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**BACHELOR'S DEGREE THESIS:  
THE RISE OF THE FAR-RIGHT IN THE EU**



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## Abstract

This paper will discuss the rise of some radical and extreme far-right parties in the EU and in particular their relation with three crises. Disappointment and even anger and indignation were created in many EU countries after the Eurozone crisis in 2010 that facilitated the emergence of some significant far-right parties. Then the refugee crisis has helped many far-right parties that have exploited the fear and the turmoil that had been caused and presented themselves as defenders of the national identity and security. By keeping this issue high on their agenda and associating it with terrorism and criminality they allowed it to remain a salient issue even after the escalation in 2015 and 2016, hence it is imperative for the EU to create a safer and more stable environment and some recommendations for this cause are also made. Finally, the rule of law crisis was created by two ruling far-right parties, in Hungary and Poland, and whilst the EU has prepared a new mechanism in order to put more pressure on these two countries, its implementation in the light of the war in Ukraine will prove quite challenging.

# Introduction

The rise of far-right parties in the EU that are in position to question some of its fundamental values, was one of the most significant (and troublesome) developments that transpired within the previous decade, a rise that is directly linked, I believe, to the crises the EU had to face after 2008. This paper, seeks to examine both the profile of far-right parties and their relation with the financial, refugee and rule of law crises. In particular, the focus will mainly be on radical far-right, but some extreme far-right parties will be analysed too, in Greece, Italy, Spain, France, Germany, Hungary and Poland.

Discussing this phenomenon is essential in order to comprehend its origin and its characteristics. Because only if we understand what went wrong, what mistakes have been made that instigated a considerable percentage of Europeans to turn to such parties, will we be able to protect both European values and European citizens in a sufficient way. I reckon that changing the world to the better can be achieved exclusively through the deep understanding of the needs, fears and desires of the people.

Distinguishing radical from extreme far-right parties will be very useful while reading this essay. Some main characteristics of the former are their opposition to some key features of liberal democracy, like political pluralism and constitutional protection of minorities<sup>1</sup> (both national and social). They are also very close to conservatism, whose main characteristics are authoritarianism, traditionalism, religiosity and nationalism<sup>2</sup>. The latter are even further to the right and include neo-fascism and neo-nazism, with some of their basic characteristics being nativism, authoritarianism and antidemocracy (radical far-right parties are, at least nominally, democratic)<sup>3</sup>. In the rest of this dissertation I mostly use the term far-right, hence there is a table below, which will help to clarify in each case whether I mean radical, extreme or both.

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<sup>1</sup> Mudde C. (2007). *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe*. Cambridge: University Press, pp 25.

<sup>2</sup> Mudde C. (2007). *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe*. Cambridge: University Press, pp 27.

<sup>3</sup> Mudde C. (2007). *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe*. Cambridge: University Press, pp 23 and 49.

The essay is divided in three parts. In the first, shifts in European public opinion that seem to have encouraged the rise of the far-right will be presented and prominent far-right wing parties, which have appeared or enjoyed increased electoral success during the period of crisis will be introduced. The second will discuss the refugee crisis, in particular both the way in which it was handled and the way it facilitated the rise of far right parties and some policy suggestions for what the EU might do about it, will be made. In the third, the outbreak of the rule of law crisis, prompted by two far-right parties, will be analysed. Furthermore, the EU's stance, what it could have done by now and what it could do in the future, will be highlighted as well. The dissertation will finish with a conclusion regarding the significance of these crises for the EU and the far right-wing parties and discussing likely developments along with possible courses of action for the EU.

The paper will focus on significant far-right parties of seven countries. Greece and Italy, as they are two states that have been severely affected both by the financial and the refugee crisis. Spain in spite of the fact that the rise of its far-right party, Vox, is not linked to any of the crises examined here, it is an interesting and important case bearing in mind that Vox has many similarities with other far-right parties and the population of the country, which renders it an important member of the Council under the current voting system<sup>4</sup> and determines its seats in the European Parliament, might also give it considerable influence in the EU. France and Germany are indisputably the most significant countries in the EU and developments there are paramount for all the member-states and the rise of the far-right in those states is associated with the financial and the refugee crises. Hungary and Poland are cases that must not be neglected too, as their far-right parties, Fidesz and PiS, are not just strong, but ruling parties and they have played a pivotal role in the refugee and rule of law crises.

My main sources of information were EU websites such as europa.eu and the Eurobarometer, reliable news websites, such as reuters.com and bbc.com and academic publications and books. Furthermore, in order to acquire well-rounded knowledge about the aforementioned issues, I have utilized both pro EU, liberal sources, like EURACTIV.com and The Guardian and eurosceptic, conservative ones,

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<sup>4</sup> EU regulations and directives must be approved by 55% of the member-states (14) that must represent 65% of the EU population.

for instance rmx.news. In this way, I hope I will be able to fully cover the subject and remain as objective as possible.

I wholeheartedly believe that solving a problem requires deep understanding of its roots and features combined with the needs and wishes of the people who are involved. Ultimate goal of this essay is to reveal all the aspects of the contested issues, so that the reader, having a clear overview, will be able to resolve what policies and principles ought to be applied.

<b>Radical far-right parties</b>	<b>Extreme far-right parties</b>
Greek Solution	Golden Dawn
League	Brothers of Italy <sup>5</sup>
National Rally	Reconquest (Zemmour)
Vox	
Alternative for Germany	
Fidesz	
Law and Justice Party	

Table i. *Radical and extreme far-right parties*

## 1. The far right on the rise

### 1.1 Public opinion in the aftermath of the financial crisis

Before discussing some major far right-wing parties, it is essential to observe the shifts in the European public opinion during the first years of the financial crisis, which had dire repercussions for several EU member-states, given that these alterations played a pivotal role in the surge of the far-right across Europe.

In 2007, one year before the ‘Lehman Brothers’ collapsed, the membership in the EU was considered ‘a good thing’ by 58% of the Europeans who were asked, a

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<sup>5</sup> Some of its members (including its leader, Giorgia Meloni) are former members of the post-fascist National Alliance. In spite of the ‘normalisation’ effort, it is not easy to say whether the party has indeed abandoned its ‘past’, as still some of its members are fascism-nostalgics. Another reason I have listed it as extreme far-right is to distinguish it from the Lega, because I think it is further to the right of Salvini’s party. Nonetheless, it must be mentioned that many scholars and analysts consider it a radical and not extreme far-right party. Source: De Giorgi E., Tronconi F. (2018). The center-right in a search for unity and the re-emergence of the neo-fascist right, *Contemporary Italian Politics*, 10(4), 330-345.

record-high rate in the last ten years, and the same percentage deemed it beneficial for their countries as well<sup>6</sup>. In addition, more than 50% considered the EU level more appropriate than the national to make decisions regarding multifarious policy areas, like terrorism, energy, immigration and competition<sup>7</sup>. It is worth noting that in the next year for this category, although the pro EU rate decreased for many policies, support for the EU having competences in the fields of competition and unemployment remained stable, 57% and 40% respectively, and the sector of economy rose from 48% to 51%<sup>8</sup>. It is evident, that in the outbreak of the world crisis, the citizens of Europe believed that the EU could protect the economy of their countries.

In addition, far-right parties that are examined in this essay at that period were actually insignificant. Some of them did not even exist and others had zero or a very small number of seats in the parliament. Only Le Pen's party (National Front) in France was quite important, though it did not enter the second round elections neither in 2007 nor in 2012, and Fidesz and Law and Justice Party in Hungary and Poland respectively were second parties, nevertheless they had not yet adopted exactly the far-right profile that was demonstrated after 2010 and even more after 2015 (for more details, see the table in the end of the chapter).

In the Autumn 2010 Eurobarometer survey, whereas Europeans were still counting on the EU to face the crisis, more than 70% wanted the EU to supervise closer financial activities of member-states and an enhanced cooperation among them, 44% deemed the actions of the EU against the crisis ineffective and 45% effective<sup>9</sup>. Furthermore, 48% believed that the Euro did not mitigate the crisis as well<sup>10</sup>. However, two years later, the hopes of Europeans would diminish and so did the popularity of the EU. 75% considered the financial situation of Europe bad and the two issues which were the most frequently mentioned as the most important problems the EU faced were the economic situation, 53%, and unemployment, 36%<sup>11</sup>. Under such circumstances, it is no wonder that only 33% felt trust towards EU, a more than

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<sup>6</sup> <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/664>

<sup>7</sup> <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/664>

<sup>8</sup> <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/832>

<sup>9</sup> <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/918>

<sup>10</sup> <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/918>

<sup>11</sup> <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/1069>

10% decrease compared to the pre-crisis period, as for the image of the EU, it was positive for 30% and negative for 29%, the worst percentage for the EU in the previous years<sup>12</sup>. Moreover, regarding the impact of the crisis in the job market, 62% of Europeans stated that the worst was still to come<sup>13</sup>. A mix of vexation and pessimism was ubiquitous in Europe, at a period when populist and far-right parties were seeing their popularity gradually increasing.

In 2014, the situation had started getting better in several EU countries, thus the stats from the Eurobarometer started improving for the EU again. The rate of Europeans with a positive image of the EU and trusting the EU rose to 39% and 37% respectively<sup>14</sup>. In addition, 56% of respondents was optimistic regarding the future of the EU, a 7% increase compared to the spring of 2013<sup>15</sup>. It is evident that the EU had only partially recovered, both financially and in popularity, before the refugee crisis struck, which will be analysed in the next chapter.

After 2015, the refugee crisis became the most preeminent source of euroscepticism, in particular far-right euroscepticism. The economy remained important for eurosceptic, but not far-right parties mainly in Greece, Italy and Spain. Hence respective data will be included in the relevant chapter.

In conclusion, the financial crisis affected negatively the public opinion towards the EU. From my point of view, one of the main reasons was that Europeans had very high expectations, which were not met, resulting in great dissatisfaction, especially in countries that were severely hit by the crisis. The crisis caused a surge in unemployment in most EU countries, a fact that is directly linked to increased votes for non-mainstream parties, mainly populist and eurosceptic, and declining trust towards national and European political institutions<sup>16</sup>. Moreover, I think it is important to stress that whilst there is no common fiscal policy, adhering to the Maastricht/convergence criteria for the Eurozone countries, meant that government spending should be limited, which usually has negative effects on the welfare state

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<sup>12</sup> <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/1069>

<sup>13</sup> <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/1069>

<sup>14</sup> <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2041>

<sup>15</sup> <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2041>

<sup>16</sup> Algan, Y., Guriev, S., Papaioannou, E. and Passari, E. (2017). The European Trust Crisis and the Rise of Populism. *Brookings Papers on Economic Activity*, 319-349.

that is quite popular in Europe<sup>17</sup> and was necessary in a period of joblessness and financial instability, hence the EU and the Euro seemed more like an obstacle to national prosperity than a mean to it to many Europeans, an image that was promoted by many (soft and hard) eurosceptic parties, though that is not totally correct (in Greece for example, the convergence criteria were not met before the crisis either and that is one of the reasons the crisis had such dire ramifications on it and it had to adhere to even stricter limitations with the Memoranda in the next years). Whereas the people who were against the EU remained fewer than the ones who supported it, their number increased dramatically in many member-states, thus offering fertile soil for far-right and populist parties to increase their popularity

## 1.2 The far-right in the European Parliament

Far-right wing parties did not only rise in national parliaments, an issue that will be discussed in the next subchapter, but in the European Parliament (EP) as well. In the current EP, there is one far-right group, the Identity and Democracy Group (ID). There is one more group, between the ID Group and the centre-right-wing European People's Party, the European Conservatives and Reformist (ECR). While it cannot be considered a far-right group, some of its members are far-right parties, thus it will be examined too.

### *European Conservatives and Reformists*

The ECR was officially founded on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of June 2009 by the British Conservatives, who wanted to diversify themselves from the centre-right 'federalist cartel'<sup>18</sup>. Its members introduce themselves as 'Eurorealists' and support that the EU has overreached by becoming too centralised, thus it has lost its contact with European citizens and it must be reformed in a way that will enhance the sovereignty of member-states and circumscribe the powers of the bureaucrats in Brussels, mainly the European Commission, as it is not a national government<sup>19</sup>. The party is soft-eurosceptic, provided that there is no desire to dismantle the EU, but to restrict its political influence over the member-states. Especially in the economy it considers the

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<sup>17</sup> For instance, one of the main slogans of the successful Brexit campaign was 'We send the EU 350 million pounds a week, let's fund our NHS (National Health System) instead'.

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.euractiv.com/section/eu-priorities-2020/news/parliament-s-new-anti-federalist-group-a-fragile-coalition/>

<sup>19</sup> <https://ecrgroup.eu/ecr>

EU paramount. In areas, like the migration policy, decisions must be backed by all the members<sup>20</sup>, which highlights state sovereignty as a value of insurmountable significance for the group. Some of its most important parties are the Brothers of Italy (FdI), Law and Justice Party (PiS) from Poland and Vox from Spain. While it presents itself as a right wing party, it contains irrefutably far-right parties as well, a fact that reasonably constitutes concern to EU officials.

Though in the beginning the group was rather fragile, due to the small number of MEPs from its nine parties<sup>21</sup>, six of them had one and only the Tories and PiS had a considerable number of MEPs,<sup>22</sup> it did not just survive, but it even came third in the European elections of 2014, with 10.28% of votes, resulting in 77 seats in the EP<sup>23</sup>, as gradually more parties joined it, or some politicians decided to change their national party and European group orientation. Profoundly, its negative stance towards the status quo within the EU fostered its popularity, as the financial crisis had reduced EU's reliability in several countries. In 2019 its seats diminished to 62 as it got 8.26% of the votes<sup>24</sup>. However, the number of far right MEPs in the EP did not decline because another far right group increased sharply its seats, namely the ID Group.

#### *Identity and Democracy Group*

The ID Group was founded in the aftermath of the 2019 European elections, succeeding the Europe of Nations and Freedom group, led by Le Pen's National Front. Its main objective is the preservation of the member states' identity, mainly referring to the refugee crisis, as it seeks to tackle migration, and sovereignty, as it endeavours, like the ECR, a less bureaucratic EU<sup>25</sup>. Its main far-right parties are the National Rally from France, Matteo Salvini's League and Alternative for Germany.

Democratic values are considered paramount and the group rejects any affiliation with totalitarianism<sup>26</sup>. It totally opposes the supra-national model and it

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<sup>20</sup> [https://ecrgroup.eu/vision/safeguarding\\_citizens\\_borders](https://ecrgroup.eu/vision/safeguarding_citizens_borders)

<sup>21</sup> A group in the EP must consist of at least 7 parties.

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.euractiv.com/section/eu-priorities-2020/news/parliament-s-new-anti-federalist-group-a-fragile-coalition/>

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/press-tool-kit/7/european-elections-results-1979-2019>

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/press-tool-kit/7/european-elections-results-1979-2019>

<sup>25</sup> [https://www.idgroup.eu/message\\_from\\_the\\_president\\_marco\\_zanni](https://www.idgroup.eu/message_from_the_president_marco_zanni)

<sup>26</sup> <https://www.id-party.eu/>

stresses the sovereignty of member-states as a core value<sup>27</sup>. In migration, for instance, each country ought to resolve alone the policy it wants to follow, based on its interests and beliefs and for this reason it advocates not only each state's freedom but also the right of its members to defend their specific national policies<sup>28</sup>. Of course, national culture and tradition are of foremost significance for the ID Group<sup>29</sup>.

Provided that such ideals seemed enticing after both the financial and the refugee crisis, it is no wonder that the party got 9.72% of votes and 73 seats in the EP<sup>30</sup>. It is unassailable that with every EU crisis, eurosceptic parties, soft or hard, are enabled to increase their popularity by providing possible solutions in areas that the EU dismayed its citizens. I firmly believe that the next subchapter will corroborate this opinion even more.

	2009-2014	2014-2019	2019-2024
Far-right MEPs	31	78	73
ECR MEPs	57	77	62
Far-right MEPs (with ECR)	88	155	135

Table ii. *Far-right MEPs in the EP with and without ECR*. Source: <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/press-tool-kit/6/european-elections-results-1979-2019> , elaborated by the author.

### 1.3 Far right parties in national parliaments

During the previous decade a considerable number of anti-EU and far right-wing parties saw their power growing markedly for multifarious reasons, be it the financial crisis, be it the refugee crisis, be it internal problems or even a combination of these. In this subchapter the circumstances, under which significant such parties emerged in national level, will be discussed. It is worth mentioning that in three southern countries, namely Greece, Italy and Spain, the main trend was anti-EU

<sup>27</sup> <https://www.id-party.eu/>

<sup>28</sup> <https://www.id-party.eu/>

<sup>29</sup> <https://www.id-party.eu/>

<sup>30</sup> <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/press-tool-kit/7/european-elections-results-1979-2019>

populism, which was included in the rhetoric of non far-right parties too, thus I deem it essential to touch upon them too, though the main focus will be of course on far-right parties.

### *Greece*

Inveterate structural problems combined with the financial crisis had a devastating effect on the economy of Greece that was acutely felt after 2010. While the general government gross debt was immense, 147.5% of GDP in 2010<sup>31</sup>, the country needed more money in order not to fall short of its obligations, but provided that it was not solvent, borrowing was not so easy. The first bailout was agreed in 2010 along with a Memorandum (the first of three!), which resulted in great austerity and poverty for the Greek people. After this development, Greece, one of the most pro-EU countries before the crisis, became one of the most eurosceptic<sup>32</sup>(in terms of soft euroscepticism). Thus, anti-EU forces soon emerged, the most significant of which were left wing SYRIZA and the extreme far-right wing Golden Dawn.

SYRIZA was founded in 2004 as an electoral alliance with other left-wing parties (it became a single party in 2013) and for years was an insignificant party in the Greek Parliament, but after the crisis its populist, soft eurosceptic rhetoric started appealing to more and more Greeks. While the mainstream parties were stressing that there was no other option, the leader of SYRIZA, Alexis Tsipras, seemed to offer an alternative for the devastated Greeks, with a populist profile trying to address all Greeks, not only leftists.

However, when SYRIZA became the ruling party in 2015 it was faced with great animosity from the EU and the members of the Eurozone. When it triggered a referendum on the measures proposed by the other members of the Eurogroup, 61% of Greeks voted for 'No'<sup>33</sup>, because the new Memorandum was considered preposterous in Greece and this percentage was an indication of the vexation, the

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<sup>31</sup> [https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/WEO/weo-database/2021/October/weo-report?c=174,&s=GGXWDG\\_NGDP,&sy=2005&ey=2016&ssm=0&scsm=1&sc=0&ssd=1&ssc=0&sic=0&sort=country&ds=.&br=1](https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/WEO/weo-database/2021/October/weo-report?c=174,&s=GGXWDG_NGDP,&sy=2005&ey=2016&ssm=0&scsm=1&sc=0&ssd=1&ssc=0&sic=0&sort=country&ds=.&br=1)

<sup>32</sup> <https://medium.com/athenslivegr/from-sweet-to-sour-euroscepticism-in-greece-a-love-hate-relationship-2dd5e3a70fb1>

<sup>33</sup> [http://ekloges-prev.singularlogic.eu/r2015/e/public/index.html#{%22cls%22:%22main%22,%22params%22:{}",](http://ekloges-prev.singularlogic.eu/r2015/e/public/index.html#{%22cls%22:%22main%22,%22params%22:{})

anger and even the resentment of many Greeks towards the EU, feelings that were exploited not only by SYRIZA, but also by the extreme far-right Golden Dawn.

Golden Dawn was founded in 1980, though it became officially a party in 1993<sup>34</sup>, and for years it could not even get 3% of the votes, the necessary rate to enter the Greek parliament, until 2012. It is foremost to mention that Golden Dawn, unlike the other parties that are going to be observed, is not merely an extreme far-right wing, but a neonazi party, thus it was not a member of any of the groupings in the EP. It was engaged in assaults and even in murders, yet a legal procedure against the party started only in 2013, after the murder of a singer by members of the party, and in 2020, after considerable delays a verdict was reached, with which Golden Dawn was rendered a criminal organisation and its members went to the penitentiary.

A main feature of the party was its antisystemic speech, against both the established political system in Greece and the EU, rhetoric that appealed to many Greeks frustrated with the two main parties, New Democracy and PASOK, and the EU, as they were seriously affected by the financial crisis and the austerity imposed by the country's lenders and they did not want to vote a left-wing party like SYRIZA. Provided that it was never in Greek parliament before 2012, it could easily dissent itself from the corrupted ruling elite. However, crimes committed by party members started becoming more known, as did its neonazi identity. In Greece totalitarian ideologies were never popular, moreover the country had fought against the Axis in the Second World War, with great losses. Therefore, even conservatives and nationalists were reluctant, if not totally negative, to support the party despite its enticing, during the 2010-2015 period, rhetoric.

The outbreak of the refugee crisis in 2015 did not help the party to increase its voters because it coincided with the dispute of SYRIZA with the EU, thus the party's anti-immigrant positions were neglected and the party got only 7% of votes in the elections of September 2015<sup>35</sup>, in the aftermath of the Greek referendum. Although it was the third largest party in the parliament from 2015 until 2019, as the trial was carrying on, it was gradually becoming irrelevant and no other party wanted to

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<sup>34</sup> <https://www.tovima.gr/2020/10/06/society/xrysi-aygi-i-anodos-kai-i-ptosi-tis-nazistikis-symmorias/>  
<sup>35</sup> <https://www.politico.eu/europe-poll-of-polls/greece/>

cooperate with it. In the 2019 elections it failed to enter the parliament with 2.9%<sup>36</sup> of votes<sup>37</sup>, which signified the political ‘death’ of the party.

The desolation of Golden Dawn was followed by the rise of the far-right wing party, Greek Solution, a more moderate party and member of the ECR Group in the EP, where it has one MEP. It is against illegal migration, accentuates the priority of the national interest and tradition, especially religion, is of major significance for the party<sup>38</sup>. It received only 3.7% of votes in 2019<sup>39</sup>, as most of the conservatives in Greece preferred to support the new leader of New Democracy, Kyriakos Mitsotakis. Currently, it is not really likely that the party will be able to increase markedly its percentage, as polls suggest<sup>40</sup>.

### *Spain*

The case of Spain has profound similarities with Greece. Again, the crisis had influenced markedly the Spanish economy, which prompted the rise of a left-wing party, namely Podemos, which was founded just in 2013, yet it got almost 8% of the votes in the European elections in 2014 and 20.5% in the national elections of 2015<sup>41</sup>, an irrefutably impressive percentage that can be mainly attributed to its anti-austerity, anti-elitist and anti-systemic speech!

However, in spite of the party’s sharp rise in the 2015 and 2016 elections with more than 20%<sup>42</sup>, it did not manage to canvass more votes than its main opponents, PP and PSOE. In the two elections of 2019 the party got under 15% and finished in the fourth place<sup>43</sup>. After the rise of the far right Vox, which will be discussed below, in the last elections, the party entered a coalition with PSOE, which has divided its supporters<sup>44</sup>, whilst the defeat of its leader, Pablo Iglesias, in the Madrid regional

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<sup>36</sup> <https://www.politico.eu/europe-poll-of-polls/greece/>

<sup>37</sup> 3% is required.

<sup>38</sup> <https://elliniki-lisi.gr/programmatikes-theseis>

<sup>39</sup> <https://www.politico.eu/europe-poll-of-polls/greece/>

<sup>40</sup> <https://www.politico.eu/europe-poll-of-polls/greece/>

<sup>41</sup> <https://www.electoralgeography.com/new/en/category/countries/s/spain>

<sup>42</sup> <https://www.electoralgeography.com/new/en/category/countries/s/spain>

<sup>43</sup> <https://www.electoralgeography.com/new/en/category/countries/s/spain>

<sup>44</sup> <https://www.france24.com/en/20200114-from-grassroots-to-government-spain-s-podemos-comes-of-age>

election resulted in his resignation from politics<sup>45</sup> that is likely to contribute to the further weakening of the party.

The case of the far-right Vox is peculiar among the other cases that are examined in this paper, as it is the only party whose rise is linked neither to the financial nor to the refugee crisis. On the contrary, the main reason is an internal issue, in particular Catalanian nationalism.

Catalonia is a region in North-East Spain with significant autonomy, as it has its own history, language, flag and even parliament and anthem<sup>46</sup>. In 2017, 90% of Catalonians voted for independence, while the turnout was 43%, in a referendum, which was rendered illegal by Spain's Constitutional Court, yet this did not prevent the Catalan parliament from declaring independence on 27<sup>th</sup> of October<sup>47</sup>.

This development was not welcome in Madrid. The Catalanian parliament was dissolved, its leaders were sacked and riots broke out in the region, with citizens being hit by policemen, reviving memories from Franco's dictatorship<sup>48</sup>. The turmoil and the fear for the integrity and the future of the country facilitated the rise of Vox.

Vox, which was founded in 2014, has promised to suspend Catalan autonomy and take control of Catalan television, police and education<sup>49</sup>, thus it was able to get 15% of votes in the elections of November 2019, making it the third biggest party in the Spanish Congress. Furthermore, it is anti-immigrant, anti-Islam, it opposes abortion and same-sex marriage and is a member of the ECR group in the EP, therefore it is considered a far right party, though its leader, Pedro Abascal, contends that its support for the EU-membership diversifies it from far-right parties<sup>50</sup>. In spite of the fact that it does not seem to constitute a direct threat to the EU, its values are in accordance with the values of parties like Fidesz and PiS, both of them will be discussed later, and contrary to EU's, like tolerance and freedom. In this respect, should it consolidate its power, it will irrefutably be a source of turbulence within the EU.

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<sup>45</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/may/05/pablo-iglesias-leaves-politics-podemos-spain>

<sup>46</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-41584864>

<sup>47</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-29478415>

<sup>48</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-29478415>

<sup>49</sup> <https://www.euronews.com/2019/11/10/vox-who-are-spain-s-far-right-party-and-what-do-they-stand-for>

<sup>50</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-46422036>

The rise of Vox is markedly different from the emergence of other far-right parties. Nonetheless, the Catalonia crisis does not seem sufficient to me to preserve to party's popularity in the mid-term, but it is likely that this crisis might have contributed to an extremist shift in the Spanish society not only regarding state integrity, but in variegated matters, such as migration. Moreover, the party's stance against the strict restrictions due to the pandemic<sup>51</sup> might prove to be a reliable source of voters as well. The party is also notorious for its anti-feminism, another value that does actually not comply with the EU values. By now, voting intention for Vox has slightly increased<sup>52</sup>, yet there are two developments that could make Vox a major power in Spanish and perhaps European politics. One is the increasing number of refugees and asylum seekers in Spain after 2020<sup>53</sup> and the other is the cooperation between the People's Party (centre-right) and Vox in the autonomous region of Castile and Leon. If they manage to cooperate effectively, this could lead to a conservative government after the 2023 elections, bearing in mind the average of polls, though it should be mentioned that currently it seems that the PP's leadership is likely to endeavour some kind of cooperation with PSOE at first place after the elections<sup>54</sup>.

### *Italy*

Italy was also heavily struck by the crisis, which prompted the emergence of an anti-systemic, populist, but not far-right party, namely the 5 Stars Movement (M5S). Founded in 2009 by the comedian Beppe Grillo and entrepreneur Gianroberto Casaleggio, M5S had a rather ambiguous programme, but clearly against the Euro, allowing it to draw support from Italians of various political backgrounds, exploiting their vexation and dissatisfaction with the EU that had imposed strict austerity measures, as it did with Greece and Spain. It is profound that the EU's stance towards the Mediterranean countries contributed to the increase of the mental and cultural gap between the South and the North, which brought about the radicalisation we have observed in these member-states.

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<sup>51</sup> <https://www.reuters.com/article/health-coronavirus-spain-idINL8N2H106A>

<sup>52</sup> <https://www.politico.eu/europe-poll-of-polls/spain/>

<sup>53</sup> The country was not seriously affected by the 2015 crisis that could have helped Vox to get more votes.

<sup>54</sup> <https://rmx.news/spain/politics-will-never-be-the-same-in-spain-after-vox-pp-regional-coalition-paves-way-for-conservative-federal-government/>

In 2013 it came first with 25.6% of votes<sup>55</sup>, but it did not become the ruling party as it did not have enough seats in the Chamber of Deputies and did not want to cooperate with other parties, but when the next elections took place, in 2018, M5S was by far the most popular party, with 32.7% of the votes<sup>56</sup>. At first, it formed a coalition with Salvini's far right Lega, which lasted one year, then with the Socialist Party and in 2021 it entered the national unity government led by Mario Draghi, who is considered the saviour of Euro. M5S is not a member of any of the European parties in the EP and efforts to categorise it as a left or right wing party are futile. This feature has now become a corrosive factor, as the party has mitigated its radical rhetoric, it is not extremely important in Draghi's government and is markedly divided<sup>57</sup>. Consequently, its popularity has diminished substantially, which was also demonstrated by the recent local elections results as many of its voters probably abstained or voted for the two far-right parties that are discussed below<sup>58</sup>.

The far right in Italy did not benefit significantly from the financial crisis, as the M5S dominated, but the refugee crisis combined with the M5S' failure gave the opportunity to not one, but two far-right parties to increase sharply their popularity: Lega and later the Brothers of Italy.

Lega Nord is a far-right wing party founded in 1991 and is a member of the ID Group in the EP. One of its main characteristics was its Padanian nationalism, which considered the northern regions of Italy superior to the ones on South, thus endeavoured more autonomy for them. However, this started changing as soon as Matteo Salvini took over in 2013, when the party's populism started focusing on another issue that was enticing for all the Italians of the country: illegal migration. For him, globalisation, an overbearing EU and out-of-control immigration rather than the centralised Italian state effacing regional culture and overtaxing the prosperous North constituted a threat to identity<sup>59</sup>. Soon, Lega Nord was replaced by Lega.

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<sup>55</sup> <https://www.politico.eu/europe-poll-of-polls/italy/>

<sup>56</sup> <https://www.politico.eu/europe-poll-of-polls/italy/>

<sup>57</sup> <https://www.euractiv.com/section/elections/news/no-leader-no-purpose-the-crisis-of-italys-five-star/>

<sup>58</sup> <https://www.euractiv.com/section/elections/news/no-leader-no-purpose-the-crisis-of-italys-five-star/> and <https://www.politico.eu/article/italy-5star-movement-brothers-of-italy-mario-draghi-giuseppe-conte-matteo-salvini-local-elections/>

<sup>59</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2018/aug/09/how-matteo-salvini-pulled-italy-to-the-far-right>

Furthermore, the party's leader is very active on social media, which is paramount for politicians who want to increase substantially their popularity, especially on Facebook, capitalising on the refugee crisis and the growing discontent with prime minister Renzi<sup>60</sup>. Salvini has managed to promote himself both as tough and kind-hearted man, while his anti-systemic speech is appealing to a rising number of people, as it always happens in periods of crisis and turmoil, which has become almost the permanent state of the EU after 2010 for multifarious reasons<sup>61</sup>...

In 2016 the number of people entering Italy from North Africa escalated to 181,000, while 157,000 Italians chose to leave their country endeavouring a better future<sup>62</sup>. The two incidents were not directly linked, yet the overall picture illustrated one of not only Salvini's, but also of most of the far-right leaders' most preeminent opinion, namely that the poor governance of the corrupted elites, both within the national borders and in Brussels, instigates the locals to leave and foreigners to come, even illegally. Whether this reflects precisely the reality is debatable, whether far-right parties are capable of eradicating corruption and contributing to the furtherance of their countries is also debatable, what is not disputable is that this rhetoric appealed (and appeals) to a vast number of Italians (and other Europeans), which indicates that the established mainstream parties cannot represent the people, thus they have failed to achieve their democratic purpose, stressing the urgent need for change, a change that the far-right evangelised to bring.

Under such circumstances, Lega was third with 17.4% of votes in the elections of 2018<sup>63</sup> and formed a government with the M5S, which lasted one year and Salvini was appointed interior minister. One of the most notorious things he did was turning away a boat of more than 600 African refugees, an action that further increased his popularity in Italy, but was condemned internationally by many<sup>64</sup>, including the EU. Nevertheless, the League decided to join Draghi's government of national unity. This indicated a slight move towards a more mainstream profile (something that will be noticed the in case of Marine Le Pen's party, which will be examined later, as well),

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<sup>60</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2018/aug/09/how-matteo-salvini-pulled-italy-to-the-far-right>

<sup>61</sup> Financial crisis, refugee crisis, rule of law crisis, health crisis!

<sup>62</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2018/aug/09/how-matteo-salvini-pulled-italy-to-the-far-right>

<sup>63</sup> <https://www.politico.eu/europe-poll-of-polls/italy/>

<sup>64</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2018/aug/09/how-matteo-salvini-pulled-italy-to-the-far-right>

but this has not benefited the League, as polls suggest<sup>65</sup>, but another far-right wing party, the FdI, which cooperated with the League and Silvio Berlusconi's Forza Italia (FI) in the 2018 elections and got only 4.4% of votes<sup>66</sup>.

FdI was founded in 2012, its leader is Giorgia Meloni and is considered by many a successor of the Italian Social Movement, a postwar descendant of Benito Mussolini's fascist party, though this is not accepted by the party, the members of which deem it conservative and not far right, as they are also members of the ECR group in the EP<sup>67</sup>. However, its support, among others, for the removal of birth-right citizenship, a naval blockade in order to eradicate illegal migration in Italy and a renegotiation of all the EU treaties, but not leaving the union, in its fifteen-point programme, combined with fascist apologist or even behaviour tendencies, at least of some members of the party<sup>68</sup>, indicate that, in spite of the party's more moderate profile (compared to the post-fascist National Alliance, from which many of its members come) it is rather vague whether its 'fascist past' really or only partially belongs to the past.

The pivotal point for FdI (as was for M5S) was the formation of the government of national unity under the former ECB president, Mario Dragi, which it was the only party in the parliament that refused to join, while the League decided to support a person that represents one of the things it is supposed to resent: the elite of the EU and the banks. '[...]They've all sold their souls and they're paying for this' was stated by FdI two months after the formation of the government, when it was already third in the polls<sup>69</sup>. The support to the Covid health pass<sup>70</sup> by the League and Forza Italia, unlike the FdI was also a notable difference between the three members of the coalition that benefited the latter, given that many anti-vaxxers, who had also

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<sup>65</sup> <https://www.politico.eu/europe-poll-of-polls/italy/>

<sup>66</sup> <https://www.politico.eu/europe-poll-of-polls/italy/>

<sup>67</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/aug/03/success-of-far-right-brothers-of-italy-raises-fears-of-fascist-revival> and <https://tldrnews.co.uk/tldr-eu/the-far-right-in-italy-the-rise-of-the-brothers-of-italy/>

<sup>68</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/aug/03/success-of-far-right-brothers-of-italy-raises-fears-of-fascist-revival> and <https://tldrnews.co.uk/tldr-eu/the-far-right-in-italy-the-rise-of-the-brothers-of-italy/>

<sup>69</sup> <https://tldrnews.co.uk/tldr-eu/the-far-right-in-italy-the-rise-of-the-brothers-of-italy/>

<sup>70</sup> A certificate showing that its owner has either been vaccinated, or recently recovered from Covid-19, or recently received a negative test result. Without it, travelling in the EU is not possible. It is also used in domestic context, for example prohibiting persons that do not possess it from entering places like restaurants, bars or universities.

voted for the League were vexed by their party's stance and believed that it could not represent them adequately, thus the FdI was rendered the best choice<sup>71</sup>. Nevertheless, leaving the coalition with the League and Forza Italia does not seem likely. With FdI polling at over 20%, the League about 15% and Forza Italia about 8%<sup>72</sup>, it is possible that the coalition will have the majority in the parliament and should FdI get the biggest percentage of them, which is also quite feasible, Giorgia Meloni will become prime minister.

In the rest of this essay we are bound to encounter far right governments, but a potential government consisting of a right wing and two far-right wing parties, which will be the most significant, can be observed solely in Italy. The main reason for this is that the financial and refugee crisis<sup>73</sup> had dire ramifications on the country, as neither the mainstream ruling parties nor the EU managed to protect it, while the latter, and especially Germany within it, were held responsible for the austerity and poverty in the country, as they were in Greece and Spain too, therefore whatever is associated with the established political system is reckoned a rival by a prodigious proportion of Italians, who are eager to support anyone who treats them with animosity, which however, does not necessarily mean Italexit, but rather some changes in the EU and most of all, a substantial alteration in the domestic political situation.

### *France*

Unlike the other cases that are examined, the far-right in France is not a relatively new phenomenon, as the National Front, founded in 1972, has entered the National Assembly since 1986, when it got 10% of the votes and 35 seats and remained relatively stable for several years<sup>74</sup>. However, its leader, Jean-Marie Le Pen, managed to enter the second round in the presidential elections of 2002, to everyone's surprise, where he was defeated by Jacques Chirac<sup>75</sup>. Under his leadership, the party was nationalistic, xenophobic and even anti-Semitic, which along with some other

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<sup>71</sup> <https://rmx.news/italy/why-melonis-brothers-of-italy-have-taken-over-from-salvinis-league-as-the-leading-right-wing-party/?fbclid=IwAR3FAYRkfdZ4oPmFL8Y9HmUa6TZhBzZly-4E8Um61k9LdquEFvahcEosaEo>

<sup>72</sup> <https://www.politico.eu/europe-poll-of-polls/italy/>

<sup>73</sup> The health crisis could also be added.

<sup>74</sup> <https://www.britannica.com/topic/National-Rally-France>

<sup>75</sup> <https://www.britannica.com/topic/National-Rally-France>

radical features of the party, such as anti-systemic speech, could render it neo-fascist<sup>76</sup>. Nevertheless, it was not before Le Pen's daughter, Marin, took over, in 2011, and the refugee crisis escalated, when the party's popularity rose substantially.

In spite of keeping some far-right characteristics, like anti-migration, anti-Islam and anti-EU rhetoric, the extremism of the party was mitigated significantly in order to encourage more French to vote for it or at least not vote against it, as it would not seem as subversive and extreme as Jean-Marie's party, a fact that instigated even left-wing voters to vote for Chirac instead of abstaining in the second round elections in 2002. Furthermore, since 2015 terrorist attacks by Muslims started occurring in France that were linked, at some extent, to the refugee crisis, causing turbulence and Le Pen tried to present herself as the only person who could maintain France's security. She managed to get 21.3% of votes and enter the second round of the 2017 presidential elections, but was defeated by Emmanuel Macron<sup>77</sup>.

One of the main reasons for this outcome was considered that the party was still rather radical, especially in the field of the EU, with Le Pen wanting to follow the UK's example and leave the Union. Therefore, she decided to move slightly more to the centre, with the party now claiming that it does not endeavour to leave the EU, but change it from within, with sovereignty, traditional values and national identity, being of insurmountable significance in this new EU, as it is also claimed by its group in the EP, the ID Group<sup>78</sup>, views that do not seem to be totally in accordance with other EU, liberal values, like tolerance or purposes, like an 'ever closer union'. In this respect, Le Pen has also adopted an ecological agenda<sup>79</sup>. It is evident that the party has appeared to be quite flexible, as it has achieved to maintain a conservative and far-right profile and alleviate markedly its extreme and radical features, which explains why it has managed to gradually and steadily increase its power.

With a new name from 2018, National Rally, the party was first in the European Elections of 2019, with 23.31% of the votes<sup>80</sup>, which could be translated as an approval of these alterations. Further tensions, regarding the financial situation, the

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<sup>76</sup> <https://www.britannica.com/topic/National-Rally-France>

<sup>77</sup> <https://www.politico.eu/europe-poll-of-polls/france/>

<sup>78</sup> <https://www.id-party.eu/>

<sup>79</sup> <https://www.euractiv.com/section/elections/news/bye-frexit-hello-ecology-why-le-pens-party-programme-has-a-new-agenda/>

<sup>80</sup> <https://www.politico.eu/europe-poll-of-polls/france/>

pandemic and migration, as the protests of the ‘yellow vests’ and the open letters from French generals warning of a civil war due to the great number of Muslim immigrants in the country, indicate, are irrefutably beneficial for Le Pen. However, it is precisely this situation, combined with the National Rally’s mainstream shift that has instigated the emergence of a new candidate for the presidency, far more extreme and radical than what Marin Le Pen was, even in 2017, namely Eric Zemmour, who announced his candidacy just on the 30<sup>th</sup> of November.

Zemmour is a writer and journalist, quite famous in France as he has been appearing on the television for many years. Among others, he believes that non-French names ought to be banned, women are inferior to men, African Muslims are violent thieves and criminals and even that Petain’s regime saved Jews! In addition, he has said that France ‘will be a Muslim country by 2060’, hence he has stated that, should he be elected, he will create a ‘Ministry for Remigration’ and deport one million foreigners<sup>81</sup>. Regarding the EU, he contends that France should reclaim its sovereignty from the technocrats and European judges, who have deprived the French people of the ability to decide their own fate ‘in the name of the chimaeras of a Europe that will never be a nation’<sup>82</sup>. It is worth noting that Jean-Marie Le Pen views positively his candidacy, as he embraces what his daughter decided to neglect<sup>83</sup>. The disparities of the two far right candidates are rather obvious, as Zemmour’s goals and beliefs are totally subversive.

When announcing officially his candidacy, he used expressions such as ‘We will be worthy of our ancestors’<sup>84</sup>. [...] We will not let them replace us.’<sup>85</sup> and ‘France no longer needs reforming, but saving’<sup>86</sup>. The major threat of course is migration that opposes national safety, stability and even prosperity, thus no more immigrants

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<sup>81</sup> <https://rmx.news/france/zemmour-to-deport-1-million-foreigners-from-france-through-creation-of-remigration-ministry-if-elected/>

<sup>82</sup> [https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/short\\_news/far-right-zemmour-attacks-eu-makes-le-pen-look-normal/](https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/short_news/far-right-zemmour-attacks-eu-makes-le-pen-look-normal/)

<sup>83</sup> [https://www.lemonde.fr/election-presidentielle-2022/article/2021/10/02/jean-marie-le-pen-soutiendra-eric-zemmour-s-il-est-mieux-place-que-marine-le-pen\\_6096818\\_6059010.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/election-presidentielle-2022/article/2021/10/02/jean-marie-le-pen-soutiendra-eric-zemmour-s-il-est-mieux-place-que-marine-le-pen_6096818_6059010.html)

<sup>84</sup> Oddly, Zemmour himself is of Algerian and Jewish origin!

<sup>85</sup> [https://rmx.news/france/we-will-not-let-them-replace-us-eric-zemmour-announces-his-run-for-french-president/?fbclid=IwAR0cFvAvQ-J7WXpvMpSkFS80e\\_VsGGaB55emJQz4RCQyHPB5LjhTRs3bhkA](https://rmx.news/france/we-will-not-let-them-replace-us-eric-zemmour-announces-his-run-for-french-president/?fbclid=IwAR0cFvAvQ-J7WXpvMpSkFS80e_VsGGaB55emJQz4RCQyHPB5LjhTRs3bhkA)

<sup>86</sup> [https://rmx.news/france/we-will-not-let-them-replace-us-eric-zemmour-announces-his-run-for-french-president/?fbclid=IwAR0cFvAvQ-J7WXpvMpSkFS80e\\_VsGGaB55emJQz4RCQyHPB5LjhTRs3bhkA](https://rmx.news/france/we-will-not-let-them-replace-us-eric-zemmour-announces-his-run-for-french-president/?fbclid=IwAR0cFvAvQ-J7WXpvMpSkFS80e_VsGGaB55emJQz4RCQyHPB5LjhTRs3bhkA)

should be admitted and the ones already living in France should be deprived of the French nationality. The name of his party is also interesting: Reconquest<sup>87</sup>, ‘The conquest has begun. Our economy, our security, our identity, our sovereignty, the conquest of our country’<sup>88</sup>. The implication towards the EU and immigrants is absolutely obvious. Just like in Italy, when a far-right wing party made a slightly mainstream shift, it alienated a part of its audience, which is big enough to enable another far right party, or person in the case of France, to emerge and play an important role in the politics of the country, though neither FdI’s nor Zemmour supporters are exclusively former League and Le Pen voters.

In the April 2022 elections the far-right saw its power increasing as Le Pen canvassed 23,3% of the votes and made it to the second round, where she faced Macron who got 27.8% in the first round, and Zemmour got 7.1% of the votes<sup>89</sup>, markedly less than what was initially expected, yet a considerable percentage. In the second round Le Pen lost again, but her percentage was significantly improved compared to 2017 (41.5% from 33.9%), whilst it should be mentioned that the turnout was relatively low<sup>90</sup>. Many analysts believe that this was Marin Le Pen’s last chance to become president of France, yet the constant increase of far-right (and radical left) parties’ popularity and the decline of mainstream, both right- and left-wing, parties, as the electoral results have shown, indicates that non-mainstream, including far-right, candidates still have chances for the presidency. Furthermore, National Rally’s electoral results in the legislative elections are notable as it was third, behind Macron’s party and a coalition of left-wing parties (NUPES) and got 17.3% of votes in the second round and 89 seats, a huge increase compared to the 8 seats it had in the previous parliament, rendering it the main representative of the right in the French parliament that could irrefutably enhance its influence on French politics, while Reconquest has totally failed by canvassing only 4.24% of the votes in the first round and did not take a single seat in the French parliament<sup>91</sup>.

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<sup>87</sup> Reconquete.

<sup>88</sup> <https://rmx.news/france/zemmour-establishes-reconquest-party-in-lead-up-to-french-presidential-election/>

<sup>89</sup> <https://www.politico.eu/europe-poll-of-polls/france/>

<sup>90</sup> <https://www.politico.eu/europe-poll-of-polls/france/>

<sup>91</sup> <https://www.politico.eu/europe-poll-of-polls/france/> and <https://www.euronews.com/2022/06/12/exit-polls-macron-s-ensemble-in-the-lead-after-french-parliamentary-election-first-round>

## Germany

After the Second World War, a strong far right party in Germany seemed almost unthinkable for many years, yet the crises of the previous decade materialised it. The Alternative for Germany (AfD) is a relatively new party, founded in 2013, a fact instigated by the Eurozone crisis. However, it was soon separated in two blocs, one focusing on economy, represented by Bernd Lucke, founder of the party, and one more nationalist and conservative, represented by Frauke Petry, with the latter prevailing, prompting the former's withdrawal from the AfD. Thus the party adopted a far-right profile and it has retained it even after Petry left the party five years ago.

Concentrating its fire on the entrance of vast numbers of immigrants in Germany, especially when this was linked to terrorist attacks and managing to draw attention constantly through the extensive use of social media and even calculated provocation (for instance, Petry had stated that in case of emergency, firearms must be utilised against immigrants along the border)<sup>92</sup> the party got 12.6% of votes, 94 seats and was third in the 2017 elections<sup>93</sup>.

In its voluminous programme for the 2020 elections, whose title was 'Deutschland. Aber normal.'<sup>94</sup>, the government was accused of violating the constitution's principles in multifarious ways with its immigrant, European and Covid-19 policy<sup>95</sup>. Regarding the last one, AfD was against lockdowns and the mandatory use of masks, while vaccination ought to be a free choice and not be forced in any way<sup>96</sup>. Furthermore, German tradition, culture and history are of utmost significance for the education and the party is bound to defend them against any effort to reduce their importance or change falsely their context, while family, which consists of a mother, a father and children, is also paramount, as a solution to the demographic problem and a core-substance of society and must be preserved and supported, whilst greens and leftists seek to efface it, at least in its current form<sup>97</sup>.

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<sup>92</sup> <https://projekte.sueddeutsche.de/artikel/politik/afd-5-reasons-for-the-far-right-rising-in-germany-e403522/>

<sup>93</sup> <https://www.politico.eu/europe-poll-of-polls/germany/#98318>

<sup>94</sup> Germany. But normal.

<sup>95</sup> <https://www.afd.de/wahlprogramm>

<sup>96</sup> <https://www.afd.de/wahlprogramm>

<sup>97</sup> <https://www.afd.de/wahlprogramm>

In the field of foreign policy, there are two prominent issues: EU and migration. It favours an EU of fatherlands that will maintain state sovereignty and totally opposes a federal EU<sup>98</sup>, as does its group in the EP, the ID Group. Moreover, it wants Germany to leave the Eurozone<sup>99</sup>. Regarding migration, the ‘Asylum-paradise Germany’ must end, which means that the asylum policy of the country must change considerably, with much stricter criteria, such as qualifications that could be of use to the country, or whether an asylum seeker’s cultural and religious background is compatible with the German values, though this is actually not compatible with the German Constitution, while humanitarian aid is better to be provided to the country of origin of the refugees and not when they are on their way to Europe or in Europe<sup>100</sup>.

In 2021, an agency responsible for the protection of the constitution, the BfV<sup>101</sup>, was granted the ability to monitor the phones of AfD members and spy on its activities as a suspected extreme rightwing organisation<sup>102</sup>. For the party this was merely a tool to damage its success in the elections of September 2021<sup>103</sup>, as it is not extreme, but just more conservative than the other parties, which want to eradicate it because its position on most issues dissents fundamentally from theirs.

The certain thing is that the party did not benefit from this procedure, with its percentage declining to 10.3% and its seats to 83, while the left-wing Social Democrats and the Greens increased substantially their popularity and formed a government along with the Free Democrats. Bearing in mind that no party is eager to cooperate with the AfD, its influence is likely to remain marginal, at least in the current Bundestag.

### *Poland*

Poland is a former soviet satellite, which however sought to join the EU as soon as the Cold War was over in 1989-1991 and its wish was materialised in 2004, when it joined it along with 9 other countries. Yet, nowadays it is considered one of

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<sup>98</sup> <https://www.afd.de/wahlprogramm>

<sup>99</sup> <https://www.afd.de/wahlprogramm>

<sup>100</sup> <https://www.afd.de/wahlprogramm>

<sup>101</sup> Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz

<sup>102</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/mar/03/german-intelligence-agency-to-spy-on-far-right-afd-party>

<sup>103</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/mar/03/german-intelligence-agency-to-spy-on-far-right-afd-party>

the most difficult partners of the EU, a development caused by the rise of PiS to power in 2015.

PiS is a fragment of the conservative Solidarity Political Action and it was founded in 2001 by the twin brothers Lech and Jaroslaw Kaczynski. 2005 was a successful year for the party, as it was first in the elections and Lech won the presidential elections, but this only lasted until 2007, when it lost the early parliamentary elections it called by the Civic Platform<sup>104</sup> and it became the ruling party again only in 2015.

Scandals in which Civic Platform was involved played a significant role and even more important was PiS' shift to a very conservative, far-right profile, being against abortion and LGBTQ rights. In this way, it got the total support of the Catholic Church, which is paramount in Poland, as 87% of Poles is a Roman Catholic and more than 33% attends church regularly<sup>105</sup>. Thus, with the church on its side PiS has become very powerful and popular, in spite of the fact that many of its policies have prompted a conflict with the EU that is also quite popular in the country.

Banning abortions due to foetal defects<sup>106</sup> resulted in great unrest in Poland, especially Warsaw, and puzzled the EU, as did the declaration of more than 100 towns and regions as LGBTQ-free zones since 2018<sup>107</sup> and president Duda's anti-LGBTQ rhetoric, characterising LGBTQ ideology more destructive than communism<sup>108</sup>, because the EU supports freedom and diversity and these actions do not match with such values. Furthermore, Poland's stance along with the other three Visegrad Group countries (Hungary, Czech Republic and Slovakia) towards the refugee crisis, which will be discussed in the next chapter, was contrary to the EU's. However, the most notable source of conflict between Poland and EU is the rule of law, a core EU-value that is constantly violated by the Polish government according to the EU, a matter that will concern us in the third chapter of this paper.

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<sup>104</sup> <https://www.britannica.com/place/Poland/The-constitution-of-1997#ref967178>

<sup>105</sup> <https://sites.uab.edu/humanrights/2020/12/14/polands-rise-in-populism/>

<sup>106</sup> This represents 98% of all Polish abortions and the only reasons that allow abortion now are rape, incest and preservation of the mother's life. Source:

<https://sites.uab.edu/humanrights/2020/12/14/polands-rise-in-populism/>

<sup>107</sup> A symbolic move actually, which has however instigated further oppression against the LGBTQ community. Source: <https://sites.uab.edu/humanrights/2020/12/14/polands-rise-in-populism/>

<sup>108</sup> <https://sites.uab.edu/humanrights/2020/12/14/polands-rise-in-populism/>

Nevertheless, PiS won the 2019 elections as well, with 43.6% of the votes<sup>109</sup>, which has enabled it to consolidate its power. The key for this success, apart from the support of the clergy, was that despite favouring conservative values like tradition and patriotism (or even nationalism), PiS was (and still is) in favour of remaining in the EU, but an EU of nations, as do its counterparts in the ECR group believe<sup>110</sup>, and all these made a match with the Polish public opinion, given that Poles have a positive image of the EU, but also deem their nationality and tradition of foremost significance<sup>111</sup>. The party has managed with its controversial policies to exploit the controversies and divisions of the Polish society<sup>112</sup>.

In 2021, tensions with the EU escalated due to the rule of law issues and the situation is likely to remain so, as long as PiS remains the ruling party, while even a Polesxit is discussed among EU officials, whereas this is not considered a viable option for the Polish government, thus it is not a feasible choice in general, provided that there is no mechanism to expel a member-state and founding one will probably require changing the EU treaties, something that requires unanimity and this does not seem possible currently. I believe that the PiS could be displaced only by a party that would manage to unite Poles towards a common purpose, compatible with both the EU and the Polish values, but such a party does not exist at this point, leaving the EU with a scarcity of means to change substantially the situation in the country.

### *Hungary*

Hungary is the last country examined in this chapter and it will be examined in the next two chapters as well. Like Poland, it is a former Eastern Bloc country which aspired to join the EU in the 1990s, but after 2010 became a very difficult partner. What is most notable, is that a far-right party, Viktor Orban's Fidesz, managed to not only increase its popularity after the financial crisis, but become the ruling party and remain in office until today.

Fidesz was founded in 1988, with Orban and the until the first months of 2022 president of the country, Janos Ader, being two of its founders. It was a party that

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<sup>109</sup> <https://www.politico.eu/europe-poll-of-polls/poland/>

<sup>110</sup> <https://ecrgroup.eu/ecr>

<sup>111</sup> <https://euobserver.com/opinion/146269>

<sup>112</sup> <https://euobserver.com/opinion/146269>

endeavoured the end of the communist regime and the establishing of democratic institutions<sup>113</sup>, with Orban being considered a hero of democracy for years. The pivotal period for Hungary and the party was 2002-2010, when the country was ruled by a coalition that consisted of the Hungarian Socialist Party (MSzP) and the Alliance of Free Democrats (SzDSz), which apart from joining the EU in 2004 the government was not successful and it was associated with corruption and incompetence. The condition of the economy was poor and in 2006, months after the elections, a recording was leaked, on which the prime minister stated that he was lying about the economy in order to assure reelection resulting in protests breaking out in Hungary and many people demanded new elections<sup>114</sup>.

The financial crisis was merely the last straw, so Orban took advantage of this situation and with an anti-establishment and soft eurosceptic rhetoric managed to canvass 52.73% of votes and control more than 1/3 of the seats in the parliament<sup>115</sup>. Soon, a new more conservative constitution, centralizing state power and enhancing the executive power, was adopted and gradually significant alterations in the fields of media and judiciary commenced<sup>116</sup>, constituting inexorably concern to the EU (more details in the third chapter). The profile of the party had become profoundly more paternalistic and conservative especially in social issues.

The refugee crisis, as we will observe in the next chapter, enabled Fidesz to consolidate its power and promote itself as the defender of national security, tradition and sovereignty, values that are probably closer to the ECR or the ID Group in the EP and not to the European People's Party (EPP), where it belonged until 2021, when it quitted it in order not to be expelled and by now it is not a member of any EU party. Hungary's stance exacerbated its clash with EU, which is only getting worse after 2020.

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<sup>113</sup> Czyz A., Kubas S. (2019). From a Liberal Opposition Party to a Right-Wing Party of Power. Three Decades of the Hungarian Fidesz (1988-2018). *Annales Universitatis Mariae Curie-Sklodowska section M Balaciencis et Carpathiensis*, 3(47), pp 48-49

<sup>114</sup> Czyz A., Kubas S. (2019). From a Liberal Opposition Party to a Right-Wing Party of Power. Three Decades of the Hungarian Fidesz (1988-2018). *Annales Universitatis Mariae Curie-Sklodowska section M Balaciencis et Carpathiensis*, 3(47), pp 52

<sup>115</sup> Czyz A., Kubas S. (2019). From a Liberal Opposition Party to a Right-Wing Party of Power. Three Decades of the Hungarian Fidesz (1988-2018). *Annales Universitatis Mariae Curie-Sklodowska section M Balaciencis et Carpathiensis*, 3(47), pp 52-53

<sup>116</sup> Czyz A., Kubas S. (2019). From a Liberal Opposition Party to a Right-Wing Party of Power. Three Decades of the Hungarian Fidesz (1988-2018). *Annales Universitatis Mariae Curie-Sklodowska section M Balaciencis et Carpathiensis*, 3(47), pp 54-55

Furthermore, Hungary is following a totally independent foreign policy and has forged close ties with Russia and China, it even got vaccines from them, which, bearing in mind that the EU's relations, especially with Russia, are at a quite low level, is also a source of awkwardness and vexation for many EU officials. Ideological bonds between Orban and Putin were critical for this development and it is worth noting that many EU far-right parties are Russia-, or perhaps it would be better to say Putin-friendly, though there are notable exceptions, like the PiS, as Polish nationalism is actually not compatible with pro-Russia sentiments.

Moreover, Non Governmental Organisations are viewed as rivals of the state, especially the ones promoting liberal values, like the Open Society Foundations of the billionaire George Soros, whose university in Hungary, the Central European University, was forced to close by a law adopted in 2017<sup>117</sup>, an indication of the animosity with which such institutions are treated. On the contrary, the EU considers NGOs a factor that can contribute to the enhancement of democracy and a positive source of influence to the EU, therefore such actions by the Hungarian government were unquestionably puzzling.

Recently, a law against paedophiles prompted tension between Hungary and EU. While the initial context, increasing the punishment of paedophiles and improving the legal protection of victims, was not, and should not be, a problem, amendments were submitted, one of them banning schools and of course LGBTQ NGOs from promoting homosexuality or sex reassignment, as for Fidesz family is responsible for this kind of education and no one else ought to interfere<sup>118</sup>. This, combined with other laws adopted in the previous years<sup>119</sup>, brought about fierce reactions among EU member-states, 17 of which signed an LGBTQ+ open letter and many stated their utter disagreement on this law, with the most notable cases being the Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte contending that Hungary should not stay in the EU and that his goal 'is to bring Hungary to its knees' on this issue and Commission

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<sup>117</sup> <https://www.solidaritynow.org/en/piece-political-vandalism-hungary-plan-shutter-central-european-university/>

<sup>118</sup> <https://tldrnews.co.uk/tldr-eu/could-the-eu-kick-hungary-out-over-lgbtq-laws/>

<sup>119</sup> For instance, gender recognition was abolished in 2020 and homosexual couples cannot be married and adopt children. Source: <https://tldrnews.co.uk/tldr-eu/could-the-eu-kick-hungary-out-over-lgbtq-laws/>

chief, Ursula von der Leyen, calling the bill ‘a shame’<sup>120</sup>. On the one hand members and supporters of Fidesz say that this law aims merely to protect Hungarian children and families and that education is a national and not European competence<sup>121</sup>. On the other hand the European Commission and opponents of the party claim that Hungary violates fundamental rights like human dignity, freedom or privacy<sup>122</sup> and consider it just another blow to the LGBTQ community and some analysts believe that Orban wanted to create a big issue that would draw attention and help him shore up his socially conservative voter base ahead of the elections that were to be held after less than a year on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of April 2022<sup>123</sup>. It is evident that the conservative values Orban deems of insurmountable significance and around which he has ‘built’ a big part of his policy are profoundly different from the liberal values that many of his EU counterparts consider essential and this has prompted tensions and even altercations among them, even when the intentions seem to be benign.

Within Hungary, Fidesz has actually no rival, as all the other parties are much weaker. This is why six parties, namely Jobbik, Hungarian Socialist Party, LMP, Momentum, Democratic Coalition and Dialogue for Hungary, formed a coalition under the name ‘United for Hungary’ in order to end Orban’s rule, as these variegated parties have found common ground on their wish to change the current situation in the country and give it a more liberal and pro-EU profile.

Nevertheless, even that was not enough to deprive Fidesz of the victory in the 2022 elections, or at least of the 2/3 majority, as it got 53.1% of the votes and ‘United for Hungary’ got only 35%<sup>124</sup>. Irrefutably, controlling most of the media, the judiciary and a majority that offers the ability to change the constitution at any time were significant factors, yet I do not think that only these can explain such an extensive victory...<sup>125</sup> After the victory, Orban stated that this victory was against, among

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<sup>120</sup> <https://tldrnews.co.uk/tldr-eu/could-the-eu-kick-hungary-out-over-lgbtq-laws/>

<sup>121</sup> <https://rmx.news/article/hungary-says-eu-delayed-rrf-approval-because-of-child-protection-law/>

<sup>122</sup> <https://rmx.news/article/concerns-in-brussels-about-hungarian-law-violating-pedophiles-gdpr-rights/>

<sup>123</sup> <https://www.euractiv.com/section/non-discrimination/news/hungary-anti-lgbtq-law-to-apply-around-churches/>

<sup>124</sup> <https://www.politico.eu/europe-poll-of-polls/hungary/>

<sup>125</sup> <https://pollsandpolitics.gr/oungrikes-ekloges-nea-archi-i-synecheia-meros-1o/>

others, the bureaucrats in Brussels<sup>126</sup>, a clear indication that the tensions with the EU will probably increase.

Parties <sup>127</sup>	Before the financial crisis	After the financial crisis	After the refugee crisis
Golden Dawn	- (2007), >1% (2009)	6.9% (May and June 2012)	7% (2015)
Lega	8.3% (2008)	4.1% (2013)	17.4% (2018)
FdI	- (2008)	2% (2013)	4.4% (2018)
AfD	- (2005-09)	4.8% (2013)	12.6% (2017)
RN(Le Pen)	10.5% (2007)	17.9% (2012)	21.3% (2017), 23.2% (2022)
Reconquest (Zemmour)	- (2007)	- (2012)	- (2017), 7.1%(2022)
PiS	32.1% (2007)	37.6% (2015)	43.6% (2019)
Fidesz	42% (2006)	52.7% (2010)	49.3% (2018)

Table iii. *Far-right parties before and after the crises*. All the elections are parliamentary except for the French elections that are presidential. Source: <https://www.electoralgeography.com/new/en/>, elaborated by the author.

As the table indicates, Golden Dawn's rise was facilitated by the financial crisis, while in Italy the rise of far-right parties has been facilitated by the refugee crisis. AfD's emergence is associated with the Eurozone crisis and the refugee crisis helped it to become more popular. In France, Marin Le Pen and her party benefited both from the financial and the refugee crisis. The former is also the main factor behind Zemmour's emergence. PiS and Fidesz took advantage of internal problems of their main rivals and the bad economic conditions to return to power in the first half of the previous decade, whereas the refugee crisis contributed to the further increase of PiS' popularity and to Fidesz keeping a high percentage and winning by a lot the 2018 elections.

<sup>126</sup> [https://www.avgi.gr/diethni/411882\\_eykoli-epanaklogi-ormpan-oi-proklitikes-diloseis-toy](https://www.avgi.gr/diethni/411882_eykoli-epanaklogi-ormpan-oi-proklitikes-diloseis-toy)

<sup>127</sup> I have not included Vox because, as it has already been observed, its rise not linked to either of the crises.

## 1.4 Conclusion

Were I asked to describe as briefly as I can the main reasons for the rise of far-right parties within the EU, I would require just 7 words: vexation, disappointment, failed policies, poverty, austerity and panic. Though every country had unique features, I think that the aforementioned feelings were ubiquitous in all the countries that were examined.

Were I also asked to describe in a succinct way the main characteristics of the far-right, I would focus on sovereignty, anti-elitism, anti-globalisation, nationalism and tradition, values that, should they dominate, require a fundamental change of the EU. It is precisely this sense of change that makes these parties appealing, because an incessantly growing number of citizens is puzzled and dismayed by the contemporary state of their homeland and there is an urgent need to confront the multifarious existing problems.

For every crisis to which EU and member-states did not answer appropriately, far-right parties were claiming to have a solution and were blaming their country's calamities on the corrupt political establishment that succumbed to the desires of the unelected bureaucrats in Brussels. The unending problems combined with the lack of transparency and democracy in several EU processes has encouraged people to believe that the EU does not care about their interests and needs, whereas a strong nation-state, with a government setting the national interest as the primary and sole value can serve them sufficiently.

There are two dates that are landmarks for the emergence of far-right, Eurosceptic parties: 2008-2010 (financial crisis) and 2015 (refugee crisis). We have already observed some dire ramifications of the former, but my opinion is that the latter gave far-right parties great influence and enabled them to consolidate their power, or become significant parties in the EP and national parliaments. Thus, I believe that for further understanding of the rise of the far-right, pondering the refugee crisis and its consequences is a vital necessity.

## 2. Refugee crisis: the far-right's heavy ammunition

The Arab Spring brought turbulence and conflict in Northern Africa and the Middle East, this brought many asylum seekers to Europe and this brought tensions and panic in many EU countries. Several far-right parties availed themselves of this opportunity to increase their popularity, capitalising on people's fear and uncertainty that was caused by the refugee crisis. The crisis escalated in 2015 and 2016, when more than 2.3 million illegal crossings were detected<sup>128</sup> and the EU received more than 2.5 million asylum applications<sup>129</sup>. Handling this vast number of people was a huge challenge and the EU faced great pressure both from within and from the outside, resulting in a very difficult and problematic situation, as far-right parties have presented the flows as a threat to national identity and unity, due to their totally different national characteristics and cultural background, to national security, the terrorist attacks after 2015 contributed markedly to building such an image for refugees, and, in the light of those, to the cohesion of the society and even the nation itself. Though this rhetoric was quite extravagant, the EU's weakness to create a safer environment regarding the entry and the integration of migrants prevented it from mitigating the impact of the far-right rhetoric, even in years after the escalation of the crisis, when the flows were actually not immense and many of the perceived threats to the nation-state were unrealistic.

### 2.1 Greece and Turkey

The two countries' position on the map is the key to comprehend their pivotal role in this crisis. Turkey has common borders with Syria, where a civil war had broken out, and the easiest way to get in a 'Schengen-country', thus in the EU, for people from the Middle East<sup>130</sup> is through Turkey and then to Greece. As a result, millions of migrants have entered Turkey over the last years. At this moment almost four million refugees are in Turkey<sup>131</sup>, a huge number indeed.

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<sup>128</sup> <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/headlines/society/20170629STO78630/asylum-and-migration-in-the-eu-facts-and-figures>

<sup>129</sup> [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/infographic/welcoming-europe/index\\_el.html#filter=2020](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/infographic/welcoming-europe/index_el.html#filter=2020)

<sup>130</sup> The majority of people entering Turkey and then Greece are from Syria, but there also people from other countries, like Iraq.

<sup>131</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/echo/where/europe/turkey\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/echo/where/europe/turkey_en)

The importance of the country has been recognised by the EU, hence it has sought to cooperate with it and the EU-Turkey Statement on the 18<sup>th</sup> of March 2016, which mentioned among others that for every Syrian whose application will be rejected and will be returned to Turkey from Greek islands another Syrian will be resettled from Turkey to the EU, Turkey will take measures to prevent the opening of new routes for illegal migration, the fulfilment of the visa liberalisation roadmap will be accelerated in order to lift visa requirements for Turkish citizens<sup>132</sup> and the accession process will be re-energised<sup>133</sup>, indicates the EU's will to control effectively the migration and refugee flows. In addition, from 2016 to 2019, Turkey has received six billion Euros from the EU under the 'EU Facility for Refugees in Turkey', along with 531.7 million in 2020 and 325 million in 2022 additional humanitarian funding outside of the Facility<sup>134</sup>. However, the implementation of the deal has proven to be problematic and has caused tensions between Turkey and Greece.

Greece has also admitted a disproportionate amount of migrants compared to other EU countries. Currently, there are 112.032 refugees and 49.407 asylum seekers<sup>135</sup>. Controlling the refugee flows from Turkey has proven very difficult after 2015, but the clash of the country, under the government of SYRIZA, with the EU during the same period reduced the matter's significance for many people, preventing far-right parties from exploiting it in order to gain more votes in the September 2015 elections. The new government's policy after 2019, under New Democracy this time, did not lead to the strengthening or the emergence of far-right parties either and it has also reduced the refugee and migratory flows to the islands, yet many (including Turkey) accuse the Greek government and even Frontex of doing illegal push-backs and treating refugees in an inhumane way<sup>136</sup>, whilst government officials and supporters of the government's policy deny the allegations and claim that the country is defending its (and European) borders according to international law from smugglers and from Turkey, which is instrumentalising refugees for financial and political gains. In the light of this, in spite of the objections against this stricter policy, an open-

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<sup>132</sup> Nevertheless this has not happened yet because Turkey has not been able to meet all the 72 benchmarks.

<sup>133</sup> <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2016/03/18/eu-turkey-statement/>

<sup>134</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/echo/where/europe/turkey\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/echo/where/europe/turkey_en)

<sup>135</sup> <https://reporting.unhcr.org/greece#toc-map>

<sup>136</sup> <https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2022/03/pushback-greece-lesbos-refugees-asylum-seekers-ukraine/> and <https://www.dw.com/en/greece-accuses-turkey-of-pushing-migrants-into-its-waters/a-59772770>

border policy would be a reward for Turkey's behaviour, which is contrary to the agreement of 2016 and the international law.

It is interesting and important to accentuate that over the last years several centre-right wing parties and politicians, like Kyriakos Mitsotakis and New Democracy, Sebastian Kurz and People's Party (Austria) or Nicola Sarkozy and now Valerie Pécresse of The Republicans (France) have decided to adopt or at least support a stricter policy in the field of migration, either to defend their borders and society or to weaken far-right parties and prevent them from getting more support, which is usually to the centre-right's detriment, or perhaps both.

Furthermore, Turkey's actions in 2020, when thousands of migrants encouraged by the Turkish government stormed the Greek borders in Evros, having heard that they would be open, and the police and even the army had to stop them, indicate its problematic behaviour during the crisis, while the EU has not been able to make it adhere to the 2016 agreement. Had Greece, which was helped by some EU member-states like Austria, not protected its borders then, great problems would have occurred in the region at first place and perhaps later in the EU as well and in this respect, not defending the borders would benefit countries that weaponise migrants, like Turkey or Belarus, which attempted something similar on the Polish borders in 2021. Unfortunately, the EU has not been able to manage its relations with Turkey in an adequate way (Belarus is a more peculiar case) and I believe that this is one of the reasons why such appalling things have happened in the Aegean, as Turkey is tolerating, if not facilitating smugglers and in this way instrumentalising the migrants to put more pressure to the EU.

Concerning the situation within Greece, most of the refugees and asylum seekers live in camps either on the Greek islands or in the mainland, where many have been transferred over the last years, but conditions under which those people live are certainly not ideal. In addition, granting asylum or giving travel documents, like passports, take too long and sometimes there are problems with the identification, for instance some underaged asylum seekers are actually adults as studies in Belgium, Sweden and Germany have shown<sup>137</sup>. Though such cases are relatively limited and their extent is overstated by far-right parties and their supporters and actually the

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<sup>137</sup> <https://rmx.news/article/73-of-underaged-asylum-seekers-in-belgium-are-actually-adults-study/>

opposite can happen too, in the UK for instance children were wrongly assessed as adults, which could lead to being deported to Rwanda<sup>138</sup>, they are an indication that the examination of the applications of asylum seekers and relevant processes have flaws. There are also problems with the registration of asylum seekers into the Eurodac database<sup>139</sup>, a fact that could deter some countries from taking refugees from Greece. Nonetheless, we ought to bear in mind that Greece is a small, poor country with limited capabilities and since several EU countries are not eager to help it manage the crisis for instance by taking more refugees, the situation both for the country and for the refugees will remain problematic.

These issues have led the Greek government to adopting a stricter policy regarding migrants, but in other member-states, such difficulties in Greece or Italy, have helped far-right parties to justify their anti-immigrant rhetoric or policy.

## 2.2 Italy

Italy is another country that was severely affected by the refugee crisis. In 2015 and 2016 it received more than 200.000 asylum applications and the number of refugees was steadily increasing and it escalated in 2019, when the country was hosting 207.619 refugees<sup>140</sup> and currently it hosts 167.000<sup>141</sup>. Those came mainly from Libya, which after the fall of Kaddafi is actually a failed state, and Tunisia. The problematic situation in Libya is also the main reason why controlling the flows to the Italian island of Lampedusa (and then to Sicily) is actually impossible, thus unlike the case of Turkey, I do not believe that the EU's actions in relation to this third country have been inadequate.

The conditions for asylum seekers and refugees within Italy, which is a relatively poor country too, are similar to the conditions in Greece. Most of them live in overcrowded hot-spots, where the situation, especially concerning hygiene, is very bad, there are problems with the identification and travel documents, whereas

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<sup>138</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jun/13/children-deemed-adults-by-home-office-could-be-deported-to-rwanda>

<sup>139</sup> <https://rmx.news/article/more-than-half-of-asylum-seekers-in-germany-arent-in-eu-databases-heres-why-thats-such-a-big-problem/>

<sup>140</sup> [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/infographic/welcoming-europe/index\\_el.html#filter=2020](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/infographic/welcoming-europe/index_el.html#filter=2020)

<sup>141</sup> <https://reporting.unhcr.org/europe>

integrating into society is often difficult<sup>142</sup>. Furthermore, support from the EU member-states was limited both in terms of financial or other assistance and in terms of taking refugees from Italy. The implementation of the principle of solidarity, according to the article 80 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, has probably been inadequate, but it is basically the EU member-states to blame for that and not the EU-institutions, like the Commission, which quickly made proposals concerning the resettlement of refugees that the national governments refused to adopt<sup>143</sup> and did not propose alternative and acceptable for all policies.

The EU and Italy (both separately and as an EU member) are working in the direction of having good relations and even offering assistance (financial for instance) to Tunisia and Libya. Moreover, the EU is funding and training national migration-control services, like coast guards. Some people have concerns regarding the humanitarian nature and purpose of this policy, for example, this question was addressed to the European Commission on the 16<sup>th</sup> of October by a member of the EP: ‘What responsibility does it [the Commission] bear for the worsening situation of migrants and asylum seekers in Libya, brought about as a result of its financing of the EU’s migration policies?’<sup>144</sup>. Others contend that these efforts are insufficient because the EU has not managed to stabilise the refugee and immigrant flows. The problem of balancing between adhering to EU/humanitarian values and being efficient, which is revealed here, is, as I believe, one of the biggest issues the EU is and will be facing.

It is also very interesting to observe some data from the Eurobarometer. In the Autumn 2016 survey the most important issue the EU was facing was immigration according to 49% of Italians (45% was the EU average) and second were terrorism and the economic situation, with 23% each<sup>145</sup>. While the financial problems were becoming less acute for most Europeans (as it has already been mentioned, those

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<sup>142</sup> <https://www.infomigrants.net/en/post/28970/migrants-inadequate-conditions-in-lampedusa-hotspot-says-local-association>

<sup>143</sup> Νικολακοπούλου-Στεφάνου Η. (2016) ‘Οι πολιτικές μετανάστευσης και ασύλου’ in Μαραβέγιας Ν. (eds) *Ευρωπαϊκή Ένωση. Δημιουργία, εξέλιξη, προοπτικές*. Athens: Κριτική, pp 480.

<sup>144</sup> This question came after the death of six migrants and the wounding of at least 24 at the al-Mabani detention centre in Tripoli, an event that according to the ‘Doctors without Borders’ was caused by the overcrowded conditions at the centre, to the creation of which the Libyan Coast Guard –trained and funded by the EU- has played a considerable role. Source: [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/E-9-2021-004713\\_EN.html?fbclid=IwAR1wlt-XdQ7USnbyjlfuvz4bCqEZI7FaCCHTVm5YTaDKIS7MIG8l1FjDLxl](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/E-9-2021-004713_EN.html?fbclid=IwAR1wlt-XdQ7USnbyjlfuvz4bCqEZI7FaCCHTVm5YTaDKIS7MIG8l1FjDLxl)

<sup>145</sup> <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2137>

remained relatively significant in Greece, Italy and Spain), another great problem had arisen, helping soft eurosceptic parties to increase their power, parties that this time were almost exclusively far-right.

In 2018, the year of the Italian elections, a special Eurobarometer on the ‘European’s perceptions of the Schengen area’ was published. 72% of Italians believed that the EU should increase funding to strengthen its external borders and 79% that it should be more involved in helping countries located at the EU’s external borders to secure them, in both cases it was markedly over the EU average that was 67% and 70% respectively<sup>146</sup>. Whereas financial difficulties were not totally over for Italy, the country had to deal with the challenging refugee crisis. Its requests for help from the other EU-members were only partially answered and Matteo Salvini availed himself of this opportunity to make Lega one of the most prominent parties in Italy.

As it has already been mentioned, anti-immigrant rhetoric and even action, when Salvini was interior minister, was the main factor that contributed to the Lega’s success. The fact that the party remained only for a year in the ruling coalition (in the current Draghi government it is not very important) prevented further tensions with the EU. Moreover, the Covid-19 pandemic reduced markedly the refugee and migrant flows to Italy<sup>147</sup>, whereas the party’s policy during that period has reduced its popularity, which however was to the FdI’s benefit. Nevertheless, the pandemic seems to be nearing its end, Libya remains almost a failed state, the situation in Northern Africa and Sahel is also rather unstable and fragile and the developments in Ukraine will have indirect effects on Italy too, as, while Ukrainian refugees will not be a direct problem for Italy (concerning their number), there will be food shortage, due to the war, in the Middle East (especially in Lebanon and Egypt that rely on Ukrainian and Russian imports of wheat) and to a lesser extent in Africa and bearing in mind that food insecurity is already a major issue for these regions<sup>148</sup>, increased

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<sup>146</sup> <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2218>

<sup>147</sup> <https://www.migrationdataportal.org/regional-data-overview/northern-africa?fbclid=IwAR3zJyNgBPGOHne3NFvon8aZOuNFgK8worcv9i65GLZQPXgFDFDQfQsJUzM#recent-trends>

<sup>148</sup> <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/opinion/2021/09/24/mena-has-a-food-security-problem-but-there-are-ways-to-address-it>

numbers of refugees can be expected in the future for the EU and a considerable percentage of them will probably attempt to enter the EU through Italy<sup>149</sup>.

Votes for anti-migration parties, like the League and FdI, tend to increase when migration becomes a salient issue (without the stance towards migration itself changing)<sup>150</sup>. That has been the case after the escalation in 2015-2016 and even after that period, when the number of migrants entering the country was reduced, it was still presented and perceived as a major problem, which is shown by the League's success in 2018, and a new escalation could have a similar result.

Under such circumstances, it is likely to hear again phrases like, immigrants 'will only see Italy in a postcard', as Salvini had stated in 2018<sup>151</sup>. It is also likely to see respective policies being implemented more systematically, since the centre-right's coalition (Lega, FdI and Forza Italia), which looks more like a far-right coalition, stands a very good chance to win the 2023 elections. The position of Lega and FdI, whose leader, Giorgia Meloni, is likely to become prime minister, regarding migration is similar and this is a field where the cooperation between the parties will probably not be a problem. Whilst the FdI's rise was basically due to the pandemic and the Covid health pass, a new refugee crisis, or at least increased flows to Italy, can help it keep its popularity in the years to come. So, it is possible, I believe, that Italy will become something like a 'new Hungary' and what that means will be examined right now.

### 2.3 Hungary and the Visegrad group

The leaked recording in 2006 combined with the outbreak of the financial crisis helped Fidesz win the 2010 and the 2014 elections. After 2015-2016, the economy, debts and financial control were not a major problem for the country, admittedly thanks to the government (and financial aid from the EU), yet this would probably not be enough for the party to remain not only first in the elections, but also with a big parliamentary majority. The refugee crisis helped Victor Orban to rally the

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<sup>149</sup> It is important to mention that the Arab Spring, which caused the 2015 escalation, started with a food crisis...

<sup>150</sup> Magistro B. & Wittstock N. (2021) Changing Preferences versus Issue Saliency: The Political Success of Anti-immigration Parties in Italy, *South European Society and Politics*, 26:3, pp 393-401

<sup>151</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/jul/01/italian-minister-aims-to-unite-european-nationalist-parties>

Hungarian society under his leadership in order to face the refugee crisis, which contributed to gaining 49.3% of the votes and a 2/3 parliamentary majority in 2018<sup>152</sup>.

In 2015, more than 180,000 people had entered Hungary<sup>153</sup> seeking asylum or trying to go to Western Europe, mainly through Serbia. Hungary is a pivotal country for the people who had taken the Turkey-Greece route and wanted to go to countries like Germany, France, Great Britain or Sweden. Controlling the flows was difficult and the vast number of foreigners that got into the country within just a few months caused turbulence and panic in the country, offering Orbán a unique opportunity.

Soon, the Hungarian refugee policy deviated from the policy of the other member-states. There was not an integration policy, refugees and asylum seekers had to stay in camps, for some of which they had to pay, and the government was not doing anything to support them<sup>154</sup>. They had to learn Hungarian in order to communicate with the authorities or go to school in a country, whose government was trying to show them in every way that they were not wanted, for instance many anti-immigrant posters were hung all over the country, even in schools<sup>155</sup>.

Furthermore, a barbed-wire fence on the borders with Serbia and Croatia was built in order to prevent migrants from entering the country illegally, though going to Hungary even through legal means is not very easy, as assessing the applications usually takes long and eventually only a small number of asylum seekers in Hungary manage to be granted refugee status. On the 2<sup>nd</sup> of October 2016 a referendum was triggered on the mandatory EU migrant quotas, which were presented by the government as the power to force Hungary take as many refugees as the EU wants, with Fidesz and (then extreme far-right) Jobbik advising the people to vote No, while the other parties advised them to boycott the referendum<sup>156</sup>. 98% of the voters voted No, yet the referendum was invalid due to the turnout, which was 40% although it

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<sup>152</sup> <https://www.politico.eu/europe-poll-of-polls/hungary/>

<sup>153</sup> [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/infographic/welcoming-europe/index\\_en.html#filter=2015-hu](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/infographic/welcoming-europe/index_en.html#filter=2015-hu)

<sup>154</sup> <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2019/01/14/viktor-orbans-far-right-vision-for-europe>

<sup>155</sup> <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2019/01/14/viktor-orbans-far-right-vision-for-europe>

<sup>156</sup> Czyż A., Kubas S. (2019). From a Liberal Opposition Party to a Right-Wing Party of Power. Three Decades of the Hungarian Fidesz (1988-2018). *Annales Universitatis Mariae Curie-Sklodowska section M Balaciencis et Carpathiensis*, 3(47), pp 57-58

should be at least 50%<sup>157</sup>, but as there was not a clear Yes, Orban felt free continue his policy. Thus, Hungary has become an unpopular destination for refugees as both entering and living in the country is difficult and even unpleasant and in 2019, only 5,772 refugees resided in Hungary and 500 asylum seekers<sup>158</sup>.

These actions were harshly criticised by the EU and many of its member-states as they appeared to be contrary not only to the EU values and treaties, but also to the obligations that are foreseen for the members of the Schengen Area, which has been joined by Hungary since 2007. Nonetheless, this nationalist policy was beneficial for Orban, who was presenting himself as the protector of Hungary from potential criminals and terrorists (more on that in the next sub-chapter), people with different culture and values that would distort Hungarian homogeneity and cause unrest in the country and a defender of national interests in the EU, referring to ‘the historical tradition of the resistance of the Hungarians against the will imposed on them from the outside’<sup>159</sup>. This kind of nationalism, which is also combined with a generous family policy, instigating (financially) Hungarians to give birth to many children instead of encouraging immigration in order to confront population ageing, has rendered Orban very popular in his country.

It must be stressed that not all EU members have criticised this policy. Poland, Czech Republic and Slovakia have actually supported Hungary. These four countries form the Visegrad Group, which was founded after the fall of the Soviet Union and it has been insignificant for years until the escalation of the refugee crisis<sup>160</sup>. It is also important to mention that due to the geographic position of the countries, when Hungary is defending its borders, it is defending the borders of these countries too, hence provided that the governments did not want refugees to enter their lands,

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<sup>157</sup> Czyz A., Kubas S. (2019). From a Liberal Opposition Party to a Right-Wing Party of Power. Three Decades of the Hungarian Fidesz (1988-2018). *Annales Universitatis Mariae Curie-Sklodowska section M Balaciencis et Carpathiensis*, 3(47), pp 57-58

<sup>158</sup> I have not used more recent data because the numbers in 2020 and 2021 were affected by the pandemic (as in all EU countries) and in 2022 the numbers have sharply increased due to the war in Ukraine, which is a very interesting case but it is not examined in this paper. Source: [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/infographic/welcoming-europe/index\\_en.html#filter=2019-hu](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/infographic/welcoming-europe/index_en.html#filter=2019-hu)

<sup>159</sup> Probably a reference to the Soviet era, especially to the 1956 uprising. Source: Czyz A., Kubas S. (2019). From a Liberal Opposition Party to a Right-Wing Party of Power. Three Decades of the Hungarian Fidesz (1988-2018). *Annales Universitatis Mariae Curie-Sklodowska section M Balaciencis et Carpathiensis*, 3(47), pp 58

<sup>160</sup> The current crisis in Ukraine has brought about a split in the group and if this does not change, the group might become insignificant again.

supporting the Hungarian policy was very beneficial and did not require to take measure like the ones Hungary took.

An interesting view of the Hungarian policy can be observed through the examination of the ‘breakthrough’ as Orban called his proposal a few years ago<sup>161</sup>. This means hotspots not in the EU, but in third countries and the migrants will be gathered there, they will send their applications to the EU member-states and only if they are granted asylum will they be allowed to enter the EU<sup>162</sup>. In other words immigrants will enter the EU only through legal means, otherwise Europe will defend its borders. The EU is trying to manage the refugee crisis in third countries, before the refugees reach Europe, too, but Orban’s proposal requires a more dynamic approach.

Should it be materialised, it could contribute to controlling the refugee flows more effectively. Additionally, this would contribute to the creation of safe ways to Europe, as smuggling would become less effective and eventually circumscribed, to a certain extent of course. In this respect, the integration of the refugees to the European societies would be facilitated, provided that each country will be able to take as many refugees as it can and it would not try to ‘punch beyond its weight’, which is currently the case in some countries.

However, the cost would be immense because prodigious facilities and a vast number of people for the personnel would be required in order to conduct the necessary work and the example of the UK and Rwanda also shows that the ‘external handling’ and deportations are quite expensive<sup>163</sup>. Besides, we must bear in mind that such a project would not be easy to become real, for example a country with the behaviour of Turkey that has instrumentalised the flows for political and financial gains would not easily accept something like that, or it would not be feasible in the precarious and devastated by civil war Libya. Finally, considering that such a mechanism will not be combined with migrant quotas, Orban would probably utilise this mechanism just to make sure that his country receives only a very limited number of refugees and put the EU aside, hence implementing unperturbed his nationalist

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<sup>161</sup> <https://www.euronews.com/2020/09/24/hungary-poland-and-czech-republic-oppose-eu-s-new-migration-pact>

<sup>162</sup> <https://www.euronews.com/2020/09/24/hungary-poland-and-czech-republic-oppose-eu-s-new-migration-pact>

<sup>163</sup> <https://edition.cnn.com/2022/06/14/uk/rwanda-asylum-flight-uk-intl-gbr/index.html>

policy, which of course would not be to the refugees' or another EU member's<sup>164</sup> benefit and would not actually pursue humanitarian ends. In this way, the problem would not be solved and the situation would just become worse, in particular for the third countries and this could be to the EU's detriment in the medium term.

Data from the Eurobarometer will contribute to comprehending the pivotal role the refugee crisis played for Orban to not only preserve, but even grow his popularity after 2015. In the Spring Eurobarometer of 2016, immigration, with 67%, and terrorism, with 47%, were considered the two most important issues the EU was facing at the moment according to Hungarians (the EU average was considerably lower, though immigration and terrorism were again the two biggest matters), but for Hungary only 28% and 4% respectively believed the same and mainly financial problems, such as unemployment, were deemed more significant<sup>165</sup>. The situation was actually the same in 2018, the year of the Hungarian elections, apart from the numbers, 54% for immigration and 29% for terrorism in Europe, but only 21% and 6% in Hungary<sup>166</sup>. My interpretation is that many Hungarians were gratified with Orban's refugee policy, therefore they were not concerned so much about these issues and problems of economical nature seemed more urgent. On the contrary, they considered EU's more open policy problematic and a source of criminality and terrorism. This is also depicted in a Eurobarometer survey of October 2017 regarding integration of immigrants in the EU, where 63% of Hungarians thought that immigration is more of a problem, whilst the EU average was 38%<sup>167</sup>.

The problems that have been described in this chapter (difficulties in the relations with third countries, inability to control the flows<sup>168</sup> and great disparity between the cultural background of locals and refugees) boosted Orban's anti-EU, nationalist rhetoric. In 2022 he used the law concerning the paedophiles and the exposure of children to LGBTQ content in order to win the elections, but in the future, provided that increased refugee waves to Europe from the Middle East (and

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<sup>164</sup> At least for members that have many refugees within their borders.

<sup>165</sup> <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2130>

<sup>166</sup> <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2215>

<sup>167</sup> <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2169>

<sup>168</sup> Both in terms of 'quantity', the number of people entering the EU, and of 'quality', whether all of the asylum seekers really fulfil the criteria to be granted the refugee status and do not belong to other subcategories of immigrants or the issue of identification that has already been mentioned and other such problems.

perhaps from Northern Africa and Sahel too) could occur again<sup>169</sup>, they could be a trump card for Fidesz in order to remain even longer the ruling party.

## 2.4 Terrorism and criminality

On the 7<sup>th</sup> of January, two Muslims, the Kouachi brothers, sent by the al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) as they declared, attacked the offices of Charlie Hebdo, a satiric magazine, due to printing cartoons depicting Muhammad, which is prohibited by Islam, and 12 people were killed<sup>170</sup>. Two days later, another Muslim, Amedy Coulibaly, entered a Jewish super market in France and took the customers hostage, demanding from the police to let the Kouachi brothers, who were then in an industrial park exchanging gunfire with the police, go, and killed four of the hostages<sup>171</sup>. This series of terrorist attacks shocked France and the EU. More such attacks happened in several EU member-states, like Germany and Austria, in the next years. It is evident that those incidents helped far-right parties, which took advantage of the people's logical fear, to justify their anti-immigrant programme and policy that of course included closed borders, as they linked immigration and Islam (the vast majority of the migrants are Muslims) directly to terrorism<sup>172</sup> and the data from the Eurobarometer that have been observed indicate that many Europeans probably had a similar view, since according to them, the two predominant problems for the EU in the 2015-2019 period were migration and terrorism.

However, direct relation between the refugee crisis and terrorism is rather debatable. For instance, the Kouachi brothers and Coulibaly lived in France many years before the refugee crisis and generally most of the perpetrators of terrorist attacks in Europe have European nationality, they are even born and raised in Europe<sup>173</sup>. It is true that terrorists also make use of the refugee routes through Greece

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<sup>169</sup> The problem with food insecurity that has already been mentioned might contribute to that, as might the situation in Afghanistan and anything else that can occur in those fragile and unstable regions.

<sup>170</sup> <https://www.britannica.com/event/Charlie-Hebdo-shooting>

<sup>171</sup> <https://www.britannica.com/event/Charlie-Hebdo-shooting>

<sup>172</sup> <https://www.dw.com/el/%CF%80%CE%B5%CF%81%CE%B9%CF%83%CF%83%CF%8C%CF%84%CE%B5%CF%81%CE%B7-%CF%84%CF%81%CE%BF%CE%BC%CE%BF%CE%BA%CF%81%CE%B1%CF%84%CE%AF%CE%B1-%CE%BB%CF%8C%CE%B3%CF%89-%CF%80%CF%81%CE%BF%CF%83%CF%86%CF%8D%CE%B3%CF%89%CE%BD/a-19394487>

<sup>173</sup> Funk M., Parkes R. (2016) *Refugees versus terrorists*. European Union Institute for Security Studies, pp 1-2.

or Italy, but their number should not be exaggerated<sup>174</sup>. Moreover, I would like to accentuate the fact that the majority of Muslims reject extremism and terrorism<sup>175</sup>, which actually constitute two of the major factors behind the immense refugee waves.

In the field of immigrant criminality, associating refugee waves with increased number of crimes, a fundamental feature of the far-right parties' anti-immigrant rhetoric, is quite difficult too as most researches both in EU and non-EU countries suggest<sup>176</sup>, yet it has proven to be quite effective for many far-right parties. It is actually financial and social exclusion that is more likely to lead immigrants (and natives) to crime and radicalisation<sup>177</sup>. People living under such circumstances, especially young men, are more susceptible to propaganda<sup>178</sup> and other means of negative influence that can lead to crime and even terrorism.

The key to the conversation about immigrant criminality is not accepting vast numbers of immigrants, or the prodigious refugee waves to Europe after 2015, but integration of foreigners to the EU member-states. Integration financial, social and cultural<sup>179</sup>. Nonetheless, I must mention that the issue of integration is not only a blow to the far-right's perception of the refugee crisis as an 'invasion of terrorists and criminals', but it also gives it a strong argument. If a problematic integration process can lead to higher criminal rates among immigrants and refugees and if integration is mainly the nation-state's responsibility<sup>180</sup>, then it is the EU member-states that must decide how many refugees and immigrants they will take from EU border-countries, like Greece and Italy, in order to make sure that the integration process will be successful and there will be no turmoil. Though it is certain that some states (mostly, but not exclusively, with far-right governments) will contend their integration capabilities are lower than what they really are, this reasoning is not, at least from my

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<sup>174</sup> Funk M., Parkes R. (2016) *Refugees versus terrorists*. European Union Institute for Security Studies, pp 1-2.

<sup>175</sup> Bale T. (2011) *Πολιτική στις χώρες της Ευρώπης. Πολυεπίπεδη διακυβέρνηση και αλληλεπιδράσεις*. Athens: Κριτική, pp 543.

<sup>176</sup> <https://worldcrunch.com/world-affairs/illegal-immigrant-crime-rate/particle-7>

<sup>177</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-45419466> and Bale T. (2011) *Πολιτική στις χώρες της Ευρώπης. Πολυεπίπεδη διακυβέρνηση και αλληλεπιδράσεις*. Athens: Κριτική, pp 535-536.

<sup>178</sup> It is interesting to mention that ISIS' propaganda through the internet has been quite effective.

<sup>179</sup> I do not mean changing, for instance, religion, but accepting each other's different culture and living peacefully together.

<sup>180</sup> I do not hereby imply that the EU must undertake the integration process, which is naturally conducted by the nation-state. The EU can try to coordinate (for instance through the Open Method of Coordination) and perhaps increase funding, but I do not believe it can or must do much more.

point of view, preposterous. Every state has limited integration capabilities and should they ‘collapse’, especially countries like Greece, no one will benefit<sup>181</sup>. Of course this does not mean that the EU should leave its members act autonomously and do nothing to assist them or let them violate EU and international law. As I will try to show both here and in the next subchapter, there are essential things it can do in relation to the refugee crisis.

Another source of great concern for Europeans is that some necessary processes in first-EU countries (like Greece and Italy) are not conducted properly. Identifying asylum seekers and distinguishing refugees from economic immigrants is very difficult, as is the return of the ones, whose applications are rejected, due to the fact that applicants do not possess the necessary papers that can show their country of origin or those papers are fake and fake identification papers are used by jihadists too, in order to move from Syria or Iraq to Europe<sup>182</sup>. Therefore, the EU must increase its efforts and effectiveness in this field. A good example is the Eurodac database, which, as it has already been mentioned, is not utilised adequately by the member-states. It must be made sure that every arriving immigrant and refugee will be registered there. I believe that should the EU manage those issues more efficiently, it would be able to show a more credible and responsible profile, thus it would decrease member-states’ reluctance to take more refugees from EU border-countries.

One final conclusion regarding terrorism is that terrorist attacks constitute an offense to the EU values themselves, an offense that has allowed EU leaders and politicians to question and even violate them. Presenting immigrants and refugees as terrorists or at least potential terrorists was not hard and in a period when terrorism was considered a major issue, far-right parties succeeded in increasing their popularity substantially. During the last years, the number of terrorist attacks has diminished and other problems, like health security, have become more urgent. Nonetheless, the far-right exploited such incidents even before the refugee crisis in order to ‘assault’

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<sup>181</sup> Ντόκος Θ. Π., Τσάκωνας Π. (2019) *Ο Δρόμος Είναι τα Βήματά μας*. Athens: Ι. Σιδέρης, pp 69-70.

<sup>182</sup> Νικολακοπούλου-Στεφάνου Η. (2016) ‘Οι πολιτικές μετανάστευσης και ασύλου’ in Μαραβέγιας Ν. (eds) *Ευρωπαϊκή Ένωση. Δημιουργία, εξέλιξη, προοπτικές*. Athens: Κριτική, pp 474.

foreigners (especially, but not exclusively, Muslims after the 1990s)<sup>183</sup> and I surmise it will do it again, if the number of terrorist attacks rises.

## 2.5 Creating a safer environment

We have seen that the escalation of the crisis was in 2015 and 2016, yet far-right parties have benefited from it in elections after that period (for example Fidesz and the League in 2018, or even Zemmour in 2022). It has also been observed that while there are indeed some problems concerning smuggling and the number of people entering the EU, or the examination of the applications and terrorism, such issues have been widely exaggerated by far-right parties, distorting at a certain extent the truth. Why is this working for them?

The answer can be found, I believe, in a book Karl Polanyi wrote many decades ago. ‘When a fear is imprinted on the public opinion, this fear remains latent as long as the root-causes of it are not eliminated’ and this fear can be exploited by politicians<sup>184</sup>. Polanyi was referring to the rise of Hitler and Mussolini, who undertook the leadership of their countries years after the respective crises and when the situation had actually started getting better, but this figure applies to the refugee crisis too.

The fear was imprinted in 2015-2016, the terrorist attacks in this period and the next years contributed to the increase of anti-Muslim sentiments that are also a component of the far-right rhetoric, and even nowadays there have been no significant changes guaranteeing that something similar will not happen again, hence far-right politicians could exploit the latent fear and they have by constantly promoting the possibility of their countries being flooded by migrants that will threaten the national identity, cause turmoil and commit terrorist attacks, creating a terrifying image. In order to counter far-right propaganda, showing the real extent of some issues, for instance the significantly decreased number of border-crossings in the EU after 2016, will not be enough as it will not reassure Europeans that the future will be like that too. Changes must be made with a view to creating a safer environment both for

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<sup>183</sup> Bale T. (2011) *Πολιτική στις χώρες της Ευρώπης. Πολυεπίπεδη διακυβέρνηση και αλληλεπιδράσεις*. Athens: Κριτική, pp 543.

<sup>184</sup> Polanyi K. (2001) *Ο Μεγάλος Μετασχηματισμός*. Thessaloniki: Νησίδες, pp 188

Europeans and for refugees, and irrefutably there are sectors where the EU can act more effectively.

Compulsory solidarity has not been successful as the member-states were not eager to really adopt it and take as many refugees as it was foreseen. Without a broad agreement among the members the EU will not be able to secure its implementation, for example by imposing penalties on defiant countries, thus a different approach is needed.

Before the war, there was an initiative for a more flexible solidarity. Instead of taking refugees, a member-state can give more money that will be used to support member-states that receive more refugees<sup>185</sup>. This is an attempt to make sure that all states will contribute<sup>186</sup>, which is of paramount significance and will improve the situation, and for that cause it is also necessary to include penalties for member-states that do not help in any way to show without ambiguities that solidarity is indeed compulsory. The war has by now stopped the developments, but such a plan stands a good chance to be approved and implemented by the member-states since it offers them more options.

A good alternative for taking refugees would also be recruiting and sending qualified personnel either directly to member-states in need or to EU agencies linked to migration, like Frontex or the EU Agency for Asylum, that can then decide where they are more needed. This would enable the EU to offer adequate assistance to its members, which has not been the case by now, in Greece for instance the lack of personnel has been a huge problem in spite of the fact that both the EU and the other countries were supposed to support it in the field of human resources<sup>187</sup>. The EU will manage in this way to enhance its role in the refugee crisis and its credibility both for the states and the people.

Relations with third states on the EU borders are also vital, but again there are some difficulties. Especially in the case of Turkey, the EU has not been able to strike

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<sup>185</sup> <https://www.euractiv.com/section/justice-home-affairs/news/eu-states-agree-to-mandatory-solidarity-on-migration/>

<sup>186</sup> <https://www.euractiv.com/section/justice-home-affairs/news/eu-states-agree-to-mandatory-solidarity-on-migration/>

<sup>187</sup> Dimitriadi A. (2016) *The Impact of the EU-Turkey Statement on Protection and Reception: The Case of Greece*, Istituto Affari Internazionali, pp 6 and Dimitriadi A. (2016) *Deals without borders: EU's foreign policy on migration*, European Council on Foreign Relations, pp 7.

a good balance between the ‘carrot and the stick’, encouraging in this way Turkey to adhere to the 2016 agreement and act more systematically against smuggling, instead of tolerating it, even with EU’s assistance if necessary. The EU can offer a vast variety of incentives for third countries depending on their needs<sup>188</sup>, yet it can and should use the ‘stick’ too with countries that do not cooperate, or even worse they are facilitating smuggling. Totally eliminating this appalling phenomenon is almost impossible (there will always be people unscrupulous enough to exploit the desperation of other people), but circumscribing it, especially in some countries, is a realistic target.

Furthermore, the EU can use the European External Action Service not only for better communication with other countries, but also for information, creating in this way an early warning system so that the EU and consequently the member-states will be informed if increased flows are expected<sup>189</sup>. This will assist in being better prepared to handle the increased number of people and even (if possible) seek cooperation with third states to better control the flows and the problematic situation in general before it is too late.

Even without replacing the national policies, the EU has the tools to coordinate the member-states, cooperate with third countries and create an effective system that will prevent the problems we observed in the 2015-2016 escalation. In such a safer environment, cries for migration as a huge issue and a threat to national identity and security will gradually become less relevant and popular. Of course, migration is not the only weapon of the far-right, as it actually fights culture wars around a whole range of matters, health and LGBTQ rights are two recent examples, but it has been one of the most effective and a convincing answer by the EU is essential.

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<sup>188</sup> Dimitriadi A. (2016) ‘Deals without borders: EU’s foreign policy on migration’, European Council on Foreign Relations, pp 10.

<sup>189</sup> Dimitriadi A. (2016) ‘Deals without borders: EU’s foreign policy on migration’, European Council on Foreign Relations, pp 10

### 3. The rule of law crisis

By now, crises that have helped far-right parties to gain more power and influence have been observed. However, as it has already been stressed, the main problem for the EU due to the rise of far-right parties is the great disparity between the values they promote, hence when such parties remain for long in power, like Fidesz or PiS, not only existing crises can be exacerbated, like the refugee crisis, but new occur to. A prime example is the rule of law crisis that has escalated during the last years in Hungary and Poland and poses a huge challenge to the EU, which must convince states notorious for their disobedience to make some substantial changes concerning the judiciary, the media and the administration.

#### 3.1 The case of Hungary

Fidesz does not just control the majority of seats in the Hungarian parliament since 2010, it controls the 2/3 of them, which enables it to amend the constitution at any time, an ability Orban has utilised, especially in 2011, when significant changes had been made, with the reforming of the electoral law and the increase of the scope of the prime minister's competences and of the executive power being quite notable<sup>190</sup>. Combined with taking control of many of the mass media, as opposition media owners were constantly pressed to either support the government or sell their media to it, and important positions in the state being filled by Fidesz supporters, the party has gained too much power<sup>191</sup>, more than allowed in a democratic regime.

The judiciary was also severely affected by the rise of Fidesz. The retirement age of judges was reduced from 70 to 62 years, resulting in the termination of the mandate of almost 300 judges, many from the Constitutional Court and nearly one 1/3 of the Supreme Court judges<sup>192</sup>. The 15 (they were 11, but Fidesz increased their number to 15, which combined with the retirement of some other members resulted in

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<sup>190</sup> Czyz A., Kubas S. (2019). From a Liberal Opposition Party to a Right-Wing Party of Power. Three Decades of the Hungarian Fidesz (1988-2018). *Annales Universitatis Mariae Curie-Sklodowska section M Balaciencis et Carpathiensis*, 3(47), pp 54-55.

<sup>191</sup> Czyz A., Kubas S. (2019). From a Liberal Opposition Party to a Right-Wing Party of Power. Three Decades of the Hungarian Fidesz (1988-2018). *Annales Universitatis Mariae Curie-Sklodowska section M Balaciencis et Carpathiensis*, 3(47), pp 55.

<sup>192</sup> <https://verfassungsblog.de/the-last-days-of-the-independent-supreme-court-of-hungary/>

Fidesz appointing the majority of them) members of the Constitutional Court are elected by the parliament that is dominated by Fidesz<sup>193</sup>.

The Supreme Court was a court that could resist the government, as it did for example in 2019 by granting pecuniary compensation to Roma students due to decade-long segregation, a decision criticised by government officials, but in 2020 the President of the Republic, Janos Ader, former member of Fidesz, nominated Zsolt Andras Varga to be the next Chief of Justice of the Supreme Court, who was a member of the Constitutional Court and is regarded as an Orban supporter, something that was possible due to two recent legislative amendments, which allowed Constitutional Court judges to be appointed as ordinary judges without any application procedure even if they do not meet the applicable eligibility criteria and amended the eligibility criteria, which used to be at least five years of judicial experience in the ordinary court system, but now experience in international tribunals or the Constitutional Court is also taken into consideration<sup>194</sup>. Under such circumstances, the National Judicial Council rejected the nomination of Varga, expressing concerns about his lack of experience and his ties with the government, but since its role is only consultative, Varga was elected by the parliament<sup>195</sup>. Hence, nowadays only ordinary courts can be an obstacle for Orban. It is interesting and important to stress that while such actions of the Hungarian government are against the spirit of the rule of law, typically they are not illegal since the way in which laws are passed or the constitution is amended does not include any typical violation...

All these incidents puzzled (and still puzzle) the EU for years. The article seven of the Treaty on the European Union includes a mechanism to control the implementation of the rule of law and impose sanctions if there is a problem with it. In order to impose the sanctions and deprive a member of its voting right, the Council must decide unanimously, the state that is being charged does not count. Until 2015 this was feasible, but European leaders, basically the ones that belonged to the EPP, hesitated to start this process because Fidesz was one of the most important members

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<sup>193</sup> <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-hungary-courts/hungary-tightens-control-over-courts-and-schools-raising-rights-concerns-idUSKBN1XP1ZF>

<sup>194</sup> <https://verfassungsblog.de/the-last-days-of-the-independent-supreme-court-of-hungary/>

<sup>195</sup> <https://verfassungsblog.de/the-last-days-of-the-independent-supreme-court-of-hungary/> and <https://www.reuters.com/article/hungary-court/hungarian-lawmakers-appoint-new-top-court-president-despite-judges-rejection-idUSL8N2HA2VU>

of the party and were afraid that they would lose power in the European Parliament. In 2015 the Law and Justice party became the ruling party in Poland and the two countries started supporting each other on this topic. In this way, although the other leaders of the EPP decided in 2018 to start this process against Hungary, Poland vetoed the process. This means that in this framework Hungary was able to avoid the sanctions, but this resulted in intensifying the dispute with the other member states.

The crisis escalated in November 2020, when Hungary and Poland blocked the seven years-budget. The problem was not the increased size, besides the two countries benefited the most from the previous seven years-budget, or the recovery package that was included, but the fact that the funding of the countries was linked to a rule-of-law mechanism. For the EU this new mechanism was a way to ensure the implementation of the article two from the Treaty on the European Union, which includes the rule of law, and it would allow it to protect the core values of the EU with a more flexible mechanism than the existing one, because the sanctions will be decided by a qualified majority vote in the Council. On the other hand, for Hungary the implementation of rule of law is vague and most of all, Hungarians are responsible to judge its implementation, not the EU<sup>196</sup>. Furthermore, this mechanism is regarded as an intervention to the home affairs of the member states. Specifically, it will force Hungary to change its family law and its policy on the refugee crisis and later it will be used for any other policy the EU does not approve<sup>197</sup>. This is seen as a political blackmail with financial means. At the same time, the new budget was vital for the EU in order to recover financially from the pandemic, especially for the southern states, thus, a deal was needed as soon as possible.

Finally, the two sides reached an agreement on the 10<sup>th</sup> of December. Hungary was assured that it will receive all its money from the previous budget, that the mechanism will be objective and it will not try to force any laws or policies, in addition to these any country will be able to challenge the rule-of-law mechanism to the European Court of Justice (ECJ)<sup>198</sup>. The mechanism was indeed challenged by Hungary and Poland to the ECJ, which reached a verdict on the 16<sup>th</sup> of February 2022

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<sup>196</sup> <https://rmx.news/article/article/with-hungary-under-threat-pm-orban-implies-possible-veto-of-seven-year-budget-in-letter-to-eu-leaders?fbclid=IwAR1pGn3UPY5uvMXe7f03irs9IA2I-snpJFTCD>

<sup>197</sup> [https://rmx.news/article/commentary/hungary-s-veto-against-blackmail?fbclid=IwAR2oU4BgeoGgbrUtr4kSpfeba6inhnjaf97giM\\_4i7tJm6Y\\_HdbzYKqn8Uo](https://rmx.news/article/commentary/hungary-s-veto-against-blackmail?fbclid=IwAR2oU4BgeoGgbrUtr4kSpfeba6inhnjaf97giM_4i7tJm6Y_HdbzYKqn8Uo)

<sup>198</sup> [https://rmx.news/article/article/poland-and-hungary-surrender-their-veto-not-everybody-can-be-general-de-gaulle-or-margaret-thatcher?fbclid=IwAR318n\\_4JRIPBp7DIKn9YSEakdbriTyGGNOiq1tIKn](https://rmx.news/article/article/poland-and-hungary-surrender-their-veto-not-everybody-can-be-general-de-gaulle-or-margaret-thatcher?fbclid=IwAR318n_4JRIPBp7DIKn9YSEakdbriTyGGNOiq1tIKn)

in favour of the mechanism, thus it can now be activated in order to cut the funds of the two countries. In April, the Commission sent a formal letter to Hungary to start the conditionality mechanism<sup>199</sup>. I reckon that this will not be the end of the crisis, but just the beginning of a new phase...

### 3.2 The case of Poland

Poland is a case that has similarities with Hungary<sup>200</sup>, hence it is no wonder that the countries are ‘partners’ on this field and I surmise that even the current deterioration of their relations due to the war in Ukraine will not alter that. Again the independence of the judiciary is gradually being undermined and the separation of powers is almost extinct in an even more blatant way than in Hungary.

In 2015, the outgoing Sejm (Polish parliament) had elected five new judges for the Constitutional Court (15 members), yet president Duda refused to swear them in and the five vacancies were filled by judges elected by the new Sejm, which was dominated by PiS<sup>201</sup>. Furthermore, the Constitutional Court is led by Julia Przylebska, a close friend of PiS-leader Kaczynski and in 2019 she was accused of scheduling hearings in accordance with PiS’ interests, manipulating the composition of panels and adjusting dates of hearings to exclude some judges from adjudicating certain cases<sup>202</sup>. Thus the Constitutional Court has become a state’s organ...

In 2017, there were some alarming developments too. In July, the Minister of Justice, Zbigniew Ziobro, was allowed to appoint and dismiss all presidents of ordinary courts on rather broad and ambiguous grounds such as ‘gross or persistent failure to perform professional duties’ or if continuation in office ‘cannot be reconciled with the interests of justice’<sup>203</sup>. Moreover, the Polish government has reformed the National Council of the Judiciary, responsible for controlling judicial appointments, whose 15 out of 25 members are now elected by the Sejm, while they used to be by judges<sup>204</sup>, increasing even more its grip over the judiciary.

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<sup>199</sup> <https://www.dw.com/en/what-impact-does-the-eus-rule-of-law-mechanism-have/a-61367149>

<sup>200</sup> It is not just the undermining of rule of law, but also conservative policies that link the two governments.

<sup>201</sup> <https://www.newstatesman.com/world/europe/2021/11/dispatch-polands-rule-of-law-crisis-deepens-with-fears-for-its-democracy>

<sup>202</sup> European Stability Initiative (2021) *Inside the system Ziobro built*, pp 4.

<sup>203</sup> European Stability Initiative (2021) *Inside the system Ziobro built*, pp 6.

<sup>204</sup> European Stability Initiative (2021) *Inside the system Ziobro built*, pp 6-7.

In 2018 the disciplinary has also changed, with a Disciplinary Chamber being created that is actually controlled by the Justice Minister himself and it is allowed to sanction judges with pay cuts or even dismissal for reasons including the content of their rulings<sup>205</sup>! The Commission has taken Poland to the ECJ for that and it has been decided that for every day that the Chamber's function is not suspended Poland will be paying one million euros to the Commission. Before the war in Ukraine it seemed that Poland would eventually yield and it is still likely, yet there are fears that this and the rule of law situation in general could be sidelined by the current major crisis in Ukraine<sup>206</sup>.

Perhaps the most obvious violation of the rule of law in Poland is the merging by the parliament of the role of Minister of Justice and the prosecutor general. In this way, Ziobro is enabled to appoint all prosecutors, instruct them and intervene in all cases and as a matter of fact he has indeed utilised his powers by dismissing 1,000 of 61,000 prosecutors and almost all the heads of provincial, regional and district prosecutor's offices<sup>207</sup>. Overall, the Polish state under the PiS has captured the whole of the judicial system of the country resulting in a political system totally incompatible with EU values mentioned in the EU Treaties.

During the last years Poland has constantly been under pressure, with the new rule of law mechanism being the frontrunner of this pressure, as the procedure under article seven of the Treaty on the European Union was vetoed by Hungary. While this mechanism was still being examined by the ECJ a ruling of the Constitutional Court on the 7<sup>th</sup> of October 2021 declaring the primacy of Poland's constitution over the EU law, going against the case-law of the ECJ and the Declaration 17 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union and that articles 1, 2, 4.3 and 19 of the Treaty on the European Union are incompatible with the Polish constitution. Though it is mentioned in the same treaty, in article 4.2 that the EU respects the national and constitutional identity of the member-states, I assume it was not foreseen that this identity would include authoritarianism, neither that it can be used for every time a member-state disagrees with EU policies and laws. For many this was the last straw

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<sup>205</sup> European Stability Initiative (2021) *Inside the system Ziobro built*, pp 7 and <https://www.newstatesman.com/world/europe/2021/11/dispatch-polands-rule-of-law-crisis-deepens-with-fears-for-its-democracy>

<sup>206</sup> <https://www.euractiv.com/section/justice-home-affairs/news/poland-urged-to-adopt-law-overhauling-disciplinary-chamber-soon/>

<sup>207</sup> European Stability Initiative (2021) *Inside the system Ziobro built*, pp 6.

and there were even fears for a Polesxit, though Poland made it clear that it did not have such intentions and there is no mechanism to expel a member.

Soon or later, Poland is likely to receive a letter similar to the one that was sent to Hungary. What will that mean for the EU?

### 3.3 In the abyss of dilemmas

As I have already mentioned, this mechanism is not the end of the crisis, but a new phase, hopefully the last, but this is not certain yet, and one of the main questions that emerge is: How will it be implemented? One of the arguments of Hungary was that the implementation of rule of law is rather vague and it is up to the Hungarian people to judge its implementation, not the EU, as it is a home affair of Hungary, and that this actually a cloak for the EU to punish Hungary and Poland for their conservative policy, for instance in the refugee crisis or with the LGBTQ rights<sup>208</sup>. This is based on the fact that other member-states also have issues with the rule of law, yet they do not appear to be threatened by the mechanism. Fairness had also been stressed by the former Austrian chancellor, Sebastian Kurz, who had stated that the rule of law and the preservation of European fundamental values must apply equally to all states<sup>209</sup>.

Nonetheless, one could say that the extent of the violations and the whole character of the regimes in Hungary and Poland<sup>210</sup> render the rule of law problems far more dangerous, thus a new mechanism was required for such cases when the article seven of the Treaty on the European Union cannot be utilised. However, it seems that the EU itself could now endanger its rationale as there are concerns that the reason the process against Poland has not yet started has nothing to do with the rule of law, but with the country's strongly anti-Russian (hence pro-Western) stance after the Russo-Ukrainian war started, while Hungary's position is considered pro-Russian. It is not the objective of this paper to discuss what policy should be followed in relation to the

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<sup>208</sup> <https://rmx.news/article/with-hungary-under-threat-pm-orban-implies-possible-veto-of-seven-year-budget-in-letter-to-eu-leaders/?fbclid=IwAR1pGn3UPY5uvMXe7f03irs9IA2l-snpJFTCD> and [https://rmx.news/commentary/hungary-s-veto-against-blackmail/?fbclid=IwAR2oU4BqeoGgbrUtr4kSpfeba6inhnjaf97gjM\\_4i7tJm6Y\\_HdbzYKqn8Uo](https://rmx.news/commentary/hungary-s-veto-against-blackmail/?fbclid=IwAR2oU4BqeoGgbrUtr4kSpfeba6inhnjaf97gjM_4i7tJm6Y_HdbzYKqn8Uo)

<sup>209</sup> <https://rmx.news/austria/austrian-chancellor-defends-hungary-poland-in-rule-of-law-debate/>

<sup>210</sup> I am referring to the main features of radical far-right parties that have been discussed in the introduction, such as authoritarianism and nationalism.

war because it does not affect the rule of law and that is why the EU's potential reaction here could undermine the rule of law mechanism from the very beginning.

If Poland escapes then many of Hungary's and (ironically) Poland's arguments and concerns against the mechanism will prove to be correct. Its implementation is depending on political criteria (since Poland's evasion is based on its foreign policy) and not legal and it seems to be a mean to punish policies that are not popular in the EU, though the rule of law is not about popularity or legitimacy, but about legality. Under such circumstances, the implementation of rule of law appears to be something vague, which can lead to arbitrariness. The EU cannot avoid this if the mechanism is used exclusively against Hungary.

Even if this process is initiated against Poland, but later, after the war and when its impact will be mitigated, the political factor will still be the dominant in the case, as the EU will have shown that there is solidarity for Poland regarding rule of law due to its 'good' foreign policy, but not for Hungary, which is also affected by the war, because of its 'bad' foreign policy. Again, this distinction is understandable in political terms, but as long as this mechanism is objective and is linked exclusively to the rule of law, as it was agreed, double standards cannot be accepted.

Bearing all these in mind, could Hungary escape too? Even if that finally happens (it seems quite difficult though), it can (or at least should) only be temporary. Perhaps the EU could postpone the implementation of the mechanism temporarily due to the war both for Hungary and for Poland. In this way, arbitrariness would be avoided, yet again political issues will have interfered. But if the mechanism is implemented on both now, one could say that the EU would undermine the unity and power of Europe in a very pivotal moment for its future. In addition, Hungary could use its policy during the war to its own benefit. It has blocked some of the sanctions against Russia, in particular the ones in the energy sector, and it could link lifting the veto with guarantees that it will not lose its funds. What course of action ought the EU to follow? I am afraid that there is no easy choice in this and the EU will have to prioritise its targets...

Putting the issue of arbitrariness and the international factor aside for now, it would also be interesting to ponder potential developments within Hungary (which could also be a guide for Poland) after the loss of EU funds because of the

conditionality mechanism. I believe there are two main scenarios. Either the so intensive conflict between Fidesz and the EU and its dire financial repercussions for Hungary will gradually lead to the fall of Orban, or he will manage once more to rally his conservative audience blaming the EU trying to impose its liberal and unpopular in Hungary policies for the financial calamities of the country and presenting himself as an unbending defender of conservative values, like family, which could not only help him keep his power, but also increase hard euroscepticism in the country as the EU will be presented as responsible for the economic problems or as not necessary if Hungary manages to find alternative sources of funding<sup>211</sup>. Though I do not think that a ‘Hungexit’ would benefit Hungary and for now it is not considered a viable option, I reckon that losing members in such a volatile internationally period would be problematic for the EU as well.

The rule of law mechanism was expected to put an end to the rule of law crisis, but the time in which it came has not been ideal, as the EU might have to face variegated issues over the implementation of the mechanism. Whereas I have demonstrated a variety of potential developments depending on disparate choices, I deem it of extraordinary difficulty to determine what course of action would be the best. Will the EU manage to overcome those barriers and emerge stronger and confident from this crisis or will it be weakened (and a weak EU is always susceptible to all kinds of euroscepticism, including the one of far-right parties)?

## Conclusion: The EU at a crossroad

We have seen how two crises have brought about the rise of radical and extreme far-right parties and how two of them have caused the rule of law crisis that, in the light of the current developments, has become an extremely complex problem. During the financial crisis far-right parties exploited the people’s vexation over the established political system and the EU that was presented as a bureaucratic, Germany-lead organisation that prevented the member-states from implementing national economic policies that would be more effective and imposing strict austerity

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<sup>211</sup> <https://pollsandpolitics.gr/oungrikes-ekloges-nea-archi-i-synecheia-meros-2o/>

or for Germany that the EU wants to make Germany pay for the improvident financial policy of other states.

Then the refugee crisis caused turmoil in many countries, especially the ones that were heavily affected and far-right parties promoted the perception of the refugee flows as a threat to national identity, security and social cohesion and national refugee policies with closed borders, contrary to EU values like solidarity and tolerance. The EU has not been able to coordinate the member-states and support them adequately, thus creating a safer environment and controlling better the situation, hence it could not counter the rhetoric of far-right parties, even in periods when the flows were actually limited.

The rule of law crisis was created by two radical far-right parties, Fidesz in Hungary and PiS in Poland, which have managed to remain for long in power and constitute a threat for core EU values (as most far-right parties do). Over the years the parties have not ‘surrendered’ under the pressure of the EU that has consequently created a new, more effective mechanism in order to protect the rule of law, by associating it with EU funds, which are paramount for those countries. However, the implementation might prove to be problematic and in this way deepen the crisis or create new problems for the EU.

Taking all these into consideration the future will not be easy and the EU will have to take some tough decisions. In 2022, whilst the health crisis is not absolutely over and its financial ramifications are certainly far from over, the war in Ukraine has come to make the economic situation even worse and create a humanitarian crisis in Ukraine and potentially in the Middle East and North Africa too due to the food shortage. Of course, so many crises might be a threat for the EU, but their extent and complexity also shows that the nation-states cannot do everything alone. Therefore crises are simultaneously an opportunity for improvement and positive change that can help the EU to emerge stronger, as Churchill has stated: ‘Never let a good crisis go to waste’<sup>212</sup>.

Nonetheless, this will not happen automatically, it requires resolve and perspicacious planning. The relatively calm and prosperous post-Cold War period has come to an end, a new approach of global issues is required and the EU must defend

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<sup>212</sup> Diamond J. (2020) *Έθνη σε αναταραχή. Πώς αντιμετώπισαν την πιο κρίσιμη περίοδο στην Ιστορία τους*. Athens: Διόπτρα, pp 39.

its interests, its values and its integrity, but doing all three simultaneously is easier said than done and it might need to set priorities, as the refugee and even more the rule of law crises have shown. Should the EU punish Hungary and Poland even if that totally ruins their relations and the integrity of the union, or EU values, like the rule of law, are of secondary importance? Answering in a satisfactory way such difficult questions is imperative for the EU. If it sometimes seemed impossible that the EU could do much more than what it had already done, this cannot be the case now.

The reason for that is not that far-right parties, which are increasing their power after every crisis that affects severely the EU, threaten its existence. Irrefutably they question and jeopardise fundamental EU values and this is a serious problem for the EU, but eventually such parties, even if they had the power to totally change the EU according to their own beliefs, they lack the necessary cohesion to do so, as every time the debate touches national interests (and that happens frequently) those parties split on country lines, undermining their potential collective influence<sup>213</sup>. The split of the Visegrad Group during the war in Ukraine is a prime example of this.

However, the emergence of the far-right in the EU is a symptom of a weaker EU, vulnerable to the rhetoric of far-right parties offering ‘easy solutions’ to crucial problems. In a volatile world, where the one crisis succeeds the others, their extraordinary character will soon or later stop being an excuse for an inadequately acting EU, and it will become a reason for the EU to become irrelevant, especially on the international chessboard, and in such an EU the number of strong euroskeptic (including far-right) parties will always be considerable and might cause turmoil within Europe. In this respect the EU must find a way to emerge stronger from crises, in spite of the difficulties this entails.

This dissertation has sought to present how crises in the EU are linked to far-right parties, they can boost their popularity and also be exacerbated or even caused by them. Does this mean that far-right parties will be among the beneficiaries of every crisis? As long as the EU manages to handle the crises sufficiently, the answer is no. In order to do this, it is of paramount significance to study previous crises and learn from the mistakes that have been made, ponder what must and can be changed, which

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<sup>213</sup> Balfour R., Basagni L. Et al. (2019) *DIVIDE AND OBSTRUCT: POPULIST PARTIES AND EU FOREIGN POLICY*. German Marshall Fund of the United States, pp 3.

were some of the main targets of this dissertation, and in the end materialise the necessary alterations. This is not always easy, but difficult does not mean impossible.

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