KONRAD ADENAUER STIFTUNG

Taking a stance against populism

Experiences from Europe

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Contents

Key Facts ... 3

Introduction ... 4

Previous Response Strategies ... 8

Country Studies ... 13

- Denmark ... 14
- Finland ... 18
- France ... 21
- Netherlands ... 25
- Norway ... 29
- Austria ... 32
- Sweden ... 36

Is There a Panacea Against Right-Wing Populism? ... 39

Conclusion ... 44

Sources ... 48

The Authors ... 56

Key Facts

- Over the last few years, populist candidates and parties have achieved remarkable success with some of them now experiencing an all-time high.
- Populist success has been at the expense of parties to the left and right of the centre. Populists attack what has long been and continues to be important to centrist parties: cosmopolitanism, tolerance, solidarity and a united Europe. Democratic parties to the left and right of the centre cannot turn a blind eye when right-wing and national populists win over their voters and cast doubt on their achievements.
- For a long time, interaction with populists was characterised by stigmatisation, disregard, dissociation and isolation, but also by insecurity, hesitation, approximation and adoption of populist positions all the way to the formation of coalitions. None of these strategies has undermined populists over the long-term.
- However, in recent years, an approach has emerged that is stymieing populists. A combination of taking a stance and politics that benefits and encourages people. This is how Emmanuel Macron in France, Mark Rutte in the Netherlands and Alexander Van der Bellen and Sebastian Kurz in Austria, have been able to defeat populists.

Introduction

Over the last few years, populist candidates and parties in Europe, not to mention on other continents, have achieved remarkable success. Some of them such as the Law and Justice Party in Poland or the Swiss People's Party, have in fact become the strongest parties in their countries, occupying the highest state and government offices there. As of recently, two populist parties have governed Italy: the left-wing populist Five Star Movement and the right-wing populist Lega. Previously, such a constellation has only existed in Greece where the left-wing populist Syriza entered into a coalition with the Independent Greeks (ANEL) following the second parliamentary elections in 2015. In Austria and Norway, right-wing and national populist parties form part of coalition governments as a junior partner. A number of populist parties such as the Five Star Movement or Italy's traditional party Lega Nord, renamed "Lega", the Danish and the Swiss People's Party, the Alternative for Germany, Podemos in Spain, La France Insoumise, the Polish ruling party and the Sweden Democrats have now reached an all-time high (cf. Table 1).

Populism is not a new phenomenon, however. It has been the focus of politics and science in Europe since the 1980s (cf. Kitschelt and McGann 1995, Betz 2002, Decker 2004, Bauer 2010a). Yet it now seems to be enjoying a renaissance. It is important to note that populism has many faces. Left-wing populists call for something different to those on the right. Right-wing populists are also nationalists, but national populists are not necessarily "right-wing"[1]. Not all populists are equally radical and shrill in appearance and tone. Yet, what all populists do have in common is that they are a symptom of crisis. By supporting populist parties, voters convey that – at least from their perspective – something is going wrong with politics. It may be a feeling of discrimination, increasing social inequality or decline, the fear of terrorism, of "foreign infiltration" by immigrants from other cultural areas, of obscurity in a globalised world, or being at the mercy of the repercussions from political decisions that are largely detached from the reality of their own everyday lives. That is the real breeding ground for populism.

At first glance, it may seem preferable for politics to be populist, in other words "down-to-earth", "in touch with the people", or "for the people". Nevertheless, populism is something different and it gives rise to a number of problems. Some of them are inconsistent with the principles of democracy. Common to all populists is that they address deficiencies but offer very little in the way of practical solutions. They fuel genuine fears and exacerbate existing or looming conflicts without helping to resolve them. Populists deepen existing rifts within society. They survive on prejudices ("corrupt elites", "foreigners only come to take something away from us") and exploit these for their own benefit. Populism is a strategy for mobilising people who are worried, insecure or dissatisfied. It is not a policy approach providing solutions for mostly complicated problems or offering constructive future prospects for the welfare of the society as a whole.

Populism is incompatible with the principles of democracy.

Table 1
Populist parties in Europe (selection)

Country	Party(s)	Type	Election results in per cent			Current position in the party and government system
			Parliament[a]	Best result	President	
AT	FPÖ	**RNP**	26.0	26.9 (1999)	46.2 (2nd)	J (3rd)
BE	VB	**RNP**	3.7	12 (2007)	/	O (6th)
CH	SVP	RNP	29.4	29.4 (2015)	/	MR (1st)
DK	DF	RNP	21.1	21.1 (2015)	/	O/T (2nd)
DE	AfD Linke	**RNP** LP	12.6 9.2	12.6 (2017) 11.9 (2009)	3.6 (3rd) 10.6 (2nd)	O (3rd) O (5th)
ESP	U Podemos	**LP**	21.2	21.2 (2016)[b]	/	O (3rd)
FI	Perus	RNP	17.6	19 (2011)	9.4 (4th)	O (3rd)
F	FN FI	**RNP** **LP**	13.2 11.0	13.6 (2012) 11 (2017)[c]	33.9 (2nd) 19.6 (4th)	O (3rd) O (4th)
GB	UKIP	NP	1.8	12.6 (2015)	/	APO (5th)
GR	Syriza Anel	LP RNP	35.5 3.7	36 (2015, I.) 10.6 (2012, I.)	n.a. n.a.	S (1st) J (7th)
IT	M5S Lega FDI-AN	LP **RNP** **RNP**	32.7 17.4[d] 4.4[d]	32.7 (2018) 17.4 (2018) 15.7 (1996)	11.9[e] (2nd) n.a. /	S (1st) J (3rd)
NOR	FrP	RNP	15.2	22.9 (2009)	/	J (3rd)
NL	PVV	**RNP**	13.0	15.5 (2010)	/	O (2nd)
PL	PiS	NKP	37.6	37.6 (2015)	52 (1st)	A (1st)
Swe	SD	**RNP**	12.9	12.9 (2014)	/	O (3rd)

Key:

Italics: countries that were examined more closely through fieldwork as part of this study.

RNP: right-wing and national populist party, NK: national conservatives, NP: national populist party, LP: left-wing populist party. The different font thickness depicts the degree of expression and ideological rigour of the respective tendency. Bold: is located at or on the way to the respective edge of the tendency; normal: more moderate expression.

a) Last elections to the national parliament.

b) In 2015, Podemos won 20.7 per cent of seats during their first election; the newly established electoral alliance Unidos Podemos held 21.2 per cent of votes cast during the 2016 election.

c) La France Insoumise emerged as the Front de Gauche and entered government for the first time in 2017.

d) Both as part of the alliance of parties Centrodestra.

e) Fourth ballot.

n.a: did not stand for election with its own candidate.

Cells highlighted in grey: State president is directly elected.

A: one-party government (the number in brackets indicates the current strength in the respective party system, as measured by the percentage of votes during national parliamentary elections: 1. = strongest party, 2. second strongest etc..), APO: extra-parliamentary opposition, J: junior partner of a coalition government, MR: Member of the government, O: opposition, S: senior partner of a coalition government, T: tolerates a minority government.

Status: 01/06/2018.

Sources: own summary according to Nordsieck (different years), La Repubblica (2015), FAZ (2018), Galetti, Saranca and Wissmann (2017), Grabow (2018).

Of the different variants of European populism, this study will only focus on right-wing and national populism. Not only are both of these variants more widespread than left-wing populism, they also pose a greater danger to democracy because ethnic-nationalist propaganda comes into play; this vilifies people according to origin, nationality, religion and skin colour, portraying them as a threat to the local inhabitants' lifestyle and quality of life. Right-wing and national populists have a pessimistic view of the world. They see themselves and their home country as being surrounded by enemies. They alone have the ability to protect "people and native land" against imminent downfall, "Islamisation", the "great exchange", selling off national interests to political occupying powers or global markets by corrupt elites. Right-wing and national populists not only consider those who disagree as political opponents, they are also an enemy of the people or "betrayer of the people". What is more, they fight against them in an aggressive and defamatory way, which in turn poisons and vulgarises the political tone and style. Symbolically hung up dolls with images of government officials during rallies or statements such as those made by the AfD leader in Thuringia about how the Federal Chancellor should be led away from the Federal Chancellery in a straitjacket (cf. Die Welt 2016), bear testimony to this phenomenon in Germany, too[2].

Populism is a strategy for mobilising people who are worried, insecure or dissatisfied.

This study examines how parties to the left and right of the centre in Europe react to their right-wing and national populist rivals. They are on the one hand a target of political attacks as well as losing or having lost voters to the populists, on the other. In some cases, these losses were more at the expense of the social democratic or socialist parties, e.g. in Denmark, Finland, France and in Austria. In others, conservative or Christian democratic parties were more severely affected e.g. in Sweden or in Germany. Ultimately, populists drive their national political situation in a direction, which also affects the principles espoused by parties to the left and right of the centre – whether that be regarding the cosmopolitanism of society as a whole, the openness of internal European borders for people and goods or finally the populists' stance towards cooperation in the European Union. For these reasons, the parties to the left and right of the centre cannot turn a blind eye to the fact that right-wing and national populists are taking their votes. Their reactions to date, however, have been completely inconsistent both nationally and internationally and were characterised by short-term successes at best; albeit, this study focuses on whether more sustainable "practices" have been found in recent years. It is based on updated preliminary studies by the authors, the analysis of specialised literature and finally on guideline-based interviews with scientists and politicians in France, the Netherlands and Austria[3].

The parties to the left and right of the centre cannot turn a blind eye to the fact that right-wing and national populists are taking their votes.

1| *For definition of populism and the distinction between left- and right-wing populism see e.g. Betz (2001), Hartleb (2006), Priester (2012), Müller (2016), Grabow (2016, 2018).*

2| *Here we selected a rather mild attack from the year 2016. More recent and violent examples can be found at MDR (2017) or Spiegel online (2018).*

3| *At this point, the authors once again express their sincere thanks to Prof Dr Werner T. Bauer (Austrian Association for Political Consulting and Development), Prof Dr Wolfgang C. Müller (University of Vienna), Pascale Joannin (Fondation Robert Schuman, Paris), Prof Dominique Reynié (Fondapol, Paris), Jean-Yves Camus (Fondation Jean Jaurés, Paris), Geerten Boogard and Pieter Jan Dijkman (CDA Research Institute, The Hague) as well as Prof Dr Ton Nijhuis (University of Amsterdam). The authors alone are responsible for interpreting the interviews.*

Previous Response Strategies

Theorists and politicians have long been searching for suitable responses to populists (Goodwin 2011). The reactions can initially be classified into two rough categories. In principle, the parties can try to distance themselves from the new competition from the right or attempt to integrate them into the political process. On the one hand, the distance can occur actively for example in the form of an explicit substantive dissociation from the populists or also passively by simply ignoring the new competition and hoping it might quickly disappear again of its own accord. Inclusion, on the other hand, can take place openly whereby one or several of the established parties offer to cooperate with the populists e.g. in the form of a coalition, or covertly. This involves one or several established parties attempting to emulate the themes and occasionally the style of the populists to win back voters that the affected party(s) has/have lost to the populists. Yet, even open inclusion does not necessarily imply that a populist contender is accepted as a welcome encouragement or at least a legitimate new contestant in the party system. The intention behind this inclusion is often to "demystify" the populists in the eyes of everyone. As we know from Austria, this approach only achieved success over the short-term. The FPÖ has long since returned and is more professional and influential than ever.

We used the variety of responses to populists described in the literature to pinpoint ten ideal types that have been most frequently applied and described in this or a similar form. Eight of them fall into the category of distancing and two into the category of inclusion (cf. Table 2). In practice, there is usually a selection and thus an overlapping of several response options (see country studies). However, at this point we initially focus on the ideal types in order to outline their key principles.

Table 2
Response strategies against populism (ideal types)

Distancing	Inclusion
(1) Ignore and hope	(9) Approximation/adoption of positions
(2) Isolate	(10) Cooperation
(3) Exclude	
(4) Stigmatise	
(5) Mitigate	
(6) Attack	
(7) Stance	
(8) Good politics	

(1) *Ignore and hope:* established parties essentially ignore populists for three reasons: they do not want to attract attention to them, they do not find them important enough or the topics addressed are considered to be too politically sensitive such that efforts are made to not discuss them in public. If all parties and the leading media cooperate, it can be a successful way of limiting public awareness of the populists. Firstly, however, they find their own ways of making themselves heard and secondly, the political pressure under this cloak of silence may increase to dangerous levels. Established democratic parties should only engage with populists to the extent necessary, but it is erroneous to believe that turning a blind eye will make populists disappear.

(2) *Isolate:* established democratic parties can distance themselves from populists in two ways. For one thing, they can publicly declare that they will never and by no means cooperate with populists or heed populist demands. On the other hand, they can emphasise the extent to which their values and positions differentiate from those of the populists and fight for their own positions. Transitions to other responses such as stigmatising, attacking, taking a stance and good politics are also options here.

(3) *Exclude*: this is at least a coordinated, at times also formally executed act on behalf of the other parties. As a "soft" variant of exclusion, the other parties may agree to forbid contact with the populists and exclude them from the political arena for moral and tactical reasons whereby populists are subjected to a type of ban (cordon sanitaire). However, the hard version of exclusion may also imply changing the rules of the political contest or populists being denied access to opportunities enjoyed by the other parties. In addition to introducing or changing election thresholds during elections, it also includes restricting party financing or changing parliamentary rules of procedure to their disadvantage or sanctioning populists for violations against democratic principles, for instance. Yet, such measures are democratically questionable given that attempts are made to silence a party that is not at first illegitimate, by changing the rules. This further fans the flames of suspicion voiced by populists towards the "establishment" or the myth propounded by them about exclusion and victimisation.

(4) *Stigmatise*: this is a strong form of isolation. Populists are not only portrayed as political opponents, but also as a threat to democracy and the democratic culture. Even if this can be justified in particular cases due to the content and style of the populist mobilisation, this approach, which also tends towards indignation and moral superiority, does not tackle the root of the evil; instead, it contributes towards the formation of myths and camps and is hardly suitable for changing the populists' world views.

(5) *Mitigate*: by choosing this strategy, established parties attempt to play down the actual importance – or that claimed by populists – of certain topics by moving others into the spotlight, for instance. This may reinforce the belief among voters that politicians will not take heed of their concerns. Over the long-term, this may diminish trust in the political institutions and undermine the functioning of the political system (McLaren 2011: 164). Furthermore, it is generally difficult for established parties to control those topics that are predominantly shaped by their opponents (Bale et al. 2010: 413).

(6) *Attack*: this strategy entails the other parties engaging in an open debate with populists. Although that promotes the other parties' acceptance of and attracts additional attention to populists, the populists have no problems achieving the latter in any case. It is, however, a sign of strength and sovereignty when established democratic parties express an opinion on the strident and tough-talking yet often meaningless or contradictory populist demands, and repudiate them. That is not something that democratic parties have to do every day and they should not react to every confrontation or provocation. However, a "targeted attack" against the disparaging or contradictory positions held by populists seems to have far greater authority than the five response strategies outlined above (cf. also Amann 2017: 263-272).

(7) *Taking a stance*: is when a politician does not change their opinion over time even when it comes to politically sensitive topics such as Europe or the refugee policy, does not shy away from engaging in public debate with their political opponent

and is pro-active when representing their opinion. Parties, movements or alliances take a stance when they are united in support of their leading candidate.

(8) *Good politics*: populists find good opportunities to develop when they can tap into, exploit or exaggerate and hence benefit from latent or pre-existing problems or fears among the population. Even if part of the electorate is receptive to populist scandalisation and mobilisation and can scarcely be convinced by factually correct argumentation or truly good balance sheets, it is important – at least for the purpose of containing populism – for established democratic parties, and especially those with governmental responsibility, to win over the majority of the population with services rendered and to keep them on board. That includes the ability to solve problems to ensure the welfare of the country and hence the majority of the population, and guarantee they feel safe and in "good hands" with the ruling government. Moreover, the latter should not give populists any cause for scandalising the conduct of elites. Albeit the era of great ideologies or grand future visions now seems to be a thing of the past, without a foundation of values and the perspectives derived from them, good and pragmatic problem solving would be nothing but soulless policy management. Therefore, good politics always has a future-oriented plan, affording the population an opportunity to participate in political processes and decision-making.

(9) *Approximation/adoption of populist positions*: the first of the two inclusion strategies is that which is empirically the most common. The adoption of topics and positions held by populist parties aims to win back protest voters (Bale et al. 2010: 413; Goodwin 2011: 24). Yet, such a U-turn may result in damaging the credibility of the established parties if voters regard the turnaround as the outcome of political expediency in lieu of a firmly held belief. This may also alienate their own voter base and give rise to disputes within the party that may further erode their own credibility. By contrast, populist parties are strengthened if others also represent their positions. Adoption or approximation of populist positions also creates further incentives for the latter to step up their demands since they recognise the extent to which the other parties can be blackmailed. The result is that populists shape the agenda and push the other parties forward. Finally, populists can invariably present themselves to the public as the original, which the other parties imitate to the detriment of their stance and credibility (Decker 2004: 268).

(10) *Cooperation*: between the established parties and the populists may take place on three different levels: established parties can enter into formal coalitions with populists (executive cooperation), or cooperate with them as the case arises e.g. whereby populists support the initiatives of other parties or vice versa (legislative cooperation). An intermediate variant of cooperation exists when populists tolerate minority governments. Executive cooperation occurs mostly for reasons of power politics in order to give a party in such a coalition the senior role rather than that of a junior partner in another constellation, for example (Geden 2007: 24). Cooperation between established parties and populists is generally justified by the fact that realpolitik constraints are intended to "demystify" the latter. Hence, they can no longer credibly refer to themselves as an anti-establishment party and are compelled to moderate both their substantive and verbal radicalism (Rydgren 2006: 177, Heinisch 2003: 101 f., Minkenberg 2001: 2). Government participation may also lend legitimacy to populists and thus imply a move away from their state of marginalisation (Rydgren 2006: 177). Executive collaboration is often discouraged as it would enable a populist party to directly influence policy-making (Geden 2007: 24). This is, however, especially serious in situations whereby the right-wing populists tolerate a minority government and hence retain their influence upon politics

without having to assume responsibility (Grabow and Hartleb 2013a: 405). When cooperation proves beneficial at the legislative or executive levels it may extend to the electorate, too (Downs 2001: 28). That is why the established party joins forces with the right-wing party prior to elections; this results in securing votes on the one hand, but may also reinforce the impression that an established party sells their agenda in favour of gaining power, on the other.

The past few years have frequently witnessed take-over strategies, but it has done little to hinder the populists.

The fact that the eight distancing strategies are opposed by only two inclusion strategies does not imply – since the emergence of right-wing and national populist parties – that the established democratic parties to the left and right of the centre would have deployed one of the numerous distancing strategies. Particularly in the early days, ongoing attempts to ignore or exclude the new competition predominantly consisted of implicit approximation and adoption strategies. As can be seen in the current strengths of the right-wing and national populists, (cf. Table 1), it failed to impede them.

Country Studies

Denmark

In contrast to other European countries, in Denmark the Danish People's Party (DF) founded in 1995 and its predecessor the Progressive Party (FP) initiated in 1972 as a tax-critical protest party, were not isolated by the other parties (Klein 2013: 113, Downs 2002: 43, Meret 2011: 260). Both movements were accepted as "normal" political parties from the outset. On the basis of the proportional nature of elections and the highly fragmented parliament, even the conservative liberal governments under Poul Schlüter between 1982 and 1993 were reliant on the support of the FP (Klein 2013: 113). Although this helped them with the adoption of several budgets, they were only given limited concessions. In particular, the governments did not support the FP's issues unrelated to the economy, since they were dependent on the social-liberals (RV), who campaigned for a liberal immigration policy (Bale et al. 2010: 414).

The social democrats in particular lost votes to the populists and sharpened the tone in refugee and immigration policy.

The immigration issue has dominated politics and mass media since the mid-1990s, after significantly more immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers flowed into the country. Some of the established parties joined in the anti-immigration discourse at the start, which emanated from the DF that was established under these conditions (Rydgren 2004: 493 f.). This left the electorate with the impression that the DF touches upon an explosive subject and has an indirect influence on the political situation. The previously insignificant and marginalised party was quickly evaluated based on the positions that it adopted. First of all, the liberal conservative Venstre accepted the demands by the DF, which can largely be explained by RV's participation in governments under the social democrats (1993-2001) (Bale et al. 2010: 415). This eroded the previous incentives to abstain from playing off the issue of immigration in effective governance. Therefore, between 1997 and 2001 Venstre turned against the government's immigration policy, which it regarded as too generous (ibid.: 421). In 1998, they published announcements in several Danish newspapers on topics such as the refugee policy. The demands were unusually excessive and were similar to those propounded by the Progressive Party in Norway (ibid., Bjørklund, Goul Andersen 1999: 26). Hereupon, social democrats were also divided in their opinion on the subject of immigration, who had lost a particularly high number of voters to the DF since the mid-1990s (Rydgren 2004: 494, Klein 2013: 114). As the original defender of the refugee migration and multiculturalism, they increasingly adopted a sceptical position and rhetoric during the late 1990s (Bale et al. 2010: 415). The social democratic government eventually tightened their refugee and immigration policy and hence partially migrated to an adoption strategy. In 1997, when the DF shot up from five to 14 per cent in the opinion surveys, the Prime Minister Poul Nyrup Rasmussen replaced the Interior Minister Birte Weiss – who refused to tighten the immigration policy – with Thorkild Simonsen. The latter, as Mayor of Århus, had already spoken in favour of harder line regarding the Danish refugee and immigration policy (Klein 2013: 114). Over the short-term, the change of course as regards personnel and content had the desired effect and the approval rates of the DF declined during the following months (ibid. Bjørklund and Goul Andersen 1999: 25). Albeit, immigration policy remained a central theme for the campaign in 1998 in which not only the DR, but also Venstre and the social democrats called for more restrictions.

Following their entry into parliament in 1998, the DF was at first ignored by the other parties and regarded as unsuited or unacceptable for a coalition (Downs 2012: 141, Hellström and Hervik 2011: 4). Nevertheless, with the exception of the social-liberals, all other parties became far more sceptical towards multiculturalism (Schumacher and van Kersbergen 2014: 7). The increased adoption of right-wing populist themes and rhetoric continued. Hence during their election campaign in 2001, Venstre made use of welfare chauvinist sayings such as "Denmark must not be the welfare agency for the rest of the world" (Bale 2003: 78). The party presented itself as a defender of the welfare state and even demanded additional expenditure in certain areas to prevent either the DF or the left-wing parties from having a target (Decker 2004: 102). After the social democratic Interior Minister Karen Jesperson had proposed banishing criminal asylum seekers to an island, the centre right-wing parties responded with even more radical immigration policy requirements (Downs 2002: 45, Goul Andersen 2003: 189). After all parties had gradually adopted the topic, the DF was able to further radicalise their anti-immigration course (Decker 2004: 102 f., Rydgren 2004: 496). The ideological critique of multiculturalism replaced cheap propaganda motivated by welfare chauvinism, which mainly targeted Muslim immigrants as a threat to Denmark's Christian-influenced identity. This process was reinforced by the attacks on 11 September 2001, which put an end to the remnants of an "ignoring strategy" by the other parties (Hellström and Hervik 2011: 4). The DF subsequently adopted a tougher stance towards Islam and even Venstre and the social democrats promised to tighten immigration policy (Meret 2011: 269, Widfeldt 2015: 135). This set a type of spiral into motion, which – emanating from the DF – resulted in a harsher tone against Muslims and immigrants living in Denmark.

However, not only was the collective swing to the right unable to prevent the social democrats from losing a number of votes in 2001, this was the case for the parliamentary majority, too (Downs 2012: 141). Of the eight parties who entered parliament, they were at first overtaken by Venstre and the DF became the third-strongest party. Venstre and the conservative People's Party formed a minority government and the DF once again found itself in the strategically favourable role of the "king-maker". It indirectly resulted in an executive cooperation between the ruling parties and the Danish People's Party.

Even on the eve of the election, the party leader of Venstre, Anders Fogh Rasmussen, had anticipated this scenario and explained that it was out of the question for the DF to participate in the new government (ibid.). Owing to the conflicting views in EU and foreign policy matters, it was not possible for his party to build a formal coalition with the DF. Nevertheless, the gulf was not large enough to prevent him from granting political concessions to the DF if it supported the minority government. During the following legislative period, Venstre was able to rely on the support of the DF (legislative collaboration) during many votes (e.g. adoption of budget, domestic reforms) (Downs 2012: 142). In return, the DF had an influence on the government agenda in areas such as immigration and justice, which resulted in tighter immigration legislation. In doing so, the ruling parties officially kept "their hands clean" but they granted the DF de facto power in national politics over a period of ten years, however (ibid.: 136 f.).

Following the election defeat in 2001, the part of the social democrats that wanted to pursue the right-wing populist position on immigration and integration experienced an upswing (Bale et al. 2010: 415). During the following years, their positions in this area thus differed little from those in the centre-right government, whose legislative proposals they even supported on many occasions (legislative collaboration). However, this change of course was not as successful as the social democrats had

hoped. Due to their high inner-party disagreement as regards immigration and multiculturalism, they could not oppose the government, which claimed that promises propounded by the social democrats are meaningless unless they rule alongside the social liberals. During parliamentary elections in 2005, the social democrats therefore had to accept further defeat, while Venstre was able to retain its position as the strongest party and continue its minority government. Accordingly, the politically symbolic relationship proved to be a win-win situation for Venstre and the DF at least in the short term. The Prime Minister avoided coming under international pressure for failing to offer an explanation about having a xenophobe, euro-sceptic party in its government, while insisting on an EU constitution (Downs 2012: 142 f.). At the same time, the DF enjoyed the freedom of criticising the government and advancing a draconian policy without having to take responsibility for it. In contrast to the FPÖ, neither did they have to answer for unpopular decisions nor were any disputes sparked off between their pragmatic and radical powers. Therefore, the DF was able to act jointly in situations where they were assigned a key role. During the following years, the decision to tolerate the DF as a "power behind the throne" continued to be the dominant strategy (ibid.: 143). Although strategies of exclusion such as legal sanctions (e.g. accusations of defamation and racist statements) were applied in isolated cases, these did not have any noteworthy effects. In 2007, the government was continued after Rasmussens' failed attempt to strengthen his mandate and free himself from the shackles of DF dependency (ibid.: 144).

Yet, five months prior to the parliamentary elections in 2011 the "blue block" lagged far behind the "red block" in opinion surveys, to which it reacted with the reintroduction of border controls to Germany and Sweden during spring (Klein 2013: 105). The liberal conservative minority government had consented to this controversial measure after the DF had given their support for the new budget (Downs 2012: 137). The electoral campaign once again highlighted that since 2001, the established parties had moved considerably to the right as regards their political rhetoric (Klein 2013: 115). Venstre and the social democrats verbalised right-wing populist arguments once again. Moreover, for the first time since 2001, the election campaign attached great importance to issues pertaining to the economy (Stubager 2012: 861 f.). After the centre-right government had cut a number of welfare measures in the course of the economic crisis, during the election campaign the social democrats and even the Socialist People's Party (SF) tried to act as a united platform for the expansion of the welfare state and a tighter immigration policy. Although the social democrats were unable to improve their percentage of votes, it resulted in a change of government with a minority government comprising social democrats, RV and SF under the Prime Minister Helle Thorning-Schmidt (ibid.: 863). The government subsequently reversed several measures that had been shaped by the DF (Widfeldt 2015: 137).

The Danish parties shifted to the right under the influence of the DF. In other words: the populists determine the agenda, the others follow their lead.

During the election campaign in 2015, immigration became one of the key issues again with the social democrats and Venstre continuing to employ an approximation and adoption strategy and had declared themselves in favour of tightening immigration laws. Although the social democrats were able to regain their position as the strongest party, the previous government was voted out of office. It resulted in a minority government under Lars Løkke Rasmussen (Venstre) that is tolerated by the DF, the conservative People 's Party and the Liberal Alliance (indirect executive collaboration).

The left-wing parties also call for a limitation on immigration.

The DF had largely benefited from the Islamist attacks perpetrated in Copenhagen in February and became the strongest power in the "blue block" for the first time (Wirries 2015: 130). Attempts to form a conservative majority government soon failed due to irreconcilable differences among the four parties and the DF decided

to remain in the opposition for tactical reasons (Matlok 2015: 1). A number of concessions were made based on this, such as cutting financial resources for asylum seekers and the election of the former party leader of the DF, Pia Kjærsgaard, as parliamentary president (Herrmann 2015).

Although the conservative parties reject a number of proposals propounded by the DF such as personnel and technical reinforcement at border controls, it is no longer possible to rule out direct collaboration with them since their indirect support phase, e.g. if the DF would mitigate its EU-critical positions (Matlok 2015: 1 f., Widfeldt 2015: 138). Ultimately, following the 2015 elections a significant change in direction could also be observed for the asylum and immigration policy adopted by the social democrats. The new party leader, Mette Frederiksen, and the party whip, Henrik Saas Larsen, declared that the once liberal course of the party during the 1990s was a mistake and the social democrats would do everything in their power to curtail the immigration of non-Western migrants (Arndt 2016: 782).

Finland

Up until the European elections in 2009, The Finns Party (PS) founded in 1995 as a successor to the Finnish Rural Party – in existence since 1959 – had marginal influence on politics at best and was scarcely taken seriously by the other parties (Raunio 2013: 133, 152). When, during the European elections in 2009, the PS successfully increased its share of the votes to almost 9.8 per cent and became a serious contender in Finnish politics, the other parties pursued a collective strategy of exclusion towards the PS, portraying them as an unaccountable and dangerous political power with too much talk and too little action. The Greens and the Swedish People's Party (SFP) in particular were fiercely opposed to the PS. However, this election result and those that followed made it clear that the *cordon sanitaire* tied by the established parties was not sufficient for curbing the rise of the PS. It was therefore hardly surprising that parties to the left and right of the centre opted for new strategies. They changed their positions as regards EU and immigration policy in particular and adopted the themes and rhetoric of the PS so as to remove issues mobilised by the latter. During the election campaign in 2011, the Greens were the only party to categorically exclude governmental cooperation with the PS (Alaja 2011, Jungar 2015: 189).

The other parties adopted the themes and rhetoric of the PS in order to minimise them – this met with little success, however.

The parliamentary elections in 2011 need to be evaluated against the backdrop of the centre-right government's party finance scandals (Centre Party [KESK], National Coalition Party [KOK], Greens, SFP) at mid-term and the Euro rescue measures (Raunio 2013: 134). The latter resulted in a heated debate about the EU and superseded all relevant campaign issues to date such as election financing, taxation or same-sex marriages (Nurmi and Nurmi 2012: 235). Owing to the Euro stabilisation measures for Greece, Ireland and Portugal, the government was forced to justify their EU policy in public for the first time (Raunio 2013: 154). It defended its decision by emphasising the positive impact of measures on the Finnish economy, whilst all opposition parties were against the pacts (ibid.: 152 f.).

The main beneficiary of the party finance scandals and the EU discussion was undoubtedly The Finns (ibid.: 136). Their percentage of votes rose from 4.1 to 19 per cent. Following this electoral success, the party leader of the KOK, Jyrki Katainen, planned to enter into a coalition with the PS – despite the latter's Euro-sceptic stance – and the social democrats (Arter 2011: 1285). This can only be understood against the background of the traditionally strong consensus orientation in Finnish politics. This means that parties with the largest increase in seats are incorporated into the government in order to reflect the election results (Jungar 2015: 196). Eighty per cent of the PS voters also expected the party to assume governmental responsibility and revive the "prehistoric" party system (ibid). Although members and delegates of the PS supported participation in the government, the party leader Timo Soini rejected it. His official justification was that the PS cannot participate in any government that has committed itself to the rescue packages (Raunio 2013: 150). Soini branded the six-party coalition that was subsequently formed as a "Government of losers" (Arter 2011: 1285 f.).

The approach towards immigrants and asylum seekers became tougher in Finland, too.

In effect, the Finnish tradition of rainbow or anything goes coalitions, as were last formed between 1995 and 2003, was thus maintained. In turn, the KOK tightened its positions on EU policy in response to the social democrats and approached the already EU-sceptic PS in this regard (Koskinen 2013: 92). One year after elections, the established parties (in particular KESK and social democrats), spent a great deal of time looking over their right shoulder in lieu of working on their own programmes (ibid.). This intensified the discourse on immigration. The social democrats and the KOK loudly proclaimed that immigrants ought to better adapt to the Finnish culture, for instance.

All parties pursued relatively cautious campaigns prior to the 2015 elections (Nurmi and Nurmi 2015: 434). There was still no sign of economic growth, unemployment figures rose to above nine per cent, and the EU sanctions against Russia and Russia's counter-sanctions hit the Finnish export sector hard. The ratio of government debt to GDP approached the critical 60 per cent mark, and public health care expenditure increased. Therefore, cuts in the public sector became the focal point of the campaign; all parties agreed that this was inevitable (ibid.: 434 f.). The clear election winner was the Centre Party; however, the PS was also able to consolidate their result. This was surprising in light of the election campaign since it did not include those topics that had explained its success in 2011 (anti-establishment, EU scepticism) (Jungar 2015: 190). By contrast, the KOK lost seats and, as the party that previously appointed the Prime Minister, had to bear most of the responsibility for the economic recession (Nurmi and Nurmi 2015: 435). The election losers were the social democrats who had appointed the Minister of Finance, and were made responsible for the state of public finances.

Gradually The Finns became "acceptable".

The election results made it clear that Juha Sipilä (KESK) would lead the coalition talks (ibid.: 437). He had not committed himself to any partner during the election campaign as well as not having ruled out a coalition with the PS (Ridder-Strolis and Rasche 2015a: 2). Following the elections, Sipilä indicated that his preferred coalition would consist of the four large parties. The social democrats withdrew, however, since they could not tolerate any further cuts in the public sector (Nurmi and Nurmi 2015: 437). Hence, the only remaining option for him was a coalition with the KOK and the PS, who still had the backing of a parliamentary majority. Little by little, the PS equally became "acceptable" as well as being necessary for the formation of a majority. The previously created *cordon sanitaire* was relaxed, and it resulted in a formal collaboration in the form of a coalition.

The second strongest coalition partner in Finland traditionally holds the post of Minister of Finance. Yet, Soini rejected this due to his critical stance towards the Euro rescue measures (Ridder-Strolis and Rasche 2015a: 2). Instead, he became Foreign Minister and deputy prime minister. The "Three S" government (Sipilä, Soini, Stubb) was sworn in relatively quickly, which can be attributed to Sipiä's pragmatic and results-oriented style of negotiations (Ridder-Strolis and Rasche 2015b: 1).

The Finns was not a very convincing coalition partner and subsequently broke up.

Just one year following their accession to power, the PS performed significantly worse in the polls and the other two governing parties also lost support in favour of the social democrats (Yle 2016). Numerous voters were dissatisfied with the policies of the PS since joining the government, and criticised the ongoing economic and refugee crisis in particular. A number of tensions were visible within the coalition, such as in connection with the reform on the health and care sector or the question about how to deal with the rapidly increasing number of refugees since autumn 2015 (Jochem 2016: 114). Whereas the PS advocated a more restrictive refugee policy, KOK and KESK pursued a rather balanced strategy (ibid.: 115). Although the

government tightened the rules concerning family reunification of refugees, these measures were in fact far more moderate than those in Denmark, for instance. The moderating role of the KESK and KOK resulted in the PS becoming increasingly isolated from the public gaze (ibid: 116).

Finally, intra-party conflicts on the part of the PS almost led to a break in the coalition. After Jussi Halla-aho (convicted of sedition) was elected as party leader in June 2017, Prime Minister Sipilä announced the dissolution of the cabinet (Schmiester 2017). The moderate wing of the PS, to which Soini and all other ministers belong, subsequently split from the party and formed the Blue Reform parliamentary group (initially New Alternative), in order to continue governmental cooperation based on the existing government programme. As a result, Sipilä ended the coalition with the PS (which since then has only held 17 of the 38 seats in parliament), and included the Blue Reform in the cabinet, whose composition thus remained unchanged.

France

The extreme right has a long-standing tradition in France. In the year 1972, Jean-Marie Le Pen founded the Front National from various right-wing and nationalist splinter groups. The FN achieved noticeable success during the European elections in 1984, when the party obtained more than eleven per cent of the votes and was able to send ten delegates, including Le Pen, to the European Parliament. Under Jean-Marie Le Pen, the FN was considered nationalistic, authoritarian, racist and anti-Semitic (Bauer 2010a: 66). The party maintained Europe-wide contacts with the right-wing extreme and neo-fascist subcultures. On several occasions, Le Pen himself was convicted of denial or relativisation of the Holocaust. Nevertheless, Le Pen firmly established his party in the French party system. While he failed the first round of presidential elections in 1988 and 1993 in each case, he entered the run-off election in 2002 with almost 17 per cent of the votes during the first round, which he then lost against the acting President Jacques Chirac.

In the aftermath, his daughter then forced the party founder out of office. In the course of her envisaged "de-demonisation", Marine Le Pen was largely successful in liberating herself from the party's right-wing extremist past. She established the FN as the "Voice of the people" against immigration, the influence of Islam and against supposedly "out of touch" elites in Paris and Brussels. She called for preference to be given to ethnic French on the labour market, and when awarding living space and social benefits, the protection of the French economy against foreign competition and optionally the exit of France from the EU or the Euro. The stereotypical enemy of the FN were immigrants, mostly those from North Africa and other Muslim countries on the one hand, and global capitalism, representatives of the other established parties to the left and right of the centre as oblivious elites, the EU and increasingly Germany, on the other. Socio-politically, the FN under Marine Le Pen developed into a rather left-wing oriented, protectionist party, which identified the worries of many French citizens regarding social decline, foreign infiltration and the loss of national and cultural identity, of growing insecurity, terrorism and heteronomy by the EU. Thus, and perhaps not a people's party in the German sense of the word, it became a party for the "ordinary people" in France and the strongest labour party in the country (Bauer 2010a: 67, Balent 2013: 161 ff., Kempin 2017: 6 ff.).

Marine Le Pen established the FN as a "Voice of the people" against immigration, the influence of Islam and against "out of touch" elites in Paris and Brussels.

The true strength behind the FN is difficult to assess because the French electoral system severely distorts the strength of individual parties. Hence, despite a double-digit result in the year 2002 the FN was left empty-handed during the National Assembly elections because no FN candidate won the majority of seats in their electoral constituency. In 2017, the result was somewhat lower than 2012 (cf. Table 1), yet with eight direct mandates, the FN obtained more seats in the National Assembly than ever before. During the presidential elections, the FN increased from 10.4 per cent and fourth place in the year 2007, the last under Jean-Marie Le Pen, to 17.9 per cent and third place with Marine Le Pen as the leading candidate in 2012. Five years later, a result of 21.3 per cent put her in second place for the run-off election during which she then suffered a resounding defeat against the present-day incumbent Emmanuel Macron with 33.9 to 66.1 per cent. European election results, such as

those in 2014 when the FN gained 25 per cent of the votes and became France's strongest party, do not tell us very much. This is because they are often not taken serious enough by the voters (of the other parties) so as to provide reliable information. However, there is no doubt that the FN has established itself as a player in French politics and can be considered as the third strongest power in the country for the time being; it has continually increased especially in local and regional elections (Kempin 2017: 22 f.).

Both political camps were affected by the rise of the Front National but the socialists in particular never found an answer to the FN.

Both political camps were affected by the rise of the Front National but the socialists in particular never found an answer to the FN. Their strategists failed to understand that it was also possible to mobilise former voters by adopting nationalistic, Islamophobic and anti-immigrant positions. The adoption of FN positions was for a long time rejected by the PS as it undermined their core values as a liberal-minded party. When the Prime Minister Manuel Valls intensified the tone and attitude against refugees and refugee camps following a series of disastrous local, regional and European elections (cf. Balent 2015), the reputation of the still-ruling PS led by State President François Hollande was already so tarnished that emulating FN positions no longer helped the socialists.

The conservative party only emulated the FN for a short period of time.

Whilst the FN was at first able to successfully penetrate the territories of the bourgeois conservative camp, the tide turned when Nicolas Sarkozy stood as candidate of this camp during the 2007 presidential elections. Not only did Sarkozy adopt FN positions in the areas of immigration, internal security, combating immigrant, youth and suburban crime or on questions pertaining to the preservation of national identity, he even exceeded them to some extent with respect to content and style. This was met with success at first. During his election to state president in 2007, he was able to win back almost 40 per cent of the voters who had voted for the FN in 2002 (Balent 2013: 178). However, the longer Sarkozy made the French wait before delivering on his electoral promise, the greater the disappointment became and the more voters were lost to the conservative camp.

During the elections in 2017, this camp went by the name of "The Republicans". They were not, however, able to exploit the catastrophic situation in which President Hollande had manoeuvred the party and the country. Their leading candidate, François Fillon, who mainly focused on economic and financial policy issues and only marginally engaged with the positions of the FN at best (DFI 2017), was long-regarded as a promising candidate for the office of state president. Yet, his moral character was seriously called into question by the dubious employment of his wife and two of his children at the expense of the state coffers. During the election in April 2017, Fillon only came third, but called on his voters to support the later victor Emmanuel Macron, and justified this – very defensively – by stating that Le Pen becoming the president was bad for the country.

The established parties to the left and right of the centre no longer had any impact on the outcome of presidential votes in May 2017 and the parliamentary elections that immediately followed. While Fillon still achieved 20 per cent and the Republicans entered the National Assembly with 15.8 per cent and 113 seats during the parliamentary election in June 2017, the socialists sunk into the abyss with 6.4 per cent at the presidential and 7.4 per cent at the parliamentary election.

The French presidential election was a dual between Marine Le Pen and Emmanuel Macron, between old and new, between pessimism and optimism, national isolationism and cosmopolitanism, indecision and hope or between the past and the

future. During the election campaign, Macron declared himself in favour of Europe and an advocate of immigration. His programme was a combination of business-friendly and socio-politically attractive topics, with a humanistic and at the same time rigorous position towards the refugee policy.

Le Pen was not the focus of Macron's election campaign. That was evident from the way in which he presented his own ideas. He did not evade Le Pen, however. During discussions, the major differences in quality were clear to see. Whereas Macron presented his future plans by substantiating arguments with facts, Le Pen consistently revealed contextual weaknesses, became entangled in contradictions and was unable to stand her ground in discussions with her opponent.

Macron and his movement La République en Marche (LREM) that was initiated shortly before the elections, took France's political system by storm and triggered unexpected hope in economic upturn, renewed social systems, social cohesion, compliance with the Paris climate change objectives and counter-terrorism (cf. DLF 2018). His movement, largely consisting of entrants from other disciplines, won the absolute majority of seats in the National Assembly during the parliamentary elections in June 2017. However, in what was a strategically skilful move, Macron appointed Édouard Philippe as Prime Minister and members of the social liberal Democratic Movement (MoDem) to his cabinet.

Even President Macron adopts a rigorous position towards refugees and asylum law.

The "Macronism" has taken over the entire centre of the French party system, extending as far as the once social democratic and conservative classes. Macron not only promised attractive tax cuts for the latter, as President, he also adopts a hard line towards refugees and asylum law and this is welcomed by both camps. Firstly, the losers are the socialists, who have been side lined by Macron due to a number of shortcomings and ambitious socio-political positions. The Republicans also have a hard road ahead. Their market segment is stuck between Macron on the one side and the FN on the other. As regards reinventing their image, their current focus is along the lines of a catholic value- and middle-class oriented provincial party rather than attempting to distinguish themselves as an equal opponent of LREM.

The FN and Marine Le Pen also emerged as losers. She has acquired the image of a loser since the elections in 2017. It is true that the party has regional strongholds in the south of the country and in the former industrial territories in the north east, as well as doing well in second- and third-order elections. Yet, when it comes to essential questions of power, they cannot win partly due to their own shortcomings and partly because the other parties and candidates are allied against them.

Power struggles and in-fighting are simmering within the Front National.

Power struggles and in-fighting are simmering within the Front National. In autumn 2017, the "head" of the FN, Florian Phillippot, left the party due to a dispute. The greatest opponent of the FN is currently the FN themselves, in spite of Le Pen's attempts to realign the party. The planned, (although not uncontested) change of name to "National Collective Movement" (Rassemblement National, RN), indicates that Le Pen wants to shift the party away from the right-wing nationalist edge further into the centre and above all creating the possibility of forming an alliance. The defeats of 2017 and the ongoing conflicts of direction and in-fighting since then do not mean that the party has been defeated over the long-term, however. They have a large organisation, a number of supporters and a wealth of experience in self-promotion. Most importantly, however, the social and cultural tensions that enabled the FN to become so strong continue to exist. These tensions can be traced back to all of the conflict patterns that shaped the party even 130 years ago (Kempin 2017). The President and his government, who in 2017 defeated Le Pen with a combination

of values and taking a stance, perspective and courage to confront, has a lot of work to do if it wants to prevent the FN becoming stronger again. They were still successful in doing so in 2017 – but faced with what was very high level of right-wing and national populism in France.

Netherlands

In the Netherlands, a turning point towards populism was stopped in its tracks.

„Rutte is far from being rid of me!" – these are the words twittered by Geert Wilders from the Partij voor de Vrijheid (Party for Freedom – PVV) at the end of the election night on 15 March 2017. In the run-up to the elections, the election polls had already portended a tight race between Prime Minister Mark Rutte from the Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie (Peoples Party for Freedom and Democracy – VVD) and Geert Wilders. In the end, Geert Wilders won more votes than before but was unable to win the elections. With 21.3 per cent and 33 seats, the VVD was far ahead of the PVV with 13 per cent and 20 seats. In the Netherlands, a turning point towards populism was stopped in its tracks.

Geert Wilders has reached his zenith.

No later than when Pim Fortuyn founded his own party (Lijst Pim Fortuyn) in 2002, the Netherlands had found their populist contender in the form of a charismatic and theatrical personality. Nationalism and Islamophobia found their way into the public debate. The political culture has developed a harsher tone since then. On 6 May 2002, a left-wing activist murdered Pim Fortuyn. This was the beginning of the end of the Lijst Pim Fortuyn, which without its leading figure was unable to establish its position and was dissolved in 2007. Many of Pim Fortuyn's supporters found a new political home with Geert Wilders – Wilders had already founded a new party in 2006 after having turned his back on the VVD in 2004 (Voermann and Lucardie 2013). Just as was the case with Lijst Pim Fortuyn, the Partij voor de Vrijheid, which with Geert Wilders has only one member, focuses on one person. His election programme for the last election only consisted of one A4 page. Dutch experts believe that Geert Wilders has reached his zenith; since 2016, he has had a contender in his own camp who is vying for his electorate: Thierry Baudet established the Forum voor Democratie (FvD). The FvD achieved 1.8 per cent and thus two seats during the last elections. Thierry Baudet attempts to break away from Wilders by presenting an intellectual image. The FvD's electoral programme includes the abolition of the Euro, a stringent immigration policy as well as new forms of democracy (Nijhuis 2017).

In the Netherlands, there is no evidence of either a uniform or joint response strategy from the four larger parties to the left or right of the centre. Instead, each party has elaborated different response strategies, which is also due to their experience with populists. These vary between "distance" and "approximation". Over time, there have been some changes in strategy, which are in part connected with the party's individual personalities. Hence, selecting a strategy is also connected to the person himself or herself and their success depends on the extent to which this strategy can be authentically represented both within and outside the party. One thing uniting all parties is that it is currently out of the question to form a coalition with Geert Wilders. This, however, has less to do with political considerations than with teachings from the past and the inherent instability of the one-man parties. On the whole, in the Netherlands there is a general willingness to cooperate with parties irrespective of their political affiliation.

The Christian Democrats (Christen-Democratisch Appèl, CDA), obtained 12.4 per cent of the votes and thus 19 seats during the last election. The strategy pursued by the

The Christian Democrats broke apart due to an internal dispute of direction when dealing with Geert Wilders.

Christian Democrats needs to be viewed particularly in light of the negative experiences of the 2010s. Following the elections in 2010, the party broke apart due to an internal dispute of direction when dealing with Geert Wilders. The main question was whether the CDA should reject or agree upon cooperation with Wilders, in which Wilders would tolerate a minority government with CDA participation. A party conference finally decided in favour of the latter – however, the government that was formed broke apart two years later. During the next parliamentary elections, the Christian Democrats suffered a significant loss of votes and migrated over to the opposition. A renewed cooperation with Wilders is currently out of the question due to bad experiences with Wilders himself, but also the intra-party discussion, which went hand in hand with many member and voter losses.

Under the party leader Sybrand van Haersma Buma, the CDA pursues the strategy of giving those voters who are angry and dissatisfied – and could potentially migrate to Wilders – the impression that they are being heard and that the CDA provides the right solutions to problems unlike Geert Wilders. Against this background, the positions held by van Haersma Buma provided for a shift towards a more critical stance on immigration and Europe. On the one hand, the hope is to win back voters who had migrated over to Wilders, this approximation and position that is more critical also harbours the danger, however, of losing the empathetic and solidary Christian democrats as voters, on the other. These "classical" Christian democrats are left behind in the electoral spectrum and are highly sceptical about van Haersma Buma's strategy of approximation. The CDA's reaction is therefore a balancing act between approximation in order to "win back" supposedly lost voters and at the same time reflection on classical Christian democracy and a refusal to cooperate with Wilders. The transformation of reactions from tolerance to involvement of the populists, right through to an approximation of positions whilst outright refusing cooperation, was less gradual for the CDA than with the VVD. The CDA found it more difficult to approximate its positions with Wilders in an authentic way than was the case for the VVD, which had always had a strong conservative wing within its ranks.

The Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie (VVD) won the last elections with 21.3 per cent of the votes and 33 seats. They succeeded in speaking to different parts of the population as well as serving the various, equally strong wings within their own party. The party leader, who ranks among the market-liberal wing and current Prime Minister, Mark Rutte, managed to marginally defeat Rita Verdonk in a crucial vote in 2006. She was affiliated with the conservative wing of the party and was subsequently excluded from the VVD parliamentary group. She then went on to found the right-wing populist party Trots op Nederland (Proud of the Netherlands).

The VVD aligned its positions to those held by Wilders with their anti-immigration and anti-European views. However, given that the party always had a strong conservative wing that espoused more critical views especially regarding immigration, this approximation was less surprising and thus easier to advocate than was the case for the Christian and social democrats. External factors in particular such as terrorist attacks, go hand in hand with a stronger articulation of such positions. Mark Rutte, more market-liberal leaning in practice, is highly critical of further European integration and takes a restrictive stance on the subject of immigration. However, during the election campaign he resisted the temptation of adopting Euro-sceptic tones in debates held with EU opponent Geert Wilders. In refugee policy, Rutte also expressed respect for the policies of the German Government and proved to be an ally of Germany (Focus online 2017). Hence, he succeeded in rhetorically serving one part of his party and electorate and using practical politics to win over the other.

In the run-up to the parliamentary elections, Mark Rutte's position on the question as to whether Turkish ministers may appear in the Netherlands to advocate a constitutional amendment in Turkey, met with praise. The Dutch-Turkish conflict, which escalated into a type of state crisis with respect to the issue raised, turned out to be a kind of blessing for Rutte from an electoral tactical point of view. His unequivocal stance, which the population had not witnessed for a long time and the policy for which he took responsibility, positively influenced the election result. Wilders did not succeed in winning the election. A number of voters, who would have previously voted for Wilders, cast their vote for Rutte and the VVD instead.

The Partij van de Arbeid (PvdA) obtained merely 5.7 per cent of votes and lost 29 of their previous 38 seats during the last elections. The reasons cited for this sharp decline include co-responsibility for the austerity policy and the market liberalism, which voters punished (cf. Nijhuis 2017: 358). The social democrats' response to Geert Wilders was similar to that by the PVV and CDA, and they attempted to take citizens' concerns seriously by adopting more critical positions on issues relating to Islam and migration. Whereas the VVD never suffered from a loss of credibility in this regard, the social democrats failed to verbally align their positions with those espoused by Wilders. These attempted rapprochements were a source of irritation largely because social democratic members have a generally social self-perception and many voters are from migrant backgrounds themselves. The idea of taking voters' concerns seriously and hence adopting more critical positions on issues relating to Islam and migration, was impossible to reconcile with both the members and electorate. The social democratic "idealists" did not feel as though they were represented by this approximation. In order to prevent losing them, statements were qualified again but this relativisation resulted in losing those voters who felt "threatened". One of the reasons why they failed to provide "good" politics was their inability to communicate the austerity policy (which they supported) in the spirit of social justice. There remained a small homogeneous group of classical social democrats. What had been a success for the VVD, namely closing the ranks of different wings and voters both inside and outside the party, is where the social democrats failed.

The social democratic "idealists" did not feel as though they were represented by this approximation.

The left-wing liberal democrats 66 (D66) achieved 12.2 per cent of the votes and thus 19 seats during the last elections – seven seats more than the 2012 election. Unlike the other parties, the left-wing liberals pursued a strategy of distance. The party D66 espoused positions that were diametrically opposed to Wilders: for Europe, for globalisation, for immigration. It sees itself as an opponent of Wilders. Following the parliamentary sessions, the leader of the left-wing liberals, Alexander Pechtold, immediately countered the views propounded by Geert Wilders. An approximation of positions held by Wilders did not take place. This is also related to the party itself; the electorate and membership of the D66 is very homogeneous and highly educated. There is no in-fighting within the party. Those who support the D66 benefit from Europe and globalisation. The D66 is now the only party in the Netherlands with a distinct pro-European course. Unlike the other parties, views held by Geert Wilders were neither adopted nor was there an approximation of Wilder's positions.

Unlike the other parties, the left-wing liberals invariably pursued a distancing strategy.

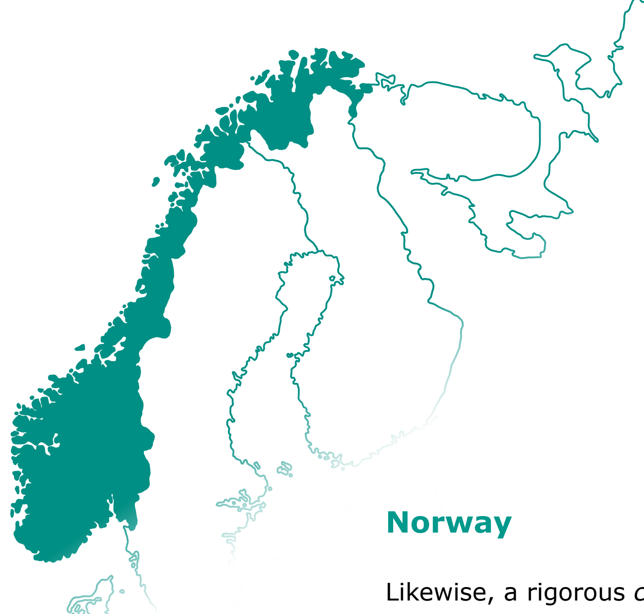
The Dutch parties have varied response strategies towards the populists. Whereas in the past populists were incorporated by allowing them to participate in government, this is not a viable option at present. The idea of involving populists in the government again or tolerating them is subject to criticism. The party-political and personal rejections of Geert Wilders and his PVV cannot be overcome. Whilst the D66 pursues the strategy of clearly dissociating themselves and keeping a distance, the other parties have sought approximation – their attempts varied as regards

consistency and credibility, however. The PvdA has sought an approximation but they repeatedly qualified this and attempted to win their voters over with good politics. None of it was successful. The Christian democrats also sought an approximation of positions, in which (similar to the PvdA), they take citizen's concerns seriously and try to resolve their problems. The VVD is adopting a similar response strategy to the CDA. However, they always had a strong conservative wing such that their positions were more credibly perceived than was the case with the CDA. Social conservative rhetoric but also free-market liberal and essentially pro-European politics made it possible for the VVD to address both the party and a broad electorate. Then there is the political personality themselves. Prime Minister Mark Rutte is politically acknowledged across party lines. His stance during critical situations, which became evident during the Turkey question, appealed to voters.

Stance and credibility are worthwhile.

In the Netherlands, a combination of problem awareness, good politics and stance seemed to play a role in making the populists less successful during the last elections than was assumed from the outset. Nevertheless, no reaction can be regarded as generally promising for all parties in the Netherlands. The success is dependent upon both the party as well as the personalities themselves who exhibit this reaction and how credibly they can represent this to their members and voters. Notwithstanding the fact that Wilders was stymied during the last elections and may have reached his zenith, this does not mean there is an end in sight. The next populist, Thierry Baudet from the Forum for Democracy (FvD), is already waiting in the wings in the Netherlands.

In the Netherlands, the next populist is already waiting in the wings.



Norway

Likewise, a rigorous *cordon sanitaire* was never established against the Norwegian Progress Party (FrP) which, in 1973, also developed in the wake of a tax revolt (Jupskås 2013: 212, Bjørklund 2011: 301). Instead, it was accepted in the 1980s and early 2000s as a supporter of several national budgets. In contrast to Denmark, for a long time the political dispute in Norway took place without a focus on immigration and integration issues, however (Bale et al. 2010: 417). This is partly attributable to the fact that the issue emerged prior to the breakthrough of the FrP, and that the labour party quickly and successfully mitigated it. Even the conservative Høyre and the Christian People's Party (KrF) attempted to marginalise the Progress Party and the centre-right governments of the early 1980s continued to distance themselves from the FrP. It was the social democratic government, which in 1975, and hence long before the FrP gained influence, introduced tougher measures in the immigration policy right up to calling for "zero immigration". Although this policy was controversial, debates on the subject were mild when compared to those in Denmark. With its relatively tough immigration policy during the 1970s and 1980s, the labour party wanted to react to the increasing importance of issues related to immigration and integration (ibid.: 418). Subsequently, the other parties adopted a tougher stance against immigration policy too (ibid.: 417, Harmel and Svåsand 1997: 324).

This trend continued to grow during the 1990s. While the party programmes of the labour party combined what was still a restrictive immigration policy with a soft integration approach in the 1980s, greater emphasis was placed on the rights and duties of immigrants during the 1990s (Bale et al. 2010: 418). This resulted in the FrP losing their exclusive claim to the issue and hence shifting their focus towards criticising the financial policy of Høyre and KrF. Once the FrP had been excluded from government participation for some time, this ban was gradually relaxed and the FrP were recognised as a negotiating partner (Bjørklund 2011: 314 f.). This can be traced back to pressure exerted mostly by the conservative delegates from the approx. 430 municipal councils (ibid.: 315, Jupskås 2013: 213). The FrP had already been represented in the majority of municipal councils since the late 1980s, where they had found many local politicians to be reliable coalition partners. Whereas the KrF and the social-liberal Venstre had consistently opposed forming a government with the FrP, Høyre was the first to open the door to such a coalition. The parliamentary elections in 2001 were an important step towards relaxing the *cordon sanitaire*, followed by a centre-right government (KrF, Høyre, Venstre) under Kjell-Magne Bondevik, which was tolerated by the FrP for the first time (Bjørklund 2011: 315). Although Høyre, as the strongest conservative force, would have accepted the post of head of government, the KrF and Venstre were opposed to this (Jochem 2012: 80). Since initial exploratory talks had failed, Høyre sought contact with the FrP. However, given that the FrP did not want to support a conservative minority government, Høyre had to accept the demands of the centre parties and Bondevik was allowed to form the government. Although this led to a tightening of immigration policy to some extent, the FrP only gained minor influence in its supporting role when compared with the DF (Bale 2003: 83; Widfeldt 2015: 91).

In Norway, the parties were already in favour of a restrictive immigration policy at an early stage.

In 2005, when the FrP decided against continuing to support any centre-right government in which it is not involved, the moderate left-wing parties exploited the situation and presented themselves as a suitable alternative government (Jupskås 2013: 225, Allern 2010: 905). The KrF and Venstre had dismissed a direct collaboration with the FrP from the outset, yet this did not win them any votes (Widfeldt 2015: 91). That is why a red-green alliance comprising the labour party, the socialist left-wing party (SV), and Centre Party (Sp) under Jens Stoltenberg took over the government. Since the local elections in 2007, the labour party has also been collaborating with the FrP at the local level (Jupskås 2013: 213). Hence, this also resulted in a legislative collaboration. Despite a number of crises during the term of office, in 2009 the parties advocated for the continuation of their coalition (Allern 2010: 904 f.). Although it seemed hopeless at first, the alliance found a narrow majority again (Jochem 2012: 109). Above all, this can be ascribed to a successful mobilisation for preventing a right-wing populist led centre-right government (ibid.).

The conservative faction was highly fragmented once again, as evidenced by the different promises made during the election campaign. Indeed, Høyre was able to imagine a coalition with the FrP for the first time provided that both parties' diverging positions on financial policy were overcome (Sitter 2006: 578). However, this option was excluded because the KrF and Venstre emphasised that the FrP is not an acceptable coalition partner for them (Allern 2010: 906). Furthermore, the FrP once against promised not to support any government (not even their budget) from which they themselves are excluded and hence ruled out a minority government comprising Høyre, KrF and Venstre.

After taking office, the red-green coalition tightened immigration laws.

The complex relationships between the FrP and the other centre-right parties are also made clear by the fact that the latter (in contrast to their Danish neighbour) always invested a lot of energy into highlighting how they differ from the FrP (Jupskås 2013: 213). Nevertheless, between 1985 and 2009, as was the case with the labour party, they gradually adapted their immigration policy positions to those held by the FrP and thus followed an approximation and adoption strategy with or from issues propounded by the FrP (ibid.: 226). Hence, during the election campaign in 2009 the Party Secretary of the labour party, Martin Kolberg, explained that his party were committed to the fight against "radical Islam" (ibid.). Following their accession to power, the red-green coalition 2010 tightened the immigration laws (Beckmann-Dierkes and Fuhrmann 2011: 46).

The FrP is considered to be a normal and legitimate power in the Norwegian party system.

During the electoral campaign in 2013, the labour party stressed above all the many election promises honoured during their term of office (Maass 2013: 3 f.). In spite of its achievements, the balanced state budget and the low levels of unemployment, they were ousted by a minority government comprising Høyre and FrP under Erna Solberg; the KrF and Venstre tolerated this. In comparison with the previous elections, the FrP had to accept heavy losses of votes, which is mainly due to the fact that since the Breivik assassination in 2011, many conservative voters preferred to vote for the original than the rather conservative-moderate tendency of the FrP with Høyre (Etzold 2013). Although the KrF and Venstre had refused to enter into a direct coalition with the FrP, they modified their behaviour towards the FrP by adopting indirect cooperation strategies, for which they had been punished during the last elections (Beckmann- Dierkes et al. 2013: 2, Widfeldt 2015: 93). As part of the cooperation agreement, one of the things agreed by the four parties was to enforce a stricter asylum policy – however, in a softer form for children at the insistence of Venstre and KrF (Beckmann-Dierkes 2013: 1). The FrP failed in their demand to spend more than the previous maximum limit of four per cent from the reserves of the Norwegian sovereign wealth fund (ibid.: 1 f.). Such a detailed

agreement between government and opposition parties had never existed in Norway before (ibid.: 2). When Høyre formed this coalition, it finally marked the end of the pre-existing reservations towards a formal collaboration with the FrP and contributed towards viewing the Progress Party as a legitimate and established power in the Norwegian party system (Jakobsen 2015: 160 f.).

During the election in 2017, Høyre and FrP hardly lost any votes and were able to continue their coalition government. On the one hand, that may be seen as confirmation of Erna Solberg's decision to form a coalition government with the FrP for the first time, and as a sign that voters were satisfied with the government work carried out by the FrP (Aardal and Bergh 2018: 1, 7 f.). In any case, none of the actors involved were demystified or penalised due to the governmental collaboration between Høyre and FrP. Currently, one can only speculate whether the new government will survive the entire legislative period. This is because they are now dependent on support by the KrF and Venstre in order to reach majorities, whereas previously support from merely one of the two parties sufficed.

Austria

Austria has been living with right-wing populism for more than 30 years after Jörg Haider radicalised the Freedom Party (FPÖ). He did so by meting out harsh criticism towards the people's parties SPÖ and ÖVP – that permeate almost all areas of Austrian life – including their representatives on the one hand, and by using anti-immigrant and in part racist propaganda as well as EC/EU scepticism on the other. In the meantime, he established it as the second strongest party in Austria and junior party of a coalition with the ÖVP.

The FPÖ was founded in 1965 from the "Federation of Independents", a union of former NSDAP members and SS officers (Bauer 2010b: 53). In addition to die-hard Nazis, supporters also came from the German national camp and among the student fraternities (Pelinka 2005: 96 f.). These traditional lines were ostensibly broken at the start of the 1970s. Besides the German national wing, a liberal economic camp had also emerged within the party. Both struggled for internal party supremacy. The liberal economic wing prevailed for the time being. If nothing else, this served as legitimation of the fact that the SPÖ minority government led by Federal Chancellor Bruno Kreisky, was initially supported by the FPÖ (1970). Its successor, Fred Sinowatz, even entered into a coalition with the FPÖ between 1983 and 1986 and involved them in the federal government. The head of the FPÖ, Norbert Steger, became the Austrian Vice-Chancellor.

In the year 1986, the then 36-year old member of the National Parliament of Austria, Jörg Haider, became the leader of the party. He identified himself as the lawyer of the people ("I say what you think"), and turned the FPÖ into the perfect right-wing populist party – that has been able to continually increase its nationwide results – through criticism of major parties, anti-immigrant, partly racist tones, German national provocations and scepticism towards the EC/EU. The FPÖ reached its zenith during the Austrian parliamentary elections in 1999, when – with almost 27 per cent of the votes – it became the second strongest party in the country on a par with the ÖVP, and Wolfgang Schüssel made it the junior partner of a "black-blue" coalition under his leadership.

Government participation seriously damaged the FPÖ.

However, participation in the government seriously damaged the FPÖ. Straitjacketed by coalition discipline and without its front man (one of the ÖVP's conditions when forming the coalition was that Haider would not assume a cabinet post), it was impossible for the FPÖ to implement anything that it had previously promised. Due to the ongoing in-fighting within the coalition, it broke up again as early as 2002. During the subsequent Austrian parliamentary elections, the FPÖ plunged to 10 per cent, whilst the ÖVP achieved 42.3 per cent; the coalition continued with the now significantly weakened FPÖ, however.

Today, the FPÖ is just as strong as before.

The decline of the FPÖ, which also went on to lose one state election after the other, founded the myth that it is possible to "demystify" (right-wing) populists through government participation. The recovery of the FPÖ over the past 15 years testifies why this cannot be regarded as a panacea (Heinisch 2013). Today, the party is just

as strong as before and – for parties to the left and right of the centre – an equal contender that influences their strategic behaviour.

The way in which both major parties interacted with the resurgent FPÖ, was for a long time characterised by uncertainty and helplessness. The FPÖ successfully presented itself as the only party representing the interests of the righteous "ordinary people" against "those at the top", and above all the "eternal" grand coalition. It staged itself as the party that alone can preserve the Austrian identity ("The Social Home Party") and at times used disparaging diction to appeal against immigration mainly from Islamic countries ("Love of one's homeland instead of Moroccan thieves", "Dahoam instead of Islam"). Furthermore, it heightened fears of an imminent Islamisation of Austria and of increasing levels of crime committed by immigrants as well as social abuse. It strongly criticised the European Union as wasteful, was up in arms about the financial aid for Greece and the failure to secure external borders and hence became one of the toughest EU opponents (Grabow and Oppelland 2015). This profile enabled the FPÖ to recruit a strong voter base and hence infiltrate what were once social democratic strongholds; such that they are now considered to be "Austria's strongest labour party" (Bauer 2010a: 58).

Irrespective of the fact that the SPÖ was the first Austrian party to enter into cooperation with the FPÖ, the social democrats long adopted a policy of isolation towards the FPÖ. They were unable to do much in the way of opposing the rhetoric of the FPÖ, their rise to power and their continued infiltration into their former pool of voters. Whereas at the end of the first collaboration in the 1980s up to the start of the 2000s there was still a strict ban on cooperation with the FPÖ („Vranitzky-Doktrin"), the relationship with the FPÖ relaxed under Alfred Gusenbauer. Gusenbauer deemed the strong dissociation with the FPÖ to be erroneous and no longer strictly precluded entering into coalitions with them even at the federal level (Kurier 2017). This repeatedly led to red-blue (but also black-blue) coalitions at the state level, too.

During the election campaign, the SPÖ adopted a sharper tone towards immigrants and refugees.

No later than after the change of party leadership from Werner Faymann, who was opposed to the FPÖ, to Christian Kern during 2016, were there increased calls for changing the existing decision that envisaged a coalition ban with the FPÖ. Although that seriously damaged the party from within, they would have been prepared to enter into a coalition at the end if they had performed better during the Austrian parliamentary elections in October 2017. In any case, during the election campaign, the party had already significantly sharpened their tone towards immigrants and refugees and spoken out in favour of less or a more strictly regulated immigration (Kahlweit 2017).

The relationship between the ÖVP and FPÖ was also characterised by a certain helplessness vis-a-vis the FPÖ for a long time. Following Haider's withdrawal from the party and the founding of his Alliance for the Future of Austria (BZÖ) in 2005, the right-wing populist camp itself seemed to break down into small parts and retreat to Haider's stronghold in Carinthia. When the FPÖ bounced back with extraordinary speed and strength under Heinz-Christian Strache (2006: 11%; 2008: 17.5%; 2013: 20.5%), while the ÖVP itself continued to fall (2006: 34.3%; 2008: 26%; 2013: 24%), the strategic and substantive weaknesses of the People's Party became blatantly obvious. Since 2007, as a junior partner in four federal governments of the ever-stronger SPÖ, they were scarcely able to oppose things that caused resentment among the population but which they had to answer for as the junior partner. Like the CDU in Germany, the ÖVP was also a European party with a firm commitment to all measures aimed at stabilising the common currency in the face of the Greek sovereign debt crisis.

The ÖVP tried everything to stymie the rise of the FPÖ, but they never found an effective method for doing so.

The ÖVP tried everything at both the regional and national level to stymie the rise of the FPÖ at their expense: it dissociated itself and stigmatised the FPÖ. It repeatedly emphasised its own local foothold ("We are Austria's Mayor's Party") as well as the integrity of its economic and financial policies. With a stronger focus on internal security and the fight against crime ("We will watch out for you"), they attempted to decrease the FPÖ's market share in the policy field of internal security. It made its voice heard about the fact that all those wanting to live in Austria would have to abide by the rules. However, it all had the same factual, rational and less than inspiring tone of a party that is simply managing its status quo. Anyone in Austria who had a problem with immigration, foreign infiltration, perceived insecurity, financial aid for Greece or other Southern European countries in precarious situations or with the EU as a whole, always found the original in the FPÖ and did not have to switch to the ÖVP. The latter, under its leaders Wilhelm Molterer (2007 to 2008), Josef Pröll (2008 to 2011), Michael Spindelegger (2011 to 2014) and Reinhold Mitterlehner (2014 to 2017), failed to find an effective method to counter the right-wing populists of the FPÖ. Whereas the People's Party suffered a decline from one election to the next, the results of the FPÖ continually improved; hence, it seemed, up to the year 2017, as though Heinz-Christian Strache would simply have to remain in good health in order to become the next Federal Chancellor of Austria.

The fact that this failed, is primarily linked to the change of leadership in the ÖVP to Sebastian Kurz, who made his willingness to take up office dependent on the party committees' agreement to delegate all internal party decision-making powers to him. With military precision and in lightning speed, Kurz converted the highly traditional ÖVP into a movement that is completely tailored towards the 31-year old (Grabow 2017). Kurz has not only renamed the party (the New People's Party) and given it a new, more modern logo. He has not only taken control of all the important decisions and reduced the influence of the national associations and alliances in the party (Montag 2017: 5). Sebastian Kurz and his team, with their combination of grass roots approach, competence in international politics, a massive online campaign as well as the mobilisation of countless voluntary supports, succeeded in depriving the FPÖ of a victory that seemed so certain.

The majority of Austrians now consider the FPÖ to be a completely normal and established party.

As regards content, Kurz had long advocated demands that also belonged to the repertoire of the FPÖ. Even during his time as foreign minister, he was seen as a harsh critic of the German asylum and refugee policy and advocated better protection of EU external borders against immigration (Kahlweit 2017). His European policies, too, bore testimony to Kurz's restrictive stance towards further financial liability for other member states and his opposition to expanding or transferring competences in favour of EU institutions. Together with his party's financial and economic policy integrity and experience, Kurz used this so-called thematic demobilisation strategy to present issues in order to either win back the vacillating voters or mobilise them to abstain from voting. Since both the SPÖ and the People's Party sent a clear message that they would not enter into another – among large parts of the population increasingly unpopular – grand coalition as a junior partner, foundations were laid for the formation of a black-blue coalition following the elections. Unlike in the year 2000, this gave rise to very little public resistance. The majority of Austrians consider the FPÖ to be a completely normal and established party (Bauer 2010b).

Sebastian Kurz by no means fought the populism of the FPÖ with the same kind of populism, especially since it is also not possible to say that he "wrestled down" the FPÖ. It simply did not achieve what seemed to be almost certain for a long time, namely the Federal Chancellery. However, three reasons enabled Kurz to win and

keep the FPÖ at a distance. Albeit, they are now involved in the Austrian federal government as a junior partner after a similarly strong result to that achieved in 1999, and can exert even more influence than in the opposition. Firstly, Kurz addressed issues that can also be found in the FPÖ manifesto, in particular with respect to immigration and asylum policy and as regards the EU. Secondly, however, Kurz represented his views on these issues with more sincerity than the FPÖ and above all: he did not merely make his views known during the electoral campaign. He was regarded as a mouthpiece for tighter immigration and asylum rules long before then and – at least as regards additional financial obligations – was considered to be EU-sceptic; he was and still is by no means anti-EU, though. In this respect, it also affirms that Kurz adopted a stance even if it is thematically different from that of the French president. In any case, Kurz remained on this course, which made him credible – similar to his Dutch colleague Mark Rutte. Thirdly, and this is a parallel with Emmanuel Macron, Kurz went into fight the election as a beacon of hope, rather than as one of the sources of old problems and a custodian of the status quo. Hence, he was never branded as an FPÖ imitator when representing more restrictive positions concerning immigration policy. The strategy of the People's Party, which was tailored to Kurz's needs, was a complete success. During the Austrian parliamentary elections in October 2017, they gained additional votes from all camps without going in one particular direction.

Almost one year prior to the Austrian parliamentary elections, taking a stance is also what enabled the candidate of the Greens, Alexander Van der Bellen, to successfully defeat the candidate of the FPÖ in the rerun of the second ballot for the office of Austrian Federal President. As was later the case with Macron, Van der Bellen stood for cosmopolitanism in every sense and declared himself fully committed to the EU. As is the case in France, a second ballot for the highest state office in Austria also involves a dual choice between two people or two political directions. This type of vote can strongly polarise, and a victor invariably wins because their electors want to prevent the other candidate. All the same, Van der Bellen remained true to himself and clearly defeated the FPÖ candidate in the end. Taking a stance, adhering to and promoting your own convictions and values, an emphasis on future perspectives and an optimistic view of the world can definitely represent suitable strategies against the pessimism and doom scenarios propounded by the right-wing and national populists. That is still no guarantee, especially since the bearers of hope do not simply fall from the sky. Yet, in this combination and complemented by politics that solves problems for the good of the people and the country, it seems to be a suitable option for opposing and repressing right-wing and national populists to some extent.

Stance and policy that promise to solve problems seem to be an option for countering populism.

Sweden

In contrast to the majority of other Western European countries, it has taken Swedish parties to the left and right of the centre a long time to establish an effective off-limits area against the Sweden Democrats (SD) (the latter merged from several movements of the neo-Nazi milieu in 1988), by refusing to cooperate with them on any level (Rydgren 2006: 179, 183). Although the other parties had long been committed themselves to not converging with the demands of the SD or emulating their rhetoric, the election campaign in 2002 witnessed an unexpected and heated debate about the failure to integrate immigrants into Swedish society (Bale 2003: 80). The liberals, who indeed trebled their votes to the detriment of the Moderate Party, initiated the debate; they could not prevent a continuation of the social democratic government, however.

Sweden's social democrats tightened the law on asylum as early as the 1990s.

Yet, it was not the first time that calls were made for a more restrictive immigration and integration policy in Sweden. Following the parliamentary elections in 1994, the social democratic government adopted a stricter immigration policy by tightening the law on asylum and abolishing the category of the de facto refugee, for example (Rydgren 2006: 179). However, this policy was heavily criticised by the other parties (in particular left-wing party, greens, liberals) who accused the labour party of complying with the demands of the right-wing populist party Ny Demokrati (ND), which was successful over the short term. In its defence, the labour party declared that this enabled them to diminish the ND's chances of success: even though they subsequently legitimised their manifesto at the same time. For a long time, however, the labour party took a stance as well as a *cordon sanitaire* strategy in response to the Sweden Democrats that was founded thereafter. During a television debate in 2007, for instance, their party leader Mona Sahlin argued that the development of a strong Swedish welfare system had always been dependent on the influx of other people to Sweden (Hellström et al. 2012: 196).

Since immigration was not a key issue even during the electoral campaign in 2006 (Green-Pederson and Krogstrup 2008: 626), the established parties also attempted to avoid the issue during the election campaign in 2010 amid fears that such a debate might be beneficial for the SD (Engström 2010a: 9). Instead, the focus was placed on economic issues and questions pertaining to social development as well as environmental, energy and education policy, too (ibid.: 4-8). In the run-up to elections, both leading candidates, Fredrik Reinfeldt (Moderate Party) and Mona Sahlin, ruled out any form of collaboration with the SD in case it should enter parliament and none of the alliances were to win a majority (ibid.: 12; Deloy 2010: 7). Even the media supported the isolation strategy against the SD: the state television channel TV4 refused to air the controversial SD election broadcast "Pensions without immigration" (Klein 2013: 123). On election day, Sweden's most widely circulated newspaper, *Aftonbladet*, called upon the electorate not to vote for the SD and printed their front page with the slogan "We like different" (Widfeldt 2015: 189). Albeit, neither the isolation and avoidance strategy adopted by the established parties nor the party political nor the media *cordon sanitaire*, were able to prevent the SD from entering into parliament (Engström 2010b: 3).

Although no alliance reached a majority once again, both the labour party and the Moderate Party still refused to collaborate with the SD in any way. Reinfeldt reiterated how he had already explained that his party would not cooperate with the SD or make themselves dependent on them (Downs 2012: 49 f.).

Sahlin made similar promises and advocated an end to the petty squabbles between the established parties in order to reduce the influence of the SD; this was the only way to stymie the xenophobic and anti-establishment party. Despite one or two tentative attempts at rapprochement regarding immigration and integration issues, the SD was not allowed to become the "king-maker" during the negotiations and investiture of the new centre-right government under Frederik Reinfeldt (ibid.: 50). Although a majority did not support them, the other parties did not vote against them so as to exclude the SD from the formation of government (Widfeld 2015: 191).

Following the SD's entry into parliament, a number of delegates advocated changing the parliamentary rules on the composition of committees, and a separate waiting line for the SD at the cafeteria in parliament (Downs 2012: 50). Whilst these proposals were considered discriminatory towards a duly elected party and were overruled, the established parties subsequently avoided the SD. For instance, its party leader was not present on the guest list for the annual noble banquet in Stockholm, hence breaking with tradition to invite representatives of all parliamentary parties.

The established parties refused to collaborate with the SD even two years after the elections (Klein 2013: 123). Reports about the SD usually had a negative connotation (Hellström et al. 2012: 204). Nevertheless, the Sweden Democrats exerted an indirect political influence to some extent, for instance by overturning all proposals upon which the government was unable to agree with the labour party or the greens; for example in the reduction of income tax (Widfeldt 2015: 191).

At the local level, however, there were some deviations from the official *cordon sanitaire* strategy (Downs 2012: 50). Since the SD had performed well in a number of municipalities and counties (e.g. in Bjuvs with 19.6 per cent), the established parties had to partially involve them in substantive issues owing to the absence of a majority. This then led to a legislative cooperation (ibid., Pehle 2010: 295). Calls for accepting the SD as a "normal" political opponent also became louder at the national level (Klein 2013: 124). This is because the SD were acknowledged as not only a disagreeable, but also as a legitimate political actor. This primarily involved countering the SD's highly successful self-portrayal as "outcast", "martyr" and "true democrats".

During the election campaign in 2014, the high levels of (youth) unemployment were a key issue, but the tax cuts and privatisation in the education and health sector as initiated by the centre-right government were also the subject of criticism (Röver 2014: 2). Socio-economic issues once again overshadowed the area of immigration. The conservatives still refused – as was the case with all other established parties – to collaborate with the SD (Jochem 2015: 495). During the final phase of the electoral campaign, Prime Minister Frederik Reinfeldt asked the Swedes to "open their hearts" to immigrants and refugees. He therefore publicly proclaimed himself in favour of a liberal refugee policy in Sweden (ibid., Röver 2014: 2). Notwithstanding, the SD who were able to more than double their percentage of votes, once again occupied a key position between both camps; none of which found a majority (Jungar 2015: 197). A red-green minority government was formed but was brought to the brink of collapse by the budget approval. It was only possible to defer new elections through the "December Agreement" (ibid.).

In this agreement, the government and the conservative-liberal alliance parties consented to grant the largest block executive power and its budget. This new parliamentary procedure enables the established parties to maintain the *cordon sanitaire* vis-a-vis the SD and its commitment to policy-making within the block formation (ibid.: 198). The agreement should be valid until 2022, in other words for two additional legislative periods, such that it is also beneficial for the conservative parties during future parliamentary elections (Röver 2015: 2). It was not only criticised by the SD, but also by the leading conservative politicians who described it as a "democratic and parliamentary defeat" (ibid.: 3). The promise to rubber-stamp the prime minister and the budget of the strongest camp, implied a shift of power from the parliament to the government and would weaken the opposition, according to their argumentation.

Amendments to the asylum law were tightened once again in Sweden, too.

Ultimately, a number of delegates from the conservative parties as well as their voters have become more open as regards a potential coalition with the SD since the parliamentary elections in 2014 (Jungar 2015: 189). Furthermore, in late 2015 a comprehensive package of measures was announced in order to reduce the asylum policy standards previously in force in Sweden. This included the awarding of only temporary residence permits and restricted family reunification (Parusel 2015: 1). The intention behind it is to make Sweden less attractive as a country of refuge and to decrease the influx of new asylum seekers to the extent possible. At the same time, the measures that came into force in 2016 can be interpreted as the established parties' vague substantive approximation to the SD so as to eliminate their potential for protest. In the past, however, a similar situation also manifested itself among the Moderate Party without giving rise to a strong inclusion strategy (Saveljeff 2011: 39, 41 f.).

Is There a Panacea Against Right-Wing Populism?

There are causes of populism that cannot simply be removed at the touch of a button.

The short answer is no. There is no "panacea" to solve right-wing and national populism in such a way that it quickly disappears again. Whoever believes it possible to easily get rid of populists with superficial promises offered by policy change ("We have understood") or a stronger accentuation of values ("We need to be more conservative"), or by adopting populist demands as if by flicking a switch, lull themselves into a false sense of security. There are causes of populism that cannot simply be removed at the touch of a button.

A precondition for obstructing populism and populists is to interpret populism as a problem in the first place. This condition has been fulfilled by the parties to the left and right of the centre in the countries examined here. They all suffer or suffered from right-wing and national populism, whether that be because populists deprived them of voters or because they believed or believe populist propaganda to be damaging to the country. The response strategies towards right-wing and national populist contenders vary from country to country and from party to party. Even the parties themselves have repeatedly changed their strategy in cases where previous stances failed to yield the desired results (Grabow and Hartleb 2013a: 400 ff., Heinze 2017: 7 ff.).

All of the response strategies discussed at the start, continue to be applied by parties to the left and right of the centre (cf. Table 3). Whereas, however, the main response from established parties during the apogee of right-wing and national populist parties consisted of ignorance, rejection and exclusion, the approximation or adoption of positions propounded by the right-wing and national populists is the primary response today. In effect, that subsequently legitimised the positions held by the right-wing and national populists and gave them incentives to tighten them one by one (Heinze 2017: 17 f.). In the end, the "race" for the most restrictive asylum, immigration, deportation and border protection policy only served to benefit the populists as opposed to the parties attempting to emulate them in these policy areas.

If a successful response strategy is understood to be a strategy contributing towards dispelling right-wing and/or national populist parties with a concomitant strengthening of the centre, then in the best case and only at first glance Britain could be considered as an example. The United Kingdom Independence Party is no longer represented in the parliament; however, the Labour Party came out stronger from the last elections to the Lower House of Parliament. Albeit, it is scarcely possible to consult Britain as a positive example when dealing with populism. UKIP did not disappear from the British House of Commons because Labour and the Conservatives dealt with them so skilfully. Instead, it was because UKIP fulfilled their mission with the Brexit referendum and then discontinued its own activities.
Large swathes of the Conservatives had previously associated themselves with UKIP's demands for the United Kingdom's exit from the EU. That and the fact that the success of UKIP, which culminated in Brexit, did indeed make the party superfluous, such an approximation of populist demands by the Tories does not appear – in light of the several uncertainties facing the United Kingdom since the Brexit referendum – to be an exemplary strategy.

Table 3
Response strategies in practice*

Country	Centre-left	Centre-right	RNP** inhibited?
A	SPÖ: including isolate, later form a coalition, then isolate again, since 2017, approximation and willingness to enter into a coalition; Alexander Van der Bellen: stance	Approximation, embrace/participation in the government but also: stance	yes but at a high level
CH	isolate and involve***	isolate and involve***	no
D	isolate, stigmatise and partly sanction	ignore and hope, good politics, adoption of positions to some extent	no
DK	Approximation, adoption of positions	Approximation, adoption of positions, tolerate	no
F	LREM: taking a stance and attacking during the election campaign, since then harder line with regard to refugee and asylum policy	UMP: adoption of positions, LR: partial approximation to FN, partial disregard	yes
FI	Approximation, adoption of positions	Adoption of positions, form a coaliton	no
IT	No opinion	Adoption of positions, alliance formation	no
GB	reluctant isolation	Approximation/adoption of positions	yes, but at the price of high political instability
NL	PvdA: reluctant approximation D66: isolate and taking a stance	VVD: partial approximation, good politics and taking a stance CDA: approximation	yes
NO	initially isolate, then approximation/adoption of positions	Approximation, adoption of positions, participation in the government	no
S	isolate, stigmatise, finally partial adoption	isolate and taking a stance, finally approximation	no

* *Positions during the last election campaign.*

** *RNP: right-wing and national populist parties. The point of reference are the last parliamentary and presidential elections in the relevant country and the strategies of the other parties. RNP are deemed to be inhibited either if they remain excluded from the highest offices of state and government, their election results fell below the forecasts or they missed their (re)entry into parliament.*

*** *In Switzerland, larger parties, depending on the percentage of their votes, participate in the federal government with one or two representatives, the so-called Swiss Federal Council, according to traditionally applied formulae ("magic formulae"). As a collegial body, this consists of seven equal members, the so-called Federal Councillors. Here no distinction is made between junior and senior partners. Owing to the fact that election results are continually on the increase, in 2003 the SVP won a second seat in the Swiss Federal Council to the detriment of the Christian democrats.*

Source: own compilation.

Even the decline of the Vlaams Belang or the Independent Greeks (ANEL, cf. Table 1), can scarcely be explained based on the skills of the traditional parties to the left and right of the centre. Whereas one of the two main demands from the Vlaams Belang, namely that of their own Flemish state outside the EU, was adopted by one of the other parties that abstained from the racist terminology and choleric anti-EU attacks that characterise the VB (Pauwels 2013), the poor performance of the Independent Greeks was more to do with the impatience of the Greek voters and their own deficiencies.

Only in Austria, France and the Netherlands was it possible to secure victories over the right-wing and national populists without greatly damaging their own countries and neighbours. In Austria, on the one hand success consisted of the other parties and voters joining forces to prevent the FPÖ candidate from becoming Federal President, and of ousting the FPÖ from the long believed first place in the Austrian parliamentary elections, on the other. The fact that the FPÖ even advanced into such dimensions does, however, testify the enormous strength of the Austrian right-wing and national populists – who were indeed inhibited by means of stance or stance and image – but who today as junior partner in a coalition with the people's party, play a major role in shaping politics in Austria. Unlike after the first black-blue coalition between 2000 and 2002, it is no longer possible to view this constellation as a path towards demystifying the FPÖ through government participation. In addition, the FPÖ is too professionally managed and is considered a "normal" party in a "normal" coalition wanted by the majority.

Even Emmanuel Macron countered Marine Le Pen by having a clear stance. His stance was or is liberal, Europe-friendly and cosmopolitan. What is more, he attacked Le Pen and hence exposed her substantive weaknesses. Of course, the duel of a run-off election embodies something different to that of a parliamentary election. It means the vote between two options or as in this case, between two worldviews and political styles. Mark Rutte and his future coalition partner, the Democraten 66, proved the fact that taking a clear stance may also be a good strategy against populism during the Dutch parliamentary election in 2017. Rutte resisted the temptation of pandering to those who would have potentially voted for Wilders by adopting increasingly Euro-sceptic positions. Furthermore, the majority of the Dutch were reasonably content with the politics of the government led by Mark Rutte (EU Commission 2016: T 41), such that, in the end, there were no grounds to vote him and his VVD out of office.

Those who defeated populists have not evaded them. They have not shied away from open confrontation with the populists, and hence they pro-actively represented their positions and did not change them even when put under pressure.

In all three countries where it was possible to inhibit – strong – right-wing populists, the victors took a stance. In doing so, it appears to be of minor importance that the positions differ from one another to some extent. It is beyond doubt that Mark Rutte and more so Sebastian Kurz take a more restrictive position on immigration issues and deeper European integration than Alexander Van der Bellen and Emmanuel Macron, yet all four confronted the right-wing populists head on. They have not shied away from open confrontation with the populists, and hence they pro-actively represented their positions and did not change them even when put under pressure.

However, Sweden's example shows that taking a stance alone is not a sufficient condition against the rise of right-wing populists. During 2014, the current Prime Minister Frederik Reinfeldt, led a value-based election against the Sweden Democrats, which expressly emphasised the values of a liberal refugee policy. However, given that social and economic policy issues dominated the election campaign and the government were less credible in this area, Reinfeldt and his party were voted

out of office whereas the Sweden Democrats achieved their best result to date; partly because they addressed the concerns of disappointed voters (Heinze 2017: 13).

Having a clear stance towards your own values and positions and an open debate only help to counter populists when combined with good political results or the hope for better politics. Emmanuel Macron succeeded in this just like Alexander Van der Bellen, Mark Rutte and Sebastian Kurz.

A high level of prosperity does not immunise against populism.

On the other hand, good politics and a high level of general prosperity do not help to counter populism per se any more than the other strategies. It is not surprising that parties to the left and right of the centre chasing after populist demands for a tougher asylum or deportation policy, offers little help when winning back voters that they lost to right-wing national populists as it results in a lack of credibility as well as the well-known phenomena of original and copy. Parties who do this run the risk of losing more voters in the centre than those that they gain on the margins. Yet, at first glance it is astonishing that voters also abandon parties to the left and right of the centre and vote populists even when the country and the greater part of the population is doing well as regards collective prosperity and under a government led by both parties; it does, however, confirm three things. Firstly, voters rarely acknowledge achieved successes. Instead, they merely expect them. Secondly, voters tend to look more towards the future than the past. In principle, the future is fraught with uncertainty, but currently in a new dimension. Parts of the electorate not only worry about the future from a social or economic perspective, but also from a cultural standpoint, too. So the questions not only focus on whether material and social status can be maintained but also on whether they will continue to feel at ease and safe in their own country. This is precisely the breaking point that populists exploit. Thirdly, it reveals that it is scarcely possible to continue addressing some of the voters with factually correct and rational arguments such as “We are doing well”, “We have achieved a lot”, “We have made the country safer”, “Less asylum seekers are entering the country”. Populist agitation has manifested latent concerns as well as convincing part of the electorate that they would be better off without asylum seekers, that they would live at their and the other local inhabitants’ expense, pose a threat to domestic security and order and not least their own way of life.

It is difficult to counter populism using rational arguments.

It is difficult to change this worldview with rational argumentation alone. It quickly becomes associated with behaviour that is lecturing, technocratic and unreasonable. That does not imply that populism must only be countered with populism. Yet, openly fighting for your positions, addressing emotions as well as showing them yourself – in connection with good politics, taking a stance, optimism and unity within the party – can certainly be a way of inhibiting populists. Evading them with the argument of not wanting to strengthen them by engaging in a debate, promises little chance of success. Hopes for self-destruction, which is inherent in populists more than others, exclusion, stigmatisation, sanctioning or the adoption of populist demands that run counter to their own past positions, do not prove to be any more successful.

Conclusion

Today, populism and populist parties are integral parts of politics all over the world. Right-wing and national populist parties and politicians in particular are deemed to be a danger to democracy (Müller 2016), yet outside Germany they are also considered to be firmly established or even "normal" members of the respective party systems (Bauer 2010b, Balent 2013: 179). Populism does not develop in a vacuum. It requires listeners, transmitters and channels of communications, in other words: consumers, suppliers and opportunities (Mudde 2007: 201 ff.). As a rule, suppliers create their own demand by assimilating latent and completely justified worries within the population, exaggerating, dramatising, polarising and personalising them as well as making problems from it, which they need to secure their own existence without offering appropriate solutions. Populists can also exploit the media, which acts as a mouthpiece for their point of view. Unlike the majority of neighbouring countries, in Germany the classic print and broadcasting media acted as a bulwark against right-wing populism for a long time (Grabow and Hartleb 2013b: 35). This offensive ban disappeared some time ago. Today, print and broadcasting media report about the AfD without emotion and are thus more advanced than many a party in the Bundestag.

Social media are echo chambers for populists.

From the outset, it was almost impossible to fight against the mobilising power and reach of the so-called social media, however. Populists all over the world use social media expertly and without any editorial or ethical brake. Here is where moods are generated and intensified, prejudices served, political opponents vilified, conspiracy theories circulated, threat scenarios and doomsday fantasies drawn up. Little can be done against this with rational arguments alone, especially since a relatively closed populist world has established itself in which people only perceive what they are meant to perceive. If this world was not continually punctured by racist agitation, they could be regarded as an inevitable part of an era increasingly shaped by individualism and technical advancement. This is not the case, though. In such a world, exaggerations, false statements and emotions continually silence the facts as well as having an impact on politics.

Under these circumstances, it is clear that a simple or fast-acting means against populism and populist propaganda is merely an illusion. Therefore, there are repeated calls for more enlightenment and more civic education. That is certainly not erroneous, especially as it is penned by a political foundation. Yet, such an approach can only immunise against populist propaganda over the very long-term. At the same time, it requires a great deal of trust in and satisfaction with the work of the other parties and the institutions belonging to the constitutional state, as well as the irreproachable behaviour of all those representing the populists' much-hated "establishment". Civic education is therefore an accompanying measure but by no means the solution in itself.

Throughout the course of this study, we enquired about the responses of parties to the left and right of the centre in Europe as regards right-wing and national populists. For a long time, interaction with populists was characterised by stigmatisation, disregard, isolation and exclusion, but also by insecurity, hesitation, approximation and adoption of populist positions all the way to the formation of coalitions with them. None of these strategies has undermined populists over the long-term. Stigmatisation and exclusion enabled populists to portray their target groups as ostracised and outsiders, which reinforced the sentiment that the "cartel of the established" would block the legitimate rise of the lawyer representing ordinary peoples' interests. Adaptation or a virtual tacit adoption of issues propounded by populists was and continues to be an impractical solution. Such a response retroactively proves populists to be right, but it risks calling the credibility of parties to the left

and right of the centre into question and is often only a strategic manoeuvre and hence far too transparent. And if nothing else, a party to the left or right of the centre that has dedicated itself to governing its country, sells itself short by pandering to populist demands.

Even by integrating them in coalitions in the hope that populists' failure to deal with realpolitik constraints would be clear for all to see is by no means a secure way of driving them back. Although there are examples of such declines following government participation like 2002 in Austria or 2017 in Finland, the guarantee of embracing populists "to death" is also not possible this way apart from the fact that it would be or de facto is a rather bitter cure for a country or the European Union. However, government participation did not inflict any damage upon the Norwegian Progress Party – the FPÖ has long since recovered following an intermittent crisis.

In light of the experiences made in late 2016 in Austria, during Spring 2017 in the Netherlands and then in France when democratic forces to the left and right of the centre dealt with right-wing and national populist parties, it becomes clear how the right-wing and national populists may be defeated. The combination of democratic forces taking a stance on their own values and positions (even those which are inconvenient and complicated), in a world characterised by global interdependence, crises and confusion as well as politics or the promise of such, is what convinces the majority of citizens that the fate of the country is better placed in the hands of other parties than with the populists. Taking a stance is also synonymous with cosmopolitanism and optimism, since that runs contrary to the gloomy future and threat scenarios conjured up by right-wing and national populists.

Stance alone is no guarantee for stymieing populists. But whenever populists were defeated, the victors had taken a stance.

Taking a stance alone is no guarantee for inhibiting populists over the long-term. Yet, whenever populists are stymied or defeated, the victors took a stance, faced populists, promoted their views and laid bare populist weaknesses.[1] We should also avoid bullying up populists by granting them more attention than is necessary; yet, a well-dosed and targeted debate has proven its worth. It is understood that it is invariably a good idea for parties to the left and right of the centre to be in touch with the citizens, their expectations and concerns. This approach doubtless requires a considerable investment in time and labour, whereby most of the so-called "established parties" reach the limits of their capacity. However, calls for it are cheap since most parties to the left and right of the centre indeed continue to be present and accessible at the local level and broken channels of communication between citizens and "the" politics are not simply due to the latter alone. In many cases, committed local politicians are also held accountable for decisions that have been taken at completely different levels, but which cause discomfort at the grass roots level. In principle, however, the democratic centre-parties' act of "caring" for the population's concerns always appears to be advisable and should never be left to populist or extremist parties.

The "caring" role should never be left to populists and let alone extremist parties.

Being in touch with the people may also help to slow the proliferation of right-wing and national populism. Of the parties who finally succeeded in gaining the upper hand against populists, only the Austrian People's Party is considered to be well rooted at the local level and in touch with the people. The VVD led by Mark Rutte is more of a liberal framework party and Emmanuel Macron's movement is still too young to be regarded as having a local presence. Instead, the movement relies on the hope of the French that emanates from the President and his movement. What else is striking is that none of the candidates who defeated populists, promised – in the respective campaigns – to increase the social expenditure specifically tailored towards the alleged concerns of the native "ordinary people", or to launch

such programmes. Irrespective of any definition problems regarding who should even be deemed as "native" in today's socially and culturally heterogeneous society, neither Emmanuel Macron nor Sebastian Kurz nor Mark Rutte made attempts during the campaign or thereafter, to demonstrate a closeness to the citizens or a caring persona by expanding socio-political services. The Dutch predecessor government under Mark Rutte was instead characterised by a strict budgetary discipline at the expense of welfare state benefits, which at least did not result in undermining Rutte (n-tv 2017). Although Emmanuel Macron visited problematic residential areas, he did not agree to an increase in expenditure for them (FAZ 2017) and increases in expenditure on specific socio-political spending played no part in the election campaign led by Sebastian Kurz (Handelsblatt 2017). This also reflects approaches that can be used to defeat populists in the end.

1| *An impression of how populists can be countered with content and taking a stance, was for example conveyed by the CDU representative Philipp Amthor in a debate on the right to demonstrate in the German Federal Parliament on 20 February 2018 (cf. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KR1qmWyGA2Y, last visited on 20/03/2018).*

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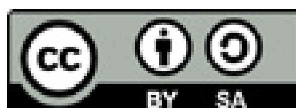

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