



# Loving Europe, hating the EU

Between EU-scepticism and Europe-philìa:  
The RN and AfD as a case-study for the  
Euro-sceptic discourse of national-populist parties  
in Europe

Master Thesis - International  
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## **List of Abbreviations**

**AfD** Alternative Für Deutschland

**BRD** Bundesrepublik Deutschland

**EC** European Communities

**EEC** European Economic Community

**ECSC** European Coal and Steel Community

**EU** European Nation

**FN** Front National

**GDR** German Democratic Republic

**RN** Rassemblement National

**TEU** Treaty of the European Union

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## **Summary**

Right-wing populists, who in general are also national-populists, are usually considered Eurosceptical. This is problematic because the term “Eurosceptic” is used for a wide variety of criticisms of the EU, not all of which are principally against European integration. This thesis will look at the discourse of the German AfD and the French RN, each of which is the most influential Eurosceptic party in their respective countries. These parties will be used as a case study for researching the Eurosceptic discourse of national-populist parties on the basis of three core themes: sovereignty, nativity, and identity. With this discourse analysis, this thesis will answer its main question of how national-populists use both nationalistic and pro-European arguments in their Eurosceptic discourse, showing how they can be both EU-sceptic and pro-Europe.

Keywords: *Euroscepticism, EU, AfD, RN, populism, Europe*

## **Introduction**

“Si nous sommes résolument opposés à l'Union Européenne, nous sommes résolument Européens. Je dirais même que c'est parce que nous sommes Européens que nous sommes opposés à l'Union européenne.”<sup>1</sup> These words were spoken in 2017 by the leader of the French right-wing national-populist party *Rassemblement National* (RN, until 2017 *Front National*) Marine Le Pen. They were greeted with applause by the attendant RN members. A little over one year later, the then-leader of the German right-wing national-populist party *Alternative Für Deutschland* (AfD), Alexander Gauland, said in the Bundestag that the members of his party wish to be “good Europeans”. Referring to this idea of German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, he explained the behaviour of so-called “good Europeans” as being respectful of European diversity and working together with other Europeans where this is both useful and possible.<sup>2</sup> Both parties were, at the time of these statements, the most well-known and popular Eurosceptical parties in their respective countries, advocating either a *Frexit* or a *Dexit* from the European Union (EU). How does this EU-sceptical agenda align with the two statements above, which each indicate a strong European identity?

The RN and the AfD are not the only Eurosceptical voices in their countries, but they are the most successful and mainstream representatives of this political position. Their Eurosceptic stance is central to their identity, but, as the aforementioned citations of very prominent leaders show, they also think of themselves as Europeans. How does this contradiction function – and is it a contradiction at all? This research aims to answer these questions by analysing how populists conceive of the nation-state, Europe, and the EU. It will analyse how these concepts are discussed through the use of three core themes: sovereignty, nativity, and identity. By analysing how these themes are utilised by national-populists to justify their position on the nation-state, Europe, and the EU, this thesis will show how national-populists use both nationalistic and pro-European arguments in their Eurosceptic discourse. This is an important topic, because resistance against European integration is no longer, as it once was, of marginal importance. Instead, it has gained influence, and, especially when leaving the EU is the goal, it has come almost exclusively from populist parties. Because of this growing influence in the twenty-first century, it is important to analyse their arguments, both to

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<sup>1</sup> Marine Le Pen, “Discours de Marine Le Pen à la journée des élus FN au Futuroscope de Poitiers,” streamed live on October 1st, 2017 on YouTube, video, 7:50, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fyty5HSaAx0>.

<sup>2</sup> Alexander Gauland, “Wir sind die guten Europäer!”, uploaded 13 January 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6-fselGUpys>, 3:05.

understand what their criticisms are and where they are coming from, but also to better grasp a core theme in European politics.

Not much research has been dedicated to the interplay between Euroscepticism and Europe-phililia in national-populistic Eurosceptical arguments, a gap this thesis wants to fill. It is a crucial undertaking if we want to better understand these parties and their appeal. Furthermore, France and Germany are the core countries of the European Union (EU) and either a *Frexit* or a *Dexit* could very well mean the end of the EU. Therefore, if this is to be prevented, it might be useful to better understand how national-populists think of the EU and Europe, and where their ideas are coming from. In turn, this might help us recognise the shortcomings of the EU as a whole.

To understand this interplay between right-wing populism, nationalism, and Euroscepticism, it is important to understand how and if these first two facilitate Euroscepticism. Therefore, the definition of these vague concepts and the way they work together should be the starting point.

### **Populism and nationalism**

Before discussing how populism, nationalism, and Euroscepticism work together, it is important to define these concepts. Populism in Europe has been a topic of interest since the turn of the millennium, when it became clear that it was once again on the rise. Some scholars, however, have pointed out that the term has been used too loosely, weakening its usefulness for analysing the current political landscape. Rogers Brubaker summarised these concerns when he wrote that “if everything is populist, nothing is distinctively so.”<sup>3</sup>

This research will use one of the most influential definitions of populism, which is Cas Mudde’s description of populism as an ideology that “considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogenous and antagonistic groups, “the pure people” and “the corrupt elite”, and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people”.<sup>4</sup> He further concludes that populism is almost always combined with other ideologies, such as nationalism, which is why he describes populism as a “thin” ideology.<sup>5</sup> This thesis, which revolves around right-wing populists, will show that on this side of the spectrum, populism is often combined with nationalism. Both the AfD and the RN employ this combination, which is very visible in their criticism of the EU.

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<sup>3</sup> Rogers Brubaker, “Populism and nationalism,” *Nations and Nationalism* 26, no. 1 (2020): 53.

<sup>4</sup> Cas Mudde, *On extremism and democracy in Europe* (Abingdon-on-Thames: Routledge, 2016), 57.

<sup>5</sup> Mudde, *On extremism and democracy in Europe*, 57.

Because of the similarities between nationalism and populism, the terms have often been conflated. Benjamin de Cleen points out that the most prominent examples of populists have also been nationalists, in that they both revolve around sovereignty for “the people”. Furthermore, because of the dominance of the nation-state within politics, populism usually operates within a national context.<sup>6</sup> His argument, however, is that scholars should make a clear distinction between populist and nationalist discourses. More academics have raised the same problem.<sup>7</sup> According to De Cleen, a crucial difference between the two is that populism revolves around its claim to represent the people, who are systematically disadvantaged by an elite, whereas nationalism claims to represent the nation and its people, who are defined through an mechanism of in- and exclusion.<sup>8</sup> In other words, their definition of “the people” differs. This is also supported by De Cleen’s definition of nationalism as a “discourse structured around the nodal point nation, envisaged as a limited and sovereign community that exists through time and is tied to a certain space, and that is constructed through an in/out (member/non-member) opposition between the nation and its outgroups”.<sup>9</sup> So, whereas populism opposes different groups within the nation – the people versus the elites – nationalism defines the people as tied to countries, opposing the peoples of different nation states. This strict segregation in definitions has been criticised by Rogers Brubaker, who instead points out that populism deliberately uses nationalism to gain more support.<sup>10</sup> This work will show how nationalism is used as a Eurosceptic argument and, by extension, how populism and Euroscepticism work together. Other scholars have argued along the same lines.<sup>11</sup>

A practical example of this use of nationalism by populists can be found in the work of Ayhan Kaya, who describes both the AfD and RN, among other national-populist parties, as “concerned with the idea of investing in national heritage” and “capitalizing on national rather than European heritage”.<sup>12</sup> This statement will be challenged later in this thesis, but for now it is interesting to note that, in both populist and nationalistic conceptions of “the people”, they

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<sup>6</sup> B. De Cleen, “Populism and nationalism,” in *The Oxford handbook of populism*, ed. C. Rovira Kaltwasser et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 342.

<sup>7</sup> Bart Bonikowski, Daphne Halikiopoulou, Eric Kaufmann and Matthijs Rooduijn, “Populism and nationalism in a comparative perspective: a scholarly exchange,” *Nations and Nationalism* 25, no. 1 (2019): 60.

<sup>8</sup> B. De Cleen, “Populism and nationalism,” 356.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibidem*, 344.

<sup>10</sup> Rogers Brubaker, “Populism and nationalism,” *Nations and Nationalism* 26, no. 1 (2020): 57-58.

<sup>11</sup> Chloé Thomas, “L’Europe contre les peuples”: Euroscepticisme et populisme dans le discours des partis politique,” *Les Cahiers du Cevipol* 2, no. 2 (2017): 22.

<sup>12</sup> Ayhan Kaya, *Populism and Heritage in Europe Lost in Diversity and Unity* (London: Routledge, 2019), 25.

share a common culture and history. Nationalism can become a tool to define “the people” in the populist conception of the word, and elites betray this national people by eroding its sovereignty as they advocate for globalisation and/or European integration. This idea is central to this thesis, which argues that both the RN and the AfD use nationalistic ideas to craft their Eurosceptic arguments. This is also why both of these parties can be classified as national-populist, but this work also argues that most, if not all, right-wing populist parties use nationalism to some extent. At the same time, this nationalism does not exclude pro-European sentiments, at least as long as they complement and do not clash with nationalist interests. It does almost always, however, clash with the idea of European integration.

As Brubaker points out, populism and nationalism share a belief in the importance of the nation-state.<sup>13</sup> Many Eurosceptic parties have directly echoed this sentiment, stating their attachment to a “Europe of nation-states”, which means that they do not want to lose national sovereignty to a supranational European institution. This does not erode the European identity many of these parties claim to have. Instead, they profess the importance of European culture and civilization. As will be discussed below, an important part of the popularity of right-wing populist parties lies in their denunciation of immigration from non-European or non-Western countries. Apparently, (Western) European immigrants are more welcome, and this research will argue that this is because they do not threaten nationalist sentiments among right-wing populist voters. This work also argues that national-populists politicise the existence of a common European culture in opposition to the non-European “Other”, in addition to a more nationalist identity. This is used to criticise the EU in a populist sense, because populists point at the political elites who force globalisation and open borders onto the people, but it also shows affiliation with Europe, because the “people” in this argumentation are Europeans.

By using both the concepts of populism and nationalism, it will be possible to deconstruct the Eurosceptic discourse of national-populists. Chapter 3 will be dedicated to this topic. For now, it is interesting to note that this focus on immigration might qualify some populist parties for the label of “ethno-nationalist populism”, in which the targeted “Other” can also include ethnic, racial, religious, or cultural outgroups, that are perceived as threats to the “true” people and who are blamed for many of society’s problems.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Brubaker, “Populism and nationalism,” 51.

<sup>14</sup> Bart Bonikowski, Daphne Halikiopoulou, Eric Kaufmann and Matthijs Rooduijn, “Populism and nationalism in a comparative perspective: a scholarly exchange,” *Nations and Nationalism* 25, no. 1 (2019): 62.



How does this tie in with Euroscepticism, and why are nationalist and populist ideologies more likely to be Eurosceptic? Kaya argues that, behind the rise of right-wing populism, there is a disconnect between voters and politics. Especially during the two largest European crises of the twenty-first century, the Eurocrisis that began in 2008 and the migration crisis that was most prominent in 2015, many people have felt affected by a lack of understanding from their politicians. Because of the negative impacts of these crises on the socio-economic level of many, or because of perceived demographic changes that were accelerated in some regions, some people felt as if their notions of identity, nation, and culture were being threatened. Because these sentiments were not discussed seriously by most politicians, many people felt unheard. It is not a coincidence that the popularity of populist parties in Europe has grown after these crises.<sup>15</sup>

This is why Euroscepticism, nationalism, and right-wing populism work well together: all three are attractive to people who feel threatened by changes in society. In the case of the so-called “have-nots”, each of these ideologies present them an “Other” who is the blame for most societal ills. When a party blends these ideologies, they can not only target a wider audience, but also strengthen the emotional response of voters by appealing to national identities. So does Euroscepticism, combined with either nationalism or populism, create a stronger juxtaposition between “the people” and the elites in Brussels. Thomas goes further, stating that for radical parties on both sides of the spectrum, Euroscepticism is a form of populism, because it allows for an anti-elitist discourse, which is supported by identification with “the people” and demands for more democracy. These Eurosceptic arguments both support and give more weight to populist rhetoric.<sup>16</sup>

### **What is Euroscepticism?**

There is not one clear definition for the word “Euroscepticism”. Instead, the meaning of both parts of this word, “euro” and “sceptic”, can differ depending on the context in which they are used. The binary – a party is either Eurosceptic and wants their country to leave the EU, or it is pro-European integration and wishes their country to remain/enter – is too simplistic.

This premise is explored by Paul Taggart, who makes a distinction between the three main Eurosceptical positions, which differ vastly but nevertheless all fall under the “Eurosceptical” umbrella. First, there is the complete rejection of any form of European

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<sup>15</sup> Kaya, *Populism and Heritage in Europe*, 1-2.

<sup>16</sup> Chloé Thomas, “L’Europe contre les peuples”: euroscepticisme et populisme dans le discours des partis politique”, *Les Cahiers du Cevipol* 2, no. 2 (2017): 4.

integration, which therefore entails a desire to either leave the EU or, if one's country is not yet a member, to never enter it. In a more extreme version, it can also mean the desire to have the whole project cancelled and to disband the EU. Second, there are those who are not necessarily against European integration, but who criticise the EU in its current form, finding it too inclusive. They feel that countries have been admitted too easily into the union, such as the post-communist states of Eastern Europe. Actors who embody this type of Euroscepticism are likely to argue that a negative consequence of EU-membership is enhanced migration.

The third position is inverse of the second: those who find the EU too exclusionary and want to expand the union to include more countries.<sup>17</sup> All these different types of attitudes towards the EU get the same label, which shows how vague the meaning of Euroscepticism is. The diversity of motivations, all captured in one word, has led to extensive criticism. Taggart summarised this aptly: "All opponents of the EU are, at least, sceptical, but not all sceptics are opponents."<sup>18</sup>

Taggart's division is the foundation for his later work, together with Aleks Szczerbiak, in which they discuss Euroscepticism in Eastern and Central Europe just before the "big bang", or the EU enlargement of 2004. They divide Euroscepticism into "hard" and "soft" types. The first means a complete rejection of European integration, which logically entails a complete rejection of the EU. The second type, soft Euroscepticism, encompasses doubts about the EU, but not complete rejection. These doubts can be based on problems with certain policies, particular EU competences or further widening and deepening integration. In this case, the scepticism comes not from a principled rejection of integration, but depends on a certain context, which means it can fluctuate or even disappear once the issue is resolved. Another form of this soft Euroscepticism is the "national-interest" one, meaning the use of nationalistic rhetoric in the context of the EU. Especially since the RN and the AfD have, nominally, let go of their desire to leave the EU, this is applicable to them. In theory, this rhetoric can be nothing but a ploy for domestic support. Both of these forms of soft Euroscepticism do not exclude support for the principle of European integration or even the EU, and, in this way, they are more flexible than Taggart's first definition.<sup>19</sup> In the case of both the AfD and the RN, their Eurosceptical classification has shifted in recent years, especially as an exit from the EU has

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<sup>17</sup> Paul Taggart, "A touchstone of dissent: Euroscepticism in contemporary Western European party systems," *European Journal of Political Research* 33, no. 3 (1998): 365-366.

<sup>18</sup> Taggart, "A touchstone of dissent: Euroscepticism in contemporary Western European party systems," 366.

<sup>19</sup> Paul Taggart and Aleks Szczerbiak, "Contemporary Euroscepticism in the party systems of the European Union candidate states of Central and Eastern Europe," *European Journal of Political Research* 43, no. 1 (January 2004): 3.

become less attractive in the face of the COVID19-pandemic and the situation in Great Britain after Brexit. The terms “soft” and “hard” Euroscepticism are therefore very useful to show the development of their Eurosceptic ideas.

Apart from the lack of nuance with which the term is often applied, there is Antonio Varsori’s point that the word “scepticism” conveys doubt, but does not imply any feelings of dislike or even hatred. According to him, this is emblematic of the current political discourse, which does not want to accept the existence of principled hostility against the project of European integration.<sup>20</sup>

Euroscepticism is most often associated with right-wing, authoritarian parties.<sup>21</sup> Nevertheless, although it is a phenomenon most strongly present in parties on the more extreme ends of the spectrum, it exists in both left- and right-wing ideologies.<sup>22</sup> According to Cesáreo R. Aguilera de Prat, however, the motivation behind their Euroscepticism is different. The radical right is considered to be more Eurosceptic if we solely look at the “hard” definition, because its scepticism is often motivated by an ethnic ultranationalism that makes it difficult to accept the very concept of European integration, whereas the socio-economic demands of the radical left do not pose this problem. They often focus more on the methods of the EU than on its right to exist.<sup>23</sup> This shows that the aforementioned hard separation between right-wing populism and nationalism is impractical.

In addition to this, Marta Lorimer’s research on right-wing opposition against the EU shows that, among far-right parties, Euroscepticism is not homogenous, with some parties completely rejecting integration and others having a more compromising position.<sup>24</sup> Other research has also shown the differences between the far-right’s attitude towards the EU and Europe. Catherine Fieschi, James Shields, and Roger Woods, in their research on the extreme right in France, Germany, and Italy, analyse how the extreme right combines a commitment to a shared European civilization with a rejection of any loss of national sovereignty to common

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<sup>20</sup> Antonio Varsori, “Euroscepticism and European Integration: A Historical Appraisal,” in *Euroscepticism: The Historical Roots of a Political Challenge*, ed. Mark Gilbert et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 10-11.

<sup>21</sup> Marta Lorimer, “What do they talk about when they talk about Europe? Euro-ambivalence in far right ideology,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 44, no. 11 (2021): 2018.

<sup>22</sup> Cesáreo R. Aguilera de Prat, *Euroscepticism, Europhobia and EuroCriticism The Radical parties of the right and left vis-à-vis the European Union* (Brussels: Peter Lang International Academic Publishers, 2013), 42.

<sup>23</sup> Aguilera de Prat, *Euroscepticism, Europhobia and EuroCriticism The Radical parties of the right and left vis-à-vis the European Union*, 43.

<sup>24</sup> Marta Lorimer, “Pro-European, anti-EU? The National Rally and European integration,” in *Right-Wing Critique of Europe: Nationalist, Soverainist and Right-Wing Populist Attitudes to the EU*, ed. Joanna Sondel-Cedarmas et al. (London: Routledge, 2022), 50-51.

European bodies.<sup>25</sup> This will be discussed in further detail in the first chapter of this thesis, but for now it demonstrates both how the comments with which this introduction opened fit into a larger way of thinking and how nationalism and populism are combined with Euroscepticism.

### **Method and structure**

The main question of this thesis is: “How do nationalist-populist parties use both nationalistic and pro-European arguments in their Eurosceptic discourse?” The analysis will make use of a content analysis to answer this question, focusing on primary sources from the RN and the AfD, such as their party programmes, but also on speeches and interviews on the topic of the EU and its policies. These sources show the views the RN and the AfD project and the arguments they give to build a case for their Eurosceptic discourse. Some of these arguments are populist in that they simplify problems by presenting one cause, namely the EU, but this thesis does not want to suggest that any point of criticism of the EU should immediately be considered populist.

The content analysis will be divided into three chapters, each discussing one of the main themes in the Eurosceptic discourse of national-populists in general and the RN and AfD in particular. These themes have been decided upon via a close reading of the aforementioned primary sources and research on the topic of national-populism. They are sovereignty, nativity, and identity. Before the content analysis, there will be a broader exploration of the historical context of Euroscepticism.

This work therefore contains four sub-questions. The first question, *What is the historical context of the Eurosceptical attitudes in France and Germany?*, will provide the historical framework for understanding the Eurosceptic discourses of the RN and the AfD. The second chapter will be dedicated to the question *How is national sovereignty used in the Eurosceptic discourse of the RN and the AfD?* It makes sense to open the content analysis with this question, because sovereignty is not only a core argument in its own right, meaning that national-populist parties are convinced of the importance of sovereign nation-states, but it also informs other criticisms. For example, any criticism of how the EU handled the economic crisis will often be supplemented with a sovereigntist argument: if only our nation had been free to decide upon its own policies, we would not have been affected (as much). As will be discussed in Chapter 3, this applies to populist criticisms of the way the EU dealt with the refugee crisis.

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<sup>25</sup> Catherine Fieschi, James Shields and Roger Woods, “Extreme right-wing parties and the European Union. France, Germany and Italy,” 235-253, in: John Gaffney, *Political Parties and the European Union* (London: Routledge, 1996), 237.

This chapter will discuss the question *How is nativism used in the Eurosceptical discourse of the RN and the AfD?* Nativism refers to the preference for the original inhabitants of a country. Whereas this seems to be a very nationalistic (and therefore anti-EU) argument, the way national-populists use it reveals an attitude in which the European “us” stands in direct opposition to the, mostly Muslim, non-European “them”. The fourth chapter will delve more into this European identity of the RN and AfD, and how this does not contradict but actually inform their criticisms of the EU. The main question will be: *How are national and European identities used in the Eurosceptical discourse of the RN and the AfD?*

The AfD is a relatively new party, so all primary sources will be from after 2013. Regarding the RN, Marine Le Pen became its leader in 2011 and has tried to rebrand her party, including changing its name from Front National to the RN in 2018. For this reason, this thesis will base its argumentation on primary sources from after 2011, apart from the historical section. It will also refer to the RN, even when the name was still Front National (until 2018), to prevent confusion.

## **Chapter one: Between EU-scepticism and Europe-phililia: A history of French and German right-wing national-populist parties' attitudes towards European Integration**

This chapter will look at why Euroscepticism developed and became a mainstream factor in European politics after the turn of the millennium, before diving into the specific cases of France and Germany. What are the origins of the AfD and the RN? In what national context did they emerge, and does this fit into the broader narrative of the development of Euroscepticism? Understanding the context behind current Euroscepticism in these countries is crucial for understanding their rhetoric. It also shows that Euroscepticism is, in most cases, a response to broader political and societal developments.

### **1.1 The history of Euroscepticism**

Euroscepticism already existed before the project of European integration took off. Varsori divides the history of Euroscepticism into three periods, which show how Euroscepticism is a reflecting of the broader political landscape. The first era encompasses the beginning of integration, which was opposed by significant minorities, both from right- and left-wing ideologies. Especially in Italy and France, influential communist parties rejected European integration out of a commitment to Stalinist thinking, which considered this integration to be a Cold War instrument for the West, and, in particular, for the US. In addition to this, more conservative nationalists were against integration out of patriotic and nationalist fears.

This period lasted from the introduction of the Marshall Plan in 1947 until the signing of the Rome Treaty, which started the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1957.<sup>26</sup> It was during this period that the French National Assembly famously rejected the plan for a European Defense Community, after which both the communist and the Gaullist parties spontaneously started to sing the French national anthem, reflecting their fears that integration would cost France its national sovereignty.<sup>27</sup>

The second period, from the late 1950s until the 1990s, was characterised by a growing consensus among both elites and citizens regarding the benefits of economic integration. It was supported by most of Western Europe, especially as it followed Jean Monnet's functionalist approach, which aimed for closer integration by first creating a supranational authority within one crucial sector.<sup>28</sup> The creation of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) in 1951 must be considered in line with this strategy. For most citizens, however, European integration

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<sup>26</sup> Varsori, "Euroscepticism and European Integration," 11-13.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibidem*, 13.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibidem*, 14.

was still a very distant reality that seemed to have little direct impact on their lives.<sup>29</sup> This led to a situation where, by the late 1970s, most parties were in favour of European integration, but were unaware of what this would entail for their countries. Euroscepticism still existed, but only on the margins of political life.<sup>30</sup> This idea is challenged by Ian Down and Carole J. Wilson, whose research shows that the level of support for the EC in the 1990s was very similar to that in the 1970s. Interestingly enough, they mention that the only two countries where the drop in support is non-negligible are West-Germany and France.<sup>31</sup> However, they do state that the 1970s and 1980s were characterised by a growing approval for the project.<sup>32</sup> According to Varsori, this optimism was strengthened by the world-changing events of the mid-1980s and 1990s. The reunification of Germany and the collapse of the Soviet Union, together with the rapid development of a globalised economy that was no longer singularly dominated by the West, forced change upon the successor of the EEC, the European Communities (EC). At first, this only seemed to strengthen the consensus and engender, for the first time, widespread interest in and support for the European project, which was only heightened by the ambition of many former communist states to join.<sup>33</sup> This was new, because, before the 1980s, the EC had been unable to create strong feelings in the European public.<sup>34</sup> Euroscepticism might not have been mainstream, but neither was enthusiastic popular support for European integration.

This changed because of the 1992 Maastricht Treaty (also called: Treaty on European Union or TEU), which turned the EC into the EU and is considered a watershed moment in the history of Euroscepticism.<sup>35</sup> Until this time, Liesbet Hooghe and Gary Marks write, Euroscepticism was tied to the macroeconomic performance of its member states, falling in periods of economic growth. As the EU took on more competences outside of economic ones, national identity replaced macroeconomic performance as a Eurosceptic argument, in response to the perceived erosion of national sovereignty and the economic concerns of individuals.<sup>36</sup> This is a crucial change, which will be explored in the following chapter, where the role of national sovereignty in the Eurosceptic discourse is analysed.

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<sup>29</sup> Ibidem, 16.

<sup>30</sup> Ibidem, 17-18.

<sup>31</sup> Ian Down and Carole J. Wilson, "From 'Permissive Consensus' to 'Constraining Dissensus': A polarizing Union," *Acta Politica* 43, no. 1 (April 2008): 46.

<sup>32</sup> Down and Wilson, "From 'Permissive Consensus' to 'Constraining Dissensus'," 38.

<sup>33</sup> Varsori, "Euroscepticism and European Integration," 19-25.

<sup>34</sup> Ibidem, 19.

<sup>35</sup> Taggart, "A touchstone of dissent," 366.

<sup>36</sup> Liesbet Hooghe and Gary Marks, "Sources of Euroscepticism", *Acta Politica* 42, no. 2-3 (June 2007): 121-122.

Varsori characterises the third period as a growing gap between the pro-EU elites and the more sceptical European public. It starts in the 1990s, however, according to Varsori, this decade and the majority of the 2000s were still characterised by a generally positive public opinion towards European integration. The reason he still lets the period of growing disenchantment begin in the 1990s is because, according to him, the foundations for intensified Eurosceptic sentiments were laid in this period. The steady progress of European integration, both widening and deepening, also engendered more criticism of both the principles and flaws of the project. For some time, however, this was concealed by the progress made in the form of the adoption of the Euro and the enlargement of the union towards Central and Eastern Europe. For Varsori, the real beginning of strong Eurosceptic tendencies among the citizens of the EU was the financial crisis, which began in 2008.<sup>37</sup> Kaya also states that the Euroscepticism of specifically right-wing populist parties was strengthened in the wake of this crisis.<sup>38</sup>

Most scholars, on the other hand, diverge from this classification in that they locate the onset of Euroscepticism as a mainstream phenomenon with the debate surrounding the TEU. For example, Taggart writes that, at least in the case of Western Europe, the rising tides of Euroscepticism were caused by the acceleration of European integration, which was exemplified in the TEU.<sup>39</sup> According to Rodríguez-Aguilera de Prat, this treaty ended the era of “permissive consensus”, because it first laid bare a clear divide between public opinion and pro-integrationist elites.<sup>40</sup> Nevertheless, he also points out that Euroscepticism did not appear out of nowhere and that there have always been chunks of the EC-population that did not look favourably upon integration.<sup>41</sup> Most scholars, however, do agree that it only became truly influential because of the economic crisis.<sup>42</sup>

More recently, the refugee crisis challenged the EU, but there is not yet a consensus on its impact. Daniel Stockemer et al. conclude that Euroscepticism did not increase in the wake of the refugee crisis.<sup>43</sup> This would suggest that the rise of right-wing populist parties in Europe,

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<sup>37</sup> Varsori, “Euroscepticism and European Integration: A Historical Appraisal, 26-27.

<sup>38</sup> Ayhan Kaya, *Populism and Heritage in Europe Lost in Diversity and Unity* (London: Routledge, 2019), 67.

<sup>39</sup> Paul Taggart, “A touchstone of dissent: Euroscepticism in contemporary Western European party systems,” *European Journal of Political Research* 33, no. 3 (1998): 363.

<sup>40</sup> Cesáreo R. Aguilera de Prat, *Euroscepticism, Europhobia and EuroCriticism The Radical parties of the right and left vis-à-vis the European Union* (Brussels: Peter Lang International Academic Publishers, 2013), 24-25.

<sup>41</sup> Aguilera de Prat, *Euroscepticism, Europhobia and EuroCriticism*, 24.

<sup>42</sup> Kaya, *Populism and Heritage in Europe*, 67.

<sup>43</sup> Daniel Stockemer et al, “The ‘refugee crisis,’ immigration attitudes, and Euroscepticism,” *International Migration Review* 54, no. 3 (2020): 905.



such as the RN and the AfD, has nothing to do with their Eurosceptic policies.<sup>44</sup> Marianne Kneuer then concludes that, because the refugee crisis did mobilise voters from populist parties, this can be attributed to cultural factors, especially in the case of older populist parties with “a strongly exclusive and nationalist program”.<sup>45</sup> The role of nativity, which is exclusive and nationalist, and Euroscepticism will be discussed in Chapter 3.

Before diving into the case-studies of France and Germany, it is necessary to mention one caveat. The majority of research on Euroscepticism was published before 2020. The impact of more recent developments, which have generally lessened Eurosceptic trends, has therefore not been adequately analysed. As Brexit turned out to have mostly negative consequences for the United Kingdom, popularising the term “Bregret”, support for leaving the EU has diminished.<sup>46</sup> Similarly, there is not yet a consensus on the impact of the COVID-pandemic on the EU.<sup>47</sup> In addition to these two developments, the 2022 Russian aggression in Ukraine has done much to enhance the attractiveness of the EU. All in all, Eurosceptic tendencies have fallen in every member state where they were researched.<sup>48</sup> Many populist parties even abandoned their “exit”-plans in favour of reforming the EU from within.<sup>49</sup> However, as discussed before, Euroscepticism is tied to current events, so there is no guarantee that five years from now it will once again be rampant.

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<sup>44</sup> “Home”, *The PopuList*, accessed May 3, 2023, <https://popu-list.org/>.

<sup>45</sup> Marianne Kneuer, “The tandem of populism and Euroscepticism: a comparative perspective in the light of the European crises,” *Contemporary Social Science* 14, no. 1 (2018): 15.

<sup>46</sup> F.e., Mark Landler, “Buffeted by Economic Woes, U.K. Starts to Look at Brexit With ‘Bregret’,” *The New York Times*, November 22, 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/11/22/world/europe/uk-brexite-regret.html>.

Polly Toynbee, “Three years on from Brexit, all UK voters are left with is a bitter taste of Bregret,” *The Guardian*, January 31, 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2023/jan/31/three-years-on-brexite-uk-voters-rejoining-eu-labour-europe>.

Soumaya Keynes, “Britain is the sick man of Europe once again,” *The Economist*, November 18, 2022, <https://www.economist.com/the-world-ahead/2022/11/18/britain-is-the-sick-man-of-europe-once-again>.

<sup>47</sup> <https://ecfr.eu/publication/the-crisis-that-made-the-european-union-european-cohesion-in-the-age-of-covid/> <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jun/23/europeans-believe-in-more-cohesion-despite-eus-covid-19-failings>

<sup>48</sup> Jon Henley, “Support for leaving EU has fallen significantly across bloc since Brexit,” *The Guardian*, January 12, 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jan/12/support-for-leaving-eu-has-fallen-significantly-across-bloc-since-brexite>.

<sup>49</sup> *Matthew Karnitschnig*, “How Putin made the EU great again. Continent has come together in the face of Moscow’s invasion of Ukraine,” *Politico*, February 27, 2022, <https://www.politico.eu/article/the-end-of-europes-putin-illusion/>.

Henley, “Support for leaving EU has fallen significantly across bloc since Brexit.”

## **1.2 The history of Euroscepticism in France**

To understand the current French attitude towards the EU, it is imperative to understand why its politicians supported the project in its early stages. Stuart Sweeney argues that France's memory of the Second World War, in the form of Charles de Gaulle's experiences in London, is crucial to understanding its role in the EU.<sup>50</sup> De Gaulle often felt marginalised by both the British and the Americans, which led him to develop the conviction that Britain was a Trojan horse for American influences on European cooperation. He embraced a certain "wariness towards Anglo-Saxons, including all British prime ministers", in stark contrast to his relationship with Konrad Adenauer.<sup>51</sup> In addition to this, there was the realization that France needed to lead Europe to maintain and increase its prestige in the new world order. De Gaulle quickly got side-lined quickly after the Second World War, but he would again play a crucial role during the 1960s. In this period he cemented the Franco-German alliance which, up to this day, plays a crucial role in the EU, and vetoed the entry of the UK into the EEC.<sup>52</sup>

Directly after the Second World War, France strongly feared renewed German aggression for the fourth time in less than a century. Most of the Western world agreed that it was necessary to improve the prosperity of common citizens in order to prevent re-radicalisation in Germany and a growing appeal of communism for the masses. In order to achieve a high level of welfare after the devastation of the war and to allow for the vital West-Germany economy to flourish without alarming the rest of Europe, the economic integration of Western Europe seemed necessary.<sup>53</sup> This strategy was first pushed by the US, the absolute world power and leader of the Western bloc, directly after the war. They realised that the project was in need of a European leader and turned to the British, who were more interested in maintaining their Commonwealth than in binding their future to the European mainland. Not until the forced devaluation of the British pound in 1949 did the US begin to consider France as an option for the role of leader, and only after the Schuman Plan had already been announced did the US accept this French proposal for readmitting West-Germany into European politics.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Charles de Gaulle was president of France during much of the influential early stage of integration, 1958-1969.

<sup>51</sup> Stuart Sweeney, *The Europe illusion: Britain, France, Germany and the long history of European integration* (London: Reaktion Books, 2019) , 87-88.

<sup>52</sup> Sweeney, *From Bismarck to Brexit: Wars, Politics and Diplomacy*, 97.

<sup>53</sup> Wim van Meurs et al. *The Unfinished History of European Integration* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2018), 31.

<sup>54</sup> John Gillingham, *Coal, Steel, and the Rebirth of Europe, 1945–1955. The Germans and French from Ruhr Conflict to Economic Community* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 97-99, 136-137.

The Schuman Plan was based on an earlier proposal by French minister Jean Monnet, who wanted to place Germany's Saarland under French administration. Moreover, both the Ruhr region and the Rhineland should come under either French or international administration. This plan would have allowed for French control over Germany's coal-rich regions, allowing France to guarantee her security and boost her own economy at the same time. The proposal was rejected by the US, but Monnet reworked it into a comprehensive peace plan and got Robert Schuman, the French minister for foreign affairs, involved. This cooperation led to the Schuman Plan, a proposal to place French and German production of coal and steel under a single supranational authority. The plan resulted in the Treaty of Paris, signed in 1951, not just by France and West-Germany, but also by the Benelux countries and Italy, which created the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC). It would become the earliest forebear of the current EU and was therefore the beginning of a process of both widening and deepening integration. For France, it was both a way to keep West-Germany under control and to heighten her own prestige.

Earlier French political leaders accepted European integration, because they had much influence over how it took shape, and because it mostly served their own benefits. De Gaulle was in favour of French membership in the EC as it was the best way to strengthen France's political and economic position.<sup>55</sup> Nevertheless, sovereignty within a European system remained a "leitmotif" in de Gaulle's thinking.<sup>56</sup>

According to Nonna Mayer and Olivier Rozenberg, French Euroscepticism was present at each step of the integration process, but it made its first popular appearance during the 1992 referendum on the TEU, which was approved by only fifty-one percent of the votes.<sup>57</sup> Until this referendum, the RN had been a pro-European party. In the 1980s, its calls for "European patriotism" changed to a vigorous campaign under the slogan "No to Maastricht – yes to a Europe des patries!"<sup>58</sup> Already before, in 1984, the RN had made its definitive comeback on the French national stage after the European elections of that year. Interestingly enough,

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<sup>55</sup> Paul Hainsworth, Carolyn O'Brien and Paul Mitchell, "Defending the nation: The politics of Euroscepticism on the French Right," in *Euroscepticism: party politics, national identity and European integration*, ed. Robert Harmsen and Menno Spiering (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2004), 38.

<sup>56</sup> Hainsworth, Carolyn O'Brien and Paul Mitchell, "Defending the nation: The politics of Euroscepticism on the French Right", 39.

<sup>57</sup> Nonna Mayer and Olivier Rozenberg, "France: When Euroscepticism Becomes the Main Credo of the Opposition," in *Euroscepticism and the Future of Europe Views from the Capitals*, ed. Michael Kaeding et al. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), 47.

<sup>58</sup> Catherine Fieschi, James Shields and Roger Woods, "Extreme right-wing parties and the European Union. France, Germany and Italy," in *Political Parties and the European Union*, ed. John Gaffney (London: Routledge, 1996), 248.

according to Paul Hainsworth, Carolyn O'Brien and Paul Mitchell, these elections "provided [Jean-Marie] Le Pen with an opportunity to flaunt his Europeanism".<sup>59</sup> The party programs and manifestos of the RN in the mid-1980s claimed to support a coherent European project. Nevertheless, the desire to put the nation first was already present. Slogans such as "France first" were consciously chosen as the FN's most identifiable symbols.<sup>60</sup> In the 1990s, both the discussion surrounding the TEU and the fear of the EU succumbing to the US' hegemony fed the RN's Euroscepticism, the latter because they feared the creation of the EU was a prelude to globalisation and Americanization.<sup>61</sup>

Jean-Marie Le Pen continued to condemn the EU as a threat to French sovereignty, which did not change when his daughter, Marine Le Pen, took over as the leader of the party in 2011. It was in this period, the 2010s, that Euroscepticism became an important factor in France, with representatives on both sides of the political spectrum. On the far right, Marine Le Pen attacked the EU, again mostly focusing on how it supposedly endangered France's sovereignty. She hinted at a French exit from the EU, the so-called Frexit, without completely adopting it into her program.<sup>62</sup> Instead, it would be dependent on the EU's willingness to meet her demands.<sup>63</sup> The discourse of the RN worked and the party obtained good results in the European elections of 2014 and 2019. In 2017, the second round of presidential elections was, for the first time, dominated by discussions on the EU. Emmanuel Macron, who would win the elections, framed them as a confrontation between "progressives and nationalists, open and closed society, liberal vs. illiberal democracy and order vs. chaos."<sup>64</sup> Le Pen tried to appeal to the working and lower/middle classes, who were traditionally less in favour of European integration than the "elites". Despite achieving a record score of thirty-four percent, she moderated her radical anti-EU positions after these elections, because she considered them to be the main reason behind her defeat. Instead, she opted for a rhetoric of changing the EU, not leaving it.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Hainsworth, O'Brien and Mitchell, *Defending the nation*, 45.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> Paul Hainsworth, "The Front National and the New World Order," in: *France. From the Cold War to the New World Order*, ed. Tony Chafer and Brian Jenkins (New York: Macmillan Press, 1996), 199.

<sup>62</sup> Mayer and Rozenberg, "France: When Euroscepticism Becomes the Main Credo of the Opposition," 48.

<sup>63</sup> BBC, "Marine Le Pen: Brexit "most important event since the fall of the Berlin Wall"," uploaded 10 Oct 2016, video, 2:48, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eUFIV-nSuGM>.

<sup>64</sup> Mayer and Rozenberg, "France: When Euroscepticism Becomes the Main Credo of the Opposition," 48.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibidem*, 49.

Despite considering itself pro-European, the RN has done much to thwart major initiatives that aim for a more united Europe, such as the Schengen Agreements. Fieschi, Shields, and Woods explain this as the RN failing to translate their ideology into policies that fit the European context. Their domestic political agenda also complicates matters, as it is simply too nationalist to be able to promote European policies.<sup>66</sup> In other words, the RN focuses too much on French sovereignty and the sovereignty of the nation-state in general for them to be in favour of European integration, despite being pro-Europe.

### **1.3 The history of Euroscepticism in Germany**

Directly after the Second World War, Germany was very insecure about its own identity. Especially in the case of the Bundesrepublik Deutschland (BRD), did the German elite rally around the project of European integration as a tool to ensure lasting European peace. Thomas Risse and Daniele Engelmann-Martin describe this as the way a strong European identity developed in the BRD.<sup>67</sup> For the resistance leaders who continued to play an important role in its government, on both sides of the political spectrum, Europe had become Nazi Germany's "Other". Europe symbolised all the good values that were worth preserving and which the Nazis had tried to destroy, such as human rights and democracy.<sup>68</sup> This sentiment even led, from the 1950s onward, to a "federalist consensus" among the elites in the BRD.<sup>69</sup> The political elites of the BRD were very pro-integration, both because they realised that their country would regain its standing in Europe, either economically or politically, without some checks on its power, and because they realised the danger communism posed if poverty were not controlled. These BRD-elites "thoroughly Europeanized" the German national identity.<sup>70</sup> European integration did provide the BRD with a way to re-establish itself within Western Europe. Especially after the relationship with France warmed, the BRD and later on the reunified Germany became one of two, if not the most important, players in the EC/EU.<sup>71</sup>

This history might explain why Germany had practically no mainstream Eurosceptic parties until the creation of the AfD. Nevertheless, its rise should be seen within the context of

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<sup>66</sup> Fieschi, Shields and Woods, "Extreme right-wing parties and the European Union", 245.

<sup>67</sup> Thomas Risse and Daniele Engelmann-Martin, Identity politics and European integration: The case of Germany, 301.

<sup>68</sup> Ibidem, 298.

<sup>69</sup> Ibidem, 300.

<sup>70</sup> Ibidem, 287.

<sup>71</sup> Ulrich Lappenküper, "On the Path to a "Hereditary Friendship"?: Franco-German Relations since the End of the Second World War," in *A history of Franco-German Relations in Europe. From "hereditary enemies" to partners*, ed. Carine Germond and Henning Türk (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 152.

the growing popularity of right-wing populist ideology. The groundwork for the acceptance of this ideology was, according to Ralf Havertz, laid by the book *Deutschland schafft sich ab*, written by Thilo Sarrazin in 2010.<sup>72</sup> This book invoked a “we” collective, which was threatened by demographic, economic, and cultural decline. The book blamed certain groups of immigrants, especially those who were either non-European or from former Yugoslav countries, for this decline.<sup>73</sup> This rhetoric, which fits into nativist discourse, has also been used by the AfD (see Chapter 3).

How does the AfD fit into the German Eurosceptic narrative? Its founders were a group of politically conservative but economically liberal people who did not agree with the approach of established centre-right parties towards European integration, especially regarding policies surrounding the Eurocrisis. Kaya describes the early AfD as an anti-establishment, anti-EU party that, over time, became increasingly reactive to immigration.<sup>74</sup> Some of its earliest members had been fighting European fiscal integration since the nineties, but the topic only gained sufficient salience after the financial crisis. When the party was founded in 2013, Euroscepticism was its most important issue.<sup>75</sup> Katrin Böttger and Funda Tekin state that the AfD is very successful in emotionalizing topics, such as the Euro-bailout of Greece. As the economic and financial crisis lost its salience, the AfD lost many voters. They managed to regain them during the refugee crisis, when over one million, partially undocumented, refugees arrived in Germany in 2015 alone.<sup>76</sup> This shows that Germany needed a European crisis for a mainstream Eurosceptic party to take hold.

Charles Lees points out that the AfD’s Eurosceptic narrative became, from 2015 on, more and more intertwined with a populist approach towards the entirety of Germany’s political establishment. At the same time, the more economically oriented party programme turned into the agenda of the more standard right-wing populist party.<sup>77</sup> The differences between West- and East-Germany’s reception of the AfD are big. The AfD is more popular in the east, the reasons for which have been heavily debated in the media. *Zeit* gives two possible explanations. First,

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<sup>72</sup> Ralf Havertz, *Radical Right Populism in Germany. AfD, Pegida, and the Identitarian Movement* (London: Routledge, 2021), 36.

<sup>73</sup> Havertz, *Radical Right Populism in Germany*, 35.

<sup>74</sup> Kaya, *Populism and Heritage in Europe*, 111.

<sup>75</sup> Ralf Havertz, *Radical Right Populism in Germany. AfD, Pegida, and the Identitarian Movement* (London: Routledge, 2021), 37.

<sup>76</sup> Katrin Böttger and Funda Tekin, “Germany: Eurosceptics and the Illusion of an Alternative,” in *Euroscepticism and the Future of Europe Views from the Capitals*, ed. Michael Kaeding, Johannes Pollak and Paul Schmidt (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), 52.

<sup>77</sup> Charles Lees, “The ‘Alternative for Germany’: The rise of right-wing populism at the heart of Europe,” *Politics* 38, no. 3 (2018): 305.

it might be the result of the history of the German Democratic Republic (GDR), which through its authoritarian character, relatively homogenous society, and lack of freedom of speech, bred fear for a multicultural society. In addition to this, *Zeit* suggested that the GDR never processed the legacy of national-socialism, which would explain why more extreme right-wing parties are more popular in the east. A second possible explanation is that, after the German reunification of 1990, problems in East Germany were never adequately dealt with. East Germans are still poorer than their western counterparts, and, as will be discussed later on, it is commonly understood that social-economic discontent can lead to a stronger presence of populist parties.<sup>78</sup> Others suggested that East-Germans lack traditional bonds between people and parties.<sup>79</sup> Interestingly, Euroscepticism does not seem to have been a common explanation. Nevertheless, it is still an important element of the AfD's programme. According to Havertz, Euroscepticism could be considered a tool to strengthen the AfD's xenophobic and Islamophobic positions, because it is an easy way to mobilise followers and voters.<sup>80</sup> Havertz does not explain why this would mobilise voters, but it is possible that, by blaming the EU for complex problems, also presents an easy solution to these problems. Later in this work, it will be argued that the AfD's Euroscepticism is strongly impacted by its stance against immigration.

Havertz also raises the question of whether the AfD truly wants to leave the EU. He points out that they have threatened to leave the EU if it does not change itself to meet the AfD's conditions. These conditions revolve mostly around returning to purely economic integration, which would come close to destroying the EU. But, as Havertz argues, they have not set a date for the EU to meet these demands, significantly lessening the threat that this ultimatum poses. Therefore, he classifies them as "reluctant hard Eurosceptics". He even goes further and suggests that the AfD only *projects* the image of a hard Eurosceptic party, because, as a populist and self-proclaimed anti-elitist party, they have to create an elitist project, such as the EU, as an opponent. In reality, their position on the EU is much softer.<sup>81</sup>

The AfD has played and continues to play an important role in the German political landscape of the last decade. The rise of (Eurosceptic) populism has to be explained by a

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<sup>78</sup> Julia Meyer, "Warum ist die AfD im Osten so erfolgreich?", *Zeit*, 27 August 2019, <https://www.zeit.de/gesellschaft/2019-08/landtagswahlen-ostdeutschland-mauerfall-ddr-AfD-politische-entwicklung>.

<sup>79</sup> Angelika Wohlfrom, "Fünf Gründe, weshalb die AfD im Osten so stark ist," *Südkurier*, June 18th, 2019, <https://www.suedkurier.de/ueberregional/politik/Fuenf-Gruende-weshalb-die-AfD-im-Osten-so-stark-ist;art410924,10186055>.

<sup>80</sup> Havertz, *Radical Right Populism in Germany. AfD, Pegida, and the Identitarian Movement* (London: Routledge, 2021), 87.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibidem*, 85.

growing unhappiness among certain groups within German society, mostly surrounding the topics of loss of sovereignty and national identity in the wake of the two crises that befell the EU in the early twenty-first century.



## **Chapter two: Against the “apostles of forced federalization”: The use of sovereignty in the Eurosceptic discourse of the AfD and the RN**

According to Aguilera de Prat, Euroscepticism is strongly associated with groups that cling to the “myth” of national sovereignty.<sup>82</sup> It therefore makes sense to open a discussion on the Eurosceptic discourse of the RN and the AfD by analysing how they present the EU as a threat to this sovereignty. This argumentation can be considered central to Euroscepticism. For populists, their criticisms of political elites are based on the idea that if only “the people” could vote without their sovereignty being limited by the decisions made in Brussels, many pressing problems would be solved. This people can, crucially, only exist within a nation-state, because, they argue, there is no such thing as a European “people”. As will be discussed in Chapter 4, this argumentation is not consistent.

National-populists principally believe in the importance of the sovereign nation-state, which turns the supranational EU into a direct threat. For the RN and the AfD, the EU is a danger to the nation-state, and because sovereignty can only exist at the level of the nation-state, it is also a threat for the possibility of sovereignty. In their eyes it is not possible to have on a different level than that of the nation state, so more EU, per definition, means less democracy. In their view, the people could therefore never support the EU, because it erodes their sovereignty, and only the elites would win if the EU got more competences. The AfD talks about “die politischen Eliten und Institutionen der EU”, whose political goals are, especially in the case of migration, different from those of the common people.<sup>83</sup> The RN uses the word technocrats, for example when Le Pen states that the then-president of France, Hollande, is nothing more than “le lackey d’une Union Européenne technocratique, qui s’est fixé comme objective la dissolution des états-nations.”<sup>84</sup> Here she simultaneously presents the EU as a danger to the very existence of the nation-state, but also shows how it threatens the sovereignty of the people. The French president, democratically elected, is nothing but a lackey, whereas the word “technocratic” also shows the lack of democracy within the union. At this time, she

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<sup>82</sup> Cesáreo R. Aguilera de Prat, *Euroscepticism, Europhobia and EuroCriticism The Radical parties of the right and left vis-à-vis the European Union* (Brussels: Peter Lang International Academic Publishers, 2013), 25.

<sup>83</sup> AfD, “Grandiose Abrechnung von Bernd Baumann mit der Migrationspolitik von Grünen, SPD & FDP!” Uploaded Dec 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2022 by AfD-Fraktion Bundestag, 0:12, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oKNG0SzXgQI>.

<sup>84</sup> Marine Le Pen, “Full Address and Q&A,” uploaded September 14<sup>th</sup> 2015 by Oxford Union, video, 18:00. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XVkTcGcPLW8>.

still aimed for a Frexit, which would then give back control to the French people. This desire, and her aversion to the EU, are clear when she states that “Ce ne sont pas quelques technocrates sordides qui vont contrôler nos vies! Pourrons-nous laisser le future de nos enfants entre les mains de ces apôtres de la fédéralisation forcée?”<sup>85</sup>

National sovereignty is of extreme importance to both the RN and the AfD. Both mention it extensively in their party programs. This is not unexpected, coming from national-populist parties. One of the core aspects of populism in general is the defence of “the people”, which often is a national people. Desiring complete sovereignty for this people, which would allow it to vote for its own best interests without the interference of a small but powerful elite, is a logical next step. A fear for the growing power of the EU follows. Berends points out that one of the strongest Eurosceptic arguments is the threat the EU poses to national sovereignty, which then again threatens the interests of the nation – and therefore its people.<sup>86</sup> Sondal-Cedamas and Berti have also noted a correlation between Eurosceptic trends on the one hand and increasing globalisation and European integration on the other. In other words: both trends, which are perceived as diminishing national sovereignty, have played a role in increasing Euroscepticism.<sup>87</sup> It should also be mentioned that these two trends, especially globalisation, also hurt ethnic homogeneity within countries, but this topic will be discussed at length in the following chapter.

Despite some similarities, sovereignty is the only theme in which the tone of the RN and the AfD has strong differences. This can be explained by the different historical contexts in which European integration took place in their respective countries, which influences how they view the impact of the EU on their national sovereignty. This chapter will therefore discuss the way the AfD and RN use sovereignty in their Eurosceptic discourse separately.

## **2.1 The RN, sovereignty, and Euroscepticism**

As discussed in the previous chapter, Euroscepticism played a larger role in France than in the BRD during the first decades of European integration. Sovereignist arguments were an important part of this French Eurosceptical sound. Central to the international policy of de Gaulle was, for example, the desire to maintain France’s sovereignty and ability to make independent choices. After his first retirement from politics (1953-1958), his influence was

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<sup>85</sup> Le Pen, “Full Address and Q&A,” 32:29.

<sup>86</sup> Ivan T. Berend, *The economics and politics of European Integration. Populism, nationalism and the history of the EU* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2021), 207.

<sup>87</sup> Joanna Sondal-Cedamas and Francesco Berti, “Introduction”, in: *The right-wing critique of Europe: nationalist, souverainist and right-wing populist attitudes to the EU*, 1.

maintained by the Gaullist parties, who were initially very hostile against European integration and voted against the European Defence Community, the EEC, and the French membership of Euratom. After De Gaulle returned to power, this changed due to his conviction that the best way to strengthen France's political and economic position would be through French-led European cooperation. However, this did clash with the traditional ideas of Gaullism, which were expressed in the Gaullist rejection of the TEU.<sup>88</sup>

After the age of consensus, French sovereigntist critique re-emerged in the 1990s, especially from the (radical) right, in which the RN played a large role.<sup>89</sup> For a long time, among the political elites and also in the earlier Gaullist discourse, the image of France as an international power was used to both support and criticise European integration. Integration has been considered both a way to revitalise France's influence on the world stage, and a threat to French autonomy and independence.<sup>90</sup> The RN has been on both sides of this spectrum. First, it desired the EU to do more to foster the influence of Europe on the world stage, until the debate surrounding TEU started and it began perceiving the EU as a threat to French sovereignty.<sup>91</sup>

The historical background shows that in the earlier stages of European integration, France was only willing to give up some of its sovereignty because its political leaders believed that their national position would be stronger because of it. At the same time, France was, in this era, the leader of the EEC. Despite this strong French influence on the direction the project would take, there was still resistance against it. Only when both the Gaullists and the union of socialists and communists, the strongest critics of European integration, lost political influence did the EEC gain more power through the introduction of direct elections for the European parliament.<sup>92</sup> This shows the inherent difference in how sovereignty and Euroscepticism are linked in France and Germany. For France, maintaining sovereignty played a key role in the process of European integration, and the RN fits into this line of thinking. For Germany, it was a way to regain sovereignty, as will be discussed below.

Le Pen has stated that she wants four sovereignties back from the EU: legislative, economic and banking, territorial, and monetary sovereignty. If the EU would not give these

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<sup>88</sup> Paul Hainsworth, Carolyn O'Brien and Paul Mitchell, *Defending the nation: The politics of Euroscepticism on the French Right*, 38.

<sup>89</sup> Emmanuelle Reungoat, "Exploring the Long-Term and Short-Term Causes of Euroscepticism: The Roots of French Opposition to European Integration," in: *Euroscepticisms: The Historical Roots of a Political Challenge*, ed. Mark Gilbert and Daniele Pasquinucci (Leiden: Brill, 2020): 42.

<sup>90</sup> Reungoat, "The Roots of French Opposition to European Integration", 48.

<sup>91</sup> Marta Lorimer, *Pro-European, anti-EU? The National Rally and European integration*, 54-55.

<sup>92</sup> Reungoat, "The Roots of French Opposition to European Integration", 40-41.

back, France would have no choice but to leave.<sup>93</sup> This means, crucially, that the EU would have few competences left, while most of them would instead be moved to the national level. This is also present in the RN programme. Le Pen's writing is less occupied with the EU than the AfD's. In the seventeen booklets in which she explains her political ideas, not a single one is dedicated to Europe or the EU. Instead, she emphasises the importance of French sovereignty, which often feels like an indirect attack on EU involvement. Regaining French sovereignty is therefore the basis of the RN's Euroscepticism. An example is when she writes in her booklet on immigration that French law has to be considered above international law, "permettant ainsi à la France de concilier son engagement européen avec la préservation de sa souveraineté et avec la défense de ses intérêts."<sup>94</sup> This could have grave consequences for the EU, as, for example, Le Pen also wants to absolve the Schengen agreement, "car incompatibles avec les intérêts des États".<sup>95</sup> This rhetoric fits into her changing view of the EU. Instead of desiring a hard Frexit, as she did in the past, she now wants to transform the EU from within into an alliance of nation-states.<sup>96</sup> As current president Emmanuel Macron has pointed out: despite this apparent change in views, her policies still amount to leaving the EU in all but name.<sup>97</sup>

In a 2014 interview with *Der Spiegel*, Le Pen says that the RN wants to represent all the French people with ideas such as "patriotism, defense of the[ir] identity and sovereignty of the people". She furthermore states she wants to destroy the EU, but not Europe; she believes in a Europe of nation-states and cooperation. Describing the different policies of the parties with which RN planned to work together in the European Parliament, she says: "Why should I care about that? For me, the fight for sovereign nations is enough. Everybody should be able to choose according to his own values and history, within a European civilization that we all belong to."<sup>98</sup> Sovereignty seems the core argument behind the RN's desire to work towards a Europe of nations, instead of a strong EU, and although she officially no longer wants a Frexit, French sovereignty is still her core policy. Crucially, in Le Pen's eyes, this sovereignty can only exist on the national level. However, the European framework is still present.

This notion was present in the debate between Macron and Le Pen during the presidential elections in 2022, in which she stated that she does not believe in European

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<sup>93</sup> "Marine Le Pen: Brexit "most important event since the fall of the Berlin Wall", 2:48.

<sup>94</sup> Marine Le Pen, *Le Contrôle de l'Immigration*, 12, <https://rassemblementnational.fr/documents/projet/projet-controle-de-limmigration.pdf>.

<sup>95</sup> Marine Le Pen, *Le Contrôle de l'Immigration*, 15.

<sup>96</sup> "Replay du débat d'Emmanuel Macron et Marine Le Pen, en intégrale," Uploaded April 21st, 2022 by TF1 INFO, video, 44:58, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=elgTG9oDiJY>.

<sup>97</sup> "Replay du débat d'Emmanuel Macron et Marine Le Pen, en intégrale," 44:47.

<sup>98</sup> Mathieu von Rohr, "Interview with Marine Le Pen. 'I Don't Want this European Soviet Union'."

sovereignty, because she does not believe in the existence of a European people.<sup>99</sup> This shows the populist notion of sovereignty coming from a singular “the people”, which shows that sovereignty can only exist in a nation-state, once again emphasizing the link between sovereignty and Euroscepticism. It is an interesting statement, because it seems to contrast her other ideas on the existence of a European identity, which will be discussed at length in Chapter 5.

## **2.2 AfD, sovereignty, and Euroscepticism**

Germany lost its territorial integrity, its sovereignty, and its standing after the Second World War. European integration became a way to regain some form of trust and, therefore, both sovereignty and respectability. Largely because of this historical background, Germany was the only founding country in which, at least until 2015, almost all relevant parties strongly supported the EU. Similarly, it was one of the few member states in which the electoral successes of radical right-wing parties were both modest and on a subnational level.<sup>100</sup> This cleavage between Germany and the rest of Europe, in particular Western Europe, was so strong that Arzheimer titled his work: *The AfD: Finally a Successful Right-Wing Populist Eurosceptic Party for Germany?* In 2015, he concluded negatively by stating that the AfD was neither a new right party and, at most, softly Eurosceptical. However, as has been discussed before, the party became more right-wing in subsequent years.<sup>101</sup>

The AfD began as a party focused on the failures of European integration, especially surrounding the euro crisis. Some had been fighting against the common currency since the 1990s, against the more common positive stance amongst Germany’s political elites.<sup>102</sup> When the party was founded in 2013, Euroscepticism was its most important issue.<sup>103</sup> Its name even referred to the statement of German chancellor Angela Merkel, who declared that there was no alternative to the current course of the German government during the Eurocrisis, with the large rescue packages which were meant to save Greece.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> “Replay du débat d’Emmanuel Macron et Marine Le Pen, en intégrale,” 44:30

<sup>100</sup> Kai Arzheimer, “The AfD: Finally a Successful Right-Wing Populist Eurosceptic Party for Germany?,” *West European Politics* 38, no. 3 (2015): 535.

<sup>101</sup> Arzheimer, “The AfD: Finally a Successful Right-Wing Populist Eurosceptic Party for Germany?,” 551.

<sup>102</sup> Ralf Havertz, *Radical Right Populism in Germany. AfD, Pegida, and the Identitarian Movement* (London: Routledge, 2021) 37.

<sup>103</sup> Havertz, *Radical Right Populism in Germany*, 37.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibidem*, 82.

The AfD is very focused on national sovereignty. Like the RN, they desire a Europe consisting of sovereign, democratic states.<sup>105</sup> This is emphatically present throughout their electoral programmes. The words “sovereign” and “sovereignty” are mentioned nineteen times in its 2021 Bundeswahltag programme, twenty-four times in its 2019 programme for European elections and twenty times in its “Grundsatzprogramm”, which originates from 2016. This is used to express a desire to be more independent from the EU, at times even threatening a “Dexit”.<sup>106</sup> They make it clear that they are firmly against a United States of Europe, but nevertheless, their goal is described as for Germany to be both sovereign and contribute to a peaceful and prosperous Europe.<sup>107</sup> The AfD wants to work together with other European countries only when this is beneficial to both parties. An example they give is that European states should work together to assure fair, free trade.<sup>108</sup> How the AfD links sovereignty with Euroscepticism becomes clear when they juxtapose the EU with sovereignty of the people and continue by effectively stating, like the RN, that these two are incompatible.<sup>109</sup>

This sovereignty of the people remains one of the core concerns of the AfD, so crucial that the electoral programme threatens with a Dexit if its sovereigntist demands are not met.<sup>110</sup> In the eyes of the AfD, sovereignty is incompatible with the EU. The reasoning behind this is that the AfD denies the existence of sovereignty for a European people, because this does not exist, and will not exist for the foreseeable future.<sup>111</sup> Following this logic, it is only possible to have true democracy in a nation-state, with the populist caveat that even there, the elites effectively hold the power.<sup>112</sup> Furthermore, they state that Germany’s lack of sovereignty also prevents the state from effectively dealing with migration streams.<sup>113</sup> The sovereigntist Eurosceptic argument therefore comes from principle and in response to certain policies.

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<sup>105</sup> AfD, *Programm für Deutschland. Das Grundsatzprogramm der Alternative für Deutschland*, (2016) 6, [https://www.AfD.de/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Programm\\_AfD\\_Online\\_.pdf](https://www.AfD.de/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Programm_AfD_Online_.pdf).

<sup>106</sup> AfD, *Europawahlprogramm. Programm der Alternative für Deutschland für die Wahl zum 9. Europäischen Parlament 2019*, (2019) 12, [https://www.AfD.de/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/AfD\\_Europawahlprogramm\\_A5-hoch\\_web\\_150319.pdf](https://www.AfD.de/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/AfD_Europawahlprogramm_A5-hoch_web_150319.pdf).

<sup>107</sup> AfD, *Das Grundsatzprogramm der Alternative für Deutschland*, 16.

<sup>108</sup> AfD, *Deutschland. Aber normal. Programm der Alternative für Deutschland für die Wahl zum 20. Deutschen Bundestag* (2021), 28, <https://www.AfD.de/wahlprogramm/>.

<sup>109</sup> AfD, *Deutschland. Aber normal*, 28.

<sup>110</sup> AfD, *Programm für Deutschland. Wahlprogramm der Alternative für Deutschland für die Wahl zum Deutschen Bundestag am 24. September 2017*, (2017), 7-8. [https://www.AfD.de/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/2017-06-01\\_AfD-Bundestagswahlprogramm\\_Onlinefassung.pdf](https://www.AfD.de/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/2017-06-01_AfD-Bundestagswahlprogramm_Onlinefassung.pdf).

<sup>111</sup> Wahlprogramm Bundestagswahl 2017, 7.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibidem*, 8.

<sup>113</sup> AfD, *Deutschland. Aber normal. Programm der Alternative für Deutschland für die Wahl zum 20. Deutschen Bundestag* (2021), 98, <https://www.AfD.de/wahlprogramm/>.

However, the reason the AfD desires sovereignty has changed. Whereas Euroscepticism, partially caused by the Eurocrisis, was their starting point, their core problem quickly evolved into migration. This mostly anti-Islamic discourse became less Eurosceptic, because it was focused on a European “us” versus a Muslim “them”.<sup>114</sup> Nowadays, the AfD does critique the lack of EU policies against migration; however, Euroscepticism is no longer their main priority. In conclusion: sovereignty remains an important topic of the AfD, but it seems to now mostly mean sovereignty for the German people – free of too many migrants – rather than sovereignty from the EU.<sup>115</sup>

Sovereignty is a key theme in the Eurosceptic discourse of both the RN and the AfD. With a populist emphasis on “the people”, it makes sense to demand sovereignty for this people, free from the intervention of both pro-European domestic elites and political elites in Brussels. Both parties have used this theme, but how it has been used has depended on the historical context of their countries. For France, sovereignty has been, by the RN, used as the most important argument for less, or no more, EU. For the AfD, sovereignty has mostly been present in their Eurosceptic discourse in relation to the two large crises of the last decade.

Sovereignty is intertwined with the two other themes, nativity and identity. Sovereignty means having control over the borders, and both the RN and AfD wish to have this control to prevent further mass-migration. Furthermore, Aristotle Kallis links it with the nativist tendencies of national-populist parties, writing that the populist “obsession” with border sovereignty has evolved into the use of the threat of ethnopluralism as an argument against anything that could hurt national sovereignty, such as political integration.<sup>116</sup> These two themes feed into any discourse on identity. When the identity of your people is dependent on nativist criteria, it is crucial to have border sovereignty and control who enters your country.

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<sup>114</sup> Hans-Georg Betz and Fabian Habersack, “Regional Nativism in East Germany: the case of the AfD,” in *The people and the Nation. Populism and Ethno-Territorial Politics in Europe*, ed. Reinhard Heinisch, Emanuele Massetti and Oscar Mazzoleni (Abingdon-on-Thames: Routledge, 2019): 113.

<sup>115</sup> Jefferson Chase and Rina Goldenberg, “AfD: From anti-EU to anti-immigration,” *Deutsche Welle*, October 28, 2019, <https://www.dw.com/en/AfD-what-you-need-to-know-about-germanys-far-right-party/a-37208199>.

<sup>116</sup> Aristotle Kallis, “Populism, sovereigntism, and the unlikely re-emergence of the territorial nation-state,” *Fudan Journal of the Humanities and Social Sciences* 11, no. 3 (2018): 296.

### **Chapter three: “Eine Asyl- und Immigrationspolitik, welche die europäische Zivilisation in existenzielle Gefahr bringt”? The use of nativism in the Eurosceptic discourse of the AfD and the RN**

Nativism, the preference for the original population of the country, is strongly present in national-populist parties. According to Mudde, it can even be considered one of the core tenants of the ideology of these parties, influencing their entire programme, including social and economic policies.<sup>117</sup> In the case of both the RN and the AfD, this is most clearly expressed in their attitude towards migration, a salient topic for which the EU takes the majority of the blame. Le Pen has stated, for example, that “La réalité de l’immigration en France, elle-est catastrophique.”<sup>118</sup> She later specifies this by stating that migration divides the French, and that there is a feeling of great injustice that these migrants get more help than *her own people*.<sup>119</sup> She blames both the French government and the EU for this policy, because the latter is, according to her, obsessed with open borders.<sup>120</sup> The AfD, for which anti-immigration is its core policy<sup>121</sup>, has stated that “Eine weitere Öffnung Europas für Zuwanderung aus anderen Kontinenten wird in relativ kurzer Frist unweigerlich zu einer Marginalisierung der einheimischen Bevölkerungen führen.”<sup>122</sup> Both these parties therefore show a commitment to the original population of their countries, and both link it to either Europe or the EU.

Havertz gives a more in-depth definition of nativism, as a combination of ethnic nationalism and Islamophobia or xenophobia.<sup>123</sup> This chapter will discuss how these elements are present in the nativism of both the RN and the AfD, and how they are used in their Eurosceptic discourses. The two parties will not be discussed separately, as did happen in the last chapter, because of the similarities in their views.

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<sup>117</sup> Cas Mudde, “It’s Not the Economy, Stupid!” In *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007) 133.

<sup>118</sup> “Marine Le Pen: Brexit “most important event since the fall of the Berlin Wall”, 6:54.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibidem*, 10:36.

<sup>120</sup> Le Pen, “Full Address and Q&A,” 16:01.

<sup>121</sup> “Marine Le Pen: Brexit “most important event since the fall of the Berlin Wall”, 10:36

<sup>122</sup> AfD, *Europawahlprogramm. Programm der Alternative für Deutschland für die Wahl zum 9. Europäischen Parlament 2019*, (2019) 37, [https://www.AfD.de/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/AfD\\_Europawahlprogramm\\_A5-hoch\\_web\\_150319.pdf](https://www.AfD.de/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/AfD_Europawahlprogramm_A5-hoch_web_150319.pdf).

<sup>123</sup> Havertz, *Radical Right Populism in Germany*, 43.



### **3.1 Ethnic nationalism and Euroscepticism**

This chapter argues that the ethnic-nationalist component of the nativism of the AfD and the RN is motivated by two core experiences, or feared experiences: social-economic deprivation and the loss of cultural identity. These experiences do not necessarily have to be rooted in reality. They are, however, associated with two large crises within the EU, which means that the EU can be indirectly blamed for them.

Regarding the first experience, social-economic deprivation, Kaya has pointed out that the Eurozone and refugee crises have further divided EU citizens between the haves and the have-nots, the latter being more likely to vote for populist parties.<sup>124</sup> These crises have therefore fed the rise of right-wing populism in the EU, showing how it is connected with deprivation. The financial crisis created socio-economic troubles, which, in combination with government policies such as neoliberalism, caused deindustrialisation and international migration. This hurt the economic position of many Europeans. The loss of cultural identity, on the other hand, was fed by the refugee crisis, which caused a feeling of “nostalgic deprivation”. Many Europeans felt that the non-Western refugees threatened established notions of identity, nation, and culture.<sup>125</sup> So both crises made Europeans feel as if “their place”, either culturally or economically, was being taken away by migrants, engendering nostalgia for older times. Seeing as national-populist parties confirmed these feelings, they again attracted many voters.

Jan Willem Duyvendak discusses why many native-born citizens in West European countries claim to no longer feel at home in their own countries. He writes that the “debate over ‘the stolen home’ is deeply nostalgic”, and that many right-wing politicians fear immigrants as a destabilizing factor in society.<sup>126</sup> These notions are very prevalent in the rhetoric of both the AfD and the RN. Le Pen has stated that multicultural societies always become multi-confrontational.<sup>127</sup> The AfD expresses the same sentiment when they write that “Die Ideologie des Multikulturalismus betrachtet die AfD als ernste Bedrohung für den sozialen Frieden und für den Fortbestand der Nation als kulturelle Einheit.”<sup>128</sup> Both these quotes indicate a preference for the “native” population. Ethnic nationalism is, for the AfD and RN, only indirectly a Eurosceptic argument. It is used to strengthen the sovereigntist argument, by stating that France is French, so the French people should decide who enters their country, without any obstructions

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<sup>124</sup> Kaya, *Populism and Heritage in Europe Lost in Diversity and Unity*, 1-2.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibidem*, 1-2.

<sup>126</sup> Jan Willem Duyvendak, *The Politics of Home. Belonging and Nostalgia in Europe and the United States* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011): 84.

<sup>127</sup> Le Pen, “Full Address and Q&A,” 23:07.

<sup>128</sup> AfD, *Das Grundsatzprogramm der Alternative für Deutschland*, 47.

from Brussels.<sup>129</sup> More directly, it turns into an argument against migration from non-European countries.

The reason why the ethnic-nationalist component of nativism does not engender direct Euroscepticism, is because both the RN and AfD consider themselves, their people, and their culture to be European. This means that Europeans are not considered a threat to any notions of ethnic homogeneity, whereas non-European (or non-Western) migrants are. Le Pen, for example, has stated that: “Des générations d’immigrés Polonais, Italiens, Espagnols, et Portugais ont vaincu les frustrations et les difficultés par l’assimilation. Aujourd’hui la machine est en panne, du fait d’un trop grand nombre d’immigrés venus principalement du Maghreb et de l’Afrique sub-saharienne (...)”<sup>130</sup> Kaya points out that, for the RN, the issue of immigration is inseparable from national identity.<sup>131</sup> As the migration of Europeans does not threaten the national identity of France, it is not a topic of any importance. The same can be said for the AfD, because it is very clear that when they discuss immigration, they do not mean immigration from other EU countries.<sup>132</sup> A very contemporary example is the response of populists to the refugee stream from Ukraine. Both the RN and the AfD were in favour of accommodating Ukrainian refugees.<sup>133</sup> In an analysis of the AfD, the *Deutsche Welle* wrote that the usual attitude of the AfD towards refugees is not applicable to “christlich geprägte Menschen aus einem europäischen Land.”<sup>134</sup> Of course, there were other factors regarding this attitude, such as the fact that it was mostly women and children fleeing the country, and the number of refugees was, for France and Germany, lower. However, it is clear that populists on the whole continent have been more welcoming towards Ukrainians and that the AfD and RN have not tried to capitalise on this crisis, whereas stronger policies against immigration are a huge part of their elective programme and, to an extent, their elective appeal.

To understand how nativism feeds Euroscepticism, feelings of ethno-nationalist pride are relatively unimportant. These feelings are not incompatible with European integration, because the national “ethnos” as, albeit to a lesser extent, European is well. Instead, nativism as a populist topic has become more salient in the face of rising migration, which is blamed on

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<sup>129</sup> Marine Le Pen, “Full Address and Q&A,” 16:01.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibidem*, 20:36.

<sup>131</sup> Kaya, *Populism and Heritage in Europe Lost in Diversity and Unity*, 78.

<sup>132</sup> AfD, *Deutschland. Aber normal. Programm der Alternative für Deutschland für die Wahl zum 20. Deutschen Bundestag* (2021), 79, <https://www.AfD.de/wahlprogramm/>.

<sup>133</sup> “AfD für Aufnahme von Flüchtlingen aus Ukraine,” *Zeit*, 28 February 2022. <https://www.zeit.de/news/2022-02/28/AfD-fuer-aufnahme-von-fluechtlingen-aus-ukraine>.

<sup>134</sup> Marcel Fürstenau, “Meinung: Die AfD hat ein Flüchtlingsproblem,” *Deutsche Welle*, May 28, 2022, <https://www.dw.com/de/meinung-die-afd-hat-ein-fl%C3%BChtlingsproblem/a-61925497>.

EU-policies. Stockener et al. pointed out this link as well, by stating that the EU stands for free movement and diversity, which means that perceived threats posed by migrants can also cause Eurosceptic attitudes.<sup>135</sup>

### **3.2 Islamophobia**

Islamophobia, the second part of Havertz's definition, is very visible in the rhetoric of both the AfD and the RN. For the RN, concerns surrounding Islam and migration started in the aftermath of 9/11. Already during the 2002 presidential election campaign, the party focused on the dangers of the Islamization of France.<sup>136</sup> This juxtaposition is also visible in the 2017 AfD *Wahlprogramm*, in which they dedicated an entire chapter to "Der Islam im Konflikt mit der freiheitlich-demokratischen Grundordnung."<sup>137</sup> Le Pen, as well, has stated that Muslim-extremists, which could enter Europe if the refugee crisis were not curbed, intended to "répandre la terreur pour nous diviser et faire triompher la sharia – c'est-à-dire, substituer leur ordre totalitaire à notre ordre démocratique."<sup>138</sup> The European "us" versus the Islamic "them". It should be mentioned that for a large part of the 2010s, there was a strong fear for Islamic terrorist-attacks, which occurred regularly in Europe at the time. Stephen Zunes points out that they have played a role in the European upsurge in Islamophobia.<sup>139</sup>

Islamophobia is central to contemporary nativist thinking in European national-populist parties. Interestingly, it also binds these populist parties stronger to a notion of European identity. Kaya has, for example, found that interviews in EU member states show that most supporters of right-wing populist parties implied that their Islamophobic sentiments made them more attached to a culturally Christian Europe, showing how Islam is still perceived as the "Other".<sup>140</sup> This does not make them more forgiving towards the EU, which is made up of primarily culturally Christian European countries. Instead, it only urges them to work harder towards a Europe of fatherlands because, in their eyes, protecting the borders is necessary for

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<sup>135</sup> Daniel Stockemer et al. "The "refugee crisis," immigration attitudes, and euroscepticism." *International Migration Review* 54.3 (2020): 883-912., 888.

<sup>136</sup> Kaya, *Populism and Heritage in Europe Lost in Diversity and Unity*, 78.

<sup>137</sup> Wahlprogramm Bundestagswahl 2017, [https://www.AfD.de/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/2017-06-01\\_AfD-Bundestagswahlprogramm\\_Onlinefassung.pdf](https://www.AfD.de/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/2017-06-01_AfD-Bundestagswahlprogramm_Onlinefassung.pdf).

<sup>138</sup> Marine Le Pen, "Discours de Marine Le Pen à la journée des élus FN au Futuroscope de Poitiers," streamed live on 1 okt 2017 on YouTube, video, 12 :05, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fyty5HSaAx0>.

<sup>139</sup> Stephen Zunes, "Europe's Refugee Crisis, Terrorism, and Islamophobia," *Peace Review: A Journal of Social Justice* 29, no. 1 (2017): 1.

<sup>140</sup> Kaya, *Populism and Heritage in Europe*, 112.

European countries to protect themselves.<sup>141</sup> Both the RN and AfD have warned of the dangers of Muslim immigrants in Europe. For the RN, migration is a threat to France and to Europe, and the EU is to blame for this. In light of this information, the opening line that “it is because we are European that we are opposed to the European Union”, makes perfect sense.<sup>142</sup> It is clear that Europeans are not a threat for the nativist notion of these parties, but the EU is to blame for not intervening, or, crucially, not allowing countries to close their borders. In this nativist narrative, it seems as if Muslims have become the core threat to the nation, more easily conceptualised than vaguer words such as “elites” or “globalists”. The xenophobic, and specifically Islamophobic, aspect of Havertz’s definition seems to therefore have a stronger presence in Eurosceptic discourses, but again only indirectly.

The clearest example of how nativism fed into the Eurosceptic discourse was in the aftermath of the 2015 refugee crisis. Eddie S.F. Yeung, however, challenges the existence of a strong correlation between immigration levels and public Euroscepticism. Instead, he places the correlation between anti-migration *attitudes* and public Euroscepticism, but these attitudes are not related to the actual levels of immigration.<sup>143</sup> This is supported by Kaya’s finding that the growing popularity of right-wing populist parties took off before the refugee crisis.<sup>144</sup> Nevertheless, the crisis did boost the popularity of these parties. Kai Arheimer and Carl C. Barning write that the AfD’s emphasis on migration during the electoral period was crucial for the party’s success, especially after then-Chancellor Angela Merkel opened Germany’s borders.<sup>145</sup> The topic has not lost much of its salience for the RN and AfD and continues to future as a core element of their programs.

Immigration is a topic where populists can shine because they can extensively point out the opposition in attitude between elites and the people. The AfD, for example, has pointed out that political elites do not follow the wishes of the people.<sup>146</sup> Marine Le Pen often does the same

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<sup>141</sup> F.e., Marine Le Pen, “Discours de Marine Le Pen à la journée des élus FN au Futuroscope de Poitiers,” streamed live on 1 okt 2017 on YouTube, video, 16 :01, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fyty5HSaAx0..>

<sup>142</sup> Marine Le Pen, “Discours de Marine Le Pen à la journée des élus FN au Futuroscope de Poitiers,” streamed live on 1 okt 2017 on YouTube, video, 7:50, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fyty5HSaAx0.>

<sup>143</sup> Eddy SF Yeung, “Does immigration boost public Euroscepticism in European Union member states?,” *European Union Politics* 22, no. 4 (2021): 632 and 647.

<sup>144</sup> Kaya, *Populism and Heritage in Europe*, 102.

<sup>145</sup> Kai Arzheimer and Carl C. Barning, “How the Alternative for Germany (AfD) and their voters veered to the radical right, 2013–2017,” in *Electoral Studies* 60, no (Nog niet in bibliografie) 3.

<sup>146</sup> AfD, “Grandiose Abrechnung von Bernd Baumann mit der Migrationspolitik von Grünen, SPD & FDP!” Uploaded Dec 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2022 by AfD-Fraktion Bundestag, 0:12, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oKNG0SszXgQI.>

and seems to suggest that the sovereign French have to make decisions to “demeurer lui-même”, which means the opposite from “une partie des “élites” politiques, médiatiques, culturelles nient l’identité française, nient l’existence d’une culture française et, dorénavant, s’attèlent à réécrire l’Histoire.”<sup>147</sup> Because the EU plays a large role in border management, it becomes the elite that is to blame for this crisis and its potential catastrophic effects in European countries.

This chapter has shown that populists use nativism as a core tenant of their ideology, which attracts many disenchanted voters. The reason for their disenchantment is, in this case, immigration. In populist eyes, this impacts not only the social-economic standing of “natives”, but also the identity and culture of the nation. The link between nativity and Euroscepticism is very interesting, because it is obscure. Nativity is, in general, not an argument against European integration per se, because national-populists believe in a common European civilization. Europeans might not be a part of the nationalist “people”, but they constitute another friendly people; not the same, but similar, and most definitely not a threat. They are not part of the “Other”. Instead, nativism informs the notion of a “Europe of Fatherlands”, and a certain viewpoint of the EU, which can be considered soft Euroscepticism – a criticism of how the EU functions, and in the case of migration, of certain European policies. There is, however, the desire to work together on a European level and the wish for this “Europe of Fatherlands” is also an acknowledgement of a common European culture that needs protecting. Border sovereignty is not desired so that other Europeans can be refused entry.

On the whole, how nativism informs the Eurosceptic discourse of the RN and the AfD is in the perceived failure of the EU to curb immigration and protect European cultures and/or the EU-economy from migrants, Islam, and globalisation.

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<sup>147</sup> Marine Le Pen, *Le Contrôle de l’Immigration*, 6.

## **Chapter four: “Our culture” but not “our people”: The use of identity in the Eurosceptic discourse of the RN and the AfD**

How does identity play a role in the Eurosceptic discourse of national-populist parties? For both the RN and the AfD, their national and their European identities are crucial. They define themselves as European in a cultural sense, but national in a political sense.

### **4.1 Both “national” and “European”: the cultural identity of populists**

The AfD states in its *Grundsatzprogramm*: “Wir sind offen gegenüber der Welt, wollen aber Deutsche sein und bleiben. Wir wollen die Würde des Menschen, die Familie mit Kindern, unsere abendländische christliche Kultur, unsere Sprache und Tradition in einem friedlichen, demokratischen und souveränen Nationalstaat des deutschen Volkes dauerhaft erhalten.”<sup>148</sup>

This citation exemplifies many of the themes of this chapter. Not only does the AfD emphasize that they want to stay German, which feels like a nativist statement in that it attacks the influence of migrants in Germany, but it also describes their culture as “unsere abendländische christliche Kultur”. This shows that, culturally, the AfD considers Germany to be Europe. In the same breath, it mentions the importance of a sovereign nation-state. In the Bundestag, Bernd Baumann of the AfD stated that migration should be stopped, because “sie drohen bei anhaltender Massenzuwanderung unsere Deutsche und Europäische Kultur zu verändern, unsere Identität, unser kulturelles selbst in eine richtung die wir nicht wollen, und die auch die Mehrheit in Deutschland und in Europa nicht will.”<sup>149</sup> In line with the last chapter, this shows that whereas German and European culture are not synonymous, German culture does fall under the European umbrella. The usage of “unsere Identität” refers to all Europeans. Especially in the face of mass-migration, it is clear to the AfD that Europe shares an identity. In short: Germany has to stay German, but culturally, that also means it has to stay European. At the same time, this European identity must not hurt Germany’s sovereignty, so it must remain a purely cultural identity. This chapter will argue that his line of thinking is present in both the AfD and the RN.

As discussed before, the RN puts more emphasis on the importance of France’s national culture than the AfD does for Germany. However, although it is mentioned less often, it is clear that in the vision of the RN, the European identity of this national culture is crucial. In 2019,

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<sup>148</sup> AfD, *Das Grundsatzprogramm der Alternative für Deutschland*, 6.

<sup>149</sup> “So zerstört migration unsere kultur und identität!”, uploaded 10 Jun 2021 by AfD-Fraktion Bundestag, 5:40, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xb54jPyBAGo>.

Le Pen stated that “Nous sommes Européens parce que nous partageons l'héritage de Jérusalem et de Rome, d'Athènes et de Constantinople. Cet héritage nous définit et inscrit nos cultures, diverses, en évolution permanente, à l'intérieur d'une civilisation [...]. Nous ne pouvons pas gaspiller cet héritage au nom d'une soumission au multiculturalisme qui a échoué partout.”<sup>150</sup> It shows not only a historical and cultural understanding of Europe, in which French culture is one among many, but also the assertion that this culture is undoubtedly European. In another speech, Le Pen said that “Ils viennent pour détruire et anéantir tous que nous sommes et tous qu'ils haïssent: notre liberté, notre mode de vie, notre culture et, en France, notre laïcité (...) Infiltré dans tous les pays d'Europe (...) ces barbares ont déclaré la guerre à nos valeurs, à notre civilisation, à nos libertés, à nos traditions.”<sup>151</sup> With the usage of “our”, she refers to Europe, which is clear when she has to specify “In France” when discussing secularism. As stated before, for Le Pen there is a very obvious European “us”, which shares values, traditions, and a civilisation, especially when there is a “them” present. This is clear when she uses the word “barbarians” to juxtapose them with the values, civilisation, freedoms, and traditions in “all the countries in Europe”. In another speech, she states that “we” come from a civilisation that has its roots in Christian teachings.<sup>152</sup> Although she does not use the word “culture”, like the AfD does, she does use words that might be stronger, such as “civilization” and “values”.

These citations demonstrate three tenants regarding the usage of European identity by national-populists. Firstly, this European identity is mostly, if not purely, cultural. This is logical because acknowledging the existence of more than just the cultural aspect of European identity could be perceived as a tacit acceptance of political European integration, which contradicts with these parties' views on sovereignty. Both parties make sure that this confusion cannot happen. Marine Le Pen states that “There is no European sovereignty because there is no European people. France is a sovereign country because France has a people.”<sup>153</sup> The AfD, remarkably similar, writes that “Weder gibt es ein europäisches Staatsvolk, das für ein solches Vorhaben konstitutiv wäre, noch ist Erkenbar, dass sich ein solches auf absehbare Zeit herausbildet.”<sup>154</sup> This does beg the question of what constitutes a “people” in the eyes of the

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<sup>150</sup> “Marine Le Pen dénonce une “soumission au multiculturalisme” en Europe”. *Le Journal de Montréal*, January 21th, 2019, “<https://www.journaldemontreal.com/2019/01/21/marine-le-pen-denonce-une-soumission-au-multiculturalisme-en-europe>.”

<sup>151</sup> Marine Le Pen, “Full Address and Q&A,” 11:30.

<sup>152</sup> “Marine Le Pen: Brexit “most important event since the fall of the Berlin Wall”, 15:00.

<sup>153</sup> The Debate - Le Pen: “I want an alliance of European nations”, uploaded April 20<sup>th</sup>, 2022 by *France 24 English*, 2:18, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eOJ2iiCqpOE>.

<sup>154</sup> AfD, *Europawahlprogramm. Programm der Alternative für Deutschland für die Wahl zum 9. Europäischen Parlament 2019*, (2019) 11, [https://www.AfD.de/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/AfD\\_Europawahlprogramm\\_A5-hoch\\_web\\_150319.pdf](https://www.AfD.de/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/AfD_Europawahlprogramm_A5-hoch_web_150319.pdf).

AfD and the RN. In the view of both parties, there is such a thing as a European civilisation, with common traditions and values, which would suggest that it is not illogical to have common political institutions. The second point is therefore that both parties use this cultural identity whenever it fits the purposes of the argument they are making. When referring to the refugee crisis, both refer to the common European civilization that needs protecting. When discussing sovereignty, there are no references to shared values and civilization. Compare, for example, the earlier quotes that mention a shared European culture with the AfD stating that the EU will fail because “Der Versuch jedoch, aus derzeit 27 oder noch mehr Staaten mit jeweils eigenen Sprachen, Kulturen und historic Erfahrungen einen wie auch immer ausgestalteten Gesamtstaat zu bilden, muss scheitern.”<sup>155</sup>

The third point is that both parties refer to Christianity. Especially interesting is how, for the RN, both secularity and Christianity are important. The AfD mentions European values and refers to their roots as “die christliche und humanistische Kultur der europäischen Völker”.<sup>156</sup> Again, both parties acknowledge the European roots of their culture and values, but at the same time they maintain a strict definition of their own “Völker” as separate entities within this culture.

The references to Christianity can be considered a way to create a non-European, Muslim “Other”. They are often presented as the main non-European outgroup, whose “Otherness” seems to evoke a stronger cultural attachment to Europe among populists. For RN and AfD, the emphasis on a shared European culture is most strongly present when discussing migration or the threat of Islam. Le Pen’s strongest appeal for unity, for example, might have been when she stated that all European nations had to come together to fight against the “menace Islamiste”.<sup>157</sup> Interestingly, in this same speech she strongly denounces the EU and states that both the UK and France should exit.<sup>158</sup> It shows a belief in a common European cultural identity, which has to be protected, and even a desire for some political cooperation. However, this cooperation does encompass the EU and its policies towards borders. It also seems she is not principally against the Islam, but instead opposes multiculturalism.<sup>159</sup> This is clear, for example, when she discusses women’s rights and burkinis and states “Si vous

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<sup>155</sup> AfD, *Deutschland. Aber normal. Programm der Alternative für Deutschland für die Wahl zum 20. Deutschen Bundestag* (2021), 28, <https://www.AfD.de/wahlprogramm/>.

<sup>156</sup> AfD, *Deutschland. Aber normal*, 22, <https://www.AfD.de/wahlprogramm/>.

<sup>157</sup> Le Pen, “Full Address and Q&A,” 12:26.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibidem*, 35:16.

<sup>159</sup> Marine Le Pen dénonce une “soumission au multiculturalisme” en Europe ». *Le Journal de Montréal*, January 21th, 2019, “<https://www.journaldemontreal.com/2019/01/21/marine-le-pen-denonce-une-soumission-au-multiculturalisme-en-europe>.”



souhaitez cela pour votre pays, parfait. Nous ne souhaitons pas cela pour le nôtre.”<sup>160</sup> It again demonstrates her commitment to sovereignty.

For the AfD, too, there is a Muslim “Other”. While discussing Turkey’s candidate-member status for the EU, they write “Die Türkei gehört kulturell nicht zu Europa. Ihre zunehmende Islamisierung gibt Anlass zur Sorge und zeigt, dass die Türkei sich noch weiter von Europa und der westlichen Wertegemeinschaft entfernt hat.”<sup>161</sup> The underlying statement is clear: Islamisation means distancing oneself from Europe and western values. Both parties often refer to this by showing how more Muslim integration into Europe could endanger Europeans, especially after the wave of terrorist attacks in the 2010s. The RN has pointed to the alleged danger Muslims pose to both homosexuals and women.<sup>162</sup> The AfD also points to the danger Muslims could pose for Jewish people,<sup>163</sup> which could be considered ironic, since the AfD has been accused of antisemitism.<sup>164</sup>

Populist ideology is often described or linked with other ideologies such as nativism and nationalism. Not much research has been dedicated to Europhilia among populists. Nevertheless, as Vasilopoulou states, irrespective of the flavour of radical right Euroscepticism, they all seem to agree on a cultural definition of Europe.<sup>165</sup> This thesis supports this statement. Therefore, the aforementioned statement by Kaya that both the RN and AfD try to capitalise on national rather than European heritage is, in the eyes of this work, incorrect.<sup>166</sup> Instead, this European heritage is regularly capitalised on, especially in the debate surrounding immigration from Islamic countries.

## **4.2 The role of national identity**

So far, the chapter has focused on what seems to be Europe-phililia. There is a broad consensus among national-populists that, culturally, their nation and its culture belong to Europe. How does this sentiment link with Euroscepticism? As research by Catherine E. De

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<sup>160</sup> “Marine Le Pen: Brexit “most important event since the fall of the Berlin Wall”, 17:19.

<sup>161</sup> AfD, *Deutschland. Aber normal. Programm der Alternative für Deutschland für die Wahl zum 20. Deutschen Bundestag* (2021), 66, <https://www.AfD.de/wahlprogramm/>.

<sup>162</sup> Le Pen, “Full Address and Q&A,” 10:42.

<sup>163</sup> AfD, *Deutschland. Aber normal. Programm der Alternative für Deutschland für die Wahl zum 20. Deutschen Bundestag* (2021), 84, <https://www.AfD.de/wahlprogramm/>.

<sup>164</sup> Samuel Salzborn, “The antisemitic turn of the “Alternative for Germany” party,” *Open Democracy*, December 9<sup>th</sup>, 2018, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/can-europe-make-it/antisemitic-turn-of-alternative-for-germany-party/>.

<sup>165</sup> Sofia Vasilopoulou, “European Integration and the Radical Right: Three Patterns of Opposition,” *Government and Opposition* 46, No. 2 (2011): 234.

<sup>166</sup> Kaya, *Populism and Heritage in Europe*, 25.

Vries has established, the rise of Euroscepticism does not seem to have been determined by the number of people who hold an exclusive national identity, seeing as this sentiment has been largely stable.<sup>167</sup> This discloses, crucially, that holding a European identity does not prevent someone from holding Eurosceptic views. However, because this identity is mostly cultural, people still felt the consequences of political decisions on a national level. Rising levels of Euroscepticism were to a large extent caused by the economic and refugees crises which made people feel like that, economically and culturally, they were being replaced. Although these problems might have been considered European problems, people felt them, politically and emotionally, on a national level.

By preventing EU member states from protecting themselves against these crises, the EU was perceived as endangering both European cultural values, but also national identities. This would allow for a denunciation of the EU, while at the same time wishing the best for Europe. As Marine Le Pen said: “I summarise it this way: the European Union is dead. Long live Europe.”<sup>168</sup>

This reflects the Eurosceptic discourse of national-populists, in which European identity is purely cultural and exists alongside a national political culture. This seems to be, however, supported by a majority of Europeans. Bergbauer points out that a collective European identity is robust if “Europe” is the reference point, in contrast to when the EU is the locus of identity. She concludes that Europeans seem to have a common we-feeling as inhabitants of the same continent, either in a geographical or cultural sense, but not as inhabitants of the same political identity.<sup>169</sup> This national culture is, at times, politicised as an argument to show the differences between European nations. Especially in the case of the RN, this was very clear, when they adopted Jeanne d’Arc as a national symbol. Every May 1<sup>st</sup> since 1988, the parade of the RN has finished with a speech from its leader near the statue of Jeanne d’Arc, symbolising how now the RN has to protect the country against “invaders”: not the English, but foreigners, immigrants and the EU.<sup>170</sup> Kaya even goes as far as to write that Marine Le Pen considers herself, and is

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<sup>167</sup> Catherine E. De Vries, *Euroscepticism and the Future of European Integration* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018): 21.

<sup>168</sup> Lara Marlowe, “Marine Le Pen: ‘The EU is dead. Long live Europe’”, *The Irish Times*, February 23, 2019, <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/world/europe/marine-le-pen-the-eu-is-dead-long-live-europe-1.3801809>.

<sup>169</sup> Stephanie Bergbauer, *Explaining European Identity Formation. Citizens’ Attachment from Maastricht Treaty to Crisis* (Cham: Springer, 2018), 129.

<sup>170</sup> Thomas Snégaroff, “Comment Jeanne d’Arc a été privatisée par le Front national (1985-2015)”, *France Info*, 24/04/2015, [https://www.francetvinfo.fr/replay-radio/histoires-d-info/comment-jeanne-d-arc-a-ete-privatisee-par-le-front-national-1985-2015\\_1776401.html](https://www.francetvinfo.fr/replay-radio/histoires-d-info/comment-jeanne-d-arc-a-ete-privatisee-par-le-front-national-1985-2015_1776401.html).

considered by her followers, to be a modern Jeanne d'Arc.<sup>171</sup> But for the AfD as well, as mentioned before, their national identity is important. This desire to maintain both a national identity and belong to Europe is clear in the following citation: "Unser Ziel ist ein souveränes Deutschland, das die Freiheit und Sicherheit seiner Bürger garantiert, ihren Wohlstand fördert und seinen Beitrag zu einem friedlichen und prosperierenden Europa leistet."<sup>172</sup> Germany is presented as a clear part of Europe, however, the EU is not mentioned. In the same paragraph, the commitment to national sovereignty and the rejection of a "United States of Europe" is made explicit.<sup>173</sup>

These quotes show the desire to maintain a distinct national political identity. This view has to engender Euroscepticism, since a project of political integration threatens the existence of a purely national political identity. However, for many people the nation-state is also simply the framework through which they regard political events. Being culturally European does not have anything to do with how they experience politics. Regarding the RN and the AfD, they either use their national or European identity depending on the context. Their European identity is used when discussed problems such as migration, when the "adversary" is non-European. Their national identity, and national history, is referenced to when denouncing the EU. Especially the RN often refers to its heritage, stating "une nation, un patrimoine".<sup>174</sup> In defining what it means to be French, Le Pen has also stated that it means "se fonder dans un corpus des valeurs, c'est se réjouir de l'histoire de son pays (...) C'est être aussi des réceptacles du patrimoine français, patrimoine littéraire, culturelle, picturale, architecturale, et j'en passe. C'est cela d'être Français."<sup>175</sup> The AfD has written "Denn Demokratie und Freiheit stehen auf dem Fundament gemeinsamer kultureller Werte und historischer Erinnerungen. In der Tradition der beiden Revolutionen von 1848 und 1989 artikulieren wir mit unserem bürgerlichen Protest den Willen, die nationale Einheit in Freiheit zu vollenden und ein Europa souveräner demokratischer Staaten zu schaffen (...)."<sup>176</sup> These definitions fit into a trend that Duyvendak describes as the "culturalization" of national citizenship. As many perceive that the "native" culture is under threat, the desire to protect traditional cultural heritage is augmented. This strengthens the emotional aspects of citizenship, which, according to Duyvendak, have changed

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Ayhan Kaya, *Populism and Heritage in Europe Lost in Diversity and Unity* (London: Routledge, 2019), 86.

<sup>172</sup> AfD, *Das Grundsatzprogramm der Alternative für Deutschland*, 16.

<sup>173</sup> AfD, *Das Grundsatzprogramm*, 16.

<sup>174</sup> Marine le Pen, *Le Patrimoine, Facteur de cohésion nationale*, 5, <https://rassemblementnational.fr/livrets-thematiques>.

<sup>175</sup> Le Pen, "Full Address and Q&A," 1:17:32.

<sup>176</sup> AfD, *Das Grundsatzprogramm der Alternative für Deutschland*, 6.

from a status or practice into a deep sentiment. As discussed before, he has also shown how the desire to protect the national identity, in cultural terms, is strengthened by the appearance of immigrants who are perceived as “foreign”.<sup>177</sup> This is visible in Le Pen’s description of what it means to be French. But since this culture is also considered European, feelings of national pride are not by definition incompatible with a strong European identity. A cultural national identity is therefore not an indication of Eurosceptic sentiments, as has been shown in the cases of the AfD and RN, neither of which use their national culture as a Eurosceptic argument. Even when discussing the “threat” of migration, it is more often the European culture that they present as being in danger, than their national culture. However, when this national identity turns political, it starts the debate on sovereignty, which can lead to Euroscepticism.

### **4.3 What is best for Europe?**

Lastly, populist parties can point to perceived failings of the EU out of Europe-philía. While discussing the rise of populism within Europe, Le Pen states “we can turn our backs on all that made European peoples suffer”.<sup>178</sup> The AfD was founded because it feels that the economic policy of the EU hurts German interests, but also because it feels the EU is not able to solve crises, such as migration and Islamification, which hurt “unserer freiheitlichen Demokratien.”<sup>179</sup> They also point out that they want freedom for all European nations and believe that nation-states are more capable than the EU to fulfil certain tasks, such as the justice system. They also emphasise that they want to live together in friendship and “guter Nachbarschaft”.<sup>180</sup>

It is no use to repeat the last two chapters, but it is clear that according to the RN and the AfD, it is not just better for their own countries, but for Europe as a whole, to have no or less EU. An example is migration. The parties criticise the EU because its policies hurt, in their eyes, all of Europe. Their criticism of the EU can therefore be seen as a form of Europe-philía.

It is also worth noting that populist parties have not always been Eurosceptic. In the late 1980s, the EU was mainly criticised for not protecting European identity and European interests on the world stage. From the early 1990s on, criticism of the EU centered around its perceived

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<sup>177</sup> Duyvendak, *The Politics of Home. Belonging and Nostalgia in Europe and the United States*, 92-93.

<sup>178</sup> Marlowe, “Marine Le Pen: “The EU is dead. Long live Europe.”

<sup>179</sup> AfD, *Europawahlprogramm. Programm der Alternative für Deutschland für die Wahl zum 9. Europäischen Parlament 2019*, (2019) 37, [https://www.AfD.de/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/AfD\\_Europawahlprogramm\\_A5-hoch\\_web\\_150319.pdf](https://www.AfD.de/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/AfD_Europawahlprogramm_A5-hoch_web_150319.pdf).

<sup>180</sup> AfD, *Programm für Deutschland. Das Grundsatzprogramm der Alternative für Deutschland*, (2016) 17, [https://www.AfD.de/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Programm\\_AfD\\_Online\\_.pdf](https://www.AfD.de/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Programm_AfD_Online_.pdf).

encroachment on the sovereignty of its member states. Both arguments are still used today.<sup>181</sup> Once again, we see the importance of the TEU for the development of mainstream Eurosceptic populism. It also shows that populism was not always Eurosceptical.

This chapter has shown the strong presence of a European cultural identity among the AfD and the RN. Nevertheless, this strong affiliation does not translate into a more forgiving attitude towards the EU. Instead, the EU is criticised because it does not conform with traditional European values and it does not benefit Europeans.

National identity does not directly cause Euroscepticism, because there does not seem to be a discussion surrounding the common cultural roots of most European cultures. Instead, this identity informs the desire for national sovereignty, which can then be used to discuss the EU. The surprising conclusion is that most populists seem to be very fond of Europe as a culture and civilization as long as, politically, their nations are free to follow their own course.

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<sup>181</sup> Lorimer, *Pro-European, anti-EU? The National Rally and European integration*, 54-55.

## **Conclusion**

National-populist parties in Europe can, at the same time, be Eurosceptic and pro-Europe. Their commitment to a shared European culture and civilization does not contradict their Euroscepticism, but reinforces it. By arguing that the existence of the EU is not in Europe's best interest, it is possible to be against the EU "because we love Europe".

The manner in which the word "Eurosceptic" is used in the public debate has resulted in an unclear definition. It has become an umbrella-term for all forms of criticism towards the EU, regardless of the feelings towards the project of European integration that inform it. Whereas scholars have pointed out this lack of nuance and created sub-categories to bring nuance to the various forms of Eurosceptic feelings, there has been little attention paid to the pro-European sentiments of Eurosceptic parties. This has fundamentally shaped the political debate, in which a rejection of the EU has often been conflated with a rejection of "Europe", and has led to mischaracterization of Eurosceptic parties. This thesis has tried to fill this gap, by showing that the largest Eurosceptic parties in Germany and France, the AfD and the RN, are fundamentally pro-Europe.

To return to the main question of this thesis, it is clear that both these parties use nationalist and pro-European arguments in their Eurosceptic debate, without this being a contradiction. Instead, the pro-European and Eurosceptic arguments complement each other because, in the national-populist narrative, they serve the same purpose. Their Eurosceptic arguments are pro-European because, in their discourse, the EU is not good for Europe.

This sentiment is echoed in the sovereigntist argument, discussed in Chapter 2. This argument has been used to critique the fundamental idea behind European integration, but has been at its most convincing when it targeted specific EU policies. By pointing at EU crises, it was argued that they proved the EU was not working – both for the nation-state in question and as a whole. In other words, the argument is not that the EU does not work for Germany or France, but that it does not work for Europe. The same applies to the nativist argument, the topic of Chapter 3. Nativism centralizes the needs of the native population of a country. Here, again, the pro-European element in the Eurosceptic discourse was present. The chapter argued that nativism can only be considered an indirect Eurosceptic argument because of how it was used to criticise the failure of the EU to protect Europe against an influx of non-European immigrants. In other words, nativist rhetoric was only used against non-Europeans, showing the existence of a European "we". This sentiment was clearly present as the AfD and RN discussed how migrants threatened European culture and civilization.

In the last chapter, the division between pro-Europe and anti-EU was the most pronounced. Both the RN and the AfD have a very strong cultural European identity – as long as this does not hurt their national ambitions. Their framework remains strongly tied to the nation-state. European sentiments therefore have to stay purely cultural, because if a more European political identity were to emerge, this would contradict the idea of national sovereignty. National arguments cancel out the more pro-European viewpoints. Both are used to arouse strong feelings and mobilise the target audience of national-populist parties: our European cultural values when the threat comes from outside the continent, and our national identity when the blame is laid with the EU.

This thesis has dedicated itself to the question how the Eurosceptic discourse of national-populist parties functions. More research is necessary to analyse what extent it is used as a tool by national-populist parties. Whereas the pro-European sentiments of the RN and the AfD seemed genuine and omnipresent, the extent to which they are Eurosceptic fluctuates. A clear-cut example is how the desire to leave the EU, in light of recent events, is no longer a point of contention for the AfD and the RN, and for national-populist parties all around Europe. This suggests that the EU can be used as a scapegoat, and Euroscepticism is a dial that is turned up when necessary.

Both the AfD and the RN are Eurosceptic, although the way this has been expressed changed throughout the years. They also very strongly define themselves as European. This thesis has shown that this is not a contradiction and that it is possible for national-populists to be both Eurosceptic and pro-Europe.

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## PLAGIARISM RULES AWARENESS STATEMENT

### **Fraud and Plagiarism**

Scientific integrity is the foundation of academic life. Utrecht University considers any form of scientific deception to be an extremely serious infraction. Utrecht University therefore expects every student to be aware of, and to abide by, the norms and values regarding scientific integrity.

The most important forms of deception that affect this integrity are fraud and plagiarism. Plagiarism is the copying of another person's work without proper acknowledgement, and it is a form of fraud. The following is a detailed explanation of what is considered to be fraud and plagiarism, with a few concrete examples. Please note that this is not a comprehensive list!

If fraud or plagiarism is detected, the study programme's Examination Committee may decide to impose sanctions. The most serious sanction that the committee can impose is to submit a request to the Executive Board of the University to expel the student from the study programme.

### **Plagiarism**

Plagiarism is the copying of another person's documents, ideas or lines of thought and presenting it as one's own work. You must always accurately indicate from whom you obtained ideas and insights, and you must constantly be aware of the difference between citing, paraphrasing and plagiarising. Students and staff must be very careful in citing sources; this concerns not only printed sources, but also information obtained from the Internet.

The following issues will always be considered to be plagiarism:

- cutting and pasting text from digital sources, such as an encyclopaedia or digital periodicals, without quotation marks and footnotes;
- cutting and pasting text from the Internet without quotation marks and footnotes;
- copying printed materials, such as books, magazines or encyclopaedias, without quotation marks or footnotes;
- including a translation of one of the sources named above without quotation marks or footnotes;
- paraphrasing (parts of) the texts listed above without proper references: paraphrasing must be marked as such, by expressly mentioning the original author in the text or in a footnote, so that you do not give the impression that it is your own idea;
- copying sound, video or test materials from others without references, and presenting it as one's own work;
- submitting work done previously by the student without reference to the original paper, and presenting it as original work done in the context of the course, without the express permission of the course lecturer;
- copying the work of another student and presenting it as one's own work. If this is done with the consent of the other student, then he or she is also complicit in the plagiarism;
- when one of the authors of a group paper commits plagiarism, then the other co-authors are also complicit in plagiarism if they could or should have known that the person was committing plagiarism;
- submitting papers acquired from a commercial institution, such as an Internet site with summaries or papers, that were written by another person, whether or not that other person received payment for the work.


The rules for plagiarism also apply to rough drafts of papers or (parts of) theses sent to a lecturer for feedback, to the extent that submitting rough drafts for feedback is mentioned in the course handbook or the thesis regulations.

The Education and Examination Regulations (Article 5.15) describe the formal procedure in case of suspicion of fraud and/or plagiarism, and the sanctions that can be imposed.

Ignorance of these rules is not an excuse. Each individual is responsible for their own behaviour. Utrecht University assumes that each student or staff member knows what fraud and plagiarism



entail. For its part, Utrecht University works to ensure that students are informed of the principles of scientific practice, which are taught as early as possible in the curriculum, and that students are informed of the institution's criteria for fraud and plagiarism, so that every student knows which norms they must abide by.

I hereby declare that I have read and understood the above.	
Name:	<b>Sanna Beenhakker</b>
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