The Undiplomats: Right-wing populists and their foreign policies

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1er MAI 2015
www.frontnational.com

★ CENTRE FOR EUROPEAN REFORM

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★ As right-wing populist parties have shifted from being marginal players to important political actors in Europe, they have also turned their attention from domestic to foreign and security policy, in ways that sometimes threaten European interests. Mainstream parties need to find effective ways to counter them.

★ Right-wing populist parties disagree on many foreign policy issues. They range from anti-American to pro-American, from Russophile to Russosceptic and from isolationist to internationalist. But they are united on some points, notably euroscepticism. They oppose further EU enlargement and, especially, Turkish membership of the EU.

★ Populist parties, especially of the right, are strongly represented in some national parliaments, and did well in the May 2014 European Parliament elections. They have used a variety of strategies to try to influence foreign policies. At the national level, they have sought to maximise their influence through formal or informal deals with mainstream parties; but their voters have sometimes punished them for getting too close to the mainstream. At the EU level, they have struggled to use parliamentary processes to maximum advantage, but the formation of a new group of populists in the European Parliament, centred on France's Front National, shows that they are learning how to play the game.

★ Whether they are in government or in opposition, populist parties can complicate the process of forming EU foreign policy. They may undermine mainstream consensus on how to react to international events, thereby weakening Europe's voice abroad and limiting its capacity to respond to global challenges. That is why foreign governments, including Russia, make a priority of cultivating ties with some of these parties.

★ Mainstream parties have tried to contain the popularity of the populists by ignoring them (unwise if they are winning a significant share of the vote) or trying to copy their policies (unconvincing to voters, who see such imitation as insincere). This policy brief looks at more effective ways to counter populists:

  ★ The best strategy for mainstream parties is to address the issues that voters worry about, for which populist parties claim to have simple answers, but to find better solutions. This applies as much to foreign policy-making, including at the EU level, as it does to domestic issues.

  ★ If the electoral arithmetic leads mainstream parties to co-operate with populists, the former need to set clear red lines on foreign policy. Foreign policy should not become a bargaining chip in coalition negotiations, and every effort should be made to preserve coherent national and European foreign and security policies.

  ★ Voters need to understand who influences the parties they vote for. The problem of opaque party funding is not limited to the populist parties; but the fact that such parties are often relatively young and lack the long-term funding base of the mainstream parties may open the way for foreign states and non-state actors to buy influence. Russia in particular has tried to convert financial aid for populist parties into Russia-sympathetic policies. European governments should make party funding more transparent.

Over the last 30 years, populist radical-right parties (hereafter referred to as populist parties) have become an integral part of the European political landscape. Such parties are now important political forces in Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Denmark, France, the Netherlands, Sweden and Switzerland. Even in the UK, where the first-past-the-post election system reduces the parliamentary voice of smaller parties, the influence of the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) on the policies of mainstream parties has grown with its share of the popular vote. There are also populist parties on the left, in particular Syriza, the larger of the two parties in Greece's coalition government. But in most of Europe, it is the right-wing populist parties which are more significant, and this policy brief focuses on them.

Hitherto, populist parties have expended most of their energy on domestic questions, especially immigration, with considerable effect on public and political debate. For many populist parties, foreign and security policy has until now remained a secondary issue. Leaders of these parties have criticised the EU and globalisation; but they have paid little attention to events outside the EU. But their increased electoral strength has led to growing confidence, and these parties are becoming more outspoken on foreign and security issues.

In late 2014 the journal *Mediapart* reported that France's Front National had received a loan of €9 million from the First Czech Russian Bank, which has links with the Kremlin. Russia's apparent support for a right-wing populist party in Western Europe led to a spate of articles on why the foreign policy of the Front National, and populist parties in general, might matter to Moscow. Many of these publications were sensationalist and overestimated the extent to which populist parties influenced foreign policy in Europe.

This policy brief aims to explore the true impact of populist on the foreign and security policy of the EU and its member-states. It examines the foreign and security policies of populist parties; what institutional platforms they can use to influence policy-making; and, in those cases where they do have leverage, how can they affect Europe's foreign and security policy. Finally, it offers recommendations for mainstream parties on how to respond to the populists.

Who are the right-wing populists?

Many scholars have studied populist parties, but there is no consensus on their characteristics and behaviour or how to classify them. Writers use a wide range of epithets, including 'protest parties', 'far-right', 'neo–fascists', 'anti-establishment', 'extreme right' and 'anti-immigrant parties'.

One of the most sophisticated definitions was put forward by Cas Mudde, a Dutch political scientist and leading expert on the populist phenomenon, who adopted the term populist radical-right parties.[1] According to Mudde, such parties share three key ideological characteristics. First, they are nativists, meaning they believe that states should be inhabited exclusively by members of a particular national group, while non-members threaten the state. The non-members differ from case to case, but they usually include Roma communities, sometimes Jews, and immigrants, especially Muslims. Second, they are populist, in that they separate society into two opposing groups: the 'corrupt elite' and the 'common people'.

Populist parties believe that the opinion and will of the 'man in the street' is an important part of a democracy, and they see themselves as the only parties that express this. Third, they are authoritarian: they emphasise an ordered society, and they believe in punishment for breaching social norms.

Many populist parties advocate 'welfare chauvinism', meaning that social and welfare services should not be available immigrants to the country concerned.[2] Populist parties tend to promote conservative social policies, including support for traditional family values and harsher punishments for criminals. Finally, all populist parties in Europe are eurosceptic. They see the EU as a danger to the independence and sovereignty of the nation-state. These parties may support pragmatic co-operation between European nations, but they are strong opponents of EU laws, which they believe limit nation-states' freedom of action.

From Stockholm to Sofia: Case studies

Although populist parties share key ideological characteristics, they are not identical: they differ in rhetoric, historical roots and character. Scholars often disagree over whether some parties are either too mainstream (for instance the Norwegian Progress Party and the Finns Party) or too anti-democratic and extreme

1: Cas Mudde, 'Populist radical right parties in Europe', 2007.

2: Jørgen Goul Andersen and Tor Bjørklund, 'Structural change and new cleavages: The Progress parties in Denmark and Norway', *Acta Sociologica*, 1990.

(Golden Dawn in Greece and Jobbik in Hungary) to be classified as radical-right populists. This policy brief looks at seven populist parties about which there is most consensus: the Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ), the French Front National (FN), the Sweden Democrats (SD), the Danish People's Party (DPP), the Dutch Party for Freedom (PVV), the UK Independence Party (UKIP) and Bulgaria's Ataka.

	FPÖ	Ataka	DPP	FN	PVV	SD	UKIP
Country	Austria	Bulgaria	Denmark	France	Netherlands	Sweden	UK
Current leader	Heinz-Christian Strache	Volen Siderov	Kristian Thulesen Dahl	Marine Le Pen	Geert Wilders	Jimmie Åkesson/ Mattias Karlsson	Nigel Farage
Presence in national parliament (number of MPs; % of seats; current position)	40 MPs; 20.5% ; third largest	11 MPs; 4.5%; one of the smallest	37 MPs; 21.1%; second largest	2 MPs; 0.3%; one of the smallest	15 MPs; 10.1%; third largest	49 MPs; 12.9%; third largest	1 MP; 0.3%; one of the smallest
MEPs in European Parliament (number of MEPs; % of seats in the national delegation)	4 MEPs; 19.7%	0	4 MEPs; 26.6%	23 MEPs; 24.9%	4 MEPs; 13.4%	2 MEPs; 9.7%	24 MEPs; 27.5%
% of actual/ predicted votes[3]	27% (largest party - poll)	3% (smallest - poll)	21.1% (second largest – general election result)	30% (predicted first round of presidential election - poll)	21% (third-fourth largest - poll)	16.6% (third largest - poll)	12.6% (third largest – general election result)
Participation in government	Yes, members of coalition from 2000 to 2005	Supported minority coalition	Supports minority coalition	No	Supported minority coalition	No	No

Many consider the Austrian Freedom Party to be the 'classic' model of a populist radical right party, and the most successful one. Its roots are in the League of Independents, a party established in 1949 that represented, among others, former Austrian Nazis and prisoners of war. Jörg Haider was elected as party leader in 1986, and he gave the FPÖ its populist character. His charismatic personality helped the FPÖ to gain unprecedented success. In 1999 the party received 26.9 per cent of the vote at the general election, and formed a coalition with the conservative Austrian People's Party (ÖVP). But the FPÖ suffered from internal conflicts, and

lost popular support. In 2005 Haider left to found another right-wing party (he died in a car accident in 2008). Heinz-Christian Strache replaced him as FPÖ leader and has continued Haider's populist style, restoring the FPÖ's electoral fortunes.

France's Front National was established in the 1970s. It brought together politicians and activists from different political traditions in France. Under Jean-Marie Le Pen's leadership, the FN consolidated its radical right-wing ideology, which includes tough anti-migration policies, euroscepticism and zero tolerance of crime.

3: Opinion polls were held between January and April 2015. Austria: March 2015 by *Der Standard*; Bulgaria: March 2015 by Exacta; Denmark: general election of June 2015; France: January 2015 by Marianne; Sweden: March 2015 by Sentios; the Netherlands: April 2015 by Peil; United Kingdom: general election of May 7th 2015.

Jean-Marie Le Pen's popularity peaked in 2002, when he lost to Jacques Chirac in the second round of France's presidential elections, having beaten the Socialist Party candidate into third place in the first round. In 2011, Marine Le Pen replaced her father as party leader. She has been trying to give the FN a more moderate image, with some success. In the 2014 European elections the FN won more seats than any other French party. Marine Le Pen suspended her father from the party in May 2015 after he downplayed the significance of the Holocaust and praised the collaborationist Vichy regime; opinion polls suggest that side-lining Jean-Marie Le Pen will improve the FN's image ahead of the 2017 French presidential election.

Populist parties also emerged in two Scandinavian nations with strong liberal-democratic traditions: Denmark and Sweden. The Sweden Democrats developed from neo-fascist movements, but in the 1990s the organisation underwent a series of changes in an effort to clean up its image: the leadership banned uniforms, renounced Nazism and expelled problematic hardliners. These steps increased the SD's appeal, and the party passed the 4 per cent national electoral threshold in 2010. In the most recent national elections, in 2014, it became the third largest party in the Swedish parliament. Despite the SD's success, however, mainstream parties refuse to co-operate with it.

The Danish People's Party sprang from the anti-tax Danish Progress Party, and grew in the 1990s under the leadership of Pia Kjærsgaard. In the 2014 European elections it received, for the first time, more votes and seats than any other Danish party. DPP politicians repeatedly speak about limiting immigration (especially from Islamic countries), 'preserving' Danish culture, and investing more resources in crime prevention. They want to limit the EU's competences to areas such as trade, and to make the Danish constitution superior to EU law. In contrast to the Sweden Democrats, the party has been able to work with other Danish parties: though it remained in opposition, it supported a minority Liberal-Conservative coalition for almost a decade from 2001-2011. In the Danish general election on June 18th 2015, the DPP became the second largest party, out-polling the mainstream centre-right Venstre liberal party; but it allowed the leader of Venstre, Lars Løkke Rasmussen, to become prime minister, leading a minority government. The DPP supports the government on most issues but has sought to keep its freedom of manoeuvre.

Since its establishment in 2006, the Dutch Party for Freedom has been identified with one man – Geert Wilders. The party leader is known for his criticism of Islam, often describing it as 'totalitarian civilisation'

that threatens European values, freedom and identity. Among other things, Wilders wants to limit the number of Muslim immigrants and asylum seekers. Under Wilders' leadership, the PVV became the third largest party in 2010, with 15.5 per cent of the vote. Following that year's elections, the PVV briefly supported (but did not join) a Liberal-Conservative minority coalition, withdrawing its support in 2012 as a result of failed budget negotiations. In subsequent elections, the party received 10.1 per cent of the vote.

"*Despite the Sweden Democrats' success, mainstream parties refuse to co-operate with them.*"

While some scholars describe the UK Independence Party as an 'anti-establishment' or eurosceptic party, others classify it as a populist radical-right party, and similar to other European parties of that type.[4] UKIP has a charismatic leader, Nigel Farage, who is well-known for his strident anti-EU rhetoric. The party's policies focus on the perceived negative implications of Britain's membership of the European Union. UKIP wants to reduce migration from other EU member-states and points out that the only way to be sure of doing this is to leave the EU.

Britain's electoral system has restricted UKIP's success in general elections: on May 7th 2015 it received 12.6 per cent of the vote, the third largest share, but only one seat out of 650. A year earlier it had won more seats than any other British party in the 2014 European elections; and before the general election it had won two seats in Westminster through by-elections (following the defection of two Conservative MPs to UKIP).

The Bulgarian Ataka party was established in 2005, under the leadership of Volen Siderov. Ataka wants to protect the Bulgarian nation from foreign ethnic, non-Orthodox Christian influences, and Siderov has used strong anti-Semitic, anti-Roma and anti-Turkish language. Ataka's members often describe the ruling elite in Bulgaria as corrupt, while they claim to represent the will of real Bulgarians. The party wants to regain Bulgaria "for the Bulgarians" and to limit foreign involvement in the economy. Siderov is a charismatic speaker, and initially achieved impressive electoral success: between 2005 and 2013 the party grew to be the fourth largest in the Bulgarian parliament, and in the 2006 presidential elections Siderov came second, though the party's popularity has declined since then.

4: For example Paul Webb and Tim Bale, 'Why do Tories defect to UKIP? Conservative party members and the temptations of the populist radical right', *Political Studies*, 2014.'

What are the foreign and security policies of populist parties?

Europe's populists have generally dedicated most of their attention to domestic issues, especially immigration. They have addressed international topics, but usually in relation to two specific topics: the negative implications of globalisation and the role of the EU. But in recent years, populist parties have increasingly discussed other foreign and security policy issues. Some of the parties (including those in Denmark, France and the Netherlands) touch on these issues in their party programmes, albeit briefly. Most of the information about their foreign policies, however, emerges in their responses to important world events. Their messages are not always consistent or coherent. Yet over time, a number of recurrent themes can be identified, including their positions on the US, NATO, defence budgets, the Middle East, Turkey and Russia.

The US and NATO

Populist parties have differing views on the US and its global role. Some are anti-American while others have a relatively positive or indifferent attitude towards the US. Anti-American populist parties (such as the FN in France, the FPÖ in Austria and Ataka in Bulgaria) see the US as the main engine behind globalisation, which they believe has negative effects in their countries, such as immigration and increased unemployment. They emphasise the 'imperialist' character of American foreign policy, and blame their national governments for dancing to America's tune, 'sacrificing' their national interests.

In Austria, the FPÖ accused the US of damaging Austria's traditional neutrality; in France the FN suggested that the US eroded the independence of French foreign policy; and Ataka's leader Siderov accused the US of using Bulgaria for its own political and military interests, and then demanded the closure of all Bulgarian-American joint military facilities. Anti-American populist parties often exploit political tensions between Europe and the US; after Edward Snowden revealed details of the US National Security Agency's spying techniques, FPÖ and FN leaders called on their countries to grant Snowden political asylum.

The policies of the FN, FPÖ and Ataka towards NATO generally overlap with this anti-American stance. They see NATO as a tool for US dominance in Europe, and argue that subordinating their national armies to 'irresponsible' foreign command will prevent their nations from developing an autonomous foreign and defence policy. They want to withdraw from, or not join, NATO. The FPÖ programme states that Austria "must … not be a member of a military pact"; FN leaders denounce France's participation in NATO; Ataka, in its '20 principles' programme, promises that if it is elected Bulgaria will leave NATO; and the SD, despite its support for Sweden's co-operation with NATO's Partnership for Peace (a programme which brings together members

and non-members of NATO for military training, disaster planning and other activities), opposes Swedish membership of the organisation.

> *"Anti-American populists see the US as the main engine behind globalisation, which they believe has negative effects in their countries."*

However, other populist parties have a more favourable attitude towards the US. The PVV in the Netherlands, UKIP in the UK and especially the DPP in Denmark are positive about trans-Atlantic security ties, often emphasising common Western values. The PVV and the DPP speak more favourably about defence co-operation between Washington and Europe, particularly in relation to the fight against Islamist terrorist groups. These parties also support their country's membership of NATO: the PVV's programme states that NATO will remain the cornerstone of Dutch defence policy, and DPP members support Denmark's continued membership of the alliance.

Defence budgets

While some populist parties oppose NATO, it does not mean that they neglect defence. In fact, populist parties across Europe urge their governments to increase defence budgets and in some cases to re-introduce compulsory military service. Strache described Austria's repeated defence budget cuts as "disastrous". Le Pen has been a critic of France's defence cuts: she has described French military readiness as "catastrophic", and argued that France cannot be a great nation without a great army. Le Pen wants to make it a legal obligation that France spends at least 2 per cent of GDP on defence. DPP and SD politicians have also expressed concerns about defence cuts. For populist parties (especially those that are anti-American), the maintenance of large, well-equipped and well-trained forces would allow their nations to respond to threats without the need for an American security umbrella. This may be one area in which the influence of populist parties could have a positive impact on foreign and security policy: whether they are in coalition governments or not, their support for higher defence spending could put pressure on mainstream parties to spend more. A populist-influenced government might be less interested in responding to crises around the globe, but at least the military might be better armed and trained.

The Middle East

The response of populist parties to events in the Middle East is complex and inconsistent. Some leaders rarely talk about the region, while others do so constantly. In general terms, populist parties oppose foreign military interventions in the Middle East, questioning their

rationale and effectiveness. Farage, Le Pen and Siderov have made statements to that effect, emphasising the chaos and uncertainty that followed interventions like the 2003 Iraq War and the 2011 Libya bombing campaign, and pointing to the inability of the West to stabilise these countries.

All parties, mainstream or populist, are concerned about the Islamic State terrorist group and the implications it may have for migration to Europe and for the terrorist threat. Populists have made use of these concerns, however, to reinforce their messages against Muslim migrants. Nigel Farage claimed that Europe risked "opening its doors … to the Islamic extremist threat" if it took in more migrants that had crossed the Mediterranean. Both he and a number of other populist parties have expressed concern about the security of Christian communities in Iraq and Syria; Farage, in contrast with his general opposition to immigration, even suggested that Christian migrants should be given refuge in the UK. In order to keep potential terrorists out, and prevent massive flows of migrants, members of the SD, FPÖ and FN have demanded that their governments remove the citizenship of returning jihadists, and limit the numbers of asylum seekers. They have generally taken a hard line on the migrant crisis in the Mediterranean: the FN called for the French navy to escort boats full of migrants back to their ports of origin.

As for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, there is a division between the populist parties in Central Europe and their Western counterparts. In Central Europe, some populist parties express anti-Semitic and anti-Israeli views. Siderov has blamed Israel and the international "Jewish elite" for "enslaving other peoples". He has also claimed that they control the American government.

In Western Europe, on the other hand, a visible shift has occurred. While in the past, populist parties often criticised Israel, today most of them have a more moderate, or even pro-Israeli, stance. Members of the PVV in the Netherlands, FPÖ in Austria and the SD in Sweden have regularly visited Israel (including settlements in the West Bank) to express their support. There are two main reasons for their pro-Israel stance. First, some populist parties see Israel's security challenges and threats facing Europe as both stemming from Islam. They believe that Europe and Israel are fighting the same war, and that Israel therefore deserves their support. This is evident in statements from the PVV, the SD and the DPP. Other populist parties, especially those with historical links to anti-Semitic and neo-fascist movements, have more cynical motives. By supporting Israel, the FN and the FPÖ are trying to be respectable parties that seek to protect Israel and the Jews and therefore cannot be accused of anti-Semitism. Nina Horacek, an Austrian journalist, claims that Haider told her before his death that his rival Strache

was interested in visiting Israel only in order to "clear" the FPÖ's anti-Semitic image.[5]

Turkey

There is a consensus among populist parties that Turkey should not be a member of the EU. A frequently heard argument is that Turkey does not belong to Europe, in terms of culture, tradition and religion. Populists claim that Turkish membership would result in millions of Turks moving to other European countries. These parties also claim that in opposing Turkey's EU accession they are representing the wishes of ordinary European citizens.

Populists exploit the issue of Turkish accession to the EU in countries where relations with Turkey and Turkish migration are already sensitive political issues. In Austria, the FPÖ's tough stance on Turkish EU membership is connected to its anti-immigration rhetoric against the large Turkish minority in the country. In Bulgaria, Siderov uses harsh anti-Turkish arguments rooted in violence involving Bulgarians and the Ottoman Empire. The populist parties have used Turkey's increasing authoritarianism under Erdogan's rule to step up their criticism. After Erdogan's heavy-handed response to the Gezi Park demonstrations in 2013, a number of populist parties called for the cancellation of EU-Turkey agreements and the expulsion of Turkey from NATO.

"*Populist parties called for the cancellation of EU-Turkey agreements and the expulsion of Turkey from NATO.***"**

Russia

Populist parties fall into three groups in their attitudes to Russia. First, the FPÖ, FN, and Ataka enjoy close links to Moscow. They believe that European countries should give more credence to Russia's concerns; the FN's foreign policy programme contains a proposal for the creation of a trilateral alliance between Paris, Berlin and Moscow. Leaders of these parties have also been vocal defenders of Russia's actions in Ukraine: they endorsed the legitimacy of the 'referendum' which preceded Russia's annexation of Crimea, and the Russian government invited members of these parties to observe the so-called referendums and elections that took place in Crimea and the Donbass. The parties have made statements which follow the Kremlin's official line very closely: party officials have said or implied that Ukraine is part of Russia's legitimate sphere of influence; that there are no links between Russia and the shooting down of Malaysian Airlines flight MH17; and that the replacement of President Viktor Yanukovych in February 2014 was not the result of a democratic revolution but of a violent coup by local neo-fascist movements.

5: Adar Primor, 'Strache is Haider's heir: an interview with an Austrian fascist', *Haaretz*, March 5th 2010 (in Hebrew).

A number of factors fuel these Russophile sentiments. First, Putin's political stance – which Strache and Le Pen praise – overlaps to a certain degree with their own authoritarian ideology. Putin's nationalistic rhetoric, conservative social messages (with regard to homosexuality, for example) and strong line against radical Islam and the US appeal to some right-wing populists. Second, such parties perceive Russia as an actor capable of weakening the EU, an institution that they too oppose. Finally, Russia is a potential counterweight to the US in the global order, and populists hope that a stronger Russia will diminish American involvement in Europe.

The second group are not 'pro-Russian' per se, but accuse the EU of damaging the interests of European states by provoking confrontation with Russia. UKIP, the SD and the PVV fall into this category. Farage and Wilders have claimed that the EU is as responsible as Russia for the current crisis in Ukraine: the EU provoked Putin; it gave Ukraine unrealistic hopes of joining the Union; it ignored Russia's historic relations with Ukraine and its citizens; and by using sanctions against Russia it has damaged Europe's economy. When MEPs of the SD voted against ratifying the EU's association agreements with Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia, its MEP Kristina Winberg justified the vote by referring to her party's opposition to EU enlargement: "SD's primary consideration is that the EU, under no circumstances, should be expanded. This consideration is relevant regardless of whether it concerns Moldova, Turkey or, as in this case, Ukraine … We are not, as some have claimed, admirers of Putin's authoritarian Russia."[6]

> **❝***Putin's nationalistic rhetoric, conservative social messages and strong line against radical Islam and America appeal to some populists.* **❞**

Finally, some populist parties do not belong to either of these groups. The Danish DPP has no clear and coherent policy towards Russia. On the one hand, DPP foreign policy spokesman Søren Espersen condemned Russia's aggression and spoke about the Danish obligation to help secure the Baltic States against Russia by deploying naval forces; on the other, he accepted the results of the Crimean referendum.

Channels of influence

What channels do populist parties use to influence foreign and security policy? Most populist parties in Europe are part of the opposition in their national parliament; few have ever been in government. But populist parties can influence the debate without holding cabinet positions, or in some cases without even having representatives in the national parliament. The FN, FPÖ, SD and UKIP have had an impact on the way the public and mainstream parties address migration. UKIP's popularity (even before it had any MPs) not only helped to shape the immigration debate, but also put the UK's future relationship with the EU high on the political agenda, and framed it in terms of the UK's ability to control migration. Immigration, both from within the EU and from outside it, is an issue that many populist parties have succeeded in exploiting for political advantage; these parties were often able to 'own' the issue, mobilising the public and influencing the decision-makers.

However, in contrast to immigration, the traditional ruling parties have always 'owned' the foreign and security domain, making it more difficult for populist parties to influence policy from outside government. Populist parties have tried to overcome this by linking questions of external policy to domestic issues. In France, Le Pen's speeches on Russia and the legitimacy of its action in Ukraine probably have limited influence on French decision-makers. But when she speaks about how EU sanctions against Russia damage the French economy and its fragile labour market, then mainstream politicians pay more attention, knowing that the FN is a serious electoral force among disaffected working-class voters.

The scope for populist parties to influence foreign and security policy directly depends on the extent to which each national legislature has responsibility for foreign and security policy, as well as on the number of MPs the party has. Populist MPs can play an active role in parliamentary foreign affairs or defence committees, raise issues in debates and even work with foreign groups, NGOs and individuals on international issues of mutual interest. In Bulgaria, Siderov uses the national parliament as a stage from which he presents his foreign policy proposals, such as a national referendum on the secession of Bulgaria from NATO and the EU. In the Swedish Riksdag, SD MPs travelled to Israel for meetings, and through the parliament's Committee on EU Affairs have tried (so far unsuccessfully) to overturn Sweden's decision to recognise Palestine.

Some populist parties have supported minority coalitions while formally remaining in opposition. Mainstream parties may prefer this arrangement; they fear that working with a populist party in a coalition will not only be extremely difficult, in terms of forging a common programme, but also enhance the electoral legitimacy of the populists. But this situation benefits populist parties. Their influence on policy increases, since minority

6: Kristina Winberg, 'Debate on the situation in Ukraine', European Parliament, January 14th 2015 (In Swedish).

coalitions must try to maintain their support, while populists avoid the pressure to compromise that comes from being in a coalition government.

The Dutch PVV and Ataka (for a short period of time) supported minority governments, but the most significant co-operation has been in Denmark, between the DPP and the Centre-Right/Liberal parties. For almost a decade the DPP influenced various domestic policies, including budget negotiations, labour reforms and tougher immigration rules. But the DPP also used its position in order to influence foreign and security decisions: for example, it pushed to cut overseas development aid. Most importantly, it was only thanks to the votes of this relatively pro-US populist party that the Danish government secured a parliamentary majority in favour of participation in the Iraq war in 2003.[7] Following the Danish general election on June 18th 2015, the DPP resumed its pattern of backing a centre-right government but not formally joining a coalition. Although the DPP did not initially rule out joining a new government, it set conditions for doing so (including the re-imposition of border controls with Sweden and Germany) that no mainstream party could have accepted.

Geert Wilders has remained in opposition in the Netherlands, but from 2010 to 2012 he supported the minority government led by Mark Rutte. The PVV worked with the government on foreign policy issues, including cutting Dutch international aid. The government and the PVV did not always agree, however, and the former often promoted policies that Wilders opposed (for example, eurozone financial bailout packages). But even if Wilders did not always succeed in shaping policies, his link to the minority government increased the political and public importance of his statements, causing diplomatic embarrassment for the government on a number of occasions. In 2012 he publicly condemned the state visit of then Turkish President Abdullah Gül; and in the same year he called for the public to post their complaints about Central European immigrants on a dedicated website, raising tensions between Rutte's cabinet and its Central European counterparts (who felt that the Dutch government had done too little to distance itself from Wilders' comments).

A populist party reaches the pinnacle of success if it joins a governing coalition or holds high office in a presidential system; but this success may come at a price to the party. Appointing ministers gives the party the best opportunity to influence foreign and security policy. One of the rare occasions on which a populist party formally took part in a government was in Austria in 2000, with the formation of the FPÖ-ÖVP coalition. During the first years of the coalition the Ministry of Defence was in the hands of the FPÖ's Herbert Scheibner. He was involved in a number of projects, including the creation of a commission of experts that worked on the development of a new Austrian security and defence doctrine.

"A populist party reaches the pinnacle of success if it joins a governing coalition."

Although the FPÖ ran the Ministry of Defence, however, its ability to change Austrian security policy was limited. Party members lacked the expertise to use the machinery of government to promote their views effectively. Most importantly, the ÖVP (and its Chancellor, Wolfgang Schüssel) maintained their dominant voice on foreign and security issues. They did this by pre-empting the FPÖ with clear proposals on the defence budget, reforms of the army and future strategic partnerships, thereby limiting the FPÖ's freedom to act. As a result, the military budget did not increase (despite demands from FPÖ members) and the party could not fulfil its electoral promises.

Although this policy brief is focused on populist radical-right parties in Europe, populist parties on the left can influence foreign and security policy in similar ways. Only a few days after the Greek government dominated by the left-wing populist Syriza party took office in January 2015, there were signs that it wanted to improve relations with Russia, despite the situation in Ukraine and the related EU sanctions. Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras has made a number of visits to Russia since taking office. So far Greece has not tried to block EU action in relation to Russia, but Greece's position could limit the EU's ability to speak with one voice. Greek dissent might be even more likely if Greece left the eurozone (which would weaken the EU's leverage in Athens).[9]

7: Jørgen Goul Andersen, 'Nationalism, new right, and new cleavages in Danish politics: Foreign and security policy of the Danish People's Party', ed. Schori Liang, Geneva Centre for Security Policy, 2007.
8: Berthold Meyer, 'Austria between felt permanent neutrality and practised European engagement', PRIF, 2007; Fabian Virchow, 'The aims and objections of the Austrian far right in the fields of foreign and military politics', Ed. by Schori Liang, Geneva Centre for Security Policy, 2007.
9: Ian Bond and Rem Korteweg, 'Greek foreign policy: The next ruin?', CER bulletin article, July/August 2015.

The European level

Depending on which parties are included, populist parties hold 100-120 seats in the European Parliament (EP), out of a total of 751. The Parliament increases the public exposure of radical right MEPs, and gives them a stage on which to set out their arguments, including on foreign policy. In the case of Turkey, MEPs from the FN, PVV and the SD have used the Parliament to criticise the Erdogan government. They have underlined Turkish limits on freedom of speech and the incompatibility of Erdogan's policies with European values. A number of populist MEPs also participate in parliamentary delegations for relations with third countries; the FN's Aymeric Chauprade, a close advisor of Le Pen (and known for his enthusiastic support for Russia's policies), is a member of the EU-Russia delegation, which serves as a platform for dialogue between the EP and the Russian parliament.

The European Council and the Foreign Affairs Council take the most important foreign and security policy decisions in the EU. But even though the EU's Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) is an inter-governmental responsibility and not a matter for the EP, the Parliament can influence it. The EU's annual budget (which includes administrative and operational CFSP expenditure) cannot be passed without the approval of Parliament. The EP also adopts legislative resolutions (including ratification of trade and other agreements with third countries). This allows MEPs to have some leverage over the implementation of foreign policy decisions taken by the Council.

Though trade is not strictly a foreign policy issue, it can have important foreign policy implications. The populists have been very critical of the talks between the EU and the US on a Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP); but there are also a large number of TTIP opponents in the mainstream groups. Together, they could form a powerful group that could complicate TTIP's ratification in the EP.

Perhaps fortunately for the mainstream parties, even after several terms in the European Parliament, the populists have not found particularly effective ways of making their influence felt. The problem for the populists is that an informal 'grand coalition' operates in the EP: the mainstream parliamentary groups often vote together, leaving the populist parties with minimal influence. Though the populists use the Parliament as a public platform for expressing their views, they are not always as active in the legislative process: according to the website 'Votewatch Europe', Marine Le Pen only asked three parliamentary questions and signed just four motions

for resolutions in the whole five-year term of the last Parliament.[10] Interestingly, she has been much more active in the new parliament, asking 54 questions and signing 44 motions for resolutions in its first year. She may see her activity in the Parliament as a way to appear to be a more serious politician, ahead of the French presidential election in 2017 in which she is expected to be a candidate. Nigel Farage of UKIP, by contrast, remains one of the least active MEPs: in the last year he ranked 741st out of 751 for taking part in votes; asked one parliamentary question and signed two motions for resolutions.

> **"** *Even after several terms in the European Parliament, the populists have not made their influence felt.* **"**

The hundred or so populist MEPs are divided between two parliamentary groups and the so-called 'non-inscrits' (those not included in a formal group, which requires a minimum of 25 MEPs from seven member-states), which further limits their impact, both in the assembly and in committees and parliamentary delegations, where they are only a small minority.

The FN struggled for more than a year after the May 2014 elections to form a formal parliamentary group. This has limited the ability of the populists to exploit the potential influence the EP gives them. In June 2015, however, the Front National succeeded in pulling together a group, 'Europe of Nations and Freedom', consisting of the FN, the PVV, the FPÖ, the Italian Northern League, Vlaams Belang from Belgium and the Polish Congress of the New Right, plus one MEP who had been expelled by UKIP.

The creation of a formal group will give the parties involved more influence: the leader of the group will take part in the 'conference of presidents', which organises the Parliament's work and is responsible for relations with other EU institutions, national parliaments and third countries. The group will have more access to information from other institutions. It will be allocated more time to speak in debates. It will receive extra funding from the Parliament for its administrative expenses. The question is whether 'Europe of Nations and Freedom' can remain united: attempts to form similar groups in earlier parliamentary terms have failed because of disagreements over issues such as the free movement of labour.

10: Agata Gostyńska, 'Eurosceptics' march on the Parliament', PISM, May 30th 2014.

THE UNDIPLOMATS: RIGHT-WING POPULISTS AND THEIR FOREIGN POLICIES

August 2015 **9**
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Who do populists speak for?

European co-operation on foreign and security policy will suffer if populist parties increase their influence. Since most Council decisions on external action require unanimity, one assertive populist foreign minister or prime minister would suffice to cause serious trouble. A Russophile populist party could block sanctions against Russia, and a party that favoured total neutrality could oppose any EU military operation in the framework of the Common Security and Defence Policy, including sending troops for humanitarian purposes.

There is a risk that populist parties could act as proxies of foreign actors. Over the years, media reports claimed that Jörg Haider received money from Muammar Gaddafi. The Libyan leader apparently sought the FPÖ's help in easing European sanctions against Libya. Geert Wilders was accused of receiving financial aid and donations from pro-Israel American conservative organisations.[11] But recently the financial relationship between populist parties and Russia, in particular, has come into focus during the Ukraine crisis. Party members from the FN, FPÖ and Ataka

have reportedly met Russian officials, both in Moscow and in European capitals.

Russia cultivates, and uses, populist parties to spread its messages, to discourage policies that could harm Russian interests and to claim international legitimacy for its actions (particularly but not only in the case of observers at the 'referendums' in Crimea, Donetsk and Luhansk). However, it is important to avoid drawing exaggerated conclusions: these parties are not simply tools of the Russian intelligence services. Many of them have some ideological overlap with Russia, and may support Russia not only for financial reward but also because of shared 'conservative' values and a belief that the nation-state is under threat from the EU. The same applies to Wilders and Israel; he has been a vocal supporter of the country since his youth, and shares a similar worldview with American neo-conservatives who fund him. Thus, relations between these parties and foreign actors are based on mutual interests and ideology, though they may be reinforced by illicit funding.

The right response?

The classic competition between mainstream right and left-wing parties for the centre ground is breaking down, and new populist players have appeared. Their presence presents numerous challenges for the large mainstream parties and for the European project. Populist parties are increasing their electoral appeal; they are not afraid to speak about sensitive problems, and they offer compelling if simplistic arguments and solutions.

Europe cannot eliminate the populist phenomenon, mainly because it is impossible to solve all the problems that motivate voters to support populists (such as neutralising all the negative consequences of globalisation). Populist parties are a symptom of modern Europe and its challenges, and they will remain part of the political landscape for the foreseeable future. However, large mainstream parties can take a number of steps in order to reduce populism's negative impact on Europe's foreign and security policy. Mainstream parties should:

★ **Avoid creating a *cordon sanitaire* around populist parties.**
In some countries (such as Sweden) mainstream parties placed a *cordon sanitaire* around populist parties, ignoring and excluding them from any governing coalition. By doing so, they hoped to delegitimise the populists. Such a strategy requires all the mainstream parties to present a united front, both at the national and at the local level. But

the electoral arithmetic sometimes makes this impossible. The *cordon sanitaire* approach may also encourage large parties from the centre-left and the centre-right to create grand coalitions, or to form minority governments. But grand coalitions may play into the hands of populists: they blur the ideological differences between the large parties, making them all look similar to the voter. They also create a de facto cartel that restricts political competition, allowing populists (even reactionary ones) to pose as the only authentic candidates of change.[12]

> **❝** *Populist parties are a symptom of modern Europe, and they will remain part of the political landscape.* **❞**

The 2014 Swedish budget crisis epitomised the problems caused by a *cordon sanitaire*. The SD voted with the centre-right parties to reject the minority centre-left government's budget; this should have led to an election. Instead, both centre-right and centre left agreed to a deal which excluded the SD, in order to avoid an election in which they feared the SD would do well. The result, however, was that the SD became more, not less, popular.

Not only can the *cordon sanitaire* strategy benefit populist parties in the long run, but it can also undermine

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11: Allan Hall, 'Diary may reveal source of Haider's 'secret £40m fortune', *The Independent*, August 4th 2010; Anthony Deutsch and Mark Hosenball, 'US groups helped fund Dutch anti-Islam politician Wilders', Reuters, September 10th 2012.

12: Nicholas Aylott, 'The Sweden Democrats: Ostracised and energised?', Policy Network, January 22nd 2015.

democracy and the idea of representative government, especially when the populist party is one of the most popular. The premise of a *cordon sanitaire* is that the mainstream parties can decide what is right and what is not. But the normal democratic principle is for the voter to be responsible for deciding what his or her preferred political alternative is. The voter has the right to choose populist parties that advocate policies unwelcome to traditional governing elites.[13]

★ **Be open to limited co-operation with pragmatic populists, but insist on 'red lines'.**
The outcome of elections may leave mainstream parties with little alternative but to co-operate with populist parties, even if this risks giving such parties a seal of approval from the political establishment. But the advantages outweigh this risk: a *cordon sanitaire* or a grand coalition allow populists to position themselves as the only alternative to mainstream parties. With support from populist parties (whether in a formal coalition or through ad hoc backing), mainstream parties can carry out parts of their political programme, while forcing the populists to take some responsibility for it.

Co-operation can also expose the weaknesses of a populist party, such as its inability to govern or achieve electoral promises. The Austrian FPÖ and the Dutch PVV suffered electoral losses after they collaborated with the government. The FPÖ lost support when it joined the government in 2000; many of its politicians lacked experience and proved to be incompetent ministers. Internal conflicts in the party did not help (and eventually led to a split). The FPÖ paid the price in the 2002 elections, when its representation fell by more than a half (although the coalition government continued until 2005). In the Netherlands, Wilders suffered electoral losses after he walked away from budget talks in 2012, having previously supported the minority government. Politicians and voters alike held him responsible for the collapse of the government and in the early elections which followed, Wilders' party lost nine seats. Both these populist parties regained support once they went back into opposition.

When mainstream parties co-operate with populist parties, they need to draw red lines, including on foreign policy. They need to pursue coherent foreign and security policies at the EU and national levels; they must ensure that policy does not reflect (for example) distorted perceptions of the EU's 'imperial' ambitions in its neighbourhood. The mainstream party in any coalition should therefore aim to keep control of the foreign ministry and manage the country's input into foreign and security co-operation at the EU level. This will limit the potentially damaging influence that populist parties can have on these policies.

★ **Make party funding more transparent.**
The question of Russian funding for some populist parties has underlined the importance of scrutinising the funding of all political parties more closely. Funding regulations vary from country to country, but parties are not always obliged to reveal their funding sources. In the Netherlands the PVV has no official members (besides Geert Wilders), and unlike other parties which rely on government subsidies and party membership, the PVV mainly depends on private, undisclosed donations.

Civil society organisations and the media should put pressure on parliaments to pass legislation making political funding more transparent. With growing representation in national parliaments and in Strasbourg, populist parties need to be made accountable. Whether or not foreign funding is legal in a particular country, parties should disclose the names of all donors. Clearer funding rules and more transparency would decrease the ability of foreign states and interests to finance populist parties and cultivate them as proxies. It would also shed more light on the nature of populist parties, their interests and their goals.

★ **Beware of copying populist parties' policies.**
When confronted with the increased popularity of populist parties, mainstream parties may be panicked into reconsidering their agendas and adopting populist policies themselves. Research into the Austrian case, however, shows that this strategy may scare off moderate voters and traditional supporters of the mainstream party, and that it may make the mainstream parties appear opportunistic and unprincipled.[14] Mainstream parties create more problems if they copy populist rhetoric without offering new policies to match. They erode trust in the political system by creating a gap between what voters are promised and what they experience. Then the number of frustrated voters who may prefer 'real' populists to mainstream imitators increases.[15]

★ **Pay attention to the problems populist parties raise.**
Finally, mainstream parties should listen carefully to what the populist parties say, and try to solve the issues that drive their support, without copying their policy prescriptions. While the solutions populists present to problems can be simplistic, their diagnoses often reflect genuine and legitimate fears among voters. Concerns about immigration are often closely related to concerns about integration, unemployment, school places, housing or access to healthcare. Mainstream parties should publicly respond to these anxieties with rational counter-arguments and with clear policies to improve matters; they should not dismiss the idea that there may be a problem, but nor should they act as though the populists have the solution.

13: Chris Bickerton and Carlo Invernizzi-Accetti, 'European democracy cannot be clubby world of familiar faces', *Financial Times*, January 6th 2015.
14: Oliver Gruber and Tim Bale, 'And it's good night Vienna. How (not) to deal with the populist radical right: The Conservatives, UKIP and some lessons from the heartland', *British Politics*, 2014.

15: Cas Mudde, 'Jean-Claude Juncker and the populist Zeitgeist in European politics', *The Washington Post*, 30th December 2014.

Conclusion

In a democracy, voters have the right to vote for any party they choose (with a few exceptions, as in the countries that ban Nazi or neo-Nazi parties). Populists are legitimate players on the political stage. If they attract support from voters, it is because they are either claiming to have better solutions than mainstream politicians, or because they are highlighting issues that mainstream politicians prefer to be silent about. The challenge for mainstream parties is to do a better job of explaining that complex problems can rarely be solved with simple formulas; and to be honest about addressing sensitive issues.

It is important for mainstream parties to address the problems raised by populist parties, because that limits the ability of populists to 'own' the debate on crucial issues and thereby mobilise voters. It also helps to counter the narrative that mainstream parties are 'disconnected elites'. Engaging with the issues that populists exploit can eventually increase the levels of trust in the political system. Ignoring or downplaying the problems they focus on is more dangerous. If the mainstream parties ignore them, then 'ordinary people' will vote for a party that they think listens to them. And Le Pen, Wilders and Farage know how to sound as though they have listened closely.

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August 2015