

# Populism and Immigration in the European Union

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## Introduction

The main purpose of this article is to assess the relationship between populism and immigration in the European Union. Based on a literature review on the current state of populist movements in the EU as well as on the findings of a comparative fieldwork conducted in five European countries (Germany, France, Italy, Greece and the Netherlands) between mid-March and late-May 2017, the article seeks to understand and explain the relevance of the debates on migration, refugees, mobility and Islam on the rise of extreme right-wing populism.<sup>1</sup> The article starts with the depiction of the very substance of the populist rhetoric in Europe vis-à-vis migrants and refugees, which is based on the reiteration of a Manichean understanding of the world polarizing the public between “us” and “them”. Then, the content of the right-wing populist rhetoric will be analysed further looking at the social-economic, political and cultural drivers of populist extremism, the resentment against diversity, multiculturalism, Islam, immigration and mobility among the supporters of populist parties in five selected European countries.

## A Manichean Understanding: “Us” vs “Others”

Populist extremism feeds on the antagonism it portrays between the constituted ‘pure people’ and the enemies such as ‘the Jews’, ‘the Muslims’, ‘ethnic minorities’, or ‘the corrupt elite’ (Ionescu and Gellner 1969; Berlin, 1967; Taggart, 2000; Ghergina, Mişcoiu and Soare, 2013; Franzosi et al., 2015; Moffit, 2016; Mudde, 2016b) In Europe, this purity of the people is largely defined by far-right extreme populist groups in ethno-religious terms, which rejects the principle of equality and advocates policies of exclusion mainly toward migrant and minority groups. Despite national variations, these parties and movements can be characterised by their opposition to immigration, concern for the protection of national/European culture, adamant criticisms of globalization, the EU, representative democracy and mainstream political parties and by their exploitation of the ‘culturally different’ to the ethnic/religious/national self. Their appeal to the idea of having a strong leader is also very common across the populist movements in the world. Populists simply argue that established political parties corrupt the link between leaders and supporters, create artificial divisions within the homogenous people, and put their own interests above those of the people (Mudde, 2004: 546).

Mabel Berezin (2009) makes a relevant analysis to explain the relevance of migration and mobility to right-wing populism prevalent in the EU. He claims that there are two analytical axes on which European populisms capture their nuances: *institutional axis*, and *cultural axis*. In the institutional axis, their local organizational capacity, agenda setting capacity at national level, and their policy recommendation capacity, and at national level to come to terms with unemployment related issues

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<sup>1</sup> The fieldwork is composed of one hundred indepth interviews conducted in five countries within the framework of a Horizon 2020 project entitled CoHERE: Critical Heritages (<https://research.ncl.ac.uk/cohere/>). The project started in April 2016, and will last until April 2019. The first interventions on the populist rhetoric in Europe as well as other papers on critical heritages are accessible in the following page <http://cohere-ca.ncl.ac.uk/#/grid> .

are of primary subjects of inquiry. In the cultural axis, their intellectual repertoire to offer answers to the detrimental effects of globalization, their readiness to accommodate xenophobic, racist, migrant-phobic, Islamophobic discourses, and the capacity of their inventory to utilise memory, myths, past, tradition, religion, colonialism and identity. Using these two axes in analysing the European populisms at present may provide the researchers with an adequate set of tools to understand the success and/or failure of local and national level. Using these two axes, one could try to understand why and how many populist parties in Europe become popular in particular cities, but not in the entire country, as well as the role of non-rational elements such as culture, ethnicity, past, religion and myths in the consolidation of the power of populist parties.

It seems that right-wing populism becomes victorious at national level when its leaders can blend the elements of both axes such as blending economic resentment and cultural resentment in order to create the perception of crisis. It is only when the socio-economic frustration (unemployment and poverty) is linked to cultural concerns, such as immigration and integration, that right-wing populists distinguish themselves from other critics of the economy. This is the reason why right-wing populists capitalize on migration, culture, civilization, religion and race while the left-wing populists prefer to invest in social-class related drivers. The immigration issue is central to the discourse and programmes of all radical parties in Europe. According to a survey made in the second half of the 2000s, for instance, voters of such populist parties are significantly more likely to say their country should accept only a few immigrants, or even none: in Austria 93 percent of these voters (versus 64 percent overall); in Denmark 89 percent (44 percent); in France, 82 percent (44 percent); in Belgium 76 percent (41 percent); in Norway 70 percent (63 percent); and in the Netherlands 63 percent (39 percent). In fact, fewer than 2.5 percent of voters of populist extremist parties across six countries want to see more immigration (Rydgren, 2008: 740). Regarding immigration in Europe, a more specific form of hostility towards settled Muslim communities can be observed particularly in the past decade. Many voters are anxious about increasing diversity and immigration which provides the electoral potential for these parties. Anti-immigration sentiment often goes together with anti-Muslim sentiments. For instance, in 1994, 35 percent of the Danish People's Party supporters endorsed the view that Muslims were threatening national security; by 2007 the figure had risen to 81 percent (as opposed to 21 percent of all voters) (Goodwin, 2011: 10). Anxiety is not solely rooted in economic grievances, but support for these parties and public hostility to immigration is mainly driven by fears of cultural threat. The discriminatory and racist rhetoric towards the 'others' poses a clear threat to democracy and social cohesion in Europe.

To that end, the Norway terrorist attacks of 22 July 2011 against the government, the civilian population and a summer camp of the Workers' Youth League, the youth organisation of the Labour Party in Norway, are a sad reminder of the dangers of extremism. The perpetrator, Anders Behring Breivik, a 32-year-old Norwegian right-wing extremist, had participated for years in debates in Internet forums and had spoken against Islam and immigration in Europe. Some critical voices are now questioning the rise of right-wing extremism and populist movements as they resemble at first sight past experiences of Nazism, Fascism and the Franco regime, which are still alive in our collective memory. Furthermore, the rise of populist extremism in European politics is challenging democracy with regards to individual rights, collective rights and human rights. For instance, citizenship tests which are being performed in the Netherlands, Germany and the UK are designed from the perspective of a single and dominant culture and they undermine political and individual rights insofar as they tie those rights to an understanding and full acceptance of a single culture (Kaya, 2012b).

Another reliable survey was conducted by Mathew Goodwin, Thomas Raines and David Cutts for the Chatham House Europe Program between 12 December 2016 and 11 January 2017. The online survey was conducted with nationally representative samples of the population aged 18 or over in Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Spain and the UK. The online

survey was made with quota sampling (age, gender and region) and the total number of respondents was 10,195.<sup>2</sup> The survey asked the respondents if immigration from Muslim-majority countries should be stopped. An average of 55 percent of those surveyed agreed, 25 percent neither agreed nor disagreed and 20 percent disagreed. According to the survey, 71 percent of people in Poland, 65 percent in Austria, 64 percent in Hungary and Belgium, and 61 percent in France agreed. 58 percent of the Greeks, 53 percent of the Germans and 53 percent of the Italians also agreed with the question. Support for the ban was stronger among older populations, with only 44 percent of people aged 18-29 being in favour, while 63 percent of those older than 60 said they agreed with a ban. The notion of a ban was more popular with men and those living in rural areas. Urban dwellers and female respondents were less likely to support the move. Education was also a dividing factor. 59 percent of those with secondary level qualifications opposed further Muslim immigration, while less than half of all degree holders supported further migration curbs. As will be discussed further in the following sections, gender, education, age, region and religiosity play an important role in the perception of European citizens with regards to acceptance and tolerance towards Muslim-origin immigrants and refugees.

One of the striking commonalities of the interviews we conducted during the field work, held between mid-March and late-May 2017 in Germany, France, Italy, Greece and the Netherlands among the supporters of the right-wing populist parties, was that a great majority of the interlocutors explicitly differentiated between immigrants and refugees. Though having a great sympathy for the refugees who seek refuge from war zones, they expressed their concerns about the impossibility of their countries to take care of them permanently. The refugees should be given shelter in their own neighbouring countries, and the European Union member states should help them out with economic support. Immigrants, on the other hand, are a different category as they are embedded in their countries for decades. They are not treated very sympathetically by the interlocutors as they are perceived to be seeking to take their jobs and to use resources without contributing to their society. There is a common belief that immigrants do not really integrate while taking advantage of public services, such as health care and unemployment benefits. As for the immigrants, mostly they are perceived by the supporters of the right-wing populist parties as an economic burden. A 24-year-old male student supporter of the Front National in Paris expressed his thoughts in a very similar way to most of the interlocutors when asked about his party's official line on refugees and migrants:

“In my opinion, there are two different issues. Concerning immigration, I don't follow entirely the FN's position. Personally, I think that immigration is not necessarily an identity threat, but I consider it more as an economic risk. I think immigration brings about economic risks. Concerning refugees, in my opinion, refugees are people who flee their country because of a conflict. Personally, I consider that immigrants and refugees are two different issues. Concerning refugees, I fairly agree with the FN's proposition, which suggests creating safe zones to welcome them, nearby their countries. In my opinion, doing that is more coherent than welcoming them in Europe. However, by saying we'll welcome them, we make them cross the Mediterranean, which is so dangerous for them. Personally, I see refugees issue as a temporary phenomenon. But immigration is a different thing: it's more related to work, to family. In my opinion, immigration is a more lasting phenomenon” (interview with 24-year-old male student in Paris, 28 April 2017).

It was often implied by the interlocutors that immigration is an inevitable outcome of the processes of globalization, about which they are very critical. The experience of immigration is clearly differentiated from the experience of refugees in the sense that the former is a permanent act, and the latter is temporary. The experience of immigration is resented by the interlocutors in terms of its economic and cultural consequences. Economically speaking, immigrants are believed to be exploiting the welfare state regime. Culturally speaking, they are mostly associated with Islam, which

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<sup>2</sup> For more information on the Chathamhouse Survey see <https://www.chathamhouse.org/expert/comment/what-do-europeans-think-about-muslim-immigration#sthash.QrwHQfPP.dPA8JAoB.dpuf> accessed on 12 June 2017.

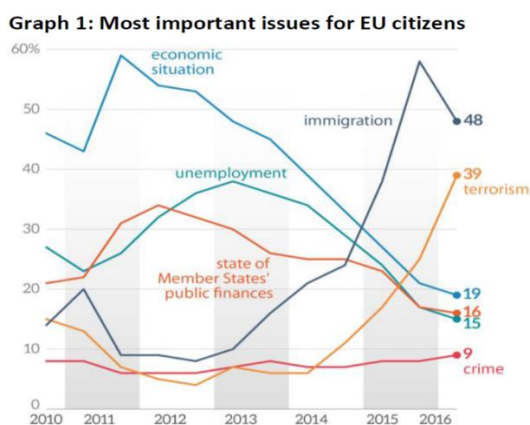
is believed to be in opposition with their national values. A 49-year-old male supporter of the AfD in Dresden refers to the relevance of immigration to globalization as follows:

“The AfD is standing for strengthening our national interests. Therefore, that we are ending this craze for globalization. Immigration to Germany and in general to Europe needs to be limited. The AfD argues that more German interests should be at the centre of politics, not the interests of the other nation-states. Exactly, it should be the way it is in the United States nowadays. There they are focusing on their own national interests and that is legitimate” (interview with 49-year-old-male printer in Dresden, 10 April 2017).

Europe’s far-right parties have rejoiced at Donald Trump’s win at the American elections held on 8 November 2016 and the UK’s vote to leave the EU, hailing both as a victory for their own anti-immigration, anti-EU and anti-Islam stances and vowing to push for similar results in countries such as France, the Netherlands, Denmark, Hungary, Germany and Sweden. European public is not different from the rest of the world in the sense that it is also becoming more and more polarized between various Manichean understandings of the world as in the antagonist dichotomies of "us/them", "pure people/corrupt elite", "privileged/underprivileged", which are interpellated and hailed by populist discourse.

### ***Backlash against multiculturalism: Lost in Diversity***

European public seems to have a shared opinion about the most important challenges they are currently facing in everyday life. The Heads of State or Government of the 27 members of the EU and the Presidents of the European Council and European Commission summoned in Bratislava on 29 June 2016 to diagnose the present state of the European Union and to discuss the EU-27’s common future without the UK. The Bratislava meeting resulted in the ‘Bratislava Declaration’, which spells out the key priorities of the EU-27 for the next six months and proposed concrete measures to achieve the goals relating to: 1) *migration*, 2) *internal and external security*, and 3) *economic and social development*, including youth unemployment and radicalism. Figure 1 displays the perception of the European citizens with regards to their priority of the most important issues according to the Eurobarometer Survey 2016.<sup>3</sup>



Source: Eurobarometer 85 (July 2016)

**Figure 1. Most important issue for the EU citizens (Source: Eurobarometre, July 2016)**

Extremist populist parties and movements often exploit the issue of migration and portray it as a threat against the welfare and the social, cultural and even ethnic features of a nation. Populist leaders

<sup>3</sup> See European Parliamentary Research Service Blog, <https://epthinktank.eu/2016/10/03/outcome-of-the-informal-meeting-of-27-heads-of-state-or-government-on-16-september-2016-in-bratislava/most-important-issues-for-eu-citizens/> accessed on 4 July 2017.

also tend to blame a soft approach to migration for some of the major problems in society such as unemployment, violence, crime, insecurity, drug trafficking and human trafficking. This tendency is reinforced by the use of racist, xenophobic and demeaning rhetoric. The use of words like ‘influx’, ‘invasion’, ‘flood’ and ‘intrusion’ are just a few examples. Public figures like Geert Wilders in the Netherlands, Heinz-Christian Strache in Austria and others have spoken of a “foreign infiltration” of immigrants, especially Muslims, in their countries. Geert Wilders even predicted the coming of *Eurabia*, a mythological future continent that will replace modern Europe (Vossen, 2010; 2011; and Ye’or, 2005), where children from Norway to Naples will have to learn to recite the Quran at school, while their mothers stay at home wearing *burqas*.

Diversity has become one of the challenges perceived by a remarkable part of the European public as a threat to social, cultural, religious and economic security of the European nations. There is apparently a growing resentment against the discourse of diversity, which is often promoted by the European Commission, the Council of Europe, many scholars, politicians and NGOs. The stigmatisation of migration has brought about a political discourse, which is known as “the end of multiculturalism and diversity.” This is built upon the assumption that the homogeneity of the nation is at stake and should be restored by alienating those who are not part of a group which is ethno-culturally and religiously homogenous. After a relative prominence of multiculturalism both in political and scholarly debates, one could witness today a dangerous tendency to find new ways to accommodate ethno-cultural and religious diversity. Evidence of diminishing belief in the possibility of a flourishing multicultural society has changed the nature of the debate about the successful integration of migrants in their host societies.

Initially, the idea of multiculturalism involved conciliation, tolerance, respect, interdependence, universalism, and it was expected to bring about an “inter-cultural community”. Over time, it began to be perceived as a way of institutionalising difference through autonomous cultural discourses. The debate on the end of multiculturalism has existed in Europe for a long time. It seems that the declaration of the ‘failure of multiculturalism’ has become a catchphrase of not only extreme-right wing parties but also of centrist political parties across the continent (Kaya, 2010). In 2010 and 2011, German Chancellor Angela Merkel, UK Prime Minister David Cameron and the French President Nicolas Sarkozy heavily bashed multiculturalism for the wrong reasons (Kaya, 2012a). Geert Wilders, leader of the Freedom Party in the Netherlands, made no apologies for arguing that “[we, Christians] should be proud that our culture is better than Islamic culture” (Der Spiegel, 11 September 2011). Populism blames multiculturalism for denationalizing one’s own nation, and to decode one’s own people. Anton Pelinka (2013: 8) explains very well how populism simplifies the complex realities of a globalized world by looking for a scapegoat:

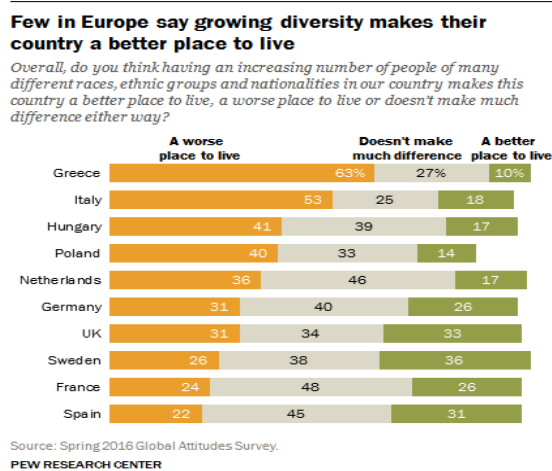
“As the enemy – the foreigner, the foreign culture- has already succeeded in breaking into the fortress of the nation state, someone must be responsible. The elites are the secondary ‘defining others’, responsible for the liberal democratic policies of accepting cultural diversity. The populist answer to the complexities of a more and more pluralistic society is not multiculturalism... Right-wing populism sees multiculturalism as a recipe to denationalize one’s nation, to deconstruct one’s people.”

For the right-wing populist crowds, the answer must be easy. They need to have some scapegoats to blame in the first place. The scapegoat should be the Others, foreigners, Jews, Roma, Muslims, sometimes the Eurocrats, sometimes the non-governmental organizations. Populist rhetoric certainly pays off for those politicians who engage in it. For instance, Thilo Sarrazin was perceived in Germany as a folk hero (*Volksheld*) on several right-wing populist websites that strongly refer to his ideas and statements after his polemical book *Deutschland schafft sich ab: Wie wir unser Land aufs Spiel setzen* (German Does Away with Itself: How We Gambled with Our Country, 2010), which was published in 2010. The newly founded political party *Die Freiheit* even tried to involve Sarrazin in their election campaign in Berlin and stated *Wählen gehen für Thilos Thesen* (Go and vote for Thilo’s statements)

using a crossed-out mosque as a logo.<sup>4</sup> Neo-fascist groups like the right-wing extremist party National Democratic Party (NPD) have also celebrated the author. They stated that Sarrazin’s ideas about immigration were in line with the NPD’s programme and that he made their ideas even more popular and strong, as he belonged to an established social democratic party.

The NPD is no longer popular in Germany, but the *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD) has replaced it with its extreme right-wing populist agenda. One of the interlocutors we interviewed among the supporters of the AfD in Dresden within the framework of the Horizon 2020 Project on Critical Heritages, CoHERE, explicitly repeated Sarrazin’s line when asked about his perspective on migration in general:

“There is nothing bad in general about globalisation and immigration. But one should differentiate between *good* and *bad* immigration. It is scientifically proven: What we have in Germany now, is possibly the worst kind of immigration. If you want immigration to help the country and its economy, you need a kind of immigration, where the average IQ of immigrants is higher than the average IQ of natives. Unfortunately, we have that kind of immigration, where the average IQ of the asylum seekers is much lower than the average IQ of Germans. Besides, the gender gap has devastating effects. This is something we must discuss in public! Unfortunately, our society is too politically correct, and the AfD is the only power to change that. The direct expenses of the federal government are estimated to be around 23 billion Euros, the indirect expenses are around 50 billion Euros. And we also must talk about the costs of the federal states! How does it relate to 17 billion Euros spent on research and education?” (a 40-year-old male lawyer interviewed in Dresden, 2 April 2017).



**Figure 2. Perception of diversity by EU citizens (Source: PEW Survey, 2016)**

Surveys also reveal that European citizens have similar concerns about ethno-cultural, linguistic and religious diversity prevalent in the EU. A recent survey conducted by the PEW Research Centre displays that many Europeans are uncomfortable with the growing diversity of society. When asked whether having an increasing number of people of many different races, ethnic groups and nationalities makes their country a better or worse place to live, relatively few said it makes their country better (Figure 2). In Greece and Italy, at least more than half said increasing diversity harms their country, while in the Netherlands, Germany and France, less than half complained about ethno-cultural diversity (PEW, 2016).

<sup>4</sup> See <http://www.morgenpost.de/politik/inland/article105070241/Pro-Deutschland-ueberklebt-Sarrazin-Plakate.html> accessed on 5 June 2017.

It seems that contemporary Populism has made another term very popular, i.e., *nativism*. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, nativism is prejudice in favour of natives against strangers. Today, nativism means a policy that will protect and promote the interests of indigenous, or established inhabitants over those of immigrants. This usage has recently found favour among Brexiters, Trumpists, Le Penists and other right-wing populist groups, who seem to be anxious to distance themselves from accusations of racism, xenophobia and Islamophobia. Nativism sounds more neutral, and conceals all the negative connotations of race, racism, Islamophobia and immigration (Jack, 2016). Hence, the nativist European populism is now claiming to set the true, organic, rooted and local people against the cosmopolitan, globalizing elites denouncing the political system's betrayal of ethno-cultural and territorial identities (Filc, 2015: 274).

### ***Islamophobia as a new ideology***

These populist outbreaks contribute to the securitisation and stigmatisation of migration in general, and Islam in particular. In the meantime, they deflect attention from constructive solutions and policies widely thought to promote integration, including language learning and increased labour market access, which are already suffering due to austerity measures across Council of Europe member states. Islamophobic discourse has recently become the mainstream in the west (Kaya, 2011: and 2015b). It seems that social groups belonging to the majority nation in each territory are more inclined to express their distress resulting from insecurity and social-economic deprivation, through the language of Islamophobia; even in those cases which are not related to the actual threat of Islam. Islamophobia has also been legalized and thus further normalized through the laws against the *hijab* (in France, 2004) and the *burqa* (in France, 2011) and the recent debates around the state of emergency in France in the wake of the 2015 Charlie Hebdo attacks. In the meantime, Pegida and other groups have attempted to exploit the New Year's Eve 2016 assaults in Cologne which were blamed on Muslim refugees (Ingulfsen, 2016). Islamophobia was previously more prevalent among male populations (Kaya and Kayaoğlu, 2017). However, in the last few years, the use of gender rights has also been particularly prevalent in the stigmatization of Islamophobia. Some features and manifestations of mainstream Islamophobia relate to what has been defined as "homonationalism" (Puar, 2007) and "femonationalism" (Farris, 2012). Geert Wilder's Party, PVV, in the Netherlands and the AfD in Germany, whose current co-leader (Alice Weidel) is openly gay, have recently attracted many women as well as the members of LGBTI groups who are becoming more and more vocal in their attacks against Islam on the basis of its supposed inherent illiberalism against the position of women and gays in everyday life (Mondon and Winter, 2017).

Several decades earlier it was Seymour Martin Lipset (1959) who stated that social-political discontent of people is likely to lead them to anti-Semitism, xenophobia, racism, regionalism, supernationalism, fascism and anti-cosmopolitanism. If Lipset's timely intervention in the 1950s is now translated to the contemporary age, then one could argue that Islamophobia has also become one of the paths taken by those who are in social-economic and political dismay. Islamophobic discourse has certainly resonated very much in the last decade. It has enabled the users of this discourse to be heard by both local and international community, although their distress did not really result from anything related to the Muslims in general. In other words, Muslims have become the most popular scapegoats in many parts of the world to put the blame on for any troubled situation. For almost more than a decade, Muslim-origin migrants and their descendants are primarily seen by the European societies as a financial burden, and virtually never as an opportunity for the country. They tend to be associated with illegality, crime, violence, drug, radicalism, fundamentalism, conflict, and in many other respects are represented in negative ways (Kaya, 2015b).

There is a growing fear in the European space alleviated by the extreme right-wing populist parties such as PVV in the Netherlands, FN in France, Golden Dawn in Greece and AfD in Germany. This fear is based on the jihadist attacks in different European cities such as Paris (7 January and 13 November 2015), Nice (14 July 2016), Istanbul (1 January 2017), Berlin (28 February 2017), and

London (2017) as well as on the atrocities of the Al Qaida, the Islamic State (ISIS), and Boko Haram in the Middle East, Africa and elsewhere. This fear against Islam, which has material sources, is also mitigated by far-right political parties. One of the interlocutors we interviewed in Rome among the supporters of the 5 Star Movement very explicitly vocalize such fears:

“In a few years European culture will cease to exist, once the Caliph will have taken control of Europe. Then we will build a long memory of what we lost, something that was perhaps too weak. The takeover of the Caliphate was previewed by a clairvoyant, who said the Caliph will control even the Vatican. Beyond the clairvoyant, there are signs that our culture is changing with every little cross being taken away from the schools” (interview with a 39-year-old doorman in Rome, 16 May 2017)

Such fears were also reiterated by many other interlocutors in Germany, France, Greece, Italy and the Netherlands. A 70-year-old former saleswoman in Dresden expressed her feelings in a similar way when she was asked about the European heritage:

“When we have an Islamic caliphate in Germany one day, the European heritage will be gone. Maybe it sounds exaggerating, but I think we should be very careful. Many of the Muslim refugees have dangerous thoughts in their minds. Otherwise you would not think of driving a bus into a crowd [referring to the attack on the Breitscheid-Platz in Berlin in December 2016]” (interview with 70-year-old-female, pensioner in Dresden, 18 April 2017).

The construction of a contemporary European identity is built in part on anti-Muslim racism, just as other forms of racist ideology played a role in constructing European identity during the late nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. Use of the term ‘Islamophobia’ assumes that fear of Islam is natural and can be taken for granted, whereas use of the term ‘Islamophobia’ presumes that this fear has been fabricated by those with a vested interest in producing and reproducing such a state of fear, or phobia. By describing Islamophobia as a form of *ideology*, I argue that Islamophobia operates as a form of *cultural racism* in Europe which has become apparent along with the process of *securitizing* and *stigmatizing* migration and migrants in the age of neoliberalism (Kaya, 2015b). One could thus argue that Islamophobia as an ideology is being constructed by ruling political groups to foster a kind of false consciousness, or delusion, within the majority society as a way of covering up their own failure to manage social, political, economic, and legal forces and consequently the rise of inequality, injustice, poverty, unemployment, insecurity, and alienation. In other words, Islamophobia turns out to be a practical instrument of social control used by the conservative political elite to ensure compliance and subordination in this age of neoliberalism, essentializing ethnocultural and religious boundaries. Muslims have become global ‘scapegoats’, blamed for all negative social phenomena such as illegality, crime, violence, drug abuse, radicalism, fundamentalism, conflict, and financial burdens. One could also argue that Muslims are now being perceived by some individuals and communities in the West as having greater social power. There is a growing fear in the United States, Europe, and even in Russia and the post-Soviet countries that Muslims will demographically take over sooner or later.

### ***Resentment against Mobility in the EU: Lost in Unity***

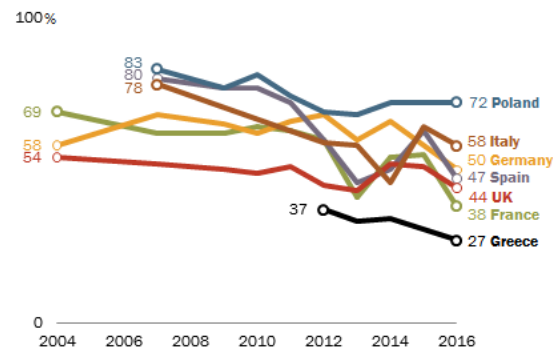
In addition to the growing popular resentment against multiculturalism and diversity, there is also a growing resentment among populist segments of the European public against the discourse of unity and mobility, which is also promoted by European institutions as well as by scholars, politicians, local administrators and NGOs. Right-wing populist leaders have always tried to capitalise on anti-EU sentiment. Most recently, the perception that European leaders are failing to tackle a developing economic crisis is fuelling further hostility towards the European Union, both right and left.



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### After short-lived rebound, views of the EU are on the decline again in key European countries

Favorable view of EU



Source: Spring 2016 Global Attitudes Survey.

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**Figure 3. Views on the EU are on the decline (Source: PEW Survey, 2016).**

Populist parties in many member states of the EU are known with their Eurosceptic positions, especially right-wing extreme parties. Their Euroscepticism has become even stronger after the global financial crisis which continuously hit the EU since 2008. Accordingly, in their edited volume, Kriesi and Pappas (2015) revealed that the recession led to a growing public support for the populist parties. Comparing the election results before and after the financial crisis they found that populism in Europe increased notably by 4.1 percent. However, the support for populist parties shows a remarkable difference from region to region. The populist surge has been very strong in Southern and Central-Eastern Europe with a rather anti-systemic content. Nordic populism is also on the rise, but it has a rather systemic nature, and populist parties including Sweden's Democrats and True Finns Party, are even supportive of their competitors' policies. In Western Europe, populism was also triggered by the financial crisis. With a very strong Eurosceptic content, France and the UK experienced a sharp increase in the public support for right wing populism (Kriesi and Pappas, 2015: 323). In Germany, however, extreme right-wing populism also increased, but the main reason of this increase is the refugee crisis.

Global financial crisis has brought about various demographic changes in the EU leading to the migration of skilled or unskilled young populations from the South to the North, and from the East to the West. Germany, the UK, Sweden are certainly the net winners of the current demographic change. However, the changes in the demographic structure of the EU do not only create problems for the migrant sending EU countries, but also for the receiving countries. For instance, high skilled German citizens cannot compete with the cheap skilled labour recruited from Spain, Italy, or Greece. Hence, they also find the solution in migrating to another country of destination such as Switzerland, Austria, the USA and Great Britain (Verwiebe et al., 2010). On the other hand, relatively poorer countries of the East and South such as Greece, Spain, Italy, Portugal, Bulgaria, Romania and Poland cannot compete with the rich West to retain their skills and young generations, the loss of which apparently causes societal discomfort. The increase in migration flows in the EU has been accompanied by an increase in the migrants' education level.<sup>5</sup> According to a recent study, the percentage of intra-EMU migrants that were highly educated increased 7 pp between 2005 and 2012, from 34 percent to 41 percent (Jauer et al., 2014). Emigrants from the southern periphery show higher educational achievement and skill levels.<sup>6</sup> Highly educated migrants from the GIPS (Greece, Ireland,

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<sup>5</sup> The average population with a tertiary education rose from 19.5 percent in 2004 to 24.7 percent in 2013. Among the peripheral countries, Portugal has seen the largest increase in the number of graduates, rising 59 percent in the last decade, followed by Ireland and Italy at 44 percent and 43 percent, respectively.

<sup>6</sup> Deutsche Bank Research, "The Dynamics of Migration in the Euro area,"

[https://www.dbresearch.com/PROD/DBR\\_INTERNET\\_EN-PROD/PROD000000000338137/The+dynamics+of+migration+in+the+euro+area.PDF](https://www.dbresearch.com/PROD/DBR_INTERNET_EN-PROD/PROD000000000338137/The+dynamics+of+migration+in+the+euro+area.PDF)

Portugal, Spain) moving to other euro member countries went from 24 percent of the total in 2005 to 41 percent in 2012. Among these migrants, the highly skilled percentage of the total that found work rose from 27 percent to 49 percent. Regarding east-west migration, the same research finds out that the average emigrant from the EU-2 (Bulgaria and Romania) has tended to be less educated than his or her European counterparts – although being highly educated from these two countries increases the likelihood of emigration compared to those that are not. Highly educated emigrants from these two countries that moved between 2011 and 2012 accounted for 24 percent of the total emigrants. Accordingly, the countries of destination have experienced an increase in the immigration of skills. Germany is the leading country in the EU attracting most of the highly-skilled labour from the rest of the EU. In Germany, 29 percent of all immigrants aged 20 to 65 who arrived in the last decade or so (2001 to 2011) held a graduate degree while among the total population the respective figure was only 19 percent in 2011. Among the immigrants more than 10 percent had a degree in science, IT, mathematics or engineering compared to 6 percent among the rest of the population aged 25 to 65.

The changes in the magnitude and direction of migration flows reflect the changes in macroeconomic conditions in the EU. Emigrants often prefer to choose pre-existing paths where fellow country(wo)men have already settled down.<sup>7</sup> Due to such network effects migration often increases only slowly at first and then intensifies when it has reached a critical figure. Language also influences emigrants' choice of a destination country. This factor is important for skilled workers searching for an adequate job abroad. Thus, language skills might have gained in importance. In contrast, geographic proximity has lost relevance. The temporary restrictions on labour migration within the EU have also led to distortions. Most major forces, namely immigration rules, language and network effects have benefited the UK in the past decade. According to a study for the European Commission, about 90 percent of inward migration from the EU-8 (Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia) to the UK in the years 2004 to 2009 is due to the EU enlargement, while in Germany only 10 percent of total immigration during this period can be attributed to this event (Holland et al., 2011).

In the past few years, however, intra-EU migration and intra-eurozone migration have largely been driven by the economy. In the GIIPS (GIPS + Italy), decreasing immigration and surging emigration are clearly related to the deterioration in the labour markets there. It is also not a coincidence that Germany has become the leading destination country in the EU. Given the ongoing expansion in employment and the low unemployment rate -as of May 2014 it was 5.1 percent- Germany has become more and more attractive for jobseekers from the GIIPS. As crisis-triggered migration was initially clearly dominated by EU-8 and EU-2 nationals, doubts have emerged about the willingness to migration of citizens from the old member countries. However, it is hardly surprising that foreign workers are more mobile and more prepared to leave their host country again when they become unemployed due to a labour market shock. Furthermore, the crisis in the GIIPS has especially hit sectors like construction, retail, and the hotel and restaurant industry, which used to employ many migrants from eastern EU and non-EU countries. In the past two years more and more nationals have joined the line away from the GIIPS. It is obvious that the economic situation has markedly influenced and altered migration patterns in the eurozone. Recently, young skilled Italians are heading towards Germany while their Spanish fellows are becoming less likely to leave their homeland.

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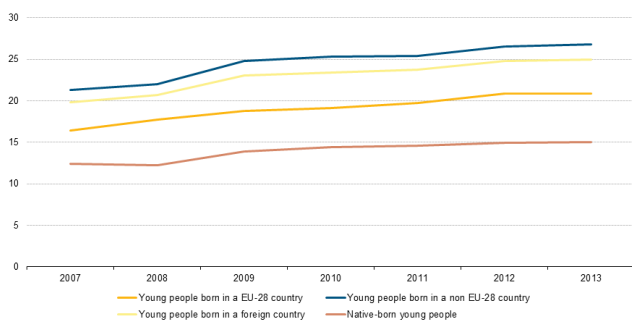
<sup>7</sup> For a detailed discussion on the Network Theory in migration studies see Thomas and Znaniecki (1918), Castells and Cardoso (2005), and King (2012).

	Young people born in the reporting country	Young people born in a foreign country	Of which	
			Young people born in an EU-28 country (except reporting country)	Young people born in a non-EU-28 country
EU-28	15.0	25.0	20.9	26.8
BE	13.0	27.0	19.7	31.7
BG	25.8	.(u)	.(u)	.(u)
CZ	12.8 <sup>(b)</sup>	12.6 <sup>(b)</sup>	9.9 <sup>(bu)</sup>	15.3 <sup>(b)</sup>
DK	7.1	10.5	8.3 <sup>(u)</sup>	11.6
DE	7.5	.	.	.
EE	13.8	27.3	.(u)	31.2 <sup>(u)</sup>
IE	18.7	18.0	19.6	15.1
EL	27.0	43.8	39.9	44.6
ES	20.0	33.9	34.0	33.8
FR	12.7 <sup>(b)</sup>	26.3 <sup>(b)</sup>	16.8 <sup>(b)</sup>	28.6 <sup>(b)</sup>
HR	21.4	37.0	28.8 <sup>(u)</sup>	39.2
IT	24.6	35.7	35.2	35.9
CY	19.7	22.7	25.4	19.9
LV	15.4	.(u)	.(u)	.(u)
LT	13.7	.(u)	.	.(u)
LU	5.3	10.7	8.7	17.4
HU	18.3	27.4	25.8	.(u)
MT	10.7	23.4	.(u)	20.1 <sup>(u)</sup>
NL	6.2 <sup>(b)</sup>	15.6 <sup>(b)</sup>	12.0 <sup>(b)</sup>	16.7 <sup>(b)</sup>
AT	6.9	18.5	13.0	22.2
PL	16.2 <sup>(b)</sup>	.(bu)	.(bu)	.(bu)
PT	16.3	18.5	.(u)	20.0
RO	19.6	.(u)	.	.(u)
SI	11.9	31.0	27.7 <sup>(u)</sup>	31.6
SK	19.0	.(u)	.(u)	.(u)
FI	10.5	17.7	13.5 <sup>(u)</sup>	19.8
SE	7.0	12.2	9.4	12.7
UK	14.4	15.8	12.9	17.6

. = not available; b = break in time series; u = low reliability

**Table 1. Young people (aged 15–29) neither in employment nor in education and training (NEET) by broad groups of country of birth, 2013.png (Source: Eurostat)**

Table 1 shows the level of unemployment hitting the young generations without education and training (aged between 15 and 29) as of 2013. Greece, Italy, Spain and Portugal perform extremely weak in terms of the employment, education and training of young generations. While 27 percent of the Greek youngsters were unemployed, uneducated, and/or trained in 2013, 24, 6 percent of the Italian youngsters and 20 percent of the Spanish youngsters shared the same destiny.



**Figure 2. Young people (aged 15–29) not in employment, education or training (NEET) by groups of country of birth, EU-28, 2007 (Source: Eurostat)**

Figure 2 shows the level of unemployment and uneducation in accordance with the origin of youngsters residing in the European countries. Accordingly, young generations originating from non-EU countries are the most disadvantaged ones in terms of their level of employment, education and occupational training.

	Young people born in the reporting country	Young people born in a foreign country	Of which	
			Young people born in an EU-28 country (except reporting country)	Young people born in a non-EU-28 country
EU-28	28.3	44.0	32.2	49.3
BE	16.9	51.4	36.7	61.1
BG	48.4	.. <sup>(u)</sup>	.. <sup>(u)</sup>	.. <sup>(u)</sup>
CZ	17.0	24.3	20.8 <sup>(u)</sup>	27.6 <sup>(u)</sup>
DK	37.3	46.9	52.1 <sup>(u)</sup>	44.6
DE	25.1	35.2	29.3	38.6
EE	24.5	27.5 <sup>(u)</sup>	.. <sup>(u)</sup>	27.4 <sup>(u)</sup>
IE	39.6	41.3	32.9	65.5
EL	42.5	69.3	43.9 <sup>(u)</sup>	74.8
ES	30.9	50.9	40.5	53.7
FR	22.5	50.8	30.8 <sup>(u)</sup>	55.4
HR	29.3	51.1	19.0 <sup>(u)</sup>	56.7
IT	34.4	47.9	44.6	49.2
CY	25.6	41.9	34.2	49.8
LV	34.5	37.1 <sup>(u)</sup>	.. <sup>(u)</sup>	39.3 <sup>(u)</sup>
LT	33.3	35.5 <sup>(u)</sup>	.. <sup>(u)</sup>	.. <sup>(u)</sup>
LU	16.8	30.3	24.6	42.8
HU	37.4	24.5 <sup>(u)</sup>	.. <sup>(u)</sup>	.. <sup>(u)</sup>
MT	20.7	11.6	14.5 <sup>(u)</sup>	10.2 <sup>(u)</sup>
NL	17.4	45.3	17.8 <sup>(u)</sup>	49.8
AT	17.1	42.2	54.2	36.2
PL	27.0	.. <sup>(u)</sup>	.. <sup>(u)</sup>	.. <sup>(u)</sup>
PT	27.3	37.2	26.6	43.0
RO	44.5	.. <sup>(u)</sup>	.. <sup>(u)</sup>	.. <sup>(u)</sup>
SI	17.0	44.0	48.1 <sup>(u)</sup>	43.6
SK	20.2	.. <sup>(u)</sup>	.. <sup>(u)</sup>	.. <sup>(u)</sup>
FI	21.7	43.7	44.4 <sup>(u)</sup>	43.3
SE	21.7	43.5	39.8	44.2
UK	28.7	34.9	19.6	44.9

.. = not available; b = break in time series; u = low reliability

**Table 2. At-risk-of-poverty or exclusion rate of young people (aged 16–29), by groups of country of birth, 2012.png (Source: Eurostat)**

Table 2 also shows the risk of poverty among the young people aged between 16 and 19. Bulgaria (48 percent), Romania (44,5 percent), Greece (42,5 percent), Ireland (39,6 percent), Hungary (37,4), Italy (34,4 percent) and Spain (31 percent) are at the top of the list with the highest rate of youngsters being at the risk of poverty. The second column of the table displays the fact that foreign origin youngsters residing in these countries are even in a more difficult situation as far as their level of poverty is concerned. Growing poverty and unemployment prompt the young generations of these countries, especially those highly-skilled ones, to immigrate to Germany, UK or elsewhere in the world such as the USA, Canada and Australia.

	Young people born in the reporting country	Young people born in a foreign country	Of which	
			Young people born in an EU-28 country (except reporting country)	Young people born in a non-EU-28 country
EU-28	11.2	16.5	7.8	20.5
BE	4.9	26.6	11.8	36.3
BG	42.9	.. <sup>(u)</sup>	.. <sup>(u)</sup>	.. <sup>(u)</sup>
CZ	7.3	6.7	11.9 <sup>(u)</sup>	2.0 <sup>(u)</sup>
DK	5.8	6.1	.. <sup>(u)</sup>	8.7
DE	4.7	5.9	5.2	6.4
EE	9.2	14.6 <sup>(u)</sup>	.. <sup>(u)</sup>	16.2 <sup>(u)</sup>
IE	13.4	11.6	8.5	20.9
EL	23.4	55.3	39.1 <sup>(u)</sup>	58.8
ES	5.2	19.6	5.9	22.0
FR	6.7	16.2	3.1 <sup>(u)</sup>	19.2
HR	14.7	22.0	2.3 <sup>(u)</sup>	25.4
IT	15.1	26.7	17.9	30.4
CY	19.2	19.7	14.4	25.1
LV	23.9	10.4 <sup>(u)</sup>	.. <sup>(u)</sup>	9.9 <sup>(u)</sup>
LT	20.3	16.2 <sup>(u)</sup>	.. <sup>(u)</sup>	.. <sup>(u)</sup>
LU	1.8	1.3	1.7	0.5
HU	29.6	24.5 <sup>(u)</sup>	.. <sup>(u)</sup>	.. <sup>(u)</sup>
MT	9.9	4.1	5.2 <sup>(u)</sup>	3.5 <sup>(u)</sup>
NL	1.5	10.7	.. <sup>(u)</sup>	12.4
AT	2.7	13.4	4.2	17.9
PL	13.0	.. <sup>(u)</sup>	.. <sup>(u)</sup>	.. <sup>(u)</sup>
PT	8.3	17.4	5.0	24.2
RO	31.9	.. <sup>(u)</sup>	.. <sup>(u)</sup>	.. <sup>(u)</sup>
SI	6.5	14.5	.. <sup>(u)</sup>	15.8
SK	10.8	.. <sup>(u)</sup>	.. <sup>(u)</sup>	.. <sup>(u)</sup>
FI	4.2	5.9	10.3 <sup>(u)</sup>	3.9
SE	0.9	5.3	0.9	6.2
UK	11.9	13.2	4.9	18.7

.. = not available; b = break in time series; u = low reliability

**Table 3. Severe material deprivation rate of young people (aged 16–29), by groups of country of birth, 2012.png (Source: Eurostat)**

Material deprivation among the European youngsters is also another source of the quest for a better life elsewhere. Bulgarian, Hungarian, Romanian, Greek, Lithuanian, Latvian, Cypriot and Italian

youngsters are materially the most deprived youngsters in the EU (Table 3). Internal mobility of the young EU citizens who must migrate to another EU country was also raised by many interlocutors during the field research we conducted in five EU countries. Most of the interlocutors stated that they are not mobile people themselves, and they hardly left their countries. In the first place, many interlocutors we interviewed among the supporters of the extreme right-wing populist parties expressed their resentment against the freedom of mobility of EU citizens within the EU. The freedom of mobility does not seem to mean a lot to those who are rather immobile due to their social-economic constraints. One of the 60-year-old female Italian interlocutors stated her concerns about the migration of young generations abroad when asked about the European heritage:

“I don’t really know a lot about the European heritage. We do not really take the past into account as much as we should in Italy. You also must consider that I do not know Europe that much, I have not travelled a lot. Now that I think about it maybe Arabs, like my co-worker, are much more attached than we are to their roots and that is great. We, in Italy, are used to criticize ourselves all the time. *The young people with some brains go abroad and in the end, we are not able to value and protect what our culture. It is like the big firms, now they are all abroad*” (interview with 60-year-old-female baker in Rome, 2 May 2017, italics mine).

Such a demographic change within the EU is feeding into the fears of the local populations in different ways. Sometimes, the citizens of the receiving countries such as Germany may resent the growing mobility of EU citizens by holding onto their nativist aspirations as they may not appreciate the fact that their habitats are becoming more and more diversified, or somehow, they may find it difficult to compete with the recruited cheap labour in the labour market. In the case of migrant sending countries such as Spain, Italy, Greece or Portugal, their inhabitants may find it very challenging to cope with the fact that the rich North, or West, is impossible to compete with regards to the free mobility of skills. In both cases, it seems that what is more likely to be blamed is either globalization or Europeanization, or super diversity.

## **Conclusion**

The purpose of this article has been to address the relevance of the migrants and refugees in Europe to the growing right-wing populist trend. It is often presumed that the affiliates of such populist parties are political protestors, single-issue voters, “losers of globalization”, or ethno-nationalists. However, the picture seems to be more complex than this. Populist party voters are dissatisfied with, and distrustful of mainstream elites, and most importantly they are hostile to immigration and rising ethno-cultural and religious diversity. While these citizens are economically feeling themselves insecure, their hostility springs mainly from their belief that immigrants are threatening their national culture, social security, community and way of life. They are perceived by the followers of the populist parties as a security challenge threatening social, political, cultural and economic unity and homogeneity of their nation. The main concern of these citizens is not only the ongoing immigration and the refugee crisis, they are also profoundly anxious about a minority group that is already settled: the Muslims. Anti-Muslim sentiments have become an important driver of support for populist extremists. This means that appealing only to concerns over immigration such as calling for immigration numbers to be reduced or border controls to be tightened, is not enough. The sources of such fears have been explained in the article with reference to the recent field work interviews conducted with the supporters of right-wing populist parties in Germany, France, Italy, Greece and the Netherlands.

Populist parties seem to be investing in the worsening economic conditions, public attitudes to immigration, attitudes and prejudices towards Muslims and Islam, and public dissatisfaction with the response of mainstream elites to these issues. The views and ideas they espouse cannot be dismissed as those of a marginal minority. It seems that these parties are here to stay. Public concern over immigration and rising cultural and ethnic diversity, anxiety over the presence and compatibility of Muslims, and dissatisfaction with the performance of mainstream elites on these issues are unlikely

to subside. As Mathew Goodwin (2011) stated in an earlier research conducted in 2011, the enduring nature of this challenge is perhaps best reflected in more recent findings that demonstrate how populist extremist parties are not the exclusive property of older generations. There is evidence that those who vote for such parties are also influencing the voting habits of their children. For instance, it is known that 37 percent of the support for FN leader Marine Le Pen in France comes from those aged under 35, who are hit by a prolonged state of chronic unemployment.

It was also argued the relative success of the far-right populist parties lies in their ability to utilize ethnicity, culture, religion, colonial past, tradition and myths in politically mobilizing lower middle-class and working-class people who are alienated by the detrimental flows of globalization leading to the processes of de-industrialization, unemployment, poverty, social-economic-political deprivation and mobility. In Berezin's (2009) words, as the *institutional axis* of far right-wing populist parties is not developed enough to come to terms with unemployment related issues, they are more inclined to capitalize on the *cultural axis* to politically mobilize masses. The exploitation of cultural discourse by these political parties is likely to frame many of the social, political, and economic conflicts within the range of societies' cultural-religious differences. Many of the ills faced by migrants and their descendants, such as poverty, exclusion, unemployment, illiteracy, lack of political participation, and unwillingness to integrate, are attributed to their Islamic background, believed stereotypically to clash with Western secular norms and values. Accordingly, this article has just argued that "Islamophobia" is a key ideological form in which social and political contradictions of the neoliberal age are dealt with, and that this form of culturalisation is embedded in migration-related inequalities as well as geopolitical orders (Brown, 2006; Dirlik, 2003). Culturalisation of political, social, and economic conflicts has become a popular sport in a way that reduces all sorts of structural problems to cultural and religious factors – a simple way of knowing what is going on in the World for the individuals appealed to the populist rhetoric.

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