

Right-wing Populism in the European Union  
and Its Challenges for the European Democracies

Master's Thesis in  
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## Abstract

**Aim:** The aim of the study was to investigate the development of the right-wing populism in the European Union and the challenges it forms for European democracies. It also aims to find out what needs to be done at political and societal levels to stop right-wing populist ideologies from trickling into the middle of European societies.

**Method:** The used scientific method was expert interviews. The interviews were transcribed and analyzed with the Inductive and Deductive Category Development method according to Philipp Mayring.

**Results:** The study showed that European right-wing populism differs from country to country due to their various historical, political, and societal backgrounds. Despite these differences, the populist movements and parties have many common features and a functioning network across the whole of Europe. Right-wing populism creates serious challenges for the European democracies. Their EU-skepticism, however, is usually only a way to win votes. The risk of countries actually leaving the EU is relatively low. It is essential to differentiate between different right-wing populist actors because it makes it possible to find suitable measures, both political and societal, to deal with right-wing populism more effectively.

**Conclusions:** In order to determine the best practices for dealing with right-wing populism, a mixture between political and societal actions is crucial, to cover all the aspects and facets of right-wing populism. Right-wing populism will most likely continue to play a role in Europe's future. It therefore needs to be immediately addressed and closely monitored. A pan-European approach towards the problem is recommended.

*Key Words:* Right-wing populism, European Union, Democracies, EU-Skepticism,

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Aim of Study

The study investigates the current state and occurrence of right-wing populism in the European Union. It puts a special focus on the development and status-quo of right-wing populism in all its manifestations. However, it also focuses on the possibilities and requirements for preventing a further spread and other possible consequences of a strong right-wing populism in Europe.

## 1.2 Definitions

In everyday language and in the media, the terms of right-wing extremism, populism, radicalism and neo-Nazism often get mixed up or are even used as synonyms. In fact, the boundaries between these terms are not always clearly definable and are often fluid. Nevertheless, the terms do not describe exactly the same phenomenon and they therefore cannot be used as synonyms for one another (Salzborn, 2015). For this reason, the four terms are shortly defined.

### *1.2.1 Right-wing Extremism*

Right-wing extremism itself is not ideologically homogeneous and therefore difficult to grasp (Salzborn, 2015). There are several and, in some cases, contradicting explanations and definitions. Right-wing extremist groups take a wide range of forms ranging from legal right-wing parties to violent groups, sometimes with terrorist tendencies. Nevertheless, all of them have some fundamental characteristics in common, which makes a broad definition possible (Salzborn, 2015). The most important part is the meaning of the term “extremism”. It implies a rejection of the constitutional state and its values. Looking at the European Union, some of these values could be having democratic institutions, the universalism of human rights, or the rule of law. Right-wing extremist ideology also includes rejection of and violence against groups that are seen as not fitting into the politically correct world view. Forms of this group-based misanthropy include racism, anti-semitism, antiziganism, islamophobia, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, and hostility toward the homeless and disabled. Other components are social Darwinism, which promotes the natural selection by the right of the stronger, as well as authoritarianism, which rejects political diversity and promotes one central power, that rules the whole nation. Also typical is a trivialization of National Socialism, historical revisionism, and a tendency toward conspiracy ideologies.

Attitudes towards ideologies can have many faces and are characterized by protests, voting behavior, membership in certain organizations or even violence and terror (Salzborn, 2015).

### *1.2.2 Right-wing Radicalism*

Parties, individuals, or organizations that position themselves or allow themselves to be positioned clearly to the right of the center of the political spectrum are described as radical right-wing. Right-wing radicalism is often seen as a weakened form of right-wing extremism. In fact, the boundaries between radical right-wing and extreme right-wing attitudes are often blurred (Nandlinger, 2008). Elements of racism, sexism or anti-semitism can also be found in the radical right-wing worldviews, just as well as some extreme right-wing elements (Salzborn, 2015). Compared to extremist attitudes, however, radical attitudes find their rightful place in democracy and politics. Radical (from Latin "radix" = root, origin) refers to basic political-ideological attitudes or endeavors that seek to solve social issues and problems from their origins down to the last detail, i.e., with particular consistency and one-sided intransigency. In contrast to right-wing extremism, they do not have to be hostile to the basic democratic order (Nandlinger, 2008).

### *1.2.3 Neo-Nazism*

Neo-Nazis are an integral part of the right-wing extremist scene, but they only make up a small amount of it. Thus, every neo-Nazi is a right-wing extremist, but every right-wing extremist is not a neo-Nazi (Nandlinger, 2008). Neo-Nazism includes all persons, groups, organizations, and ideological content which have a positive relationship to National Socialism and refer to historical National Socialist models. Many parallels can be drawn between neo-Nazism and right-wing extremism, therefore many elements that are the content of right-wing extremist ideology can be found in neo-Nazism (Salzborn, 2015). Neo-Nazis are committed to the ideology of National Socialism, and the Third Reich is seen as the ideal state order. They advocate a state established on totalitarian principles (Nandlinger 2008).

### *1.2.4 Right-wing Populism*

Just like right-wing extremism, right-wing populism has many different manifestations, which makes it difficult to define. The term right-wing populism is nowadays commonly used to describe a xenophobic protest party, marking the transition area between a democratic-conservative view and

right-wing extremism. Populist worldviews are far less solid than the ones at the extreme right and therefore more flexible and adaptive. Since they usually do not aim for a revolutionary change of the society, they stay within the democratic range, although many right-wing populist parties show a constant tendency towards a smooth transition to right-wing extremism (Bauer, 2010). The scientific discourse is split between the opinions that populism is just a style of politics used by right-wing parties and that populist parties are an independent type of parties itself. Nevertheless, there is an agreement about the fact that there is a common ideological core, consisting of two dimensions (Gaisbauer, Korkmaz, & Jung, 2020). On the one hand, there is populism. The idea of populism is that the society is ultimately split up into groups, which are antagonistic towards each other but homogenous in themselves (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017). Populist ideas are based on a vertical dichotomy between the people and the elite ("we down there, you up there"), while additionally having a demarcation on a horizontal level against the "others" or "foreigners" (Bauer, 2010). The European Union, or in particular, the EU bureaucracy, is portrayed as one part of "the elite". It is important to mention that most right-wing populists do not reject the European unification process in general. In line with the slogan "Europe yes - EU no," they primarily criticize the current status rather than the general existence. They serve the sentiments that exist in large parts of the population against a Europe that is governed by "Brussels bureaucrats" and their "regulatory frenzy" at the expense of their own national identity (Bauer, 2010). The role model enemies regarding the "others" differ from country to country and exclude all those groups that are identified as "foreigners" according to its concept of the people, i.e., primarily ethnic, cultural and religious minorities; parts of the population who have "deviant" sexual orientations (homosexuals) or political convictions (leftists) can also be targeted (Decker & Lewandowski, 2017). They are all blamed for social or economic grievances and accused of criminality or corruption (Bauer, 2010). In Western Europe, the hostility is usually directed against Muslims and immigrants. Hostility against immigrants can also be found in the Eastern European countries. However, the hostility is usually more directed against Jews and Roma (Grabow & Hartleb, 2013). Their claim to represent the common man is a provocation against other politicians and parties. When discussing social problems, differentiated analyses of causes are sidelined in favor of simple good/evil schemes, blame, and constructions of the enemy: The leader and the "we" group are always the good ones, while the "others" represent a potential threat to the common good. In their slogans and campaigns, right-wing populists doubt that "the people" are actually represented by the politicians in power. They portray them - as well as other representatives of a diverse democratic society, such as journalists - as corrupt or untrustworthy. Politicians are branded as "traitors", and the free media as the "lying press" (Gaisbauer et al., 2020). The devaluation of politics feeds anti-democratic and anti-parliamentary attitudes. Paradoxically, however, the right-wing populists

standing for election are often members of the so-called elite themselves, thus also particularly privileged (Gaisbauer et al., 2020). Since the ideology of populism mostly relies on societal segregation, its center is very thin. On its own, it could not fill out a whole political agenda, and since it does not have any opinions about key political areas such as good economic decision-making, it has to be combined with a hostile ideology. Populists with leftist tendencies tend to combine their original ideology with some kind of socialism, while right-wing populists combine their ideologies with nationalism (Mudde, 2021). A right-wing orientation stands for a cultural demarcation against supposed foreign infiltration, the warning against a supposedly Islamization of Western countries, but also a rejection of cultural modernization within society, for example in the form of same-sex marriage or other postmodern lifestyles. Right-wing populists define "their people" by racist-chauvinist standards. The "others" or "foreigners" are defined by exaggerated ethnic, religious, cultural, sexual, and political stereotypes (Gaisbauer et al., 2020): Right-wing populist parties can easily become extremist, at the moment they cross the line to an open hostility towards the existing democratic system. Among the European representatives, this applied for a long time to the French Front National, the Belgian Vlaams Blok and the Sweden Democrats. In the meantime, these parties have pushed back hard extremism and are striving for a more moderate image. The FPÖ and the AfD can be described as right-wing populist representatives with extremist "sprinklings". Conversely, there may be right-wing extremist parties that lack the typical elements of populism. This applies, for example, to the German NPD. In a European comparison, the non-populistic right-wing extremist parties lose against the non-extremist populist parties. Extremist worldviews might scare ideologically moderate voters away. This circumstance has the consequence that populism is a formula for success in bringing a right-wing mindset into the midst of society. A glance at the votership of right-wing populist parties shows that across the whole of Europe, the right-wing populist voters are mostly white men, often with low education and from low-income groups, belonging to the lower middle class, in some cases from the broader middle class, as well as from a racist old elite. They are also more successful in rural areas than in dynamic and diverse cities (Gaisbauer et al., 2020). A particularly worrying "new quality of right-wing extremism" is the rejuvenation of its electorate (Bauer, 2010).

#### 1.2.4.1 Mindset and Goals of the Right-wing Populism

Right-wing populism promotes a so called "ethnopluralism", which implies the existence of a diversity of different "ethnicities" that are supposed to live separately without mixing. The "others" that do not belong to one's own group are strictly to be excluded. In Eastern Europe, the most popular

enemy images are Romani people, Jews, ethnic minorities, and homosexuals. Muslims and Islam make the number one enemy images in Western Europe. All right-wing populist parties want to restrain the migration into Europe and to aggravate integration and inclusion (Gaisbauer et al., 2020). Another enemy all right-wing populists have in common is the European Union. According to them, this supranational construct endangers the national sovereignty and culture and is working against the wishes and needs of the population. In their eyes, the EU is distant from the citizens, overly bureaucratic and complex. The EU supposedly lacks democratic legitimacy and therefore only rules with the loss of sovereignty of the national states. Accordingly, they celebrated the Brexit vote in 2016. However, they not only reject the EU from a cultural and societal point of view, but also from an economic one. There is a tendency among the European rightwing populists to deny transnational markets and trade unions. Previously, the phenomenon was more typical for Eastern Europe, but today also Western European right-wing populists promote social-nationalist and autarkic economies. Since most of the parties do not want to boycott the EU, because they gain a lot from it, they promote a European “fortress” where their economic and cultural values are enforced and secured (Grabow & Hartleb, 2013). Another important topic is gender. Right-wing populists are opposed to the development of new gender-perspectives, because they believe in the dual gender system. They promote the traditional gender roles and motivate women to embrace their role as mothers and housewives (Gaisbauer et al., 2020).

#### 1.2.4.2 Right-wing Populist Rhetoric Devices

Right-wing populism strongly relies on rhetoric devices and methods to spread their ideas and values. Populists are not in favor of slow politics and procedures requiring plenty small steps. They often demand courageous intervention and see the ability to compromise as weak. To achieve their big interventions, they usually prefer radical solutions for all kinds of problems (Gaisbauer et al., 2020). One typical feature of their argumentation is the equalization of individual and collective moral, according to the motto: what works in my private sector cannot be wrong in the public sector. This argumentation can be found especially in the field of economics. They promote greater individual benefits, which includes less money and support for individuals who do not belong to the same ingroup. The populist worldview believes that society is divided into clear fronts: on one hand one’s “own” people and their advocates, and on the other the internal and external enemies. The construction of the enemy image takes place through personification - social problems are projected onto certain groups of people to expose them as the culprits - and through conspiracy-theory justifications. In the process, one's own party or movement is also portrayed as a "victim" (Gaisbauer



et al., 2020). To dissociate themselves from the current establishment right-wing populists, they tend to override the habit of political correctness. They also tend to provoke, at the edge of unconstitutionality, reactions/counter-reactions from the established parties and their representatives. This fact makes it necessary to position oneself clearly against right-wing agitation. However, because they are treated as social outsiders, their staging as opponents of the "old party system" is very credible (Matuschek & Morcos, 2016). To make their provocations more effective, they often choose sensitive topics or taboos. Instead of being aware of the way they address topics, they consciously play with resentments and prejudices, which are discharged in an aggressive form against the alleged enemy. Existing insecurities of the population are not rebutted by argumentation but, on the contrary, are deliberately stirred up to make the audience receptive to the populist message. The confrontation of friend and foe gives the populists the opportunity to present themselves as the chosen saviors.

The right-wing populists often use biological and violent metaphors to describe their self-appointed enemies. In their speeches, they paint the picture of a sick society threatened by decay and other dangers that the enemy (often portrayed as animals or diseases) supposedly brings (Gaisbauer et al., 2020). While degrading others, right-wing populists portray themselves as crusaders who fight for the little people and therefore become falsely stigmatized by the established parties. They want to create an appearance of tirelessness, that they will defend and fight for their nation, which they want to bring welfare to (Grabow & Hartleb, 2013). Objective argumentation against right-wing statements is often difficult. However, not opposing them means silently agreeing with their statements and actions. That is why ignoring right-wing populists only works to a limited extent and can be counterproductive. In addition, sympathizers increasingly move in virtual parallel public spheres (especially in social networks), which are a kind of echo chambers. These are isolated spheres where there is no diversity of opinion due to online filters, which mainly provide users with information that fits their worldview and therefore consequently reinforces their beliefs. This procedure creates self-reinforcing self-referential systems. The more often populist statements are repeated, the more likely they are to be memorized. Details are more easily forgotten, such as the fact that something is a false statement or a rumor. A simple misstatement, a simple rumor is cognitively more attractive than a complicated correction, because it requires no effort to understand it (Matuschek & Morcos, 2016).

#### 1.2.4.3 Right-wing Populist Parties

The seemingly unstoppable rise of right-wing populists has often been accompanied by the anxious question of whether they pose a serious threat to liberal representative democracy by questioning its mechanisms, or whether they may actually contribute to the stabilization of the democratic system as an unwanted but necessary corrective. Populist parties and movements can be seen as a byproduct of social modernization. They arise as a consequence of too rapid change because certain population groups suffer a loss of values and orientation. These losses are accompanied by status anxiety, uncertainty about the future, and feelings of political alienation. Modernization processes do not directly lead to successful right-wing populist parties. The successes of right-wing populist parties are always combined with the failure of the moderate parties to convey and respect the will of the people in their politics. This is because parties to the right and the left are becoming increasingly similar in order to compete for the majority of the electorate, and therefore, they can no longer credibly convey that they stand for different political concepts. Thus, these parties lose their traditional economic and cultural positions that used to be significant for their ideologies and programs. These problems of the traditional parties are partly homemade, and partly based on structural changes, a fact that makes it difficult for them to fulfill their traditional functions as representative bodies and bearers of democratic competition (Decker & Lewandowski, 2017).

There are various reasons why right-wing populist parties thrive, and various conditions are needed for them to be successful. Regarding the growth of right-wing populism, the five following factors can be considered fundamental: (1) economic and social change; (2) the behavior of the established democratic parties; (3) country-specific conditions of the political institutions; (4) public attention, and (5) political entrepreneurs of the right-wing parties. Each factor can make an impact on its own; however, together they form a favorable hotbed in which right-wing parties can flourish (Grabow & Hartleb, 2013).

*1. Economic and social change.* Although there are no studies about the change of voting behavior in times of modernization and change, it appears that the messages of right-wing populists are particularly appealing for individuals who are negatively affected by the consequences of economic, cultural, and political globalization. They consider themselves among the "losers of modernization" and are often politically dissatisfied or anxious about their own status and material poverty, and they often lack orientation and identity. However, right-wing populists also profit from the prosperity chauvinism of those groups and individuals who are affected by "subjective deprivation". These people objectively do not have to have material or financial problems, but they subjectively perceive

themselves that way, and therefore they fear material loss and decline. The group of people, who support right-wing populist parties is extremely heterogeneous. Therefore, it often lacks the organizational capacity to represent its concerns politically. The right-wing populist parties fit perfectly in here and can easily find supporters, since they claim to represent exactly this particular group.

*2. Behavior of the established democratic parties.* The rise of the right-wing populist must partly be seen as a consequence of the steady decline of the established parties, regarding their social entrenchment in the public society. The decline of entrenchment is associated with lack of identification of the voters with the party. The voters who now do not “belong” to any party are free to be mobilized by others. The last couple of years have shown that especially the dealing with topics such as immigration and European integration are of great significance, when it comes to populists’ rise or fall (Grabow & Hartleb, 2013). Since the 1980s, there has been a rise of migration towards the European countries, which reached a peak in the last couple of years, creating a complex hotchpotch of laws, rules, and definitions. With rising numbers of migrants, the ideology of xenophobia increased as well, especially considering the “non-European” cultures, to which most of the arriving migrants belong. The right-wing populists took that chance to use this societal mood for their own good. The key elements of their xenophobic arguments were and are the allegedly excessive foreigner criminality, the exploitation of the welfare state, and rising (national) unemployment. Behind all this lurks the rejection of the "multicultural society," the threat to one's identity due to too much "foreignness in one's own country", and finally, the horror vision of the creeping "Islamization of Europe” (Bauer, 2010). However ideologically, populism uses the term ethnopluralism in contrast to openly racist right-wing extremism. The "new racism", masked as ethno-differentialism, no longer aims at the different valence of races, but at the necessity to respect and, above all, to preserve their diversity by keeping them separated. However, in fact, there is no inevitable and measurable connection between xenophobia and the actual presence of foreigners. This fact is shown by several electoral results. For example, the Swiss SVP achieves its best results in predominantly rural cantons, the Norwegian "Progress Party" succeeds in small towns with no foreign population, and the FPÖ wins the most voters in Viennese districts predominantly inhabited by "real Austrians" (Bauer, 2010).

*3. Country-specific conditions of the political institutions.* The success of populist parties depends on the political context and system in which they act and operate. Electoral thresholds can be found in almost all countries. This threshold can vary from country to country. The highest threshold lies at 5% and is used for example in Germany and Latvia. The threshold is able to decrease the chance for small parties to win seats in the government, which therefore also reduces the changes of small

populist or extremist parties to have a direct influence on the political decisions. However, this threshold was created out of technical matters (for example to avoid fragmentation of the party system, which would make a government formation more difficult) and not in order to prevent certain parties from becoming part of the legislative. Therefore, right-wing parties managed to get access to the national governments in European countries such as Germany or Italy and many more (Grabow & Hartleb, 2013).

*4. Public attention.* The modern mass media are vital for the populist spread, even if the media coverage is a negative one. The populist parties or leaders create scandals which are covered by the media. The media tries to simplify complex societal and political developments to reach the broad mass, while populism offers easy solutions for these problems and developments. That creates a working symbiosis between the media and the populist parties (Bauer, 2010). However, the media coverage and the actions against propaganda vary from country to country due to different media environments and public spheres. The Scandinavian countries often have less restrictive media environments, while Germany has quite a tough environment for the right-wing populist media. Most countries and their media tend to choose between two distinct ways of dealing with right-wing populist ideologies, either by repeating the populist slogans or shutting them down completely (Grabow & Hartleb, 2013).

*5. Political entrepreneurs.* Some of the populist parties have a charismatic leader, who can play a crucial role for the success of the party. The leaders set the political direction of the party, and they try to mobilize the public by addressing dissatisfaction and grievances while staying loyal to themselves, the party, and its goals and values. As European examples of charismatic leaders can be mentioned the Dutch politician Geert Wilders, the Hungarian president Victor Orban and others. However, this role is not necessarily inherited by male members of the parties anymore, as has been shown in France with Marine LePen or Poland with Beata Szydło. Not every country has the required environment for the rise of charismatic leaders. High social costs or social stigmatization may prevent their appearance. Examples of populist parties without charismatic leaders can be found in Germany and Spain (Grabow & Hartleb, 2013).

Considering these factors, it is possible to see how different conditions the European countries provide for the flourishing of right-wing populism. Countries like Austria, Slovakia or the Netherlands offer quite good conditions for the rise of populist parties. The worst conditions can be found in Germany, because of an especially high awareness of the public, media and politics, for historical reasons. Nevertheless, the existence of supporting factors is no guarantee that the parties will also be politically successful (Grabow & Hartleb, 2013). Differences can be found in the

historical development of populist parties between the different parts of Europe. A rapid process of transformation and modernization began in the Eastern European countries with the downfall of the communist regime. These processes are still ongoing, and they have made a lot of people feel as losers of modernization, therefore making them more easily mobilized by populist parties. The communist regime left its mark on many countries in Central and Eastern Europe, with a negative effect on their citizens' trust in political institutions and parties. However, most former communist countries have a relatively stable democracy with a quality that does not differ much from the Western European ones anymore. Exceptions can be found in countries with high levels of corruption, such as Romania or Hungary (Grabow & Hartleb, 2013). The Western European focus on the anti-Islamization can be explained with a quick look at history, which created different processes of nationalization across Europe. Countries in Eastern Europe and the Baltic states put their main effort into dealing with their newly won (re-) independence, while Western Europe already started to develop a homogenization in their societies, where Islam often is not seen as matching. Populist parties claim that a multicultural society is nothing but an unrealistic idea, since the mindsets of libertarian European societies and Islam stand in unsolvable conflict (Grabow & Hartleb, 2013). The question of whether right-wing populist parties are doomed to fail in government can tend to be answered in the affirmative, based on the diverse experiences of recent years. However - even if most right-wing populists struggle on a governmental level, it needs to be kept in mind that the participation of a right-wing populist party in a government inevitably leads to a shift to the right of the political spectrum in both agenda-setting and actual policymaking. This circumstance can have dangerous effects on the democratic culture of the "mainstream", which makes the damage -once it is done - not so easily repairable. The political effectiveness of right-wing populists is therefore not primarily by their actual implementations, but by the extent to which they are able to influence the political discourse on socio-politically sensitive issues. Their indirect influence and agenda-setting often remain their greatest successes. It is therefore no surprise that the influence of right-wing populists is more effective and visible in the area of cultural issues than in social and economic policies (Bauer, 2010). Right-wing populist parties are by their nature negatory and oppositional. Fundamental opposition, self-isolation and exclusion form a good basis for their long-term secure existence (Bauer, 2010). Populist parties tend to push center parties into more extreme directions in order to keep their voters (Yeo, 2019). However, a well-functioning democracy does not need to fear populism. By lending a voice to protest, not banning populism simultaneously ensures that this protest remains within the democratic and visible system and forces the political forces to address those problems that obviously have been neglected for some time. However, even a temporary success of right-wing populist movements represents a rupture in the system because they reject some of the central values

that form the foundation of representative democracy, namely pluralism and universalism, the primacy of individual rights, human equality as the basis of the rule of law, and the delegation of sovereignty (Bauer, 2010). Right-wing populism slowly but steadily changes societies and political systems in various ways. With their influence on the public opinion, they begin to challenge and change the traditional model of democracy with all its values and norms. The affected values can be the pro-European attitude (e.g., in France or Hungary) or basic human rights and tolerance towards migrants and minorities. Nevertheless, this change in the democratic system is extremely difficult and time consuming to reverse (Grabow & Hartleb, 2013). Populist successes always bear the danger of extremist forces using the success as free riders to connect with the center of society or persons who so far have no connection to the far right. Populism undermines the institutional and cultural principles on which democracies are based, it acts like a "creeping poison". As long as the challengers remain in opposition and purely act as protest parties, they should not pose an immediate threat to the constitutional order. It becomes precarious when they get governmental power and can actively implement their ideas. This has been seen in Austria, Hungary and Poland. In Poland, the government extended its influence over the public media immediately after the elections and at the same time attempted to disempower the Constitutional Court. Hungary has transformed into a quasi-democratic authoritarian system since Fidesz came to power (Decker & Lewandowski, 2017).

### 1.3 The Framework of the European Union

The European Union is a political and economic union, which consists of 27 member states. Its citizens share an internal market, and a common history and culture. 19 of the member states even share a common currency. All member states of the European Union share the values of the EU. They strive for a society where inclusion, human dignity, freedom, equality, human rights, tolerance, solidarity, non-discrimination, and the rule of law are fix values. These values shape the European way of life. The European Union has declared specific goals it wants to achieve regarding democracy, economics, environment, and culture. One of the main goals is the promotion of peace, European values, and the wellbeing of the European citizens. This goes along with the abolition of social injustice and discrimination (Europäische Union, 2021). The member states work towards a strengthening of the economic, social, and territorial cohesion. Despite of sharing the same values, currency, and outer borders, the EU still honors and upholds the cultural and linguistic diversity of its member states. Economic goals of the EU are stability, common currency, mobility, and growth. Since border controls between EU countries have been abolished, people enjoy freedom of travel in most of the continent. This also led to an internal market, which is the main engine of the EUs'

economy. It ensures freedom of movement for most goods, services, capital assets and humans. It also allows an easy promotion and sharing of scientific and technological achievements and progress. Balanced economic growth, price stability, a competitive market economy, social progress and protection of the environment are the base for the gained sustainable development. The internal market is an important tool to ensure that all Europeans can derive the greatest benefit from the general knowledge, market and resources (Europäische Union, 2021). To strengthen the trust between the member states as well as between the common citizens and the EU itself, the European Union strives to make its governing bodies even more transparent and democratic (Europäische Union, 2021).

## 1.4 Right-wing Populism in the European Union

Since the mid-1980s, right-wing populist parties have emerged in numerous Western European countries. When the newcomers (e.g., Front National, Lega Nord, Vlaams Blok, FPÖ) appeared on the scene in their countries and achieved their first spectacular electoral successes, there was still a tendency to dismiss them as fleeting protest manifestations, since populist forms of parties had existed in Western democracies before. The expectation was that the challengers would sooner or later be cut down again or disappear from the party systems altogether. Further developments were to prove this thoroughly wrong. Not only were the right-wing populists able to defend and even expand their position. The phenomenon began to spread to other countries all over Europe (Decker & Lewandowski, 2017). Nowadays almost every European country has a right-wing populist party. Examples of successful parties are the Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ), the Alternative for Germany (AfD), the Fidesz Party in Hungary, the National Front in France, the Northern League in Italy, the Sweden Democrats, the True Finns, the Dutch Party for Freedom, and the Law and Justice Party in Poland. The success of the party differs from country to country. In some countries, the parties did not make it into the current government, while in other countries, they are the leading party. Especially in the Eastern EU states, these parties have strong support (SOP, 2016). In Hungary, the right-wing populist party Fidesz gained over 50% of the votes, according to a poll at the end of 2019 (Populism tracker, 2019). The Law and Justice Party in Poland gained about 40%, while 30% of the Bulgarian voters voted for the Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria (GERB) (Populism Tracker, 2019). The spectrum of right-wing populist parties is broad. It includes clearly extremist, "old-right" parties (the French Front National and the German NPD), more "moderate" right-wing populist parties (Swiss SVP, Austrian FPÖ, Danish People's Party, and Scandinavian "Progressive Parties"), ultra-Catholic parties ("League of Polish Families"), and more moderate "entrepreneurial

populist parties" like the party of Silvio Berlusconi in Italy. Most of these differences are historically conditioned and must be seen in their respective national contexts. Despite often having ideologies which are at odds with each other, right-wing populist movements share many common characteristics which make it possible to group them into a "political party family" (Bauer, 2010). Even though it is not a new political phenomenon that the Western democracies are facing, the populist parties challenge the political establishment and democratic system by the significant growth of supporters they have gained in the last couple of years. Especially after the year of 2016 and the so called "refugee crisis", the parties gained significant political support (Boros et al., 2018). In 2019, the Italian Northern League had 30% of the voters' support, the French National Rally 28%, the Sweden Democrats and the True Finns about 24%, and the AfD 14%. Portugal seems to be the only Western European country without a significant rise of right-wing populism (Populism Tracker, 2019). Despite the relatively high numbers in Western Europe, a clear trend is that the biggest supporters of right-wing populist parties are -with the exception of Italy- the Eastern European Countries. The Eastern European populism has to be seen as a phenomenon of its own. Eastern European countries are generally less industrialized, which has promoted an agrarian populism. Additionally, compared to Western European states, there has been almost no immigration into these countries (Bauer, 2010). The right-left schema is only conditionally applicable to Western European politics, but it is even less applicable for the Eastern European Countries. After the fall of communism, cooperation between post-communists and ultra-nationalists became common. Paradoxically, the new Eastern European populism that emerged in the course of the dramatic socioeconomic transformation processes combined nationalist and right-wing authoritarian-anti-elitist attitudes with "left-wing" economic and social policies that are sometimes linked to a nostalgia for the communist social order. It expresses a fundamental disappointment with the unfulfilled promises of the democratic system and a distrust of the new elite. Unlike many of their Western "colleagues," the Eastern European populists are not hostile to the state; on the contrary, they rely on the state as a social distribution agency and a "firewall" against the "economic sellout" of the country. As in the West, Euroscepticism and hostility toward Europe are important motives of right-wing populism in Eastern Europe. This was very clearly reflected in the extremely low voter turnout in the 2004 EU elections (e.g., Slovakia 17%, Poland 21%, Czech Republic and Slovenia 28%); a negative trend that continued in most Eastern European states in 2009 (Bauer, 2010). Eastern European nationalism is indeed still a "folk" nationalism. However, Western Europe has been largely "Europeanized", and the main concern is to defend the "occidental culture". Today, Eastern European populism is at the center and not at the periphery of the party system. It finds its electoral base among the "losers of the modernization," which includes large sections of the working class, parts of the new



small business community, but also many women and middle-class employees. In Eastern Europe, the threat potential is by no means only "felt," but instead it is very real. This as well as the lack of practice in democracy offers Eastern European national populism the best opportunities for development (Bauer, 2010). The Western European democracies are older and have had enough time to establish strong traditional parties, which have a solid ground of support in the population. Eastern European countries have been "recently" democratized and seem to have failed to develop a secure establishment of traditional parties, which makes them more vulnerable towards rising populist parties (Hillebrand, 2015). The drastic socio-economical changes in the last centuries lead to a common disappointment in the unfulfilled promises of the democratic system and a distrust against the new elite of the countries (Kostzrebski, 2005). The very different track records of right-wing populist parties in Europe show that the national political environment and the nation-specific starting positions are of the utmost importance. At the same time, a parallel strengthening of these movements can be observed, which can probably be traced back to very similar socio-cultural, political and economic transformations. The Populism Tracker database shows that there is no specific populist breakthrough, but a continuous rise of populist parties and their support. They cannot be seen as a marginal political phenomenon anymore, because their popularity reaches all parts of the societies (Boros et al., 2018). Some of the key factors of a changing cultural and political environment are immigration, climate change and the global economy. It seems that whenever the traditional parties fail to provide a sense of orientation, right-wing populist groups offer "solutions" and fill these newly developed gaps (Somdeep, 2010). Except for a few countries, right-wing populist parties are now present almost everywhere. They are prominently represented at a regional level, but also in many cases at the national level. A country overview shows that right-wing extremist parties are frequently successful in Belgium, Denmark, France, Italy, Norway, Austria and Switzerland, and occasionally successful in Germany, Greece, the Netherlands and Sweden, while they so far have failed to achieve any countable successes in Ireland, Luxembourg, Spain and Portugal (Bauer, 2010).

Looking at the European Parliament, the right-wing populist parties can be found in various different parliamentary groups and spread from the conservatives all the way to EFDD (Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy) and ENF (Europe of Nations and Freedom) (Yeo, 2019). Throughout Europe, the rule applies that the more precarious the social living conditions are, the lower the voter turnout will be. It follows that growing regional and social differences lead to political inequality. At a smaller scale, the social situation of a neighborhood determines the level of voter turnout: A high number of households from socially weaker milieus correlates with a high level of unemployment and low levels of formal education, purchasing power and voter turnout. That leads to the conclusion that the declining voter turnout in Europe is an expression of an increasingly social

division of the electorate. Democratic decision-making is becoming an increasingly exclusive event for citizens from the middle and upper social milieus, while the socially weaker milieus remain significantly underrepresented. The results of long-term studies in Western democracies show that political inequality grows along with social inequality, initially in the sense of unequal participation. Right-wing conservative, extreme and populist parties primarily rely on the lower social middle classes (Pfahl-Traugber et al., 2015). In order to stop the populist growth, it is important for the EU to fill the legitimacy gap and become more transparent and easier to understand (Grabow & Hartleb, 2013).

Table 1  
*European Member States, their Right-wing Populist Party and the Percentage of Votes in the Last National Elections*

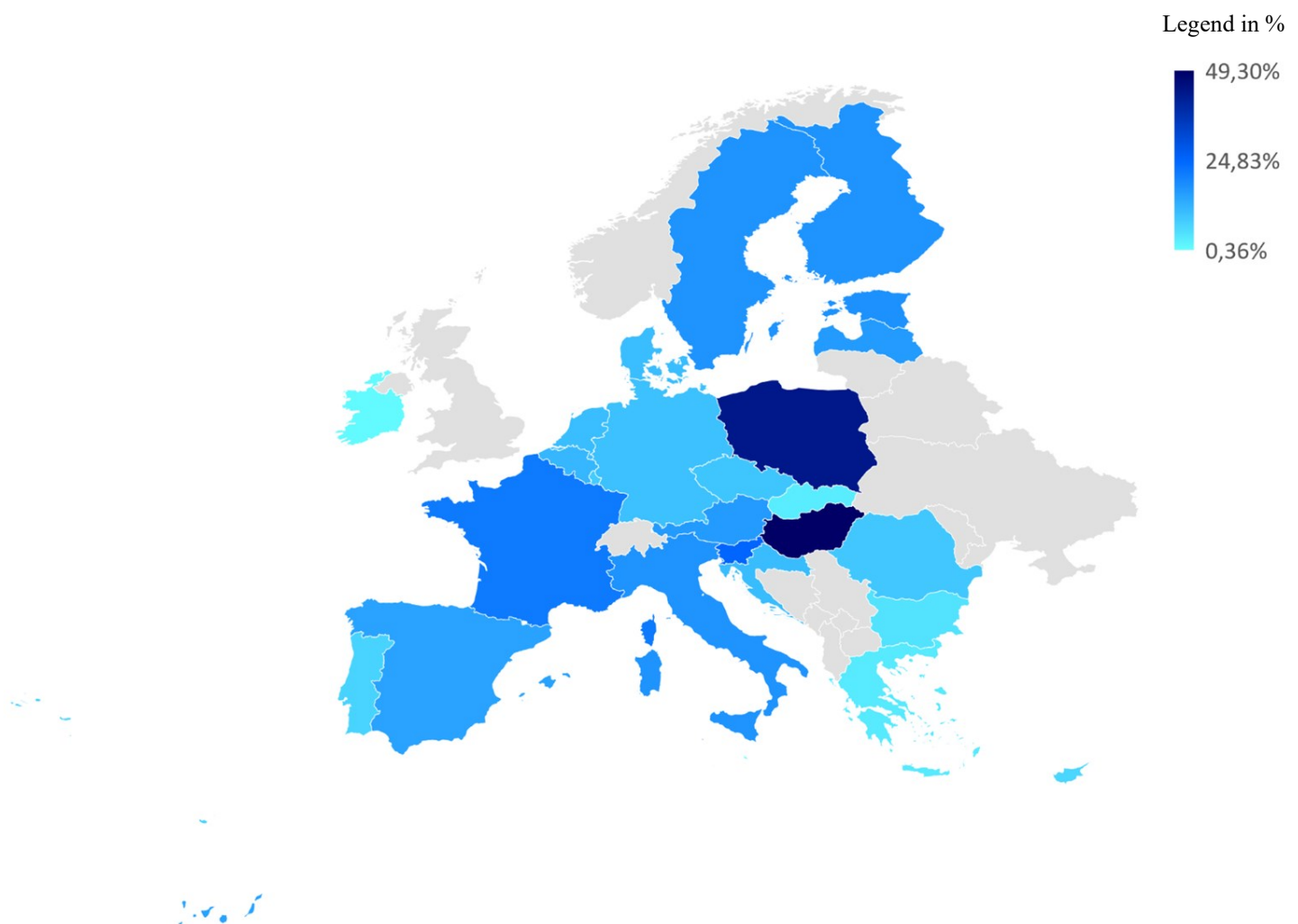
Country	Party	Elections	Results
Austria	FPÖ	2019	16.20%
Belgium	Vlaams Belang	2019	11.95%
Bulgaria	IMRO, Voyer	2021	<5%
Croatia	DPMSŠ	2020	10.90%
Cyprus	ELAM	2021	6.80%
Czech Republic	SPD	2021	9.50%
Denmark	DF	2019	10.76%
Estonia	EKRE	2019	17.80%
Finland	PS	2019	17.50%
France	RN	2017	21.42%
Germany	AfD	2021	10.30%
Greece	EL	2019	3.70%
Hungary	Fidesz	2018	49.30%
Ireland	NP	2020	<1%
Italy	Lega	2018	17.40%
Latvia	NA	2018	16.40%
Lithuania	-	-	-
Luxembourg	ADR	2018	8.30%
Malta	MPM	2017	0.36%
Netherlands	PVV	2021	10.80%
Poland	PiS	2019	43.60%
Portugal	CHEGA!	2022	7.30%
Romania	AUR	2020	9.10%
Slovakia	SNS	2020	3.20%
Slovenia	SDS	2018	24.90%
Spain	VOX	2019	15.10%
Sweden	SD	2018	17.50%

The table shows the percentage of votes for right-wing populist parties in each European country in their most recent national election. The oldest national elections that are included in the table are the elections from Malta and France. Both were held in 2017. The most recent elections took place in Portugal earlier this year.

Hungary reaches the highest results with almost 50% of the voters voting for a right-wing populist party while for example Malta (0.36%), Ireland (1.0%) and Greece (3.7%) show some of the lowest percentages in Europe. This leads to a European average of 13.5%.

Figure 1

*Percentage of Votes for Right-wing Populist Parties in the Last National Elections of the European Member States*



The map depicts the data from Table 1 graphically. It makes visible that it is almost impossible to geographically restrict right-wing populism to one region of Europe. Rather, it is spread over the whole continent. However, the map does not indicate the general political state. For most of the European countries the map reflects the situation quite well, but for some other countries, the situation is shown only very limited. Since the subject of this work is right-wing populism, only that is shown on the map. Even if right-wing populist party only got a few percentages of the votes, this does not mean that right-wing ideologies or politics are not present in this specific country. Other parties, such as extreme right-wing parties or right-wing conservative parties, are not included in the map. For this reason, special attention must be paid to this, and no hasty conclusions should be drawn. In some countries, there are parties that have received a high number of votes that have a right-wing tendency but do not fall under the right-wing populist category. When conservative parties strike right-wing notes, right-wing populist parties have a hard time attracting a large number of voters. Even if no right-wing populist parties “are to be seen”, it is still possible that the country’s political landscape shifts towards the political right. Successful center-right parties show that right-wing ideologies have already made it to the center of society and are considered normal. In the case of Slovakia, an even extremer picture can be seen. The extreme right-wing and neofascist “People’s Party Our Slovakia” (Ľudová strana naše Slovensko, ĽSNS) got more votes in the current elections than the right-wing populist “The Slovak National Party” (Slovenská národná strana, SNS). The populist party only got 3.2% while the far-right party reached a result of 8% (Grabow & Hartleb, 2013).

The map shows Lithuania without any color. That is because of the fact that Lithuania can be seen as a special case when it comes to European right-wing populism. There is no party that fits the definition of a right-wing populist party. However, there are parties who have right-wing tendencies but either lack the populist characteristics or the typical right-wing ideology. One example for this is the party called “Order and Justice” (Lithuanian: Tvarka ir teisingumas, TT). On the one hand, it can be seen as a right-wing populist party, because the party represents itself as a political outsider fighting against the current elite and establishment. They make use of populist rhetorical methods and speak for the ordinary people and their current problems and grievances. On the other hand, despite having nationalistic goals and ideologies, the party only has soft Eurosceptic views and is lacking a right-wing migration policy and the anger towards ethnic minorities or immigrants. There are no proven links between the Order and Justice party and the extreme right scene, which is often the case for other European right-wing populist parties (Grabow & Hartleb, 2013).

Nine European member states (Portugal, Hungary, Serbia, France, Slovenia, Malta, Austria, Sweden and Latvia) will hold their national elections in 2022. Portugal already ran its elections in

January. Each of the elections will shape the face of the political landscape of the European Union and determine the European future.

## 1.5 Research Question

In light of the previous research and theory analysis, three specific research questions can be derived.

Research question 1: How does right-wing populism influence the European democracies?

Research question 2: What can be efficiently done against right-wing populism on a societal and political level?

Research question 3: What does the future of Europe look like and how will right-wing populism develop in the next couple of years?

## 2. Methods

This chapter explains in more detail how the data for the study were collected. First, the sample is described, followed by the interview scheme, to get a better overview of how the interviews were structured. It ends in a detailed description of the data collection process, the analysis, and the evaluation. Furthermore, it explains the framework in which the interviews were conducted and clarifies why some topics deserved particular attention.

### 2.1 Sample

The sample consisted of experts who are known in the field of European right-wing populism through their publishing, teaching or research work. Out of the 14 suitable experts who were contacted via email, five responded. Four of them kept contact and an actual interview could be arranged. One of the suitable experts agreed to participate in the interview. Unfortunately, due to contact and communication errors, no specific date for the interview could be arranged. The planned length for the interviews was approximately 20 to 30 minutes. However, in three of the four conducted interviews, the timeframe was extended, resulting in an average length of 40 minutes per interview. The longest interview lasted 47:31 minutes and the shortest interview 23:26 minutes.

The first interview was on the 15.09.2021. The interviewee was Prof. Ragnar Müller, who is teaching at the Pedagogical University in Ludwigsburg in Germany. He teaches political science at

the university with a specialization in right-wing populism and the European Union (PH Ludwigsburg, 2022). Prof. Beate Küpper was the second interview partner. The interview was conducted on the 27.09.2021. Similar to Prof. Müller, she is a professor at a university (University of Applied Sciences Niederrhein) in Germany. She works on the topics of discrimination, diversity, integration, and group-related misanthropy. From 2015 to 2016, she was a member of the independent expert council on anti-Semitism of the German Federal Parliament. She also is a co-author of the FES-Mitte Studies. These studies deal with far-right attitudes in Germany (Stiftung Mercator, 2022). The last two interviews were conducted on the same day, on the 12.10.2021, with Prof. Hans Vorländer and Dr. Natalia Mamonova. Prof. Hans Vorländer teaches at the Political Science Faculty of the Technical University in Dresden, Germany. He also is the director of the Center for the Study of Constitutionalism and Democracy (Fachkommission-Integrationsfähigkeit, 2022). Dr. Natalia Mamonova is a researcher at the Global Politics and Security Programme at the Swedish Institute of International Affairs and specializes her research in agrarian populism, food sovereignty and right-wing movements in post-socialist settings (UI, no date).

The following table summarizes the information about the interviewees and assigns numbers to the interviews. The numbers will later be relevant when it comes to the evaluation of the interviews and make it possible to assign each quote to the correct person.

Table 2

*Description of the Interviews and the Interviewees (N = 4)*

Interview	Interviewee	Profession	Interview Date	Interview Duration
I	Prof. Beate Küpper	University of Applied Sciences Niederrhein, Germany	27.09.2021	47:31 min
II	Prof. Ragnar Müller	Pedagogical University Ludwigsburg, Germany	15.09.2021	43:06 min
III	Prof. Hans Vorländer	Director of the Center for the Study of Constitutionalism and Democracy, Political scientist, Professor at Technical University Dresden, Germany	12.10.2021	23:26 min
IV	Dr. Natalia Mamonova	Researcher at the Swedish Institute of International Affairs, Stockholm, Sweden	12.10.2021	46:40 min

## 2.2 The Interview Scheme

As the data collection method, a guided, semi-open interview was chosen. Therefore, the interviews did not follow a fixed list of questions; rather, the questions were oriented on the respective expertise of each of the interview partners. However, in order to give the interviews a fixed framework so that comparability between the interviews could be established, an interview guideline was prepared beforehand. Every guideline included some questions that were identical in all the interviews in order to facilitate better comparisons between them. In the guideline, all possible questions were collected and checked for their actual suitability to provide answers to the research questions. Despite the guiding format, the semi-open form also left room for spontaneous changes. The interviewer adapted the questions and their sequence to the course of the conversation, with additional follow-up questions.

The fixed questions were:

- (a) Is there one form of “European right-wing populism”, or does it differ from country to country?
- (b) How does right-wing populism in other parts of the world influence the European right-wing populism?
- (c) Is EU- skepticism a real threat? Yes or no?
- (d) What can the civil society do to promote pro-democratic and European values?
- (e) What is the best way to deal with right-wing populism on a political, societal and personal level?

The questions were created on basis of the theoretical background knowledge, described in chapter one of the thesis. The goal was it to get an overview over different aspects, such as challenges the EU has to face, or what can be done to improve or maintain a European democratic spirit. With the answers of the interviews and in combination with the theory, a conclusion could be worked out, providing answers to the research questions.

## 2.3 Procedure

The first step of the research procedure was to acquire some basic knowledge about the subject and to find out who might be a suitable potential interview partner. Once found, all of them were contacted via email, and they received information regarding the relevance, the aim and the data collection of this Master’s Thesis. The dates of the interviews were discussed with the participants in

person. For each of the participants, an interview guideline was created. The guideline included customized questions about the participants' expertise and questions which were asked to all participants. The participants themselves received a list of interview questions beforehand, in order to prepare themselves. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic and the geographical distance between the interviewer and the interview partners, the interviews could not be conducted in person. Instead, all the interviews were held over Zoom or by telephone, depending on the wishes of the interviewees. Online interviews strongly rely on the proper functioning of the used laptops, cameras etc. which lead to some minor problems in some of the interviews. However, this did not negatively affect the outcome and the atmosphere of the interviews.

The participants were informed in written and verbal form about their rights and the voluntary nature of their participation. All participants were explained their right to stay anonymous and were verbally asked about the matter of anonymity. However, all the participants agreed that their names could be mentioned and used in the thesis. The interviews were held in September and October 2020. All the interviews were recorded either via Zoom or an external recording device. On the wish of the interviewees, they could request a "Declaration of Handling of the Interviews". The declaration described the exact research method and the usage of the interview passages. It confirmed that all answers from the interviews would be correctly associated with the corresponding person, quoted in a direct way, and that the interviewees would be clearly referenced and cited according to university regulations. After the interviews were conducted, all of them were transcribed with the software EasyTranscript. The transcription itself does not match the recorded interviews 100%, since repetitions, verbal errors or slips of tongue were transcribed. The left-out parts have been documented with the following sign (...) in order to keep the work and transcription processes as transparent as possible. Nevertheless, long pauses (sign: (long pause)) and incomprehensible parts (sign: (unv)) were transcribed if they were considered necessary in order to maintain the meaning or value of the sentence. The finished transcripts were then evaluated with the help of qualitative content analysis according to Mayring. For this, it was determined that each statement represents a unit of analysis. Nevertheless, the context of the statement must always be taken into account in order to enable the best possible understanding. For the creation of the category system, an interplay of deductive and inductive category findings was used (Mayring, 2010). With the help of the background knowledge, which was presented in the theory part, the statements of the transcripts were arranged into meaningful categories, which were oriented to the interview questions. Afterwards, the complete transcripts were analyzed and the statements were sorted into the category system. All statements that did not fit into any category were collected and checked again for their relevance to the research



project. In some cases, a new category was created. In order to be able to answer the research question, the obtained results were then discussed in a detailed manner, with the help of the consulted literature.

## 2.4 Ethical Considerations

The study is consistent with the principles concerning human research ethics of the Declaration of Helsinki (World Medical Association, 2013), as well as follows the guidelines for the responsible conduct of research of The Finnish Advisory Board on Research Integrity (2012).

## 3. Results

### 3.1 Is there One Form of European Right-wing Populism or Does it Differ from Country to Country?

The experts agreed that there is no such thing as a common form of a European right-wing populism. Professor Vorländer pointed out the different roots of the right-wing populist movements depending on their country of origin. According to Dr. Mamonova, the differences regarding historical development especially between post-socialist and non-socialist countries needed to be especially emphasized. Even if the countries had a common history, for example a communist one, every country has its own cultural, geopolitical, and societal factors that have contributed to a different development along the years. It is clear to say that each European country has its own country-specific socio-spatial and regional contexts and reasons that made it possible for right-wing populist ideologies to develop and grow. That leads to very country specific ideologies, which matches and picks up each country's circumstances and problems. Consequently, it is not possible to talk about a common European right-wing populist ideology and one should be careful with generalizations due to individual characteristics and peculiarities.

However, Professor Müller argued that despite the strong national differences, a family similarity can be found. Despite of country specific ideologies, all interviewees agreed that there are at least some ideological elements in common. These factors include the widespread beliefs, which always have been typical for populist-movements, of anti-elitism, anti-pluralism, nationalism, and the construction of enemies. Looking at the current historical and political development the factors of anti-Islamism and EU-scepticism need to be added. These commonalities make a general definition of right-wing

populism possible. Dr. Mamonova added the influence about the current neo-liberal capitalistic system, which fails to distribute its freedoms and prosperities equally, which causes stratification in the European societies. Right wing-populism picks up these stratifications and claims to be the voice of the ones left behind no matter in which country it occurs.

Table 3

*Answers to the Question: Is there One Form of “European Right-wing Populism” or Does it Differ from Country to Country?*

Interviewee	Original Interview passage	Translated Interview Passage	Coding
I	<p>“ [...] die ihre martialischen Märsche machen oder ihre Schießübungen. Die machen die da gerne zusammen mit Rechten aus Tschechien oder aus anderen osteuropäischen Ländern, obwohl sie sich in ihrer Ideologie sich zum Teil beißen. Obwohl sie sich in ihrer Ideologie sich zum Teil beißen. Also das Antislawische, was wir in der völkischen Ideologie, seit jeher in der deutschen völkischen Ideologie haben, ist es im Grunde genommen (kurze Pause) das passt nicht.”</p>	<p>“ They like to do their marches and shooting practices together with right-wing groups from the Czech Republic or from other Eastern European countries, even though their ideology is partly at odds with each other. For example, the anti-Slavic thing that exists in the German folkish ideology, since the very beginnings of the ideology, it’s basically (short pause) that simply doesn’t fit.”</p>	<p>Contradicting Ideologies</p>
II	<p>“Ich würde sagen es gibt nationale Unterschiede, aber es gibt schon zumindest mal eine Familienähnlichkeit. Es gibt schon einige Faktoren, die Sie überall identifizieren können. Das ist erstmal das was wir für ihre Definition verwenden, nämlich die Tatsache, dass sie antielitär sind, das war früher schon so (...) und das ist heute auch noch so. Sie richten sich gegen die herrschenden Parteien, Medien usw. Aber und das ist dem Jan Werner Müller so wichtig, das reicht nicht (...) das reicht als Definition nicht aus, deswegen sagt er, dass der Antipluralismus dazu kommen muss. (...) . Ich persönlich finde das Antielitäre und das Antipluralistische sind schon zwei von den Merkmalen, nach denen Sie gefragt haben. Dann würde ich sagen ist der Nationalismus, der manchmal ein bisschen übersteigert ist zum Nativismus, ist ein durchgehendes Merkmal. Neuerdings jetzt der Antiislam/ Islamophobie. Mit dem Nationalismus ist Islamophobie zusammen mit einer Anti Europa Haltung, das gängigste Merkmal. Kritik an der EU, Kritik am Islam, wobei Kritik da ein bisschen beschönigend ist und Kritik, Nationalismus und, wenn man das alles zusammennehmen will und das ist mein Ansatz in der Rechtspopulismusforschung,</p>	<p>“I would say there are national differences, but there is already at least once a family resemblance. There are already some factors that you are able to identify everywhere. That’s first of all what is used for the definition, which is the fact that they are anti-elitist. That was already the case in the past (...) and that is still the case today. They are directed against the ruling parties, media, etc. But and this is so important to Jan Werner Müller, that it is not enough (...) that is not enough for a proper definition, that’s why he says that anti-pluralism must be added. (...) . Personally, I think that anti-elitism and anti-pluralism are already two of the characteristics you asked about. Then I would say that also nationalism, which is sometimes a bit exaggerated to nativism, is a consistent characteristic. More recently the anti-Islam/Islamophobia postures have been developed. Together with nationalism and Islamophobia, is an anti-Europe attitude, one of the most common features. Criticism of the EU, criticism of Islam, although criticism is a bit of a euphemism</p>	<p>National differences but “family similarity”</p> <p>Similarities: Anti-elitist, antipluralistic, nationalistic, anti-islamic, EU-sceptic, construction of enemies</p>

dann könnte man meiner Ansicht sagen, das wichtigste Merkmal von Rechtspopulismus ist, dass sie vornehmlich mit Feindbildern arbeiten. Also die Konstruktion von Feindbildern scheint mir, da bin ich jetzt aber ein bisschen allein an der Front, aber es scheint mir das wichtigste Merkmal."

there, nationalism, and, if you want to take all of that together, and that's my approach in right-wing populism research, then I think you could say that the most important characteristic of right-wing populism is that they work primarily with enemy images. So, the construction of enemy images seems to me, even though I might be alone with holding that position, but that seems to me the most important characteristic."

III

"In Westeuropa aber eben auch Osteuropa, Mitteleuropa, Nordeuropa und in Südeuropa mit sehr unterschiedlichen Wurzeln, mit sehr unterschiedlichen sozialräumlichen und regionalen Kontexten.

Dass Trump an sich ein gewisses Vorbild ist als rechtspopulistische Figur und man sich ganz bestimmte mediale Strategien von ihm abgekuckt hat, das ist sicherlich durchaus hier und da der Fall. Aber im Prinzip sind in Europa eher interne, in den Ländern jene spezifischen Kontexte die Rechtspopulisten haben entstehen oder groß werden lassen."

"Western Europe but just also Eastern Europe, Central Europe, Northern Europe and in Southern Europe have very different roots, and very different socio-spatial and regional contexts.

The fact that Trump is a certain role model as a right-wing populist figure and that certain media strategies have been copied from him is certainly the case here and there. But in principle, in Europe it is rather internal, country specific contexts that allowed the right-wing populists to become big and rise.

Different roots very different socio-spatial and regional contexts

IV

"You know I would be very careful this generalizing to the whole Europe, because there are different cultures, historical legacies especially if you look at the post-socialist countries and non-socialist countries. There is a significant difference between triggers of right-wing populism.

There is also like you know even if you take the countries that have a similar history of post socialism, for example Hungary and Poland it is still very different the cause. It is not only the legacy of socialism can influence that so the national politics and development and leaderships style. It has cultural elements and so on.

But what is common, which is I would say that what we see based on our research the main cause, there are different expressions of populism, different ways, forms and shapes but the main cause we argue is the

Different historical developments

Post-social and non-socialist countries

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*fundamental crisis of neo liberalized capitalism.  
But if you look at the whole system, we rather talk about the failure of the neo liberalized capitalism to deliver prosperity and freedoms to all. It causes stratification in society. It benefits some people and some areas for example urban, metropolitan regions. They are flourishing of the capitalism and actually became the winner of the regime, but the more remote areas, they became the loser of the system and also the people, those left behind. That group that was taken on by populist, they actually experience the capitalism and this globalized order in a very different way. This perhaps is a common feature if you talk about the European Union”*

Winners and losers of capitalism

Clear answer of all: NO

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### 3.2 How does Right-wing Populism in Other Parts of the World Influence the European Right-wing Populism?

The right-wing community inside of Europe and also in the world is well connected. According to Prof. Küpper, these internal connections are often better than the ones in the democratic communities and parties. This applies for the right-wing extremist scene, who despite having partly contradicting ideologies often unite for common marches and also share a common symbolic. The groups are united in their tough demeanour, in their martial appearance, even in their willingness to use violence. This unity even bridges ideologies which are contradicting and not always neatly matured. The same networking skills also apply to the parties on the far right. They hold party meetings, where the far-right parties of Europe meet all together. The well-structured networks are used to transport these ideological fragments and make it possible that they find their way across the globe until they spread everywhere. Prof. Küpper gave the example of white supremacy which was originally a strong idea in the United States but can now also be found all over Europe. Also, the French movement about ethno-pluralism is now spread all over the continent.

Prof. Müller, Prof. Vorländer, and Dr. Mamonova shared the opinion that there is, looking at other parts of the world, for example the United States, only very little if even no influence at all on the European right-wing populist scene. Prof. Müller supported his opinion with the example of Donald

Trump. When Trump was president, it felt like populist opinions were on a rise and a new populist wave was flooding across the world. Of course, Trump made a huge impression on the other populist leaders and their parties. However, at the end of the day, Trump lost the elections and also the election results in Europe at the same time did not show a significant rise of the right-wing populist parties. For example, in the federal election of Germany in 2021, the right-wing populist party “Alternative für Deutschland” received 11% of the votes, which was in fact a little lower than in the elections before 2017. Dr. Mamonova argued that the international influence is limited because she sees right-wing populism as a symptom of deeper-rooted problems. Populism is an expression of dissatisfaction with the current politics and general situations. Due to the very different national challenges each individual country faces, the populist movements are quite nationally based and therefore might not fit properly in with another country’s situation, which creates only little chances to make an impact or create influence on it.

Although there might not be a clear and direct international influence on the European right-wing populist scene, it is clear that they are interacting with each other and therefore also influence each other’s ideas and ideologies. They mix at the level of actors, at the level of currents, and at the party level. The network and the shared ideas reach nowadays, due to the internet, a much broader amount of people, which makes it easier to share and spread ideologies.

Table 4

*Answers to the Question: How does Right-wing Populism in other Parts of the World Influence the European Right-wing Populism?*

Interviewee	Original Interview Passage	Translated Interview Passage	Coding
I	<i>”Ne das wissen wir schon lange, die sind bestens vernetzt. Besser vernetzt oft als die Demokraten. Das gilt sogar für harte rechtsextreme Gruppierungen, die ihre martialischen Märsche machen oder ihre Schießübungen. die machen die da gerne zusammen mit Rechten aus Tschechien oder aus anderen osteuropäischen Ländern, obwohl sie sich in ihrer Ideologie sich zum Teil beißen. Also das Antislawische, was wir in der völkischen Ideologie, seit jeher in der deutschen völkischen Ideologie haben, ist es im Grunde genommen (kurze Pause) das passt nicht, aber sie marschieren zusammen und sie üben auch zusammen. Sie finden auch den schwarzen Adler der extremen Rechten aus den slawischen Ländern sehr schick, das sieht einfach toschick aus so ein schwarzer Adler (lachen), sehr martialisch. Das heißt da sehen wir auch so eine Benutzung von</i>	<i>”No, we've known for a long time, that they are very well networked. Often better networked than the democrats. That even applies to the hard right-wing extremist groups that make their martial marches or their shooting exercises. They like to do them together with right-wingers from the Czech Republic or from other Eastern European countries, even though their ideology is partly at odds with each other. For example, the anti-Slavic thing that exists in the German folkish ideology, since the very beginnings of the ideology, it's basically (short pause) that simply doesn't fit but they march together, and they also practice together. They also really like the black eagle of the extreme right from the Slavic countries, that just looks extremely</i>	Worldwide networks and movements

Symbolik, da ist also die Ideologie, die ist nicht immer ganz sauber ausgereift, einige sind einig in ihrem harten Auftreten, in ihrem martialischen Auftreten, auch in ihrer Gewaltbereitschaft. Das gilt auch für die Parteien rechts außen. Auch die machen auch Parteitreffen, hatten wir vor drei Jahren oder so ähnlich in Deutschland, dass die Rechtsaußen Parteien Europas sich da getroffen haben. Wir sehen, dass Ideologieströmungen ganz eindeutig durch die Welt marschieren, bis hin von Slogans bis hin zur White Supremacy Idee, der weißen Überlegenheit, haben wir aus den USA, das ist inzwischen hier sehr verbreitet. Wir haben die Idee der identitären Bewegung und des Ethnopluralismus mal irgendwann aus Frankreich auch stark geworden, übrigens auch in anderen europäischen Ländern, dann in Deutschland aufgegriffen, da sehen wir auch durchaus über das Netz Verbeamtung dieser Ideologiefragmente, die wie gesagt nicht immer ganz ausgeschliffen sind. Da sehen wir dann, das dringt da rein bis in die Rufe aus der Mitte der Bevölkerung von Widerstand oder Völker sollen sich nicht vermischen. So etwas haben wir auch gefragt, da sind auch durchaus etliche die hier zustimmen. Also da können wir sehen, dass das sich auf der Akteursebene, auf der Strömungsebene vermischt, auf der Parteiebene sich austauscht bis eben durch das Internet eine breitere Masse erreicht, bis hin zu tatsächlich geteilten Slogans."

great such a black eagle (laughter), very martial. That means that we also see a use of symbolism, so the ideology, which is not always quite cleanly matured, however are sometimes united in their hard appearance, in their martial appearance, and also in their willingness to use violence. That also applies to the parties on the far right. They also hold party meetings, for example the one we had three years ago or so in Germany when the far-right parties of Europe met there. We see that ideological currents are clearly moving all over the world, starting from slogans going all the way to the white supremacy idea, that came from the U.S., that is now very widespread in Europe too. At some point, the idea of the identitarian movement and ethnopluralism became strong in France, and incidentally also in other European countries, and was then taken up in Germany. That is where we see that these ideological fragments, which as I said are not always completely polished, are also being promoted via the network. Then we see that this penetrates into the calls from the middle of the population calling for resistance or that peoples from different countries should not mix. We have also asked this question, and there are quite a few who agree with it. So, we can see that ideologies are mixed and networked at the level of actors and currents- It goes over the party level, until it reaches a broader mass through the Internet and creating actually shared slogans in the end."

Party meetings

Internet as new way for spreading

II "Ich bin der Meinung, dass da ein relativ geringer Einfluss ist. Es gab ja klar Trump und da fühlte man sich so als Populist im Aufschwung, es sah so aus als gäbe es so ne populistische Welle, aber die ist wieder abgeebbt, Trump ist wieder weg. 11% Stammwähler dann haben, die auch dauerhaft dann die AfD wählen werden. In Österreich oder der Schweiz sinds jeweils 20%-25%, insofern muss man da wahrscheinlich zufrieden sein. So aber jetzt zur ursprünglichen Frage. Achso die Einflüsse (...) also ich seh keine großen

"My personal opinion is that there's a relatively small influence. There was Trump and with him it felt so as if the populists are in the upswing, it looked as if there was a new populist wave, but it has ebbed away again, Trump is gone again. In Germany we will then have 11% core voters who will then also permanently vote for the AfD. In Austria or Switzerland have 20%-25% each, so you probably have to be satisfied there with 11%. So, but now to the original question. The

No direct (American) influence

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	<i>Einflüsse tatsächlich auf die Europäische Rechte. “</i>	<i>influences (...) so I see no great influences actually on the European right from abroad.</i>	
III	<i>”Insofern ist der amerikanische Rechtspopulismus nicht unbedingt, in einer klaren Position der Einflussnahme auf europäischen Rechtspopulismus. Weil es den europäischen Rechtspopulismus auch schon seit sehr viel längerer Zeit gibt, in unterschiedlichen Formen.”</i>	<i>”In this respect, American right-wing populism is not necessarily, in a clear position of influence on European right-wing populism. Because European right-wing populism has also been around for a much longer time and expresses itself in different forms.”</i>	No direct American influence
IV	<i>“I think that I would suggest to look at the nationalism and where it might come from and to learn perhaps also from the events that happened in the Second World War how the fascism emerged, you know people like you and me we can't become nationalists or fascist just without any particular reason for that. We should also think about these people who are following these ideas, so how come that people start directing their anger on some other ethnic groups, but what is the cause of that anger. So, it is not necessary that the other group are they rather the scapegoat that particular political group to mobilize people so we should look at the cause of that dissatisfaction.”</i>		No direct influence
			Common view: Rather national movements and happenings  Too nationalistic Too different

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### 3.3 Is EU- skepticism a Real Threat? Yes or No?

Euro- skeptical positions are not inherited by right wing positions, however, according to Küpper, empirical data show, that right wing populism and Eurosceptic opinions are very strongly correlated.

This can be seen in the fact that the European Union is one of the common enemies the right-wing populists have, regardless of the member state in question. The skeptic opinion has strongly influenced the media, where the unity of the European Union often gets questioned. However, the experts agreed on that more withdrawals from the EU could happen in the near future.

Prof. Müller and Prof. Vorländer both raised the example of Hungary, a country which is currently in conflict with the values and laws of the European Union, due to its right-wing populist government. The two experts agreed that the benefits the countries get from their EU membership outweigh all the negative effects. The member states often strongly rely on the financial benefits of the EU in order to keep up their societies and economies. A withdrawal from the EU would therefore mean a reduction of resources in the country, which inevitable will lead to decreased support for the current politicians. Therefore, a withdrawal is not to be feared and the EU- skepticism is more a matter of propaganda in order to stay in power and get a larger number of votes. The most common argument against the EU concerns sovereignty encroachments or even a complete loss of sovereignty. Looking at the eastern-European member states, Eurosceptic positions seem to be especially strong. Dr. Mamonova explained that this lies within differences in strength and stability of the democracies. While the western countries have the oldest, strongest and most established democracies, and most of the time the largest populations, it is up to the small new eastern-European democracies to keep up with them. While the thought of being part of the European Union was inspiring in the beginning, it switched to disappointment for many people, due to the fact that they often feel as they do not have enough political power to make an impact on the decision-making. Therefore, they often feel like second class citizens, who are not heard and not good enough to completely fit in. The populists in Eastern Europe pick these feelings up, to make a vote against the EU. It goes to say that right-wing populist movements and parties are dissatisfied with the way the European Union is working rather than with the existence of the European Union itself.

Another important factor contributing to the negative picture is the lack of knowledge within the broad societies. Prof. Küpper claimed that only a minority of the society knows how the European Union, its bodies and the decision-making processes work. Therefore, European citizens are especially vulnerable to right-wing populist statements against the EU. The European Union embodies the perfect enemy, being a mixture between the hated elite and the unloved others. This makes the EU a perfect target for right wing populist statements. Some people believe these statements, since they do not have enough knowledge to be able to refute them. The data explained seem to draw a dark picture regarding the support to the EU. However, Prof. Müller argued that the situation is not as precarious as it often sounds, since there is a lot of negative framing against the EU. This can be simply explained with an example given by Prof. Müller. The Eurobarometer



regularly measures the support and trust towards the EU in different countries. If the results say that 45% of the citizens in country X trust the European Commission, the media often reports in headlines saying: Low trust in the EU. 55% of the population mistrust the European Commission. Even though this statement is technically correct, it does not give the whole truth, because the full situation can only be seen in view of proper and complete information and a correct scale. Referring to the example of country X, it is important to also keep in mind that the national government is trusted only by 30% of its own citizens. That shows that even though the EU Commission might „only” have 45% of trust, it is still more approved and trusted than the national government of country X. You have to have a proper scale to measure the results. 45% can be very little or very much regarding what it is compared to. Regarding the EU, it is often claimed that anything below 60% or 70% of trust and support is too little. The truth is that the EU most likely has more support across Europe than the respective national governments. In fact, the EU is not as controversial as it is often portrayed in the media, quite the opposite.

Table 5

*Answers to the Question: Is EU-skepticism a Real Threat? Yes or No?*

Interviewee	Original Interview Passage	Translated Interview Passage	Coding
I	<i>“Und wir wissen, also das zeigt auch unsere Empirie auf der Einstellungsebene, dass diejenigen die sich eher euroskeptisch oder kritisch äußern auch eher populistischen und rechtspopulistischen Einstellungen zustimmen. Das ist also ganz klar hochkorreliert, dass man es kaum auseinanderhalten kann. Es gibt in den Politikwissenschaften Debatten zwischen und die unterscheiden zwischen Euro-Kritisch und Euro-skeptisch. ”</i>	<i>“We know, and this is also shown by our empirical data at the attitude level, that those who are more Euroskeptical or critical are also more likely to agree with populist and right-wing populist attitudes. So that's clearly and highly correlated, that you can hardly tell it apart. There are debates in political science about the distinguishment between Euro-critical and Euro-skeptical. ”</i>	Correlation: Euroscepticism and right wing populism  Not right-wing specific opinion
I	<i>“Ich selber sehe das etwas anders. Die meisten Leute wissen gar nicht, wie die EU funktioniert. Ehrlich gesagt ich auch nur sehr begrenzt. Das gehört eben mit zum populistischen Nachplappern, von die da oben. Auch die EU als die da oben. Das ist so eine Mischung aus die da oben und die anderen. Die EU erfüllt beides. Den Antipluralismus und die Elitenkritik, sodass ich immer ein wenig aufpassen würde, was war zuerst da Henne oder Ei. War es erst die Verkrustung und dann der Populismus.”</i>	<i>“I myself see it a little differently. Most people don't even know how the EU works. To be honest, I also only know it very limited. That is just part of the populist parroting, about those politicians up there. Also the EU is considered as the Elite up there. It's a mixture of the elite and the others. The EU fulfills both. The anti-pluralism and the elite criticism, so that I would always be a little careful, what was there first: hen or egg? ”</i>	Lack of knowledge about EU leads to parroting of populist statements  EU = Mix between the Elite and the others.

II	<p><i>"Das Eurobarometer, das wird ja regelmäßig gemacht, da werden diese Einstellungen abgefragt, ich muss dazu sagen ich bin seit 30 Jahren EU-Forscher, also das ist mein Hauptgebiet. Dann heißt da immer: Okay in dem und dem Land 45% der Befragten haben Vertrauen in die Europäische Kommission. Und dann schreibt der Journalist: " Geringes Vertrauen in die EU. 55% lehnen die Kommission ab. So. Und da ist jetzt schon die Frage. Wenn man dann, aber genau hinschaut dann stellt man da fest. Die EU-Kommission hat 45% Vertrauen in diesem Land, bei dieser Umfrage. Die eigene Regierung hat 33%. Und das ist eigentlich das, wo zu man das in Relation setzen muss. Es ist immer die Frage was ist der Maßstab. Ist 45% viel oder wenig? Und es wird bei der EU, bei der EU wird immer so getan, als ob alles was unter 60/70% Zustimmung wenig wäre. Aber die EU hat in ganz Europa mehr Zustimmung unter den Leuten mehr Zustimmung als die jeweiligen nationalen Institutionen. Die EU ist nicht umstritten, die EU ist wahnsinnig beliebt, beliebter als die nationalen Systeme. Ich finde es gibt sehr viel Zustimmung zur EU und die Europäische Identität, die immer beklagt wird, dass die nicht so arg vorhanden ist, die hat zumindest so weit getragen, dass wir heute fast in nem europäischen Bundestaat leben, in einer 70-jährigen Entwicklung."</i></p>	<p><i>"The Eurobarometer, which is done regularly, surveys these attitudes. I might have to add that I've been an EU researcher for 30 years, so that's my main field. However, it is always said: Okay in this and that country 45% of the respondents have confidence in the European Commission. And then the journalist writes: "Little trust in the EU. 55% reject the Commission. And that is where we begin to question. If one takes a closer look at the state, it gets visible that The EU Commission has 45% confidence in this country, in this survey. The own government however has 33%. And that is actually where you have to put it in relation. There is always the question of what the standard is we measure it on. Is 45% a lot or a little? It is always pretended with the EU, that anything below 60/70% approval is little. But the EU has more approval among people across Europe than the respective national institutions. The EU is not controversial, the EU is insanely popular, more popular than the national systems. I think there's a lot of approval of the EU and the European identity, which is always complained about, that it is not really visible or even existing, that has carried us at least so far that today we almost live in a European federal state, in a 70-year development."</i></p>	<p>Negative framing</p> <p>Importance of right scale</p> <p>Europe more approval than national governments</p> <p>No controversy</p>
III	<p><i>"Das ist natürlich ein Grund zur Sorge, wenn man gegen die EU-Politik zu machen versucht. Aber was wir jetzt im Moment sehen, bei Rechtspopulisten ist, dass die im Augenblick nicht aus der EU mehr wollen. Sondern dass sie die EU umbauen wollen. Woran liegt das? Das liegt daran, dass die EU-Milliarden von Geldern bereitstellen, die für diese Länder ganz wichtig sind. Das sehen Sie in Italien, das sehen Sie in Frankreich, das sehen Sie in Polen, das sehen Sie in Ungarn. Dass diese Länder letztlich kein Interesse haben aus der Europäischen Union auszutreten. Insofern machen sie zwar Stimmung gegen die Europäische Union, gegen die sogenannten Souveränitätsübergriffe. Sie spielen die Nationalistische Karte aber letztlich scheuen sie den Austritt, weil ihnen dann eben</i></p>	<p><i>"That is, of course, a cause for concern, if you try to make policy against the EU. But what we see now at the moment, with right-wing populists is that they don't want to leave the EU at the moment. They rather want to transform the EU. Why is that? It's because the EU provides billions of Euros and money that are quite important for these countries. You see that in Italy, you see that in France, you see that in Poland, you see that in Hungary. These countries ultimately have no interest in leaving the European Union. In this respect, they are indeed creating a mood against the European Union, against the so-called encroachments of sovereignty."</i></p>	<p>No danger of more Withdrawals</p> <p>Bigger wish to change the EU then to leave it</p>

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<p><i>enorme Ressourcen für ihre eigene Machterhaltung fehlen. Sie können das an Polen oder Ungarn sehen, an Polen ganz besonders. Die gesamten Gelder aus der EU werden für die Infrastruktur gebraucht, die werden aber auch für das Bezahlen großer Sozialleistungen gebraucht. Das heißt ohne die Gelder der EU haben diese Länder große Schwierigkeiten und die Rechtspopulisten erst recht."</i></p>	<p><i>They play the nationalist card, but in the end, they shy away from leaving, because they then lack enormous resources for maintaining their own power. You can see that in Poland or Hungary, but in Poland especially. All the money from the EU is needed for their infrastructure, but it is also needed for paying large social benefits. That means without the money from the EU, these countries have great difficulties and the right-wing populists even more."</i></p>	<p>Withdrawal = lack resources for power preservation</p>
<p>IV</p>	<p><i>"Well, the EU- skepticism is more strong in eastern and central Europe so post-social member states that joined the EU later. Populist parties blame the EU for taking their control over their country and that all the decisions are taking place their and not on their own ground. But it is in those interviews we have conducted in different countries in eastern Europe they don't show perse the anti-EU sentiments or strong anti-EU sentiments.</i></p> <p><i>There are also some concerns about national identity about Europeanization to the maximum. I agree with you it is not really strong it is rather used by populists to create tension in society and to get their Eurosceptic view. But what is in eastern Europe, what sentiment is quite dominant is the feeling of second-class citizens. That is like not necessarily related to EU, but it is rather related to the feeling that they are considered, the post-socialist countries, as a province of the EU and as not good enough to be fully Europeans.</i></p> <p><i>In the beginning it was really inspiring for many people. They thought that coming back to Europe would bring prosperity and bring a better life and better jobs and so on. But this thrive for becoming a copy of Europe or to mimic the western European development became too long and there is a growing dissatisfaction of being not good enough for I already mentioned. But also, what they see as eastern Europeans in political debate and also in the decisions that are taking on a European level that the main countries that drive the political decisions are those in western Europe. Because they are oldest, they are strongest, and their economies are largest. Eastern Europe just had to follow and what we see on an international arena they don't have enough political power to influence the decisions or that their suggestions are not met in the EU development program. Talking about those</i></p>	<p>Skepticism especially high in East-Europe</p> <p>Loss of national sovereignty</p> <p>EE (Easten Europe) second class citizenship</p> <p>Differences in strength of democracies</p>

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*countries like Hungary and Poland and others that are led by populist leaders these days, so they have different vision of how Europe should function, that also creates dissatisfaction of not necessarily the EU but of the way how it functions. If you see all this even though they are talking about Polesit now and other Anti-EU campaigns, there are hardly any eastern European countries want to leave the EU because it brings much more benefits than any negative effects. It is rather the dissatisfaction of how the EU functions and the rule of second level citizenship that makes eastern Europe be unhappy about this situation”.*

More dissatisfaction of the way the EU functions

Benefits are bigger than The negative effects

Common answer:  
No danger for Withdrawal.  
Euroscpticism as  
“propaganda”

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### 3.4 What can the Civil Society do to Promote Pro-democratic and European Values?

Each of the experts raised his or her own ideas of how pro-democratic and European values can be enforced.

Prof. Vorländer argued that the young generations are having a particular responsibility. He additionally wished for the same enthusiasm and promotion for the EU as there is for the climate change, for example through Fridays for Future protests. He stated that the older generations can be taken as an example, since they already did their parts in building up the European Union through promoting the European Unification or founding the “partners of Europe “. However, learning about the past of the EU and the actions of other generations in school is not enough

He suggested that social media provide a chance to mobilize young people in order to start living and promoting European values. The beneficial sides of the EU need to become more visible, since they are relevant for future generations. Prof. Vorländer mentioned the Erasmus program as an example of one of these benefits. This program makes it possible for students all over Europe to travel and study at universities abroad.

In this respect, young Europeans, in particular, should develop a European enthusiasm, since it affects them in their own future in the same way as the climate issue.

Dr. Mamonova pointed out that there is no simple solution, since the promotion strategies need to be just as diverse as the origins of right-wing populism themselves, in order to address every single aspect. She also saw the necessity for bottom-up processes where the “normal” EU citizen promotes these values. The societies must overcome their disputes. She emphasized the importance of a unification of the often-separated societies and the need of finding ways for cooperation. However, in order to have a reason to promote pro-European and democratic values, it needs to be ensured that fears and worries of the citizens are taken seriously and are going to be addressed. In order to achieve a valuable and long-lasting change, a synergy between government and the citizens is necessary.

In case of an argument with a person who has a far-right populist worldview, all four agreed that an argumentative rebuttal is almost impossible. Therefore, they advocated that instead of acting reactively and defensively and trying to argue against right wing populist statements, it is better to argue offensively for European and democratic values.

Prof. Küpper used the example of moral courage as a possibility for strengthening important values. The model consists of five steps. The first two steps inherit the realization of certain topics or situation together with their declaration as a problem that has to be taken seriously. This includes the realization that there are certain far-right ideologies stuck deep down in the European society and that these opinions should not be seen as just a legit opinion, but as a serious threat. It implies the realization that freedom of speech only works within the constitutional frameworks and not any further. After having realized the situation and classified them as a problem, the third step is to take responsibility. Responsibility can be taken at every level, starting from one’s personal space (friends and family), continuing to work-related responsibility all the way to political responsibility. The general public needs to realize its own responsibility in addressing right-wing issues, in order to be able to change something about them. Prof. Küpper mentioned several examples how responsibility can be taken. Teachers, social workers and others working with social services need to realize that this is a relevant topic for them, which they need to address in curricular and extracurricular activities. Cities and communities need to take responsible for the potential damage that can be caused through their passiveness. They need to ask themselves: what can we do in terms of protection for civil society actors who are committed to democracy, who are also very much under attack? How do we support employees who work in the migration department and receive hate and agitation every day? Media is another actor who has a large public responsibility for what they chose to show and share. There needs to be awareness that every shared information has an impact on the recipients. If they give room for right-wing ideologies and speech, the media have to be responsible and aware of the possible consequences. The fourth step of the model is finding action strategies. It is important to educate

oneself regarding this topic, especially for one’s own profession and about what can be done. The fifth and last step inherits the implementation of the action strategies. Prof. Küpper especially pointed out the struggle with having too many topics to address and therefore having too many concepts. In schools, for example, there are several separate programs and strategies against bullying, violence or discrimination. She suggested that instead of having plenty several concepts, one big concept, which addresses basic issues and values, would make it possible to include all of the other smaller concepts. She also stressed the necessity of education about the EU. In order to strengthen European values, it is important that people know what these values are and what the EU stands for. Prof. Müller agreed with Prof. Küpper regarding the education about the EU. He took it even further, and suggested education about the whole system of representative democracy and a modern liberal democracy with the protection of fundamental rights, and about constitutional courts, since, in his opinion, there is very little knowledge about it among the majority within society. This education is according to Prof. Müller also the most effective strategy to defy right-wing populist “arguments”. While having discussions with representatives of the far right, an argumentative rebuttal is almost impossible, because their opinions often are irrational and emotionalized statements rather than clear arguments. Therefore, he suggests, as a counterstrategy, the persistent reminding of the advantages of a European Union and a working democracy. He therefore favored the use of pro-active democratic counterstrategies, rather than defensive arguments. Pro-democratic counterstrategies are able to reach the broad society, instead of only focusing on people with right-wing populist or far-right ideologies.

Table 6

*Answers to the Question: What can the Civil Society do to Promote Pro-democratic and European Values?*

Interviewee	Original Interview Passage	Translated Interview Passage	Coding
I	<i>“Da können wir uns am klassischen Modell der Zivilcourage ganz gut orientieren. Das, der erste Schritt ist ein Problem wahrnehmen. Wir müssten also hinkucken und wir müssten auch hinkucken wollen. Also wir müssen nicht sagen: "Das ist ja normal. Das ist eine Meinung. Wir haben hier Meinungsfreiheit, da kann ich ja das sagen und das". Ja auf dem Boden des Grundgesetzes und im Geiste des Grundgesetzes. Das ist ja jetzt nicht nur was (unv.) also es atmet den Geist. Es ist entstanden aus der schrecklichen Zeit des</i>	<i>"We can orient ourselves quite well at the classic model of civil courage. The first step is to perceive a problem. We have to open our eyes to it, and we have to want to see it. So, we shouldn't say: "That's normal. That's an opinion. We have freedom of opinion here, so I can say this and that." Yes, on the basis of the Basic Law and in the spirit of the Basic Law. That's not just something so it breathes the spirit of our constitution. It emerged from the terrible time of National</i>	Civil courage 5 Step model: 1. Realization

*Nationalsozialismus und des Holocausts. Es hat also einen Geist einer offenen Gesellschaft, das Grundgesetz. Da sind wir schon beim ersten Punkt, wo es oft hapert, also hinkucken und als Problem wahrnehmen und nicht als normal wahrnehmen und einschätzen, sondern als Problem einschätzen. . Der nächste Schritt in diesem 5 Stufen Modell der Zivilcourage ist das Übernehmen von Verantwortung. Und Verantwortung kann man im kleinen Bereich bei seinen Freunden, bei seiner Verwandtschaft übernehmen, in seinem Arbeitstag, aber eben auch politisch Verantwortung übernehmen. Das heißt ich muss als politischer BildnerIn, das bedeutet angefangen von LehrerInnen, SozialarbeiterInnen im schulischen und außerschulischen Bereich sagen, das ist ein Thema für mich. Das gilt zum Beispiel auch für Medien. Für Medien, die auf dem demokratischen Boden stehen und hier auch einen Auftrag erfüllen, auch hier Verantwortung für das zu übernehmen, was man anrichtet. Und wenn ich extremistischen Positionen Raum gebe, dann macht das was. Dafür muss ich auch Verantwortung (unv.) und mir muss klar sein, dass ich hier auch mit in der Verantwortung stehe und diese Verantwortung übernehme. Und das gilt zum Beispiel auch für Kommunen. Was mache ich an Schutz für zivilgesellschaftliche Akteure, die sich für die Demokratie engagieren, die auch sehr unter Beschuss stehen? Wie unterstütze ich die? Wie unterstütze ich KollegInnen, die im Migrationsreferat arbeiten und den Hass und Hetze jeden Tag über E-Mail bekommen? Und der nächste Schritt, der vierte Schritt ist, ich muss Handlungsstrategien kennen, heißt ich muss mich schlau machen. Also wir brauchen nicht mehr Material, sondern wir brauchen vor allem eine bessere Kommunikation aus meiner Sicht. Und der letzte Schritt ist, man muss auch handeln. Zu sagen wir können das Verbinden mit Konzepten beispielweise gegen Mobbing, Konzepten gegen Gewalt, Konzepten gegen Diskriminierung. Das ist alles, fällt alles in den*

*Socialism and the Holocaust. So, the spirit of an open society is the Basic Law. Here do we already face our first challenges, because we don't open our eyes for that and do not want to perceive it as a problem, so we have to look and perceive as a problem and not assess these things as normal but assess them as a problem. . The next step in this 5-stage model of moral courage is taking responsibility. And you can take responsibility in a small-scale way with your friends, with your relatives, in your everyday life, but you can also take responsibility politically. This means that as a political educator, starting with teachers and social workers in and outside of the school context, I have to say that this is an issue for me. The same need applies to the media. For example, media which stands on democratic ground has to also take responsibility here for what they do. And if I give extremist positions space, then there will be consequences. I have to take responsibility for the consequences, and this must be clear to me that I am also responsible for this, and I have to accept this responsibility. And that also applies to municipalities, for example. What do I do to protect civil society actors who are committed to democracy, who are under attack? How do I support them? How do I support colleagues who work in the migration department and receive the hate and agitation every day via e-mail? The next step, the fourth step, is that I need to know strategies for action, better said, I need to educate myself. We don't necessarily need more educational material, but above all we need better communication from my point of view. We should combine the pro-democratic concepts with concepts, for example, against bullying, concepts against violence, concepts against discrimination. That all falls into the same category. So, we can develop one concept for all*

2. Classification as problem

3. Taking Responsibility

4. Actionstrategy

Combined concept

5. Taking action

gleichen Kladderadatsch. Da können wir ein Konzept entwickeln und brauchen nicht fünf."

because we don't need five. And the last step is of course to take action."

I "Ich selber sehe das etwas anders. Die meisten Leute wissen gar nicht, wie die EU funktioniert. Ehrlich gesagt ich auch nur sehr begrenzt. Das gehört eben mit zum populistischen Nachplappern, von die da oben. Auch die EU als die da oben. Das ist so eine Mischung aus die da oben und die anderen. Die EU erfüllt beides. Den Antipluralismus und die Elitenkritik, sodass ich immer ein wenig aufpassen würde, was war zuerst da Henne oder Ei. War es erst die Verkrustung und dann der Populismus."

"I myself see it a little differently. Most people don't even know how the EU works. To be honest, I also only know it very limited. That is just part of the populist parroting, about those politicians up there. Also, the EU is considered as the Elite up there. It's a mixture of the elite and the others. The EU fulfills both. The anti-pluralism and the elite criticism, so that I would always be a little careful, what was there first: hen or egg? "

Lack of knowledge about EU → more education

II "So und jetzt wollte ich ja eigentlich noch was zu den Gegenstrategien sagen, aber jetzt ist leider die Zeit um, weil nämlich im Grunde herrscht Ratlosigkeit, kein Mensch was man eigentlich machen soll. Was ich jetzt so ähm unter anderem deswegen, weil argumentatives Entkräften schwierig ist, da hatten wir vorher schon darüber gesprochen, weil es eben keine Argumente sind, die vorgebracht werden, sondern irrationale, emotionalisierende Faktoren, die kann man eben nicht diskutieren, das ist eine Sache. Konsens rausgebildet hat in der Forschung, dass es sehr viel vielversprechender ist, nicht quasi den Rechtspopulisten, den Rechtsradikalen, den Rechtsextremen quasi entgegenzutreten mit Argumenten, im Sinne einer Defensive, sondern im Sinne einer Offensive, die Vorzüge der liberalen Demokratie, der repräsentativen Demokratie, des Pluralismus auszustellen. Und das ist eigentlich auch mein Ansatz. Ich möchte mich auch gar nicht so lange, damit irgendwie meine Zeit vergeuden mit den Leuten zu diskutieren, ob das jetzt Q-Anon was weiß ich ist oder so, da ist mir die Zeit zu schade. Was glaube ich aber wirklich sinnvoll ist, ist so vielen Leuten wie möglich auch, das mache ich durchaus auch

"So now I actually wanted to say something about the counterstrategies, but unfortunately time is up now, because basically there is helplessness, and no one knows what to do. One reason why it is so hard, is that it's difficult to refute arguments - we've already talked about this before - because there are no arguments being stated, but rather irrational, emotionalizing factors that can't be discussed, so that's one reason. The consensus that has emerged in research is that it is much more promising not to counter the right-wing populists, the right-wing radicals, the right-wing extremists, with arguments, in the sense of a defense, but in the sense of an offensive, to exhibit the advantages of liberal democracy, of representative democracy, of pluralism. And that is actually my approach too. I don't want to waste my time discussing with people whether it's Q-Anon or whatever, because I don't have the time. But what I think really makes sense is to explain liberal democracy to as many people as possible - and I do that at family coffee parties, when it's my aunt's birthday or

Argumentative rebuttal impossible

Pro-active democratic > defensive arguments



beim Familienkaffee, wenn die Tante Geburtstag hat oder so, die liberale Demokratie zu erklären, weil das versteht nämlich keiner. Was da eigentlich im Kern dahinter steckt, was da die Ideen sind, was die Idee von einer repräsentativen Demokratie ist, was es heißt verantwortliches Regieren und so weiter und so weiter. Die ganzen Systematiken einer repräsentativen Demokratie oder einer modernen-liberalen Demokratie mit dem Grundrechtsschutz und den Verfassungsgerichten einfach auseinander zu setzen, weil ich hab den Eindruck da herrscht ziemliche Ratlosigkeit und ich hab auch die Erfahrung gemacht persönlich, nicht nur bei meinen Studierenden, da mach ich das natürlich schon ab dem ersten Semester ist das zentrales Studienziel bei uns, die repräsentative Demokratie zu verstehen, das mache ich aber auch tatsächlich bei Familienfeiern oder so, wenn entsprechende Äußerungen fallen dann sage ich nicht: Oh das war jetzt aber rechtspopulistisch was du da gesagt hast oder: Oh das führt nach Auschwitz wieder oder was. Das bringt nämlich gar nichts. Tatsächlich dann schon inhaltlich argumentieren, aber nicht gegen das was jemand gesagt hat, weil das ist meistens nur blödes Geschwätz, sondern für, also dafür Argumentieren, wie die Sache jetzt gerade abläuft und dafür Verständnis zu wecken, das scheint mit vielversprechender zu sein, Also offensiv, statt reaktiv und defensiv zu agieren, das ist glaube ich das entscheidende Stichwort."

something. Because nobody understands what is actually at the heart of it, what the ideas are, what the idea of a representative democracy is, what it means to govern responsibly, and so on. It is important to deal with the whole systematics of a representative democracy or a modern liberal democracy with the protection of fundamental rights and the constitutional courts, because I have the impression that there is quite a bit of helplessness. I have also made this experience personally, not only with my students, of course this is the central study goal of us from the first semester, to understand the representative democracy, but I also actually do at family gatherings or so, if one of these statements falls then I do not say: "Oh, that was right-wing populist what you just said there" or: "Oh, that leads us back to Auschwitz". That doesn't help at all. Of course, one has to argue content-related, but not against what someone said, because that's mostly just stupid chatter, but rather arguing for how things are going right now and arousing an understanding for that. That seems to me to be more promising, so acting offensively instead of reactively and defensively, I think is the crucial keyword."

Explanation and education about democratic system and its advantages

Not against populism but for democracy

III

"In dem, junge Menschen wie Sie, sich in dieser Gesellschaft aktiv beteiligen. Und die Freude an Europa durch gemeinschaftliche Aktionen in die Öffentlichkeit tragen. Und das ist insbesondere auch die Aufgabe von Erasmus-Generation. Dass ist die Verpflichtung der jungen Menschen und die alten haben das schon mehrfach getan, nach dem zweiten Weltkrieg, in den 50er Jahren, in dem sie den europäischen

"In which, young people like you, actively participate in this society. And bring the joy about Europe to the public through collective actions. And that is especially also the task of the Erasmus Generations. That is the obligation of the young people because the old ones have already done that several times, after the Second World War, in the 50s, in which they have promoted the European

Commitment of the young

	<p><i>Einigungsprozess gefördert haben und in dem sie jetzt beispielsweise in Deutschland aber auch in vielen anderen Ländern "Partners of Europe" gegründet haben. Auch bei Europawahlen, da gab es viele Aktionen und da hätte ich mir mehr Engagement der jungen Leute gewünscht. So wie man für Klima, für Klimawandel auf die Straße geht, sollte man auch für Europa auf die Straße gehen.</i></p>	<p><i>unification process and in which they have now founded, for example, in Germany but also in many other countries "Partners of Europe". Also in European elections, there were many actions and that is where I would have liked to see more commitment from the young people. Just as people take to the streets for the climate and against the climate change, they should also take to the streets for Europe."</i></p>	<p>Voting in European Elections</p>
III	<p><i>„Das ist Aufgabe der Schule, der Bildung, aber es ist auch Aufgabe der jungen Leute, denen ja eine Menge an sozialen Medien zur Verfügung stehen, dass die sich mobilisieren. Und man darf nicht immer erwarten, dass man das von anderen vorgelebt bekommt, ich meine Vorleben ist immer gut, aber man kann nicht erwarten, dass man durch die Aktionen von Lehrern dazu motiviert wird. Das ist ja auch in der Klimageschichte ähm Bewegung ein Bottom Up gewesen. Und wenn man sich überlegt, dass während der Pandemie viele (unv.) da sieht man was es bedeutet wieder in einem nationalen Egoismus der europäischen Staaten zurückzufallen. Europa ist die Lösung aber nicht das Problem. Und insofern sollten gerade junge Leute in dieser Situation mit dieser europäischen Begeisterung bereitstehen und diese auch entwickeln, weil sie auch ganz stark davon profitieren, oder profitiert haben in dem sie zum Beispiel durch Erasmus-Programme in Europa studiert haben, an anderen Universitäten waren und weil es sie in ihrer eigenen Zukunft einfach genauso betrifft wie die Klimafrage.“</i></p>	<p><i>“That is the task of schools, of education, but it is also the task of young people, who have a lot of social media at their disposal, to mobilize people. And you can't always expect others to set an example, I mean setting an example is always good, but you can't expect to be motivated to do so by the actions of teachers or others. After all, the climate movement has been a bottom-up movement. And during the pandemic you see what it means to fall back into a national egoism of many of the European states. Europe is the solution but not the problem. And in this respect, especially young people should be ready in this situation having or developing this European enthusiasm, because they benefit very much from it, or have benefited from it, for example, by studying in Europe at other universities because of the Erasmus programs, but also because it simply affects them in their own future just as much as the climate issue."</i></p>	<p>Necessity of education</p> <p>Bottom-up process</p> <p>Visibility of profits</p>
IV	<p><i>“The same way there is no single solution that fits all. And what we suggest is that (unv.) there was enough already done by different governmental programs to try to engage the population with different success. But it is not getting in a way</i></p>		<p>Not a one-way solution</p>

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*how it was intended so (kurze Pause). It has to be done that the initiative should come from below. How to stimulate it and how to empower it and we were talking about the food sovereignty. ' We will need to look at the root of the problem and try to find the solution there. And not just to look at the expressions of the crisis but to combat some fundamental causes of it. So, we need to find a more sustainable solution and try to create a discourse about a sustainable food system and food sovereignty and an alternative to the agriculture model now. Trying to be very specific nuanced and not to blame anyone multinational operations. Trying not to divide people and communities but rather find the common language to bring them together and try to find ways for collaboration and cooperation rather than finding an enemy, how populists are doing and based on that we should unite people."*

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Bottom-up process

Take fears and worries of society seriously and address them

Unity > division

### 3.5 What is the Best Way to Deal with Right-wing Populism on the Political, Societal, and Personal Levels?

The far-right scene has many facets and appearances which makes it hard to find one fitting way of dealing with them. Prof. Müller claimed that the far right is schematic, which consequently blurs the border lines between right-wing liberal and national liberal, and between the right-wing populist and right-wing extremist. The political orientation oscillates between the different currents, which makes it difficult to make detailed evaluations. That is why the dealing with right-wing populism strongly depends on its appearance and setting.

Prof. Müller and Prof. Vorländer both focused more on the political way of dealing with for example right-wing populist parties or even whole governments. Both emphasized the various ways of differentiating, which are necessary to address this topic correctly. The first difference must be drawn between constitutional and unconstitutional right-wing populist ideologies and parties. With parties which fall out of the constitutional spectrum, it is important to use measures, jurisdictions of prohibition and observations, to control the development of the party. If the parties fall within a democratic and constitutional spectrum, they both agreed that they need to be seen as serious political

opponents. This recognition forces the other parties to make better politics with appealing political offers in order to win votes and support of the population, and to make it more difficult for the right-wing populist to win elections. Another important matter which decides the counterstrategies is the political level the party is on. At a national level, different rules apply, depending on whether the party is parliamentary or non-parliamentary. Furthermore, the choice of action depends on whether the right-wing populist party in question is in the government or in the opposition. If the party is in the government, it is important that the opposition exercises strongly and very sharp control what kind of politics is made. If the right-wing populist party is in the opposition, the opposition groups have to be taken seriously as such, but it also has to be made sure that the parliamentary disputes stay within the boundaries, that parliamentary rules are followed, and that there is no hounding and hate speech in parliaments.

Looking at the European Union, it again depends on whether the right-wing populists belong as a party to the European party network or have seats in the European Parliament. The same applies to national parliaments. The traditional parties have to decide whether they want to include right-wing populist parties in their alliances. There might also be party rules, bylaws, which regulate how to deal with right-wing populist parties.

Prof. Küpper, on the other hand, focused more on the private and societal level of dealing with these issues. She emphasized that far-right opinions, no matter if they are right-wing groups, parties, or associations, should get as little stage as possible. Therefore, dialogue events are not a good idea, because it automatically creates public space for these kinds of opinions. She drew a line between people with a solidified far-right worldview and the ones whose worldview is not solidified but inherits a few ideas from the far right. In her opinion, the current counterstrategies focus too much at the troublemakers, who are in this case the very far-right margins of the society. The rest of the society will eventually get frustrated. In order to avoid this frustration, the rest of the society must be supported and addressed. There is nothing to talk about in the very hard right-wing extremist spectrum, and it therefore is ultimately something for the security authorities. It is important to address people with a less solidified right worldview, but also the ones who are uncertain about their political opinion and convinced them of the values of democratic and nondiscriminatory behavior. There is scientific evidence in psychology that shaming and reproaching the people for their opinion is the wrong way to go. That is why empathy is required to succeed in convincing them

It is essential to not only contradict statements but also to explain these contradictions cognitively and emotionally, and to offer a possibility to think and feel in line with democratic arguments. Prof. Küpper claimed that there is a necessity to make it clear what democracy means, where democracy

actually comes from and what it means to have different interests and opinions. However, according to her, what is mostly needed for a fruitful discussion is dignity. Humans have dignity, no matter who they are, and this is noted in the constitutions of the European countries. It should therefore be an absolute basic standard for every (political) discussion. Our constitutions give us a framework of what opinions can be accepted, and everything that falls out of that framework should therefore not be covered under the freedom of speech. Like the other experts, Prof. Küpper agreed that it is really important to differentiate the various settings in order to be able to react properly, which is either with dignity towards the other or not at all.

Table 7

*Answers to the Question: What is the Best Way to Deal with Right-wing Populism on a Political, Societal and Personal Level?*

Interviewee	Interview Passage		Coding	
I	<i>"Dialogveranstaltungen mit der äußeren Rechten sind meiner Meinung nach keiner guten Idee. Es ist was anderes, wenn ich mit der Kollegin in der Teeküche spreche, die rassistische Aussagen macht, weil sie vielleicht nicht darüber nachgedacht hat. Wenn ich denke: "Ok ich kann den noch kriegen", dann rede ich mit der. Ich versuche Empathie zu erzeugen, ich versuche eine Perspektivenübernahme zu erzeugen. Ich arbeite nicht mit bloßstellen und an den Pranger stellen und Vorwürfe machen, dann wissen wir, aus der Psychologie, macht der Mensch zu, da geht er eher in Reaktanz, aber ich biete eine Möglichkeit mitzudenken und mitzufühlen, wie sich das zum Beispiel, wenn man selber (unv.) wichtig ist es, dass dann auch vor allem für all die anderen die drum herumstehen. Ich krieg nicht immer die Person, die schon ziemlich drin ist, die schon ziemlich hardcore Sachen von sich gibt. Aber all die anderen die unsicher sind, die vielleicht in so einem Teil/teils-Bereich sind, die sagen: "Ich weiß gar nicht was ich hier für eine Meinung haben soll". Für die ist es wichtig dann nicht nur Widersprüche zu machen, sondern die Widersprüche zu erklären. Nicht nur kognitiv, sondern auch emotional.</i>	<i>"Dialog events with the far right are not a good idea in my opinion. It's different however when I talk to the colleague who makes racist statements in the kitchen, because maybe she hasn't thought about it. If I think, "Okay I can still get this one and convince this one" then I talk to that person. I try to create empathy; I try to make them see my perspective. I don't work with exposing, shaming and reproaching, because we know from psychology, the people consequently close up and rather go into reactance. That is why I offer a possibility to think and to feel along, how it feels for example, if one himself (unv.) above all it is important also for all the others who are standing around. I don't always get the person who already has a solidified worldview and who already says pretty hardcore things. But all the others who are uncertain, who are maybe in an ambivalent area, who say: "I don't know what kind of opinion I should have here". For them it is important not only to make contradictions, but to explain these contradictions. Not just cognitively, but emotionally."</i>		As little stage as possible  Importance of different settings  Creation of empathy  Address bystanders
I	<i>". Nochmal auch klar machen, was bedeutet Demokratie. Also woher kommt eigentlich unsere Demokratie, also was heißt das mit unterschiedlichen Interessen</i>	<i>"To clarify again, what democracy means. So where does our democracy actually come from, what does it mean to have different</i>		

<p><i>und Meinungen und das ist nicht einfach irgendeine Meinung. Sondern vorne steht: Würde. Das ist das allerwichtigste unseres Grundgesetzes, nicht irgendeine Meinung, sondern es ist gerahmt von den ersten Artikeln des Grundgesetzes. Nochmal erklären, wo das herkommt und wohin das führt, wenn wir das nicht machen. Haben wir schonmal gehabt. Also man muss den Menschen die Chance geben mitzugehen, zumindest denjenigen die drum herumstehen, die mithören oder mitlesen im Internet. Die Chance geben mitzudenken und mitzufühlen, das ist wichtig. Und der wichtige Punkt ist Teeküche unterscheiden von Forum. Also hart rechten Akteuren und rassistische Positionen kein Forum geben in öffentlichen Versammlungen. Da haben die nichts verloren. Und dann nicht naiv meinen: "Das gehört ja zur demokratischen Auseinandersetzung." Ne, da bin ich ganz klar und sage: Unser Grundgesetz gibt uns hier das Spielfeld vor und da ist aber auch Ende im Gelände jenseits davon. Und klar antisemitische, rassistische und demokratiefeindliche Positionen haben auf solchen Foren nichts verloren. Wir kucken zu viel auf die zwei Störenfriede und der ganze Rest ist dann auch irgendwann frustriert. Das heißt der muss auch gestützt, der muss auch adressiert werden. Der ganz harte Rechtsextremismus ist nichts zum Reden, der ist was für die Sicherheitsbehörden letztendlich."</i></p>	<p><i>interests and opinions and that some things are not just any opinion. However, the most important thing is: Dignity. That is the most important thing in our Basic Law, it is framed by the first articles of the Basic Law. Explain again where that comes from and where it leads to if we don't respect that. We've had that before. You have to give people the chance to join in, at least those who are standing around listening or reading on the Internet. It's important to give people the chance to think and feel. And the important point is to distinguish the workplace kitchen from a public forum. So far-right actors and racist positions should not be given a platform in public meetings. They don't belong there. We are not allowed to naively think: "That's part of the democratic debate." No, I am quite clear and say: Our Basic Law gives us a certain room to act and at some point, there is a limit. And clearly anti-Semitic, racist and anti-democratic positions should not have place on such democratic forums or debates. We look too much at the two troublemakers in our society and all the rest will at some point also be frustrated. That means that they, the rest, also have to be supported and addressed. At the end of the day, is the very hard right-wing extremism nothing to talk about, but rather something for the security authorities."</i></p>	<p>Explain importance of democracy</p> <p>Dignity &gt; opinion plurality</p> <p>Constitution as framework</p> <p>Create Empathy</p> <p>Extremism is for security agencies</p>
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<p>II <i>"Also die Partei von Koalitionen ausschließen, kommt drauf an welche Partei und wie die Partei aussieht. Wenn sie jetzt auf kommunaler Ebene, wenn sie da rein gehen, gibt es schon sehr viele Kooperationen zwischen CDU und AfD und das ist glaube ich nicht generell zu verurteilen, wenn dieser kommunale Ableger oder dieser Landesverband eben nicht Thüringen ist oder so. Rechtspopulisten das sind Demokraten, auch wenn sie vielleicht etwas veraltete Vorstellungen haben, aber das sind Demokraten. Die sind zum Teil sogar</i></p>	<p><i>"Excluding a party from coalitions strongly depends on which party it is and what the party looks like. If they are at the German municipal level for example, we already find many cooperations between CDU and AfD and that is I think not generally to condemn, if this municipal offshoot or this regional association is not for example from Thuringia. Right-wing populists are democrats, even if they may have somewhat outdated ideas. Some of them are</i></p>	<p>Difference between constitutional and unconstitutional</p>
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rechtsradikal, aber auch das kann man und muss man noch ertragen als Pluralismus, aber die Grenze ist halt das Rechtsextreme. Rechtspopulismus ist einerseits Chamäleon artig andererseits so Schemen artig, so die Grenzen verwischt, zwischen Rechtsliberal und Nationalliberal und Rechtspopulistisch und Rechtsextrem (...) das oszilliert immer zwischen den Strömungen und das macht es schwer das jeweils im Einzelnen zu beurteilen."

even right-wing radicals, but even that can and must be tolerated as pluralism. However, the limit is the extreme right.

Depending on appearance

On one hand, right-wing populism is chameleon-like phenomenon, on the other hand, it is so schematic and blurs the boundaries between right-wing liberal, national liberal, right-wing populist and right-wing extremist (...) that always oscillates between the currents and that makes it difficult to judge that in each case in detail."

Differentiation is important!

III

"Man muss unterscheiden zwischen dem parlamentarischen Umgang mit rechtspopulistischen Parteien und eben Umgang mit rechtspopulistischen Parteien, die nicht in Parlamenten sind und dann muss man unterscheiden, wie man mit Wählern und Wählerinnen von rechtspopulistischen Parteien umgeht. Das sind alles ganz Unterschiedliche. Hat man den in Parlamenten vertretenen Rechtspopulismus muss man wiederum unterscheiden zwischen solchen die im Parlament in der Opposition sind und solchen die in Regierungspositionen sind. Bei Populisten der Teil einer Regierung sind gelten natürlich andere Umgangskriterien. Da muss die Opposition natürlich kräftig und sehr scharf kontrollieren. Wenn jemand im Parlament ist und ist dort in der Opposition, da muss man natürlich die Oppositionsfraktionen als solche ernst nehmen, aber man muss drauf achten, dass die parlamentarischen Auseinandersetzungen im Rahmen bleiben, wie die Geschäftsordnung das vorsieht und dass in Parlamenten nicht gehetzt und Hassreden gehalten werden, dass die parlamentarischen Regeln eingehalten werden. Wenn man jetzt außerhalb sieht, außerhalb vom Parlament. Ob sie sich innerhalb einer demokratischen, politischen Handlungsform bewegen oder eben außerhalb. Wenn sie sich außerhalb bewegen oder die Grenzen fließen sind, da muss man natürlich, da zeigt sich das deutsche Beispiel ganz gut, da muss man eben kucken wie weit sich womöglich Verfassung oder Demokratie feindlich oder widrig sind und dann dementsprechend auch Maßnahmen, Gerichtsbarkeiten des Verbotes der Beobachtung einsetzen. Wenn sie sich innerhalb des demokratischen Spektrums bewegen, dann muss man die sicherlich auch ernst nehmen. Und dann

"You have to distinguish between dealing with right-wing populist parties which are part of the parliament right-wing populist parties that are not in parliaments. Furthermore, you have to distinguish how you deal with voters of right-wing populist parties. These are all very different things. If you have right-wing populism represented in parliaments, you again have to distinguish between those that are in opposition in parliament and those that are in governmental positions.

Differences between parliamentarian and non-parliamentarian

With populists who are part of a government, of course, other criteria apply. In this case, the opposition must, of course, exercise vigorous and very sharp control. If someone is in parliament and is in the opposition, you have to take the opposition groups seriously as such, but you have to make sure that parliamentary disputes remain within the bounds of the rules of procedure, that there is no hounding and hate speech in parliaments and that the parliamentary rules are observed. If you look outside now, outside of parliament. Whether they move within a democratic, political form of action or just outside. If they move outside or the borders are fluid, then of course, as the German example shows quite well, you have to look at how far the constitution or democracy may be hostile or adverse and then accordingly use measures, jurisdictions of the prohibition of observation. If they move within

Differences opposition and government

Constitutional or unconstitutional

*muss man sie durch die bessere Politik überzeugen versuchen und der harten politischen Auseinandersetzung sich stellen. Gegenüber Wählern und Wählerinnen da muss man natürlich zunächst einmal verstehen, warum die Rechtspopulisten oder rechtsextreme Parteien oder PolitikerInnen wählen, und muss das sehr genau sehen, dass man die besseren Politikangebote macht und es den Rechtspopulisten schwer macht, in den entsprechenden Wahlkreisen bei Wahlen erfolgreich zu kandidieren. So würde ich das sagen. Sie sehen auch hier ist die Differenzierung die Mutter der wissenschaftlichen Analyse. Auch da hängt es wieder davon ab, ob die Rechtspopulisten in der Regierung sind oder ob sie sich beispielweise als Partei am europäischen Parteienverbund gehören oder in einem europäischen Parlament arbeiten. Bei Parlamenten gilt da gleiche. Bei Parteien gilt natürlich das die Parteienbündnisse darüber richten müssen, ob sie solche Parteien dabei haben wollen, wie ihr eigenes Verständnis ist. Dann gibt es Parteiordnungen, Satzungsordnungen, die dann auch den Umgang mit solchen rechtspopulistischen Parteien regeln."*

*the democratic spectrum, then one must certainly take them seriously. And then one must try to convince them by the better policy and party politics, and one has to face the hard political argument. With regard to voters, of course, you first have to understand why people vote for right-wing populists or right-wing extremist parties or politicians, and you have to see that very carefully, that you make the better policy offers and make it difficult for the right-wing populists to run successfully in the corresponding constituencies in elections. That's how I would put it. You see here, too, differentiation is the mother of scientific analysis. Here, too, it depends on whether the right-wing populists are in government or whether, for example, if they belong as a party to the European party alliance or work in a European parliament. The same applies to parliaments. In the case of parties, of course, it is up to the party alliances to decide whether they want such parties to be part of their own understanding. Then there are party rules, bylaws, which then also regulate how to deal with such right-wing populist parties."*

Serious political opponent

Make better politics

Party Regulations, Statutes



## 4. Discussion

### 4.1 Summary of the Findings

The main conclusion to be drawn from this study is that right-wing populist parties nowadays are an established part of the European political landscape, at an international, national, and regional level. The challenges of the European democracies depend on the success of the right-wing populist parties and whether or not they are in a governmental role. However, the results of the interviews make it possible to see that the most dangerous challenges are not necessarily the ones that are portrayed in the media and the ones that are the most clearly visible. Skepsis towards the EU gives a good example. Right-wing populists often publicly claim that Europe gets “destroyed” by the European Union. Even though EU-skepticism is a characteristic that nearly all European right-wing populist parties have in common, it is usually used in order to get attention and voters, with no intention whatsoever to actually leave the union. One of the biggest challenges is the slowly shifting attitude towards right-wing populist statements and ideologies. This tendency towards an acceptance of misanthropic or racist statements leads to attempts to justify them as representative of the voice of the people. The more these ideologies and attitudes find their way into the midst of society, the harder it is to reverse the process and create a society based on democratic and philanthropic values. This understanding is important for answering the second research question regarding possible interventions, in order to stop the increase and spread of right-wing populist ideologies and attitudes at societal and political levels. The interviewed experts and the literature were in agreement about the fact that right-wing populism is a symptom of deeper root causes and problems. In order to address these problems, an effective mix of offers and programs from both political and societal actors is crucial. This mix would ensure that there are both bottom-up and top-down processes at the same time. For actions at political and societal levels, it is essential to look at the context and the exact manifestation of right-wing populism in specific situations. In politics, a distinction should not only be made between the regional, national, and international levels, but also between the oppositional or governmental roles of right-wing populist parties. However, regardless of which position the right-wing populist parties have, they should be considered serious opponents, and therefore, political strategies are required to first of all reach the voters, bring them back to the other parties and to give the right-wing populist parties as little power as possible when it comes to decision-making. The experts also agreed that at a European level, sanctions can be a useful way to deal with conflicts between member states and European values. However, the ways for the European Union to deal with these problems need to be improved and further developed.

When it comes to how society at large should tackle right-wing populism, the experts and the literature were in agreement about the fact that neither accusations nor factual argumentation helps in changing an individual's perspective on certain ideologies or beliefs. The experts specified this by giving specific suggestions about possible actions. Because of the symptomatic character of right-wing populism, the experts claimed that it is important to look at societal dissatisfactions and worries in order to understand the people's needs and wishes. Once this is properly understood, it should be possible to find equivalent measurements and offers, ranging from educational work to victim support. The experts also pointed out that every individual has responsibility for his/her own actions and the way he/she reacts to political development. There is consensus in the scientific society that democracy is something that needs to be fought for and defended every day, and that actions taken in the current situation are not enough. The experts claimed that it requires more civil engagement in order to spread pro-democratic values and pro-European values and that this can only be done with sufficient education about the European Union, its values and benefits.

With the implementation of these strategies and methods, it should be possible to pull away the carpet under the right-wing populists' feet. The ability to diminish the support for the right-wing populist parties lays the foundation for decreasing their relevance in the future.

There was no consensus among the experts regarding the future of the European Union in relation to right-wing populism. Some of the experts were slightly optimistic that the right-wing populism would decrease in the next couple of years due to its retrograde ideologies and policies. Others, however, saw a reason for concern due to the growing global challenges, the decline of solidarity inside societies, and the growing gap between different groups in societies. The upcoming elections in 2022 in some of the European member states are an important indicator of the current development. Nevertheless, theory and research agree that the topic of right-wing populism needs to be urgently addressed in an appropriate manner, in order to keep the European values and ideologies alive. Only with a proper invention it is possible to stop the spreading of far-right ideologies and the division of the society.

As a final analysis, it is possible to claim that detailed research has already been conducted on the topic, which therefore offers a good amount of knowledge about right-wing populism and its political and societal appearances. Certainly, there is always a need for improvement, but the current state of knowledge provides an opportunity to improve already existing structures or create new ones with the goal to spread pro-European, pro-democratic values. Research and the monitoring of the societal opinions are other important tools to promote these values. Through monitoring, it is possible to track the development and to see if and how much right-wing populist attitudes have trickled down into the

midst of European societies.

Even though it is difficult to predict the future development of the right-wing populist parties in Europe, it is clear that they will continue to be a part of the European political landscape in the near future. In fact, European societies and governments can choose to consider the activity of the right-wing populist parties and the consecutive information about fears and grievances in the population as an opportunity to address these problems.

## 4.2 Limitations of the Study

The sample of this study was a convenience sample, with less participants than originally planned due to time factors and a lack of positive responses. The participants have a diverse background in experience, fields of study, and workplaces. However, most of them had a common national or scientific background, since they teach at universities and lead research projects. It would have been desirable to have interview partners from other professions as well, in order to make the study more representative and diverse. For example, the study could have included politicians, who see the direct influence of right-wing populism in the governments, or people who work on a societal level with for example victims of right-wing violence. Another possibility would have been the inclusion of participants with other nationalities, in order to cover views from different parts of Europe. Also, to include participants of different nationalities in order to cover views from different parts of Europe could have been a possibility.

## 4.3 Implications of the Study and Suggestions for Future Research

The main aim of the study was to demonstrate the diversity and complexity of the European right-wing populism and to find out what factors might contribute to a decline in right-wing populist attitudes.

In order to gain or keep a broad perspective on right-wing populism, it would be beneficial if future research noted the diversity of right-wing populism. Its strong flexibility and adaptability are not to be underestimated. Therefore, future research must be broadly based to cover all possible attitudes and forms of expression. European cooperation is needed in order to establish functioning long-term methods, which result in a decline of right-wing populist attitudes and votes. However, the national differences of the European countries need to be considered.

It would also be beneficial to observe the various opinions of the European societies to measure how far right-wing ideologies have trickled down into the general public, in order to find helpful strategies and methods to eradicate the deeply rooted causes of right-wing populism.

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