



Utrecht University

Identity crisis or deliberate strategy?

Analysing the Europeanization of the politicized social identity of the Dutch Party for Freedom during the European debt crisis (2009-2014)

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Abstract

This study examined a paradox in the discourse of recent European radical right parties: while traditionally being strongly nationalist and rejecting of the EU, an appeal to a European ‘civilization’, including European values and heritage, seemed to be central in their discourse. Studies on radical right parties generally emphasized their nationalism and Eurosceptic viewpoints, while only a few recent studies pointed towards the appeal to a European identity by these parties, called ‘civilizationism’. This study aimed to fill this gap in the academic debate and investigated whether the social identity that the Dutch Party for Freedom politicized during the European debt crisis (2009-2014) Europeanized, by investigating their discourse towards the mass public during this period as a case study. The theoretical framework of the thesis was based upon the theory of postfunctionalism, developed by Liesbet Hooghe and Gary Marks, as well as the theory of Europeanization of identities and public spheres of Thomas Risse. The analysis showed that while there was no clear gradual trend towards the Europeanization of the social identity that the PVV politicized during this period, the PVV did alternate between a more nationalized and Europeanized identity in their discourse, adjusted to the situation and audience. Therefore, this study concludes that the Europeanization of social identity was used as a deliberate strategy by the PVV when this was beneficial, perhaps with the intention to build towards a European public sphere between radical right parties. This insight is a fruitful first step in understanding the stance of European radical right parties in our world today.

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Introduction

*“The EU is deeply harmful, it is an anti-democratic monster. I want to prevent it from becoming fatter, from continuing to breathe, from grabbing everything with its paws and from extending its tentacles into all areas of our legislation. In our glorious history, millions have died to ensure that our country remains free. Today, we are simply allowing our right to self-determination to be stolen from us.”*¹

This quote derives from Marine Le Pen, the leader of the French party *Rassemblement National* (formerly called *Front National*). In this interview with the German newspaper *Der Spiegel*, which was conducted in June 2014, she expressed her disapproval of the European Union, because she argued that the EU undermined the national sovereignty of, in this case, France. During the time of this interview, 2014, Le Pen and her party strongly defended a ‘Frexit’ and the exit of France out of the eurozone.²

In other words, the then *Front National* was strongly eurosceptic. This does not seem surprising, since the party is generally classified as a radical right-wing party with populist elements. Such parties exist across the whole of Europe and have traditionally been sceptical towards European integration and the European Union, while being strongly nationalist.³ Because these parties aim to defend the nation and its interests, they consider supra-national institutions like the EU undesirable.

However, in the same interview with *Der Spiegel*, Marine Le Pen speaks of ‘a European civilization that we all belong to’, when describing her relationship with party leaders of other right-wing populist parties in Europe. In fact, in 2019, the party abandoned its idea of Frexit and released a manifesto called ‘Manifesto for a Europe of Nations’, in which the idea of the common European civilization, to which European nation states belong, was described.⁴

This relates to a development that seems to have taken place within the ideas of several radical right parties in Europe. Recently, these parties have been appealing to a

¹ Mathieu von Rohr, “‘I Don’t Want this European Soviet Union’: Interview with Marine Le Pen”, *Spiegel International* (np 3 June 2014).

² Cécile Barbière, ‘Le Pen’s Rassemblement National revises stance towards EU and the euro’, *Euractiv.com* (np 2019) [<https://www.euractiv.com/section/eu-elections-2019/news/le-pens-rassemblement-national-makes-its-ties-to-the-eu-and-the-euro-official/>].

³ Sofia Vasilopoulou, ‘European integration and the radical right: three patterns of opposition’, in: *The Populist Radical Right: A Reader* (1st edition; London 2016).

⁴ Barbière, ‘Le Pen’s Rassemblement National revises stance towards EU and the euro’.

European identity, emphasizing the European ‘civilization’ and European values. In an article in *Foreign Policy*, Florian Bieber stated that Europe’s nationalists had become ‘internationalists’: ‘Nationalism, populism and authoritarianism are not new phenomena, but their modern proponents have made inroads across Europe partly because they have adopted a broader civilizational outlook that, ironically, centralizes the importance of European culture’.⁵ This emphasis on the existence of a European civilization, that is associated with a certain religion (Christianity) and ethnicity (the white ‘race’) and is thought to share a common history and common values, is central to the ideology and political discourse of certain recent populist radical right parties in Europe, according to Bieber.

Thus, there seems to be a paradox in the ideology of these parties. While defending the ‘nation’ and opposing European integration and the EU, the idea of ‘Europe’, as an idealized place that existed in history and is thought to be threatened nowadays, has a central position in their ideology and political discourse. The standard idea of a radical right party, as a party that strongly appeals to a certain national identity and opposes a European identity, might therefore be too blunt.

Academic debate

Anti-EU attitudes & national identity

Radical right parties have traditionally been associated with a negative attitude towards European integration and the European Union in particular. While the exact definition of a ‘radical right party’ differs among researchers, some definitions even include the anti-EU viewpoint of these parties as a defining element of radical right parties.⁶ According to Sofia Vasilopoulou, the principle of nation-state sovereignty is central to the ideology of radical right parties and the supranational character of the EU is seen as a violation of this principle.⁷ Additionally, the European Union is viewed as suffering from a ‘democratic deficit’, in which the actors with decisive power are out of reach for the population of member states.⁸

⁵ Florian Bieber, ‘How Europe’s Nationalists Became Internationalists’, *Foreign Policy* (np 30 November 2019) [<https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/11/30/how-europes-nationalists-became-internationalists/>].

⁶ Sofia Vasilopoulou, ‘The radical right and Euroscepticism’, in: *The Oxford Handbook of the radical right*, ed. J. Rydgren. (Oxford 2018); Andrej Zaslove, ‘The dark side of European politics: unmasking the radical right’, *Journal of European Integration* 26 (2004) 61–81.

⁷ Vasilopoulou, ‘The radical right and Euroscepticism’, 122.

⁸ Jürgen Habermas, ‘Why Europe needs a constitution’, in: *Developing a Constitution for Europe* (np 2004), ed. Erik Oddvar Eriksen, John Erik Fossum, Agustín Menéndez, and John Fossum.

Furthermore, many studies connect the anti-EU attitude of radical right parties with their supposed nationalist ideology, in which the opposition between the ‘insiders’, namely the nation, and the ‘outside’, which is seen as a threat, is central.⁹ This form of nationalism, which Tamir Bar-On calls ‘ethnic nationalism’, is based on the idea that there exist homogenous nations and rejects the idea of pluralism within nations.¹⁰ In this worldview, every person or institution that does not fit within the idea of the ‘nation’ is seen as a threat. According to Rogers Brubaker, radical right parties view the European Union as part of this ‘outside’, as an institution that threatens ‘our way of life’ (i.e. the life of the insiders, the nation).¹¹ Cas Mudde emphasizes this as well in his description of radical right parties: ‘Given the predominance of nativism in the ideology of the populist radical right, it comes as no surprise that most parties hold negative views on the European Union.’¹² Mudde’s concept of ‘nativism’ is similar to what Bar-On calls ‘ethnic nationalism’, namely an ideology of nationalism combined with xenophobia, in which non-native people and ideas are seen as fundamentally threatening.¹³ Other authors agree that the nationalism of radical right parties often includes exclusivist elements like xenophobia, a negative attitude towards immigration and Islamophobia, which has been called ‘new racism’ or ‘cultural racism’.¹⁴ This new form of racism emphasizes the differences between ‘heritages’ and ‘values’ of different cultures, that are regarded incompatible with each other.

Alongside nationalism, some studies emphasize the lack of a feeling of ‘European identity’ among citizens of EU member states, which would supposedly cause negative attitudes towards the EU.¹⁵ For example, according to Fligstein et al., ‘the sense of ‘Europeanness’ (never strong to begin with) has seemed to lessen. Immigration, the so-called ‘war on terror’, slow economic growth and, finally, the financial crisis have caused citizens across Europe to view their national governments as the main focus of their identities and political activity’.¹⁶ This lack of a ‘European identity’ is seen as a motivation for radical right

⁹ Rogers Brubaker, ‘Between nationalism and civilizationism: the European populist moment in comparative perspective’, *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 40 (2017) 1191–1226.

¹⁰ Tamir Bar-On, ‘The Radical Right and Nationalism’, in: *The Oxford Handbook of the Radical Right*, ed. J. Rydgren (Oxford 2018).

¹¹ Brubaker, ‘Between nationalism and civilizationism’.

¹² Cas Mudde, *Populist radical right parties in Europe* (np 2007) 159.

¹³ *Ibidem*, 19, 24.

¹⁴ Chiara De Cesari, Ivo Bosilkov and Arianna Piacentini, ‘(Why) do Eurosceptics believe in a common European heritage?’, in: *European Memory in Populism: Representations of Self and Other* (London 2019).

¹⁵ Habermas, ‘Why Europe needs a constitution’; Neil Fligstein, Alina Polyakova and Wayne Sandholtz, ‘European integration, nationalism and European identity’, *JCMS: journal of common market studies* 50 (2012) 106–122.

¹⁶ Fligstein, Polyakova and Sandholtz, ‘European integration, nationalism and European identity’, 107.

parties to oppose the EU and further European integration, in order to gain votes from the electorate.

This is not in line with a study of Sofia Vasilopoulou, who argues that some radical right parties agree upon the existence of a European identity. According to Vasilopoulou, radical right parties can have different degrees, or ‘patterns’ of opposing European integration.¹⁷ The parties that are most opposed towards European integration show a pattern of ‘rejection’. These parties are against European cooperation at a multilateral level, as well as the ‘practice’ (i.e. the current institutional framework of the EU) and the ‘future’ (i.e. integrating the EU even more) of the EU.¹⁸ Yet, they do agree upon the ‘cultural definition’ of Europe, which means that they endorse a certain European identity, with its own cultural, religious and historical bonds.

European identity

The idea of a European identity seems to play a role in the recent discourse of some radical right parties, who appeal to a pan-European civilization instead of just their ‘own’ nation. Little research has been done on this topic. One of the few studies that focuses on this trend is by Rogers Brubaker, who calls this phenomenon ‘civilizationism’.¹⁹ According to him, these parties still construct a strict opposition between insiders and outsiders, but they differentiate between broader civilizations instead of nations. Brubaker links this development to the preoccupation of these parties with Islam.²⁰ The characteristics of civilizationism, such as emphasizing the European Christian identity but ‘embracing secularism’, supporting gender equality and LGBT+ rights and defending freedom of speech, are all understood as being opposed to Islam, is his argument.²¹ Yet, Brubaker does not claim that these parties are not nationalist: ‘The populist parties I have been discussing are, of course, nationalist. But they are at the same time civilizationist.’²²

Another study, by Chiari De Cesari, Ivo Bosilkov and Arianna Piacentini, investigates the so-called ‘paradox of Eurosceptic populists critical of the European Union mobilizing ideas of European values, heritage and civilization’ as well.²³ They interviewed eighty populist parties’ supporters across Europe and concluded that while most respondents denied

¹⁷ Vasilopoulou, ‘European integration and the radical right: three patterns of opposition’.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, 127–128.

¹⁹ Brubaker, ‘Between nationalism and civilizationism’.

²⁰ *Ibidem*, 1193–1194.

²¹ *Ibidem*, 1194.

²² *Ibidem*, 1211.

²³ De Cesari, Bosilkov and Piacentini, ‘(Why) do Eurosceptics believe in a common European heritage?’, 26.

the existence of a single European culture, their narrative was based on ‘civilizational Europeanism’, in which the common heritage and values of European nations were emphasized. In other words, the study concludes that populist (of which radical right parties) parties and their supporters both have a sense of nationalism, as well as an emphasis on the European civilization and that these can coexist.

Thus, it seems as though certain European radical right parties have shifted towards a more European outlook. Instead of only having a nationalist ideology, they appeal to a civilizational, European identity as well. Thomas Risse, whose work does not focus on radical right parties in particular, but on national and European identities in general, uses the term ‘Europeanization of identities’. His central argument is that a European identity should not be viewed as a separate identity, ‘above’ national identities, but as intertwined with them. Thus, national identities can ‘Europeanize’, meaning that the extent to which references to Europe are incorporated in national identities increases. When applying this to the appeal to a broader European civilization of radical right parties, the question could be asked whether the national identity that these parties put forward has Europeanized.

This ‘Europeanization’ also seems to be reflected in increased transnational cooperation between radical right parties of different European countries.²⁴ For example, in 2017, various political leaders of European radical right parties gathered on a conference in Koblenz, in which they announced a ‘patriotic spring’ in Europe. Moreover, several of these parties have been united in political groups in the European Parliament: the group *Europe of Nations and Freedom* (2015-2019) and the recent group *Identity and Democracy* (2019). These groups consisted not only of the *Front National* (or *Rassemblement National*), but among others of the Dutch *Partij voor de Vrijheid*, the Belgian *Vlaams Belang* and the Austrian *Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs*.

Thus, there seems to exist a trend in which radical right parties across Europe increasingly appeal to the idea of a European civilization, including a certain European identity, and furthermore, in which radical right parties from different European countries increasingly reach out to each other to spread their message and cooperate within the institutions of the European Union. However, both in the academic literature, as well as in the public debate, this trend seems to go largely unnoticed.

²⁴ Blake Stewart, ‘The Rise of Far-Right Civilizationism’, *Critical Sociology* (2020).

Investigating this topic is at the heart of our understanding of the political landscape of the past twenty years, as well as the future. Instead of a growing polarisation between the pro-Europe and anti-Europe groups, caused by several crises of the European Union, such as the European debt crisis and the Schengencrisis, which for example Brubaker points out, there might just be two alternative visions on ‘Europe’. In this case, radical right parties are not anti-Europe, but just envisioning a different Europe. This could mean that the conventional political classifications and analyses among researchers will not suffice anymore.

This topic has also grown in importance the recent years, because of the growing impact that radical right parties have on both domestic politics as well as in the European Parliament. The data base ‘The PopuList’, that offers an overview of populist, far right, far left and Eurosceptic parties in Europe since 1989, shows that the share of votes of far-right and far-right populist parties in 31 European countries has increased from about 5 percent in 2000, 9 percent in 2010 to 16 percent in 2020.²⁵ As stated before, several radical right parties also gathered on a conference in 2017 and united themselves in the groups *Europe of Nations and Freedom* (2015-2019) and *Identity and Democracy* (2019). However, media coverage and analyses of, for example, the Koblenz conference mainly emphasized the nationalist ideology of these parties. For example, in the *Financial Times*, politics professor Kai Arzheimer, stated that ‘[...] each of these parties is really mostly focused on its national interests. There isn’t much cross-border solidarity between them’.²⁶ This shows that the European ‘trend’ of these parties is often ignored or unnoticed. There might be a unnoticed development towards a European ‘public sphere’ among radical right parties, who are concerned with the same issues and identify with the same definition of Europe and contrary to Arzheimer’s statement, have large solidarity with each other. With a growing share of seats in the European Parliament and in national parliaments, this shift will likely have a significant impact on the European Union. Therefore it is important to get a nuanced and up-to-date understanding of the social identities that are mobilized by radial right parties in national and European debates.

Theory and concepts

This thesis will use the postfunctionalist theory of European integration, developed by Liesbeth Hooghe and Gary Marks, combined with the theory of Europeanization of identities

²⁵ M. Rooduijn et al., ‘Shares of populist, far-right and far-left parties votes in European countries weighted by population size’, *The PopuList: An Overview of Populist, Far Right, Far Left and Eurosceptic Parties in Europe*. (np 2019) [www.popu-list.org.]. NB: The votes are weighted by the population size of the examined countries.

²⁶ Guy Chazan, ‘Europe’s rightwing populists proclaim ‘patriotic spring’’, *Financial Times* (Koblenz 22 January 2017).

and public spheres of Thomas Risse, as its guiding theoretical framework.²⁷ Both theories will be discussed briefly in this section, while Chapter 1 provides a more extensive theoretical framework and explanation of these theories.

The postfunctionalist theory of European integration seeks to explain regional integration, in this case European integration, by analysing what key actors, namely domestic political parties, strive for and whether they decide to bring certain issues to the ‘arena’ of the mass public.²⁸ Hooghe and Marks argue that since the 1990s, a shift towards the mass public has taken place regarding European integration. Whereas before 1991, there was a period of ‘permissive consensus’, in which the decision making took place in the ‘interest group arena’ by party elites, there is now (since the 1990s) a period of ‘constraining dissensus’, in which European issues have become salient and relevant to the mass public (and domestic politics) and elites have to take this into account.

This shift of European ‘issues’ by political parties towards the mass public arena is what Hooghe and Marks call ‘politicization’. They argue that political conflict is central to the process of European integration and political conflict is characterized by processes of politicization. The model of politicization assumes that political parties, as key actors, interact strategically and try to optimize their electoral success. When it is potentially electorally advantageous to bring a certain issue to the mass public, parties will therefore do so. When an issue is brought to the mass ‘arena’, Hooghe and Marks argue that the political conflict will focus on ‘identity’, instead of only economic distributional logic. This means that in processes of politicization, parties try to appeal to a certain group of people, who can relate to the identity that the party mobilizes and will therefore support the party. This derives from the nature of governance, which is not only a means to achieve collective (economic) benefits, but also an ‘expression of community’.²⁹ According to Hooghe and Marks, identities are always politically constructed: parties frame the identity in a certain way. For example, a national identity can be ‘exclusive’ or ‘inclusive’, which determines whether it can coexist with a sense of a supranational identity, such as a European identity.

As the model assumes that parties mobilize identities in order to gain political power, parties will politicize European issues, when European ‘issues’ become important to the

²⁷ Liesbet Hooghe and Gary Marks, ‘A postfunctionalist theory of European integration: From permissive consensus to constraining dissensus’, *British journal of political science* 39 (2009) 1–23.

²⁸ *Ibidem*.

²⁹ *Ibidem*, 2.

(domestic) public. Applying this model to the radical right parties in Europe, it can be asked whether the identity that radical right parties politicize, has shifted towards a more European identity. It could be the case that in certain times, it is beneficial for these parties to mobilize a strong national identity, while in other times, European elements of identity resonate more with the public.

In order to analyse this development in the politicization of identity of radical right parties, this thesis will use the concept of ‘Europeanization’ of identities that Thomas Risse developed.³⁰ This concept, that does not view national and European identities as separate, but as intertwined, is useful to analyse the processes of politicization. According to Risse, national identities can sometimes increasingly include European elements, which is what Risse calls the ‘Europeanization of national identities’. Instead of analysing whether a party appeals to either a national identity or a European identity, this approach allows for nuances. Using this theoretical concept, we can investigate the development within the identities that radical right parties mobilize. When the references to Europe increase, the national identity Europeanizes, which could also work the other way around.

According to Risse, social identities (i.e. group identities) have a specific ‘substantive content’, which defines what it is that is seen as characteristic for this social group. Within the substantive content of a social identity, Risse defines two concepts: the ‘differentia specifica’ and the ‘community boundaries’. By the ‘differentia specifica’, the history, norms and values and purposes that are seen as common to the members of the social group are meant.³¹ The ‘community boundaries’ define who is described as belonging to the group and who is not.

Research question and subquestions

In short, this thesis seeks to investigate a development within the social identities that European radical right parties politicized, namely whether the substantive content of the social identity Europeanizes over time. As a case study to research this possible larger trend, the discourse of the Dutch Party for Freedom at the time of the European debt crisis (2009-2014) will be examined. Thus, the thesis aims to answer the main research question:

‘To what extent did the social identity that the Dutch Party for Freedom politicized during the European debt crisis (2009-2014) Europeanize?’

³⁰ Thomas Risse, *A community of Europeans?: transnational identities and public spheres* (np 2010).

³¹ *Ibidem*, 36.

To answer the main research question, the analysis will focus on two subsidiary questions. These questions are based on the two categories of the ‘substantive content’ of social identities that Risse describes. This leads to the first subquestion: ‘To what extent did the ‘differentia specifica’ of the social identity that the Party for Freedom politicized during the European debt crisis (2009-2014) Europeanize?’ and the second subquestion: ‘To what extent did the definition of the community boundaries of the social identity that the Party for Freedom politicized during the European debt crisis (2009-2014) Europeanize?’.

Methodology

As stated before, this thesis seeks to investigate whether the social identity that was politicized by radical right parties in Europe, Europeanized in recent years. This underexamined field of study comprises many different radical right parties in Europe, during several years. However, considering the limited size of this thesis, the analysis of this thesis will focus on one case study, as a first step in research on this topic of study. The case study that will be examined is the Dutch Party for Freedom, *Partij voor de Vrijheid* (PVV), during the period of the European debt crisis (2009-2014).

The Dutch party PVV was founded in 2006 by Geert Wilders, a former politician of the Dutch liberal party VVD. The party - especially its leader Wilders- is known for a very critical attitude towards immigration and Islam and is generally grouped under the family of radical right parties. Since its foundation in 2006, the PVV has been an important actor in the Dutch party landscape. In 2006, the party already won nine seats in parliament and in 2010, it became the third party of The Netherlands. Between 2010 and 2012, the PVV was ‘part’ of the government coalition; while the PVV did not officially take seat in the cabinet, it was agreed that the party would support the (minority) cabinet. After 2012, the party was never part of the coalition again, but still remained a substantive party within the parliament up until the present. Thus, unlike several other European radical right parties, the PVV has been an ‘established’ party for a period of almost fifteen years, which means that the party has produced enough discourse to investigate a development in the social identity that they politicized over the years. Furthermore, the literature on the recent appeals to a European identity by radical right parties, such as Brubaker’s article on ‘civilizationism’, argue that this development is especially visible in Northern and Western Europe.³² The PVV, as an

³² Brubaker, ‘Between nationalism and civilizationism’; De Cesari, Bosilkov en Piacentini, ‘(Why) do Eurosceptics believe in a common European heritage?’; Bieber, ‘How Europe’s Nationalists Became Internationalists’.

established radical right party in The Netherlands, therefore seems a suitable case study for this thesis.

The time period that this thesis investigates is the European debt crisis. This crisis, in which several eurozone states needed loans and rescue packages to save their economy and to prevent a total crisis of the Euro, is defined here as the period from 2009 up until 2014. In 2009, the Greek government disclosed that its budget deficits were much larger than claimed before, which is seen as the start of the crisis. In the following years, the eurozone countries and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) came up with collective rescue packages and financial measures to combat the crisis in several countries. By 2014, several states, such as Ireland, Spain and Portugal, were able to exit their rescue programme. While Greece was not able to exit its programme yet and even received a third package in 2015, it was able to borrow money on the markets again in 2014, which indicated that the trust in the country's financial situation was increasing. The year 2014 will therefore be considered the ending point of the period of analysis. According to theories on social identities, social identities are especially important in times of crises, which is when they become salient and are prone to change.³³ Moreover, the measures that were taken during the crisis, imposed a large amount of financial solidarity upon the eurozone countries, including The Netherlands. It can be expected that during such a crisis, European issues became important to the public, upon which the PVV needed to act strategically. Frank Schimmelfennig, for example, argues that the European debt crisis caused 'unprecedented politicization of European integration'.³⁴ It can then be examined whether the PVV chose to politicize a strong national identity or also incorporated European elements into this identity. Thus, the thesis not so much aims to investigate the PVV's viewpoints on the European debt crisis itself, but to investigate the general discourse of the PVV within the context of this crisis, since it is expected that this context caused a strong politicization of social identities.

To answer the main research question and the subquestions, the thesis will use primary sources from the discourse of the PVV at the time of the European debt crisis. As the theoretical framework of the thesis assumes that parties, in this case the PVV, actively politicize a certain social identity to gain electoral success, hereby framing this identity in certain ways in their discourse, the thesis will principally focus on sources authored by the

³³ Risse, *A community of Europeans?*, 30–33.

³⁴ Frank Schimmelfennig, 'European integration in the euro crisis: The limits of postfunctionalism', *Journal of European Integration* 36 (2014) 321–337.

PVV. Sources that are not written or published by the party itself, are not seen as part of the party's strategy and will not give a representation of the identity that the party itself seeks to mobilize. Furthermore, the focus of the analysis lies on sources that are especially meant to reach the public (i.e. the electorate), since the process of politicization means that an issue is brought to the mass public arena.³⁵ These are for example election programmes, interviews, opinion pieces and speeches outside of parliament. The sources are retrieved from the archive of the website of the PVV and are selected on the basis of these two criteria. While these specific sources will not be representative of all of the viewpoints and decisions of the PVV during this period, they are useful to investigate the social identity that was politicized towards the potential electorate in particular. As stated before, the analysis of these sources will focus on the 'differentia specifica' and the 'community boundaries' that are visible in the sources, corresponding with the two subquestions of the thesis.

The remaining of this thesis will first explain the theoretical framework of the thesis, built on the theories of Hooghe and Marks and Risse, in Chapter 1. This is followed by Chapter 2, in which the analysis of the discourse of the PVV during the European debt crisis is set out. Lastly, the thesis will end with a conclusion, in which the research question will be answered and the contribution of this thesis to the academic debate will be discussed.

³⁵ Hooghe and Marks, 'A postfunctionalist theory of European integration'.

Chapter I. Theoretical framework

This thesis combines the postfunctionalist theory of European integration of Liesbeth Hooghe and Gary Marks, with the work of Thomas Risse on the ‘Europeanization of identities and public spheres’ to form the main theoretical model for the analysis. This chapter will first explain the theory of Hooghe and Marks, after which Risse’s theory on both the Europeanization of identities, as well as the Europeanization of public spheres will be discussed. Lastly, the specific theoretical framework of the thesis, which combines concepts from both theories, will be explained.

I.1 The postfunctionalist theory of European Integration

The first theory is the ‘postfunctionalist theory of European integration’ that was developed by Liesbeth Hooghe and Gary Marks and was set out in their article ‘A Postfunctionalist Theory of European Integration: From Permissive Consensus to Constraining Dissensus’.³⁶ As the name ‘postfunctionalist’ indicates, their theory is a variation on the theory of functionalism. Both functionalism and postfunctionalism are used to explain the emergence of regional integration, European integration in particular.

The theory of functionalism starts with the assumption of a mismatch between the current authority structures at a time and efficiency.³⁷ For example, when economic institutions exist and operate at the national level, while states would benefit from cooperating and organizing economic policies through supra-national institutions, the theory argues that there is a mismatch between the scale of human problems and the scale on which institutions to solve those problems exist. Therefore, there is ‘functional pressure’, which means that there is a pressure to integrate to a higher level of governance and create more efficient authority structures. In the case of the example, economic actors, such as companies, would put pressure on national governments to integrate their economic policies with other states. The theory then argues that integration in one functional area, such as economic integration, leads to ‘positive spillover’, which means that the region will integrate in other areas (such as political institutions) as well. There will also be a shift in the loyalty of political actors towards the new center, which will lead to more integration.³⁸ In short, functionalism explains regional integration as a self-reinforcing process, which is driven by the need for efficient authority structures.

³⁶ Liesbet Hooghe and Gary Marks, ‘A postfunctionalist theory of European integration: From permissive consensus to constraining dissensus’, *British journal of political science* 39 (2009) 1–23.

³⁷ *Ibidem*.

³⁸ Ernst Haas, *The Uniting of Europe: Political, Social and Economic Forces 1950-1957* (Stanford 1958).

The postfunctionalist theory of Hooghe and Marks goes ‘post’ functionalism, because it does endorse the mismatch between authority structures and efficiency, yet it questions the assumption that this would necessarily lead to efficient integrated institutions. According to Hooghe and Marks, the process towards integration is characterized by political conflict, which they argue ‘makes all the difference’.³⁹ This political conflict is characterized by processes of ‘politicization’, which is the process of bringing an issue to the political arena, that is, to the mass public. Politicization makes an issue the subject of the public debate.⁴⁰

Hooghe and Marks created a model of politicization as part of the postfunctionalist theory of European integration.⁴¹ In this model, the central variable is the choice of political parties to either bring an issue solely to the ‘interest group arena’ or to the ‘mass arena’, of which the latter means that the issue is politicized. Political parties form the key actors in this model and it is assumed that these parties will act strategically: they will politicize an issue when they deem this (electorally) beneficial for them. The start of the model is the mismatch between functional efficiency and the existing authority structures, which is also the starting point of functionalism. Hooghe and Marks call this the ‘reform impetus’: there is functional pressure to reform the authority structures. Both interest groups and public opinion take a stance towards this impetus, to which political parties respond and create a party strategy. Political parties, as the key actors in this model, thus ‘create an issue’. Consequently, through ‘arena rules’, which are the formal rules regarding the arena choice (such as the possibility of a referendum), political parties choose the arena to which they bring the issue. By ‘arena’, Hooghe and Marks mean the space in which the decision making takes place. As stated before, they can choose to politicize the issue by bringing it to the mass public or containing it in the interest group arena. Finally, according to Hooghe and Marks, the arena choice determines the ‘conflict structure’ on the issue. When the issue stays within the interest group arena, they argue that the conflict will centre around (economic) distributions, whereas when the issue is politicized, the conflict can be structured by either this distributional logic or the logic of identity.

This ‘identity logic’ is central to postfunctionalism.⁴² According to Hooghe and Marks, the political conflict surrounding the politicization of European integration is largely

³⁹ Hooghe and Marks, ‘A postfunctionalist theory of European integration’, 2.

⁴⁰ Pieter De Wilde and Michael Zürn, ‘Can the politicization of European integration be reversed?’, *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies* 50 (2012) 137–153.

⁴¹ Hooghe and Marks, ‘A postfunctionalist theory of European integration’, 8–9.

⁴² *Ibidem*, 2.

about identity. As regional integration concerns multilevel governance, including the national and supra-national level, it is decisive with which of these levels the public identifies. Hooghe and Marks argue that this derives from the ‘nature of governance’, meaning that governance is not only functional (with the purpose of achieving collective benefits by coordination), but also the ‘expression of a community’.⁴³ An individual can identify with a national community or with a larger, European community or even with both. The latter relates to what Hooghe and Marks call ‘exclusive’ and ‘inclusive’ territorial (mostly national) identities.⁴⁴ An individual that has an exclusive national identity, will not be able to identify with a larger territorial identity (such as a European identity) besides this, because these two identities are seen as incompatible. This is in contrast with inclusive national identities, which means that an individual can identify with the national community, yet with a larger community at the same time.

Thus, the postfunctionalist theory of European integration focuses on the political conflict that is part of the process of regional integration. The theory uses the model of politicization to describe this conflict and argues that once an issue is politicized, the conflict around this issue is often structured by a logic of identity. The model of politicization and the importance of identity in this model are especially relevant for the theoretical framework of this thesis.

I.2 Risse’s theory of the Europeanization of identities

In his book ‘A community of Europeans?: Transnational identities and public spheres’, Thomas Risse presents his theory of the ‘Europeanization’ of both national identities and public spheres.⁴⁵ His central argument rejects the claim that there does not exist a European community and a European communicative space. According to Risse, we should not view European identity as separate and ‘above’ national identity and we should not view a European public sphere as a communicative space ‘above’ the national public sphere, but instead see them as intertwined: Europe and the EU become integrated into the national identities and national public spheres.⁴⁶ This first section will explain his theory of the Europeanization of identities.

⁴³ Ibidem.

⁴⁴ Ibidem, 13.

⁴⁵ Risse, *A community of Europeans?*

⁴⁶ Ibidem, 5.

Risse uses a social constructivist notion of identity, meaning that identity is viewed as a social construct.⁴⁷ A social identity, a concept derived from social psychology, is not innate and does not exist for an individual separately from other humans, but it exists for the individual in relation to certain social groups. Such a social identity is also collectively shared: all members of the group are aware of their belonging to that group and thus, this social identity. In the case of national and European identities, an important concept is the ‘imagined community’.⁴⁸ Imagined communities are social groups to which an individual belongs, yet this individual does not know every member of the group personally. This community should be ‘real’ in the mind of its members, in order to be influential for their behaviour. The nation is a good example of such an imagined community.

An individual can have multiple social identities.⁴⁹ For example, an individual could identify with both a national (imagined) community and a European (imagined) community. What is important for Risse’s argument of the Europeanization of identities, is the way how multiple identities are connected. Two contrasting conceptualizations about the relation between multiple identities are the ‘nested’ or ‘onion’ model and the ‘blended’ or ‘marble cake’ model. The first conceptualization, the nested model, uses different ‘layers’ of identities. Every person that is part of a smaller community is also part of a larger community: for example, the core social group could be the family, who are part of a local community, who are in turn part of a national community. However, what is problematic to this model according to Risse, is that the model assumes a hierarchy in the multiple identities, with identities ranging from core to periphery. This is how scholars have generally thought about the relation between national and European identity: someone has a national identity in the first place and a European identity on top of that. The other model, the blended model, conceptualizes multiple identities as intertwined. National and European components of the identity are sometimes difficult to distinguish from each other, which is why Risse uses this model.

Instead of viewing national and European identities as separate, Risse thus argues that national identities can become ‘more’ European. This Europeanization of identities occurs when the content of a social identity, in this case a national identity, includes more references to Europe or the EU.⁵⁰ For example, when the national identity is thought to include European

⁴⁷ Ibidem, 20–23.

⁴⁸ Ibidem, 22–23.

⁴⁹ Ibidem, 23–25.

⁵⁰ Ibidem, 9.

historical events, such as European wars or the creation of the European Union, the national identity includes European elements. When these elements are increasingly visible in the expression of national identities, the Europeanization of identities occurs.

Relating to that, besides giving the definition of a social identity and the way multiple social identities can be related to each other, Risse thus argues that a social identity has a ‘specific substantive content’.⁵¹ The substantive content of a social identity defines exactly what it is that is seen as characteristic for this social group. Risse defines two categories within the substantive content of a social identity. The first category defines the ‘differentia specifica’ of the identity, meaning the history, norms and values and purposes that are seen as common to the members of the social group.⁵² Secondly, the substantive content is defined by the boundaries of the community, which defines who belongs to the social group and who does not. The substantive ‘content’ of the social identities that radical right parties politicize are is what this thesis seeks to investigate. It can therefore be examined what these parties define as the ‘differentia specifica’ of the identity that they construct in their discourse: for example, do they describe certain values and if so, are these values seen as characteristic for the nation or for ‘Europeans’? It can also be investigated how these parties define the boundaries of the ‘in-group’ and ‘out-group’. For example, do they juxtapose the nation to other nations or do they construct an opposition between Europe and other parts of the world?

The social constructivist notion of social identities assumes that identities can change. This process of identity change can also be actively pursued by political actors. This is what Risse calls ‘persuasion’.⁵³ This thesis assumes that radical right parties actively try to invoke certain identities as part of their strategy as well.

1.3 Europeanization of public spheres

Besides the Europeanization of national identities, a central part of Risse’s argument and book focuses on the Europeanization of public spheres. There has been an extensive academic debate on the existence or non-existence of a ‘European public sphere’. The concept of a ‘public sphere’ originates from the work of Jürgen Habermas, who defines the public sphere as a space of social life in which public opinion can be formed.⁵⁴ In this line of thought, Risse speaks of public spheres as communicative spaces, in which people discuss topics that are of

⁵¹ Ibidem, 25.

⁵² Ibidem, 36.

⁵³ Ibidem, 32.

⁵⁴ Jürgen Habermas, ‘The Public Sphere: An Encyclopedia Article’, in: *Media and Cultural Studies: Keywords*, ed. Meenakshi Gigi Durham, Douglas M. Kellner (np 2006).

their common concern.⁵⁵ Previous literature on the ‘European public sphere’ has discussed whether such a common communicative space exists for Europe. According to Risse, the conventional view argues that a European public sphere does not exist, because Europe does not have a common language and European-wide media. However, Risse argues that this view is flawed: we should not view a European public sphere as a separate public sphere, above national public spheres, but we should investigate whether common European issues become incorporated into national public spheres.⁵⁶ Thus, similarly to his argument on the Europeanization of national identities, Risse speaks of the Europeanization of public spheres. This Europeanization of public spheres has especially been ongoing since the end of the Cold War, according to Risse, for example in the early 2000s, when public referenda decided on a possible European constitution.

This thesis focuses on social identities, namely those that radical right parties mobilize and whether these identities Europeanize, rather than the discussion on the European public sphere or Risse’s idea of the Europeanization of public spheres. However, the concept of public spheres is important for a complete understanding of Risse’s theoretical model and thus, the theoretical model of this thesis. After all, social identities and public spheres are related to each other: social identities are constructed and contested in discourse and this discourse is part of a communicative space, namely a public sphere. When this discourse increasingly includes the politicization of European affairs, in this case a European identity, public spheres Europeanize as well.

1.4 The combined model

Risse’s theory of the Europeanization of identities fits well into the postfunctionalist theory of Hooghe and Marks. In the theoretical model of this thesis, the theoretical concepts of both theories are combined.

First of all, the theories of Hooghe and Marks and Risse are general theories about politicization and the role of political parties and about the Europeanization of identities and public spheres in general, that do not concern radical right parties in particular. However, the concept of politicization of Hooghe and Marks and the idea of Europeanization of identities fit the academic debate on radical right parties well. The academic debate to which this thesis aims to contribute, focuses on the social identities that radical right parties appeal to and whether these are exclusively nationalist, broader European or an intertwined version with

⁵⁵ Risse, *A community of Europeans?*, 107.

⁵⁶ Risse, *A community of Europeans?*

both nationalist and European elements. This thesis will therefore use the concepts of the general theories that were discussed before and apply these to radical right parties in particular.

In Figure 1 (on the following page), the theoretical model of the thesis is visualized. The key actor in this model is the political party (i.e. the Party for Freedom in the case of this thesis). Like the postfunctional theory of Hooghe and Marks, it is assumed that this party acts strategically and politicizes certain issues in order to gain electorally and thereby gain power. More specifically, it is assumed that the party politicizes a certain social identity, based on Hooghe and Marks' claim that political conflict often centres around identity. The social identity is politicized in the discourse of the party, which forms the object of study for this research. Based on Risse, the model distinguishes two parts of the content of this social identity, which are the 'differentia specifica', i.e. the common history, norms and values and purposes that the social identity is thought to entail and the 'community boundaries', that define who is thought to belong to the social group and who is not. These two concepts are the focus of the subquestions of this thesis. Finally, it is investigated whether these differentia specifica and community boundaries (and therefore the social identity of radical right parties) have Europeanized. Visualized in grey is the public sphere, of which the discourse is part and which Risse considers to be Europeanized as well. However, this element will not be researched in this thesis.

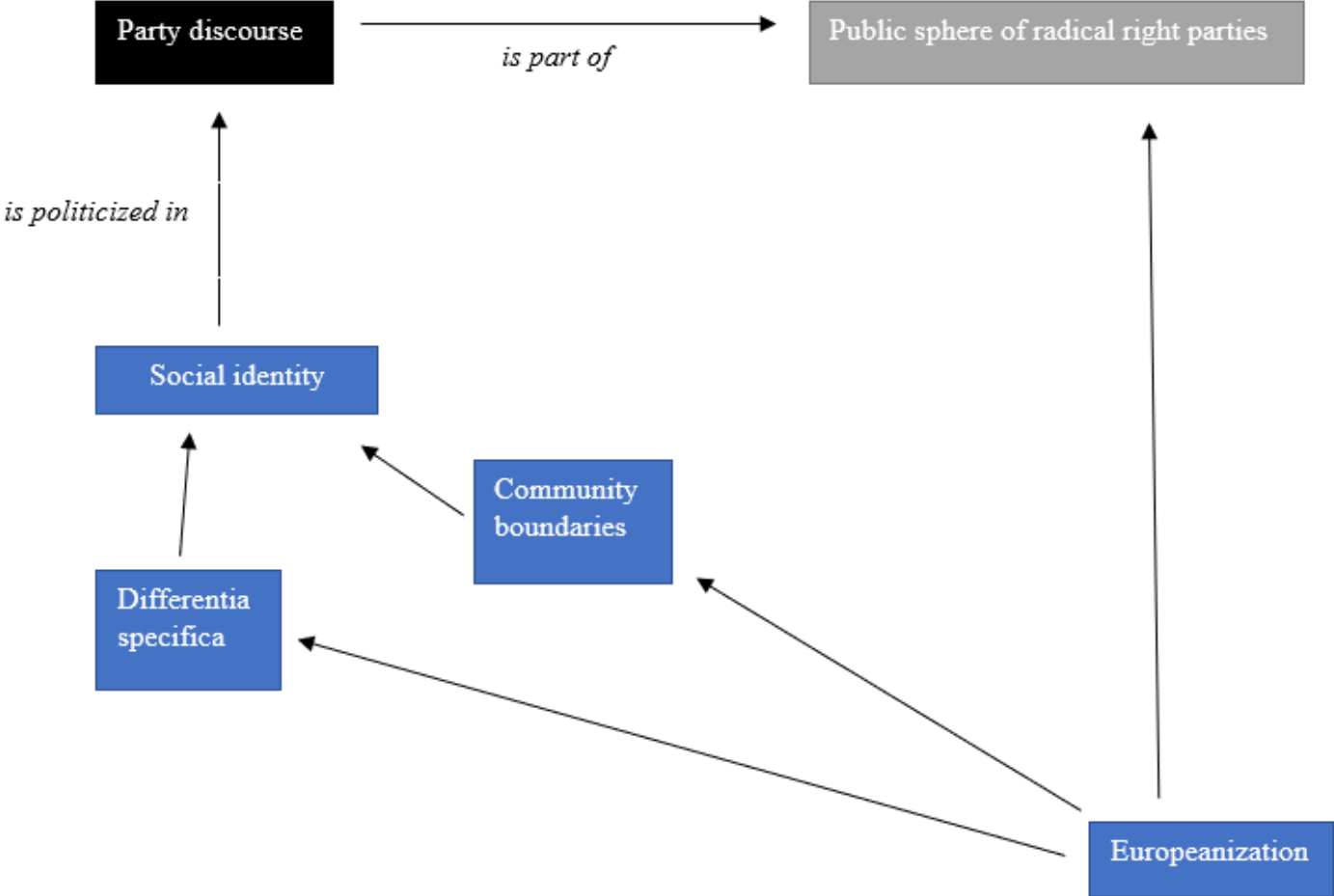


Figure 1. The theoretical framework of this thesis.

Chapter 2. Analysis: the PVV's discourse during the European debt crisis

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the discourse of the *Partij voor de Vrijheid* (PVV) at the time of the European debt crisis is analysed. As explained in the introduction, this thesis considers this period to have started in 2009 and ended in 2014. The analysis of this chapter will therefore use sources that originate from the period of 2009 until the start of 2014.

In October 2009, Greece announced that it had presented false and far too positive information about its budget deficits in the past and that in fact, its budget deficits were much higher than the other eurozone member states had known. Following this disclosure, the trust in Greece on the financial markets decreased and the country eventually became unable to borrow from the markets. It was evident that the country needed help in order to prevent its bankruptcy. However, Greece's crisis was not an isolated national problem, but it affected the other eurozone states as well, since many of these countries had already built up high public debts and budget deficits, as a result of the credit crisis that started in 2007. It became clear that the financial situation in several member states besides Greece, such as Ireland, Spain, Portugal and Italy, became unsustainable and that the stability of the euro was in danger. Over the course of the crisis, the EU member states, together with the European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund, implemented several financial support measures to combat the crisis, such as bailout programmes for Greece, Ireland and Portugal and rescue packages for Spain and Cyprus.

The European debt crisis forms an interesting context for analysing the discourse of radical-right parties in Europe (more specifically, the eurozone). This was pre-eminently a European crisis, in which collective European policies had to be developed, which required changes in domestic policies as well. In particular, the eurozone states had to contribute financially to the European loans for the countries in need. This analysis focuses on the case study of the Dutch party PVV. The Netherlands belonged to the group of countries who did not benefit from receiving a loan themselves, but had to contribute to the European loans to other eurozone countries. This will likely have had influence on the domestic politics of the country and on the viewpoints of a radical right party like the PVV. It can be expected that the crisis raised questions about solidarity; with either the nation or the EU member states. According to Frank Schimmelfennig, the European debt crisis caused 'unprecedented

politicization of European integration'.⁵⁷ Connecting this with Hooghe & Marks' idea that politicization is characterized by conflicts over identities and Risse's claim that social identities especially become salient in times of crisis, it can be expected that the discourse of the PVV at the time of the European debt crisis will strongly show the politicization of social identities.⁵⁸

2.2 Chronology

This chapter will be structured chronologically, based on major policy developments in the crisis. The analysis will therefore consist of four sections. The first section covers the period of the year 2009 up until May 2010. During this period, especially since the end of 2009, the crisis had already started. Several European countries suffered from a high public debt and it became clear that the financial situation of Greece, but also of other countries, was worrisome. In January and February of 2010, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) expressed its concerns about the situation and the need for reforms.⁵⁹ However, there was no centralized policy solution set up yet. The first section covers this first phase of the crisis.

The second section starts in May 2010, when a rescue plan was created to support Greece, in order to prevent a crisis of multiple eurozone countries and eventually, a crisis of the euro itself. Both the IMF and the eurozone countries decided to grant loans to Greece; the eurozone countries together granted a loan of 80 billion euros and the IMF granted 30 billion euros.⁶⁰ Besides this measure, the European Financial Stability Facility (EFSF) and the European Financial Stabilisation Mechanism (EFSM) were created. The EFSF was a special temporary entity that borrowed money on the global financial markets and then lent this to eurozone countries in need. Because this institution of the EU was considered trustworthy (i.e., it was backed by guarantees of the eurozone states), it was possible to grant lower interest loans than if states had to borrow on the global markets directly. In theory, the EFSF could guarantee up to 440 billion euros.⁶¹ In exchange for such a loan, a state would have to provide a plan of measures to combat its crisis. Contrary to the EFSF, the EFSM was a direct part of the European Commission (i.e., of all EU member states) and could provide 60 billion

⁵⁷ Schimmelfennig, 'European integration in the euro crisis'.

⁵⁸ Hooghe and Marks, 'A postfunctionalist theory of European integration'; Risse, *A community of Europeans?*

⁵⁹ International Monetary Fund, *Financial System Stabilized, but Exit, Reform, and Fiscal Challenges Lie Ahead*. Global Financial Stability Report: Market Update (np January 2010); International Monetary Fund, *Strategies for Fiscal Consolidation in the Post-Crisis World* (np February 2010).

⁶⁰ Europa Nu, 'De Griekse crisis', *Europa Nu* [https://www.europa-nu.nl/id/viccj7o2p7ug/de_griekse_crisis]; Rijksoverheid, 'Financiële steun aan noodlijdende landen in Europa', *Rijksoverheid* [<https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/onderwerpen/kredietcrisis/financiele-steun-aan-noodlijdende-landen-in-europa>].

⁶¹ Europa Nu, 'Europese Faciliteit voor financiële stabiliteit (EFSF)', *Europa Nu* [https://www.europa-nu.nl/id/vigv4m9mu0/europese_faciliteit_voor_financiele].

euros.⁶² The EFSF and EFSM were supposed to provide financial assistance to eurozone countries in trouble in the future. In November 2010, Ireland called on the IMF, EFSF and EFSM to receive a loan and in May 2011, Portugal followed.⁶³ Both countries were provided the loans.

The third section starts in July 2011, when the leaders of the eurozone countries decided that Greece would be provided a second rescue package, including a loan of the EFSF of 109 billion euros and an extension of the first loans.⁶⁴ This is treated as a separate phase of the crisis in this analysis, as the decision to support Greece for the second time, is thought to have asked an even higher amount of financial solidarity from the eurozone countries than the initial rescue plan. The section ends in September 2012, when a new institution came into place.

This new institution, the European Stability Mechanism, which was operative from October 8th 2012 onwards, was a permanent financial emergency fund, that replaced the temporary EFSF and EFSM. The EFSF and EFSM continued to handle the previously granted loans to Greece, Ireland and Portugal, but stopped being available to call upon new loans from July 2013 onwards. The new ESM granted emergency loans to Spain (2012) and Cyprus (2013), as well as a third package to Greece (2015).⁶⁵ The last section covers the period of September 2012 up until the start of 2014, as the ‘real’ crisis is thought to end in 2014.

Thus, the analysis of this chapter will be structured along four phases of the European debt crisis, which are summarized in Table 1. Besides providing a chronological framework, it is interesting to investigate whether the developments in the policies to combat the European debt crisis influenced the discourse of the examined party, the PVV, at the time. The crisis imposed financial solidarity upon The Netherlands, towards the other eurozone countries. While this thesis does not focus on the PVV’s ideas on the measures that were taken, the developments within the crisis and the increasing financial solidarity could have resulted in either a Europeanization of national identity in the general discourse of the PVV or the opposite, a stronger national identity and a turn away from Europe.

⁶² Europa Nu, ‘Europees financieel stabilisatiemechanisme (EFSM)’, *Europa Nu* [https://www.europa-nu.nl/id/vjvmjkc867tc/europees_financieel].

⁶³ Rijksoverheid, ‘Financiële steun aan noodlijdende landen in Europa’.

⁶⁴ Europa Nu, ‘De Griekse crisis’.

⁶⁵ Rijksoverheid, ‘Financiële steun aan noodlijdende landen in Europa’.

| | | |
|------------------|-------------------------------|--|
| Section 1 | January 2009 – May 2010 | Start of crisis |
| Section 2 | May 2010 – July 2011 | First package for Greece; EFSF and EFSM |
| Section 3 | July 2011 – September 2012 | Second package for Greece through EFSF |
| Section 4 | September 2012 – January 2014 | ESM |

Table 1. *The four sections of the analysis, based on phases in the European debt crisis.*

The question is whether the ‘*differentia specifica*’ (i.e., the common history, values and norms that the party appeals to) and the ‘community boundaries’ of the social identity that the PVV politicized in the sources looks like: did these Europeanize? The analysis will focus on both the *differentia specifica* and the community boundaries that the sources put forward, corresponding with the subquestions of this thesis.

2.3 January 2009 – May 2010

In 2009, the Party for Freedom (*Partij voor de Vrijheid*; PVV) was a relatively new party. Its leader, politician Geert Wilders, had founded the party in 2006, after he had quit the liberal People’s Party for Freedom and Democracy (*Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie*; VVD). During his time at the VVD, Wilders had been one of the more right-wing members, for example by advocating stricter crime penalties and a more restrictive immigration policy.⁶⁶ Furthermore, he had been sharply criticizing Islam. In 2004, Wilders’ disagreement with some of the VVD’s viewpoints and the party’s direction intensified and he decided to quit the VVD and start his own political movement. In 2006, Wilders’ ‘group’ in parliament became the Party for Freedom and in the parliamentary elections of that year, the party gained nine seats. Thus, by 2009, while relatively new, the PVV had established itself as a party with seats in parliament.

On January 26th of 2009, Geert Wilders, as the PVV’s leader, published an opinion piece in the *National Review*, co-written by Robert Spencer, an American author who is known for his anti-Islam views.⁶⁷ The reason for writing the piece was the fact that Geert Wilders had been prosecuted for inciting hatred and discrimination shortly before, on the 21st

⁶⁶ Paul Lucardie and Gerrit Voerman, *Populisten in de polder* (np 2012), 154.

⁶⁷ Geert Wilders and Robert Spencer, ‘2009: A year to defend free speech’, *National Review* (np 26 January 2009).

of January 2009, because of his statements against Islam in several media.⁶⁸ In reaction to that, Wilders and Spencer aimed to defend free speech. In the opinion piece, the right of free speech and conscience are central and these are described to be a fundamental value of the Western world. Furthermore, the importance of universal human rights, grounded in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of the United Nations, is stressed. According to Wilders and Spencer, the prosecution of Wilders is a violation of these human rights and because of the right of free speech, it should be possible to express anti-Islam viewpoints. In the article, Wilders and Spencer clearly construct community boundaries, as they repeatedly place the ‘free nations of the world’ and the ‘Western civilization’, whom they seek to address, opposite to Islamic states and the ‘barbaric structures of sharia’.⁶⁹ This Western civilization is called upon by Wilders and Spencer to defend its freedom, especially freedom of speech, as a human right. Thus, in this piece, a broader, Western social identity is politicized, with particularly human rights as community values. This Western identity is not necessarily limited to a certain nation or even to Europe, but includes the United States too, for example.

In June 2009, elections for the European Parliament took place and for the first time in the party’s history, the PVV took part in these elections. The elections were especially characterized by economic themes such as the credit crisis and possible consequences, but also the issues of potential expansion of the European Union and security. The European survey ‘Eurobarometer’ found that among the Dutch people, the themes of unemployment, economic growth, inflation and purchasing power, the future of pensions and ‘the unsafety’ were the topics that were deemed most important for the elections of 2009.⁷⁰ While economic issues were heavily politicized, the upcoming European debt crisis was not foreseen yet. After all, the Greek government would only announce the seriousness of the Greek financial situation later that year. Thus, the European debt crisis did not play a role in these European elections. The elections of 2009 therefore form a good starting point for analysing the development within the social identity that the PVV politicized during this crisis.

⁶⁸ Gerechtshof Amsterdam, *ECLI:NL:GHAMS:2009:BH0496, De Rechtspraak* (Amsterdam 2009). The trial report states that Geert Wilders was prosecuted for inciting hatred and discrimination towards Muslims, because of his statements in several media and in his movie ‘Fitna’ (2008). Especially comparisons with Nazism that Wilders made were deemed harmful. The report states that public debates on controversial questions are usually not within the field of criminal law, except when ‘fundamental boundaries’ are exceeded, which was deemed the case for Wilders.

⁶⁹ Wilders and Spencer, ‘2009: A year to defend free speech’.

⁷⁰ Europees Parlement, *Europeanen en de Europese verkiezingen 2009: Eurobarometer 71; Nederlandse resultaten*. Eurobarometer (Brussels 27 September 2009).

During the run-up to the elections, on the 5th of April, Wilders gave an interview to the Dutch newspaper *De Telegraaf*, together with Barry Madlener, who was a member of the national parliament for the PVV at the time and also placed first on the list for the European elections.⁷¹ In this interview, Wilders and Madlener present a more nationally-oriented outlook. They repeatedly state to defend the Dutch interests in the European parliament, using the slogan ‘Voor Nederland’ (For the Netherlands). Furthermore, they state to be anti-EU outside of economic cooperation, but willing to participate in the European elections to defend the Dutch people. In sum, the interview shows a nation-centred and Eurosceptic viewpoint. However, while Wilders and Madlener thus mainly construct community boundaries based on the nation versus the EU, they refer to ‘our Western culture’ when speaking about possible EU-accession of Turkey, opposing this Western culture to the ‘Islamic culture’ of Turkey.⁷²

The PVV’s election programme for the elections consisted of only one page.⁷³ Like the interview, the election programme mainly emphasizes the PVV’s aim to defend the Dutch interests. To achieve this, The Netherlands should be able to veto every decision made by the EU and the ‘flow of billions’ to the EU should stop.⁷⁴ The constructed community boundaries between the nation on the one hand and the rest of the EU or other nations on the other hand are also visible in the paragraph ‘Turkije nooit welkom’ (‘Turkey never welcome’) and ‘Geen uitbreiding’ (‘No expansion’), in which the PVV argues against the potential EU-accession of Turkey and against any expansion of the EU. However, in explaining the objections against EU-membership of Turkey, the programme states that ‘the Islamic culture is at odds with our culture’.⁷⁵ Again, the idea of a Western culture versus an Islamic culture is politicized, while also stressing a nationalist viewpoint regarding the EU. The PVV eventually won five seats (16.97% of the votes) and became the second largest party during these elections.

Besides the community boundaries between the West and Islam, Wilders often constructed an opposition between the supposed elite and the people. In February 2010, for example, Wilders strongly expressed this sentiment in an interview with Dutch newspaper *De Telegraaf*. He states that the Netherlands should have a prime minister that speaks the

⁷¹ “Samen met CDA en VVD”; GEERT WILDERS “Hier en daar zullen we compromissen moeten sluiten” “We willen ons geld terug, we betalen het meest aan al die onzin in Europa”, *De Telegraaf* (np 5 April 2009). Author’s translation.

⁷² “Samen Met CDA En VVD”; GEERT WILDERS “Hier en daar zullen we compromissen moeten sluiten” “We willen ons geld terug, we betalen het meest aan al die onzin in Europa”.

⁷³ Partij voor de Vrijheid, ‘Verkiezingsprogramma Europees Parlement 2009’ (np 2009), Europa Nu.

⁷⁴ Ibidem. Author’s translation.

⁷⁵ Ibidem. Author’s translation.

‘language of the people’ and criticizes the existing cabinet at the time for just having a desire for power. The interview shows how Wilders tries to mobilize a social identity that is anti-elite.⁷⁶ This distinction between the ‘pure people’ and the ‘corrupt elite’, populism, is thought to be a classic characteristic of radical right parties.⁷⁷ In this regard, the PVV thus fits within the standard view of radical right parties. However, the community boundaries between the ‘people’ and the ‘elite’ that are described, are not solely national or European for the PVV. Both the national government as well as the European Union are referred to as the ‘elite’.

After the participation in the European elections, the national elections would come up in June 2010. However, earlier in the year 2010, the PVV also participated in the local elections in the city of Almere and in The Hague. In March 2010, Wilders spoke to PVV party members in the Almere after winning the local elections in Almere and becoming the second party in the elections of The Hague.⁷⁸ While this speech mostly focuses on thanking the party members, Wilders also talks about the choice between the ‘way of hope and optimism’ or ‘a programme of unsafety and Islamization’.⁷⁹ This shows that hope and optimism are expressed as important values of the social identity of the PVV and once again, Islam(ization) is seen as the ‘other’ and as related to unsafety. Furthermore, he emphasizes his sentiment against the ‘left elite’ and their value of multiculturalism. While the PVV was successful in both of these elections, the party did not become part of the ruling coalition in both cities.

Also in March 2010, Wilders gave an international speech, in London.⁸⁰ He was invited to the House of Lords by Malcolm Pearson, member of the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP), to show his anti-Islam movie ‘Fitna’. This visit was originally planned to take place in 2009, but Wilders was banned from the United Kingdom at the time because he would threaten ‘community harmony and therefore public safety’.⁸¹ The content of this speech has similarities with the article with Spencer in *National Review*, which was also published for an international audience. Namely, the speech, like the article, has a broader outlook than just a national identity. It focuses on the dangers of Islam and mass immigration.

⁷⁶ Paul Jansen, ‘Interview Geert Wilders in Telegraaf’, *Partij voor de Vrijheid* (np 2010) [<https://www.pvv.nl/in-de-media/interviews/2599-interview-geert-wilders-in-telegraaf.html>]. Author’s translation.

⁷⁷ Cas Mudde, ‘Populist radical right parties in Europe today’, *Transformations of populism in Europe and the Americas: History and recent trends* (2015) 295–307.

⁷⁸ Geert Wilders, ‘Overwinningsspeech van Geert Wilders’, *Partij voor de Vrijheid* (np 2010) [<https://www.pvv.nl/in-de-media/interviews/2614-overwinningsspeech-van-geert-wilders.html>]. Author’s translation.

⁷⁹ *Ibidem*.

⁸⁰ Geert Wilders, ‘Speech Geert Wilders in Londen, 5 maart 2010’, *Europa Nu* (np 2010) [https://www.europa-nu.nl/id/vidhi411klxx/nieuws/speech_geert_wilders_in_londen_5_maart].

⁸¹ Sam Jones, ‘Geert Wilders anti-Islam film gets House of Lords screening’, *The Guardian* (np 5 March 2010).

First of all, Wilders cites Winston Churchill, who stated that ‘the civilisation of modern Europe might fall, as fell the civilisation of ancient Rome’.⁸² By choosing such a quote, Wilders explicitly appeals to a Europeanized identity, namely the supposed civilization of modern Europe. Furthermore, he hereby refers to a common history of Europe, in which Churchill played a role. This common history is also visible further on in the speech, when he talks about the ‘heritage of the brave young soldiers who stormed the beaches of Normandy. Who freed Europe of tyranny’.⁸³ Besides this, Wilders states that Islam is not compatible with ‘our western way of life’. This way of life and ‘western values’ are, for example, the equality of men and women, the equality of homosexuals and heterosexuals, the separation of church and state and freedom of speech. It is interesting to note that Wilders explicitly gives ‘differentia specifica’ of the social identity that he appeals to, namely these values, which he ties to the ‘Western civilization’, not just to a national identity. By mentioning these values and specific moments in history that are not just Dutch, but European, Wilders politicized a broader, more European identity than in the previous sources.

The fact that in this speech, Wilders politicizes a Europeanized identity, makes sense. After all, the speech took place in an international setting and was supposed to appeal to a larger public than just the Dutch electorate. Interestingly, the opinion piece in *National Review*, that Wilders wrote with Spencer, also showed this broader identity.⁸⁴ There seems to exist a discrepancy between the PVV’s discourse for an international audience and the national public, of which the latter showed strong opposition towards ‘Europe’. This suggests that the politicization of a certain social identity is indeed used strategically by the PVV and Wilders, namely by varying the degree of Europeanization of the politicized identity between different arena’s. This fits well within the theory of Hooghe and Marks, since they assume that parties politicize certain issues (i.e. identities) in a strategic way.⁸⁵

As the Dutch elections for the national parliament would take place in June 2010, the PVV released its election programme called ‘The agenda of hope and optimism’ in April.⁸⁶ The programme presents the viewpoints and ideas of the PVV for the upcoming five years, yet it also strongly shows the differentia specifica and community boundaries of the social identity that the PVV politicized during this time. First of all, the prologue of the programme,

⁸² Wilders, ‘Speech Geert Wilders in Londen, 5 maart 2010’. Author’s translation.

⁸³ Ibidem. Author’s translation.

⁸⁴ Wilders and Spencer, ‘2009: A year to defend free speech’.

⁸⁵ Hooghe and Marks, ‘A postfunctionalist theory of European integration’.

⁸⁶ Partij voor de Vrijheid, ‘De agenda van hoop en optimisme’ (np 2010), Parlement.com.

written by Geert Wilders, starts with references to Dutch history: Wilders refers to the ‘Opstand’ (rebellion) against the king of Spain in the sixteenth century and argues that the Dutch people were people ‘who determined their own fate’.⁸⁷ Traditionally, the Netherlands were characterized by tolerance and freedom, according to Wilders. However, he argues, the Dutch people nowadays feel that they are ‘losing’ the Netherlands, of which some examples are the islamization of neighbourhoods and schools, the persistence of crime and the ‘European superstate’.⁸⁸

The supposed culture of the Netherlands is an important topic in the programme. For example, one chapter of the programme is called ‘Kiezen voor onze cultuur’ (Choosing for our culture). In this chapter, as well as in other chapters, it is stated that the Dutch culture is based on ‘Judeo-Christian, humanist values’.⁸⁹ These values are stated to be for example, democracy, the separation of church and state, the equality of men and women and the freedom of homosexuals. This forms an interesting contrast; appealing to a ‘Judeo-Christian, humanist’ culture seems to be a broader civilizational, European element of identity. This culture is also put into contrast with the culture of Islamic states: for example, one of the ideas of the PVV regarding foreign policy is to ‘strengthen bonds of frontline states of Islam, who are in the defensive’.⁹⁰ However, this idea of culture and the mentioned values are explicitly referenced to as ‘Dutch’ and are seen as part of the national identity.

Thus, while the identity that is politicized in the viewpoints on culture contains European elements, another point in the programme is the anti-EU viewpoint. The EU is presented as elitist, non-transparent and non-democratic and is often called the ‘European superstate’.⁹¹ The programme speaks of ‘EU-nationalism’, with which it is made clear that the PVV is against any European integration, besides economic cooperation. About this, the programme states: ‘We take down their flag, their ‘president’ is going to entertain his grandchildren and they can sing their national anthem in the shower. The Netherlands must remain!’.⁹² This is a clear rejection of *differentia specifica* of the European Union, such as its flag and anthem.

⁸⁷ Ibidem, 5. Author’s translation.

⁸⁸ Ibidem. Author’s translation.

⁸⁹ Ibidem, 33.

⁹⁰ Ibidem, 43. Author’s translation.

⁹¹ Ibidem, 17.

⁹² Ibidem. Author’s translation.

However, it should be noted that the ideas on the EU are not the most central to this election programme; for example, there is not a separate chapter dedicated to this topic. This could mean that while the PVV was already sceptic towards the European Union during the first phase of the crisis, the EU and the European debt crisis as a topic were not heavily politicized in their discourse. This seems logical, since the European debt crisis was just starting and there was no centralized policy yet. While the first rescue package for Greece was decided upon in May 2010 and the national elections took place in June, the election programmes of the participating parties, including the PVV, were released before this decision.

The discourse of the PVV over the course of 2009 up until May 2010 shows clear community boundaries. In many of the sources, a strong opposition is constructed between the ‘inside’ and the ‘outside’, like Rogers Brubaker defined it.⁹³ Of which people these two groups consist, differs. One basis of community boundaries is the boundary between the Dutch nation and the European Union. In this regard, the PVV shows a ‘classic’ element of radical right parties, like they have been described in the work of Cas Mudde, Rogers Brubaker and Chiara De Cesari, Ivo Bosilkov and Arianna Piacentini, among others.⁹⁴ While the European Union is not the main issue of the sources during this period, it is visibly portrayed as the other, as an institution outside of the community.

Another community boundary that is repeatedly discussed in the sources, is the boundary between the ‘western culture’ or ‘Judeo-Christian, humanist culture’ and the ‘Islamic culture’. In practice, this view results in strong opposition to ‘Islamization’, which is thought to happen through mass immigration. The opposition to immigration and Islam is in line with the ‘standard’ view on radical right parties, such as put forward by Blake Stewart, who argues that limiting immigration is the ‘primary policy prescription of the far-right’ and the practice of its ‘base ideological assumptions’.⁹⁵ Other scholars have also characterized radical right parties as anti-immigration and even xenophobic or Islamophobic.⁹⁶ However, the community boundaries between western culture or European culture and Islamic culture

⁹³ Brubaker, ‘Between nationalism and civilizationism’.

⁹⁴ Mudde, *Populist radical right parties in Europe*; Brubaker, ‘Between nationalism and civilizationism’; De Cesari, Bosilkov and Piacentini, ‘(Why) do Eurosceptics believe in a common European heritage?’.

⁹⁵ Stewart, ‘The Rise of Far-Right Civilizationism’, 9.

⁹⁶ De Cesari, Bosilkov and Piacentini, ‘(Why) do Eurosceptics believe in a common European heritage?’; Yannis Stavrakakis et al., ‘Extreme right-wing populism in Europe: revisiting a reified association’, *Critical Discourse Studies* 14 (2017) 420–439.

also point to the more recent ideas on radical right parties, in which they are described as appealing to a broader European civilization.⁹⁷

The ‘*differentia specifica*’ of the social identity that the PVV put forward in this period are mainly a common history, with references mainly to Dutch history, but occasionally also to European history and common values, such as the freedom of speech, gender equality and LGBT+ tolerance. This is line with the idea of Brubaker, who argued that the ‘civilizationism’ of radical right parties includes promoting liberal values, such as gender equality and freedom of speech.⁹⁸ Blake Stewart, who speaks of ‘Far Right Civilizationism’, argued that the radical right parties who appeal to a European civilization emphasize traditional values and anti-feminism. These sources do not support this idea.

2.4 May 2010 – July 2011

On May 3rd 2010, the Dutch minister of Finance, Jan Kees de Jager, sent a letter to parliament to announce the rescue package for Greece that the Eurogroup had proposed and to ask for the parliament’s permission for the planned Dutch loans to Greece.⁹⁹ In the original plan, The Netherlands would contribute a maximum of 4.7 billion euros to the loan for Greece. Immediately after, the PVV submitted a motion to stop the plan and requested a plenary debate about the proposal. This plenary debate took place on May 7th and in the opening speech, as well as throughout the debate, the PVV strongly resisted any loan to Greece.¹⁰⁰ Tony van Dijck, a member of parliament for the PVV, repeatedly stated that the ‘Dutch tax payer’ should have priority over Greece and expressed the concern that providing a loan for Greece would lead to Spain and Portugal ‘knocking on the door’ for loans in the future. Therefore, the PVV submitted both a motion to stop the planned loan of 4.7 billion euros as well as a motion to consider quitting the eurozone and the reintroduction of the guilder. Both motions were rejected and eventually, the planned rescue package was accepted by parliament. However, this debate shows the PVV’s immediate rejection of the European measures to combat the Greek crisis, motivated by nationalist arguments.

On May 10th 2010, the first financial rescue plan for Greece was presented by the eurozone ministers and the IMF, including the contribution of 4.7 euros of The Netherlands. It

⁹⁷ Brubaker, ‘Between nationalism and civilizationism’; Stewart, ‘The Rise of Far-Right Civilizationism’; De Cesari, Bosilkov and Piacentini, ‘(Why) do Eurosceptics believe in a common European heritage?’.

⁹⁸ Brubaker, ‘Between nationalism and civilizationism’.

⁹⁹ J.C. De Jager, *Kamerstuk Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal; Brief van de Minister van Financiën 2009–2010* (np 2010).

¹⁰⁰ *Handeling Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal; Behandeling van de brief van de minister van Financiën inzake financiële stabiliteit in het eurogebied (21501-07, nr. 709), 2009–2010* (np 2010).

can be expected that after this decision, the European debt crisis and European issues in general became more heavily politicized in the public debate and therefore in the discourse of the PVV as well.

Later that month, on the 25th of May 2010, Wilders gave an interview to the Dutch news website *NU.nl*.¹⁰¹ The interview was conducted in the light of the upcoming national parliamentary elections, which were to be held in June and thus was not explicitly about the support for Greece. However, in the interview, Wilders does mention the crisis. He states that the ‘reigning elite’ chooses to support Greece, while the Dutch people would be against this. This again shows the opposition between the elite and the people that was visible in earlier discourse as well. Furthermore, Wilders chooses to explicitly refer to ‘Dutch people’ as opposed to ‘the Greek’. This seems to point to a rejection of a European identity, rather than incorporating European elements. However, in explaining why he thinks The Netherlands should support Israel more strongly, Wilders states that ‘they [Israel] are fighting our fight’ and that ‘there is not being fought against Israel, but against the free West’.¹⁰² Thus, in this part of the interview, different community boundaries are described, namely in terms of ideologies. Here, the social identity seems to encompass a broader European or Western community, of which Israel is also considered a part.

In June, the elections took place and the PVV became the third party, with 24 seats, behind the VVD with 31 seats and the Labour party (*Partij van de Arbeid*; PvdA) with 30 seats. This meant that the PVV had won 15 seats compared to the elections of 2006, which seems to point out that the social identity that the PVV politicized in the ‘Agenda of hope and optimism’ resonated with a considerable part of the Dutch electorate. After negotiations, it was decided upon a coalition between the VVD and the Christian Democrats (*Christen-Democratisch Appèl*; CDA), who were a minority in parliament together. The PVV was not in the coalition, but would support the cabinet on topics agreed upon in the coalition agreement, which would make a majority.

In November 2010, Wilders was interviewed by the German newspaper *Der Spiegel* later on in the year.¹⁰³ In this interview, Wilders states that the biggest problem for Europe is ‘cultural relativism’. This idea, that cultures are not necessarily equal, was touched upon by

¹⁰¹ Martin Kuiper and Lucas Benschop, ‘Wilders: ‘Wij zijn niet xenofob of racistisch’’, *NU.nl* (np 2010) [<https://www.nu.nl/politiek/2251677/wilderswij-niet-xenofob-of-racistisch-.html?redirect=1>].

¹⁰² Ibidem. Author’s translation.

¹⁰³ Walter Mayr, René Pfister and Paul Cohen, ‘Merkel Is Afraid’: SPIEGEL Interview with Geert Wilders’, *Spiegel International* (np 9 November 2010).

Wilders in earlier discourse as well. In this light, Wilders argues that Europeans ‘no longer know what they should be proud of and who they really are’.¹⁰⁴ This statement shows the assumption that there exists a certain European identity. To this European culture or identity, Wilders connects the value of freedom and respect for the rights of ‘non-believers, women and gays’.¹⁰⁵ He also contrasts the ‘traditions of Judaism, Christianity and humanism’ on the one hand with Islam on the other hand and ends the interview with the words ‘Europe has to rise up and, with united forces, tell the Islamic world: Enough is enough, we will defend ourselves with democratic means’.¹⁰⁶ All of these statements seem to point towards a Europeanized identity, which is especially politicized in opposition to Islam, like Rogers Brubaker argued is an element of civilizationism.¹⁰⁷ The differentia specifica that are connected to this European identity are among others ‘freedom’ and liberal values, such as the rights of women and homosexuals. It is interesting to note that in this interview, the European debt crisis and the financial measures are not mentioned. This absence, together with the European elements of identity mentioned here, again show that Wilders chooses to Europeanize the politicized identity when addressing an international audience. His rejection of the loan to Greece and his idea to leave the Euro, would probably not have resonated with this public.

The same month, on November 19th, Wilders also gave an interview to the Israeli newspaper *Yedioth*, in which he speaks about his life and viewpoints.¹⁰⁸ In one part, he explicitly dissociates himself from the French party *Front National* and the Austrian party *Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs*, which are both European radical right parties. Furthermore, he expresses his support for Israel and like in the interview in May 2010, he states that ‘the fight against Israel is the fight against us. We are Israel’.¹⁰⁹ This seems to fit well within earlier discourse, in which the ‘West’, including Israel, is placed opposite of Islamic countries. When asked about his view on implementing a ‘loyalty oath’ in The Netherlands, Wilders answers that he thinks that is a good idea, because the people of Europe have forgotten their culture: ‘We have to reinvent our identity’.¹¹⁰ While he mentions ‘our identity’, which seems to point towards a European identity, he also speaks about celebrating ‘national

¹⁰⁴ Ibidem.

¹⁰⁵ Ibidem.

¹⁰⁶ Ibidem.

¹⁰⁷ Brubaker, ‘Between nationalism and civilizationism’.

¹⁰⁸ ‘Israel Is Fighting Our War’, *Yedioth* (np 19 November 2010) [<https://www.pvv.nl/in-de-media/interviews/3709-israel-is-fighting-our-war-.html>].

¹⁰⁹ Ibidem.

¹¹⁰ Ibidem.

uniqueness'. In short, in this interview, Wilders politicizes both a broader identity, which includes Europe and Israel, but also emphasizes a national identity.

Considering that the developments within the European debt crisis took place during the time these interviews were conducted, such as the first rescue package for Greece in May 2010, which the PVV resisted, and the EFSF support for Ireland in November 2010, it is interesting to note that the European debt crisis and even the EU do not seem to be very central to the discourse of the PVV and Geert Wilders during the period after May 2010. Up until November 2010, the discourse seems to centre around the community boundaries between European or Western culture and Islamic culture.

This is also the main topic of a two part interview series with Wilders with *NU.nl* in February 2011.¹¹¹ These interviews revolve around the PVV's ideas on Islam. Wilders speaks about his desire for an 'anti-islam wave', that he wishes would spread throughout Europe. According to Wilders, this is what the European people want. Regarding the differentia specifica of the social identity that he politicizes, this seems to be a common European purpose.

In March 2011, Geert Wilders was invited by the Italian thinkthank *Magna Carta Foundation*, which is a neoconservative, right-wing group and held a speech called 'The Failure of Multiculturalism and How to Turn the Tide'.¹¹² In this speech, he again criticizes the idea of multiculturalism, which he defines as the idea that all cultures are equal. Throughout the speech, he constructs the idea of a European civilization, as opposed to the Islamic civilization. In the beginning of the speech, he says:

As Westerners, we share the same Judeo-Christian culture. I am from the Netherlands and you are from Italy. Our national cultures are branches of the same tree. We do not belong to multiple cultures, but to different branches of one single culture.¹¹³

Wilders clearly politicizes an overarching European identity in this speech. To this identity, he connects examples about the history of Ancient Rome and literally sums up the values that

¹¹¹ Martin Kuiper and Lucas Benschop, "Met islam blijft elke democratie fake", *NU.nl* (np 25 February 2011) [<https://www.nu.nl/politiek/2454897/met-islam-blijft-elke-democratie-fake.html>]; Martin Kuiper and Lucas Benschop, "De anti-islam-wave is niet meer te stoppen", *NU.nl* (27 February 2011) [<https://www.nu.nl/politiek/2456211/de-anti-islam-wave-niet-meer-stoppen.html>].

¹¹² Geert Wilders, 'Speech Geert Wilders in Rome, 25 maart 2011: The Failure of Multiculturalism and How to Turn the Tide', *Partij voor de Vrijheid* (np 2011) [<https://pvv.nl/index.php/component/content/article/36-geert-wilders/4128-speech-geert-wilders-in-rome-25-maart-2011.html>].

¹¹³ Ibidem.

belong to this identity, referred to as ‘our values’.¹¹⁴ These values, including gender equality, rights of homosexuals and free speech, are threatened by Islam.

However, later on in the speech, he argues that in order to preserve the European civilization, the national sovereignty of nation states has to be emphasized again. Wilders states ‘We must reclaim Europe. We can only do so by giving political power back to the nation-state. By defending the nation-states which we love, we defend our own identity’.¹¹⁵ In this argument, he also criticizes the EU for undermining national sovereignty.

Interestingly, the social identity that Wilders politicizes in this speech contains both strong national elements, as well as explicit European ‘*differentia specifica*’ and ‘community boundaries’. This seems to correspond with Brubaker’s claim that the ‘civilizationists’ are nationalist at the same time.¹¹⁶ In this speech, as well as in previously mentioned sources of this period, the character of the politicized social identity seems to vary. In arguments about Islam and immigration, the social identity often seems Europeanized, including references to European history and the ‘Western way of life’. However, in arguments about the EU or the Greek crisis, the Dutch nation or the nation state in general is emphasized.

In the second phase of the crisis, while financial solidarity was already imposed on The Netherlands and several countries received financial support, the examined discourse of the PVV does not seem to evolve around the European debt crisis. Rather than the crisis, the discourse focuses on the PVV’s ideas on culture and Islam. The PVV did resist the measures that were taken to combat the crisis in parliament, yet this is less visible in the discourse meant for the electorate. It is interesting to note that in expressing ideas on Islam, the PVV often mobilizes a social identity that contains European elements.

2.5 July 2011 – September 2012

In the second half of 2011 and in 2012, the European debt crisis continued. Several European summits were held, which mainly centred around the question whether a part of Greece’s debts should be relieved. Furthermore, measures were taken to ensure that eurozone countries could not have a budget deficit larger than 3 percent of their GDP, such as automatic sanctions and the commitment to include this rule in the national constitution. This also had consequences for The Netherlands, that had to implement extra budget cuts to comply to this rule. In April 2012, the cabinet that was supported by the PVV, was dissolved after

¹¹⁴ Ibidem.

¹¹⁵ Ibidem.

¹¹⁶ Brubaker, ‘Between nationalism and civilizationism’.

disagreement between the PVV on one side and the CDA and VVD on the other side on these budget cuts. The PVV resisted too much cuts and proposed to organize a referendum on the question whether The Netherlands should stay in the eurozone or reintroduce the guilder. The VVD and CDA did not agree and eventually, the negotiations stalled and the PVV decided to withdraw its support for the government. This meant that new elections for the national parliament would take place in September, for which the European debt crisis would be one of the most important themes. By withdrawing support for the coalition, the PVV actively prioritized the national interest and opposition towards more European interference. It can therefore be expected that this was a turning point towards a stronger national outlook in the PVV's discourse.

In June, the PVV published its new election programme, called 'Their Brussels, Our Netherlands'.¹¹⁷ The first chapter of the programme is called '*Their* Brussels', followed by nine chapters named '*Our* ...', for example '*Our* safety'. Both the main title and the chapter titles already show that the opposition between the social identities 'Brussels' and The Netherlands was the most important topic of the elections for the PVV. By emphasizing this opposition, as well as the words 'their' and 'our', the PVV strongly politicizes nationalist community boundaries between the nation and the EU.

As the title already makes clear, the entire programme shows a strong rejection of the EU: the PVV suggests to leave the EU, reintroduce the guilder and also explicitly resists the proposed ESM, which is deemed the 'final piece in the dissolution of the Netherlands as a nation'.¹¹⁸ The EU is described as problematic, because it undermines the national sovereignty. Furthermore, it is often stated that due to the EU, the Dutch people have to suffer by paying, while other countries can benefit. To the social identity of the 'Dutch people', the norms of being frugal and working hard are ascribed, while 'totally different cultures' are described to be 'more focused on retiring quickly, dodging taxes and enjoying a drink in the sun'.¹¹⁹ The EU is also presented as non-democratic, elitist and ruled by 'eurocrats' or 'europhiles', which is similar to the anti-elite sentiment of earlier discourse.¹²⁰

The anti-Islam viewpoint is still present in this election programme. However, it plays a significantly smaller role than in the election programme of 2010, for example. In the

¹¹⁷ Partij voor de Vrijheid, 'Hún Brussel, óns Nederland' (np 2012), Parlement.com. Author's translation.

¹¹⁸ Ibidem, 13. Author's translation.

¹¹⁹ Ibidem. Author's translation.

¹²⁰ Ibidem. Author's translation.

chapter ‘*Our freedom*’, Islam is described as a threat to freedom and to the entire ‘Western world’.¹²¹ While this sentence mentions the ‘Western world’, similar to the way in which earlier discourse constructed community boundaries between the Western culture and Islamic culture, it is interesting to note that the rest of the chapter and programme do not appeal to a broader European or even Western culture. Rather, the PVV speaks about ‘Islam in The Netherlands’ (instead of Europe) and references Abraham Kuyper, a Dutch historical figure.¹²² Furthermore, the ‘threat’ of Islam in The Netherlands is blamed on the EU, since The Netherlands can not control their own immigration policy, according to the PVV. It seems to be a conscious choice to not support the anti-Islam argument by politicizing a Europeanized identity, since the rest of the programme centres around the resistance against the EU (often called ‘Europe’). This is a shift from earlier discourse, in which the anti-Islam viewpoint was often politicized by the opposition between the European or Western culture or civilization, including liberal values, and Islamic culture.

It is clear that over the course of 2012, the European debt crisis became heavily politicized by the PVV; in the election programme, it was the central topic. However, while the topics that were politicized definitely Europeanized, the social identity that the PVV politicized certainly did not. On the contrary, this election programme shows a clear turn away from European elements of identity and an emphasis on the national identity. Even in the PVV’s argumentation against Islam, the image of the European culture versus the Islamic culture and references to European history and liberal values that were often used in argumentation against Islam, is largely absent. At this point in time, the PVV fit well into the standard view of radical right parties: nationalist, anti-Islam and Eurosceptic.¹²³

Later in June, Geert Wilders spoke at the Western Conservative Summit in Denver, an annual conference for conservatives in the United States. In his speech, he explained his criticism towards Islamization.¹²⁴ This is supported by the same politicized social identity as in earlier international speeches or pieces, namely referring to the ‘Judeo-Christian humanist civilization’ or ‘heritage’ and contrasting this with the Islamic culture. The speech explicitly politicizes the social identity of a broader Western civilization, which in this case, includes

¹²¹ Ibidem, 26. Author’s translation.

¹²² Ibidem, 26, 34. Author’s translation.

¹²³ For example: Mudde, ‘Populist radical right parties in Europe today’; Mudde, *Populist radical right parties in Europe*; Bar-On, ‘The Radical Right and Nationalism’; Vasilopoulou, ‘The radical right and Euroscepticism’.

¹²⁴ Geert Wilders, ‘Speech Geert Wilders at the Western Conservative Summit, Denver, 30 June 2012’, *Geert Wilders Weblog* (np 2012) [<https://www.geertwilders.nl/index.php/87-english/news/1795-speech-geert-wilders-at-the-western-conservative-summit-denver-30-june-2012>].

The United States as well as Europe. Wilders makes references to ‘our values’, ‘our identity’ and ‘our freedom’, that ‘we’ will lose when the Islamization of Europe and the US continues.¹²⁵ At the end of the speech, he states:

My friends, you and I, Americans and Europeans, we belong to a common Western culture. We share the values and ideals of our common heritage. In order to preserve our nations and our homes, in order to pass our heritage on to our children, in order to survive, we must stand together. [...] Indeed, We must defend our own civilization.¹²⁶

It is striking that in the same month as the publication of the PVV’s election programme, which strongly politicized a national social identity and was centred around opposing ‘Europe’, Wilders politicized a completely different identity in this speech. This speech politicizes a Europeanized (or Westernized) social identity, of which the differentia specifica are Judeo-Christian humanist roots and values like freedom of speech. The discrepancy between these two sources, of which one was directed towards the Dutch electorate and the other was directed towards US conservatives, again point towards a conscious strategy, in which the politicized identity changes in different arena’s.

Back in The Netherlands, the PVV’s electoral campaign continued. During that campaign, in August, Wilders gave a speech to PVV members in Rotterdam, in which he set out the PVV’s vision for the elections.¹²⁷ Like the election programme, the speech mostly consisted of the anti-EU narrative, including the opposition towards the EFSF and ESM. Naturally, he politicizes a strong national identity, for example by referring to Dutch history, such as the bombing of Rotterdam and the Dutch Golden Age: ‘After we liberated ourselves from Spain and the Brussels governor in the 16th century, our Golden Age began. If we liberate ourselves from Greece, Spain and the Brussels governors today, a new Golden Age begins’.¹²⁸ Again, the community boundaries between the Dutch people and rest of Europe are emphasized, in order to support the anti-EU viewpoints.

During the period between July 2011 and September 2012, in which the European debt crisis reached its peak, the PVV’s discourse shows two different images. First of all, it is clear that at this point in the crisis, European issues are strongly politicized, which confirms the claim of Frank Schimmelfennig, that the European debt crisis caused ‘unprecedented

¹²⁵ Ibidem.

¹²⁶ Ibidem.

¹²⁷ Geert Wilders, ‘Toespraak Geert Wilders, Ahoy, 24 augustus 2012’, *Partij voor de Vrijheid* (np 2012) [<https://www.pvv.nl/36-fj-related/geert-wilders/6114-toespraak-geert-wilders-ahoy-24-augustus-2012.html>].

¹²⁸ Ibidem.

politicization of European integration'.¹²⁹ The EU and the crisis were, for example, the main topic of the PVV's electoral campaign. However, instead of Europeanization, the social identity that was politicized returned to being almost solely national, including references to Dutch history, Dutch values like frugality and freedom and community boundaries that were not drawn in opposition to Islam, but to Southern and Eastern European countries and the elite in Brussels. The party clearly chose to politicize a nationalist social identity, as an alternative to the Europeanized social identity of other parties, that were in favour of the EU and the ESM. Nevertheless, when Geert Wilders addressed international audiences during this period, he did mobilize a Europeanized (or Westernized) identity in his arguments against Islam. This switch to a broader identity when addressing an international audience, could be intended as a strategy to build a pan-European, transnational platform or public sphere.

2.6 September 2012 – January 2014

In September, the PVV gained fifteen seats in the elections, which was a loss of nine seats compared to 2010. A coalition was formed between the VVD and the PvdA and the PVV became an opposition party again. During this period, the PVV kept opposing more financial European support measures to combat the crisis, such as a reduction of the interest rates for the loans that Greece had already received.

Later in September, Wilders gave another international interview, to *The Washington Times*.¹³⁰ Instead of the preoccupation with the EU, this interview centred around Wilders' fight against Islam and did not mention the EU or the crisis. Wilders emphasizes the defence of 'our' freedoms and states that 'cultural relativism is undermining our willingness to defend our civilized Western culture against the barbaric culture of Islam'.¹³¹ These community boundaries are similar to those that were frequently politicized in earlier discourse when talking about Islam, namely between a Western culture and Islamic culture. Wilders does not mention any objections against a European social identity or the EU. This makes sense, as the audience of this interview was from the US, to which the European debt crisis and the EU would be less relevant. However, it again shows that while the PVV was using certain language in the national debate, namely strong community boundaries between the nation and Europe, while simultaneously politicizing a Europeanized identity in an international setting.

¹²⁹ Schimmelfennig, 'European integration in the euro crisis'.

¹³⁰ Brett Decker, 'DECKER: 5 Questions with Geert Wilders', *The Washington Times* (np 2012) [<https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2012/sep/14/geert-wilders-5-questions-with-decker/>].

¹³¹ Ibidem. Author's translation.

In April 2013, Wilders announced in an interview with *Algemeen Dagblad* that he foresaw a ‘political revolution in Europe’, caused by cooperation and electoral successes of Eurosceptic parties in Europe.¹³² Among others, he announced his will to cooperate with the French party *Front National*, from which he had distanced himself in the past, as this party agreed ‘for 90 percent’ with the PVV on Europe and had a lot in common regarding immigration. While this announcement explicitly calls for transnational cooperation between European radical right parties and possibly the creation of a European public sphere between them, Wilders does state that these parties ‘value the national interest, the national identity’.¹³³ Thus, this interview rather shows a Europeanization of the communicative space of radical right parties, than Europeanization of the community boundaries or *differentia specifica* of the politicized identity.

During this last period, in which the peak of the European debt crisis was over, the PVV’s discourse noticeably contained less sources that were meant to reach the mass public. Rather, the PVV’s website mainly shows parliamentary questions that the PVV group had asked. This is not considered to be part of the process of politicization, since that means that issues are brought to the mass public.¹³⁴ This could have to do with the fact that the national elections had just taken place and there were no upcoming elections in the short term. The discourse that was meant for the mass public shows a similar image to the period before the ESM, namely opposition towards the EU in the national debate, while seeking transnational cooperation on the European level.

2.7 Conclusions

This analysis sought to answer the question whether the social identity that the PVV politicized during the European debt crisis Europeanized, thereby focusing on the *differentia specifica* and community boundaries of the social identity that was politicized.

Regarding the *differentia specifica*, the PVV mainly described common values and a common history in its discourse. The common values that are mentioned frequently are liberal values, like gender equality, freedom of speech, the rights of homosexuals and the separation of church and state. These are often described as belonging to ‘Western culture’ and sometimes specifically described as Dutch values, yet most of the time, they are directly put into contrast with Islam or Islamic culture, which is described as threatening these values.

¹³² Frank Hendrickx and Marcel Wiegman, ‘‘Er komt een politieke revolutie in Europa’’, *Algemeen Dagblad* (np 27 April 2013).

¹³³ Ibidem.

¹³⁴ Hooghe and Marks, ‘A postfunctionalist theory of European integration’.

References to a common history are also frequent in the PVV discourse. In some sources, specific moments in Dutch history are mentioned, for example in describing anti-EU arguments, while in other sources, mostly for international audiences, moments in European history are mentioned. In short, the analysis shows that the *differentia specifica* of the politicized social identity did sometimes Europeanize; however, they just as often nationalized. There is no clear trend visible towards more and more European elements being incorporated into these *differentia specifica* over time, but rather a constant switch between national and European elements.

This also applies to the community boundaries. The PVV often politicized sharp community boundaries between the ‘inside’ and the ‘outside’, which is deemed a central characteristic of (populist) radical right parties by several studies.¹³⁵ However, who belongs to these two groups, differs per source. Often, especially at the start of the crisis, these boundaries were drawn between the European culture, Western culture or ‘Judeo-Christian humanist culture’ and Islamic culture. Later on, when the European debt crisis became more politicized, the boundaries were often drawn between the Dutch people and ‘Brussels’, the EU or other European countries. This points at a more nationalized social identity, rather than Europeanized. However, similarly to the *differentia specifica*, there is no clear development towards Europeanization in the politicized community boundaries. The boundaries that are described, are adjusted to the audience and the argument that is made, for example more nationalized when discussing the EU and more Europeanized when discussing Islam.

Thus, the analysis does not show a trend of Europeanization in the politicized social identity of the PVV during the crisis. Rather, it shows that the PVV alternated between a more nationalized and a more Europeanized identity. This confirms Brubaker’s claim that civilizationists are simultaneously nationalists and the argumentation of Fligstein et al., who argued that national and European identities can be complementary.¹³⁶ However, national and European elements are not used interchangeably within a single source, but seem to be carefully chosen per situation. In this way, the PVV fits well into the theory of Hooghe and Marks, who argued that political parties acted strategically by ‘creating issues’ and bringing them to the mass public. The analysis shows that the PVV adjusted its issues (i.e. the social identity) to what was deemed electorally beneficial.

¹³⁵ Mudde, *Populist radical right parties in Europe*; Brubaker, ‘Between nationalism and civilizationism’.

¹³⁶ Brubaker, ‘Between nationalism and civilizationism’; Fligstein, Polyakova and Sandholtz, ‘European integration, nationalism and European identity’.

Another striking trend within the discourse is that when a Europeanized identity is politicized, this is almost always placed opposite with Islam or the Islamic culture. This is also in line with Brubaker, who argued that the shift towards civilizationism is driven by the ‘civilizational threat’ of Islam. The emphasis on liberal values and even on Judeo-Christian roots (while the PVV is not a religious party) shows that the broader civilizational elements of identity are mainly expressed in antithetical opposition to Islam. Furthermore, Fligstein et al. pointed to the use of a Europeanized identity to justify the exclusion of outsiders.¹³⁷ This is also visible in the discourse: opposing Islam is often justified by stating that liberal values, such as gender equality, are threatened.

Lastly, the analysis shows an interesting duality between sources with a national and an international public, of which the latter show a far more Europeanized social identity. This suggests that the PVV used a Europeanized identity mainly to strengthen cooperation with other European radical right parties and possibly, to build towards a European public sphere between them. Some studies point towards the increasing right-wing cooperation in Europe, such as Fligstein et al. and Farid Hafez, of which the latter argued that especially the shared Islamophobia was on the basis of transnational right-wing cooperation.¹³⁸ This seems to be true for the PVV. However, these studies do not mention the possibility of the Europeanization of identity to build a European public sphere among parties, while the analysis of this thesis strongly suggests that the PVV used this as a strategy.

¹³⁷ Fligstein, Polyakova and Sandholtz, ‘European integration, nationalism and European identity’.

¹³⁸ Ibidem; Farid Hafez, ‘Shifting borders: Islamophobia as common ground for building pan-European right-wing unity’, *Patterns of Prejudice* 48 (2014) 479–499.

Conclusion

This study started with an observed paradox: in recent years, several radical right parties in Europe started to refer to a European ‘civilization’, ‘heritage’ or ‘culture’ in their discourse. This strong appeal to not just a national, but a broader European identity is striking, since radical right parties have traditionally been characterized as strongly nationalist and Eurosceptic. Thus, there seemed to be a paradox within the discourse of these parties: while adhering to a nationalist ideology and opposing European integration, the idea of a European culture had a central place in their discourse. The current study therefore set out to see whether there was an ongoing trend of Europeanization in the discourse of these parties, regarding the social identity that they politicized. More specifically, examining a case study, the thesis aimed to answer the question to what extent the social identity that the Dutch Party for Freedom (PVV) politicized during the European debt crisis (2009-2014) Europeanized.

The PVV’s discourse was analysed during a period in which more and more European integration took place, regarding the measures that were taken to combat the crisis. While the specific viewpoints of the PVV towards these measures and the crisis were relevant, the topic of study for the analysis was not so much the party’s viewpoints on the crisis itself, but rather the development of the social identity that the party politicized towards the mass public during this time. Namely, based on the theory of politicization of Hooghe and Marks and theory of social identities of Thomas Risse, it was expected that a crisis like the European debt crisis would cause an increasing politicization of European issues and a high salience of social identities within the party’s discourse.

The analysis shows that as the crisis escalated and more European measures were taken, European issues and the EU in particular indeed became increasingly politicized in the discourse of the PVV, especially in the elections of 2012. However, while the issues that were politicized became more European, the PVV politicized an increasingly exclusive national identity during this period. This is likely a reaction to the European debt crisis, in which financial solidarity was imposed on The Netherlands: appealing to a national identity and defending the national interests became increasingly important to reach the electorate. Simultaneously, however, the party, especially Geert Wilders, repeatedly politicized the idea of a broader European or Western culture when describing the PVV’s opposition towards Islam and immigration, especially when addressing international audiences. Thus, the discourse showed a duality of more national and more Europeanized politicized identities,

which did not gradually develop towards a Europeanized identity, but rather seemed to vary between situations.

The analysis was guided by two subquestions, based on the theoretical concepts retrieved from the work of Thomas Risse, that describe the substantive content of a social identity.¹³⁹ It was therefore investigated whether two elements of the social identity that the PVV politicized Europeanized over time, namely the *differentia specifica* and the community boundaries. From the analysis, it can be concluded that both national and Europeanized elements were visible in the PVV's discourse, regarding the *differentia specifica* and community boundaries. However, as stated before, there was no clear trend of Europeanization over time for both of these elements. The PVV frequently made use of expressing certain *differentia specifica*, such as common values or a common history, and community boundaries in order to emphasize a certain social identity, yet seemed to adjust the extent to which these were Europeanized in a strategic way.

Taken together, the findings of this study suggest that the social identity that the PVV politicized rather nationalized than Europeanized during the European debt crisis, yet to some extent, in specific situations, a Europeanized identity was indeed visible. This Europeanized identity was especially politicized in discourse targeting international audiences and when in opposition to Islam. A significant conclusion that can be drawn from this finding, is that politicizing a certain social identity, and varying the extent to which European elements were included in this identity, was a deliberate strategy of the PVV. This fits well within the theory of Hooghe and Marks, who argue that political parties strategically politicize certain issues, in this case social identities.¹⁴⁰ Furthermore, it also confirms Risse's idea that a European identity does not exist separately from a national identity, but that a national identity can be Europeanized to a certain extent, by including European *differentia specifica* and community boundaries.¹⁴¹

The empirical findings in this study provide a new understanding of radical right parties and the relationship between the elements of a national identity and a European identity in their ideas. In the academic debate, the 'standard' idea of radical right parties is currently the most prevalent: studies on radical right parties in Europe mainly emphasize the parties' nationalist ideology and anti-EU viewpoints. Recent studies by Brubaker and De

¹³⁹ Risse, *A community of Europeans?*

¹⁴⁰ Hooghe and Marks, 'A postfunctionalist theory of European integration'.

¹⁴¹ Risse, *A community of Europeans?*

Cesari et al. do point towards the importance of European elements in the identity of these parties.¹⁴² Both Brubaker and De Cesari et al. note that the European outlook can coexist with a strong sense of nationalism as well. However, neither of these studies closely examined the discourse of recent radical right parties as case studies. This study concludes that in the case of the PVV, both nationalist and Eurosceptic elements as well as Europeanized elements were part of the politicized social identity. Thus, while the standard view of radical right parties as nationalist and Eurosceptic is not incorrect, this study confirms that Europeanization, such as the appeal to a European civilization, values or history, should certainly be taken into account. This study therefore agrees with Rogers Brubaker's idea of 'civilizationism', that he argued could co-exist with nationalism in the discourse of European radical right parties. However, instead of claiming an ongoing trend towards Europeanization or civilizationism, this study gives the insight that the Europeanization (or the opposite) of social identities is used as a conscious strategy, to actively influence identification processes of the electorate, when this is beneficial. This alternation between national and European identities as an active strategy of radical right parties has not been discussed in the academic debate before.

This insight is of major importance for the understanding of European radical right parties in recent years, as well as in the near future. The centrality of a Europeanized social identity in the discourse of the PVV targeted at international audiences, could point towards a strategy to create a European public sphere or transnational movement of radical right parties, in which not the pro-EU, cosmopolitan idea of 'Europe' is central, but the idea of a European civilization that should be protected. Instead of interpreting recent successful radical right parties as nationalist and aiming to undermine the EU, perhaps they should be interpreted as working towards an alternative Europe.

Since the study was limited to only one case study, of the PVV as a radical right party located in The Netherlands, the question remains whether these findings are generalisable to other European radical right parties, as well as to other periods in time. After all, it could be asked whether other parties show this conscious alternation between national and Europeanized identities, as well as whether they could be working towards a European public sphere of radical right parties. Furthermore, it could also be the case that in other time periods, in which European issues were possibly less politicized, the discourse of these parties does not show a Europeanized identity at all. Lastly, this study focused on the discourse of the

¹⁴² Brubaker, 'Between nationalism and civilizationism'; De Cesari, Bosilkov and Piacentini, '(Why) do Eurosceptics believe in a common European heritage?'

PVV that was especially targeted at the mass public, such as election programmes and interviews. However, in order to examine whether the PVV (and other parties) are indeed working towards a European public sphere or transnational cooperation, their actions in for example the national and European parliament and at international conferences should be examined.

In these questions lies a great challenge for future research. Especially fruitful would be research that uses a pan-European approach, in which the discourse of several radical right parties from different European countries would be used as case studies. Such a study would be able to compare the use of Europeanization of identities for different parties and identify whether this is indeed developing into a European public sphere between these parties. Further research might also explore different time periods, especially other crises than the European debt crisis, such as the European refugee crisis that peaked in 2015 or the COVID-19 pandemic, and investigate whether European issues, including the Europeanization of identity, were politicized during that time.

While future research is needed to fully understand this topic, this study gave a first striking insight into the interplay between national and Europeanized elements in the politicization of social identities of a radical right party. This study suggests that the observed paradox, with which the study started, was not an accidental identity crisis, but rather a deliberate strategy.

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