remain vigilant.

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