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50 SHADES OF RADICALISM: AN ANALYSIS OF CONTEMPORARY RADICAL PARTIES IN EUROPE

ABSTRACT: The paper provides a comprehensive overview of European radical parties. The main aim of this paper is to examine whether there are common patterns regarding these parties, and to analyse the implications of this phenomenon. In order to achieve the above, the paper proceeds as follows: Firstly, the phenomenon of political radicalisation in contemporary Europe is explored. This leads to mapping the radical political landscape in Europe. Finally, the paper concludes with the analysis of the possible outcomes of radicalisation of European politics including the possible societal effects. By doing so the paper argues that a fresh theoretical approach to comprehend the phenomenon is necessary .

KEY WORDS: radical politics, far-right, populism, European politics, societal insecurity

The Problem of Radical Politics

Why are European radical parties increasingly popular and what are the possible outcomes of this phenomenon? This paper aims to connect the issues and perspectives which, thus far, have not been explored in a systematic and thorough way. Such study is vital especially in the light of recent elections to the European Parliament and events in France with continuing popularity of Front National in the carnage of “Charlie Hebdo” attacks or Greece, where the victory of SYRIZA prompted many to question whether the Eurozone will survive until the end of 2015. Also, popularity of hitherto a-political movements like PEGIDA, requires a deepened reflection on whether

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the radical parties a temporary occurrence or will they become a permanent feature of European political landscape (The Economist)? Not only it is vital to identify those parties but more importantly, it is necessary to delineate what these parties have in common and what are the differences among them. Such map of European radical landscape will allow for analysing the likely consequences of certain radicalisation in European politics.

The possible ramifications are profound regardless of whether the radical parties will be isolated by the mainstream parties or will the radical parties achieve and/or retain significant position in their countries. Firstly, political victory might enforce the radical parties to 'civilise' and moderate their political programmes. Secondly, continuing pro-radical electoral trends in Europe are likely to influence the mainstream parties who will strong incentives take over some of the radical parties' agenda and/or language. However, the most pressing question is: What societal effects will the increased popularity of the radical parties have? The level of societal insecurity in Europe steadily rises and its ramifications might be of momentous significance and consequence. This paper attempts to tackle some of the above questions. Firstly, it explores the phenomenon of political radicalisation in contemporary Europe. This leads to mapping the radical political landscape in Europe. Finally, the paper concludes with the analysis of the possible outcomes of radicalisation of European politics including the diagnosis of possible societal effects. By doing so the paper argues that a fresh theoretical approach to comprehend the phenomenon is necessary.

European Political Horizon

Up until recently, European political cake seemed to be cut with a painstaking care. The biggest portions were given to the conservative parties (built to a great extent on Christian foundations) towards the right side of the political scene and the different variances of socialist parties drawing upon the Marxist ideals situated on the left. In a fairly typical situation for mature democracies these two blocks were customary opposing. Therefore the balance of power and at the same time the available alternative would be secured by centrist parties or the parties under a green-and-rainbow banner representing an assortment of ideological postulates from the global warming to gender issues. The tiny fringe on the right side of the mainstream right parties was occupied by a collection of political 'far-right' while

the left margin would be populated with not-so-numerous leftist extremists of various proveniences. Those marginal groupings would be advocating everything that was not included into the official narratives of political mainstream. Political consensus would deny these 'radical' parties and movements any rights of representation and preferably a *cordon sanitaire* would guarantee marginalisation of those political parties who did not fit into the political status quo. If such party increased its sphere of influence, like it happened with Jörg Haider's Freedom Party in Austria in 2000, isolation and freezing of diplomatic cooperation would be immediately applied.

Interestingly however, within the last couple of years Europe saw a real surge of the anti-establishment parties. They are commonly referred to as the 'far right', 'hard-right' or 'populist' parties but this essentialist approach befuddles the picture as some of them (especially in economic terms, but not only) are firmly rooted in the leftist tradition. These parties have one in common – they are parties of protest, they do not want to work within the current political status quo. To the contrary, their main political objectives are aimed at overturning the establishment; they want to change present strategically objectives but they do so not through a revolution, but using perfectly acceptable political means.

The increasing popularity of the radical parties in many European countries is potentially lethal for the current socio-political situation in Europe. The fact that so many Europeans in different states declare their support for parties espousing such radical views is a phenomenon that should not be ignored. Quite surprisingly however, the research on the unexpected popularity across the continent is scant. Thus it remains unclear whether this popularity is a temporary anomaly, or whether the radical parties play a simple role of a safety vent indispensable in every political system. One could go as far as to argue that the scale and rapid rupture in politics resembles changes in the political agenda that occurred in Europe before the outbreak of WW2, especially with the endeavours to unite the parties from different countries and create a united front (*The Times*).

Who Are the Radicals?

When thinking about 'radicalisation of European politics' one cannot escape the simple question: What is radical? A claim that 'radical' is nothing but a label or a political tool however partially

justified ignores the fact that language has an inherent normative dimension: There are no words devoid of meaning and none whose meaning is not open to interpretation. Undoubtedly, 'radical' is one of those buzzwords which have been invested with many emotions. Sometimes its very use hinders scholarly pursuit since people have troubles with agreeing on the very definition of the subject they are discussing let alone agree on the characteristics of analysed phenomenon. Understanding what being a radical mean and what it involves is a key to understanding the processes connected to this phenomenon.

It is the sign of our times and the growing and deepening interdisciplinary connections that the literature on radical politics can be found in many academic fields from international relations to psychology, from economics to sociology. Various theories and approaches are complementary and different studies feed into each other: Both those analyses carried on micro level, interested primarily with individuals *per se*, their electoral preferences influenced by personalities, beliefs, attitudes, motivations and socio-economic backgrounds and those carried on macro level from, mainly from the angle of political parties. This multitude of approaches, theories, levels of analysis only intensifies confusion as to what the breath, depth and indeed the very nature of radical politics is and constitute the most potent trap, i.e. the lack of conceptual clarity without which the term itself is nothing more than a bumper sticker available for everyone to use it as they please.

When two factors: political programmes and electoral popularity are taken into consideration, the following political landscape of European radical politics emerges:

- France – National Front (Front National); at present with 21% of support and steadily growing.

- UK – United Kingdom Independence Party with 13% share of votes.

- Denmark – Danish People's Party (Dansk Folkeparti); with 20% of support became the second political power in the country.

- The Netherlands – Party for Freedom (Partij voor de Vrijheid); according to the latest polls 24% of voters in Holland would cast their votes for them.

- Austria – Freedom Party of Austria (Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs); at 20% would be the third strongest political power in Austria if the election were held now.

- Sweden – surveys give the Swedish Democrats (Sverigedemokraterna) 13% making them third biggest party in the country.

– Finland – the True Finns (Perussuomalaiset); reached 19% of support, ranking at number two in Finland.

– Norway – the Progress Party (Framstegspartiet) is at 14% and growing.

– Hungary – serving as an ‘extreme’ case; the Movement for a Better Hungary (Jobbik Magyarországért Mozgalom) commonly known as Jobbik being the political force in power.

– Poland – National Movement (Ruch Narodowy) despite poor results its leaders do not deny their political ambitions (Polonia Christiana, 2013) and has proposed its of candidate in the upcoming presidential elections in Poland.

– Italy - Northern League (Lega Nord) secured nearly 20% of the vote in last elections and its leader, Matteo Salvini, has 33% of approval securing position of a rising political star.

– Greece – SYRIZA (Greek: ΣΥΡΙΖΑ, Synaspismós Rizospastikís Aristerás) founded as a coalition of left-wing and radical left parties in January 2015 defeated the ruling coalition and went on to become the winning coalition getting 36.3% of the popular vote.

If the programme vs. popularity method was deemed too theoretically imprecise, another approach might be employed. Should the results of elections to the European Parliament were taken into consideration, when juxtaposed with the general political scene of respective member states, the list of European radicals would comprise of the following parties:

– UK: UKIP, 30% – 24 mandates;

– France: Front National, 25% – 24 mandates;

– Hungary: Fidesz-KDNP, 51% – 13 mandates; Jobbik, 17,8% – 4 mandates;

– Finland: True Finns, 21.7% – 3 mandates;

– Denmark: Danish People’s Party, 23% – 3 mandates;

– Austria: Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs, 20% – 4 mandates;

– The Netherlands: Party for Freedom, 13.2% – 4 mandates;

– Sweden: Swedish Democrats, 6.9% – 1 mandate.

Arguably, European radical parties differ in many respects. They have different histories, different leading personas and operate in different political contexts. Most of all, their political programmes differ: some of them are Eurosceptic while for others the issue of European integration is not an important part of their agenda; some are emphasizing national character and roots, while others are more ethno-pluralistic or at least progressive in terms of societal changes; some are concerned about preserving the welfare state, others approach the economic issues from a more liberal

stance. In short, they are not identical clones springing from the same root and it is necessary take these similarities and differences into consideration when analysing what is truly 'radical' in European politics. One cannot exclude that a certain interpretation of 'radical politics' is dominant (Newman 179) or that these parties are indeed far right yet only in socio-cultural sense of the term (Rydgren 3). Simultaneously, it remains unchallenged that these parties differ and only the 'politics of rupture' or 'politics of contest' is their binding element and at the same time, the only universal horizon across Europe. They use it unabashedly perceiving it as a useful tool in obtaining various (even contradictory!) goals with varied responses to various social and political settings.

The Conceptual Limbo

As far as the generalist theories are concerned, most of the scholarship still treats the radical parties as if they were fringe and marginal. They base the support on fear (Kitschelt) or economic crises (Flecker et al.) and assume it being rather unstable (Givens). Furthermore, there are some problems with conceptual clarity. Firstly it needs to be emphasized that the term 'far right' or 'populist' is insufficient. Not only is this notion ambiguous, emotionally laden and pejorative, but also, because norms and values are intricately infused into this concept, it becomes inherently subjective. Secondly, in addition to confusion and frequent misinterpretations, speaking about 'far right'/'populist' only is not applicable in the context of radicalization of European politics, particularly with the elements of leftists ideologies being present.

As to the reasons of increased popularity of radical parties, political sciences lack a unanimous and convincing theory. Regarding the particular electoral preferences, several earlier studies on far right parties take on the more popular explanations that post-industrialisation and globalisation have restructured social stratification in Western societies thus creating new 'pools of frustration' to be exploited (Rydgren 1). Others argue that the voters' choice should be explained not in economic terms but rather through socio-cultural policy-preferences (Ignazi) which become more salient in Europe. Kemper bases on a grievance theory (Kemper) while Goodwin and Jasper point to in-group out-group dynamics (Goodwin, Jasper). Finally, factors like migration (Ivarsflaten) and ethnic competition (Lubbers et al.), discontent (Belanger, Aarts) are

proposed as the ultimate leverages. More importantly, recent studies looking into the causal models explaining the success of radical parties (Arzheimer, Norris, van der Brug et al.) are one-dimensional when juxtaposed with other political actors. Other studies aimed at measuring radical parties' impact, mistake correlation for causality (Williams 66) putting forward quite a tautological argumentation, e.g. that the increased anti-immigrant sentiments prove that right wing parties have played a part in fuelling these negative feelings. In her study Williams entirely ignores the possibility of a bottom up reaction or a demand-supply dynamics.

Question of the leadership cannot be ignored. The leader often sets the tone for the whole party to such extent that they epitomise its programme, ideals and values. Consequently, the leader inevitably contributes to any change in party reputation. Stewart and Clarke run multivariate analysis in order to confirm the practical wisdom that leader images had strong effects on party choice thus constituting a significant factor influencing party's popularity (Stewart, Clarke). This is supported by Luther who claims that parties' success to a great extent depends on their leaderships' capacity to identify and implement strategies (Luther). Furthermore, Harmel and Janda suggest that any change in the political programme does not 'just happen', but instead results from leadership change (Harmel, Janda), while Garzia's study confirms that voters' evaluation of party leaders plays a crucial role in shaping their feelings of attachment to parties (Garzia). Accordingly, Haiders untimely death proved that the change of the leader can be devastating for given party. Davies and Mian confirm that any leadership change can also significantly alter party's rhetoric or reshuffle priorities like it happened when Marine Le Pen replaced her father as a president of Front National (Davies, Mian).

Need for a Paradigm Change

The foregoing discussion has elucidated that traditional approaches are merely able to provide the vast list of factors influencing electoral preferences, however this still does not answer the question of recent increased popularity of radical parties. Furthermore, the up to date research is also admittedly patchy when it comes to analysing potential impact and consequences of such popularity. But the primary concern is caused by the fact that overexploitation of the 'far right'/'populist' paradigm lost the

capability to apprehend the whole complexity of political changes in Europe. Thus, a paradigm change is needed and this paper proposes to depart from the confines of traditional conceptualizations and analyse the current political milieu in Europe via the 'radical politics' framework based on the concept of societal security.

Radical politics was defined by Giddens as breaking away from the holds of the past while simultaneously bringing and controlling such change (Giddens 1). Hence, radicalism is an advocacy of and commitment to bringing about a sweeping social, political or religious change and a total, political and social transformation. In terms of means used, radicalism can be a perfectly legitimate challenge of the established norms or policies which defines the contemporary political 'off-stream'.

Naturally, 'radical politics' can only be understood in reference to what it means in given context and must be identified and ultimately explained by reference to the unobservable subjective experiences and the non-deducible meanings. This is so because any study focused on radicalism in politics inevitably touches upon certain phenomena associated with 'political consciousness' and this research in particular purports to show that something suprasensible and non-deducible like values, meanings and purposes influences radicalisation of European politics. Perhaps, as Newman observes, in case of new radical politics theory is lagging behind practice (Newman 178). However, if the political parties are treated as if they constitute a homogenous monolith across countries, this kind of scholarship aspires to prediction and flattens the complex issue by creating essentialist view. Consequently, if we agree to the theory that a homogenous set of factors can produce political radicalism, this hinges on an assumption that political radicalism itself is a homogenous phenomenon, we are therefore ignoring its susceptibility to adapt to the specific momentum of time and place as well as the complex relation between the structural and contextual factors.

Another layer of difficulty is added when one realizes the fluidity of normative dimension connected with the issue of radicalisation in politics – the perception of what constitutes 'radical politics' changes over time, varies in different places and, last but not least, is framed independently by each individual. This observation belies a stipulation that all European radical parties are radical in the same way. Perhaps if among all the differences one common denominator was to be identified, the anti-migrant or anti-Islamic stance of radical parties should be pronounced. From *Ruch Narodowy* to

Front National, what binds the radical parties is a staunch opposition against migration in general and Islam specifically (but not only). Such observation stipulates that notwithstanding the particular voters' electoral preferences, the increased widespread popularity of radical parties is generated by the deepening level of societal insecurity (Buzan et al.) in Europe.

Societal Insecurity and its Dilemmas

The concept of societal security was designed to tackle the changing reality of post-cold war Europe, adjusted to new settings and conceived to deal with emerging political reality of the European Union (EU). It places heavy emphasis on society as the main focal point of European security concerns. And if societies constitute the cornerstone of the new security agenda, then, Buzan et al. argue, issues of identity and migration that underpin the possible threats and vulnerabilities (Buzan et al. 120). Consequently, the processes that place 'us' versus 'them', the situations where one identity is challenged by another one and hence reinforce each other reciprocally, is what leads to a societal security dilemma. Societal insecurity, on the other hand, appears when societies define given change, development or potentiality as a threat to their survival as a community.

One of the fundamental assumptions governing the societal security concept is that the state and the society 'of the same people' are two different things. Wæver argues that states can be undermined or destabilized by 'their' societies becoming threatened or weakened in terms of social cohesion and identity, the society becomes the referent object by itself (Wæver et al. 42). Since societal identity is able to reproduce itself independently of the state and even in opposition to it, societal security being an integral part of state security should be considered as something more than just a factor to state security. The discrepancy is even more visible Friedman argues when one considers that the elites and the general public pursue a different logic (Friedman), with the elites more closely linked to the state and the public to the society. By neglecting this factor, in the words of Holton, one may hastily ascribe the reaction of 'mass politics' against cosmopolitanism to single phenomena (racism, populism, xenophobia) that are not able to provide satisfactory explanation for the complex canopy of society (Holton 141).

To answer the question why would political radicalisation stem from societal insecurity one must look carefully to the concept of the societal insecurity dilemma. As its name suggests, it consists of two ideas: the security dilemma and societal security. Roe explains that:

societies can experience processes in which perceptions of ‘the others’ develop into mutually reinforcing ‘enemy’ pictures leading to negative dialectics whereby groups tend to define their national identity and national consciousness in negative terms, through distinction from or comparison with neighbours (Roe 22).

In accordance with this theory, within the societal sector, the main threats to security come from competing identities. They can be mutually exclusive or one with overbearing influence that disrupts the reproduction of the other triggering protection against seductive cultural imports. Societal security dilemma denotes then processes whereby a group perceiving its identity as threatened starts to act in a security mode on this basis (Wæver et al. 23).

With the societal, as with other forms of security, what is perceived as a threat, and what can be objectively assessed as threatening, may be quite different. Real threats may not be accurately seen. Perceived threats may not be real, and yet still have real effects. Wæver et al. argue, that internal threats to society are symptomatic for weak states (Wæver et al. 43-44, 49); a claim that needs to be scrutinized in the contemporary European context. Spinner-Halev et al. present arguments to support this new problematic (Spinner-Halev et al.). Their analysis demonstrates that self-respect and group identity are strongly connected and can lead people to place collective interests above their individual ones. They also make it clear that the assumption that low-status groups have little self-respect and majority status groups have it in abundance is mistaken.

Societal security dilemma is not a static configuration, but a process with its own dynamics whereby the nature of the threats is changing and “some changes will be seen as part of natural process by which identities adjust and evolve to meet alternations in historical circumstances” (Wæver et al. 42). However, it is important to note that when religious and national identities reinforce each other they can create very strong identities (e.g. Muslim immigrants vs. Christian indigenous Europeans), and very strong patterns of fear, hostility and societal insecurity. In such a dispute, how do cultures defend themselves? With given identity threatened, one has to strengthen its expression. Thus, culture, Wæver et al.

extend their argument, becomes a security policy and over time the physical and symbolic boundaries (Wæver et al. 70), dividing the communities may become reinforced even further (Watson, Boag).

Buzan et al. explain that societies can react to threats through activities carried out by the community itself or by having the threat placed on the state agenda (Buzan et al. 122). The former trend is visible through emergence of radical parties and their political programmes laden with anti-immigrant or xenophobic discourse, while the former is supported by the fact that various non-state actors have mobilized a resistance against EU and immigration based on the security claim that they threaten national identity. Similar responses can be observed particularly towards Muslim presence in Europe, suffice to mention civic movements like PEGIDA or Stop the Islamification of Europe. If societal security concerns escalate to a level where the state is called back in, this will signal a potential retreat from integration (Buzan, Wæver 356) and opens up the space for radical parties. If not, it could possibly enhance further integration, but – one could argue – could be a stimulus for further political fragmentation and regionalization, both conducive towards violence.

Threats to Societal Security in Europe: Migration and Identity

Since identity is constructed, threats to identity always depend on the construction of something perceived as threatening to ‘us’. Globalisation is undoubtedly the source for vast influx of immigrants to Europe in a relatively short time span that threatens society with powerful inflows of language, style, culture and values that may weaken or overwhelm their indigenous counterparts and damage the ability of local identities to reproduce. In fact, Europe, which has never thought of itself as a place for immigration, is experiencing an unprecedented massive intake of people. In Europe however, not only do not national identities include a constituent belief that immigration should and can contribute to the process of building and redefining them; also intra-European migration cannot be a useful guide to the ability of European states to adjust and to integrate the latest waves. The reason for this is the sheer scale and different cultural background.

George Friedman poses a difficult question: What does one do with the foreigner who comes to your country and wants to be

a citizen? And further: What happens when a foreigner comes to your country and wants not only to be a citizen, but to become part of your nation? Citizenship can be granted; nevertheless it is difficult to change identity. National identity for Europeans is not rooted in choice. The issue of immigrant assimilation in Europe is a fault line that, under sufficient stress and circumstances, can rip Europe apart not only because of numbers. The European states are not configured to deal with immigration and have a definition of nationhood that is, in fundamental ways, incompatible with immigration. Assimilation in such situation is not impossible, but it is enormously more difficult. In this atmosphere, Islam has grown in Europe as a major complication and challenge. It becomes the second religion of the continent; a development that has raised practical questions about societal life. Holton who investigates the order-creating function of culture and its impact on societal identity under the persisting influence of globalisation, observes that culture seems to be harder to globalize than economics (Holton 145). In this context, monotheism such as Islam, encourages the development of imagined communities, and enhances spiritual bonds between believers even when they are separated geographically. It has particular appeal to those who perceive themselves as excluded from the society.

It has to be emphasized that people willingly perceived as outsiders are not necessarily immigrants in any evocative sense of that term. This issue refers to a situation where individuals born and bred into certain society are still perceived as strangers and/or societal burden as explicit from the anti-migrant agenda of European radical parties. This factor is particularly significant in respect to Muslims in Europe especially that in Europe's past, this group constituted the main 'other', and hence a point of reference for identity construction. Mastnak's thesis proposes that Islam was essential for the formation of European identity, and remains so for its maintenance (Mastnak). He argues that this identity was formed not by Islam but, predominantly, in the relationship to Islam and that Europe has developed a 'collective identity' and the ability to orchestrate action, a unity articulated in relation to Muslims as the enemy. These factors would explain why radicalisation of European politics manifests itself in a staunchly anti-Muslim way. The first dimension of Muslim presence is that this group change the balance of indigenous European population. Although there is certainly no proportional formula, simple numbers can change the identity (Laqueuer 19). This is then primarily about how relative

numbers react with absorptive and adaptative capabilities of society. The second dimension point to a hidden hand of socio-economic issues, which, unquestionably prominent, still have a subservient role to the main set of ideational factors. They stem from the ever-present societal security dilemma in Europe, as Wæver voiced it: "Threats strengthen identities at which they are aimed. Attempts to suppress an identity may work, but equally they may reinforce the intensity with which the group coheres" (Wæver 43).

Conclusions

While undoubtedly Hungary still remains a sole exception to the rule, in several countries the radical parties become second or third political power and actively strive to take over political control. This pattern was also palpable during recent elections in Greece. While we are not able to define authoritatively the source of radical parties' popularity, estimate its stability or predicts what results it might bring in the future, certain generalisations can be put forward. Firstly, The increasing popularity of the radical parties in many European countries is potentially lethal for the current socio-political situation in Europe. Secondly, an overview of Europe's radical parties proved that they are not identical clones springing from the same root and it is necessary take these similarities and differences into consideration when analysing what is truly 'radical' in European politics. Finally, overexploitation of the 'far right'/'populist' paradigm lost the capability to apprehend the whole complexity of political changes in Europe.

Thus, there is a need for paradigm change and this paper proposes to depart from the confines of traditional conceptualizations and analyse the current political milieu in Europe via the 'radical politics' framework based on the concept of societal security. In line with this claim, the paper proposed to analyse the phenomenon of political radicalisation in Europe through the emergence of radical parties and their political programmes laden with anti-immigrant or xenophobic discourse. Furthermore, such argument is also supported by the fact that various non-state actors have mobilized a resistance against EU and immigration based on the security claim that they threaten national identity. Similar responses can be observed particularly towards Muslim presence in Europe, suffice to mention civic movements like PEGIDA or Stop the Islamification of Europe.

It needs to be reckoned with that the increasing popularity of radical parties may trigger further radicalisation of European politics whereby the mainstream parties would take over some of the arguments or language used by their radical competitors. What is more, if we focus on the societal side of the whole situation, it is undeniable that the current trends impact the society, too. Nonetheless, it remains unclear whether the social divisions along the political lines might further harden, deepening the polarisation of societies with 'critical situations' like "Charlie Hebdo" attack happening more often, leading to social tensions, instability and, at least potentially, violence.

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