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# The European Far-Right and the Economy

## *Introduction*

Before the Great Recession, and the subsequent European Sovereign Debt Crisis, far-right parties were limited to the periphery of both European and national politics. However, during and after the financial slump of 2008, Western European countries saw a sharp rise in the share of electoral votes for the previously benign radical right-wing parties. A similar rise occurred during the 1930s, in Europe, in the aftermath of the Great Depression.

This thesis seeks to compare these two series of events and to determine what similarities and differences, from a predominantly political perspective, there are between the rise of fascist parties during the period between the two World Wars, from obscure origins as anti-communist workers parties run by disgruntled war veterans, to their ascension to the halls of power, where they proceeded to institute fascist regimes, and the modern day "claim to fame" of far-right parties. Once vague collections of outright racists and suspected Neo-Nazis, who would only garner votes from the , typically, more uneducated, members of the lower class, these parties have seen themselves bite sizeable chunks of election shares in the recent years. They still find themselves trailing behind more mainstream parties in most states, however, a few, such as the *Golden Dawn* in Greece or the *Front Nacional* in France, have seen themselves catapulted to the centre stage of national politics. This shift echoes grim developments of almost a century ago, and has caused great concern both in Europe and abroad.

Whether it was by riding the wave of loud Euro-scepticism flared up by the debt crisis, by improving their populist and nationalist rhetoric, by shifting from a mere anti-immigrant ideology to outright Islamophobia or by simply attracting increasing numbers of people disillusioned by the usual political choices, these parties have proven that they can be a political force. However, many

questions, such as how similar these parties are to the far-right of Inter-war Europe, how profound was the impact of the Great Recession on the rise of these parties or how these parties view themselves in relation to their predecessors, are still the topic of high level debate.

The main goal of this thesis would be the identify what are the similarities and differences between the political effect of the Great Depression on the rise of far-right parties in the 1930s and the political effect of the Great Recession on the ongoing rise of modern day radical right-wing parties in Western Europe.

The most common theories state that the far-right, though at one point pro-European Union, became vigorously Euro-sceptic when the EU clashed with their anti-immigration views and pushed for greater degrees of globalization. As a fortunate coincidence, the European Sovereign Debt crisis provided an example of the perceived nefarious influence of the EU, which parties, such as the Golden Dawn, have used in their rhetoric. This use has been mainly to serve as proof that the European Union, is , overall, a bad idea. However, some argue that, ironically, radical parties from across Europe have actually come closer together in their views regarding the EU in this period, creating a pan-European Euro-sceptic bloc to challenge the more mainstream pro-EU political blocs. This echoes the early groupings of fascist movements under common causes in the 1930s, culminating in the announcement of the Rome-Berlin Axis.

Another similarity between the two political movements would be the usage of populism as a political tool in times of economic hardship. As Wouter dan der Brug and Meindert Fennema note, “Manual workers with low education tend to loose their jobs as a result of changes in modes of production. Moreover, they are competing with immigrant groups for scarce resources such as jobs and houses”. In a sense, this voter base of disgruntled post-industrial workers, which initially supported these radical parties due to their stressing of anti-immigration, has grown in the wake of the financial crisis, thus swelling the ranks of the far-right. Parallels can be drawn with the NSDAP of 1930s Germany, which also pandered to the needs of a population that felt exploited by other ethnic groups, such as Jews, Roma and Slavs. However, as Mayer and Williams argue, the recent success of the far-right could also be attributed to a *softening* of their anti-immigration views, and focusing on specific immigrant groups, mainly Muslims.

One of the reasons the modern far-right is identified as far-right, is due to the continuous use of populism as a political instrument and strategy, similarly with how fascists used nationalism to appeal to their electorate. Mudde Cas, in his work cataloguing far right parties, notes the

interdependence between populism and political extremism in democracies Scholars argue over the efficiency of populist or nationalist rhetoric in a Europe which still remembers the horrors of World War 2 and the atrocities ultimately committed by fascist governments. However, a few, such as Licata and Williams argue that a degree of xenophobia is inherent to European society, as a whole. As a result, such sentiments will always exist and will always serve to bring votes to these parties.

Yet, all is not so bleak, since most scholars argue that there are stark differences between the two great radical right movements of European history. First and foremost, is the knowledge of previous events. That is to say, no political entity in Europe, bar perhaps the most extremist of groups, believes in a return to a more radical right-wing view of politics, simply due to the fact that history has shown us what that path leads to.

Secondly, and of great significance to this thesis, is the fact that, all in all, the damage of the Great Recession did not match the catastrophic repercussions of the Great Depression. Though all European states where hit hard by the economic downturn, most where more-or-less prepared to deal with it and managed to limit the damages. Those states that where most brutally hit by the crisis, where also some of the states that saw the sharpest resurgence of radicalism in society and politics (such is the case of Greece).

With the purpose of narrowing down the research topic, this thesis is split into four chapters, each one dedicated to analysing a major facet of the research question's answer. The 1st chapter will deal with Euro-scepticism[1] and try to pinpoint similarities and differences between the modern day disapproval of the European Union and Inter-war antipathy between European states. The 2nd chapter will take a thoroughly economic approach, and will aim to link the intensity of the effect of both the Great Depression and the Great Recession on European states, with the rise of far-right parties in several Western European States, herein used as broad case studies. For the purpose of gaining actual insight into the effect of an economic crisis on a society, the case study of Nazi Germany in the 1930s, shall be taken. The 3rd chapter will look at populism and, more specifically, how populist rhetoric profited from the European Sovereign Debt Crisis, in comparison with the bellicose rhetoric of fascist parties. Lastly, the last chapter will approach the *bread and butter* of today's far-right: anti-immigration and xenophobia. The purpose of this chapter is to draw comparison between the Anti-Semitism of the 1930s and modern day xenophobia and Islamophobia, in particular.

1 Mainly because Euroscepticism has grown to become one of the principal policy proposals of contemporary far-right parties.

## *Chapter 1:*

## *Euro-scepticism vs. Warmongering*

One of the titular characteristics of the Nazi regime, and others of it's like around Europe, was its obsession with military might, territorial expansionism and dominance over other peoples. However, the early ideology of the NSDAP, as a workers party, was merely the belief that the German people had been cheated out of winning the First World War, an issue that they felt was left unaddressed and which was perceived a situation brought on by the internal betrayal of a certain ethnic minority, i.e. the Jews. In other words, the Nazis and other fascist movements sought to remove any perceived foreign influence, which they believed had caused the Central Powers to lose the Great War.

This opposition to all things foreign, stands in stark contrast to current radical parties, which merely regard the European Union, as a singular actor, as the cause of their economic woes and cultural repression, as opposed to believing that individual European nations seek to undermine each other. Euro-scepticism is different, as a political ideology, to fascist warmongering, since it represents merely the belief that the European Union is a malicious entity, by itself, not in the entirety of its member states. Euro-sceptics point to the democratic deficit within the European Union, the suppression of the individual cultures of member states  and to the adoption of the Euro as a cause of the European Sovereign Debt Crisis .

Swank finds that “groups that face ostensible risk to income and employment and challenges to traditional values, institutions and social status in the wake of globalization – disproportionately support radical right wing parties” (Swank, 216). That is to say that people in precarious financial positions and who feel their livelihood threatened by globalization, and the European Union often supporting a more and more integrated Europe, essentially become Euro-sceptic and vote for far-right parties. The parties themselves have their own reasons for opposing the European Union, yet the people who vote for them do it merely because they perceive the globalization-friendly stance of the European Union as a threat to their way of life. This is a a somewhat similar view  Brug and Fennema's position, outlined as a major point in their work *Support for Radical Right Parties*, about why people who feel that they are in a form of “competition” with immigrant groups, and feel cheated out of their birthright of having priority when selecting a workplace, support the radical right. With the onset of the Great Recession making jobs even harder to come by, unemployed workers saw

in the far-right a possible ailment for their precarious situation.

Yet, some researchers regard the actual state of the economy, as a whole, as being negligible when it comes to the voting patterns of the far-right. “The increase in Euroscepticism is mostly due to “mood:” the fear of losing cultural identity and financial expectations and by large unrelated to economic background variables like income inequality” (Ritzen, 3). So the economic situation of a given state and the influence of the European Union on a state's economy, usually fly right by the ears of would-be voters, who are merely interested in conserving their own national identity and maintaining a positive financial outlook.

While Ritzen and van der Brug consistently support the claim that the main cause is the fear of losing one's natural identity, in favour of a more European identity, they disagree as to the exact importance of the state of the economy on people's opinions. There is a clash of sorts between different nations, when it comes to the origin of their Euro-scepticism. Werts' study on the relationship between Euro-scepticism and the percentage of far-right voters, found direct correlation between the two. However, a distinction can be made at a national level between member states. While the Euro-sceptics in countries that where left in financial ruin after the Great Recession, criticized the EU as a *cause* of their predicament, those in countries that weathered out the crisis through austerity disapproved of supporting the countries that didn't hold their ground in front of impending financial meltdown.

Regardless of the exact causes of Euro-scepticism at a cultural or societal level, which are debatable, the prevalence of Euro-scepticism amongst the far-right can be explained in a somewhat more straightforward manner. “Even though most of these parties were initially pro-European, they became increasingly Euro-sceptic, particularly after the enlargement with central European countries in 2004 and 2007” (Mudde 160). That is to say that when the EU directly threatened their anti-immigration views, most populist right-wing parties chose faithfulness to their primary policy over their beliefs in a united Europe and decided to gradually oppose the EU and push for lesser degrees of integration.

Remarkable, however, are the surprising levels of collaboration between different far-right parties within the European Union. Most notable of these is the astounding presence and coordination of Euro-sceptics in the European Parliament in comparison to national parliaments. UKIP, a notoriously Euro-sceptic party, for example, has 21 seats in the European Parliament, yet only 2 seats in the British Parliament. This prevalence of Euro-sceptics in the legislative chamber *of the European*

*Union itself*, can roughly be attributed to national disinterest in European politics[2] at the level of each member-state. EU elections turnout has always been abysmal and it is usually Euro-sceptic parties that choose to campaign for seats, running on an anti-EU platform.

Noteworthy to the evolution of Euro-scepticism as a political movement is the massive boost received by the effect currency crisis, coupled with the European Sovereign Debt Crisis. Whilst sceptics outside the Euro-zone pointed to the common currency as a defining failure of European integration, those inside were more focused on discrepancies at state level. In Italy, the inflation wrought on by the Euro's adoption, which was only exacerbated by the recession, Euro-sceptics criticized mainly national institutions which ushered in the Euro to replace the lira. In the UK, a member state that currently enforces an opt-out right against the adoption of the Euro, scepticism has revolved mainly around the desire to maintain the Bank of England's ability to set interest rates on the pound. In a sense, this panders to the essential principles of the right-wing in general: maintaining a certain degree of conservatism. Since the rise of income inequality and the onset of the financial crisis coincided with the enlargement of the European Union in 2004 and 2007 and the adoption of the Euro, populist radical parties have pointed to this change caused by the EU as a nefarious factor in the continued prosperity of their nations. However, as scholars such as Ritzen argue, this economic reasoning takes a second seat to the more established cultural aspect: the need to maintain one's identity in the face of globalization.

This criticism of the European Union's economic mechanisms and its gradual suppression of individual European cultures, stands in contrast to the plain and simple disdain with which fascists regarded their fellow European. Whilst fascists strived for a European continent dominated by "superior" peoples, enforcing their rule through military might, modern radical right-wing parties merely push for their countries' continued sovereignty in a European continent, more-and-more politically influenced by the European Union. In a sense, this is consistent with what far-right is ideologically: an extreme form of conservatism, i.e. a desire to return to a previous *status quo*, which was considered more favourable. The Nazis and other fascists wanted a rematch against their WWI opponents and a return to a European system defined by military might and conflict between peoples attempting to assert dominance over each other. Modern far-right parties simply advocate for a return to that period in time after the implementation of the Marshall Plan and before the onset of waves of immigration, beginning with the 1960s.

2 According to Eurobarometer surveys.

However, both categories of far-right parties have used economic crisis to suit their own needs, and they have done so in a similar fashion. They blamed the economic downturns on foreign actors and on a malicious "foreign" influence within their own borders. Whether they were directly influenced by the Euro Crisis or not, or whether they believed the Jews had engineered the Great Depression, the results were the same: Europeans voted for far-right when faced with economic hardships. There is, however, a notable correlation between all these events: the harder an economy was hit and the more impoverished people found themselves at the end of the crisis, the greater the influence radical parties ended up having. This correlation is nothing surprising, as scholars have noted its occurrence time and time again. However, the lesson that should be drawn here is that the actual state of the economy is somewhat irrelevant for right-wing populist rhetoric. As Ritzen found for the link between rising Euroscepticism and economic stagnation: it is "more mood than economy" (Ritzen, 1) or, in other words, it does not truly matter what is happening to the economy for radicals to blame any perceived economic hardship on foreign agencies.

Case in point: Weimar Germany was hit harder by the Great Depression, than any modern state during the Great Recession and it was also the state that fell to fascism the hardest. Yet, even in 1930s Germany, in the face of runaway inflation, the Nazis never took more than 34% of the vote. The subsequent takeover of power by the Nazis, was due largely to their divided opposition and weak central government, rather than to the gain of any overwhelming popularity. This is a huge element when comparing the two historical periods: 1930s Europe was still recovering from the devastation wrought on by the Great War of 1914-1918, whilst the Europe of 2008 had just experienced the longest stretch of consistent prosperity and relative peace (the Cold War had marked Europe for 45 years and the Yugoslav Wars had shaken the long standing peace to a disturbing degree) in the continent's history. This fortune enabled both the European Union and its member states to handle the crisis far better than their Inter war predecessors had. This, in a sense, signifies the great difference between the two time periods compared here: contemporary Europe is a far more politically stable place than 1930s Europe, albeit it might still be quite politically divided. However, despite any perceived political division, the current agenda pursued by the far-right is currently focused heavily on questioning the exact benefits of being in the European Union and pursuing deeper and deeper integration. Once more, this "tameness" of the ideologies of contemporary radical right-wing parties is largely due to the recent history of political stability in Europe.

Of all the remarks on Euro-scepticism, none stands truer than the note that the political

movement behind it is specifically about questioning the benefits of individual member-states being part of the union, and not about the instigation of conflict between member states. The most virulently Euro-sceptic parties, typically the radical right-wing, have actually chosen to work together to oppose further integration. They have done this in recent years, due to the fact that the outbreak of the European Sovereign Debt Crisis *proved them right* in the eyes of many voters which saw in their financial hardships the malevolent hand of the European Union and globalization. These parties became Euro-sceptic when the EU clashed with their disapproval of foreign workers competing with the native workforce, during the enlargement of the early 2000s. They integrated Euro-scepticism as an economic policy, which also pandered to widespread beliefs that national identities where being threatened.

Yet, these views on the continent's politics are benign in comparison to the reactions of fascist states in the 1930. This was due mainly to modern states being better prepared for the Great Recession, than their predecessors were for the Great Depression. As a result, fewer people were disillusioned by the aptitudes of the ruling or mainstream parties and even fewer turned to vote for the far-right.

## Chapter 2
## The Two Greats

Since much of this paper is dedicated to analysing and comparing the effects of two distinct economic slumps, research has gone into comparing the two crisis from an economic perspective. The conclusion is somewhat unanimous amongst the literature: thought both the Great Depression and the Great Recession were horrible events of cataclysmic proportions (from an economic perspective), the Great Recession was a less intense event in its magnitude and intensity in Europe.

Aiginger, in his 2010 paper *The Great Recession versus the Great Depression: Stylized Facts on Siblings That Were Given Different Foster Parents,* tackles this topic head on. He regards the two economic slumps as being relatively identical "siblings" (thus stressing that the two had roughly the same outcome), that were given different "foster parents". What Aiginger means by this is that, presented with the same situation, 1930's governments and 2000's governments handled things in different ways. The 1930's governments were *bad foster parents* which only took measures that made

their predicament even worse, whilst the 2000's governments were *good foster parents* which actually took competent policy decisions which alleviated the harm caused by the Great Recession.

This competence shown by contemporary governments was due to the blessing of having learned from the mistakes made during the Great Depression. So to speak, "the science did learn its lesson from the Great Depression and was able to give decent policy advice to at least limit the depth of the recent crisis" (Aiginger, 1). In his sense, Aiginger supports the belief, held by many other scholars, that the Great Recession was not as bad the Great Depression, mainly because "the policy response has been fast, bold, and well-conceived" (Romer, 11)[3].

Though both crises caused the majority of all imaginable economic indicators to take a negative turn, the recent Euro-crisis pales, slightly, in comparison to the financial ruin wrought on by the Great Depression. "The Great Depression had two epicenters (Germany/Austria and the United States). This time round almost all industrialized countries had rather parallel declines in economic activity in the first three quarters of the crisis (Aiginger, 33)." What this difference in impact patterns between the two crisis highlights is the fact that the world was better prepared and that there was not one state[4] which *collapsed* under the pressure of the Great Recession.

The only parameter in which the two come close is a concurrent rise in income inequality during the high points of the crisis, which has persisted even in the aftermath of each crisis. However, according to Wertz, the contemporary rise in income inequality has disputable implications. While populists tend to point the finger at the European Union which ,they say, has deliberately pursued policies that have lead to income inequality, others argue that this is a global trend, indirectly caused by globalization and events such as economic slumps. In other words, no definitive consensus has been reached whether or not the Euro-crisis, the European Union or globalization have lead to the growth in inequality. However, as the title suggests, *Euro-scepticism and radical right-wing voting in Europe, 2002–2008: Social cleavages, socio-political attitudes and contextual characteristics determining voting for the radical right,* Wertz argues[5] that the economy is a secondary concern for the average voter of the far-right, with "lower educated people, manual workers, unemployed people and non-churchgoers are more likely to vote for the radical right" (Wertz, 1) regardless of whichever actual policy said radical right right party might support.

3 Romer makes this statement about the response in the USA, yet similar responses were the norm in Europe, thus helping soften the blow of the crisis.

4 Greece can be given as an example of a country ravaged by the Recession, yet it was not an "epicentre".

5 More-or-less the same point as Ritzen.

All in all, returning to the comparative nature of this paper, the existence of a link between the two economic slumps and the growth of far-right parties in their wake is indisputable[6]. An economic crisis provides the exact conditions required for a far-right party to gain voters and the more horrible a crisis appears, the greater the gains for the radical right. As a result, a direct proportionality can be noted amongst these two great slumps and the far-right parties they propelled to power. That is to say, since the Great Depression was a far more acute event, it lead to a greater surge in power for the far-right in the 1930s, than the contemporary European Sovereign Debt Crisis has for today's radical right-wing parties.

A more disturbing implication of this manner of viewing things would be the future behaviour of European voters, as the development and wealth gap between Western Europe and the developing world shrinks and the European economy ultimately stagnates. In *The End of the West: The Once and Future Europe*, Marquand, though largely ignoring the impact of the far-right, considers two possible paths which an economically stagnant European Union might take: a two-tiered Europe, with wealthy states having well integrated economies and "poorer" states being less integrated, or an eventual fragmentation of the European Union, collapsing under the pressure of political shifts caused by a stagnating or receding economy.

## Chapter 3

### *Populism and the Appeal to the Masses*

In essence, populism is not necessarily a "bad" thing. Though scholarly definitions vary, the broad idea populism is that a certain party or movement aims to appeal to the general population by adopting a specific rhetoric that panders entirely to the broad public. Another relevant aspect is that, usually, an enemy of the people is usually identified, either in the form of the established political elite or under the guise of any given minority which is presented as dedicated to the downfall of "the people" and the identity, cultural and well-being of a nation. It is a tactic which is inherent to all democratic political entities, due to the intrinsic aspect of the need for electoral success. However, far-right parties have historically been major employers of populism is their party's policy.

Mark Mazower writes in *Dark Century* of the appeal of the German NSDAP and Italian

6 In *Dark Century*, Mazower claims a direct correlation between German economic ruin and the rise of the Nazis.

*black shirts*, even in the early days of those fascist movements, to the general populations of their countries. These groups spoke of foreign agencies and internal enemies that had conspired towards the ruin of their country and their way of life, a message which many took to heart and held to be true. The Great Depression and the destruction wrought on be the First World War were presented as instruments of these, perceived, nefarious organizations and groups. This policy of *putting the people first* is an inherent aspect of fascist regimes, which, even though are totalitarian in their behaviour, centre their state-sanctioned doctrines around *national values*.

Once more, it must be said that this type of behaviour can be recognized in most political parties[7]. However, what distinguishes far-right populism, apart from its intensity, from other political movements, is the notion that the current political elite does not have the good of the people in mind. As a result of this, far-right parties find it easy to point to "failures" of established political parties, such as economic slumps or defeat in war, as proof of either their incompetence or their malevolence. Again, these characteristics are common amongst opposition parties, yet far-right parties will strive to prove that they are not part of the overall political apparatus, and that they come to offer radical, new policies, with the good of the people in mind.

Although the tactic of using populism seems very rewarding and overpowering in its ability to draw votes, it is inherently dependent on the existence of "failures" to which these parties to point. The intensity of these failures should preferably be as high as possible, in the sense that the more people they affect negatively, the more people that may become susceptible to far-right rhetoric. Indeed, the NSDAP and the Front Nacional had and have existed in their countries for quite some time and they pre-dated the disasters and blunders that propelled them closer to power. It was only in the aftermath of the runaway inflation caused by the Great Depression, and the exhaustion of the First World War, that pro-Nazi votes started entering electoral ballots. In a similar manner, contemporary far-right parties have only gained ground in the aftermath of the European Sovereign Dent Crisis.

However, in regards to the effectiveness of populism, the nature of the electoral system must be taken into account. On this topic, it should be noted that far-right parties seem to tend to near or gain power, only if there is not a two-party system in place. A very good example of this system impeding electoral gain for radicals are the systems of the United States and the United Kingdom. Whilst the two-party system comes with its own flaws, it does make it rather difficult for parties at the

7 With the notable exception of ethnic-regional parties, which do not pander to the general population, but rather to a specific minority inside the country.

edges of the political spectrum to ever elevate from the opposition, or even to gain seats in parliaments Albeit, this strange immunization caused by having a two-party system, does not compensate for the many flaws that such a system will eventually have. A very recent and good example of this would be the case of UKIP in Britain, during the 2015 general elections, where UKIP gathered 12.6% of all votes, yet only gained a single seat in the House of Commons. This is due to the fact that even though UKIPs populist stance on any number of topics succeeded in gathering support around the country, it was never strong enough in any given constituency to garner sufficient votes to win seats from more established parties such as the Conservatives and Labour, or regional parties such as the Scottish National Party.

On the other hand, in states such as contemporary France or the Netherlands, or Interwar Germany, where there were no two dominant political forces, radicals found and find it easier to enter parliaments and obtain a degree of influence. They do so by means of winning over heavily contested constituencies by making use of staunch populist rhetoric and proceeding to take on a "kingmaker" role, where they try to enter coalitions by providing a swing vote. Moreover, the presence of far-right parties in the halls of power often had the effect of radicalising the established political elites and parties, either by causing some to favour the new ideologies that had won so much popular support, or by deepening party member's resolve to their own cause. Such was the case in 1930 and 1932 in Germany, where the Nazis were able to hinder the formation of any government that did not include them. Old hatreds amongst the German parties would eventually lead to the Nazis rise to power, as the other parties simply weakened each other, which only strengthened the NSDAP.

The nature of the electoral system is also relevant to this discussion, as populist parties find it much easier to win votes with electoral processes that involve party lists. However, in these cases, the nature of the electoral system will likely force all parties to adopt somewhat more populist views. Swank, points out in the very abstract of his book **"***Globalization, the Welfare State and Right-wing Populism in Western Europe",* that *"social protection lessens the economic insecurities attendant to internationalization and, in turn, weakens support for far-right parties"*(Swank, 1). As a direct consequence of this, the absence of social protection (i.e. the feeling of abandonment by one's government) will cause voters to shift their views towards the far-right. As a reaction to this shift, the mainstream parties will try, in the short-term, to adopt more populist views.

Nonna Mayer, when discussing the recent success of the Front Nacional in *From Jean-Marie to Marine Le Pen: Electoral Change on the Far Right* , also speaks of the influence this will

most probably have on the other French parties, which will likely mimic the tactics of the Front Nacional (Mayer, 1), and will likely tilt their ideology more to the right. In this sense, populist parties must also strive to maintain their role as outsider, since once they become members of the government, they lose the benefits of being an outsider. Far-right parties that gain power, lose the right to claim that, if they were to replace the political elites, they would do a better job. It is because of this need that populist parties tend to not be able to enter coalitions, since any potential coalition partner is likely a hard-line opponent of their parties. This scenario often leads, like in the case of Germany in 1930 and 1932, to political instability and government deadlock.

So, in regards to the actual reasons why far-right parties often employ populist tactics, these stem mainly from the existing political situation and the nature of the political system. The appeal of populism to the general population, however, is dependent, at heart, more on economic, social and cultural reasons. That is to say, people will tend only find populist rhetoric appealing, if the current government and mainstream political parties have disappointment them on economic or social grounds, as is the view of scholars such as Swank, who regards it as the responsibility of the government to not create a scenario were populists could gain credibility. Mammone argues that "*populism, if it describes a political style based on easy, catchy, emotional slogans, rather than a certain value ascribed to a rational event, is, of course, not the exclusive preserve of right-wing extremism*" (Mammone, 4) . That is to say, populism is a rational choice in electoral strategy, which mainstream parties can also adopt if they feel the need,Great crisis such ass the Great Depression and the Great Recession serve as noteworthy examples of economic slumps turning people away from established parties and towards new options. Of these options, populist parties always seemed to catch the eye of many disillusioned voters first, though the mainstream parties frequently followed suit.

Moreover, the triggers for far-right party electoral gain, as looked upon in the entirety of this paper, all seem to be related in some way to the state of the economy. However, whether or not the perceived economic situation is as bad as it is portrayed, is debatable. Ritzen finds that, Euroscepticism, for example, in contemporary Europe has surged more due to, what he describes as "mood"(Ritzen, 1), as opposed to actual economic changes. However, Ritzen, Wertz and others all agree that the only economic indicator which has affected Europeans negatively in recent years has been the rise in income inequality. It should come then, as no surprise, that populist tactics, which inherently appeal to a dislike of "the elites", in the economic, social and political sense, should benefit from this statistic, thoroughly explored by Ritzen in *Euroskepticism in the Crisis: More Mood than*

*Economy*. Whether or not this rise in income inequality is a direct result of the existence of the European Union, as many Euro-sceptic populists believe, is subject to a much greater debate. Thomas Piketty, in his book *Capital in the Twentieth Century*, deems rising income inequality a global phenomena, wrought on by long-term capitalism, as opposed to a regional occurrence.

The fact of the matter remains that the current *status quo,* works in favour of populists, which are able to appeal to those who feel left behind by capitalism and "*abandoned*" by their governments in front of big business and economic elites. This situation enables these parties to focus on specific groups which can be blamed for the current situation. Although greatly different from the current situation, fascist populism also focused on specific groups, mainly the Jewish community, which it identified as the malevolent entity that leached their country's wealth and weakened the nation's resolve. It must be noted that, even though modern far-right parties have focused, in their rhetoric, on broad social groups, as opposed to specific minorities, the catalyst that has fuelled their rhetoric has always been the belief that the economic slump the "*people*" currently experience is either the result of a series of intentional acts, or simply due to the stupidity, incompetence or lack vision of people in charge. Yet, these perceived culprits often remain unnamed in speeches, but not unknown to the audience.

Other than the situation of the concurrent economy to the status quo, the other factor that is important when considering the effectiveness of populist far-right tactics is not not necessarily economic in nature, albeit it is frequently influenced by economic history.

Fascism tends to involve a glorification of the past, as opposed to plain conservatism or right-wing-ness, which simply wishes to maintain a current *status quo* or return to a previous one. Because of this, nations whose culture implies a very passionate admiration of their "*peoples*" past, often find themselves to be more susceptible to the auspices of fascism. An obvious example of this would be Nazi Germany, the self-styled *Third* Reich which strived to entertain an idea of continuity with the Holy Roman Empire, and Bismarck's united Germany or Fascist Italy's emulation of the Roman Empire in ideology, nomenclature and, even, architecture. The Golden Dawn's flirtations with romanticized notions of Greek Antiquity or Hellenistic conquest or the Front Nacional frequent appeals to France's bellicose past serve as contemporary examples of far-right parties using their country's past as a weapon meant to stir up patriotic fervour, in the hopes of electoral gain.

Moreover, fascism and the far-right, in general, traditionally tend to promote patriarchy in some sense. It is because of this that, Mayer argues, Marine Le Pen's replacement of her father as

head of the Front Nacional proved to be so beneficial for the party, as it helped distance it, in the French people's eyes, from fascism, simply because it seemed nonsensical to many French voters, that a woman could lead a, somewhat, fascist party. It has been publicity successes such as this one which have helped contemporary far-right parties by distancing them from fascism if not ideologically, then at least in terms of their identity. These moves have proven to be particularly effective given the change in European society that has occurred in the last century. Whilst the populist rhetoric employed by the far-right has usually been addressed to traditional families, structured around a heterosexual couple where the man is the house breadwinner and the woman is a housewife, modern European households do not frequently stick to such a structure any more. As a result, parties, such as the British Nationalist party (or BNP) have actually garnered some degree of electoral success through their support of gay marriage. All in all, parties that are inherently far-right, according to Mudde's definition outlined in *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe.*

Furthermore, this line of thought can also be pursued from the point of view of a cultural analysis of countries as being feminine or masculine. In essence, far-right parties have traditionally gained footholds in countries which could be described as masculine[8]. This is due to the fact that masculine societies do not revolve around reaching consensus, but rather around one side proving the other wrong. Because of this, far-right parties can potentially reap the rewards of total opposition to the established political system, given that the inability to reach a deal with other parties would not necessarily be regarded as a failure by the public, as Mazower frequently notes in *Dark* Century.

All in all, even though some countries are more inherently susceptible to populist rhetoric, be it that of the far-right or that of outright fascists, some are more vulnerable than others, as a result of history, culture and the nature and structure of society. However, since populism is, at its base, a weapon meant to be used by the many against the few, populist parties have profited from the coincidence of rising income inequality and the inception of a more integrated European Union. This situation allows them to be populist, whilst also fulfilling their Euro-sceptic and anti-immigrant agenda. Yet, the disillusionment that has turned people from established mainstream parties and towards the far-right by means of their populist approach to politics, is as economic in nature today, as it was eighty years ago.

## Chapter 4

8 According to sources such as the Hofstede Foundation, Germany is regarded as a very masculine society, for example.

### *Anti-Semitism vs. Islamophobia*

As has been touched upon the previous chapters, a major characteristic of the far-right, in the majority of its incarnations, is the tendency of radicals to exhibit xenophobic traits. The great historical example is the Holocaust orchestrated by the Germany Nazi party and its World War II fascist allies. However, the adversity portrayed by modern far-right parties towards certain immigrant groups, particularly Muslims, could also be considered a consequence of the slight radicalization of European right wing politics, following the impact of the Great Recession.

Whilst far-right parties have been, are and forever will be opposed to multiculturalism and cosmopolitanism in general (according to Mudde), the contemporary focus on Muslim immigrants (particularly those of Middle Eastern descent) is a phenomena that can be attributed to the nature these immigrant groups and how they have been framed by the media and politicians. Williams argues in *Can Leopards Change Their Spots? Between Xenophobia and Trans-ethnic Populism among West European Far Right Parties,* modern far-right parties *"were able to create a target outgroup in the immigrant population and to generate public fear or xenophobia"* (Williams, 1).

One of the most nefarious stigmas attributed to Muslim communities in Western Europe, is that they support Jihadists or Salafists (either under the guise of ISIS or Al-Qaeda) and serve as breeding grounds for domestic terrorism. The Madrid train bombings, the London bombings and the recent Charlie Hebdo attacks have all ignited previously latent Islamophobia sentiments in many European. There are factors that have all contributed to this specific focus of far-right parties on Muslim minorities. Most notable are: the growth of radical right-wing and anti-immigration parties in electorate, Euro-sceptic beliefs that the European Union is a negative influence on its member-states due to its promotion of multiculturalism, and the relative weakness of European governments, still struggling with the European Sovereign Debt Crisis.

A sensible example could be the virulent intensification of rhetoric of the Front Nacional in France against France's Muslim minority, in the aftermath of the Charlie Hebdo attacks. When the now famous "*Je suis Charlie*" slogan started to gain popularity, Jean-Marie Le Pen proposed an alternative slogan in the form of *"Je suis Charles Martel"*(Le Huffington Post, January 9th 2015), *re*ferencing the medieval Frankish king Charles Martel, and his war against Muslims, culminating in the battle of Poitiers of 732. This bellicose statement has remained overshadowed by more pacifistic statements of solidarity, yet its very existence hints at startling developments occurring in French

society.

This trend of being somewhat more transparent about their specific views on Muslim-Europeans, is common in political systems around the continent. The PEGIDA movement in Germany is also motivated against Islam in particular, as opposed to immigrants in general.

However, the main relevant factor to the discussion was the impact of the recent economic crisis on these sentiments, in comparison to the impact of the Great Depression on Anti-Semitism. In this light, once more a proportional similarity can be noted. Whilst there had always been a latent anti-Semitic sentiment in Europe before the rise of the Nazis, it was only after the Great Depression, and only in certain countries, that political parties benefited from anti-Semitic rhetoric and stances. Similarly, in modern Europe, though the energized Islamophobic sentiment is present in most European societies, it is often more pronounced in some states than others.

To this discussion must also be added the influence of recent military developments. Whereas in post-Great War Germany, the Jews received blame for their, supposed[9], role in Germany's capitulation, in contemporary Europe, there has been a consistent trend of encounters between European military forces and Islamic fighters in Afghanistan, Iraq, Mali, Somalia and other regions. These conflict, often coupled with media bias and sensationalism, have lead to a gradual polarization of European society. Whilst, by and large, Europeans remain liberal in their views of foreigners, including Muslims, there has been an increase in Islamophobia and general xenophobia in the years following the financial crisis.

Overall, even though the actual processes through which contemporary European Islamophobia has risen, it is without doubt that, insofar, it does not compare to the intensity and obscenity reached by anti-Semitism in the 1930's. This difference in scope can be attributed to several factors, apart from the obvious impact discrepancy between the Great Depression and the Great Recession. Perhaps the most obvious of these is the unprecedented (in history) and, almost, unparalleled (in the world) respect for human rights that exists today in Europe[10]. Francis Fukuyama argues in his book *The End of History and the Last Man*, as the main point of the book, that this situation is a direct consequence of the victory of liberal democracy against communism and fascismThough scholars, such as Benedict Anderson, explain that xenophobia is somewhat intrinsic to

9 And heinously fabricated by the Nazis (Glassman discusses this topic at great length in *Benjamin Disraeli: The Fabricated Jew in Myth and Memory*, using Nazi propaganda regarding the Jewish-English statesman Benjamin Disraeli as a specific example).

10 As the CIA World Factbook and Freedom House frequently mention in their reports.

the human condition, strong leadership, consecrated laws and historical precedents have assured the safety of minorities in Europe, despite growing levels of xenophobia. The European Union, as evidenced by the Nobel Peace prize received in 2012, has historically contributed to this protection of the rights of minorities in Europe. Coupled with aforementioned animosity to the European Union's enlargement policy, immigration views and transferred sovereignty, this policy of anti-xenophobia makes Euro-scepticism an even more viable political position for anti-immigrant and Islamophobic far-right radical right-wing parties.

In truth, most parties catalogued as far-right are, at their very nature, xenophobic, since the nationalism they strictly stand by implies the belief that one's people are frequently at threat from *foreign* agencies. This knowledge that encouraging xenophobia will inherently lead to overt racism is the cornerstone at the base of the European electorate's abstinence from voting for extremist parties. However, as Williams argues, the question that today is of the essence is "*Can Leopards Change Their Spots?"* (Williams, 1) That is to say, can far-right parties be trusted to not with power, knowing that their political ideology has been proven to be vulnerable to degenerating to a state where persecution of minorities becomes acceptable? In this respect, Mayer and Williams both argue that much of the reason behind Marine Le Pen's newly found electoral success, derives from a "softening" of the Front Nacional's views in most respects. Whilst still adhering to a strong anti-immigrationist, Euro-sceptic and outright xenophobic ideology, Marine Le Pen's Front Nacional has gained popularity by distancing itself from the more somewhat fascist views of the party's previous leader, Marine's father, Jean-Marie.

This tactic of veering away from conspicuous statements and ideas is actually prevalent in most far-right parties in Europe, particularly those that have stricter laws regarding statements that could be classified as "hate speech". For instance, even though the Dutch politician Geert Wilders made a controversial statement regarding Moroccans in March of 2014 (Reuters, May 14th 2014), he later revisited his statements and claimed that they were taken out of context and that their meaning was distorted. These politicians often find themselves at odds between pandering to their hard-line supporters[11] and the tolerant and liberal media which often dominates the press in European states. As such, they often have to withdraw statements made "in the heat of the moment" which were meant to appeal to their hard-line voters, but which might scare away their target voters, who hold less radical views. As Mazower points out in *Dark Continent* this differs greatly from the habits of Inter-war fascist parties, which often stood by their even most extreme statements.

11 Which frequently hold outright racist views, as argued by Brug.

Yet, there is another potential similarity between the xenophobia of Nazi Anti-Semitism and contemporary far-right Islamophobia. A similarity drawn from the state of democracy in the states xenophobia tendencies emerged. A habit of political parties influencing one another has long been observed in democratic states. That is to say that, if mainstream parties notice that one fringe party or another, obtains some degree of electoral success, as a result of solely advocating one specific policy, they ill often incorporate said policy into their own ideology, so as to attempt to reconcile with former voters which turned to the far-right. In states like Nazi Germany, for example, Anti-Semitism and other radical ideologies and policies, were usually the primary concern of fascist parties and factions. Yet, upon noticing the success of the Nazi Party, some other political forces would attempt to incorporate Nazi-style policies into their own agenda. The fear of such a phenomena occurring in contemporary Europe has been most pronounced in states where such parties have become "*3rd parties*", such as with the Front Nacional in France, the Golden Dawn in Greece, and, to a lesser degree, the UK Independence Party in Britain.

However, such phenomena have been proven to work both ways, as shown by the aforementioned case of the Front Nacional and its distancing from the fascist tendencies portrayed by the older party elements. Moreover, the Front Nacional is not in isolated case. Whilst many parties, previously considered Anti-Semitic parties have opted to gradually distance themselves from outright extremist views, the undertones of such ideas are still relatively present and the stigma of advocating beliefs that channel the overtly racist policies committed by the Nazis still looms over these parties. It could also be argued that, simply because there is no heavy Jewish presence in Europe, yet there is a strong Islamic presence, xenophobic sentiment has shifted towards Muslims, filling the void left by Jews. In other words, populist xenophobia is linked on the very foundations of radical right-wing parties and is not a purely reactionary phenomena to any specific "*foreign*" group.

Also, in regards to the manner in which parties influence one another, there is the added dimension of parties from different countries influencing one another. Euro-scepticism is often the umbrella under which these parties usually converse, as is famously the case of UKIP which, though a primarily Euro-sceptic party, is renowned for its attempts at coordinating with other European parties and working together towards the formation of a proper pan-European Euro-sceptic movement, made manifest in the "*Europe for Freedom and Direct Democracy*" bloc in the European Parliament. From this point of view, all parties appear to be exhibiting the same behaviour, regardless of position on the political spectrum. Mazower points to communists, fascists, Marxists, yet also to humanists and

liberals, frequently communicating and exchanging ideas across borders. These exchanges become even more common and communication sometimes gives way to cooperation in specific regions. Europe, in particular, is known for the ideological permeability of its borders, which political ideas always found easy to traverse. The advent of the internet, as well as faster communication and transport in all forms, have facilitated an environment where the nuances of individual parties and their rhetoric, ideologies and policies, often change overnight.

All in all, in terms of xenophobia, it can be concluded that even though contemporary far-right parties share much with their 1930s counterparts, many pronounced differences endure. The most obvious difference is that of intensity. The outright hated of the Nazis towards minorities cannot be compared to the relatively benign dislike of foreigners practised by anti-immigration parties. Yet, this discrepancy in intensity and scale could be explained by the difference in impact between the two economic slumps discussed in this paper The second major difference is the identity of the actual groups targeted by the two far-right movements. Whereas in the 1930s the Jews were the go-to foreign parasite, nowadays, as a result of feverish anti-anti-Semitic policies, Islamophobia has taken root, by filling the void left by anti-Semitism. Yet this focus on a specific group is somewhat irrelevant in the greater scheme of things, as anti-immigration far-right parties will unavoidably be xenophobic to a certain degree.

## *Conclusion*

A conclusion cannot be stated without a final discussion regarding the degree of similarity between the Great Depression and the Great Recession. Although this paper focuses greatly on the similarities between the effects of the two events on Western European politics, it must, once again, be noted that, even though the two events are similar in nature, they are vastly different due to the difference in scale. Though both are economic crises that started across the Atlantic, on Wall Street, then crossed over into European banks and states, as a result of the interconnectivity of the financial world, they where inherently different in their magnitude. This was a result of several factors, primarily due to a swift reaction to the Great Recession, aided by foreknowledge of how previous crises were resolved. All in all, even though the Great Recession brought many to the brink of economic collapse, it does not compare to the borderline apocalyptic effects of the Great Depression. As a result, even though the impacts of both crisis were similar, they differed in magnitude, hence leading to the

differences amongst the two events. Furthermore, the repercussions of Europe's previous "investment" in far-right parties, during the 1930's, are still fresh in the minds of many Europeans, and influence their voting behaviour.

First and foremost, both crises lead to the relative rise of the far-right in Western Europe. The runaway inflation present in Germany, the financial disaster that was pre-fascist Italy, coupled with the lingering effects of the greatest war in European history[12] would cause the general population of both countries to suffer immensely, and would disillusion many former voters of established parties. This disappointment in the system would facilitate the expansion of a niche electorate, up to that point, of the far-right voters, though scholars such as Mayer and Williams argued that all that was needed to propel these parties to the mainstream was some re-branding.. This disappointment is mirrored in recent electoral changes in contemporary European states, where the far-right, previously limited to an insignificant number of voters, has surged to the point where, in countries like France, Greece or the Netherlands, these parties now have a significant presence in their countries legislature. In these countries and others, these parties have even tilted the political spectrum more to the right in recent years. Yet, once more, this change is puny in comparison to the political upheaval of 1930s Europe.

Secondly, there is a slight difference in the exact origins of the two party categories. The 1930's fascists were heavily connected to the military, and disenfranchised veterans would serve as their earliest voting bases, while modern far-right parties are purely socio-political movements, and, almost all, have anti-immigration as their root ideology and were initially supported by low-working class people who viewed foreigners as direct competition in the job market. This difference is incredibly important, as it defines the directions both party categories have taken. Whilst parties, such as the German NSDAP, would eventually develop revanchist views, which would fester as the Germans yearned to reclaim all which they considered to have been taken from them by the Allies and other perceived enemies of their nation, modern far-right parties simply strive for an insulation of their "*homeland*" from foreigners, whether they be immigrants or European Union bureaucrats. Though, in both cases, parties frequently collaborate with foreign analogues in order to achieve mutual political gain. The fascists had the Axis, whilst modern far-right parties have their Euro-sceptic blocks.

Thirdly, though both party categories have used populism to some degree, contemporary far-right parties struggle greatly with the problem of foreknowledge by European voters. That is to say, Europeans know from history what voting for such politicians and parties may lead to, and strictly

12 Up to that point, that is.

avoid such parties during election as a result. This issue hinders contemporary far-right parties in several other ways as well. Namely, given the consistency of rumours and claims that, even though, on the surface these parties do not portray a Neo-Nazi, fascist or racist behaviour overtly, they are inherently racist and nefarious in nature (as Williams explains in *Can a Leopard Change its Spots*). The fact that the typical far-right tactic of glorifying the past and insisting upon a return to a previous *status quo*, often leads to revelations regarding contemporary views of their far-right forerunners, does not further the cause of radical parties any more either.

Lastly, a remarkable parallel can be drawn between the 1930s Anti-Semitism, and modern day Islamophobia, in the sense that both categories of far-right parties strive to use underlying xenophobic sentiments inherent to their society, for political gain. However, once more, there is a great discrepancy in intensity between the two movements. Whist fascist rhetoric would gradually grow to target Jews in particular, and continue with downright persecution and genocide, the current far-right has yet to escalate its dialogue beyond a simple desire that immigrants either become completely naturalized or leave their country. This anti-immigrant view is the cornerstone of these party's ideologies, and has morphed into the current specific focus on Muslim communities in the wake of a perceived "cultural war" between the *West* and the Muslim World. A war made manifest by events such as the invasions of Iraq, and Afghanistan, and the recent Copenhagen and Paris attacks. Yet, despite the similarity in behaviour towards minorities, the two far-right movements remain inherently different due to the fact that Islamophobia has not escalated to the point of overt persecution of the Muslim minority by either governments or far-right groups. At least, it hasn't yet and it probably will not reach that point any time in the foreseeable future.

The single-most relevant observation to be taken from this thesis is the fact that, even though it can be unanimously agreed upon that economic slumps flare up any radical right sentiment in any given state, the appeal of the far-right and its ideologies is inherent to European society. Basically, even though the radical right gains prominence mainly during times of economic hardship, these parties never truly disappear, as they will always have an electorate that will supply them with a minimum of votes, and because their ideology and rhetoric are timeless in nature and intrinsically appealing to many potential voters.

As a conclusion, though the fascist movements of the 1930s and contemporary far-right movements share many similarities in terms of ideology, rhetoric and political behaviour, they remain inherently different phenomena, due to a collection of factors, but, most importantly, due to the

difference in impact of the Great Depression and the Great Recession. The exact mechanisms through which the radical right benefits from times of economic hardship are disputable. However, metaphorically speaking, economic slumps fuel the far-right, and the far-right only seems to obtain electoral results directly proportional to the effect of economic downturns. Furthermore, the great lesson to be taken from this tale remains the power of learning from the mistakes of the past, since, it was knowledge gained from going through the Great Depression that taught policy-makers how to deal with an economic crisis and it was remembering the evil unleashed upon the world by fascist governments that taught the European electorate about the importance of voting wisely.

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