

The Russian Connection: On populism, radicalism and the relationship between Eurosceptic and pro-Russian positions among political parties in Europe

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Abstract:

Since its inception, the European Union (EU) has faced Eurosceptic parties in Europe that identify the organisation as a negative factor. These often populist and radical political players may be found on both sides of the political spectrum and may belong both to the political right and the left.

Despite the ideological gaps between them, this study argues that these parties tend to support pro-Russian positions. In order to test the claim, populist parties in Europe will be examined through an analysis of their manifestos, the statements of senior officials, and their voting patterns.

The study finds that Eurosceptic and populist parties do tend to support Russian positions. The study suggests that the parties do so as they consider Russia as an alternative to the West, and that populist parties often seek a strong foreign player that can and could be interested in assisting them in their struggle against what they consider as the elites. Since the EU is seen as an elite to be fought against, Euroscepticism often leads populist parties into supporting Russian positions.

Introduction

The idea of a united Europe is deeply rooted in the history of the continent and has taken different forms since antiquity, including unity by force, unity as a principle, unity in diversity and unity through a mutual agreement. The current manifestation of the idea evolved during WWII, when several European countries became interested in European unification to bring peace, prosperity, and democracy to the war-ravaged continent (Vătăman, 2010).

Today, the European Union consists of 27 member states and incorporates characteristics that go far beyond intergovernmentalism, placing it somewhere on the continuum between an intergovernmental organisation and a super-state (McCormick, 2017). Since its inception, the European Union has struggled with Euroscepticism, that is, an ideology that opposes the integration processes of the European Union at one level or another (Carter, 2018)

This study examines the relationship between populist and radical European parties on both the left and the right side of the political map, with Russia. This country is a significant power in the international arena, and not only lies on the EU's eastern border but often has conflicting interests with the organisation. The relationship between these two political entities is largely characterised by competitiveness, both in general as well as by normative competitiveness in particular, especially in light of the EU's recent enlargement rounds that have led it to Eastern Europe, an area that Russia has long seen as its sphere of influence, following the disintegration of the Soviet Union.

The research question underlying this work is: To what extent is there a link between Euroscepticism and pro-Russian positions among radical and populist parties in EU countries?

This paper uses a number of tools in order to answer this question and will examine several corpora: The first corpus will include manifestos of radical parties in Europe, on both sides of the political map. Since these parties do not hold enough power to be a major governmental

actor in most cases, manifesto analysis will serve as a key tool to examine party positions, while a second corpus consists of speeches and media appearances by senior members of the examined parties. Finally, a third corpus includes voting patterns of these parties in the European Parliament on several issues that are viewed as relevant to Russian foreign policy, such as: EU relationship with Eastern European countries, the Syrian civil war, and issues related directly to Russia, including sanctions and condemnations of the country by the EU.

In order to focus the discussion, this paper examines party manifestos and media interviews published between August 1, 2008, to September 30, 2017. The selection of these dates was made to analyse several events: the beginning of Russian military involvement in Georgia, the Russian involvement in Ukraine, the 2016 UK referendum on leaving the EU, and the 2017 UK elections. The first two of these events are especially relevant to this discussion as they will allow us to see in practice what the positions of the various parties were in light of actions taken by Russia. These corpora will first be analysed separately, but the picture will not be complete without cross-referencing them. Using diverse data, from various sources will help us understand the positions of radical parties in Europe towards Russia, alongside their positions regarding the EU itself, and form a complete picture of the relationship between these actors.

In order to analyse the data qualitatively, the tool of discourse analysis will be used to interpret the statements of party officials and the party platforms, while examining the functions and meanings of expressions.

The parties examined in this work are the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) and the Irish “Sinn Féin” (“We Ourselves”) party. These two parties were chosen because they are radical parties in a significant country in the European Union and give representation to both left and right populism. Another advantage of examining these parties is that the United Kingdom has been experiencing a political storm in recent years: “Brexit”. Examining the

positions of these parties regarding this political move will provide us with further insights into the extent of their Euroscepticism.

Literature Review

In order to examine the relationship between populist and radical parties in Europe, Euroscepticism and Russia, this work will present relevant key concepts, such as populism and Euroscepticism, and therefore this review will begin first with their definition. Other concepts defined in this paper are nationalism and globalism, since these are cornerstones of the populist ideology, both right-winged and left-winged. Then existing literature on foreign involvement in election campaigns will be presented and relevant literature on European foreign policy regarding Russia and vice versa.

According to Mudde and Kaltwasser (2012), the term populism is a form of moral politics that focuses on the confrontation between "people" and "government", from an anti-elitist approach. The different versions of populism, they claim, criticise powerful, and often corrupt minorities who in one way or another prevent the fulfilment of the general will of the 'the people'. This term populism will accompany us throughout the discussion as the parties examined in this paper have long been categorised as populist in literature.

A second key concept that is vital for this discussion is Euroscepticism. According to LaConte (2010), this is an ideology that holds reservations, disapproval and even hostility towards the integration processes of the European Union. LaConte distinguishes between two main types of Euroscepticism, the first approach is 'soft Euroscepticism, ' which is a critical approach towards the EU or European integration processes. This approach presents a position characterised by dissatisfaction with EU policies or its general direction concerning national interests. The second approach is a 'hard Euroscepticism, which is defined as one that opposes the existence of the EU itself as a matter of principle, and therefore views the process of

integration negatively. This work will examine the connection between pro-Russian and Eurosceptic positions among populist parties.

Another important concept is nationalism, which is a cornerstone in the position of radical right-wing parties. According to Breuilly (2005), nationalism is a political movement for attaining and maintaining autonomy, unity, and identity on behalf of a population, some of whose members deem it to constitute an actual or potential “nation”. A nation, according to Breuilly, is a named human population occupying a historical territory and sharing common myths and memories, a public culture, and common laws and customs for all members. Breuilly adds that nationalists not only identify the nation with explicit and unique characteristics, but they hold that the interests and values of the nation take priority over all other interests and values. Additionally, nationalists claim that the nation should be as free as possible, which is reflected in the idea of sovereignty. Breuilly points out that since nationalism is a movement, it will always strive to change the balance of power.

According to Halikiopoulou, Nanou and Vasilopoulou (2012), radical parties on both ends of the political spectrum share a Eurosceptic approach that opposes the European integration project. They point out that right-wing radical parties use nationalistic rhetoric to explain their opposition to the European project, and that radical left-wing parties state reasons related to opposition to the common market and capitalism, the protection of social rights and the promotion of social justice principles. In practice, the researchers claim that paradoxically, the opposition of these seemingly distinct political actors stems from a sense of nationalism which leads them to oppose the integration processes of the European Union, leading both right-wing radical parties and radical left-wing parties to adopt similar positions regarding economic and territorial nationalism. However, the right-wing radical parties see the ethnic constituents as more significant than the radical left-wing parties, while the latter see the cultural component as more critical.

It seems, therefore, that nationalism is relevant to both right-wing and left-wing parties and may explain Eurosceptic positions expressed by such parties. In order to understand why nationalistic positions may develop and appear in these parties, and be expressed negatively towards the EU, another concept must be examined: globalisation.

Giddens (1990) defines globalisation as the intensification of worldwide social relations, in a way that connects distant places and leads to local events being shaped by events that occur at great distances, and vice versa. Giddens notes that globalisation could explain the rise in nationalism at the local level in Europe, as it leads to the nation-state being too small to deal with big problems, but too big to deal with small problems.

This approach is reinforced by Hooghe (2007), who links Euroscepticism to globalisation. Hooghe points out that the first is a product of a 'social cleavage' that pits the losers from globalisation against the winners, often resulting the European integration being blamed for the sense of loss. Additionally, according to Barbieri (2015) the 'winners' of globalisation are those who benefit from the new opportunities resulting from globalisation, and whose life chances are enhanced. The 'losers' people whose chances in life were traditionally protected by national boundaries, and therefore they perceive the weakening of these boundaries as a threat to their social status and social security and reduced life chances and action spaces. One of the most important reasons for the expansion of Eurosceptic parties is, therefore, the economic crisis, its severe impact on citizens' lives, and the apparent inability of the EU institutions in addressing its effect on 'losers' of globalisation (Barbieri 2015). Citizens affected by the economic crisis have effectively lost faith in the ability of European institutions, political elites and major parties to improve their situation. On the other hand, peripheral parties gain support among those 'losers' of globalisation, leading to increased support to parties that demonstrate populist positions that criticise the political elite and point the blame at 'imagined' enemies, such as the EU and immigrants.

Having presented the key concepts relevant to this work, the various non-party actors should be discussed: The EU and Russia. It is essential to understand the nature of the relationship between these players, as well as the tools that Russia can use to influence the EU:

In recent decades there has been much activity to produce strategic cooperation between the EU and Russia (Averre, 2005). The two sides have emphasised the common interests on foreign and security policy issues such as the Middle East, the Balkans, the fight against terrorism and WMD proliferation. However, despite the joint agreements and interests, there are significant difficulties in relations between Moscow and Brussels, particularly concerning EU enlargement, the expansion of NATO eastwards, and the Russian record on human and civil rights. There is, therefore, an evident tension between geo-political rivalry and the desire for closer engagement between the EU and Russia (Averre, 2005).

Jong (2016) agrees that a rivalry exists between the EU and Russia, while claiming a deadlock exists between Russia and the West. This impasse stems, among other reasons, from the different viewpoints that Moscow and Brussels have regarding the European integration process. While the EU portrays regional integration processes as a vehicle for positive change, Moscow sees the European integration, and the EU's partnerships with Eastern European countries, particularly Ukraine, as a malign force and threat to its security. While the European Commission prefers to act multilaterally, as a union of 28 (now 27) with Russia, the latter prefers bilateral dialogues while employing a tactic of 'divide and rule' to weaken Brussels, playing off member states against each other. Jong points out that Russia engages, among other things, in patterns of information and misinformation in order to spin narratives that could undermine the European Union and draw on Eurosceptic parties that promote Russia's goal of undermining the EU's cohesion and coherence.

When examining how Russia could negatively impact the European Union, one effective tool is influencing elections. According to Kelly (2012), various mechanisms and activities fall under foreign involvement in elections. While some external influences enhance and benefit democracy, not all international efforts aim to improve the democratic process, and some international players are interested in acting to undermine the electoral process and the democratic processes. According to Kelly, those actors, or "black knights", deliberately seek to impair the quality of the democratic process and manipulate election outcomes in their favour. Kelly notes that the United States has been accused of intervening in this manner during the Cold War, and that today Russia is the leading player known for using such tactics.

The next part will portray the historical and ideological ties between Russia and radical parties and their common interests. These interests and relationships make it possible to establish collaborations between the various actors and explain the potential support of populist and radical parties in Europe for Russian positions. The chapter will make a distinction between the relationships that exist between Russia and radical ring-wing parties on the right, and those that exist between the country and radical left-wing parties.

Common Interests

Having reviewed the theoretical literature key to this work, the next step is to try and make sense of the possibility of a relationship between Russia and populist, radical parties in Europe, based on their historical and ideological ties, as well as on the basis on interests that could be in common for these actors.

One approach that examines the collaboration between these actors, focuses on shared values. According to Klapsis (2015), Putin's social conservatives appeals to far-right parties across Europe. This ideology, which aims to return to traditional values, emphasises the importance of nationality and perceives the idea of multiculturalism as a threat. Putin's political approach sees

globalisation as a force that undermines the authority of the nation-state and culture that it represents. The West is perceived as hedonistic and as if it gave up on its Christian values, while the European Union and NATO are seen as the source of this problem, while the solution needed is a strong leader who can decisively implement policies that will save the country.

Putin's ideology resonates with the far-right parties in Europe, and therefore Russia is perceived as the only power that is willing to defend what these parties stand for. Like Putin, far-right parties in Europe believe globalism to be a force that undermines the nation-state's authority. These parties are apprehensive of multiculturalism which they see as a threat to national and traditional cultures (Klapisis 2015). Therefore, their ideology is mostly anti-Western, anti-liberal, nationalist, and requires, as per Putin's viewpoint, a strong leader who uses authoritarian means to achieve these goals. The common ideology lays the foundations for a close relationship between Russia and these parties (Klapisis 2015).

Another point of similarity could be found in the social conservatism of these parties and Russia, with one clear example is the attitude of these towards the LGBT community. According to Putin, there is a need to counter 'homosexual propaganda', which degrades society and undermines its foundations. Politicians from far-right parties in Europe, such as Mary Le Pen's party in France, are demanding the adoption of laws similar to those found in Russia (Klapisis 2015).

However, the ideological similarity is not all that this relationship is based on, since, beyond the ideological foundation, there is also a critical geo-political element that connects them. The far-right parties see Russia as a model for a state that is both sovereign and independent of the West. As these parties oppose European integration processes and hold anti-American positions, they see strong ties with Russia as a springboard that will allow their countries to disengage from Euro-Atlantic institutions. Russia is therefore perceived not only as an

alternative to liberal democracy, but to the European Union and the West (Klapisis 2015). For the most part, the far-right parties are Eurosceptic, as the process of European integration requires the transfer of sovereignty from national governments to the European Union. The European Union, as a supranational entity, is perceived as a threat to the nation-state.

It seems, therefore, that these leaders identify Putin and Russia as players that may help them dismantle the EU, while providing geo-political assistance to European countries in the post-EU era.

While explaining radical right-wing parties' affiliation with Russia is not a laborious task; the support given by left-wing parties to Russia is more difficult to fathom. The two sides traditionally do not share the same set of values, as these parties generally oppose conservatism, and hold different opinions on religion, equality, human rights and pacifism. Still, since the 2000s there has been a trend of rapprochement between the radical left parties and Moscow, with Russia actively trying to renew the same ties that it had in Europe and around the world, which weakened after the Cold War ended. It seems, therefore, that there is no significant ideological connection with Russia, and one must ask what the foundation of this relationship is?

It appears that this affiliation is also based on two main components: A shared history and pragmatism. According to Krekó and Gyori (2016), the relationship between the radical left and Russia is the product of five factors: First, there is a background of historical cooperation between the two parties. Second, international organisations of the radical left bring together European and Russian communists. Third, the principle of "my enemy's enemy is my friend" leads to opponents of globalisation, the United States and the liberal-capitalist West to become a natural partner of anti-establishment left-wing parties. Fourth, the Russian economic model of a controlled economy is a model that is attractive to some of these parties. Fifth,

disinformation campaigns succeed in framing public issues in a way that is consistent with the anti-establishment ideology of the radical left, with the example of the call for 'peace' or 'neutrality' in Ukraine and Syria.

Russia seems to simultaneously support both right-wing and left-wing radical parties, to create rifts in Europe and increase Russian support in the continent. As for the radical left, it seems that the main turning point was in the annexation of the Crimean Peninsula, when some radical left parties sent observers to the area, alongside observers from the radical right, in a move that provided legitimacy to Russian actions in the area (Krekó & Gyori 2016).

Russia uses these parties, among other things, in order to legitimise various moves, including military intervention in Georgia and Ukraine. Russia often invites members of radical parties to serve as observers in referendums and disputed territorial elections, and these observers, to this day, have always found that the elections were legitimate by international democratic standards. These observers were even invited to observe the parliamentary elections in Russia, and a member of the British far-right party BNP who was present, went as far as claiming that the elections were not only flawless but also fairer than the British election (Klapisis 2015).

Beyond legitimacy, Russia has another use for these parties - weakening the EU from within. The investment of financial and ideological resources in far-right and far-left parties is a common Kremlin strategy to produce influence, and while these parties are usually found on the political fringes, they can produce rifts in the country's political coalitions (Polyakova, 2016).

Russia, therefore, seems to see these parties as allies in its mission to dismantle the EU and weaken NATO, and these parties allow Moscow to expand its influence in Eastern Europe and into Western Europe. Even if these parties are currently not part of their country's leadership,

they can still put pressure on governments in a way that promotes Russian economic and strategic interests (Polyakova, 2016).

This claim is consistent with Kelley, who argues that "black knights" as she called such players, particularly Russia, are interested in impairing the quality of the democratic process through manipulation whose purpose is to benefit the influencer (Kelley, 2012).

Now, after examining the interests of the various actors, it is vital to scrutinise the positions of the relevant parties to understand whether or not these populist parties do indeed present both a Eurosceptic approach and a pro-Russian approach.

Party Policies

Having examined the combination of interests likely to lead to the use of election intervention tactics by Russia to advance its interests through populist parties in Europe, showing that these are likely to see Russia as a natural ally, it is now possible to examine whether this is the case, by examining parties on both sides of the political spectrum. This will allow me to see whether this cooperation, in fact, takes place and whether there is a significant difference between radical right-wing parties and radical left-wing parties in this regard.

The two parts will analyse the positions of selected parties to interpret the relationship between these parties vis-à-vis Russia, based on party manifestos, statements by party leaders and voting patterns on topics that have been identified as essential for Russia. These issues include granting special statuses in the European Union to the countries in Eastern Europe, activities in Syria, and issues related to economic sanctions and condemnation of Russia.

The United Kingdom Independence Party

The first party to be examined in order to understand the relationship between Eurosceptic and pro-Russian policies is the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP).

UKIP was founded in 1993 and is a British right-wing Eurosceptic party that holds separatist positions. As of November 2018, the party is the third-largest British party in the European Parliament, with 16 out of 73 seats allocated to the UK. In addition, the party has three representatives in the House of Lords but no seats in the House of Representatives.

First, it must be understood whether this is a populist party at all. As previously stated, this paper accepts the claim that populism focuses on the confrontation between powerful minorities, perceived as preventing in one way or another the fulfilment of the “will of the citizens”, with the former are viewed as corrupt elites (Mudde and Kaltwasser 2012).

According to Fernández-García and Luengo, the party ranks highly on the anti-establishment rhetoric index, with a mean value of 9.29, where 0 means no presence of such rhetoric and 10 means a full presence of such rhetoric in the party’s manifesto.

According to researchers, three vital elements of populism can be identified in platforms: anti-elitism, People-centrism and Popular sovereignty (Fernández-García & Luengo, 2018).

Anti-elitism is a central motif in the populist approach, and the party clearly points at a conflict between the "people" and the "elites". Anti-elitism is reflected in the UKIP 2015 manifesto in several forms; firstly, the manifesto refers to undefined elites, for example: "too few people" and "bureaucratic elites". Secondly, anti-elitism directed at the political elite can be identified, examples of which can be found in expressions such as: "the Europhilic political class", "establishment parties", "the old parties", and "the pro-EU lobby". The party's platform also includes repeated references to foreign elites, such as the "interfering EU", the "failing super-state", "foreign judges", "EU bureaucrats", and "Brussels". The platform also includes references to economic elites, for example: " Multi-national corporations", "the wealthy", "landowners and investors", "big businesses", and "large companies". Additionally, the manifesto includes references to cultural elites such as "liberals" and "metropolitans", as well

as to ideologies that are considered elitist, such as "multiculturalism" and "Political correctness" (Fernández-García & Luengo, 2018).

Populist parties focus on the people, with right-wing populism tending to define "the people" according to cultural characteristics while recognising multiculturalism as a cultural danger and a threat to sovereignty. When it comes to people-centrism, homogeneous treatment of populations is common throughout the manifesto, with repeated use of terms such as: "the British people", references to people as "taxpayers", "everyone", and as "the supreme authority". The manifesto also commonly uses terms such as: "proud Britain", "the nation", "our nation", and "families" (Fernández-García & Luengo, 2018).

Another element of populism is the expansion of direct democracy mechanisms in order to rebalance the power in favour of the people. For example, UKIP calls in its manifesto to "Rebalance power from large corporations and big government institutions and put it back into the hands of the people of this country" (Fernández-García & Luengo, 2018).

It seems that populist rhetoric is clearly evident in the party's manifesto. Therefore it is possible to continue the discussion and examine whether there is a connection between support for pro-Russian policy and Eurosceptic policy regarding the party.

An analysis of the UKIP party manifesto (2017) reveals that the EU is mentioned 87 times in various ways. The party notes that previously, "leaving the European Union was UKIP's dream", and that its platform "outlined a vision of how strong and democratic Britain could be if we grasped the opportunity to become an independent, sovereign nation once again". The 2017 manifesto proposes "six 'Brexit Tests' which need to be passed before we can say we are finally free of the EU."

The majority of the text found in the manifesto platform presents how the United Kingdom will 'regain its sovereignty', as the party claims, after the country leaves the EU and how that feat should happen. According to the party, the United Kingdom has "no legal or moral obligation to use Article 50" and that the country has "the legal right to withdraw from the EU unilaterally." Additionally, the manifesto calls for a bill to be placed to ensure that "no British national can stand for election to the European Parliament in 2019." The party claims that "There must be no compromise on Brexit", and that should PM Theresa May sign "a withdrawal agreement which means" that the country "will leave in name but not in substance, she will have betrayed Britain to the EU, just as every Prime Minister has done since 1972". The party adds in its manifesto that "the current political class is choosing to dance to Brussels' tune" (UKIP, 2017).

UKIP's approach towards the EU, as presented in the platform, is a clear example of is a 'hard Euroscepticism', which by principle opposes to the EU and the European integration process (LaConte 2010).

As for Russia itself, the country appears directly in the party platform in 5 different mentions and in two paragraphs. One paragraph addresses the need to invest in the United Kingdom's defence budgets, noting that the British Air Force is experiencing reductions during a period when Russia probes British airspace regularly. The second and more interesting paragraph states that the party "will seek better relations with Russia, but only on the basis of Russia changing its approach to international relations, no longer seeking to intervene in and manipulate the conduct of politics in western nations, and having respect for the territorial integrity of other countries."The paragraph goes on to say that the party sees "Russia as a potential important ally in the struggle against Islamist terror", and that it believes that "Russia should immerse itself in global rules-based relationships instead of seeming to glory in renegade status within the international community" (UKIP, 2017).

While this statement can be interpreted as balanced, and as one that seeks to change Russia's ways, party officials have a history of statements and actions that express support for Russian positions:

The party's leader at the time, Nigel Farage, claimed in 2014 that Putin was provoked into taking action in Ukraine, and noted that " the European Union, frankly, does have blood on its hands " following the events in Ukraine (Osborn & James, 2014).

In another case, Farage stated that European states had "directly encouraged" the uprising that "led in turn to Vladimir Putin reacting" in Ukraine. In his speech, he noted that "we better recognise that the West faces the biggest threat and crisis to our way of life we have seen for over 70 years. The recent beheadings of the British and American hostages graphically illustrate the problem and of course we have our own citizens from our won countries engaged in that struggle too". Farage added that "amongst the long list of foreign policy failures and contradictions in the last few year, amongst them the bombing of Libya, the desire to arm the rebels in Syria, has been the unnecessary provocation of Vladimir Putin," and that "this EU Empire, ever seeking to expand, stated its territorial claim on the Ukraine some years ago, just to make that worse of course some NATO members said they too would like the Ukraine to join NATO." Finally, he concluded that "We directly encouraged the uprising in Ukraine that led to the toppling of the president Yanukovich and that led in turn of course to Vladimir Putin reacting. And the moral of the story is if you poke the Russian bear with stick..." (Graham, 2014).

The new leader of UKIP, Diane James, named Putin in 2016 as one of her three political heroes, while in another interview from 2015 she stated that she admires "him from the point of view that he's standing up for his country. He is very nationalist", and added that he was "a very strong leader," and that "he is putting Russia first, and he has issues with the way the EU

encouraged a change of government in the Ukraine which he felt put at risk a Russian population in that country.” (Lyons, 2016)

If the party manifesto presents a seemingly more balanced picture, then these statements clearly point the finger at West, specifically at the EU, while removing the blame from Russia for military intervention in Ukraine while expressing affinity for Russia.

Regarding the party's voting patterns on policy issues involving Russia, several such important decisions can be identified over the past few years: One proposal in the European Parliament in 2014 was to ratify the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement. The purpose of this agreement was to produce political and economic integration between the two sides. Before the vote, Polish MP Jacek Saryusz-Wolski stated that the proposal would support Ukraine in light of the Russian occupation, and that the country should be protected from Russian aggression by introducing "increasingly heavy sanctions until the cost for Russia will be too high to sustain its policy". This decision passed with a majority of 535 against 127 opponents and 35 abstentions. 3 party members abstained, and 21 other members opposed this decision (European Parliament, 2014). This decision passed with a majority of 535 for, 127 against, and 35 abstentions. 3 party members abstained, and 21 other UKIP members opposed this decision (VoteWatch Europe, September 2014).

In the same year and in light of the situation in Ukraine, a vote was also held regarding the granting of an association status to Moldova, similar to the one granted to Ukraine. Along with a call for cooperation between Moldova and the EU, the proposal also condemned Russia for its involvement in Ukraine and its attempts to create instability in Moldova. This proposal passed with 529 for and 96 against, and 46 abstentions. One member of the party voted in favour of the decision, 2 abstained, and 21 other members opposed the decision (VoteWatch Europe, November 2014).

At the end of that year, a resolution was passed that gave Georgia a similar status, while condemning the country's occupation by Russia, its use of ethnic cleansing and forcible demographic change measures, and other human rights violations, such as restrictions on freedom of movement. The decision called on Russia to respect Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity withdraw all of its military forces from the area. This decision passed by a majority of 491 for, 84 against, and 63 abstentions. Among party members, 17 voted against, 1 did not vote at all, and 6 were absent (VoteWatch Europe, December 2014).

In 2015, another substantive vote was held, this time focused on the State of EU-Russia relations, and condemned Russia for, among other things, involvement in conflicts, violence and harassment against the gay community, for its financial support for radical and extremist parties across Europe. The resolution called for a freeze on European cooperation with Russia, until these could be renewed and conducted under European values, standards and international commitments, based on the respect of international law and human rights. This decision passed by a majority of 494 to 135, with 69 abstentions. 22 party members voted against the decision, and another 1 was not present (VoteWatch Europe, 2015).

Another decision from 2016 called on all parties involved in the Syrian civil war, particularly on Russia, to stop the attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure. This vote passed by a majority of 508 to 40, with 56 abstentions. Among party members, 16 abstained, and another 6 were not present at the vote (VoteWatch Europe, 2016).

A 2017 decision condemned Russia for illegally detaining Ukrainian citizens, called for continued sanctions on Russia, condemned Russian annexation of the Crimean Peninsula, noted that Russia is accountable for its support of terrorism in eastern Ukraine and supported the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of Ukraine within its internationally recognised borders. This decision passed by a majority of 541 to 73, with 86

abstentions. Among party members, 12 abstained, 5 more were not present, and 3 did not vote (VoteWatch Europe, 2017).

It seems that while the party's manifesto presents a balanced picture that seeks to improve relations with Russia, should the latter 'improve' its conduct in the international arena, and a different picture is painted in party leadership statements, expressing ideological affiliation with Russia, admiration and support for its conducts. Finally, the picture that emerges from the analysis of voting patterns is only slightly more complicated: A party member has voted against the Russian policy and contrary to its party's position only in one examined case, while in other cases the voting pattern ranges from voting clearly according to the Russian policy, to abstention, absence from the vote or lack of voting despite attendance. Among the votes examined, there was not a single case in which the majority of the party members voted in a manner that was contrary to the official Russian position. Of the six cases examined, in 4 cases, most of the party members voted against the decision, per Russian interests, while in two cases, most of the party members abstained or were absent.

Sinn Féin

The other party chosen to be analysed is the Irish "[We] Ourselves" (Sinn Féin) party. Sinn Féin was founded in 1905 as an Irish separatist-monarchical party, but in 1962 adopted a Marxist ideology. The party has undergone several incarnations, splits and changes over the years and now defines itself as a Republican Socialist party that aims to bring about the unification of Ireland. As of November 2018, the party holds 22 seats in the Irish Lower House, 6 seats in the Irish Upper House and 27 seats in the Northern Ireland House of Representatives. In addition, the party holds 7 seats in the British House of Representatives as a result of its seats in Northern Ireland, and 4 seats in the European Parliament: 3 from Ireland and 1 from Northern Ireland.

Here, too, will the question of the party's populism be first examined. According to Fernández-García and Luengo, the party received a high rating in the anti-establishment rhetoric index - 8.19 out of 10 (Fernández-García & Luengo, 2018).

The platform identifies a conflict between the "people" and elites. The Sinn Féin 2016 manifesto shows similar tendencies to those presented by the UKIP platform, and anti-elitist rhetoric could be detected, often directed against similar groups. For example, one can identify rhetoric directed against undefined elites, such as: "their friends at the top" and "A circle of wealthy and well connected, seemingly teflon elites". The platform also refers to political elites, for example: "government parties", and "the Golden Circle". Finally, the platform also refers to economic elites, for example: "the wealthiest", "the rich", "bankers and their friends", and "corporate interests". This platform does not include rhetoric directed against foreign elites, cultural elites, and dominant ideologies (Fernández-García & Luengo, 2018).

While right-wing populist parties identify multinationalism as a threat to 'the people' due to cultural characteristics, left-wing populist parties focus on economic differences and identify multinationalism as an economic danger manifested in various agreements that threaten the economy, sovereignty and welfare system. Sinn Féin, very much like UKIP, uses terms that identify 'the people' as homogeneous, focusing on the "people of Ireland", while referring to students, teachers, various workers and other groups as victims of the elites (Fernández-García & Luengo, 2018).

When it comes to expanding direct democracy mechanisms, the party, unlike the UKIP party, does not explicitly call for the rebalance of power and greater power to be given to citizens, but Sinn Féin does call in its platform to promote multiple initiatives through referendums. Among the various issues that the party seeks to resolve in this manner is a call for a referendum on unification with Northern Ireland, a referendum to lower the voting age, a referendum for

granting suffrage to Northern Irelanders and the Irish diaspora, and a referendum on amending Article 8 in the Irish constitution (Fernández-García & Luengo, 2018).

It seems, therefore, that this party also shows signs of populism in its platform, and therefore the analysis will continue with the examination of the relationship between Eurosceptic positions and support for pro-Russian policies.

The Sinn Féin 2017 platform for the Northern Ireland Assembly does not include any references to Russia. Beyond that, interestingly, the party platform showed an aspiration to remain in the EU in the wake of Brexit. The manifesto states that the party “will also stand against Brexit and the threat it poses to the economy of the island and to the all-island architecture of the Good Friday Agreement” (Sinn Féin 2017).

Additionally, the platform states that "The people of the North voted to remain in the European Union. The Tory government are seeking to impose Brexit on Ireland. The DUP stand with them and not with the people, or our economic interests .Sinn Féin will defend that democratic mandate and the rights of citizens. Sinn Féin believe that the only credible approach is for a designated special status for the north within the EU that will uphold the democratic vote of citizens, but will also ensure that the frontier between the EU and Britain will not be on the island of Ireland. Brexit undermines the integrity and status of the Good Friday Agreement and the political institutions. It will be bad for our economy, our people and our public services. The north must continue to have free movement of our people, goods, and services on a north/south basis, and between the other member states of the EU enabling us to benefit from the biggest trading bloc in the world. The north receives agriculture and fisheries funding, structural and investment funds and peace funding from the EU. These economic benefits must be continued. Sinn Féin is totally opposed to an EU frontier across Ireland. Trade tariffs, physical checks or border passport controls are unacceptable. Sinn Féin will work to ensure the

Irish government acts in the national interest to make achieving designated special status within the EU an objective of the Brexit negotiations” (Sinn Féin 2017).

Here, too, it can be seen that the platform does not explicitly oppose the EU, but a complete picture is obtained as the platform is further read. The manifesto describes the party's primary goal: “Partition has been a disaster for Ireland. It has failed the people of the north and south. It has failed unionists. It has failed nationalists. It has divided our people, our economies and our systems of government. Ending partition has now taken on a new imperative following the EU referendum. Brexit is a game changer. Now is the time to look to the future, to begin to debate and plan the type of Ireland in which we can all live and prosper” (Sinn Féin 2017). The platform also calls for a referendum on the unification of the North and the South.

This passage illustrates that it may very well be that the party’s seeming support for the European Union is intended to oppose the decision made by the UK, encourage a referendum, and not out of sincere support for the EU. This notion is reinforced when examining historical statements made by party members.

On 18 February 2016, party member Linda Ní Riada condemned the EU's fiscal policies, arguing that these "had catastrophic effects on the lives of its citizens," and that "the gaps between rich and poor in the EU are growing, social rights are being abolished "Unemployment, especially among young people, is at an all-time high, and residents of member states are suffering from poverty and stagnation" (Liadh Ní Riada, February 2016).

The same party member, claimed on March 9, 2016 that "The annual EU BUDG exercise is becoming an impossible mission.” ... “Every month we are surprised by Council declarations. Every month we are informed of new EU BUDG commitments, to newly found priorities. Requests are made to implement cuts to previously set and agreed priorities on key programs: research, infrastructures even on social support programs." ... "Is austerity ruling the EU

BUDG committee as it has been ruling some of our Member States?" (Liadh Ní Riada, March 2016).

In an interview on 21 February 2016 to the Irish radio network RTE, party leader Gerry Adams stated that the reason why his party, which has been critical of the EU in the past, supported a "remain" vote regarding Brexit: was that "That's where the future of the island lies and we think it would be wrong if one part of the island left and one part of the island stayed in." Additionally, he noted that his party was "critical of the European Union because of the democratic deficit" (Newsletter Newsroom, 2016)

This quote shows us that the party's campaign's goal was strategic, not ideological. The purpose of their support for staying in the EU was to strengthen the bond between the two sides of the island to facilitate and promote a referendum to unite the two political entities in Ireland.

The attitude towards the EU presented by the party in these quotations is an attitude of soft Euroscepticism, that is, an attitude that is critical towards the EU or European integration processes, but does not necessarily oppose its existence (Leconte, 2014).

A 2014 quote from the party's Foreign Affairs spokesperson, Seán Crowe noted that it is important to "stand united with the Ukrainian people at this very worrying and difficult time," and that "The Ukrainian people have suffered under corrupt and ineffective governments for too long. The result has been a deterioration in socio-economic conditions and the effective bankruptcy of the state." He added that in his opinion, "the recent problems in Ukraine stem from the EU/US and Russia playing a zero-sum geo-political game with Ukraine. Ukraine basically got offered to throw all its eggs in the EU basket, on the off chance, that down the line, they might possibly, in a few years, get EU membership, or to throw all its eggs in Russia's basket and continue to be under its thumb while surrounded by countries who have went the EU route." The spokesman further noted that "Rather than trying to railroad the

Ukraine down one particular political route, the EU and Russia should have been working together to create mutually beneficial and non-exclusive economic, political and social relationships with Ukraine. This is what would have been of real and genuine benefit to ordinary Ukrainians.” He added in his statement that “there is an urgent need for restraint from all sides within Ukraine and from foreign powers, at this crucial time. We have not seen that from the EU, from the United States or from Russia.”, and that “The interim government in Kiev has very little legitimacy. The country continues to be divided and attempts the EU, the United States and Russia to increase their influence is merely exacerbating tensions and making the problems worse. I am under no illusion of Russia’s self-interest in this region and its reasons for its recent behaviour. But the EU’s actions have been just as disastrous for the Ukrainian people. The EU has ploughed ahead with its Association Agreement with Ukraine, one of the causes of the escalation in the first place.” Finally, he criticises “the agenda of those unelected EU bureaucrats, wedded to neo-liberal policies and seeking to extend their influence eastwards, spreading a destructive austerity” (Crowe, 2014).

This statement offers us apparent criticism of Russia in light of its involvement in Ukraine, but this criticism comes accompanied by similar, and even harsher criticism of the European Union and the United States, that appears before the criticism of the former. In addition to criticising the seemingly destructive European involvement, the party also presents a classic Eurosceptic approach critical of EU 'bureaucrats' while accusing it of not being democratic.

When it comes to supporting Russian policies, an interesting trend can be identified when examining their voting patterns in the European Parliament:

When looking at the vote in the European Parliament in 2014 to ratify the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement, all 4 party members opposed this decision (VoteWatch Europe, September 2014).

In the same year, all 4 party members abstained from voting on an Association Agreement with Moldova, similar to the one granted to Ukraine (VoteWatch Europe, November 2014).

At the end of that year, a decision was passed that gave Georgia a similar status, and as previously mentioned, condemned Russia for the occupation of the country, for ethnic cleansing, forcible demographic changes, and other human rights violations. Among party members, 3 voted against, and 1 was not present (VoteWatch Europe, December 2014).

In 2015, as mentioned before, a vote was held, on the nature of relations between the EU and Russia. This decision condemned Russia for its involvement in conflicts, its actions against the LGBT community, financial support for radical parties in the EU, and called, among other things, for the EU to freeze its cooperation with Russia. In this decision, all 4 party representatives abstained (VoteWatch Europe, 2015).

In the 2016 vote, calling on all parties involved in the Syrian civil war to stop the attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure, 2 party members supported the decision, while two more were not present (VoteWatch Europe, 2016).

In a 2017 vote condemning Russia for illegally detaining Ukrainian citizens, while calling for further sanctions on Russia and condemning the country for its annexation of the Crimean Peninsula, three party members voted in favour, and another was not present at the vote (VoteWatch Europe, 2017).

In contrast to the United Kingdom Independence Party, where a clear trend of Russian support in the European Parliament could have been identified, here the trend is mixed: in two out of six votes, the majority party members voted in a manner consistent with the Russian position. In two more votes, most of the party members abstained or were absent. Half of the party members voted against the Russian position in another vote, while two more abstained. In the

last vote examined, from 2017, three party members voted against the Russian position, and another was absent.

While it is not possible to point to an unequivocal trend of supporting Russian positions in EU voting, the party seems to have voted against or abstained in most cases.

The next part will discuss the meaning of these platforms, quotes and voting patterns and what can be deduced not only regarding these parties, but concerning populist parties in general.

From Theory to Practice

The two parties examined in this work are both populist and radical parties, one on the right and one on the left. While the Independence Party has presented a 'hard' Eurosceptic stance against the EU outright, Sinn Féin has presented a more mild stance, or a 'soft' Eurosceptic approach, which is critical of the EU but does not fundamentally reject it.

Both parties presented positions that differed from the European consensus concerning Russia. UKIP's approach expressed admiration for the country's leader, a desire to lead the United Kingdom to have a warmer relationship with Russia, and even complete avoidance of Russia's blame for crises. Sinn Féin party had taken a softer stance here as well, with obvious criticism towards Russia, but also offered significant criticism towards the West in general, and the European Union in particular. This criticism perceives both sides as problematic, in a way that contradicts the European consensus.

Krekó and Gyori (2016) point at a number of popular arguments among radical left-wing parties in the context of Russia, proposing "false relativisation and symmetry" as a common argument among radical left-wing parties that support Russia. This argument is more shrewd than other arguments supporting Russia and is based on the presentation of both sides as factors that undermine stability. This is often done without reference to events like the military

takeover of the Crimean Peninsula. This approach indirectly supports Russia as it denies Russia's central role in undermining peace through direct military moves and indirect actions.

It seems, therefore, that the two parties examined express support for Russia, but the method of support is different: the radical right-wing party, examined in this paper, offers Russia more direct support, while the radical left party offers Russia indirect support. While these two approaches are different and include different rhetoric towards Russia, the meaning is similar, and so is the end result, strengthening Russia's legitimacy as a player in the international arena.

Why do these parties choose to do so? Remember, the radical right is broadly identified with the ideology that currently dominates Russia, while between the radical left parties and Russia there is a history of cooperation that facilitates contemporary cooperation despite current ideological differences. In both cases, however, the most central aspect is not ideology or history, but in my view, pragmatism:

Globalisation leads to the creation of a class of people who are negatively affected by the weakening boundaries of the defined national statuses, particularly those who have traditionally been protected by the nation-state and therefore see the weakening of borders as a threat to their social, economic status and even security. Among the same class 'losers of globalisation', we are likely to recognise an increase in nationalism in order to change the balance of power between the nation-state and the forces that threaten it. In the case of Europe, those 'losers of globalisation' will develop Eurosceptic positions, as they blame the European integration process for weakening the nation-state and, therefore, the weakening of their status.

While radical right-wing and left-wing parties will identify a different kind of threat in the EU, as the weakening of borders affects these sides differently, populist parties, regardless of on which side of the political spectrum they belong, will identify a conflict between elites and 'the

people', while blaming these elites at interfering with the fulfilment of the will of the people. These elites are often identified with the European Union.

In order to combat these elites, the parties search for a significant player that can provide them external support and serve as an alternative to the EU, and perhaps the West as a whole. While radical right-wing parties may agree to one degree or another with Russian positions, populist parties will seek to aid from players such as Russia regardless of their positions. Thus, radical and populist left-wing parties may also benefit from a relationship with Russia. The parties seek Russian support in their attempts to dismantle or weaken the EU, which aligns with Russian policies, and in return, these parties offer Russia legitimacy. Thus both sides enjoy the benefits of this relationship.

It is important to note that this study is limited in scope, and therefore its inference capacity is limited. Not all populist parties in Europe were examined, nor were populist parties outside the continent. However, in light of the findings, it can be assumed that this relationship will not be limited to European countries and that similar trends could perhaps be identified in other countries, especially in North and South America, where populist parties will seek significant player support in the international arena. Russia is expected to serve as a potential supporter or patron in these cases. However, Russia is not the only player that can provide such support, and in different areas, it is not inconceivable that different populist players will seek the support of other leading players who are perceived as an alternative to the elites.

Discussion

This work examined the relationship between populist parties in Europe and Russia, in an attempt to understand and explain the relationship between the two. The study suggests that this relationship exists between populist parties on the right and the left, with Russia.

The reason for this lies in an ideological or historical connection on the one hand, but also on shared interests. One side, the parties, are interested in supporting a player who is not perceived as part of the elites, while the other side is interested in the legitimacy that these parties can provide.

With the two parties examined, a relationship was found between Euroscepticism and support for Russia, which is explained by the claim that Euroscepticism produces this affiliation with Russia in the first place. The EU is perceived as a negative, elitist and anti-democratic factor, and therefore the parties seek to leave the EU or alternatively carry out significant reforms to change it. Russia, which opposes EU enlargement into Eastern Europe, uses these parties in order to gain legitimacy, as they vote for it in the European Parliament, express support for it, take part in various delegations, verify the authenticity of referendums, or compare Russia to the West as bearing equal blame in conflicts.

In order to strengthen the claim and verify it, other parties should be examined, first in the EU, but also beyond Europe, in order to test whether populist and radical parties in those areas will perceive the EU and the West negatively, as elites with whom they have a conflict, and therefore seek Russian support, or that of an alternative Black Knight player with whom their interests may align.

Additionally, this paper was written prior to the 2022 conflict between Russia and Ukraine, and it would therefore it would be wise to examine whether populist and radical parties, whether the ones examined here, or a broader array of parties, in Europe and beyond it, would exhibit a similar rhetoric towards Russia and this conflict.

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