iscte

**INSTITUTO
UNIVERSITÁRIO
DE LISBOA**

The ECR party's critique of the federalist model of the EU: an alternative model of European integration in the shadow of the sovereign Nation-State

Ricardo Taborda Trigo Marques

Master in International Studies

Supervisor: Doctor Riccardo Marchi, Integrated Researcher,
            CEI-Iscte – Centro de Estudos Internacionais (ESPP)

September, 2023

Department of History

The ECR party's critique of the federalist model of the EU: an alternative model of European integration in the shadow of the sovereign Nation-State

Ricardo Taborda Trigo Marques

Master in International Studies

Supervisor: Doctor Riccardo Marchi, Integrated Researcher,
        CEI-Iscte - Centro de Estudos Internacionais (ESPP)

September, 2023

Dedication

Honestly, I am not particularly fond of dedications. I am quite restrained and circumspect, indeed. However, I would like to refer that, unfortunately, the recent demise of my former philosophy professor Paulo Tunhas, from the University of Porto, has suddenly but definitely changed my will. Therefore, since this research concerns the European conservative right, I found it pertinent to leave a sincere dedication to him. Undeniably, he was one of the greatest professors, I have ever had, and a unique intellectual in every category that Portugal loses. He was an unquenchable connoisseur of several engaging domains such as: theatre, music, cinema, literature, political science, history and obviously philosophy. Paulo Tunhas was a charismatic person that accurately and typically represented the Portuguese conservative right.

Acknowledge

My thanks go naturally and exclusively to Professor Riccardo Marchi for his constant solicitude and encouragement. His contribution not only proved to be a tremendous asset in determining exactly the research question but also in its subsequent operationalisation. As such, without his vast experience concerning the history of both Portuguese and European radical rights, this work would not have been possible, or at least carried out in the same way. Therefore, this actual and preponderant study was partly conceived due to his support. The eventual success of this dissertation is inseparable from his considerable knowledge.

Resumo

A voraz emergência do partido Europeus Conservadores e Reformistas (ECR) tem vindo a desencadear constante curiosidade e espanto quer por parte do meio académico, quer pelos tradicionais partidos europeus. Indissociável de temas em voga e tidos por definitivos como a globalização e o projeto federalista europeu, por ser um crítico acérrimo de ambos, o grupo ECR é considerado hoje em dia um partido tanto incontornável no campo do euroceticismo quanto temido pelos partidos tradicionais. Nos países europeus mais preponderantes, os seus principais membros ou estão no governo ou são o principal partido da oposição. Este facto deve, efetivamente, levar-nos a refletir profundamente sobre que modelo de integração europeia podemos e devemos ter uma vez que a crescente tensão entre os espaços doméstico e europeu gera quezílias, que paulatinamente vão desgastando e enfraquecendo a coerência e credibilidade da União Europeia (UE). Isto é, este partido não só coloca em causa o presente e dominante modelo federalista da UE, baseando-se em factos concretos ocorridos num passado recente, como também a sua visão pode constituir um prenúncio daquilo que poderá vir a ser o futuro da integração europeia. Como tal, o seu intrigante alternativo modelo de integração europeia torna-se um tema de pertinente análise, procurando conciliar a soberania do Estado-Nação europeu com o projeto de integração europeia. Deste modo, a inevitabilidade e relevância da confrontação entre o que este partido propõe e o projeto federalista da UE reúnem todas as condições para dar origem a um atual e impactante estudo.

Palavras-chave: ECR, federalismo, UE, Estado-Nação, euroceticismo, soberania

Abstract

 The voracious emergence of the European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) party has been triggering constant curiosity and astonishment both on the part of the academia and the traditional European parties. Inseparable from themes in vogue and considered definitive as globalisation and the European federalist project, for being a staunch critic of both, the ECR group is nowadays considered a party that is both unavoidable in the camp of Euroscepticism and feared by traditional parties. In the most dominant European countries, their main members are either in government or are the main opposition party. This fact should, effectively, lead us to reflect deeply on what model of European integration we can and should have, since the growing tension between the domestic and European spaces generates quarrels, which gradually wear out and weaken the coherence and credibility of the European Union (EU). That is, this party not only questions the present and dominant federalist model of the EU, based on concrete facts occurred in the recent past, but also its vision can constitute a harbinger of what could become the future of the European integration. As such, its intriguing alternative model of European integration becomes a topic of pertinent analysis, seeking to reconcile the sovereignty of the European Nation-State with the project of European integration. This way, the inevitability and relevance of the confrontation between what this party proposes and the federalist project of the EU gather all the necessary conditions to give place to a current and impactful study.

Key-words: ECR, federalism, EU, Nation-State, Euroscepticism, sovereignty

Table of contents:

Acronyms:

ECR- European Conservatives and Reformists

EU- European Union

ODS- Czech Civic Democratic Party

PiS- Law and Justice Party

SD- Sweden Democrats

FDI- Fratelli d'Italia

VOX- Voice of United Spain

Introduction

Since its foundation in 2009, the European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) party has gained more and more weight within the European Parliament's core. As referred by Steven (2016:1), *"The European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) emerged as the third largest 'Euro-party' after the 2014 European elections." The* notorious emergence of an immaculate soft Eurosceptic party not only poses a tough and tricky challenge to the current model of European integration but it might also suggest a glittering alternative to it. Definitely, its importance is far from being a trivial matter of fact. Therefore, the analysis of the ECR's position on the EU's model of integration becomes a pertinent and quite actual topic.

Over the past two centuries, radical changes concerning transportation and communication have been shaping our lives in a dramatic manner. Evidently, the speed at which we move from one point of the globe to another has repercussions on the way we conceive and see the foreigner. With an intriguing voluptuousness and unsupportable affliction, life and the way of experiencing life drastically altered. In addition, the titanic confront between the national space and the international sphere has arisen further in vogue and volatile, considering the inescapable tension, we are currently witnessing. Indeed, impactful discoveries might not necessarily result in pioneer and genuine transformations in the human condition. In fact, the natural acceleration of globalisation's advent was largely felt particularly within the regional level, with the transference of powers from the national to the supranational level in a dynamic of ever-increasing interaction between Nation-States within the European scenario.

In this line of reasoning, the plausible and teetering conjugation between the EU and the sovereign European Nation-State constitutes an ideal intellectual stimulus for researchers who intend to understand the reality as a whole. Obviously, this keen theme has profound historic roots that make it a fascinating case-study. The EU's peace and prosperity post-war project, nowadays even fostered by an enthusiastic European federalism, may interestingly be confronted with a Eurosceptic confederal model proposed by the ECR.

Moreover, the ECR's subtle critique must be understood in the light of a historical and appropriate context with several key points to guide us since the renowned Maastricht treaty to the present moment. Albeit Euroscepticism is a prior concept to the Maastricht treaty, it is at this point that permanently becomes conspicuous and slightly intolerable. Therefore, the 1990s onwards will be the period of time it definitely matters for us. That is, the puissant antechamber

of the ECR's psyche, when the side effects of globalisation began to be mainly felt alongside the EU's integration project evolution. The apparatus was grossly nourished by Euroscepticism. According to Brack (2010:2) *"Avec la campagne de ratification du Traité de Maastricht, il semble que les résistances à l'intégration européenne se soient révélées publiquement, tant au sein des élites politiques que des opinions publiques nationales."*[1] In other words, it will be required to delve into the striking incidents occurred in the last 30 years, taking into account the outcome achieved in terms of glaring divergences that effectively contributed to the creation of the ECR and its subsequent growth.

Historical context

Primarily, there is the indelible mandatory pre-requirement of tackling the significant period in which, concretely, the concept of Euroscepticism gained substantial form. According to Akbaba (2014:2) *"In the 1990s, criticism, resistance, and a certain amount of backlash— henceforth referred to as Euroscepticism—started gathering pace, and was mostly geared towards the European integration, or more broadly, towards globalization."* The 1990s were a crucial period of time geopolitically speaking. Underlying and ineffaceable events like the fall of the Soviet Union and the sign of the Maastricht treaty slowly helped build this picture of a European superstate. The vigorous emergence of the distinguished concept of Euroscepticism is everything but despicable or superfluous. It has deep and wide ties with this absorbing image of a European superstate because it utterly opposes it.

Although the last decade of the 20th century was full of impactful events, after the turn of the century, we were about to witness another symptom towards this European superstate desire. Underneath the elation of the Soviet Union's collapse, the biggest enlargement of the EU took place in 2004. According to Ultan and Ornek (2015:4), *"With the Eastern enlargement of the European Union in 2004 and 2007, ten new member states from post-communist Eastern Europe became as members of the EU and integrated into the structures and decision-making processes."* Definitely, neither the indole nor the number of countries that belong to the EU should be considered a contemptible nuance. Actually, Euroscepticism has been formed over time and it is inherent to few cutting happenings that concern the EU's structure and model.

---

[1] With the campaign to ratify the Maastricht Treaty, it seems that resistance to European integration has come to light publicly, both within political elites and national public opinion.

Furthermore, the stinging 2008 crisis composes another inerasable term. From 1992 to 2008, the EU only encountered prosperity. In other words, prosperity abundantly nourished peace. In this case, harmony among its members wasn't straight threatened. Indeed, struggling with the European party that the British Conservative Party should belong to, which was at the time the European People's Party-European Democrats (EPP-ED) group that existed from 1992 to 2009, under the command of the Tories, the ECR was built. Namely, the 2008 crisis corresponded to a difficult economic period that inaugurated polemical disputes thereby instigating the ECR's apparition. As a result, the 2008 crisis and the ECR's creation are two intertwined happenings, without which the evolution of Euroscepticism cannot be integrally understood.

Thus, the broad magnitude of the migration crisis in 2015 corresponds to another self-evident hurdle. In other words, the preposterous backwardness with which the EU solves its issues and implements assertive measures whereby overcomes the problems is once again limpid and crystalline. The worrying paranoia with which the European leaders reacted to the migration crisis made the ECR even more eager to integrate the main European stages. In fact, immigration can be a tricky double-edged sword. Unsurprisingly, this occurrence cannot plainly go unnoticed by the ECR because it vehemently marks a breaking point between the party and the EU's position regarding immigration.

Main features of the research

Henceforth, the focus will remain on the factors that led to the ECR's emergence as well as its urgent and imperative idea of reforming the EU. In order to do that, we should once for all keep in mind that some of its most preponderant members have achieved a huge relevance in their respective countries: Italy, Fratelli d'Italia (FDI); Spain, Voice of United Spain (VOX); Sweden, Sweden Democrats (SD); Czech Republic, Civic Democratic Party (ODS) and Poland, Law and Justice Party (PiS). As Manucci refers (2021:14), *"Considerable gains to right-wing populists occurred in countries where PRR parties were previously weak, for example Sweden (9.7% in 2014; 15.3% in 2019), Germany (from 7.1% in 2014 to 11% in 2019), Estonia (from 4% in 2014 to 12.7% in 2019), and Spain (from 1.6% in 2014 to 6.2% in 2019)."*

Moreover, their striking position on the EU's integration must not be neglected once they provide a nitid view of the unambiguous picture we would like to draw. Thus, such elucidative events ought not be underestimated because they broadly illustrate generalised symptoms of ascension of the populist radical right-wing in Europe. In today´s political panorama, the radical right is recurrently unleashing scattered obstacles to the European federalist endeavour. As

such, prominent fractures within the European Parliament's core are thoroughly carved out. In other words, it is fundamental to comprehend where, in the opinion of the ECR, the EU failed.

As it was mentioned above, this dissertation intends to identify the reasons behind the ECR party's critique of the enthusiastic federalist model of European integration as well as clarifying its alternative model. By providing an alternative model, a dynamic confederal Eurosceptic one, we are implicitly presented by plenty of unavoidable concepts we will be obliged to address. Thus, incisive concepts like: sovereignty, federalism and Nation-State will serve as a theoretical background to this pervasive study.

Nowadays, the grievous war in Ukraine is certainly at the top of the agenda. Once it concerns the EU's foreign policy and external action, its relevance is yelling and imperious. Not only the slowness and opacity observed, when it comes to take actions, can result in a lack of understanding and, sometimes remarkable disagreements among leaders, but also the starling bureaucracy involving a joint decision-making is whopping. Therefore, the ECR has another extremely relevant subject in which a thundering criticism is perhaps more than valid or justified. Its argute view on how to approach the determinant war in Ukraine is at least worthy of attention.

Object and objective of the research

First of all, I would like to mention that the following master's thesis was carried out under the FCT Project PTDC/CPO-CPO/28748/2017 ("The New Radical Euro-American Right in Portugal: A Comparative Perspective")

This investigation has the purpose of presenting the ECR party's critique of the European enthusiastic federalism thereby extracting a critique of the federalist framework by confronting it with its alternative confederal model. Even though the clash between the confederal model proposed by the ECR and the federalist project will be in vogue, we will avoid at all cost a Manichean outlook. Therefore, the object of this dissertation is the peculiar ECR Euro-group and its main members, specifically: FDI (Italy), VOX (Spain), SD (Sweden), ODS (Czech Republic) and PiS (Poland).

Obviously, the object and the objective of every research are extremely linked to each other. Understand the ECR party is, therefore, utterly necessary in order to comprehend its critique and the main reasons behind it. According to Akbaba (2021:5), "*In particular, starting in the 1990s, a challenge to European integration has come into existence in the form of*

Euroscepticism. This challenge is a reaction and direct response to Euro-enthusiasm, rather than specifically to the European integration process. In fact, the resistance hidden in the arguments of the ECR group is in the name of democracy, sovereignty and migration, not directly towards the existence of the EU itself, which the party seeks to reform." Concretely, the critique that the ECR party offers us is neither anachronic nor much less meaningless. In other words, the object has to be fully understood if we want to establish a coherent and narrow bridge between the ECR group and its reasonable critiques of the enthusiastic federalism framework and its inherent ramifications.

As such, the ECR party constitutes an unavoidable object, especially, nowadays because it drags an unremitting and inexorable controversy. Its study is not only relevant due to its electoral expression, already threatening mainstream parties' hegemony, but also to provide a closer perception to the events currently in progress within the European scenario. Moreover, the ECR's present can only be perceived if we study and try to dive into the past. Anyway, this meticulous research on the ECR has the predicate of providing us a clue of how the European future will necessarily unfold because the party has been witnessing a remarkable support that can be witnessed in the most preponderant European countries.

In this line of reasoning, it makes total sense to use the ECR group to contest and criticise the European federalism. Thus, both the ECR and the European federalism culminate in a verily intriguing case-study. The pertinent combination of the two, unsurprisingly, goes beyond the foam of days. Either has roughly its origin at the same epoch. That is, the ruthless advancement of the federalist endeavour gave rise to or was the main harbinger of the naissance of the ECR.

Therefore, this pertinent research has tremendous implications in order to perceive the present time we live in but also helps comprehend the past of the European integration evolution. For example, the fact that the myocardium of the EU is the Franco-German axis is not understandable if we do not realise that the EU was erected due to a profound reconciliation between France and Germany. Instead of naively or enthusiastically favour the EU's enlargement, the ECR prefers to go to the origins or roots of the EU thereby focusing on the essence of the European project. Hence, we are dealing with a study whose pertinence has its centre gravity in the present, an anchor in the past and it might always shape a somehow predictable future.

To sum this part up, the prodigal case-study such as the ECR party combined with a ruthless critique of the enthusiastic federalist project definitely generate not only a contemporary but

also an intertwined relationship between the object and the objective of this dissertation. In other words, there are good motifs to write another dissertation even when endless dissertations are already written.

Euroscepticism: soft vs hard

The sharp Eurosceptic narrative has become more and more recurrent in the contemporary European political landscape. As referred by Brack (2010:6,7), *"Le terme « euroscepticisme » a émergé dans les années 1990 comme notion permettant d'étudier les réactions, principalement des partis politiques sur les scènes nationales, vis-à-vis de l'intégration européenne."*[2] Namely, after the Maastricht treaty and the fall of the Soviet Union, this concept gained contours, we had never expected to witness before. Euroscepticism is, therefore, manifestly linked to this idea of a European superstate because it wholly contradicts it.

Before delving into the intricate and pertinent debate between soft and hard Euroscepticism, we should mention how political radical left and radical right carve Euroscepticism out. That is, an inherent and ideological distinction between political ideological varieties of Euroscepticism has to inevitably occupy the centre gravity of this relevant discussion. It is required to point out that we will attribute more importance to the distinction between soft and hard Euroscepticism, which better suits our purposes and research, than Euroscepticism on the radical right and on the radical left.

On the one hand, the radical left profoundly believes that the EU corresponds to an egoistic capitalist project and an unquenchable conspiration willing to foster free-trade and achieve profit at all cost. Especially, communist parties all over Europe sheerly mirror this dubious idea. Still, the vast majority of them has kept this skewed vision on the EU's integration model. According to Elsas and Brug (2016:3), *"The Euroscepticism of radical left-wing parties stems from their defence of welfare state arrangements and from their opposition to ongoing market liberalisation."* Particularly in the Portuguese case, that vastly helps explain why the Portuguese Communist Party was quite reticent about adhering to the EU. In this case, there is an explicit economic opposition and, therefore, an unshakable principled rejection. Taking into account that the European integration project started with a European economic community, this conflict is, indeed, quite insoluble. Radical left-wing parties vehemently oppose market

---

[2] The term "Euroscepticism" emerged in the 1990s as a concept for studying reactions, mainly of political parties on national scenes, to European integration.

liberalisation which might enter into conflict with their uninterrupted defence of the social State. In fact, these parties associate the EU with betrayal and lack of reciprocity.

On the other hand, the radical right, which is our case-study and therefore matters the most for us, tends to be suspicious of the benign effects that might emerge from an exorbitant and unmeasured integration project. According to Elsas and Brug (2016:3), *"Radical right-wing Eurosceptic parties on the other hand mainly take issue with the threat that European integration poses to national sovereignty and cultural homogeneity."* Moreover, the federalist endeavour is considered an unthinkable eventual repercussion of an incessantly intrusion and serious violation of sovereignty. In other words, the degree to which nations are willing to concede powers in order to belong to the EU is not innocuous or random. This is, naturally, the place where the ECR fits and assumes, nowadays, protagonism.

Henceforward, the cutting clash between soft and hard Euroscepticism will be in vogue. The two modalities of Euroscepticism primarily manifest displeased about the EU's efficacy to promote equity and nourish prosperity. Nevertheless, the degree to which they oppose the European integration project is, perhaps, the most important factor to truly take into account. As referred by Taggart (2002:5), *"HARD EUROSCEPTICISM is where there is a principled opposition to the EU and European integration and therefore can be seen in parties who think that their counties should withdraw from membership, or whose policies towards the EU are tantamount to being opposed to the whole project of European integration as it is currently conceived."* In this case, there is an inherent and inflexible opposition to the EU, regardless of what might come across. Especially, this modality of Euroscepticism is guided by a principle and therein lies the rub. We face an ideological opposition to the European integration project. hard Eurosceptic parties do not vehemently want to belong to the EU. They emphatically claim that the EU is a failed entity and, consequently, is not reliable and triumphant.

On the contrary, soft Euroscepticism, which is where the ECR is located, mainly opposes an enlargement of the EU. As referred by Taggart (2002:5), *"SOFT EUROSCEPTICISM is where there is NOT a principled objection to European integration or EU membership but where concerns on one (or a number) of policy areas leads to the expression of qualified opposition to the EU, or where there is a sense that 'national interest' is currently at odds with the EU trajectory." At* the first glance, we do not have a principled opposition if we wish to establish a comparison with hard Euroscepticism. Yet, soft Eurosceptic parties oppose some measures or policies that can interfere with their national interests. That is, an explicit skirmish and,

therefore, tension between the national panorama and the European scenario. Embedded in the soft Eurosceptic camp, the ECR group is characterised by an unflinching opposition to a federal EU and suggests than the only possibility is an immaculate Europe of nations, what according to them would be the famous Euro-realism. As referred by Akbaba (2014,6), *"Thus, as acknowledged by the group, assuming this as a part of their role, they are to defend the citizens against the bureaucratic structure of the EU. The role, the party group assumes, is important in emphasizing the EU not only as a community of the States but also of the Citizens."* Considering the non-traditional or outsider parties, the ECR is by far the most delightful voice within the spectrum of left and right Euroscepticism. Therefore, not only its soft Euroscepticism must be equated but also its alternative European integration model.

Literature review

 The following literature review has focused on three directions: Euroscepticism on the right and on the left since the 1970s, right-wing Euroscepticism in the European Parliament since the 1990s and the European Conservatives and Reformists as a case-study. The first phase had to do with the concept of Euroscepticism. As Hooghe refers (2007:4), "Contrary *to much of continental Europe, Euroscepticism has found a home in mainstream parties. In the early 1970s it constituted a powerful strand within the Labour party, and since the 1980s it has surfaced strongly in a divided Conservative party." Particularly*, the indispensable distinction between hard and soft Euroscepticism. Here, placidity and discernment were extremely helpful in order to provide a resplendent sight of the history of Euroscepticism as well as its candid roots. Thus, the elaboration of the Eurosceptic narrative was interpreted in the light of a historical and appropriate context, without which we would not have any ground to shape and establish solid connections with the other two phases. It is worth emphasising that France and the United Kingdom, with famous voices such as Charles de Gaulle and Margaret Thatcher, can be considered two of the first countries that represented Euroscepticism thereby criticising the federalist project and being favourable to a Europe of Nations.

The second part has concentrated on the identification, qualification and distinction between the diverse indoles of radical right-wing parties in the European Parliament as well as its origins and background, always searching for a pertinent and feasible comparison with the ECR party. Obviously, the epoch has ranged from the Maastricht treaty to our days. According to Brack (2010:6), " *L'opposition de plus en plus visible à l'Europe tant au sein des élites politiques que dans la population depuis l'adoption du Traité de Maastricht (1992) s'est accompagnée d'une*

littérature abondante, reflétant l'intérêt académique croissant concernant la nature, les origines et les perspectives de ce qui a été labellisé « euroscepticisme »."[3] Main definitions and interpretations of prevalent concepts were obviously taken into account in order to accurately scrutinise the populist radical right. Since the fall of the Soviet Union and the sign of the Maastricht treaty, radical right parties all over Europe have definitely converged into a slow but common electoral steady success. This fact is everything but despicable or trivial. Not only helps explain the present but it might also have a verisimilar and credible impact in the foreseeable future. The historical evolution of Euroscepticism cannot be fully understood with the essential benchmark of the Maastricht treaty and the 1990s.

 The third phase involves the ECR party. Its history was naturally sought to be understood in view of the underlying historical path we had to go through. According to Steven (2016:2), *"Despite this, ECR is a relatively under-researched political movement, certainly compared to other longer established European party families or groupings*." Its members as well as their ideologies and positions on the several domains that are related to the European integration project were vastly considered. ECR's plasticity and versatility are a proof of wealth and hermeticism whenever we wish to understand the party univocally. The intertwined relationship between its main members and the unavoidable concept of Euroscepticism had, therefore, lots of material to talk about. Doctor Martin Steven is a nuclear author whenever we think of the ECR and, simultaneously, a profound connoisseur and researcher of the group. His meaningful insights are decisive if somebody intends to study or be familiar with the ECR party.

 Furthermore, once a vast majority of populist radical right parties have their bedrock on a doubtful and cautious European sight, we tried to link the European populist radical right to a Eurosceptic narrative. Genuinely, each one of these three phases is utterly intertwined with each other. Consequently, the ECR has a quite palpable relationship with either Euroscepticism and the populist radical right in the European Parliament, which obviously fused were the motto of the literature review of this dissertation.

Methodology

---

[3] The increasingly visible opposition to Europe both among political elites and among the population since the adoption of the Maastricht Treaty (1992) has been accompanied by an abundant literature, reflecting the growing academic interest regarding the nature, origins and perspectives of what has been labelled "Euroscepticism.

The methodological camp is intrinsically related to three parts or phases: the type of data collected, how are the data collected and how are the data analysed. As such, it becomes indispensable to justify what kind of data was collected and what were the criteria and tools used. Therefore, beyond a theoretical analysis, this research combines an empirical component, whose purpose fucoses on data from the ECR group and its main members, with a historical and theoretical approach.

Hence, it was implemented a qualitative methodology because the ECR is party with a considerable plasticity. That is, composite or versatile could also be terms used to describe the party once a vast majority of its members are radical right populist parties but there is also some room for: conservative right-wing parties, social right parties, liberal parties and also centre-right parties. Moreover, the fact that some of its the main parties have suffered alterations over time, that is, with the radicalisation of conservative parties as a major example, confirms even more this plasticity.

The methodology carried out was a documental analysis in which key-words and meaningful sentences were taken into account. Once a documental analysis is never an easy task, documents were compared to each other in order to extract the desired data, according to the topics in which there is a huge gap between the EU and the ECR. Immigration and nationalism are two obvious examples. Furthermore, the selection of : Fratelli d'Italia (Italy), Sweden Democrats (Sweden), Polish Law and Justice Party (Poland), VOX (Spain) and Civic Democratic Party (Czech Republic) had overwhelmingly to do with their electoral expression and therefore political strength because they are either government in their respective countries or the main opposition party.

Nevertheless, it should be pointed out that too many parties would correspond to a confused approach whereas two or three would not constitute a valid or solid sample. As a result, not only the number was considered adequate but also their geographic dispersion across Europe was seen as a sign of enrichment of the research and demonstration of the almost omnipresence of radical rights populist parties across Europe. VOX and the Sweden Democrats illustrate that geographic dispersion, proving that it is not an exclusive symptom of central Europe.

Concerning the interviews, we must specify that four interviews per each one of the five ECR members were took into consideration. The interviews were as recent as possible and were made by journalists from the respective countries. Moreover, the target of the interviews were the leaders of each one of the parties. Only regarding the PiS there were interviews with the

president used as a complement to interviews with the prime-minister, which had particularly to with the complexity in the polish case.

In addition to interviews, oral and written speeches of each of the party leaders were an object of analysis. An oral and written speech was collected from each of the members of the five parties in question. Both can be found on YouTube as well as the interviews. Such as the interviews, a documental analysis of oral and written speeches was equally carried out. The common adjective of federalism and the reference to the word sovereignty clearly mirror what the documents of the different parties actually have in common. The synchronic defence of national self-determination cannot be seen as a trivial or irrelevant data. Thus, party websites were also considered given the fact that they represent a primordial source of information. On the website of each party there is a section for every category, namely there is an EU section concerning the topics in which they believe the EU has gone too far. Immigration, the EU's democratic deficit, the approach to the war in Ukraine and the notion of federalism and the confederalist alternative are examples of this disagreement.

Obviously, the data analysis concerned the translation issue. It was implemented a minutely translation word by word, according to their meaning within the context and the intention of who utters these words. Namely, key-words were taken into consideration to extract a desirable content that aimed at achieving our goals. Specifically, there is a fundamental distinction we have to establish, concerning the literature data and the data that does not come from de literature but from documents like interviews and speeches. When the reference is a party leader, it means that it does not have to do with a literature data but an interview or a speech. When the reference is not a party leader, quite simply it means that the reference can be found in the scientific literature. Naturally, all the information can be found in the final bibliographic section.

The ECR's history

The road to the ECR's creation in 2009

The history of the ECR party is intimately linked to the rise of Euroscepticism and generalised dissatisfaction with the direction that the current model of European integration was taking. Furthermore, in the first decade of the 21st century, the displeasure with the course that the EU had been following and adopting has definitely materialised. According to Steven (2016:2), "ECR *was established after the previous elections in 2009 by politicians from the United Kingdom (UK), Poland and the Czech Republic who were uncomfortable with the federalist*

policy of 'ever closer union' (European Union 2009) promoted by the main centre-right group, the European People's Party (EPP)." Nevertheless, its eruption in 2009 was just the culmination of a common desire against a greedy federalist design and a will to create an alternative thereby generating a powerful opposition and looking forward to reach consensus.

On the one hand, its foundation is inherent to the British Conservative Party. As referred by *Gaweda* and Miller (2022:3), *"The Tories played a central role in the birth of the group."* It is well-known that the British Conservative Party has ever represented a charismatic source of Euroscepticism, even before the Maastricht treaty. The former prime-minister of the United Kingdom Margaret Thatcher constitutes an unavoidable and paradigmatic voice whenever criticism resonates the federalist project. For peculiar motives related to British exceptionality, such as the fact that Britain is an island, the English vision on the European integration has ever been composed of containment and suspicion.

On the other hand, the ECR party is undeniably a vast debtor to the figure of David Cameron. According to Gaweda and Miller (2022:2), *"The group was born out* of *divisions in the UK Conservative Party, when David Cameron sought to take the party out of the EPP, seen as too integrationist."* Seemingly, David Cameron wanted to stood by a European constellation. In fact, at the time that preceded the ECR's origin, the British Conservative Party lived a troubled and unsettled period due to inauspicious feelings connected to the unfold of the ongoings. That is, nostalgic uncertainty attached to the European party they should belong to. Moreover, gloom divergences within the party left David Cameron with scarce choices.

However, this marriage between the Tories and its congeners goes back to the year of 2003. According to Akbaba (2014:7), *"An* initiative *commenced in 2003 was the first step taken by the Czech Civic Democratic Party, the British Tories and the Polish Law and Justice Party, in issuing the 'Prague Appeal'."* Shared preoccupations gradually conducted to a joint edification. The naissance of the conservatives and reformists went from an ideal mirage to an explicit reality. The document denominated "Prague Appeal" was designed to counter what was conceived as a movement towards a European superstate whose governance would mitigate and, eventually, knock down the sovereign European Nation-State. In other words, the right to national self-determination was in danger and the conservatives saw the need to intervene thereby defending their values. It turned out to be an idiosyncratic manoeuvre.

All occurrences require contextualisation. We should bear in mind that the single currency came into circulation in 2002. Albeit the Maastricht treaty was an unquenchable catalyst in the proliferating narrative of Euroscepticism, the introduction of the single currency in 2002 lengthen even further the transformation of the European community into the European Union. This way, the 2003 reply is understandable in the light of what was an increasingly shattered reliability on the leading European institutions and a doubtful evolution from an economic community to a political union.

Notwithstanding, the 2003 appeal was just a flashpoint of a chain of events. Their rapprochement was mainly due to repudiation of an increasingly strangling EU. An attempt to halt the federalist design ended up being inevitable. Following the above findings, neither the British Conservatives nor the Czech Democrats had the embryonic pretension of forming a new party. Rather, either party proudly showed discouragement and was utterly upset with the turn of events and, consequently, the intrusive European treaties. In truth, they were at the mercy of alien will. The likelihood that it was precisely necessity that brought parties together to erect the ECR is probably huge. Moreover, the intense state of affairs was prone to a central party abrasion and a natural extension to the verges. Indeed, the trend remained so unshakable that not overlapping parties converged into a coherent steady heartiness.

Nonetheless, the process wasn't a trivial piece of cake. After David Cameron stabilised the situation within the British Conservative Party, concerning the European party he must inhere, he was finally ready to initiate a bright and abiding dialogue with the Czech Civic Democrats (ODS) and the Polish Law and Justice Party (PiS) in order to edify a new European political party. These three parties constituted the backbone of the ECR, providing it with an institutionalised consistent strength as well as a conservative and ideological robust personality. We must mention that it didn't take a long time. In politics, circumstances like time and space drastically supply an ephemeral component.

According to MaDonnell and Anika (2020:1), *"While the European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) group was formally created in 2009, its roots lie in the conflicts over the previous two decades within the UK conservatives, regarding the party´s position on Europe."* As such, the British Conservative Party, under David Cameron's egis, played a remarkable role in bringing the group together. Given the fact that David Cameron roundly swept away the path towards a promising initiative, imbued with a crystalline disposal, we are forced to recognise

what the ECR really owes him. Basically, it appears that the ECR is in its essence an astounding heir of the British Conservative Party.

Furthermore, the economic component is inherent to the political matter. The onerous and blurred period of the subprime crisis has definitely bolstered the ECR's creation. A skewed transparency has immeasurably proliferated a colossal scepticism about globalisation, immigration and the own European integration project. The growing unsatisfaction bounded up the levels of confidence in the European organisms therein causing massive distrust. The 2008 crisis helped back up the ECR's ideals, favouring its charming cogitations. Everything went smoothly and elegantly to the ECR, leisurely eradicating any sort of mistrustfulness. As referred by Ivaldi (2014:3), *"Les élections de mai 2014 ont témoigné d'une accentuation de la fragmentation du système de partis transnational et du déclin des acteurs « mainstream » dépositaires historiquement du projet européen."[4]* All of a sudden, the space occupied by central parties got slightly hollowed out, leaving an unprecedent vacuum. According to Gaweda and Miller (2022:2), *"Due to the weakening of the centrist political groups that traditionally formed majorities in the EP (notably the European People's Party, EPP, and the Socialists & Democrats), the influence of the ECR has steadily increased.*" It sounds that the ECR has benefited from the weakening of central parties therefore taking advantage of the situation to start implementing and promoting its own agenda. The lopsidedness and accentuation of the expected polarisation in the European glebe was overwhelmingly felt by conventional centre parties thereupon dropping tons repleted of incongruency and distrust that bit by bit inundated and transformed the European Parliament configuration.

As far as we delve into the major details that led to the creation of the ECR party, we definitely realise how complex and tenacious are its founding members from a political point of view and, of course, how intricate its political philosophy might sound. Considering their political courage, in the ECR nothing is taken for granted. In other words, perseverance and volition simultaneously characterise its founding members. The mysterious and abundant harvest will be even more emphasised within the following chapters.

From its foundation in 2009 to our days

---

[4] The May 2014 elections demonstrated an accentuation of the fragmentation of the transnational party system and the decline of the "mainstream" actors who have historically held the European project.

From 2009 onwards, step by step the ECR party constantly conquered more and more adhesion from external parties within the context of the European Parliament. It is worth mentioning that according to the European Parliament (2009:5), *"Every political group must be made up of 25 MEPs from at least 7 Member States."*

Table 1: Composition of the ECR party in the European Parliament in the 2009 elections

Party	Country	Number of Deputies
British Conservative Party	The United Kingdom	27
Polish Law and Justice Party	Poland	12
Czech Civic Democratic Party	Czech Republic	9
Liberty and Direct Democracy	Belgium	1
The Fokus Party	Denmark	1
The Christian Union	The Netherlands	1
For Fatherland and Freedom	Latvia	1
The Christian Families Alliance	Lithuania	1
The Hungarian Democratic Forum	Hungary	1
Croatian Party of Rights	Croatia	1

https://www.europarl.europa.eu/election-results-2019/en/breakdown-national-parties-political-group/2009-2014/constitutive-session/0011.png

In 2009, the ECR reached 55 members in the European Parliament, achieving the fifth position only in its first year of existence. According to Alexandre and Jardin (2009:2), "*Il faut y ajouter les 55 députés du nouveau groupe des Conservateurs et Réformistes Européens (CRE)*"[5] The party was erected with a strong conservative feature, supported mainly by: the British Conservative Party (United Kingdom) 27, PiS (Poland) 12 and the ODS (Czech Republic) 9. These three parties formed the backbone of the party with a total of 48 deputies within the 55 ECR deputies.

---

[5] To this must be added the 55 deputies of the new group of European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR).

Not only the ECR has become increasingly noticeable but also its electoral expression has begun to be feared by traditional power parties. From the mainstream parties' point of view, suddenly flooding the core of their unswerving convictions, the ECR may look like a jocose intruder by messing up the landscape apprehension in the European Parliament therein jeopardizing their credibility and perhaps coherency.

From the ECR's foundation to our days, three leaderships held tightly its ambitions and goals. Like this, it becomes imperative to go through the most preponderant and pernicious events that contributed to its evolution and help explain what the party is today. For example, supposedly Brexit was inadvertently a remarkable downside, turning the table of what had been an inviable rise. Moreover, the departure of the Tories should not be overlooked. A party, whose ideological base was British conservatism, had to adapt and perhaps to metamorphose to continental European conservatism.

Unequivocally, the ECR's sudden evolution cannot be dissociated from the 2008 crisis. Consisting of voracity and avidity, the 2008 economic crisis tangled up the European financial system, stressing the fact that the European Central Bank either takes measures that protect the German banks or benefit the Greek economy. According to Hobolt and Vries (2016:2), *"In return for these credit arrangements by the EU, jointly with International Monetary Fund (IMF), the debtor countries had to engage in significant fiscal retrenchment and structural reforms. The economic and social consequences of the crisis within the EU have been far-reaching." Apparently*, a deep flaw in the unhinged European economic model was found out. The baffled European financial system was inadvertently in shambles. Partially because Germany and Greece have the same currency and utterly unlike economies, but also due to an unquenchable chasm hovering over Europe's psyche. The huge and stark contrast between peripherical and central countries categorically antagonised the state of affairs. The sloppiness and delay with which the European leaders dealt with the financial crisis worsen and exasperated countries, whose political parties got closer to Euroscepticism. The ECR's splendid voyage was about to kick off.

Mainly due to the economic crisis but safely to other factors, the ECR party achieved the third position in the European Parliament in 2014. Fatally, a financial crisis foments displeasure and instigates radical right and radical left movements. According to Hobolt and Vries (2016:2), "*In Greece and Spain, we have witnessed the rise of challenger parties, Syriza and Podemos, who campaign against the austerity associated with the bailout programmes.*" Once the ECR

party is composed of members to whom, scepticism is more than palpable in relation to the EU's management, the party's ascension was an authentic aftermath and not a fortuitous coincidence. It was just a matter of meticulously riding over that fragility, stressing particularly the increasingly contrast between the peripheral countries and the Franco-German axis.

As such, the triumphal meddling within the European stage besides being legitimate, was expected. According to McDonnell and Anika (2020:2), *"This made it the third-largest group in the EP, narrowly surpassing ALDE."* From 2009 to 2014, the ECR party acquired and cemented further strength of Eurosceptic supporters, based on how the EU poorly managed the crisis. We should point out that the ECR improved its force from 55 places in the European Parliament in 2009 to 70 in 2014, which culminated in the ECR group as the main Eurosceptic European party. The ECR was about 9,3% of the European Parliament members. One can easily infer that the 2008 financial crisis and its subsequent development undoubtedly nourished the Euroscepticism phenomenon. Thus, it truly constituted another unavoidable catalyst, contributing to the spread of the Eurosceptic narrative. It reflected symptoms that unequivocally pointed at a softened loss of sovereignty.

Naturally, when this occurs, the answer is usually a rise of nationalism. The ECR's explosion has fed on permanent query about the health and durability of the European project and the reduction and, eventual, dilution of nationalism. Furthermore, the economic crisis' stoutness has emphasised one vulnerability of the European project. Not all countries that belong to the European Union have the same fate. This aspect is everything but despicable. In order to be a nation, you must share a fate. Despite being redundant, it is totally veracious.

During the 2008-2014 period, the European nations did not share a fate. This fact achieved its unflinching climax in the 2014 European elections. It was totally different to be a 24-year-old Greek young man, whose ambitions would naturally be limited by stratospheric unemployment and precarious jobs, and a 24-year-old German young man, whose horizon was placid and promising. National voters reacted energetically by expressing their desire in an utterly divergent manner. Maybe reflecting the flagrant degree of unhappiness and melancholy felt within the domestic panorama thereby catapulting a baffled frame.

In other words, a tough discourse against globalisation and the threat that massive immigration represents put swiftly and sharply nationalism in evidence, provoking an unprecedent eruption. Nationalism was sluggishly emphasised, wrecking ideals we had already taken for granted.

Ruthless events confer a 180 shift. Crises or chaotic moments produce the magic tool of making us review our steadfast and sublime beliefs.

As referred by Alexandre and Jardin (2009:12), *"La création du groupe des CRE qui devient ainsi la quatrième formation au sein du Parlement européen signale l'émergence d'un conservatisme plus atlantiste et anti-fédéraliste et pose la question de l'avenir du PPE désormais confiné au continent européen et dominé par un axe franco-allemand."[6]* The ERC's vibrant and dynamic alternative in favour of NATO and famous for withering criticising the Franco-German axis and the federalist project, gradually began to question mainstream parties' hegemony and their inevitable policies.

From 2009 to 2014, all the necessary elements were blowing in the favour of the flourishing and prosperous ECR so that in 2014 electorally the party sophisticatedly accomplished its zenith. In 2014, the PiS and the British Conservative Party held 19 deputies each one. In a total of 70 deputies, 38 belonged to the two main parties. Yet, the ODS party registered a considerable tumble from 9 to only 2 deputies. Consequently, the conservative strand sluggishly began to dissipate with the weakening of the ODS party and it would be accentuated both with the radicalisation of the PiS and the departure of the British Conservative Party. However, we should give some credit to the other parties, as well, who achieved 32 in total as illustrated in the following table.

Table 2: Composition of the ECR party in the European Parliament in the 2014 elections

Party	Country	Number of Deputies
The British Conservative Party	The United Kingdom	18
PiS	Poland	18
The Alternative for Germany	Germany	7
The New Flemish Alliance	Belgium	4
The Danish People's Party	Denmark	4

---

[6] The creation of the ECR group, which thus becomes the fourth formation within the European Parliament, signals the emergence of a more Atlanticist and anti-federalist conservatism and raises the question of the future of the EPP, now confined to the European continent and dominated by a Franco-German axis.

The Czech Civic Democratic Party	Czech Republic	2
Finn Party	Finland	2
The Christian Union-Reformed Political Party	The Netherlands	2
Croatian Party of Rights	Croatia	1
The National Alliance	Latvia	1
The republican party	Ireland	1
Family party of Germany	Germany	1
NOVA	Slovakia	1
Ordinary People and Independent Personalities	Slovakia	1
The Ulster Unionist Party	The United Kingdom	1
Christian Families Alliance	Lithuania	1
Reload Bulgaria	Bulgaria	1
Bulgarian National Movement	Bulgaria	1
The Independent Greeks National Party	Greece	1

https://www.europarl.europa.eu/election-results-2019/en/european-results/2014-2019/constitutive-session/0007.png

We should definitely stress the emergence of The Alternative for Germany with 7 new members and the entrance of many more new members, culminating in a shift from an original conservative ideology to a palpable radicalisation. We must note that the acceptance of both the Finn Party and the Danish People's Party in 2014, who had been refused in 2009, also helped the ECR obtain a considerable electoral expression in 2014.

According to Ivaldi (2014:7), *"Ces mouvements réunissent au total 79 sièges contre 52 en 2009 et 49 en 2004.''[7]* The populist radical right had been in constant strike since the 2004 to the 2014 elections, owing largely its abrupt rise to the ECR party and its electoral achievements. At this time, we should definitely point out that the British Conservative Party has never been a populist radical right party, emphasising the abyssal difference between a populist radical

---

[7] These movements bring together a total of 79 seats compared to 52 in 2009 and 49 in 2004.

right party and a party with a conservative ideology. They were a conservative party based on a liberal-conservative ideology. Furthermore, populist radical right parties tend to be highly critical about the main democratic institutions despite accepting the democratic game, which the far-right does not. The distinction between the radical right and the extreme right is not insignificant, especially nowadays. Actually, a conservative party is neither authoritarian nor sees the pivotal democratic institutions with evil eyes. Quite the contrary, a conservative party deeply believes in the maintenance of the leading democratic institutions in order to achieve a stable and cohesive society with slow but palpable progresses. In other words, a conservative party does not want a profound change of the system such as most populist radical right parties.

Table 3: Composition of the ECR party in the European Parliament in the 2019 elections

Party	Country	Number of Deputies
PiS	Poland	26
Fratelli d'Italia	Italy	5
Czech Civic Democratic Party	Czech Republic	4
The British Conservative Party	The United Kingdom	4
VOX	Spain	3
People´s Party for Freedom and Democracy	The Netherlands	3
Sweden Democrats	Sweden	3
The New Flemish Alliance	Belgium	3
Bulgarian National Movement	Bulgaria	2
The National Alliance	Latvia	2
Freedom and Solidarity	Slovakia	2
The Reformed Political Party	The Netherlands	1
The Christian Families Alliance	Lithuania	1
The Independent Greeks National Party	Greece	1
Croatian Party of Rights	Croatia	1

Family party of Germany	Germany	1

https://www.europarl.europa.eu/election-results-2019/en/european-results/2019-2024/0007.png

The tide was undeniably favourable. Turmoil was unimaginable. However, neither the perennial nor the nirvana has place in this world. Nothing foresaw the drawback, but from 2014 to 2019 the party not only had a small tumble but also witnessed a change of leadership. ECR's composition was severely affected due to the ongoing departure of the Tories that had a significant weight within the European Parliament's core, which bit by bit resulted in a transition from a predominantly conservative ECR to a party with a substantial dose of radicalism. The ECR, founded by the Tories, begins its course by being a typical Eurosceptic conservative party based on the English conservative tradition. However, the initial project of the ECR started modifying its configuration due to the shift to the right of the PiS and the entry of populist radical right parties such as the FDI.

In the 2019 European elections, the ECR group witnessed a small decline due to the increasingly weaking of the British Conservative Party. In 2019, the imminent ascension of parties such as: Fratelli d'Italia, VOX and the Sweden Democrats was already predictable due to their electoral achievements and generalised rise of the European radical right. Not only the path towards radicalisation was confirmed but also the conservative component was succumbed by the consolidation of the Poles. Additionally, the following withdrawal of the British Conservative party from the EU severely undermined the ECR's prestigious reputation, dwarfing its weight within the European Parliament´s core. The myocardium of the ECR party had decided to abandon the European integration project, provoking uncertainty and an imminent foreseeable tragedy. In fact, unbearable consequences were predictable.

On the one hand, Brexit was perhaps as unpredictable as impactful. It revealed itself an onerous obstacle to the ECR's growth. According to Steven and Szczerbiak (2022:6), "*Clearly, there was a much deeper mission that drove the ECR forward. Its overall MEP total may have been slightly lower after the departure of UK MEPs from the Parliament but, given that the grouping was predicted to collapse altogether after Brexit, it remained a significant vehicle in Strasbourg in the 2019–2024 session.*" In spite of the expected effects of Brexit, the ECR's heart has remained intact. Rather, there was a tangible fear of the collapse of the party and an unintended fragmentation.

On the other hand, the withdrawal of the British Conservative Party from the European Parliament left room for the (PiS) the Polish Law and Justice Party to take over and assume the party's command. Time was required to absorb disparities and implement continental conservatism. Still, the party kept the foundational sheer and stunning ideals preconised by the Tories, expelling a slashing speech against a mismatched European federalism.

Specifically, we must refer that the Finn party (PS) had already tried to integrate the ECR along with the Danish people's party (DF) since 2009 but they were only accepted in 2014. The Finn Party had previously been a member of the ECR from 2014 to 2019 but when the Tories decided to abandon the party with Brexit, they joined the Identity and Democracy. However, it is worth mentioning that the Finn party returned to the ECR in April 2023 after winning the elections.

As referred by McDonnel and Anika (2020:3), *"Similarly, following policy congruence theory, the Danes' and Finns' move to the ECR from the EFD (in which they had sat alongside UKIP and other parties), implies that in 2014 they were a better fit with the ECR with either the EFD or the prospective radical right populist ENF group that Marine Le Pen and Geert Wilders were attempting to set up."* Now that they can get closer to the government of Finland, they prefer to distance themselves from the pro-Russian parties thereby entering into a more institutionalised party like the ECR group due to the consistency provided by the Poles and the Czechs. By the way, the fresh adhesion to NATO in 2023 not only confirms Finland's serious concerns with the war in Ukraine but also gives absolutely no space for complaisance.

As a matter of fact, in 2019 Fratelli d'Italia and VOX entered the ECR party, boosting its foreseeable future. The prominence of the Fratelli d'Italia party propelled it directly to the leadership of the ECR in 2020. It is worth mentioning that Fratelli d'Italia has tried to integrate the ECR group since its foundation in 2012. However, due to Giorgia Meloni, leader of FDI, origin in the neofascism, the Tories have ever rejected her proposals. Hence, after Brexit the PiS leadership has unmeasurably facilitated the ascension of Meloni's party within the ECR until her presidency of the party. In addition, Giorgia Meloni's aegis has nowadays generated looming easiness in the hosts of the European Parliament. An overwhelming ubiquitous discourse has moved onto solid ground. It seems that after the shaken period of Brexit, the ECR party was reborn and regained vivacity to face its perhaps bright future.

ECR nationalism vs EU superstate

Immigration

Immigration is a recurrent and superlative topic that accurately features the populist radical right. According to Ivănescu and Filimon (2022:4), *"Cas Mudde's theorization on the topic of far-right parties and ideologies remains one of the most cited. According to him, at the core of all these parties, the ideological strata comprises the following three traits: nativism, authoritarianism and populism."* Cas Mudde is a nuclear author and researcher whenever the populist radical right is on the table. His enlightening and precise insights are as instructive as actual. Nationalist parties tend to be suspicious of the benign side that immigration brings. At least, they are selective about the type of immigrants they want. Unmistakable values such as multiculturalism do not prevail over the Christian tradition, internal cohesion and security. Definitely, the combination of concepts like: nativism, authoritarianism and populism with precision define and scrutinise closely populist radical right parties' peculiarities and strategies.

According to Ivaldi (2014:6), *"En politisant de nouveaux enjeux culturels, ces partis ont progressivement structuré une offre idéologique nationaliste ethnocentriste, se posant en remparts contre les « dangers » représentés par l'immigration, les minorités ou, désormais, l'islam. Leur repli identitaire est assorti d'un chauvinisme du welfare, c'est-à-dire la volonté de réserver aux seuls nationaux l'accès aux ressources et à la richesse nationale"*[8] As a matter of fact, these parties might see immigration as being a perverse task and a disruptive element, more than capable of threatening the viability of the irreproachable and taken for granted welfare State by contributing to the idea that immigrants enjoy the wealth created by native people. Undeniably, the immigration topic is as current as relevant. It flagrantly drags secondary question marks and side effects that ordinary people were not expecting. Thus, the 2015 migration crisis thoroughly portrays our goal. It is an event that beautifully mirrored this maybe questionable idea that immigrants enjoy the wealth created by native people. As we shall witness, for the ECR and its main members, homogeneity is not negotiable, leaving no room for the threat that multiculturalism might pose to nations.

As the European Union's treaty refers (2016:6), *"Regular immigration: The EU is competent to lay down the conditions governing entry into and legal residence in a Member State, including for the purposes of family reunification, for third-country nationals. Member States*

---

[8] By politicizing new cultural issues, these parties have gradually structured an ethnocentric nationalist ideological offer, positioning themselves as bulwarks against the "dangers" represented by immigration, minorities or, now, Islam. Their withdrawal into identity is accompanied by welfare chauvinism, that is to say the desire to reserve access to resources and national wealth for nationals only.

retain the right to determine volumes of admission for people coming from third countries to seek work. Integration: The EU may provide incentives and support for measures taken by Member States to promote the integration of legally resident third-country nationals; EU law makes no provision for the harmonisation of national laws and regulations, however. Combating irregular immigration: The European Union is required to prevent and reduce irregular immigration, in particular by means of an effective return policy, in a manner consistent with fundamental rights." There is a sparkling difference between what the EU and the ECR defend in terms of immigration. The most clamorous concerns illegal immigration. While the ECR is completely intransigent with illegal immigration, the EU's intentions are preventing and reducing it with an effective return policy, nonetheless, based on the charter of human rights. The ECR is utterly intolerant with illegal migration whereas the EU leaves some room for tolerance, following the charter of human rights thereby colliding with the rule of law. In other words, the EU puts human rights above security and decision-making capacity. This is evidently the point in which the doctrine divides itself.

Furthermore, the fact that Member-States only determine the amount of people they accept from third countries to work there is another absolutely crystal clear example of a bureaucratic and intrusive EU through its rules and regulations. Indeed, the EU is above Member-States' decision-making capacity to decide whether they want immigrants or not. In the background, there is no limpid reciprocity between what the EU intends and Member-States' will. This example is evidently intertwined with the EU's democratic deficit that we will witness later on.

According to the ECR group (2022:5), *"In reality borders protect us. They define the places in which our laws are applied. They safeguard our democracies, and our European way of life. They help keep unwanted criminals out."* The ECR party has a quite peremptory policy on mass migration. Not only considers that it is one of the challenges of the 21st century but also alerts to its perils. Considering the demographic trends and the political processes underway, mass migration is a topic in which cooperation is indispensable. Moreover, the ECR deeply believes that there are regions of the globe that are inherently unstable and therefore protecting the European way of life is indispensable. As a result, borders are seen as a useful and necessary tool in order to face the coming challenges. According to Ryszard Legutko (2021:10), *"Or perhaps, by "primacy" you mean that European institutions will decide which areas are under their competence and which are not. And national institutions will have no power to oppose their decision. But this is a very dangerous concept, extremely dangerous because it gives the EU omnipotence and omniscience it does not have, it cannot have, and to be frank, it does not*

deserve." The secretary of the ECR, Ryszard Legutko, is quite frontal when it comes to be assertive and indicate where the European institutions have exceeded their respective functions thereby reducing and shrinking national competencies and sovereignty. Particularly, the European commission and the European parliament. The ECR's strongest criticism focuses on ignoring Member-States' basic right to control immigration. Thus, from the ECR's point of view, the European commission does not accurately respect sovereignty, which safely raises strong suspicion and containment about this powerful and often intrusive institution.

Particularly in the case of Italy, the rough concern with, above all, illegal migration but also immigration is understandable in the light of the preponderant geographic position that this country occupies in the Mediterranean. Nothing is diametrically impinged. Circumstances and constrains always help but, certainly and predominantly, a heady ideology is the most important factor to regard. According to Giorgia Meloni (2023:2), *"La soluzione qual è? Difendere I confini esterni dell'unione."[9]* Meloni is pragmatic when it comes to approach the immigration topic. In her mind, the world is composed of sovereign States whose right to rule must not be neglected or overlooked. Therefore, it ends up being their decision and responsibility.

There is an evident and intrepid refusal of the migration pact, which is the Dublin pact in 2013, supported by a ruthless nationalist reply. In other words, controlling its respective borders is a duty of each State and we cannot impose on others what they don't want because it has everything to do with their own sovereignty. In the background, immigration is a determinant national competence and the EU should not interfere with States' jurisdiction. Intromission is particularly and very likely quite unpleasant.

As Giorgia Meloni refers (2023:2), *"Noi possiamo fare finta che il tema non esista. Ma oggi la questione è anche un fatto di sicurezza."[10]* As we have the chance to witness, immigration is definitely a safety issue. In addition to not being a trivial topic, when it is massive, its insipid outcome may be disastrous. Therefore, Meloni wants a redistribution of migrants in her own way and fair, that is, to other Member-States that should share the burden, unlike Victor Orban the prime-minister of Hungary, who does not want to divide and carry the immigration onus. Thus, according to Meloni's rhetoric, the national interest is an imperative and always comes first. With Meloni there is one genuine certainty: the oneiric is put aside and declined due to spurious and sterile designs. An assertive pragmatism prevails over the reverie. Tradition and

---

[9] What is the solution? Defend the external borders of the union.

[10] We can pretend the theme doesn't exist. But today the question is also a matter of security.

identity are preserved against the unknown. The real doesn't enable the ideal. Engagements are stripped down of ethics.

Accordingly, Meloni is pellucid when this question of illegal migration comes up. It doesn't matter whether it has to do with a human right or a futility. The State is irrevocably a sheer sovereign and is not to blame for the migration problems or the eventual biased transparency associated to the process. In other words, the State solely decides if allows the entry of migrants. It is not forced to do anything because ultimately is sovereign. That is, it has autonomy to determine and carry the burden of its own decisions.

On the contrary, she believes the problem is solved in the source and not posteriorly mitigated. According to Giorgia Meloni (2023:2), *"Il diritto a non emigrare. La soluzione non è spostare millioni di africani dall'Africa all'Italia. La soluzione è capire come si possano aiutare quelle nazioni."*[11] Considering the demographic trends in Africa and the Middle East, the solution is to gently help these countries have better living conditions and reduce the gap between developed and developing countries. Otherwise, we would be constantly postponing and running after the loss or prejudice. Hence, there is little room for skewed cooperation between States in Meloni's view. She is definitely peremptory. Nevertheless, each State should be highly responsible and carry the burden that its decisions inadvertently give way to. Concretely, in spite of her rough approach, she deeply believes the problem must be solved at the European level. That is, the EU should assume full responsibility for its southern border, which aggregates Italy. Therefore, she is definitely not isolationist in this sense. She is unequivocally a brave decision-maker but not isolationist.

Still in the case of the VOX Party, the posture adopted does not seem to fluctuate much. Regarding immigration, the party is scathing, leaving no space for doubts or delicacies. As referred by Santiago Abascal (2020:2),*" Si coincidimos con alguien en una posición de defensa de las fronteras y de defensa de la inmigración legal y ordenada que es nuestro planteamiento."*[12] Santiago Abascal is frontal and tenacious regarding immigration. Not only VOX is on the side of who defends this approach but also is not ashamed to assume positions

---

[11] The right not to emigrate. The solution is not to move millions of Africans from Africa to Italy. The solution is to understand how those nations can be helped.

[12] If we agree with someone in a position of defence of the borders and defence of legal and orderly immigration, that is our approach.

that for many could imply a setback. Hence, Abascal claims that would agree with the socialist party if this party advocated these assumptions.

As Meloni stated, combatting illegal immigration is definitely an absolute priority. It is an imperative in the unpolluted Europe of sovereign nations they would rather see. Moreover, immigrants must be carefully chosen by each Member-State. In other words, we cannot impose or force other sovereign nations to accept or refuse people. It is up to them. In the interview, Abascal is questioned whether his ideas are against the European project. He goes on with the narrative by saying that there are parties in Europe that presumably share his views on immigration and are not against Europe. Perhaps, they are against this model of European integration, which is utterly different from being against the European project, no matter what. In other words, Abascal is, therefore, in favour of other European model of integration with necessarily more sovereignty for each Member-State.

According to Santiago Abascal (2020:2), *"Sino los que puedan por razones culturales adaptarse mejor a vivir entre nosotros en ese sentido la inmigración procedente de los países hermanos hispanoamericanos es una inmigración que tiende a integrarse con facilidad en la sociedad española y por lo tanto creemos que un país tiene que poder decidir qué tipo de inmigración recibe."[13]* This passage is absolutely crystal clear. The authentic message that both Giorgia Meloni and Santiago Abascal want to convey in terms of cultural cohesion and immigration control is perfectly mirrored. Sometimes, the degree of identification can be stronger with more distant countries. Abascal strongly reinforces this demystified thought by adding that Latin American countries are privileged in relation to Muslim immigrants.

Without stretching too much, we should point out that the speed at which an immigrant adapts to the culture of the country, he would like to go, is not worthless. Nevertheless, the performance of Abascal and Meloni must not be neglected. Their stubborn arguments are valid whether we appreciate or not their rhetoric. Moreover, they are compelling and peremptory. Nationalism is a factor of union. Furthermore, it binds a society together making it further cohesive. Blending may cause preposterous consequences.

---

[13] If not those who, for cultural reasons, can better adapt to living among us, in that sense, immigration from the Spanish-American sister countries is an immigration that tends to integrate easily into Spanish society and therefore we believe that a country must be able to decide what type of immigration you receive.

Moreover, Poland constitutes a paradigmatic case in which internal cohesion and immigration are two subjects intimately related to each other. Despite being a quite marked nation, Poland has nowadays a tremendous identity and a vigorous nationalism. According to Dominik Tarczyński (2019:11), *"It´s not about Ukrainians who are allowed to come to Poland it´s about illegal migrants who wants to cross our borders."* Nowadays, the war in Ukraine has been in vogue for trenchant reasons. As a usual outcome of every war, there were people who tried to escape from it. Due to geographic factors, Poland was one of the most targeted countries. It is located next to Ukraine. In spite of the initial difficulties, when Poland received war refugees, the country adopted a favourable posture towards Ukrainian refugees. Nonetheless, in the same line of reasoning as Meloni and Abascal, Poland manifestly opposes illegal migration. Still, we get the impression that this country is open to establish a dialogue with other partners.

Nevertheless, the inhospitable narrative goes on. According to Dominik Tarczyński (2019:11), *"It has nothing to do with the Muslim religion, it´s not islamophobia, is someone trying to tell us it´s all about this moment and this fact that at 2015 Angela Merkel started this madness and now this is a problem about Muslims coming to Europe. I´m surprised they are not going to Saudi Arabia."* This excerpt neatly transmits what the polish party thinks about this matter. The chimera is refuted by reality. We are dealing with a nasty preconceived idea about other States and cultures.

On the one hand, Dominik Tarczyński, one of the most incisive deputies of the Polish Law and Justice Party, is a tremendous critic of the way the Europeans dealt with the refugee crisis in 2015. Notoriously, in Dominik Tarczyński's opinion, it has surpassed the limits, interfering with the vital right to national self-determination. His main criticism points to Angela Merkel who embarked on a policy in favour of human rights but against nations' intentions. The migration pact and nations' desires were incompatible and spawned dissention, according to this leader. At this point, we unwittingly reach a sumptuous dilemma. Politics has, perhaps, nothing to do with ethics. Machiavelli would certainly agree with us. The issue is that nowadays we are surrounded by the speech of political correctness and these parties are guided by coldness and realism.

On the other hand, there is a window of opportunity to realise how dauntless is this discourse, particularly against Muslim immigration. At least, it is suspicious of the positive effects that might emerge from it. Despite trying to hide it, these leaders have nitid prejudices about the Muslim community, constantly pursuing a ravishing discourse to contain them. It sounds that

there is a sharp and unrestrained allergy to Muslim immigrants. Indeed, Europe is a place for Christianity. Perhaps, Europe has an overwhelming historic issue with Islam that doesn't want to reveal or demonstrate. As referred by Dominik Tarczyński (2018:7)," We *took over two million Ukrainians who are working who are peaceful in Poland. We will not receive even one Muslim because this is what we promised."* There is no place for political correctness in his dictionary. His approach is guided by a harsh frontality.

Furthermore, the Czech Civic Democratic Party has something to say about this ordinary omnipresent issue as well. The federalist project does not fit in with Czech Republic's constrains. According to Petr Fiala (2022:7), *"The Czech Republic is one of the countries with highest number of Ukrainian refugees per capita. There are more than 3.5 percent refugees in our population now." Concerning* the war in Ukraine, Petr Fiala, the prime-minister of the Czech Republic, shows a transparent solidarity towards Ukrainian war refugees. Moreover, he believes one of the keys to stretch out the European future is to construct a Europe where dialogue reigns. Preponderant areas of common interest must be on the table for an abiding and profitable discussion. Obviously, immigration does not narrowly escape the rule. Europe must carefully cooperate in order to have a bold laughing future.

Thus, for the prime-minister of the Czech Republic, immigration is a matter of security to. As referred by Petr Fiala (2016:9)*," Needless to say, that uncontrolled migration also means a sad crisis. The security crisis for Europe namely in the form of terrorism."* He sagaciously criticises the way the EU managed to get rid of the tough migration crisis. In addition, he seems to suggest that the migration crisis not only has hurt some countries more than others but also its biased management had intrinsically to do with political interest. According to him, an unregulated migration has potential to provoke insecurity and nurture an economic crisis thereby widening the gap between the Franco-German axis and the peripheral countries.

Categorically, the prime-minister of the Czech Republic enjoys this topic to address a scathing criticism of the federalist endeavour. According to Petr Fiala (2016:9)," If *a State wants to succeed and defend its interest in the current versatile and unstable international and security environment, it needs conditions and means for flexible brisk reaction. Reality shows that the straitjacket whatever close union does not allow for such conduct."* This statement faithfully mirrors the yelling relevance that immigration has to a country. It interferes with the internal juridical system by opening exceptions and makes internal borders permeable. In fact, the migration pact, specifically the Dublin pact in 2013, was a mistake and these parties wholly

agree on it. In other words, it revealed itself a quite misleading tool, uncapable of eradicating polemics. Moreover, it defied a nuclear norm in the EU that is equal treatment for every EU member. The migrations crisis definitely represents a whopping moment in which solidarity was more than questionable. Petr Fiala judges this was an awful situation that fomented distrust and help bolster the ECR towards a magisterial alternative. There was no limpid consensus on austerity. On austerity every attempt to stimulate a common solution turned out to be hopeless.

Still, the Sweden Democrats don't escape the rule. Even though Sweden's geographic location is in Scandinavia, this party is inflexible about the immigration task. Its immeasurable nationalism challenges immigration. According to Richard Jomshof (2018:11), *"Today the threat comes from many directions. From a supra-national and anti-democratic EU, which threatens our self-determination."* Perhaps, in this case we are facing an exacerbated nationalism. Nevertheless, this vibrant and ruthless narrative against multiculturalism and immigration had already been seen before. Immigrants also pose a threat to the national welfare State. This is the speech that most echoes. In other words, this party appeals to a nationalist sentiment thereby criticising immigration. As such, it evokes the fact that Sweden owes what today has to its ancestors. A nation is made of history. Time is required to build an identity, personality and share a destiny.

Whilst, the argument is backed up by a persuasive logic. As referred by Richard Jomshof (2018:11)," The *results of the mass immigration and multi-culturalism of recent decades is clear. Sweden, once safe and homogenous country, is now characterised by division, segregation, alienation and a lack of security."* As we have already witnessed, immigration is an exorbitant safety factor. The Sweden Democrats align with the other ECR party members. It might remind us of the Polish discerning counter-current discourse against multiculturalism and in favour of a homogenous society. Nationalism has its roots well-established. A panoply of necessary services is being affected by mass immigration. Schools, hospitals and the own welfare State, according to Richard Jomshof the former secretary-general of the Sweden Democrats, have suffered catastrophic effects. In his opinion, Swedish people have become a minority in their country and have lost priority to a bunch of services they have worked for.

In conclusion, to these leaders, immigration is a whooping and embracing theme used to foment their positions on several aspects that focus on criticising globalism and multiculturalism thereby confronting a severe nationalism and an unthinkable European superstate. Besides quite relevant, nowadays immigration is a topic in which right and left-wing

tend to disagree with each other. As we had the chance to witness, due to the demographic trends in Africa and the Middle East, immigration will definitely be one of the wounds of the century for an aging Europe thirsty for young workers.

Christianity

Religion is an impregnable component that trustingly represents radical right's authoritarianism. Nativism and authoritarianism are two fundamental aspects that illustrate radical right's languid intransigence. According to Cas Mudde (2015:3), "*In the late 1980s nativism was primarily framed in ethno- national terms with economic concerns, but particularly since the terrorist attacks of 9/11 West European populist radical right parties (PRRP s) have shift ed to an ethno- religious discourse with strong liberal democratic and security concerns. Concretely, whereas previously "Turkish immigrants" were opposed because of their different culture and alleged drain on the economy and welfare state, today "Muslim immigrants" are rejected because of their purported anti- democratic beliefs and violent culture.*" Both the immigration topic and the religious appeal fit in Cas Mudde's accurate theory to describe the populist radical right. This author provides us a historical and entire explanation of the inseparable relationship between religion and nativism. In other words, nativism intends to oppose two divergent group: the natives who belong to the nation and the foreigners who can be considered intruders.

Therefore, this antithesis can be understood as a potential threat to the sovereign European Nation-State. That is, the populist concept is perfectly mirrored here because we have a Manichean opposition between the good and the evil. As such, both factors are related to each other in the sense that one religion may brutally oppose others thereby constructing a pre-conceived idea on some immigrants. Particularly, Muslim immigrants. Considering the five most relevant parties of the ECR, only the Sweden Democrats because Sweden is not a Christian country, don't follow a Christian narrative and a return to a Europe of Christianity. A daring return to the origins. As we will testify later on, a desired return to a Greco-Roman culture.

As referred by the European Union's website (2021:9), *"The right to freedom of religion or belief includes the freedom to change one's own religion or belief and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest one's own religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance."* The EU has a befitting vision with its wished multiculturalism. It is clearly in favour of freedom of religiosity and condemns every persecution, either whether it has to with a belief or a religion. In this camp, the EU is as open

as the ECR but the ECR favours a Christian narrative embedded within a nationalism frame. In this department, the great distinction is related to the fact that the ECR group is more hostile towards Islam, and therefore, to Muslim immigrants.

The ECR party has a convicted position on this matter. The party vehemently believes that religious freedom is an indispensable human right. According to Charlie Weimer (2021:12), *"My urgent appeal to the commission is therefore: look around you and see how the persecution of faith is increasing worldwide. Quickly give us an EU Envoy, really quickly, and provide substantial civil service support."* The ECR party sees religion as a fundamental groundwork in order to obtain a stable EU. An EU with a lack of credibility out of borders may become teetering and divert its own attention. In addition, the ECR's proposal for a special Envoy for freedom of religion and belief is understandable in the light of the restrained freedom of belief observed worldwide. A society that aims at an astonishing development must preconise a deep liberty of belief in order to avoid unwelcome ramifications. Moreover, belief has everything to do with actions. Our actions are overwhelmingly guided and hammered out by our most profound beliefs and the ECR is totally aware of it.

Consequently, in spite of the spurring Christian doctrine preached, the ECR is favourable to a plural society in which freedom of religion and belief prevail. As referred by the ECR group (2021:5), *"Religious freedom is under tremendous pressure. It is violated every day in many parts of the world. ECR Members have founded the European Parliament's Intergroup on Freedom of Religion or Belief."* Currently, religious liberty is constantly threatened, according to the ECR group. So that, multiple actions should be carried out in order to rectify these defaults all over the world. Therefore, the ECR party deeply believes the EU should have a more assertive role to support and look after persecuted people due to either their religious beliefs or non-religious beliefs.

Concretely, religion is an in-dept tool whenever we think of Georgia Meloni. Not only is an instrument evoked to galvanise a society but also a pretext to unite families. As Meloni refers (2019:10),*" Io sono Giorgia, sono una donna, sono una madre, sono italiana, sono cristiana. No me lo toglierete, no me lo toglierete, mi vergogno, mi vergogno di uno Stato che non fa niente per le famiglie."[14]* Tradition and identity are inseparable, according to Meloni. Furthermore, conservatism has values that does not negotiate and prescind. Therefore, her

---

[14] I am Giorgia, I am a woman, I am a mother, I am Italian, I am Christian. You won't take it away from me, you won't take it away from me, I'm ashamed, I'm ashamed of a state that does nothing for families.

vision is settled in a family society in which families play a basal role. Hence, she fiercely wipes out every sophisticated attempt to weaken and melt her sharp identity by proposing a free society from a social point of view. Meloni believes the State must help strengthen families though she is in favour of a less interventive State from an economic point of view.

Moreover, Giorgia Meloni is not a unique person in this field. In the same line of reasoning, the head of VOX almost fully underlines her thoughts. According to Santiago Abascal (2021:9), *"Una Unión Europea que respete la soberanía, una Unión Europea que defienda las fronteras, una Unión Europea que defienda el derecho a la vida, que respete a la familia, una Unión Europea orgullosa de sus tradiciones cristianas y eso son los proyectos comunes."*[15] Santiago Abascal's opinion is completely crystal clear. He intends a Christian Spain that harshly defends its values and sees families as a profound pillar of the society. What he vehemently advocates for Spain, strongly supports for the EU. In other words, a prudent EU that protects its families and defends its Christian heritage. A society with a glaring character and a deep personality. We should point out he does not deviate much from Giorgia Meloni's vision. Indeed, their accentuated opinions on religion and cultural values are neighbours of each other.

Definitely, their shared sight is understandable in the light of what is an overwhelming authoritarianism that faithfully characterises them. Religion and social values are inseparable. Religion is, therefore, a mechanism used to foster their ideals in favour of a family society that utterly opposes LGBT minorities and Muslim immigration. Hence, they have strict norms that they do not abdicate. Intermittencies and spasmodic novelties should not take place.

Yet, the Polish Law and Justice Party is an underlying suspect if we want to gauge the degree of religiosity within the ECR. According to Dominik Tarczyński (2019:11), *"We don't want Poland being taken over by Muslims, Buddhists or someone else. For us, Christianity is identity, as our DNA is very important."* This quotation accurately depicts *the* religious clash among the various religious. The PiS is not afraid of telling the truth. As we mentioned above, religious clash is presumably ubiquitous and historical. The most striking differences between them should not be underestimated. Thus, Christianity is a nuclear engine of Polish society.

---

[15] A European Union that respects sovereignty, a European Union that defends borders, a European Union that defends the right to life, that respects the family, a European Union that is proud of its Christian traditions, and these are the common projects.

According to Archbishop Jedraszewski (2019:11), "*From the very beginning, the history of the Polish State and Polish nation were connected with the history of Christianity. Hence, this special role with these three elements: Christianity, nation and State were so tightly connected, they were almost inseparable.*" It sounds the Polish case is a screaming one. The Polish State has its roots well-established in the Christian tradition. Not only the PiS party utterly supports a family society but also strongly opposes LGBT minorities. This party is blunt when it comes to words like racism or homophobia. That is, they do not care whether they are called racist or homophobic. Chaos and disorder should not take place because Poland is totally aware of its sorrowful history. An ingrained Christianity floods the heart of Polish conservatism.

Asked whether his party was against preventing and combatting violence against women, Dominik Tarczyński shrewdly replied he was against LGBT ideology and the outcome of dissemination and, eventual, annihilation of the family society he preconises. According to Dominik (2020:5), *"It's not about LGBT rights. Everyone is equal in Poland, everyone is free. This is a democratic country. It's about pushing, promoting and using money for the organisations with the flags of the rainbow. They are making money on it. They want to get into the schools and the children."* As such, he recognises that there are currently some threats to his Christian values and family society. Its authoritarianism is thrilling. There is no time for any kind of delirium or chimera. Nevertheless, the harsh and ostensive discourse climaxes in a frequent intoxicant absorption. Still, to this author we get the impression that Islam and democracy cannot coexist, are somehow incompatible.

Thus, Czech Republic also follows this Christian, traditional and conservative narrative. Petr Fiala, its prime-minister and leader of the Civic Democratic Party, considers that Czech Republic has a Christian tradition, western values and way of life that Czechs people cannot obliterate. Even though the weight is perhaps not as notorious as in the other three parties mentioned, Christianity has an unescapable meaning for Czech people. Christianity has not vanished. In other words, the religious appeal is not as exacerbated as it happens with Meloni or Abascal, though not meaningless. Rather, we are merely introduced to a bunch of concepts that contribute to Czech conservatism.

As the ODS party refers (2014:3), *"The ODS is a liberal-conservative party based on the traditions of European Christian civilization, the humanitarian and democratic legacy of the First Republic and the experience of Western democracies. In our program, therefore, we promote individual freedom, the rule of law, and the free market, which is the best prerequisite*

for general prosperity. In the same way, we stand for the standard functioning of Western-style liberal democracy, therefore we reject eternal attempts to find third ways, collectivist ideologies and naive attempts at non-political politics." This way, the ODS party firmly believes there is a precious linkage between the European Christian civilisation and democracy. Moreover, we get the impression that democracy is a western value, supported by an irreproachable Christian ethic. Thoroughly squeezed, they believe that the European Christian civilisation is the bold harbinger of the democratic world.

As such, there is the nitid proclivity to contradict Islam and illiberal democracies. In this context, western civilisation means the civilisation of democracy, enlightenment, secularisation between State and church and, therefore, human rights. At the expense of paradigmatic revolutions and increasingly achievements, western civilisation was sluggishly brewed. In other words, there is a necessary construction over time that we cannot cut off and enhance everything from the starting point. Consequently, individual freedom, the rule of law and the free market are values that the conservatives are not willing to give up. In this line of reasoning, ODS's conservatism is inserted within a crystalline context which follows the democratic Christian tradition with conservative social morality and economic laissez-faire.

As a result, although the ECR's ideology is deliberately embedded in a narrow Christianity, the party strictly advocates a freedom of religiosity. According to Steven and Szczerbiak (2022:17), *"Those MEPs were completely comfortable with using the conservative term, and owning such a label, and often promoted policies associated with this political tradition in their approach to European integration, transatlantic relations, the single market and business, and 'family values' and Christianity." Its* glad goals are clairvoyants. To conclude, it genuinely sounds that Christianity has not become an obsolete doctrine and, with all its plasticity and versatility, the ECR party follows it. Instead of crumbling, Christianity is looming again.

ECR confederation vs federation

The ECR party is definitely an unquenchable critic of the grasping federalist European framework. A relentless nationalism lethally does not allow the federalist endeavour to demolish the longstanding sovereign European Nation-State. According to the ECR group (2018:4), *"The European Union must change; the status quo is not an option. Some argue that the solution is more Europe; others that the solution is no Europe. But the ECR believes that neither federalist fundamentalists nor anti-European abolitionists offer real solutions to the problems faced by Europe today."* The ECR's alternative does not intend to abolish the

sovereign European Nation-State by proposing a federalist frame, nor wishes to withdraw from the tenacious European integration project. Erratic forays shall be threatened minutely.

On the one hand, abandoning the EU would be almost as radical as suppress the European Nation-State. In fact, identity and concession of powers are not trivial phenomena. Inevitably, every integration project implies some kind of loss of sovereignty. In other words, a healthy balance between the sovereign European Nation-State and an integrated Europe is perchance necessary and commendable. Therefore, neither the greedy federalist framework totally fulfils the nationalist insatiable thirst nor leaving the EU would be a promising solution. According to the ECR, respecting the rights and sovereignty of Member-States is wholly indispensable.

On the other hand, diligence is requested in order to meet an even integration project with lucidity and a reasonable amount of optimism. According to the ECR group (2018:4), "*The European Union has overreached. It has become too centralised, too ambitious, and too out of touch with ordinary citizens. Only this eurorealist agenda offered by the ECR will achieve positive results and meet the expectations of the peoples of Europe.*" Thus, the ECR group considers that, over time, the EU has slowly subjugated nations' sovereignty by becoming too centralised and extremely obsessed, perhaps even masochist, with a fanatical superstate whose right to govern would derive from a poor democratic transparency among the main driving European institutions. Its criticism focuses not only on a dubious democratic deficit but also on an EU reluctantly suffocating.

Furthermore, its proposal looks for a sensible and viable model of integration. Hence, a confederalist model would necessarily imply more autonomy and decision-making capacity for every Member-State, by opposition to the federalist model. Indeed, the EU was founded by nations already defined and perfectly functional. It would be at least bizarre and ironic to elaborate an entity that would conduct to the destruction of its creators. As referred by the ECR group (2018:4), *"The ECR instead offers a bold alternative vision of a reformed European Union as a community of nations cooperating in shared confederal institutions in areas where they have some common interests that can best be advanced by working together."* An immaculate Europe of sovereign nations and not a nation of Europe. That is, quite similar to the vision that both Charles de Gaulle and Margaret Thatcher idealised. A Europe of nations which respects Member-States' sovereignty and their unavoidable cultural heritage. Moreover, the EU should accept union in diversity and refuse an unreasonable superstate that would create an overwhelming imbalance between Member-States and the EU in terms of competencies.

Notwithstanding, the intellectual clash between the federalist model and the confederalist alternative turns out to be, in the last analysis, profoundly a question of political philosophy and ideology. While not precarious or despicable, this thematic hurdle tends to grab nowadays' attention. Naturally, there are fairly good vicinity arguments in favour and against. Possibly, the federalist effort would much likely clamp down on Nations' nationalism and trigger unstoppable tedium on the European continent.

Albeit federalism might sound more translucent and easier to put into practice, a confederalist option would perhaps offer a more lasting and sturdier laughing future. At least, further faithful to the truth and to the unfolding of the last unsteady events that have largely contributed to dissonant and penetrating voices. At the first sight, a utopic federalism may look like a jocose necessary simplification. However, it does not benevolently eradicate common problems and looks after nations' primordial interests. On the contrary, it can severely aggravate a tenacious agony felt within the EU's core.

Common currency

The single currency is a major mark in the EU's history. Obviously, the condensed nature of this issue is comprehensible whenever trade is implicated. It facilitates exponentially the ambitioned free-trade zone. Nevertheless, the euro entails simultaneously deep sorrow and profound joy. On the one hand, it brings tremendous advantages once it represents a vibrant catalyst and preponderant harbinger of free-trade and, consequently, of the single market. On the other hand, nations are intrinsically dependent upon the European Central Bank to inject money into the economy or print currency, which has tremendous effects in terms of nations' sovereignty. The 2008 crisis has already showed some disputes. The common currency is more than relevant within this instructive narrative of the ECR confederation vs federation.

Therefore, main ECR members' view on the euro will be required in order to deepen and widen our knowledge about the party's opinion on the single currency. According to Balas (2023:17), ""*The euro has been a great deal for some states and a bad deal for others. [..]The nation that lost out the most was Italy (...). We will therefore ask Europe for compensatory measures (...). We need a radical reform of the European Central Bank; we need to reaffirm the public nature of Bankitalia and the gold reserves.*" Although Fratelli d'Italia's position seems stubborn and paradoxical, Meloni's party proclaims a change of the single currency. Still, this position is highly double-edged and ambivalent, as they mention in the article. In other words, the euro

ends up providing considerable gains and substantial losses. The most assertive and viscous critique claims for an urgent and radical reform of the perfidious European Central Bank.

Hence, we get the impression that national banks are subordinated to the European Central Bank. For example, nowadays the issue of interest rates and inflation have been in evidence. That is, the rise in interest rates helps some countries in controlling inflation whereas others are damaged. Obviously, this assertion has impregnable repercussions on Member-States' capacity to act and interfere in favour of their interests and citizens. Furthermore, she thinks that the single currency tends to benefit northern countries and harm southern nations. The euro sharpens the EU's natural polarisation between northern and southern States. Despite not being completely clear, Meloni is at least reticent or sceptical about the euro's efficacy to promote equality and feed sustainable economic development. In sum, Giorgia Meloni ends up merging both visions into an opaque answer. In this matter, she is everything but incisive, perhaps, enigmatic. Nevertheless, it must be said that recently this position has been softened over time, inducing Meloni to gradually abandon this idea although keeping a stinging view, which claims that the euro was a good business for the Franco-German axis and not for the southern Europe.

The ODS party has a more flexible and moderated approach than Fratelli d'Italia's. The Czech Party foments a voluntary adoption of the single currency. The decision of adopting the euro should belong to each Member-State authority. As referred by Balas (2023:17), *"All the experiences to date (especially the Greek crisis) clearly show that the eurozone will work best as a club of countries for which a common currency is appropriate and beneficial. The Member States that still have national currencies must be able to decide for themselves whether they wish to adopt the euro and when"* The Czech Party quite pertinently alludes to the Greek example of the subprime crisis' outspread to contest euro's efficiency. The ODS' statement looks into a recognition of glaring cleavages thereby mentioning edges' impossible overlap. The dream of a federalist fusion is unequivocally refuted due to geographic, cultural and historic chasms. There are static elements that should not drive us to deterministic outcomes.

This assumption struggles with the magnificent idea that there clubs of countries. Clustering always reveals itself useful to underpin methodical researches and establish comparisons. This party deliberately imposes on us a litigious concept. There are many (Europes) and not only one single entity called Europe. Hence, there are groups of countries that are naturally more proclitic to hug the single currency while others are more prone to see that with evil eyes.

Obviously, these arguments have substantial weight when it comes to shape a slashing critique of a federalism uncapable of successfully spreading a tamed satisfaction.

Curiously, the PiS Party does not seem to vary much from the ODS' ample approach. Both countries possess a monolithic rhetoric. The Polish Party shares an open and embracing intuition. The adoption of the single currency must be voluntary. According to Balas (2023:18), "*Fiscal discipline, an independent European Central Bank without political agenda, and the respect of Member States' decision not to adopt the euro, are the key ingredients of preventing future economic shocks*" In principle, the PiS would be more likely to align on the side of Fratelli d'Italia than converging into a common sight with the ODS, given the fact that Poland has its own currency. Nevertheless, an abrupt and fulminant comment sticks to the lack of independency of the European Central Bank.

On the contrary, the party insists on the entire respect for Member-States' monetary sovereignty, focusing on a fiscal discipline. Thus, Poland within a near future, when it reaches Germany's GDP, hopes to adhere to the euro. Primarily, the party judges that the country does not yet have a sufficiently robust economy to comfortably adopt the common currency. Undeniably, the party believes that the euro is a fundamental mechanism whereby countries can foster their ambitioned free-trade and subsequent prosperity. According to Balas (2018:18), "*We will adopt the euro someday, because we are committed to do so, and we are and will be in the European Union, but we will accept it when it is in our interest (…). It will be in our interest when we reach a level very close to Germany in GDP level, standard of living*" Only a fertile imagination would consider that Poland would join the euro under adverse circumstances. Still, the party vehemently judges that the decision to leave membership of the single currency up to the Member-States must belong to each nation volition.

Even though Sweden has its own currency, the Sweden Democrats have something to say about the single currency too As referred by the Sweden Democrats (2019:1), *"Trots att svenska folket röstade nej till införandet av euron som valuta har Sverige fortfarande en skyldighet att göra det. Sverigedemokraterna vill att Sverige, i likhet med Danmark, förhandlar fram ett formellt undantag från deltagande i EMU: s tredje steg och därmed behåller vår svenska krona."*[16] The Sweden Democrats are bitterly critical of the EU's fiscal and monetary policies. According to

---

[16] Despite the fact that the Swedish people voted no to the introduction of the euro as currency, Sweden still has an obligation to do so. The Sweden Democrats want Sweden, like Denmark, to negotiate a formal exemption from participation in EMU's third stage and thus keep our Swedish krona.

them, not only the EU should reduce its spending but also nations must have more monetary sovereignty, which has notable implications. By keeping the Swedish Krona, the Sweden Democrats think they are protecting their autonomy and purposes thereby controlling the amount of currency in circulation.

Additionally, the Sweden Democrats advocate that Swedish people must have an opinion on their own currency. That is, whether they want to adopt the euro or remain with the Krona. Once again, a referendum should be carried out whereby a further pellucid volition on the euro will come straight to the bottom. Yet, the Sweden Democrats harshly consider that Sweden shall keep its own currency, intending to protect nation's autonomy.

Perhaps, the euro involuntarily aggravates the flagrant contrast between peripheral and central countries and therein lies the rub. However, despite the huge unemployment rate during the 2008 crisis and the collateral effects of the euro in Spain, Vox does not dare to criticise the euro. Vox does not even mention the euro whether it has to do with leverages or downsides. According to Moreno and Martínez (2021:22,23), *"Aun cuando para el resto de partidos la Unión Europea es un lugar común en sus enfrentamientos discursivos, el caso de VOX parece ser distinto, probablemente por el consenso existente en España acerca de la utilidad de la Unión Europea. Mientras las otras formaciones extremistas analizadas se atreven a criticar el euro, VOX no llega ni a mencionarlo."*[17] In spite of the reviews on actual topics like the overwhelming disproportionated immigration or the unequivocal refusal of the federalist mirage, VOX does not present a capable solution to the common currency. Either manifestly criticising it or timidly supporting it.

In sum, concerning the euro, a holistic approach is utterly necessary in order to gauge how deeply the ECR is committed to the single currency. In other words, ECR's members do not converge into a coherent steady and resolute view on the single currency. However, we should point out that the ECR is favourable to a voluntary adoption of the euro. In the follow-up of its pragmatic defence of Member-States' sovereignty, each State must be in charge of this unavoidable policy thereby able to decide whether it wants the euro as its currency or not.

---

[17] Even though for the rest of the parties the European Union is a common place in their discursive confrontations, the case of VOX seems to be different, probably due to the existing consensus in Spain about the usefulness of the European Union. While the other extremist formations analysed dare to criticize the euro, VOX does not even mention it.

Despite the wished free-trade unanimity, the position on the euro demonstrates the ECR's plasticity and tremendous independency of its major members that compose it. To conclude, the euro ends up being a double-edged sword, bringing advantages and disadvantages. Concerning the ECR party, we may say that the euro or the common currency undoubtedly constitutes an unflinching matter in which there is no straight proposal or consensus.

The EU's democratic deficit

The ECR group is utterly famous for withering criticising the EU's clamorous democratic deficit. Beyond hyper bureaucratic entities, the major European institutions are often guilty of generating a shattered reliability on the EU's democratic legitimacy and transparency. As referred by Lefebvre (2018 :6), *"Le jeu consiste à bâtir des compromis consensuels entre la Commission (représentant « l'intérêt euro - péen »), les États (au sein du Conseil) et le Parlement (représentant théo - riquement les citoyens), plutôt qu'à polariser la prise de décision, comme c'est le cas dans une démocratie nationale classique."*[18] The adequate interconnection and healthy functioning between these three institutions is underlying because they replace what classic national democracy needs to accomplish its essence. Both the European Commission's questionable actions and the European Parliament's lack of political majority are recurrent targets of mistrust whereas the European Central Bank's natural propensity to benefit the Franco-German axis, highly criticised by the ECR, is a catalyst within the powerful suspicion that hovers over Europe's exempt monetary policy and fiscal discipline. As referred by the ECR group (2022:4)," *In order for transparency and accountability to be increased, the ECR Group believes in asking the difficult questions, and ensuring that the European Commission, and the European budget is held to account. If the EU is to have deep and meaningful reform, in order to function better for its citizens, then first Brussels and its politicians need to identify what isn't working, and acknowledge what has previously gone wrong. Only then can we build a better stronger future for the EU."*

In contrast, the rule of law's hegemony clash remains a highly censurable and objectionable matter. The endless strife over whether the EU's law or States' law prevail makes inerasably part of the federal and confederal skirmish. The ECR group mightily advocates that Member-

---

[18] The game consists in building consensual compromises between the Commission (representing "the European interest"), the States (within the Council) and the Parliament (theoretically representing the citizens), rather than polarizing the decision decision-making, as is the case in a traditional national democracy.

States' law must prevail over EU' law. This assumption is everything but trivial in the unscathed Europe of nations they would rather elaborate. According to Balas (2023:37), "*Infringement procedure: the European Commission may take legal action – an infringement procedure – against an EU country that fails to implement EU law. The Commission may address the issue to the Court of Justice, which in certain cases will impose financial penalties*." Meanwhile, the European Commission saves for itself the inestimable prerogative to infringe procedure against an EU Member-State that potentially debilitates EU law or does not apply it. In addition, the Commission should tightly conduct the flaw or deviation to the European Court, which will properly and duly rectify the situation by inflicting heavy economic sanctions.

Moreover, an ingrained slowness and skewed transparency of the European institutions' conduct raise interminable quarrels between Member-States and the EU entity. As referred by Steven (2016:5), "*This offers some indication that 'Euro-realism' is primarily concerned with addressing the EU's 'democratic deficit' above all else – in particular, the need to protect the sovereignty of national parliaments to make law from the pressures of 'ever closer union'.*" The so-called Euro-realism, defended by the ECR to contrast an (ever closer union), intends to emphasise an excessive intrusion of the federalist design. Therefore, protecting national parliaments' sovereignty is indispensable in order to carve out a non-promiscuous EU. National parliaments' primacy to elaborate laws shall not be neglected.

The European Commission is a core institution within the EU's democratic deficit. According to Balas (2023:16), "*ECR parties want to counterbalance the Commission's influence with a greater implication of Member States and, for some of them (N-VA), local entities as an answer to the democratic deficit the EU is blamed for.*" The ECR deeply believes that the European Commission's size should be reduced thereby improving its parsimonious efficiency. Moreover, the New Flemish Alliance Party goes far beyond this criticism and claims that local entities would be a solution, mitigating the EU's democratic deficit. Local entities involve a smart but powerful criticism to the federalist project thereby favouring a Europe of nations. When we refer to the European Commission, we must bear in mind that this institution is the only one with sufficient autonomy to initiate a legislation. As the ECR group refers (2022:4), "*Increasing democratic accountability and transparency are objectives at the heart of the ECR Group's agenda for guaranteeing reform of the European Union. Without increased transparency and accountability of the EU's institutions, agencies, budget and policies, then public faith and trust in the EU will continue to be eroded.*"

Furthermore, its hegemony over the partner European institutions may fluidly give place to envy or distrust. In other words, in this matter the European Commission is not subordinated to the other European institutions if it freely wants to initiate a legislation. While the other European institutions just initiate a legislation when they tack an applicable subject. For example, in case the European Parliament wanted to perform a legislative procedure, it would need to consult the European Commission to come up with a legislation on a certain matter.

As such, the European Commission is solely responsible to implement trade agreements with external partners by replacing and supressing Member-States' natural role and decision-making. However, this benign free-trade agreements portray pivotal steps destined to put forward development and instigate a wished global peace. Beyond that, the underway free-trade agreements and their respective removal trade barriers also suit the democratic component, allowing and encouraging the plummy link between prosperity and democracy. If we prefer, the inextricable bond between capitalism and democracy.

Hence, anyone who effortless seeks for a democratic deficit or democratic incongruities within the EU's backbone, will inevitably meet the European Commission with a weight composed of exorbitant functions. At least, that is what the ECR considers. As referred by Balas (2023:38)," *For Hermann TERTSCH (Vox), "no treaty says that this Parliament or the Commission is going to dictate the national policy of Hungary or Poland. Nowhere does it say that! Jadwiga WIŚNIEWSKA (PiS) agrees: "Member States must have the sovereign right to act within their sphere of competence in accordance with their own constitutional order."* An incessant rupture between national policies and the European Parliament and the European Commission slowly wear out the EU's already wrecked credibility and institutions damaged reliability.

Whilst, the manifest relationship between the ECR's successful ascension and the major European institution is patent. According to Steven (2016:13), "*The growth and formal development enjoyed by ECR parties from 2009 to 2014 can be in part connected to the wider political fallout from the Eurozone crisis and the subsequent structural reforms initiated by member state governments on the recommendation of the European Commission, the European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund."*[80] The ECR assertively outlines an unthinkable performance of the delegated European institutions, wanting to redefine not only their huge competences but also their mediocre effectiveness.

The European Parliament has an inestimable preponderance within the EU's democratic framework. This indispensable institution is not only responsible for conducting a powerful

opposition but also to confer a plausible democratic consistency. According to Brack (2010 :5), *"En raison du système institutionnel européen et en particulier, de l'absence d'un exécutif présentant une cohérence partisane et réclamant le soutien d'une majorité d'élus, il n'y a pas de clivage permanent entre majorité et minorité parlementaire. De plus, le PE est caractérisé par la superposition de clivages et a tendance à recourir à de larges majorités en son sein."*[19] In spite of what most people might believe, there is no classic parliamentary majority/minority political struggle. Instead, reality is conceived by inert political engagements between political parties that share common views or approaches. Whilst its natural role ought to strengthen a democratic viability, its nature ends up being innocuous.

Furthermore, the European Parliament is accountable to carry out a manifest European public space. Preponderant debates and elections are often the unassailable visible side of the coin. However, the European Parliament was undeniably incapable of engender a European democracy. The democratisation of decisions is not exclusive to the European Parliament. That is, it passes mandatorily through the European Council and the European Commission.

Thus, the EU's democratic deficit is, in the first instance, compulsorily connected with the idea that there is no necessary relationship between the people and who takes the decisions that affect them. In other words, and for example, there are commissars and other core positions that are not directly elected by the people. There is no limpid or immaculate reciprocity. And democracy is made of a glaring reciprocity between who is elected and who votes. Still, the narrative we have been developing, concerning the EU's democratic deficit, beautifully demonstrates how intricate and embracing is the concept of Euroscepticism, in the sense that voters may be prone to contest the EU's legitimacy and its malfunctioning institutions. Yet, the vibrant and effusive contestation can witness either internal voices within nations' stronghold or external voices at a European level.

ECR's approach to the war in Ukraine

Russia's invasion of Ukraine has been the most significant and impactful menace to Europe's abiding peace since World War II. Surely, the war of Yugoslavia and NATO's interventions in Serbia deserve our attention. Contrary to what many think, the existence of nuclear weapons

---

[19] Due to the European institutional system and in particular, the absence of an executive with partisan coherence and claiming the support of a majority of elected representatives, there is no permanent cleavage between parliamentary majority and minority. Moreover, the EP is characterized by the overlapping of divisions and tends to resort to large majorities within it.

does not invalidate a conventional war. Apparently, war has not been abolished nor its innate ramifications. Therefore, unsurprisingly the ubiquitous nightmares of the past can always come back quickly and merciless. If Ukraine were exclusively at the mercy of its own luck, the Russian aggression would already have been successful. Geopolitically speaking, to the EU, Ukraine represents an indispensable buffer between Europe and the Russian federation. We have to take into account that the EU's architecture was largely conceived due to the cold war and, therefore, to the Soviet imminent danger. Thus, the tense relationship between the EU and Russia is as ineluctable as current. So far, Ukraine has managed to do extremely well, contrary to expectations, obviously overwhelmingly hampered by the robust western alliance. Yet, the war in Ukraine has definitely proved NATO's irreplaceable and remarkable role.

Primarily, there is a required contextualisation we have to execute. At the end of World War II, the European continent was in tatters. The Soviet Union had occupied eastern Europe and, therefore, a strong western Europe was utterly necessary in order to prevent the red army from seizing the whole continent. As a result, both NATO and the EU are the product of a Europe shattered into pieces. NATO has exclusively to do with defence whereas the European community primordially with an economic component decisive to thrive western Europe in order to counterbalance an intermittent and unreliable eastern Europe. Somehow, if nations were linked to each other by prosperity, then Europe could aim at regaining its sovereignty again. Undoubtedly, there is an intrinsic relationship between the Atlantic commitment and the foundation of the Europe of the 6. Quite likely, geopolitical necessity. At the end of World War II, Europe had definitely lost its sovereignty.

Unequivocally, the ECR, if we want to oppose to the Identity and Democracy European Party, believes the roots of the EU are located within the core of the Euro-Atlantic relationship. Thus, once the foundation of the EU is utterly linked to the United States, the maintenance of this alliance besides making total sense, is perhaps desirable because the EU was erected in order to contain the soviets. Therefore, there is a natural relationship between the EU and the Atlantic partners. That is, supporting the EU and being favourable to the Atlanticist and western alignment is perchance more reasonable than backing up the EU and being allergic to NATO. In this sense, the ECR coherently follows an historical and congruent past not only by faithfully favouring the EU but also to unflinching believe in NATO. To sum up, the ECR's endless support to Ukraine is as evident as timeless. It is the aftermath of bearing NATO.

Given the fact that the ECR group is a fan of NATO, its view on how to approach the war must be seriously taken into account. Main ECR members' opinion on the subject should be equated. On the other hand, the pertinent question of how to approach the war in Ukraine is umbilically linked to the energy challenge because Europe's dependency on Russia's natural gas is screaming. Both problematics are ridiculously concomitant. Both problematics are irreversibly inseparable. And both problematics are related to autonomy. That is, ultimately sovereignty.

Giorgia Meloni is peremptory in saying that Ukraine's sovereignty shall be defended and preserved. As referred by Giorgia Meloni (2023:3), *"Io non sono cosí iprocrita da scambiare una invasione con la parola pace e quindi credo che non si debba consentire l'invasione dell'Ucraina che non vuol dire non lavorare per un piano di pace che non lavorare per una soluzione del conflito."*[20] Perchance, it would be hypocritical to utter that not protecting Ukraine would lead to a more pleasant denouement. On the one hand, she is totally aware that a NATO/ Russian direct fight would have preposterous outcomes for everyone. Consequently, in principle this catastrophic scenario must be avoided at all cost. On the other hand, Ukraine should not be at its solely mercy. NATO alliance ought to provide Ukraine with war material in order to halt the insolent and ferocious Russian aggression.

Furthermore, Meloni finds the EU's support to Ukraine indispensable. The EU should stand by Ukraine thereby not shrinking its military and financial aid. According to Giorgia Meloni (2023:2), *"Noi oggi abbiamo una sitazione energetica molto difficile perché l'Europa e anche l'Italia hanno deciso di dipendere e di dipendere quasi unicamente da un unico attore che nel caso specifico era la Russia(...)Lavoriamo per abbandonare il gas Russo"*[21] Not only there is the intention to face the tough energetic situation in Europe but also to reduce Europe's massive dependency on Russia's natural gas. Thus, according to Meloni, Europe must look for other sources of natural gas in order to diversify them and reduce Russia's bothersome dependency.

VOX approach to the war in Ukraine does not seem to fluctuate much. As referred by Jorge (2022:1), *"Nosotros claramente, obviamente como los polacos estamos del lado de Ucrania y*

---

[20] I am not so hypocritical as to exchange an invasion with the word peace and therefore I believe that the invasion of Ukraine should not be allowed which does not mean not working for a peace plan than working for a solution to the conflict.

[21] Today we have a very difficult energy situation because Europe and also Italy have decided to depend and to depend almost exclusively on a single actor which in this specific case was Russia (...) We are working to abandon Russian gas.

del respecto a su soberanía."[22] In spite of not being favourable to a direct NATO intervention, VOX believes the EU cannot afford a Ukraine collapse and, therefore, providing military material to Ukraine is indispensable. Moreover, this party finds Europe's apocalyptical dependency on Russia's natural gas aberrant. Like this, the implementation of a consistent elaborated plan to decrease this worrisome dependency is more than urgent and screaming. Europe must diversify its energy sources deepening relationships with Member-States because it is a common trouble. Yet, the energy sector is so nuclear to every nation that a joint reflected decision-making on this theme is profoundly required.

Utterly harassed by this disturbing war in Ukraine, Poland shall be as careful as precisive in its moves. There is no room for spontaneity. Poland has ever been caught in the middle of two great powers: Germany and Russia. Nowadays, the war in Ukraine represents more than an alert to a country used to bear an unbearable geopolitical burden. According to Mateusz (2022:11)." *The war in Ukraine so important from the point of view of security of this region but I would say it is critically important from the point of view of security of the entire Europe."* For the Polish prime-minister, backing up Ukraine is a geopolitical necessity and a security vitality. Evidently, his commitment to NATO is unbreakable. NATO members should hold Ukraine with a robust military support but not interfere directly within the conflict.

Moreover, the massive energy concern has been teetering on the brink of an abundant affliction. Thus, the Polish prime-minister has already acted prophylactically. His dependency on Russia's natural gas has ever been on his mind. In consonance with the other ECR members, filling this void is extremely pressing. According to Mateusz (2022:10), *"In 2016 we have started to build a new pipeline system to Norway and Denmark and we have just finished all the works and this is why for the first time in our history Poland is independent of Russian gas."."* This huge gap came to the surface after Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Afterwards, Poland is undeniably favourable to a solid military and financial support to Ukraine. Ukraine's fall cannot be considered a trivial phenomenon. Nonetheless, uncertainty regarding Ukraine's eventual collapse remains palpable. So far, Fratelli d' Italia, VOX and PiS drastically converge in their sight on how to approach the war in Ukraine.

Czech Republic is also a weight supporter. Petr Fiala's views will be as lucid as incisive in relation to the Russian aggression because Czech Republic is currently holding the presidency of the European Council. This pertinent fact surely carries a vast responsibility. As referred by

---

[22] We clearly, obviously, like the Poles, are on the side of Ukraine and respect for its sovereignty.

Petr Fiala (2022:6) "*Europe needs to manage both the refugee crisis and Ukraine post-wars recovery. I informed Jens Mr. secretary general about the big check military assistance to Ukraine, including heavy weapons and our support will continue.*" Pragmatism quite accurately characterises the Czech approach to the war in Ukraine. Dealing with a war is never an easy task. There are always risks. Whilst, as we have already discussed above, doing nothing and being a mere spectator, hoping for a pleasant denouement, would be as naïve as dumb. Problems are not solved by simply being ignored and therein lies the rub. ECR members are dressed out of an immeasurable reluctancy and possess a high sense of responsibility. That is, none of them is ingenious to the point of letting go a pending issue that the longer it is postponed, the worse and severe it becomes. Yet, the inescapable energy crisis has been a major worrying of the Czech leadership of the European Council. To Petr Fiala, the EU is utterly dependent upon the fundamental energy sector. Therefore, this problematic raises up an existential threat to the European project that is far from being small or innocuous. As a result, this dependency must be transformed into an independent department. In his opinion, the EU shall engage in a coherent and operative alternative plan to abolish the EU's overwhelming dependency on Russia' natural gas.

Furthermore, the ongoing war in Ukraine is naturally triggering a massive concern that should be treated as a considerable repercussion. All wars trigger indelible concerns. Particularly, the Nordic countries have become more and more assertive about their sometimes-neutral foreign policy. The sorrowful war in Ukraine seems ending up with Sweden's almost interminable neutrality. Proximity leads countries to take utterly divergent approaches. Sweden and Finland for geographical reasons have definitely realised how ruthless is the Russian menace and have been taking precautions. Namely, their unstoppable hurry and avidity in joining NATO. At least, the military alliance has revealed itself an indispensable dissuasion element.

Notwithstanding, the Sweden Democrats are solidly suspicious of holding a preposterous ambiguous relationship with Russia. In fact, some European radical right parties, mainly belonging to the Identity and Democracy group, are often accused of possessing a benign opinion of Putin's regime. Pertinently, the benign or malign position about Vladimir Putin's regime and the Atlantic relationship definitely mark a turning point between the ECR and the ID. In other words, it perfectly distinguishes the sorts and indoles of the European radical right. Over time, the Sweden Democrats have become more and more transparent about what they really want from Russia. This evolution is far from being a trivial statement once the position on the Russian federation helps differentiate radical right parties' headquarters. It has distanced

the Sweden Democrats from the parties of Le Pen or Salvini and has brought them closer to the ECR. For example, since the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014, the Sweden Democrats have adopted a more incisive discourse against a Russian imminent danger.

Moreover, the Sweden Democrats have been embracing a more intertwined relationship with NATO. Sweden's almost perpetual neutrality has been undeniably shaken by the terrible war in Ukraine, resulting in a stunning shift towards NATO. As a result, Sweden and Finland are seriously equating joining the military alliance. As referred by Bolin (2023:3), "*Officially, the party has also taken a stand against Russia's actions and for support and assistance to Ukraine.*" Despite the incessant controversy over the Swedish Democrats' distorted view of Russia, the Russian aggression has ineluctably left little room for stalemates and indecisions.

To sum up, the ECR's resounding vision of the war in Ukraine does not contemplate hesitations. Indeed, the ECR profoundly faces this determinant clash with Russia as a first step in the troubled shock between multilateralisms in constant evolution, that naturally means and implies the challenging emergence of the Chinese power. The ECR party definitely masters how to approach an implacable and unequivocally support to Ukraine, without involving directly NATO. The ECR will stand by Ukraine until Russia is defeated and beyond. According to Ryszard (2023:2), "The *European Union must ensure that Ukraine emerges victorious from this war - and that Russia pays the price for no longer being able or willing to repeat such an appalling act. In solidarity with Ukraine, we must ensure that its soldiers receive the most modern equipment.*"

As a whole, the ECR party emphatically conveys a lucid message replete of assertive tons of pragmatism. In other words, to the EU the unimaginable collapse of Ukraine corresponds to a calamity that is not negotiable. Ukraine is not only vital in terms of security buffer but also poses a peremptory and determining challenge on how to manage a war close to the EU's borders. Perhaps, the eventual fall of Ukraine would call into question the future of the EU. An implosion is, perhaps, not as hard to imagine as many people might consider. From a geopolitical point of view, the grievous war in Ukraine is as endless as determinant. Mostly, their repercussions only represent a small sample of what we may be about to witness. Unreluctantly, ECR main members almost reach unanimity when it comes to seriously overcome the war in Ukraine.

To conclude, the ECR acts in concordance with its own principles when it comes to approach the energy sector. The EU should condescendingly act together in order to coherently solve the

energy tough issue thereby creating a common plan to ensure that the EU is self-sufficient in terms of energy. In fact, this glittering idea perfectly fits in its desirable Europe of nations in which every nation collects considerable profits from a transparent integration.

Conclusion

The ECR party definitely offers us an intriguing and challenging approach to the European integration model. The ECR undoubtedly represents nowadays the major example of a European group that contains endless challenges to the European mainstream parties due to its electoral and institutional consolidation (currently with three heads of government within the European council: Poland, Italy and Czech Republic.) According to Gaweda and Miller (2022:2,3), "*While the ECR group has had around 10–15 NPDs in successive EPs since 2009, three of them have acquired particular significance for its current outlook and ideological direction.*" Unquestionably, neither totally unbeliever about the European project nor blindly guided by a precipitate federalist framework. Utterly aware of an unescapable and ineffable European history, its main members bravely preconise an immaculate Europe of nations and a bold return to a Greco-Roman culture, instead of recklessly and unadvisedly aligning with a perhaps desirable but possibly utopian multiculturalism. In other words, they vehemently intend to emphasise how relevant and underlying are nations not only for the construction of the EU but also to the maintenance of a key pilar like sovereignty thereby not embarking or committing to a promiscuous and spurious lust.

On the one hand, the ECR group fiercely provides us sound arguments to be highly sceptical about the eventual biased federalism endeavour. According to Alexandre and Jardin (2009 :11), "*Au sein de ce nouveau groupe, la notion de « non-fédéralisme » a été définie dans le « Manifeste de Prague », déclaration de 10 principes fondateurs signée par tous les membres du groupe le 22 juin 2009 et qui insiste sur « la nécessité urgente de réformer l'Union européenne sur la base de l'euro-réalisme, de l'ouverture, de la crédibilité et de la démocratie.*"[23] By digging a hollow ditch, its foundational members focus upon transversal flaws that, concretely, turned some Member-States against each other. Of course, these skirmishes had everything to do with concrete facts, more precisely: the clairvoyant EU's democratic deficit, the immigration

---

[23] Within this new group, the notion of "non-federalism" was defined in the "Prague Manifesto", a declaration of 10 founding principles signed by all the members of the group on June 22, 2009 and which insists on "the urgent need to reform the European Union on the basis of Euro-realism, openness, credibility and democracy.

concern, the poor management of the economic crisis and, above all else, the counterintuitive and subjugating idea of an enthusiastic federalism. Euro-realism is, therefore, the answer to the more and more opaque and inviable model carried out by the EU.

On the other hand, the ECR's alternative model of integration might be fairly considered slightly far-fetched or taciturn. Perhaps, it inevitably needs time to mature. This way, criticising is probably easier than building a robust and capable alternative. Apparently, the ECR's alternative incorporates elements that already exist, modifying them, though inducing Member-States to cooperate in areas of common interest thereby increasing their decision-making capacity and room for manoeuvre.

For example, it was truly possible to constate that ECR main members do not share a common view on the euro currency, which is not a despicable matter of fact. The common currency is recurrently an unquenchable centre of attention. Thus, the ECR's unassailable plasticity and versatility allows us to deduce an ingrained melange of uniqueness and tenaciousness unfolding within its sheer psyche, simultaneously combined with occasionally lack of mutual understanding among its members due to, perhaps, its callow but promising history. Nevertheless, the European conservative right firmly holds a European alternative project.

In addition, ECR's nationalism was mostly expressed by two preponderant aspects that trustingly characterise the radical right. In terms of immigration and religion, we may confidently utter that there is an almost integral collision among its main members. In this line of reasoning, it was plainly possible to confront what a European superstate would imply against an ECR's unquenchable and infrangible nationalism. Hence, there were points where overlapping was utterly impossible. The ECR's model does not fit with a federalist design and, therefore, a European superstate. On the contrary, it is located in the antipodes of this irreconcilable model, albeit sustaining a European integration project.

Furthermore, ECR main members immaculately convergent into a decent and assertive criticism. There is a limpid unanimity when it comes to point out where the EU has scattered motifs to thoroughly spread distrust. According to Sondel-Cedarmas (2022:5), "*The EU forgets that nations are 'living organisms' and tries to deny them, instead of trying to emphasise their richness and the common source from which the idea of Europe was born.*" *Even* though every ECR main member highlight fracturing mistakes like the irresponsibility dealing with the immigration topic and the permeable nations' sovereignty, this implacable statement corresponds, perhaps, to the greatest common criticism we may throw at a slovenly EU. The

cultural aspect is not as trivial or residual as most people might judge. People are unequivocally a vividly product of a concrete space, time and defined culture. According to Sondel-Cedarmas (2022:6), "*Europeans cannot be deprived of the roots that individual nations have formed over the centuries, because they are all descendants with a common history.*"

 Notwithstanding, the core issue fatally ends up being the alternatives implemented to mitigate or even delete those faults. Parties struggle with underlining each other's opinions in relation to the same topic. As de Gendt referred (2014:11), "*L'ECR et l'EFDD sont des groupes politiques moins cohérents idéologiquement.*"[24] We should point out that the Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy European party was established in 2014 and succumbed in 2019. Its main members were mainly the Five Star movement party and the UK Independence party. That is, the ECR is stained with substantial ideological incongruencies about key topics among some of its most preponderant members. Albeit concordance is not subjacent to every party, in the ECR we easily mention how dissonant voices may become whenever a constructive alternative is required. In other words, criticising the European Parliament or the European Commission can be a vague and addictive task but proposing an alternative way is also quite relevant and unlike. Regarding the euro and the EU's democratic deficit, the ECR corresponds to an annoying and persuasive critic in which good reasons are always found out. Nonetheless, when it comes to suggest an alternative or a solution, the question becomes harder than we might expect or wanted. Seldomly, there is a perfect match between what we get and what we desire. In politics, circumstances always shape and condition our actions.

 On the contrary, the ECR group is extremely assertive about the war in Ukraine. Rather than being a mere critic, as it succeeds with the EU's democratic deficit along with the common currency, the ECR has at its disposal a current and important topic in which the EU has been conducting a dubious and biased approach to a determinant war. In other words, divergent voices reverberate all over Europe. As we had already had the opportunity to allude, when difficult moments arrive, discordance reigns. Consequently, the ECR has pertinently and precisely been enjoying this apocalyptical war to elegantly demonstrate how nations act according to their own interests thereby putting national interest above the European interest.

 As such, this intrepid research acquired, at least, the merits of deepen and widen the approach of an emergent soft Eurosceptic party to the European integration model therein jeopardizing the notorious and afflicted faults this humble model carries. Hence, not only sharply shapes,

---

[24] The ECR and the EFDD are less ideologically coherent political groups.

therefore, the own concept of Euroscepticism by confronting hard and soft Euroscepticism, but also vehemently provides a relentless critique of the federalist endeavour thereby proposing an alternative model of integration. According to Fabbrini and Zgaga (2022:9), "*All sovereignist leaders shared a criticism of the supranational features of the EU. The criticism of supranationalism was based on the refusal of the principle of supremacy of EU law over national laws.*" Despite often slightly double-edged when it comes to build a constructive and viable narrative, every sovereignist converge into a fulminant criticism of the bureaucratic EU. Besides actual, this dilemma is verily pertinent, once it affects nowadays' reality in such an indelible manner.

Inevitably, the ECR party has made us reflect on the present time we live in and the process of building the EU. If there were doubts about the transparent impact of the ECR on the European Parliament, the sceptics have definitely become a minority. Undoubtedly, the tendency has abundantly moved towards this idea. The history of the European integration project shall be taken into consideration whenever we think of radical and sharp changes. In other words, there is an implicit historical and logic path we cannot forget and escape to.

To sum up, in spite of all of its defects, the ECR party systematically demonstrates that electorally is rising thereby bothering the traditional parties and representing a powerful alternative. This fact can be witnessed nowadays in many European countries. Despite its historical tumbles and hurdles, the ECR has not shrunk its importance. Its weight is not superfluous or residual. Ignoring its rise and the reasons behind it is as naïve as unwary.

To conclude, the ECR party definitely gives us a providential clue of how the European future will necessarily unfold. Perhaps, the conservative right has a teetering alternative European integration model that remains in its infancy yet. Currently, we are ironically but inevitably witnessing the return of the Nation-State. The question revolves, therefore, around the following mystery: how this return is willing to contradict the past and evolve to a promising and bright future or Europe is once again returning to history. Has Europe learnt with history or hasn't history abandoned Europe?

Bibliography

Akbaba, S. (2014). A critical assessment of a Eurosceptic party group on European integration: A case study of the European Conservatives and Reformists Group. *TalTech Journal of European Studies*, *4*(1), 97-118.

Alexandre-Collier, A., & Jardin, X. (2009). La nouvelle carte électorale du conservatisme européen. *Revue internationale de politique comparée*, *16*(4), 583-594.

Archbishop Jedraszewski. (2020, April 28) A New Crusade: Poland's embrace of Catholicism and Anti LGBT Ideology | Foreign Correspondent. (Video). YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mNg02F6FY_0 10:25- 10:44 Accessed on 23/2/2023

BALAS, P. (2023, January). The Far-Right in the European Parliament https://www.transform-network.net/fileadmin/user_upload/the_far-right_in_the_ep.pdf Accessed on 17/5/2023

Boros, T., & Vasali, Z. (2013). The rise of euroskepticism and possible responses prior to the 2014 European Parliament elections.

Brack, N. (2010). Quelle opposition au sein du Parlement européen?. *L'Europe sous tensions. Appropriation et Contestation de l'intégration européenne*, 179-195.

Brack, N. (2013). Euroscepticism at the supranational level: the case of the 'untidy right' in the European Parliament. *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies*, *51*(1), 85-104.

Brack, N. (2015). The roles of Eurosceptic Members of the European Parliament and their implications for the EU. *International Political Science Review*, *36*(3), 337-350.

Brack, N. (2015). The roles of Eurosceptic Members of the European Parliament and their implications for the EU. *International Political Science Review*, *36*(3), 337-350.

Bolin, Niklas. (2023: March). "The repercussions of the Russian Invasion of Ukraine on the populist Radical Right in Sweden." In: The Impacts of the Russian Invasion of Ukraine on Right-wing Populism in Europe. (eds). Gilles Ivaldi and Emilia Zankina. European Center for Populism Studies (ECPS). Brussels. https://doi.org/10.55271/rp0031

Charlie Weimer. (2021, December 2). We need an EU Special Envoy for Freedom of Religion & Belief / ECR Group. (Video) YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u5ssn728Qrc Accessed on 28/2/2023

De Gendt, P. (2014) La victoire des eurosceptiques, un signal d'alarme pour l'Union européenne. Analyses et Études, Politique internationale

De Quant, S. (2019). Euroscepticism and the European elections. *Survival*, *61*(2), 111-119.

Desrochers, É. (2016). L'extrême droite au Parlement européen: Que l'expression d'un mécontentement?. *Glendon Journal of International Studies*, *9*.

Dominik Tarczyński. (2018, July 23) STRONK Polish politician shocks leftist women and the mainstream media. (Video). YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sWfpFN4tp4s 6:12-6:21 Accessed on 23/2/2023

Dominik Tarczyński. (2019, November 9) Polish MP: 'For me, multiculturalism is not a value' UpFront (Headliner). (Video). YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ccOp0I8ZPho 0.55-1.02 Accessed on 23/2/2023

Dominik Tarczyński. (2019, November 9) Polish MP: 'For me, multiculturalism is not a value' UpFront (Headliner). (Video). YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ccOp0I8ZPho 1.26-1.48 Accessed on 23/2/2023

Dominik Tarczyński. (2019, November 9) Polish MP: 'For me, multiculturalism is not a value' UpFront (Headliner). (Video). YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ccOp0I8ZPho 13:11-13:21 Accessed on 23/2/2023

Dominik Tarczyński. (2020, May 28) Polish MEP: We are trying to keep Europe 'great and Christian Conflict Zone. (Video). YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iXho8DNayVc 19:44-20:01 Accessed on 23/2/2023

Donà, A. (2022). The rise of the Radical Right in Italy: the case of Fratelli d'Italia. *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, *27*(5), 775-794.

ECR group. (2018, April) Vision for Europe. ECR website https://ecrgroup.eu/vision/Respecting_rights_sovereignty_member_states Accessed on 3/3/2023

ECR group. (2018, April) Vision for Europe. ECR website https://ecrgroup.eu/vision/Respecting_rights_sovereignty_member_states Accessed on 5/3/2023

ECR group. (2018, April). Vision for Europe. ECR website. https://ecrgroup.eu/vision/Respecting_rights_sovereignty_member_states Accessed on 3/3/2023

ECR group. (2021, May). Religious freedom. ECR website. https://ecrgroup.eu/campaign/religious_freedom Accessed on 28/2/2023

ECR group. (2022, May 5). Mass migration is proving to be one of the greatest challenges of the 21st century (Video). YouTube. https://youtu.be/SWKHusIdHoc 0:19-0:33. Accessed on 18/2/2023

Emanuele, V., Maggini, N., & Marino, B. (2016). Gaining votes in Europe against Europe? How national contexts shaped the results of Eurosceptic parties in the 2014 European parliament elections. *Journal of Contemporary European Research*, *12*(3).

European Parliament. (2009, June). Seats by political group and Member State https://www.europarl.europa.eu/elections2014-results/en/seats-group-member-2009.html Accessed on 8/6/2023

European Parliament. (2014, May). Seats by political group and Member State. Seats by political group and Member State 2009 - European Parliament (europa.eu) Accessed on 29/5/2023

European Parliament (2014, July). Results of the 2014 European elections. Seats by political group and Member-State. https://www.europarl.europa.eu/elections2014-results/en/seats-group-member-2014.html Accessed on 7/6/2023

European Parliament (2019, July) Results of the 2019 European elections. Seats by political group and Member-State. https://www.europarl.europa.eu/election-results-2019/en/breakdown-national-parties-political-group/2019-2024/ Accessed on 7/6/2023

European Union´s treaty. (2016, June). Immigration Policy. https://www.europarl.europa.eu/factsheets/en/sheet/152/immigration-policy Accessed on 15/5/2023

Fabbrini, S., & Zgaga, T. (2022). Sovereignism and its implication: The differentiated disintegration of the European Union. *EU3D Research Paper*, (22).

Falkner, G., & Plattner, G. (2020). EU Policies and Populist Radical Right Parties' Programmatic Claims: Foreign Policy, Anti-discrimination and the Single Market. *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies*, *58*(3), 723-739.

Gaweda, B., Siddi, M., & Miller, C. (2022). What's in a name? Gender equality and the European Conservatives and Reformists' group in the European Parliament. *Party Politics*, 13540688221116247.

Giorgia Meloni. (2019, October 20) Centrodestra in piazza, Meloni contro gay e lgbt: "Sono una donna, sono cristiana" (Video). YouTube https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KmaIuGJWbEA 00:47-1:06 Accessed on 20/2/2023

Giorgia Meloni. (2023, February 3). Vi propongo la mia intervista a Dritto e Rovescio. Buona serata. (Video). YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TuxOpS7U9iE 18.31- 18.34 Accessed on 10/2/2023

Giorgia Meloni. (2023, February 3). Vi propongo la mia intervista a Dritto e Rovescio. Buona serata. (Video). YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TuxOpS7U9iE 18.38-18.43Accessed on 11/2/2023

Giorgia Meloni. (2023, February 3).Vi ripropongo la mia intervista a Dritto e Rovescio. Buona serata. (Video). YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TuxOpS7U9iE 5:24-5:36 Accessed on 29/3/2023

Giorgia Meloni. (2023, February 5) Giorgia Meloni in diretta dall'Auditorium della Conciliazione a Roma. (Video). YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=55eNth0p24M 15:26-15.38 Accessed on 11/2/2023

Giorgia Meloni. (2023, March 23). Italian PM Giorgia Meloni responds to the pacifists. (Video). YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fnelcl72lZ8 0:41- 0:57 Accessed on 28/3/2023

Heft, A., Pfetsch, B., Voskresenskii, V., & Benert, V. (2023). Transnational issue agendas of the radical right? Parties' Facebook campaign communication in six countries during the 2019 European Parliament election. *European Journal of Communication*, *38*(1), 22-42.

Hix, S. (2007). Euroscepticism as anti-centralization: A rational choice institutionalist perspective. *European Union Politics*, *8*(1), 131-150.

Hobolt, S. B., & De Vries, C. (2016). Turning against the Union? The impact of the crisis on the Eurosceptic vote in the 2014 European Parliament elections. *Electoral studies*, *44*, 504-514.

Hooghe, L., & Marks, G. (2007). Sources of euroscepticism. *Acta Politica*, *42*, 119-127.

Ivaldi, G. (2014). Euroscepticisme, populisme, droites radicales: état des forces et enjeux européens. *L'Europe en formation*, (3), 7-28.

Ivaldi, G. (2014). Réflexions sur la poussée des droites radicales populistes européennes. *Revue politique et parlementaire*, 125-140.

Ivănescu, M., & Filimon, L. M. (2022). Mainstream Fringes or Fringe Mainstream? An Assessment of Radical Right (Re) Alignments in the European Parliament after the 2014 and 2019 Elections. *European Review*, *30*(1), 96-114.

Jorge Buxadé. (2022, January 22). Vox se posiciona "del lado de Ucrania" en el conflicto con Rusia. (Video). YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pdg0hgIf9kY 1:42-1:50 Accessed on 29/3/2023

Lefebvre, M. (2018). Le défi de la démocratie européenne. *Politique étrangère*, (4), 73-85.

Manucci, L. (2021). Forty years of populism in the European Parliament. *População e Sociedade*, *35*, 25-42.

Mateusz Morawiecki. (2022, November 22). Independence for Poles is like air - Interview with Polish PM Mateusz Morawiecki | TVP World. (Video). YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qn35iMHGDTI 4:51-5:01 Accessed on 30/3/2023

Mateusz Morawiecki. (2022, October 25). Polish Prime Minister on war in Ukraine and European energy crisis. (Video). YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EzvpX-CM70w 17:31-17:50 Accessed on 30/3/2023

McDonnell, D., & Werner, A. (2018). Respectable radicals: Why some radical right parties in the European Parliament forsake policy congruence. *Journal of European Public Policy*, *25*(5), 747-763.

McDonnell, Duncan, and Annika Werner, 'European Conservatives and Reformists: A Very Respectable Marriage', *International Populism: The Radical Right in the European Parliament* (2020; online edn, Oxford Academic, 17 Sept. 2020), https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780197500859.003.0003, Accessed 13 May 2023.

Moreno, S. M., & Martínez, J. M. R. (2021). La construcción del enemigo en los discursos de la derecha radical europea: un análisis comparativo. *Encrucijadas: Revista Crítica de Ciencias Sociales*, *21*(2), 13. Pages 22 and 23

Mudde, C. (2015). Populist radical right parties in Europe today. *Transformations of populism in Europe and the Americas: History and recent trends*, 295-307

ODS party. (2014, March). Basic information about the Civic democratic party. ODS website. https://www.ods.cz/o-nas   Accessed on 25/2/2023

Petr Fiala. (2016, September 23) Opening Remarks of ODS Chairman Petr Fiala MP at AECR Prague Conference 2016. (Video). YouTube https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QugkYa2APFg 5:29-5:38 Accessed on 16/2/202

Petr Fiala. (2016, September 23) Opening Remarks of ODS Chairman Petr Fiala MP at AECR Prague Conference 2016. (Video). YouTube https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QugkYa2APFg 6:55-7:16 Accessed on 16/2/2023

Petr Fiala. (2022, July 6) Czech Prime Minister Petr Fiala addresses the European Parliament. (Video). YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qCvq3KFH0VY 9:51-10:02 Accessed on 15/2/2023

Richard Jomshof. (2018, November 11) Speech in Swedish Riksdag by Sweden Democrats Richard Jomshof, English Subtitles. (Video). YouTube https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZpimWZluRh0 1:21-1:28 Accessed on 16/2/2023

Richard Jomshof. (2018, November 11) Speech in Swedish Riksdag by Sweden Democrats Richard Jomshof, English Subtitles. (Video). YouTube https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZpimWZluRh0 1:47-2:00 Accessed on 18/2/2023

Ripoll Servent, A., & Panning, L. (2019). Eurosceptics in trilogue settings: interest formation and contestation in the European Parliament. *West European Politics*, *42*(4), 755-775.

Ryszard Legutko. (2021, October 19). Prof Ryszard Legutko on the primacy of EU Law | ECR Group. (Video). YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iFbzDtCah_I 4:59- 5:38 Accessed on 6/6/2023

Ryszard Legutko. (2023, February). Legutko: The ECR will stand by Ukraine until Russia is defeated and beyond https://ecrgroup.eu/article/legutko_the_ecr_will_stand_by_ukraine_until_russia_is_defeated_and_beyond Accessed on 3/4/2023

Santiago Abascal. (2020, February 14) Entrevista a Santiago Abascal VOX 14 Febrero 2020. (Video). YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kiKyErVXnx4&t=730s 12.37-12.45 Accessed on 12/2/2023

Santiago Abascal. (2020, February 29) Entrevista a Santiago Abascal, presidente de Vox. (Video). YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hu6sv-lY1cQ 14:52-15:08 Accessed on 12/2/2023

Santiago Abascal. (2021, September 9) Discurso de Santiago Abascal em Lisboa. (Video). YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=irgs92rshe8 4:05-4:21 Accessed on 20/2/2023

Serricchio, F., Tsakatika, M., & Quaglia, L. (2013). Euroscepticism and the global financial crisis. *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies*, *51*(1), 51-64.

Sondel-Cedarmas, J. (2022). Giorgia Meloni's new Europe: Europe of sovereign nations in the brothers of Italy party manifestos. In J. Sondel-Cedarmas & F. Berti (Eds.), The right-wing critique of Europe: nationalist, sovereignist and right-wing populist attitudes to the EU (pp. 60–75). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003226123-8

Steven, M. (2016). 'Euro-Realism'in the 2014 European Parliament Elections: The European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) and the Democratic Deficit. *Representation*, *52*(1), 1-12.

Steven, M., & Szczerbiak, A. (2022). Conservatism and 'Eurorealism'in the European Parliament: The European Conservatives and Reformists under the leadership of Poland's Law and Justice. *European Politics and Society*, 1-18.

Strategic communications. (2021, September). Freedom of religion or belief. European Union' website. https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/freedom-religion-or-belief_en Accessed on 15/5/2023

Strategic Eurosceptics and Polite Xenophobes: Support for the UK Independence Party (UKIP) in the 2009 European Parliament Elections1

Sweden Democrats. (2019, January). Finances and budget. Electoral platform for the European Parliament. https://sd.se/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/eu-valplattform-2019_final.pdf page 9 Accessed on 11/3/2023

Taggart, P., & Szczerbiak, A. (2002). *The party politics of Euroscepticism in EU member and candidate states* (p. 7). Brighton: Sussex European Institute.

Treib, O. (2014). The voter says no, but nobody listens: causes and consequences of the Eurosceptic vote in the 2014 European elections. *Journal of European Public Policy*, *21*(10), 1541-1554.

Treib, O. (2021). Euroscepticism is here to stay: what cleavage theory can teach us about the 2019 European Parliament elections. *Journal of European public policy*, *28*(2), 174-189.

Trenz, H. J., & De Wilde, P. (2009). *Denouncing European integration: Euroscepticism as reactive identity formation* (No. 10).

Ultan, M. O., & Ornek, S. (2015). Euroscepticism in the European Union. *International Journal of Social Sciences*, *4*(2), 49-57.

Usherwood, S., & Startin, N. (2013). Euroscepticism as a persistent phenomenon. *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies*, *51*(1), 1-16.

Van Elsas, E. J., Hakhverdian, A., & Van der Brug, W. (2016). United against a common foe? The nature and origins of Euroscepticism among left-wing and right-wing citizens. *West European Politics*, *39*(6), 1181-1204.

Vasilopoulou, S. (2009). Varieties of Euroscepticism: the case of the European extreme right. *Journal of Contemporary European Research*, *5*(1), 3-23.

Vasilopoulou, S. (2013). Continuity and Change in the Study of Euroscepticism: Plus ça change? *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies*, *51*(1), 153-168.

Werts, H., Scheepers, P., & Lubbers, M. (2013). Euro-scepticism and radical right-wing voting in Europe, 2002–2008: Social cleavages, socio-political attitudes and contextual characteristics determining voting for the radical right. *European Union Politics*, *14*(2), 183-205.

Whitaker, R., & Lynch, P. (2014). Understanding the formation and actions of Eurosceptic groups in the European Parliament: Pragmatism, principles and publicity. *Government and Opposition*, *49*(2), 232-263.