

# The populist and Eurosceptic right: The evolution of its electoral success

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The campaign for the elections to the European Parliament (EP) has now begun, and at this point, it becomes undoubtedly necessary to undertake the analysis of the protagonists of European politics, the Europarties, and the political groups in the EP.

In this article, we analyse the electoral history and composition of the group Europe of Freedom and Democracy (EFD), a political group that collects right-wing populist and Eurosceptic parties—when not explicitly anti-Euro and anti-EU—in the EP. The EFD is born as a political group in July 1, 2009, and in the last European elections won 32 seats, corresponding to 4.3% of the EP. Currently, it can count on 31 MEPs from 13 parties of 12 EU Member States. In particular, the major parties are the Northern League (LN), the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP), LAOS (Greek Orthodox-Christian party), the Danish People's Party, the Movement for France, the Reformed Political Party of the Netherlands (SGP), the Finns Party (formerly known as the True Finns), and the Slovak National Party (Table 1). The EFD has two cochairs, Nigel Farage (UKIP) and Francesco Speroni (Northern League), which correspond to the two most important delegations of the group (8 and 7 MEPs, respectively). The new group was formed by the dissolution of the Independence and Democracy Group (IND/DEM) and the Union for Europe of the Nations (UEN). Some delegations of the EFD (the English, Danish, French, and Finnish) have actively participated in the campaign against the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty in the second referendum in Ireland (October 2009). Between 2009 and 2011, the Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ) has been

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negotiating its entry in the EFD, however, encountering the veto by different parties of the parliamentary group including the SGP, UKIP, and the Slovak National Party. However, further MEPs have joined the EFD during the term, such as the Italian Magdi Allam (currently member of the Brothers of Italy National Alliance) in December 2011, after having left the Union of Christian Democrats, being part of the EPP. Also, four MEPs of United Poland left the group of European Conservatives and Reformists (ERC) on 26 December 2011, thus joining the EFD. Finally, in September 2013, the National Front for the Salvation of Bulgaria (party formed in 2011) joined the group. In addition to the new entrants in the course of time, there have been also some expulsions and defections, especially towards the group of Conservatives and Reformists (ECR).

Most of the parties in the EFD are part of the Europarty Movement for a Europe of Liberties and Democracy (MELD), except the UKIP. In November 2013, the Northern League (which used to be part of the MELD) has joined the Europarty European Alliance for Freedom (EAF), consisting of populist and anti-Euro right-wing parties as the French National Front led by Marine Le Pen, the Flemish *Vlaams Belang*, the Austrian FPÖ (all these parties do not belong to any group in the EP), and the Swedish Democrats (who has no elected MEPs). The EAF was founded in 2010 and has been recognized by the EP in 2011. The role and the importance of the party is likely to expand in the next European elections in May 2014 when it will count on the support of the National Front, the Party for Freedom (PVV) led by the Dutch Geert Wilders, the Flemish *Vlaams Belang*, the Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ), the Swedish Democrats, the Slovak National Party, and the Northern League. The Danish People's Party, UKIP, and Alternative for Germany (AFD) have refused to join the new alliance, while more radical and anti-Semitic nationalist parties in Europe as the National Democratic Party of Germany, the British National Party, the Greek Golden Dawn, and the Hungarian *Jobbik* were not allowed to join the alliance. Besides, here we are not concerned with the parties of the extreme right and neofascist. The least common denominator of the parties adhering to the MELD and EAF consists of the conservative political orientation, the aversion towards Europe, and the populism (Mudde, 2007; Szczerbiak and Taggart, 2008), aiming to exploit electorally the distance that has arisen between the rulers and the citizens in many European countries, and the popular discontent that has been generated as a result of epochal phenomena such as the globalization of markets, mass migration, and the global economic crisis after the collapse of Wall Street in 2008. The populist challenge brought forward by these parties usually grounds on communication skills and on a charismatic leader to coagulate around a single political project the lack of confidence that the average citizen feels facing the difficulties typical of modern democracies. This is namely the challenge that a leader, placed at

Table 1 – List of the parties members of the EFD or adherent to the EAF at the eve of the 2014 European elections

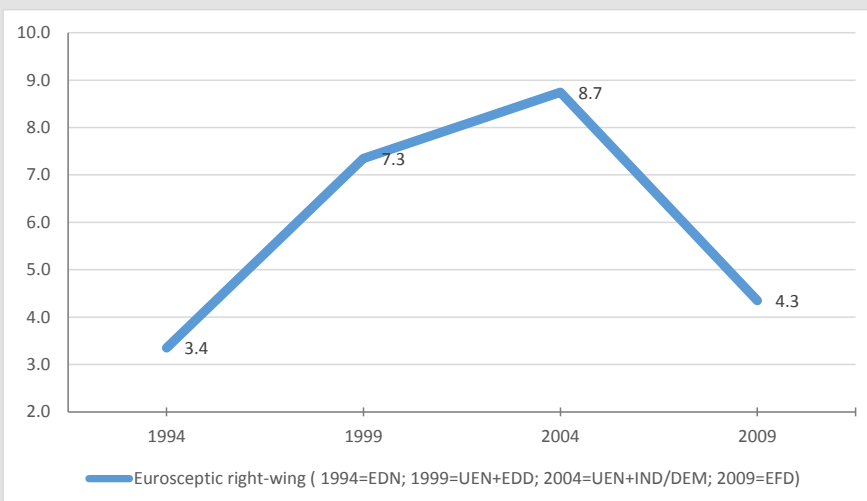
Country	Name of the party	English name	Acron.	Group or European party
Austria	Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs	Austrian Freedom Party	FPÖ	European Alliance for Freedom
Belgium	Vlaams Belang	Flemish Interest	VB	European Alliance for Freedom
Bulgaria	Natzionalen Front za Spasenie na Bulgaria	National Front for the Salvation of Bulgaria	NFSB	Europe of Freedom and Democracy
Denmark	Dansk Folkeparti	Danish People's Party	DF	Europe of Freedom and Democracy
Finland	Perussuomalaiset	Finns Party	PS	Europe of Freedom and Democracy
France	Front National	National Front	FN	European Alliance for Freedom
France	Mouvement pour la France	Movement for France	MPF	Europe of Freedom and Democracy
Greece	Laikós Orthódoxos Synagermós	Popular Orthodox Rally	LAOS	Europe of Freedom and Democracy
Italy	Fratelli d'Italia-Alleanza Nazionale	Brothers of Italy National Alliance	Fdl	Europe of Freedom and Democracy
Italy	Lega Nord	Northern League	LN	Europe of Freedom and Democracy
Lithuania	Tvarka ir teisingumas	Order and Justice	TT	Europe of Freedom and Democracy
Netherlands	Partij voor de Vrijheid	Party for Freedom	PVV	European Alliance for Freedom
Netherlands	Staatkundig Gereformeerde Partij	Reformed Political Party	SGP	Europe of Freedom and Democracy
Poland	Solidarna Polska	United Poland	SoPo	Europe of Freedom and Democracy
Slovakia	Slovenská národná strana	Slovak National Party	SNS	Europe of Freedom and Democracy
Sweden	Sverigedemokraterna	Sweden Democrats	SD	European Alliance for Freedom
United Kingdom	United Kingdom Independence Party	United Kingdom Independence Party	UKIP	Europe of Freedom and Democracy

the head of a people, considered the repository of all virtues, aims at a palace considered the house of every flaw (Tarchi, 2003).

As mentioned earlier, the EFD comes from the dissolution of the Independence and Democracy Group (IND/DEM) and the Union for Europe of the Nations (UEN). The Union for Europe of the Nations was a political group in the European Parliament that was created in 1999 and collected until June 2009 the MEPs inspired by the values of the national conservative right and who belonged to the European political party Alliance for Europe of the Nations (AEN). To the UEN belonged, among others, the Italian National Alliance. The UEN was itself the heir of the Union for Europe (UPE), European parliamentary group formed on 6 July 1995 as a result of the confluence of two distinct political groups: the European Democratic Alliance (national conservative orientation, whose main political party was the French Rally for the Republic) and *Forza Europa* (liberal conservative and Christian democratic orientation consisting of *Forza Italia*). Both the FRR and FI then abandoned the UPE to join the EPP between 1998 and 1999. The Independence and Democracy group gathered instead the deputies with a Eurosceptic nationalist or democratic inspiration. The group was born in 2004, heir of the group Europe for Democracy and Diversity, grouping regionalist or nationalist Eurosceptic parties (including the Northern League and UKIP), making reference to the European parties EU Democrats and the Alliance of Independent Democrats in Europe. The Europe for Democracy and Diversity in turn was the heir of the Europe of Nations (EDN), a European parliamentary group that included parties inspired by Euroscepticism and conservatism. Founded by 19 members, among which figured the Movement for France, the Reformed Constitutional Party, the Movement of June, and the People's Movement against the EU. The group was born in 1994 and took over in 1996 the name of Independents for a Europe of Nations. Finally, in 1999, it gave rise in fact to the group Europe for Democracy and Diversity. From what has been said so far, the right-wing Eurosceptic parties have a proper coordination at the EP level only since 1994, with the foundation of the EDN. Figure 1 shows the electoral trend—measured as the percentage of seats obtained in the EP—of right-wing Eurosceptic parliamentary groups appeared over time: Europe of Nations (EN, then the group of Independents for a Europe of Nations), Europe of Democracies and Diversities (EDD), Independence and Democracy (IND/DEM) and the Union for Europe of the Nations (UEN), and finally the Europe of Freedom and Democracy (EFD).

As it appears, the Eurosceptic right-wing groups (obtained 3.4% of the seats in Parliament in 1994), show a net increase in its electoral performance between 1999 and 2004, more than doubling its seats in the EP (7.3% in 1999 and 8.7% in 2004). At the last European elections in 2009, however, the Eurosceptic right halves their seats compared to five years ago, obtaining the 4.3%. This fact, however, can be misleading for two reasons: 1) in 2009 are not part

Figure 1 – Electoral trend of the EFD and its predecessors in percentage of seats in the EP (1994–2009)

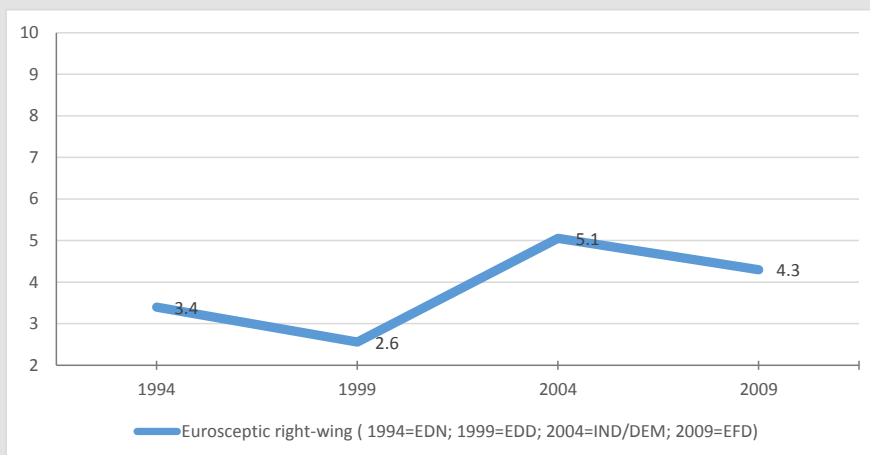


of the EFD some important populist and anti-Euro parties of the right wing including the National Front of Marine Le Pen, the Flemish *Vlaams Belang*, the Austrian Freedom Party, and the Dutch PVV, as all these parties were not members of any group in the EP; 2) in Figure 1, we reported for the elections of 1999 and 2004 also the UEN seats. However, in this group there were also parliamentary parties such as the National Alliance, the Republican Irish party *Fianna Fáil*, the Portuguese Social Democratic Centre-People's Party, and the Polish Law and Justice party (since 2004), which will later become part of the parliamentary groups belonging to traditionally pro-Europe political families or in any case only moderately Eurosceptic. In 2006, the CDS joined the EPP group. In 2009, the *Fianna Fáil* joined the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe; National Alliance merged into the People of Freedom adhering to the Group of the European People's Party, and the Law and Justice formed—with the Czech and British Conservatives—the group of the European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR).

For the reasons set out above, Figure 2 reports the same data as Figure 1 but excludes the seats of the UEN.

As can be noticed, after the exclusion of the UEN group, the electoral performance of the groups of the Eurosceptic right results as more constant over time. In this case, in 1999, the percentage of seats is less than in 1994 (2.6% vs. 3.4%), and the maximum share obtained (5.1% in 2004) is not too far from the percentage of seats of the EFD in the last election (4.3% in 2009).

Figure 2 – Electoral trend of the EFD and its predecessors in percentage of seats in the EP (1994–2009) (UEN excluded)



At this point, in order to have a more complete picture of the electoral strength of populist right-wing Eurosceptic and anti-Euro (when not anti-EU) parties in Europe, we report the election results in the European elections—expressed in percentage terms—of the parties that are currently members of the EFD or adherent to the EAF for each of the EU member states (Table 2).

The data show that the parties of the populist and anti-European right wing reach considerable percentages in some countries since the 1990s when they exceed 22% in Austria and France (in this case only in 1994); in 2004, the highest votes shares range between 14% and 17% in Belgium (14.3%), the UK (15.6%), and France (17.4%); finally, the last European elections of 2009 percentages between 12% and 24% are achieved in Austria (12.9%), Denmark (15.3%), Lithuania (12.2%), the Netherlands (23.8%), and the United Kingdom (15.9%). Among the countries which are part of the Union since 1979, the Netherlands and Belgium are the ones by the longest presence of populist and Eurosceptic right-wing electoral forces (since 1979 in the Netherlands and in Belgium since 1984). In the Netherlands, the last 2009 European elections registered a sharp success for these parties, especially due to the success of the PVV. France also has a similar electoral tradition, with percentages around 11% in 1984, while in the UK the success of UKIP in the European elections is more recent (since 2004). Finally, the greatest electoral share in Italy has been reached by the Northern League in the last 2009 EP elections with 10.2%.

In conclusion, the next European elections could be a turning point for the parties of the populist and anti-Euro right wing since there are some im-

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Table 2 – Electoral results of the EFD parties and of the populist anti-Europe right (adherents to the EAF) in the EU member states at the European elections (1979–2009)

Country	% total votes for EFD and/or EAF						
	1979	1984	1989	1994	1999	2004	2009
Austria				27.5*	23.4	6.3	12.9
Belgium	0	1.3	4.1	7.8	9.4	14.3	9.9
Denmark	0	0	0	0	5.8	6.8	15.3
Finland <sup>1</sup>				0.7*	0.8	4.3	9.8
France	0	11	11.7	22.8	5.7	17.4	11.1
Greece	0	0	0	0	0	4.1	7.2
Italy	0	0.5	1.8	6.6	4.5	5	10.2
Lithuania						6.8**	12.2
Netherlands <sup>2</sup>	3.2	5.2	5.9	7.8	8.7	5.9	23.8
Slovakia						2	5.6
Sweden				0	0.3	1.1	3.3
United Kingdom	0	0	0	1	6.5	15.6	15.9

\*Elections held in 1996, after the entry of the country in the EC

\*\*Elections held in 2007

<sup>1</sup>In Finland in 2004, the TF (True Finns) is part of the SKL (Finnish Christian League).

<sup>2</sup>In the Netherlands in 2004 and in 2009, the SGP is in alliance with the CU (Christian Union).

portant conditions that may favour their electoral success. In the first place, European elections traditionally represent a context favourable to opposition parties as stated by the theory of the “second order elections” (Reif and Schmitt, 1980). Namely, in the European elections, the stakes are lower (or are perceived as such) than in the general election (when the prize is represented by the government of the country). Voters thus feel freer in their electoral choices, and punish at the ballot box incumbent parties more easily when they perceive that they are not carrying out policies effective and appropriate to their expectations. According to this perspective, then, the elections for the EP electoral arena are particularly favourable for protest opposition parties while government parties are usually disadvantaged on the basis of the theory of electoral cycle (Reif and Schmitt, 1980; Van der Eijk and Franklin, 1996). Moreover, in the wake of the toughest economic crisis since the Second World War, in several European countries, there has been a rise in antiestablishment parties that openly oppose the austerity policies of the EU and the European integration. Also, at the next European elections in May 2014, these parties have the goal of bringing the anti-EU protest directly within the institutions of the European Union, primarily the EP. Paradoxically, it may be the first

European elections in which issues concerning the European Union are at the heart of the campaign, thanks to the anti-Europe parties. From being second order, the EP elections could thus become first order also by virtue of a vote against Europe in Europe.

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