

Un Fauteuil pour Deux?

**The Extreme Right and The Extreme Left in the European
Parliament Elections 2004**

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Abstract

In many European Union member states, defiance directed towards the incumbent government and a climate of general political dissatisfaction led to widespread predictions that the extreme left and the extreme right would obtain major successes. However, these predictions were left wanting on the morning after the actual election. While it was the case that either the extreme right or the extreme left managed to obtain good results in most countries, in very few did both forces do well simultaneously. This paper examines this paradox and suggests that the extreme right and the extreme left have become too similar in their strategies, discourses, electoral targets and systemic functions to be able to enjoy parallel success. This hypothesis is then confirmed empirically in the context of the 2004 European Parliament Elections.

Introducing the Two Contenders

While a theoretical definition of the extreme right has been the object of many a discussion among political scientists, most will agree on the core members of the family in Europe – although here again, controversies are not unusual at the fringes. In this article, we will include most of the parties that are identified by experts as extreme right wing, (even though some scholars will disagree with one or another of the members e.g. the Lijst Pim Fortuyn in the Netherlands is not extreme right for Mudde, the Alleanza Nazionale is not for Ignazi, the Danish and Norwegian nationalist parties are considered to be extreme right or not depending on the scholars who assess their case, etc) and who usually obtain a relatively sizeable share of the vote in their country, that is, about 1% or over of the vote.

Therefore, our analysis will include: the Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs (FPÖ) in Austria, the Vlaams Blok (VB) in Belgium, the Dansk Folkeparti (DF) in Denmark, Front National (FN) and Mouvement National Republicain (MNR) in France, Die Republikaner (REP), the Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands (NPD) and the Deutsche Volksunion (DVU) in Germany, the Laikos Orthodoxos Synagermos (LAOS) in Greece, the Alleanza Nazionale (AN), the Lega Nord (LN), the Lista Mussolini (AS), and the Movimento Sociale Fiamma Tricolore (FT) in Italy, the Apvieniba "T vzemei un Br v bai"/LNNK (TB/LNNK) in Latvia, Lijst Pim Fortuyn (LPF) in the Netherlands, the Liga Polskich Rodzin (LPR) and the Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (PiS) in Poland, the Prává Slovenská Národná Strana (PSNS) and

Slovenská Národná Strana (SNS) in Slovakia, and the British National Party (BNP) and the UK Independence Party in the United Kingdom¹.

The radical left might be an even more heterogeneous force than the extreme right in Europe. While the extreme left remains a relatively significant political force in many European countries, it is undeniable that it assumes fundamentally different forms on both sides of the former Iron Curtain. To the East, radical minorities derived from the former communist parties tend to attract those who are nostalgic of the former regime, and occasionally present serious contenders to national government. To the West of the former curtain, however, extreme left wing parties also include former communist parties, but also usually encompass more marginal parties than their Eastern counterparts. The parties that form the latter category are often built upon the foundations of former anarchic groups and of the most radical elements of the 1968 social protest movements.

Unlike the extreme right, almost equally split between members of the UEN and unaffiliated MEPs, most of the communist and former communist parties in Europe belong to the common GUE/NGL group in the European Parliament (Group of the United Left). These parties had 17 seats in the 1999-2004 European Parliament. Only a few smaller and occasionally more radical parties, have tended to remain unaffiliated when they were able to send members to the European Parliament. In the new member states, some of these extreme left wing parties remain very strong. For example, in Cyprus, the very left wing AKEL is the first party of the country and

¹ It is worth noting that many experts, so far, have not included UKIP on their lists of extreme right wing parties. However, the work of Bruter and Harrison (forthcoming) shows how the party's discourse clearly falls within one type of extreme right ideology. This being said, excluding UKIP from the analysis does not change the empirical results of this paper in any significant way.

obtained more than a third of the votes in the last Cypriot general elections. In the Czech Republic, the KSCM is currently the third party in the national Parliament and obtained 18.5% of the vote in the last general elections. However, in most other European Union member-states, the extreme left regularly attracts anywhere between 0 and 15% of the votes.

Altogether, the extreme left has resisted much better to the fall of communism in Southern Europe and in Scandinavia than elsewhere on the continent. It retains more than a tenth of the electorate in countries such as Greece and Portugal, and almost as many in Italy or France. It also seduces about 13% of the voters in Denmark, and about 10% in Sweden and Finland, where it has contributed to the absence of sizeable green parties. Since the unification of Germany, the former East German communist party, the PDS, also managed to restore a fraction of its former appeal. On the other hand, there is no sizeable extreme left wing party in the UK, Belgium, Hungary, Austria, or Slovenia.

Extreme Voting and the European Parliament

Traditionally, European Parliament elections have been a particularly successful platform for European extreme right wing parties. The second order and mid-term phenomena, combined with the dominant use of proportional representation systems in most countries, including those which do not use it for general elections (France, UK) have enabled extreme right parties in the past to obtain consistently high scores. eurosceptic campaign themes have also proved to be quite fertile for the extreme right

over the years. As the 2004 elections were expected to be a particularly caricatural example of a second order election, in which citizens would take the opportunity to signal their widespread discontent with their national governments, extreme right wing parties were hoping for a major breakthrough.

Similarly, in European Parliament elections since the late 1980's, extreme left wing parties managed to mobilise their electoral supporters against the European project in its recent form, and against incumbent governments they always challenge.

The contention of this paper is that these two party families, while apparently situated at the opposite ends of the ideological spectrum ended up playing a similar game in the 2004 European Parliament elections. We will first look at their discourses, surprisingly similar in their anti-European focus. We will then turn to their electoral bases, largely overlapping within the least privileged sectors of society. Finally, the paper will compare their functions within the political system and claim that the two forces compete for the role of protest outlet and try to capitalise on the second order and anti-government election phenomena. On that basis, we will claim that the extreme left and the extreme right would fail to enjoy simultaneous success within either the context of European Parliament elections or of any other. This hypothesis will then be tested empirically.

Discursive Opportunities: Two anti-European Forces

In many European Union member-states, eurosceptic parties have been particularly efficient at mobilising their electoral troops during European Parliament elections. Their traditional – and successful – claim is indeed that European institutions can only be reformed (or even dismantled) democratically and effectively from within.

The eurosceptic discourse of the extreme right is no new phenomenon. The literature suggests, indeed, that extreme right parties rely on an exclusive and unique conception of identity, which claims that multiple identities are in fact incompatible (Bruter and Harrison, forthcoming). While Risse et al. (2004) suggest that most European citizens hold multiple identities, and Bruter (forthcoming) shows that they are even positively correlated, the traditional nationalist theory in which extreme right ideology is grounded still claims, instead, that the only form of true allegiance to the state must stem from an uncompromising and unique cultural and ethnic national identity.

The euroscepticism of the extreme left, however, may come as more of a surprise given the internationalist and anti-nationalist origins of part of the extreme left described earlier. However, for a long time, the European extreme left has widely claimed that the European project was in fact a pretext for ultra-liberal capitalists to favour the interest of big business and international capitalists at the expense of the poor, whose social protection was being progressively abandoned as territorial borders were being dismantled. For many years, parties from the Greens to the Communists screamed their opposition to such a project, and at the same time claiming that they

would not be opposed to a 'social' European integration process, have always sat firmly, in practice, in the anti-European camp. This can be verified in the various referenda held concerning accession in the new member-states or about the Maastricht and other treaties in the older ones.

In the case of the 2004 elections, the eurosceptic discourse of the extreme right was confirmed once again. In fact, a new generation of *predominantly* eurosceptic parties, which can arguably be classified as extreme-right wing because of their discriminatory discourse, such as UKIP in Britain, have emerged recently, and have occasionally registered significant success. In their campaigns, anti-federalist and anti-European discourse was wide-spread, from the French National Front to almost every single far-right party in the new member-States. Their success, with such a eurosceptic line represented in fact a u-turn in many Central European countries, given the results of accession referenda. The Vlaams Blok was undoubtedly the most eurosceptic party campaigning for the election in the Belgian party systems. In fact, almost none of the extreme right wing parties campaigning in the European Parliament elections kept a neutral or positive stance towards European integration.

However, the discourse of extreme left wing parties was not much more favourable to European integration than that of the nationalist extreme right. First of all, the new member-states which retained a traditional communist party, such as the Czech Republic, usually saw this party champion the cause of anti-Europeanism. In the same way, extreme left wing parties in Western European countries, such as Lutte Ouvrière in France remained firmly opposed to a European model they accused to represent the epitome of free-trade and capitalism. The discourse of former communist parties in

Italy, France, Spain, etc, was also significantly less pro-European than that of their main competitors from the left, the centre, and the right.

Extreme Right and Extreme Left: Two Not-So-Dissimilar Electorates?

Traditional left-right models usually lead political scientists to posit the extreme right and the extreme left as the most dissimilar ideologies on the political spectrum. Downsian theory also leads us, therefore, to naturally think of extreme right and extreme left voters as further away from each other than from any other voters in the party system. However, an examination of the social, ideological, and demographic backgrounds of the electorate of both party families leads us to question the linearity of the ideological spectrum of European voters.

Indeed, a quick sociological approach to the strongholds of both the extreme left wing and extreme right wing parties shows us that the two tendencies rely on the same social-demographic basis for their vote. Both types of parties perform particularly poorly amongst the highly educated wealthy middle classes and better amongst blue collars and less educated employees. This social characterisation has been very typical of the extreme left electorate, but has become increasingly salient when it comes to the extreme right, as illustrated by Schain's work on France (Schain, 2004).

Similarly, both types of parties usually obtain less success amongst women than amongst men, and find it harder to seduce the young electorate than the older one. As illustrated by table 1 in the case of the extreme right. Conversely, many radical left

wing parties, such as the communist party in France, or the former communist party in Hungary, have had to launch campaigns to recruit new young members in order to compensate a clear generational discrepancy of their membership.

Table 1 about here

These similarities in programmes and social demographic characteristics of both electorates raise the question of whether parties of the extreme left and the extreme right families could perform similarly well in European Parliament or other elections simultaneously. This question will now be dealt with in the third part of this paper.

***Extreme Right and Extreme Left in the 2004 European Parliament Elections:
Fighting for the Same Seat?***

In this section, I will first analyse the respective fortunes of the extreme left and the extreme right, before evaluating whether there is evidence of an incompatibility of their electoral successes.

The European Extreme Left in the 2004 European Parliament Election

Table 2 illustrates the performance of European extreme left wing parties that obtained representation in Strasbourg. It is very clear from the results that the 2004 European Parliament Election was, by and large, a very good showing for the

European extreme left, which surfed high on the wave of anti-governmental attitudes throughout Europe. It is clear that - as for most other political parties which cannot pretend to have a chance of governing their country – the context of second order elections makes the European Parliament vote more favourable to the extreme left than general elections. However, it remains significant that in most member-states, parties of the extreme left have clearly improved their scores since the last general election. This is true in the case of Greece and Portugal, but also in France and Italy, where the decline of former communist parties previously seemed to be at a point of no return. The only clear exception to this pattern is Cyprus, where the status of the AKEL as the first party of the country and members of the governing coalition, undoubtedly cost them a potential share of the European Parliament vote.

As a whole, the GUE/NGL group, which most of the European extreme left parties are affiliated to, saw its representation dramatically increase from 17 to 40 members in the European Parliament.

Table 2 about here

The European Extreme Right in the 2004 European Parliament Election

The results of extreme right wing parties in each country are summarised in table 3. In Western Europe, it seems that the election enabled the Vlaams Blok to confirm its position as the first party in many Flemish areas. The election results were also deemed to be particularly encouraging for many ‘marginal’ extreme right wing

parties, such as those of Britain (BNP) and Germany (Republikaner [REP] and NPD). Finally, in Italy, the Alleanza Nazionale and the Lega Nord resisted much better, on the whole, than their dominant coalition partner, Forza Italia, to the efforts of the left to score points only two years until the next general election, and to exploit the wave of anti-war sentiment in the country.

At the same time, the 2004 election proved to be a bitter disappointment for the French extreme right, with the MNR literally blown out of the water with less than 0.5% of the vote, and the Front National limited to less than 10% of the votes only two years after Le Pen's much publicised presidential run-off. Similarly, the FPÖ did not manage to halt its progressive downfall as it lost yet further ground after its disappointing performance at the last general election. As for the Lijst Pim Fortuyn, the European Parliament election confirmed its inability to overcome the death of its charismatic leader, hence not even managing to send a representative to Strasbourg. The score of the Dansk Folkeparti in Denmark was equally disastrous as compared to their last general election performance.

While the West European extreme right parties did not achieve the spectacular results they had hoped for, the emergence of new extreme right, nationalist, and xenophobic parties in Central and Eastern Europe was dramatically confirmed at the polls. Only a few months after the referenda, which had seemed to show some Euro-enthusiasm amongst the new entrants, extreme right wing groups, used Eurosceptic programmes and took advantage of very high levels of abstention in order to feature amongst the leading political formations of their respective countries.

In Latvia, the right-wing nationalist TB/LNNK managed to capture the first position in the European Parliament race. Almost 3 out of 10 voters cast their vote in its favour. Similarly, in Poland, the Christian radical LPR more than doubled its score from the last general election and came in second place in the national contest, while the right wing populist PiS made a dramatic entrance onto the European Parliament stage with 12.7% of the votes and 7 MEPs.

Table 3 about here

Are the Extreme Right and Extreme Left successes mutually exclusive?

Do these stories retelling the success of some extreme right and some extreme left parties in the June election disprove the hypothesis of this paper? Table 4 compares electoral scores of the extreme right and the extreme left in the last European Parliament elections in each member state. It suggests that as predicted, the more successful the extreme right in a country, the less successful the extreme left and vice-versa. These results are further illustrated by the scatter-plot of figure 1.

Table 4 about here

Figure 1 about here

Altogether, the correlation between the scores of the extreme left and extreme right party families in the last European Parliament elections is a negative -0.30 . This coefficient is not statistically significant. This can be explained by a very small N and

by the presence of six party systems in the equation where neither an extreme left nor an extreme right party obtained any meaningful electoral score. Arguably, these particular countries should be excluded from the model, however, as our theory is one of mutual exclusion of the extreme left and the extreme right, and *not* one which predicts a constant emergence of extreme forces in all party systems.

If the countries where no extreme parties managed to make a breakthrough (for reasons related to either the institutional system, or the political culture, or the political climate) are excluded, the picture becomes yet more compelling. With 19 cases left, the correlation coefficient relating the scores of the extreme left to those of the extreme right becomes a negative -0.59 , and this coefficient becomes statistically significant at 0.008 level. This proves that as suggested, the similarities between the functions, eurosceptic agendas, and voter profiles (at least sociologically) force the extreme left and the extreme right to compete for the same electorate and prevents them to enjoy synchronised success within a given election, such as the European Parliament election of 10-13 June 2004.

At a time when most party systems have experienced the intrusion of new radical forces, the findings of our paper might be significant in that they show why it is rarely the case that a system be challenged simultaneously by anti-system parties of the extreme left and of the extreme right. The parallelism of their arguments and electorates, and the institutional logic of European political systems makes it indeed, more likely that one radical force will keep preventing the other from emerging as a strong contender on the national political scene.

Table 1: Extreme Right Sympathies in East and West Germany: Opposite Generations?

| | Up to 29 | 30-44 | 45-64 | 65 and over |
|---------------------|-----------------|--------------|--------------|--------------------|
| West Germany | 6.0 | 9.8 | 10.6 | 12.2 |
| East Germany | 12.0 | 7.9 | 7.6 | 8.8 |

Notes: Based on data from Eurobarometer53. Entries are percentages of extreme right sympathizers per generation.

Table 2: The European Extreme Left in the 2004 European Parliament Election

| COUNTRY | PARTY | VOTE | SEATS | CHANGE EP/GE | CHANGE 2004/1999 |
|----------------|--------------|-------------|-----------------|---------------------|-------------------------|
| Cyprus | AKEL | 27.9 | 2 | -6.8 | - |
| Czech Republic | KSCM | 20.3 | 6 | +1.8 | - |
| Denmark | SF | 8.0 | 1 | +1.6 | +0.9 |
| | FB | 5.2 | 1 | - | -2.1 |
| Finland | VAS | 9.1 | 1 | -0.8 | -1.8 |
| France | PCF | 5.3 | 2 | +0.5 | -1.5 |
| Germany | PDS | 6.1 | 7 | +1.8 | +0.3 |
| Greece | KKE | 9.5 | 3 | +3.6 | +0.8 |
| | SIN | 4.2 | 1 | +0.9 | -1.0 |
| Italy | RC | 6.1 | 5 | +1.1 | +1.8 |
| | PCI | 2.4 | 2 | +0.7 | +0.4 |
| Netherlands | SP | 7.0 | 2 | +0.7 | +2.0 |
| Portugal | PCP-CDU | 9.0 | 2 | +2.0 | -1.3 |
| | BE | 5.0 | 1 | +2.2 | +3.2 |
| Spain | IU | 4.2 | 2 | -0.8 | -1.7 |
| Sweden | VP | 9.8 | 2 | +1.5 | -6.0 |
| TOTAL | | | 42 (+25) | +1 | -0.4 |

Notes:

- *Change EP/GE measures the evolution of the party's share of the vote since the last general election.*
- *All party representatives in the table belong to the GUE/NGL group, apart from the Portuguese BE, which remains unaffiliated.*

Table 2: The Extreme Right in the 2004 European Parliament Elections: Results and Trends

| COUNTRY | PARTY | % | SEATS | CHANGE-G.E. | CHANGE-E.P. |
|------------------|--------------|----------|--------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| Austria | FPÖ | 6.3 | 1 | -3.7 | -17.1 |
| Belgium | VB | 14.3 | 3 | +2.6 | +5.0 |
| Denmark | DF | 6.8 | 1 | -5.2 | +1 |
| France | FN | 9.8 | 7 | -1.5 | +4.1 |
| | MNR | 0.4 | 0 | -0.7 | |
| Germany | REP | 1.9 | 0 | +1.3 | +0.2 |
| | NPD | 0.9 | 0 | +0.5 | +0.5 |
| | DVU | - | - | - | - |
| Greece | LAOS | 4.2 | 1 | +1.9 | -1.0 |
| Italy | AN | 11.5 | 9 | -0.5 | +1.2 |
| | LN | 5.0 | 4 | +1.1 | +0.5 |
| | AS | 1.2 | 1 | - | - |
| | FT | 0.7 | 1 | +0.3 | -0.9 |
| Latvia | TB/LNNK | 29.8 | 4 | +24.4 | - |
| Netherlands | LPF | 2.6 | 0 | -3.1 | - |
| Poland | LPR | 15.9 | 10 | +8.0 | - |
| | PiS | 12.7 | 7 | +3.2 | - |
| Slovakia | PSNS+SNS | 2.0 | 0 | -5.0 | - |
| UK | BNP | 4.9 | 0 | +4.7 | +3.9 |
| EUROPE-25 | | | 49 | | +18 seats** |

Notes:

- *Change G.E. and Change E.P represent change in vote share since the last general and European elections respectively.*
- *PSNS and SNS in Slovakia ran a joint list for the European election.*
- *** Total number of seats for the European Parliament increased from 626 to 732 with the last enlargement. Without counting new Central and East European countries, the number of seats of the extreme right group in the Parliament would have decreased by 1 rather than increased by 20.*

Table 4: Electoral Gains of the Extreme Left and Extreme Right

| COUNTRY | Extreme Left % | Change | Extreme Right % | Change |
|----------------|---------------------------|---------------|----------------------------|---------------|
| Cyprus | 27.9 | . | 0* | . |
| Czech Rep | 20.3 | . | 0* | . |
| Portugal | 14.0 | - | 0* | . |
| Greece | 13.7 | + | 4.2 | - |
| Denmark | 13.2 | + | 6.8 | + |
| Ireland | 11.1 | + | 0* | . |
| Sweden | 9.8 | - | 0* | . |
| Finland | 9.1 | - | 0* | . |
| France | 8.6 | - | 10.2 | - |
| Italy | 8.5 | + | 18.4 | + |
| Netherlands | 7.0 | + | 2.6 | - |
| Germany | 6.1 | + | 2.8 | + |
| Slovakia | 4.5 | . | 2.0 | . |
| Spain | 4.2 | - | 0* | . |
| Luxembourg | 0* | . | 0* | . |
| Lithuania | 0* | . | 0* | . |
| Estonia | 0* | . | 0* | . |
| Hungary | 0* | . | 0* | . |
| Slovenia | 0* | . | 0* | . |
| Malta | 0* | . | 0* | . |
| Austria | 0* | . | 6.3 | - |
| Belgium | 0* | . | 14.3 | + |
| UK | 0* | . | 21.7 | + |
| Poland | 0* | . | 28.6 | . |
| Latvia | 0* | . | 29.8 | . |

Note: 0: means negligible score of the party family concerned, usually under 1%.*

Figure 1: Scores of the Extreme Right and the Extreme Left in the European Parliament Elections of June 2004

