

## United in Diversity: A Comparative Analysis of the Voting Behaviours of European Far-Right Political Parties in the European Parliament between 2009-2014

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### Abstract

*While the rise of European far-right raises many questions, this article aims to contribute to the debate by looking at their voting behaviour in the European Parliament between 2009 and 2014. Although some of the most prominent European far-right parties try to emphasize their differences, this article shows how united they actually are on salient issues. This can be seen from their voting cohesion on economic and monetary affairs and immigration, but also their party programs, election manifestos, parliamentary speeches, statements and media coverage. The article concludes that far-right parties have similar voting preferences on the most salient issues, while existing deviations are mostly caused by country-specific reasons.*

### Keywords

European Far-Right Parties; European Parliament; Party Cohesion; Party Politics; Voting Behaviour

## Introduction

Following a serious error, Reuters suggested that I envisaged alliances with Jobbik and Golden Dawn. I have declared exactly the opposite [...], Asked 'with whom will you not ally yourselves?', I replied: Jobbik, Ataka and Golden Dawn among others (Marine Le Pen, the Leader of Front National) (The Guardian 2014).

Whatever Marine Le Pen is trying to do with Le Front National, anti-Semitism, is still deeply embedded in that party, and for that principle political reason, we are not going to work with them now, or at any point in the future (Nigel Farage, the Former Leader of UKIP) (UKIP East 2014).

These two statements are made by the leaders of the most prominent far-right parties of Europe as a response to the questions of forming a far-right political group within the European Parliament (EP) after May 2014 European Elections. What is striking about these statements is the exclusion of certain far-right parties. Although the leader of *Front National* (National Front-FN) Marine Le Pen does not clearly state it, the underlying factor for her denial for a possible alliance with Hungarian *Jobbik Magyarországért Mozgalom* (Jobbik, the Movement for a Better Hungary-Jobbik), Bulgarian *Ataka* (Attack-ATA) and Greek *Laikós Síndesmos - Chrysi Avgi* (Golden Dawn) is their association with Neo-Nazism and Anti-Semitism; which is precisely the same reason why the former leader of United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) Nigel Farage rules out a possible alliance with FN at the first place. While xenophobia and/or nativism are considered as the common denominator of all of the European far-right parties by the academics and commentators alike; it seems like the 'red lines' exist even for them in their relationships with each other. Those red lines prevent UKIP to involve in the same political group in the European Parliament with FN, *Jobbik*, *Ataka* or Golden Dawn despite many benefits of forming a group.

The far-right parties have never been thought to constitute a single model, however the recent example of the demonstration of the red lines between far-right parties revitalizes the questions of their differences one more time since their conceptions about each other are strong enough to prevent them making strategic moves that could clearly be in their benefit. In order to reach the differences of political parties, comparisons are traditionally made on the basis of ideology, organization, and policies. One right place to make such a comparison is the European Parliament by looking at their trans-European organization instead of intra-party organization; and the reflection of their ideologies to policy preferences through voting behaviour. Far-right parties have been contesting for European elections for decades and gradually increased their representation in the EP. The increasing powers of both the EU and the EP make this representation very valuable in order to have a word in the working and the future of Europe. The fundamentally Eurosceptic nature of far-right parties only makes the issue more interesting

since they contest for and work in an institution that is one the main symbols of everything they are opposed for in the European integration process.

Therefore, the article aims to reach an understanding for the differences of far-right parties by analyzing their trans-European organization, ideology and policies during the term of EP between 2009 and 2014. By selecting key votes from the most salient areas for far-right; the voting behaviours of the far-right parties are compared on the basis of their political groups in order to reveal whether their conceived differences about each other are reflected upon their voting preferences about the most salient issues in. I argue that their conceived differences about each other do not reflect on the voting preferences on salient issues, and the deviations are caused by the country-specific reasons.

Within the scope of this article, I firstly provide the methodology of the research; followed by a background on the far-right political parties in Europe and far-right groups within the EP. At the final part, I analyze the voting behaviour of the far-right parties and discuss the results.

## Methodology

The aim of this research is to compare the far-right parties within the EP in accordance with their party groupings, ideologies, and policies. The argument is that the cohesion of the two fictional groups that could be formed between far-right parties;

[1. far-right members of Europe of Freedom and Democracy (EFD) and Non-Inscript (Independents-NI)

2. far-right members of EFD, NI, and European Conservatists and Reformists (ECR)]

would be higher than the EFD, which consists of both far-right and non far-right members, for the selected votes. I employ mathematical calculations and textual analysis to analyse the data.

There is not a consensus on literature for the criteria or methods to employ to identify the far-right parties. Ignazi (2006) focuses on spatial location of parties and their anti-system characteristics. Betz & Immerfal (1998), on the other hand, emphasizes on the radicalism and populism. Eatwell (2003) identifies nationalism as the central character of far-right parties, while Mudde (2007) argues it is nativism, populism and authoritarianism. As for the methods, Carter (2005), Mudde (2007), Harrison & Bruter (2011) use comparative manifesto and program studies; Kitschelt & McGann (1995) and Norris (2005) prefer the method of expert surveys. In order to identify the far-right parties for this research, I compare these studies and analyze a broad list of political parties. Among them, I select the ones that could acquire seats in the EP as a result of the European Elections of 2009.

Table 1 – 2009 European Election Performances of Far-Right Parties

Country	Original Name	EPG	Vote Share	Total Seats	Seats
Austria	Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs	NI	12.7	17	2
Belgium	Vlaams Belang	EFD/NI	9.9	22	2
Bulgaria	Ataka	NI	12	17	2
Denmark	Dansk Folkeparti	EFD	15.3	13	2
Finland	Perussuomalaiset	EFD	9.8	13	1
France	Front National	NI	6.3	72	3
Greece	Laikós Orthódoxos Synagermós	EFD	7.1	22	2
Hungary	Jobbik Magyarországért Mozgalom	NI	14.8	22	3
Italy	Lega Nord	EFD	10.2	72	9
Latvia	Tēvzemei un Brīvībai/LNNK	ECR	7.5	8	1
Netherlands	Partij voor de Vrijheid	NI	17	25	4
Romania	Partidul România Mare	NI	8.7	33	3
Slovakia	Slovenská Národná Strana	EFD	5.6	13	1
United Kingdom	United Kingdom Independence Party	EFD	16.5	72	13
	British National Party	NI	6.2	72	2

Sources: (ParlGov 2015; European Parliament 2014; European Parliament 2015).

As a next step, I identify the MEPs (Members of European Parliament) of far-right parties by using the EP database with the exact dates of their political party and political group affiliations between 2009-14 since switches between parties and groups are a common phenomenon, and their party and group memberships during the votes have crucial importance for this research.

In order to assess their voting behaviour, I select the most important issues for far-right parties by analysing their party programs and election manifestos. I observe that the recurring themes are economics, immigration, law and order, environmentalism, gender rights while economics and immigration are seen as the most important issues for the far-right parties during the 2009-14 parliamentary term. I single out six key votes for economics and immigration based on the criteria of salience and controversialness out of 6921 roll-call votes (Kreilinger 2014, p. 20).

Table 2 – List of Key Votes

Vote Number	Date	Name
1	27 October 2011	Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on minimum standards for the qualification and status of third country nationals or stateless persons as beneficiaries of international protection and the content of the protection granted (recast)
2	15 February 2012	Motions for resolutions - Feasibility of introducing stability bonds
3	12 March 2013	Economic and budgetary surveillance of Member States with serious difficulties with respect to their financial stability in the euro area
4	12 March 2013	Monitoring and assessing draft budgetary plans and ensuring the correction of excessive deficit of the Member States in the euro area
5	11 June 2013	Social housing in the European Union
6	09 March 2011	EU strategy on Roma inclusion

I retrieve the voting results for the key votes from Votewatch database. I calculate the Agreement Index for three situations; 1) EFD group as a whole; 2) only far-right members of EFD and Independent far-right parties; and 3) all far-right parties, according to Hix-Noury-Roland formula:

$$Ai = (\max(Y, N, A) - (0.5((Y + N + A) - \max(Y, N, A)))) / (Y + N + A),$$

where Y=number of votes 'FOR', N=number of votes 'NO', and A=number of 'ABSTENTIONS'. This calculation shows the actual cohesion of EFD and what could their cohesion be if the far-right parties could form a group together for each of the votes. In order to complement the results of the calculations, I conduct a textual analysis based on party programs, election manifestos, parliamentary speeches, and media coverage.

## A Background for the Far-Right Parties

The existence of the far-right political parties in the European political scene is not a new phenomenon, however their increasing support is. While a couple of far-right political parties were established during 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, their electoral success remained limited until 1990s. Since 1990s, the number and visibility of the far-right political parties in Europe have been increasing with diverse electoral outcomes.

The emergence and the success of the far-right parties are tried to be understood within the terms of supply-side and demand-side theories. Demand-side theories focus on the reasons for the emergence of a demand from the society for far-right parties. The traditional approach is 'the single-issue thesis' which connects the rise of far-right with the increasing immigration (Inglehart 1990), however contemporary far-right parties have broad party programs which exceeds only immigration issue (Eatwell 2003; Kitschelt & McGann 1995; Mudde 2007). The second one is the 'anti-establishment' nature of the far-right parties, which emphasizes on the 'protest' or 'resentment' votes due to the disappointment derived from conventional political structures (Betz 1994; Eatwell 2003; Ignazi 2006). The disappointment is not only related with the conventional politics but also related with the 'new politics' which threatens the traditional values of family and society such as same-sex marriage; or threatens the material benefits and employment prospects such as environmentalism (Norris 2005).

Although far-right parties have broad political programs to attract more than resentment votes, they surely benefit from the resentment and disappointment of the electors. Among the supply-side theories, on the other hand, focus is on what is supplied to the society from the far-right parties; as Betz (1994), Betz & Immerfall (1998) suggest. By exploiting the failure of conventional politics, far-right parties demand to replace representative democracy by direct democracy in order to reflect the free will of the people and demand referendums often (Betz &

Immerfall 1998; Carter 2005; Hainsworth 2008). They are also successful to exploit specific issues such as affirmative action, immigration, multiculturalism (Betz 1994; Betz & Immerfall 1998, p. 5). Hainsworth (2000, p. 9) defines those issues as nationalism, xenophobia, racism, anti-democracy, and support for a strong state, welfare chauvinism and a strong emphasis upon law and order. Kitschelt & McGann (1995) proposes a winning-formula for far-right which is consisted of the approximation of centre left and right parties; the policy of free market economy; authoritarian and ethno-centric discourse. Betz & Immerfall (1998, p. 5) also underlines the support of the far-right parties for the free-market economics unlike the classical fascism or the post-war rightist movements. Ellinas (2010) argues the role of the 'media' is crucial in promoting or legitimizing far-right parties. Hainsworth emphasizes on the charismatic leader who is on 'the same wavelength as the people', thus underlining the populist nature of the far-right parties (2008, p. 19). Apart from the demand and supply side factors, Norris (2005, p. 18) focuses on the institutional settings of the countries as the main determinant of the electoral success by constraining the ground for supply and demand side factors and regulating the nomination, campaigning, and election processes.

While all these explanations have their merits, it is impossible to condense the emergence and rise of all European far-right parties to one single formula. Based on these explanations, different classifications are also suggested for far-right parties. Ignazi (2006) suggests a classification between old and new far-right parties based on their fascist past. Carter (2005) identifies five groups within the far-right; neo-Nazi parties, neo-fascist parties, authoritarian xenophobic parties, neo-liberal xenophobic parties, neo-liberal populist parties on the basis of their attitudes on immigration, racism and pluralist democracy. In their recent study, Harrison & Bruter (2011) proposes a model based on repressive-reactionary and xenophobia-populism dimensions, which is more nuanced rather than one-dimensional models since no party entirely fits one model.

It is also possible to categorize far-right parties in accordance with their electoral results. In Austria, Denmark, Netherlands, and Latvia; the far-right parties secure substantial amount of votes in local, general and European elections; seats in the relevant parliaments; even positions in the government. In Austria, *Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs* (Freedom Party of Austria-FPÖ) enjoyed over 20 per cent of the votes throughout the 1990s under the leadership of Jörg Haider, however lost popularity after taking part in the government, which led to Haider to leave the party and set up a new rival party, *Bündnis Zukunft Österreich* (Alliance for the Future of Austria-BZÖ). FPÖ started to gain back its lost popularity gradually under the new leadership of Heinz-Christian Strache, and in 2013 national elections took 20.5 per cent of the votes with 40 seats in the parliament. In Denmark, *Dansk Folkeparti* (Danish People's Party-DF), became the third party in the country and manages the take 12-13 per cent of the votes since 2001 elections. In Netherlands, *Partij voor de*

*Vrijheid* (Party for Freedom-PVV) managed to get 15 seats in the parliament with 10.1 per cent of the votes in 2012 elections. In Latvia, *Tēvzemei un Brīvībai/LNNK* (Fatherland and Freedom/LNNK-TB/LNNK) has secured representation in Latvian parliament since its establishment and took places in the governments. In 2011, the party merged with the more nationalist *Visu Latvijai!* (All For Latvia!-VL) and created the *Nacionālā Apvienība* (National Alliance-NA) which won ten seats in the national parliament, and one in the EP.

In Italy, Belgium, Slovakia, Bulgaria, and Romania; far-right parties have lost the electoral support they once enjoyed. In Belgium, *Vlaams Belang* (Flemish Interest-VBe), the successor of *Vlaams Blok* (Flemish Block-VB), was founded when the *Vlaams Blok* was condemned for the violation of the law against racism by the Belgian Court. VB achieved to get into the local and federal parliaments since its establishment. In Italy, *Lega Nord* (Northern League-LN) still manages to get seats in the parliament, although it lost significant support that it enjoyed during 1990s. In Slovakia, *Slovenská Národná Strana* (Slovak National Party-SNS) also secures substantial amount of votes in national elections and took part in the governments. However, SNS lost half of its seats in 2010 national elections. In Bulgaria, *Ataka* had managed to obtain an average of eight percent of votes and 20 seats in the parliament in general elections since its establishment in 2005. However, it lost half of its votes and seats at the general election of 2014. In Romania, the electoral support for *Partidul România Mare* (Greater Romania Party-PRM) was boomed in the general elections of 2000 by taking 19.48 percent of the votes and 126 seats. However, it could not maintain this success and lost its support gradually. PRM could not make it to national parliament in the last general elections.

In Finland, Greece, Hungary, and Sweden; far-right political parties have significantly increased their votes and seats in the parliament recently. In Finland, *Perussuomalaiset* (True Finns-PS) took 19.05 per cent of the votes in 2011 elections with 39 seats in the parliament by tripling its support. In Greece, Golden Dawn increased its votes from 0.29 per cent in 2009 elections to 6.92 per cent in 2012 elections and secured 18 seats in the parliament by wiping out *Laikós Orthódoxos Synagermós* (Popular Orthodox Rally-LAOS) from both national and European scene. In Hungary, *Jobbik* got 20.3 per cent of the votes and 23 seats in the national parliament in 2014 elections.

On the other hand, in Germany, France, and the UK, although there has been a long history of far-right and far-right political parties, these parties find it hard to increase their votes in general elections or manage to secure seats in the national or federal parliaments. In Germany, *Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands* (National Democratic Party of Germany-NPD), although founded in 1964, have never been represented in the federal parliament, only acquired some success at the local level. In France, *Front National* (National Front-FN) became the third political



force in France however never carried its relative success at the local and European level to the national level. The most important moment in the party history was the success of Jean Marie Le Pen in 2002 Presidential elections by making it to the second round. During the leadership of his daughter Marine Le Pen, FN tries to polish its image by leaving the Anti-Semitist past behind. In the UK, British National Party (BNP) and UKIP had only limited local victories and few seats in the EP until recently. UKIP gradually replaced BNP in national and European elections.

### **European Parliament and Far-Right Parties**

Throughout the years, the EP has managed to increase its limited powers notably to legislative, budgetary, and supervisory powers. Especially with the introduction of the Lisbon Treaty, the decision-making powers of the EP increased significantly from less effective decision-making procedures of consultation and consent to co-decision (ordinary legislation) procedure which gives equal rights to the EP with the Council of Ministers.

The increasing powers of the EP made European elections even more important. When the EP first established, MEPs had dual mandate from their national parliaments. Since 1979, direct elections have been held to elect the members of the EP. European elections are one of its kind as being the first and only international elections conducted simultaneously in all member states. The EP elections are being held in every five years, and so far, eight elections have been held. The number of the MEPs was 410 from 10 member states in June 1979, and the current number of the MEPs is 751 from 28 member states.

European elections are, usually, accepted as the ‘second-order elections’, that they come after the main national elections as local elections (Reif & Schmitt, 1980). MEPs are dependent on the performances of their national parties rather than their political groups in the EP; and the main area of contestation is the performance of governments rather than the performance of European political groups. Due to this nature of the European elections, during the election campaigns ‘national’ rather than ‘European’ issues are debated. However, recent studies suggest that because of the economic crisis, the attention to European matters have been increased and the thesis of ‘second-order elections’ do not grasp the whole picture anymore (Nissen, 2014, p. 13). Thus, the main differences between European and national elections can be summarized as ‘lower turnout than national elections; better performance of small parties; possible electoral losses of incumbent national government parties; better results for parties with strong European dimension either positive or negative’ (Nissen 2014, p. 13).

Within the EP, political parties form European Political Groups to organize better to defend their ideological positions by an efficient division of labour. Forming groups in the EP has several benefits for the political parties such as more funding, more talking times, more committee



memberships with key committee positions, and better chances to exert influence on policies. Because of these advantages, far-right parties have been involved in the efforts for forming groups within the EP. However, these efforts failed many times.

In 2009, after the failed attempts of forming technical group of FN; the rules were changed for forming groups. Before 2009, 20 MEPs from five member states were sufficient to form a group but in 2009 it was changed to 25 MEPs from seven member states, which made it hard for FN-led alliance to form a group. Since Marine Le Pen replaced his father Jan-Marie Le Pen as the leader of FN; she tries to polish the image of FN by detaching the party from its Anti-Semitist past (BBC 2014). As a first step, FN left the 'Alliance of European Nationalist' in 2011, a network organization formed between Jobbik, FN, Tricolour Frame, SND, Belgium's *Front National* (National Front) and BNP. Instead, FN joined the 'European Alliance for Freedom', which consists of the members of FPÖ, VB, LN, and PVV. On the other hand, UKIP, LAOS, and LN formed a softer far-right group of EFD with the inclusion of non far-right Eurosceptic members in 2009.

However, the establishment of the party groups do not necessarily mean cohesion in the policy preferences. In the next part, the cohesion based on the voting behaviour of the far-right parties for the selected key votes for 2009-2014 term is discussed in detail.

### **The Voting Behaviour on Key Votes**

Far-right parties are inherently Eurosceptic; however their opposition to European integration differs. Most of the far-right parties do not have any objection for intergovernmental economic cooperation among similarly structured European countries. Their objection is mainly directed to increasing competences of the supranational institutions of the EU, and the growing areas of supranational cooperation. They claim that the legitimacy of the unelected institutions of the EU is highly questionable, thus its policies do not reflect the true will of the people. They call for radical reforms to restore the national sovereignty of the member states and give power back to true representatives of the people; to national parliaments.

They are strongly against any path leading to federalism. They often use the term 'Europe of the Nations' first employed by Charles de Gaulle to underline his vision of Europe with sovereign states rather than a federal 'United States of Europe'. Most of them favour the renegotiation of the treaties in accordance with their national interests, and to secure the supremacy of national constitutions over the community law. They threaten to withdraw from the EU if it will not happen.

During the 2009-14 term of the EP, the subjects of economics and immigration gained significant importance due to the economic crisis and increasing immigration to the and within the

EU. These two subjects are also one of the most important common themes of the European far right and their main reasons to oppose to European integration in supranational terms. Thus, the agreement index for the key votes about these subjects are calculated in order to analyse the cohesion of the far-right parties. Table 3 shows the results that are discussed in detail in the next parts.

Table 3. Agreement Index for the Key Votes

Key Votes	EFD	EFD+NI	EFD+ECR+NI
1	0.30	0.66	0.66
2	0.43	0.60	0.61
3	0.52	0.79	0.75
4	0.48	0.75	0.72
5	0.65	0.72	0.72
6	0.51	0.70	0.66

Source: (VoteWatch 2015)

## Economic and Monetary Affairs

There is a difference between the attitudes of contributor and recipient member states for the subject of economic and monetary affairs. The far-right parties from net-contributor member states defend a rebate from their contribution to the EU budget (FPÖ 2014; FN 2014; VB 2014; PS 2014); the others also demand to negotiate the unfavourable clauses for their national interests (Ataka 2014; Jobbik 2014). PVV (2014), on the other hand, would not like to contribute to the EU budget at all. The ‘rebate’ issue first made into the EU agenda in 1980s with the UK Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher. She demanded a rebate from the British contribution to the EU budget, and she could finally secure it in 1984. Thus, it is not a surprise that the far-right parties of the net-contributor member states demand a rebate. They believe that their states are paying the misconduct and the mistakes of other states.

This conviction has especially increased with the economic crisis. The EU policies of the common currency of Euro and Eurozone; financial institutions; and politicians are highly criticized as the reasons of the economic crisis. The EU policies of bail-outs are opposed fiercely, and following monetary discipline and budgetary surveillance plans are only approached with more opposition and doubt. Far-right parties that do not benefit from the European Stability Mechanism calls for the end of the policy of bail-outs. They use the common discourse of ‘spending tax-payers money’ for saving ‘irresponsible and lazy states’ (SNS 2014, p. 2), or blaming ‘politicians, bureaucrats, bankers’ as stated in the UKIP MEP Godfrey Bloom’s speech on behalf of the EFD group, ‘The day must surely come when politicians, bureaucrats and central bankers must be called to account by a fiscal crimes tribunal and sent to prison for a very long time’ (Bloom 2012).

All of the far-right parties from Eurozone demand the re-introduction of their national currencies. They see Euro as a 'failed experiment' (LN 2014); the slogan of 'Euro is not money, it costs money' is used by both PVV (2014) and VB (2014). The example of Iceland to devalue its own currency to overcome economic crisis often cited by the far-right. VB (2014) suggests a less strong currency that would be used only between the member states with similar economic structures. LAOS also suggests the re-introduction of the national currency, parallel to Euro but only within the national borders and without leaving Euro (2014). TB/LNNK, on the other hand, fully supported the Latvia's entry to Eurozone on 1 January 2004 (Latvian News 2014).

The EU plans of economic and budgetary surveillance of member states, correction of budget deficits, and the introduction of stability bonds are also not welcomed by most of the far-right parties. They are mostly seen as the infringement to national sovereignty like Jean-Marie Le Pen (European Parliament 2012) stated during the parliamentary speech:

*We are losing our budgetary sovereignty and our freedom to choose our policies forever, with Parliament's collusion, although the people have not been consulted. Once the European bureaucratic, technocratic and totalitarian state has gradually – imperceptibly – become fully established, we will have lost our freedom as a people once and for all.*

In March 2013, the amended reports for economic supervision of Eurozone members were voted in the EP. The greatest agreement index for EFD is achieved for the resolution on economic and budgetary surveillance of member states with 0.52 (3). It is higher with 0.79 for EFD+NI and 0.75 for EFD+ECR+NI. Within EFD, only LAOS and VB; and within Independents only Jobbik and PRM voted in the favour of the resolution. TB/LNNK voted for 'Yes', although majority of its group abstained. The rest of the far-right parties voted against the resolution.

For the resolution on monitoring on budget deficits of the member states (4), the agreement index is 0.48 for EFD; 0.75 for EFD+NI; and 0.72 for EFD+ECR+NI. Within EFD, LAOS and VB voted in favour of the resolution, and SNS abstained; within independents Jobbik and PRM voted in favour of the resolution. TB/LNNK is abstained.

One of the solutions for sovereign debt problems of the member states was the introduction of the 'Eurobonds', which is a collective bond to regulate financial flows (2). In February 2012, the motion for the resolution on the introduction of stability bonds was voted in the EP. Similarly, the agreement index is also low for this resolution as 0.43 for EFD. It increases to 0.60 for EFD+NI and 0.61 for EFD+ECR+NI. Within the EFD, only LN; and within independents, only ATA and PRM voted in favour of the motion.

For all of the items in this area, the agreement index is higher for the EFD+IND and EFD+IND+ECR groups than EFD group, which means far-right members of EFD have more

agreement with other far-right party members for these resolutions rather than with their own group members. The voting behaviour of LN is the main reason of this result since it has six members. LN (2014) did not oppose the introduction of stability bonds as being alternatives for the crisis, and supported the idea of maintaining balance of the monetary policies of the member states in order to prevent the Greek case happening again.

## Immigration

Immigration constitutes the *raison d'être* of most of the far-right parties. Adopting a strongly nationalist discourse, most of the far-right parties have their own reasons to fight against several aspects of immigration ranging from pure xenophobia to economic consequences. For the non-EU immigration, far-right parties defend a strong border control. For the intra-EU immigration, wealthy member states often blame others for welfare tourism and demand a renegotiation of the free circulation clauses. For both types of the immigrants, they complain about the integration costs.

The increasing numbers of non-EU immigration to the EU, and the disproportionate distribution of the immigrants among member states constitute one of the main problems of the receiving member states. In addition to the weaker efforts of preventing immigration to the EU by trying to deal with the root causes; since 1999, the EU has been trying to build a Common European Asylum Policy (CEAP) to guarantee the common standards among member states for immigrants and asylum-seekers by harmonizing their legislations; and to make them share the responsibility and burden. With the Lisbon Treaty of 2007, immigration and asylum policies have been communitarized, and the EP acquired 'co-decision' power for the whole area.

The communitarization of the asylum policies has not been welcomed by the far-right parties. Far-right parties argue that the immigration is a national matter and must be solely under the national control. They believe that the CEAP made asylum applications easier, and gave rights to asylum-seekers they do not deserve as Daniël van der Stoep from PVV stated '...if it were up to Europe [Union], we would throw all borders wide open and Europe would become a paradise for fortune seekers and profiteers, as if it were not one already' (2011). What the far-right suggests is a harder asylum policy with strict border controls; keeping asylum-seekers in detention centres when necessary; zero tolerance to undocumented immigrants and immigrants with criminal records and quick expulsion of them; no wider healthcare and family reunion for immigrants. As coming from border countries, only LN (2014) and LAOS (2014) defend solidarity between member states and cooperation with the sending countries.

As a part of the CEAP, 'Qualifications Directive' (1) was renegotiated, and the recast version was voted in order to clarify the grounds for granting international protection. The

agreement index for EFD is 0.30, and it is 0.66 both for EFD+NI and EFD+ECR+NI. While Jobbik and PRM voted in favour of the directive, LAOS and two of the UKIP members voted for 'abstain'. During the debates of this directive, Nikolaos Salavrakos (2011) from LAOS explained their support as the need for European solidarity in the area of immigration, and they see it as a step towards further burden-sharing actions among member states.

Apart from non-EU immigration, far-right parties also have strong opinions on intra-EU immigration. According to Community Law, EU citizens have the freedom of circulation, which entitles them to move, work or benefit from social security systems as the EU citizens. Especially after the CEECs enlargement, the intra-EU immigration numbers increased dramatically. In fact, Romania and Bulgaria were not given the free circulation right during their accession. They faced with derogations, which were only fully removed as of 1 January 2014. When the increasing migrant flows coincided with the economic crisis and economic troubles for the receiving countries, the magnitude of the opposition also increased.

Although not being a EU member state, Switzerland had a free circulation of people with the EU. During a recent referendum in 2013, the far-right party of Switzerland achieved with a very small margin to introduce the quota system for the EU immigrants. Far-right parties from receiving countries demand either exit from this system, or they seek the Swiss formula. The opposition of the far-right parties to EU immigration is not only derived from employment concerns but also from their burden on the welfare system. They believe that the EU immigrants cause an economic burden to schooling, healthcare, social housing expenses, and unemployment despite several studies proved otherwise (Dustmann 2014).

PVV clearly states it as:

*Some countries regard accession to the EU as an unlimited access to an ATM. In Rumania, they laugh until tears run over their cheeks, because the stupid Dutch continue to transfer money. In Greece they drink another ouzo thanks to 'Henk and Ingrid'. In Bulgaria they are more than happy that their Roma population starts to inhabit our streets (2014, p. 13).*

UKIP (2014) suggests social housing only for those whose parents and grandparents were born locally. FN (2014) demands family allowances to be reserved for families with at least one parent is French; social security to be given only after a continuous residency and contribution to the system; and the priority for French families for social housing.

These views found their reflection on the voting for the motion for the resolution for the social housing in the EU in order to tackle poverty and promote social inclusion and cohesion (5). While most of the far-right parties voted against the motion; LAOS from EFD, and Jobbik and PRM voted in favour of it. Still, the agreement index is 0.65 for EFD, while it is 0.72 both with independents and ECR. The motion had a very strong Roma perspective, as it is the most

marginalized group of the EU. This was another reason of its rejection by the far-right parties. Claudio Morganti (European Parliament 2013) from LN made it clear that his party prefers to make investments for their own nationals rather than Roma. Dimitar Stoyanov (European Parliament 2013) from ATA also denoted that Roma do not deserve these investments since ‘they ruin them regularly and do not pay their obligations as citizens’.

Out of estimated 10-12 million Roma population in Europe, 6 million live in the EU, which makes them the largest minority group of the EU. With the CEECs enlargement, Roma problem became a EU wide problem since they have significant Roma population and problems related to it. Roma is the most discriminated minority in the EU and continues to be the target of the far-right of both CEECs and Western European countries due to the intra-EU immigration. They are often associated with unemployment due to laziness; exploiting welfare system; high absence levels at the school; high birth rates, low hygiene; and crime. Jobbik suggests forming a specific police force to prevent Roma crimes (2014, p. 12), so does ATA. SNS suggests establishing boarding schools for Roma children to force them to continue their education (2014, p. 8). This situation is reflected upon the votes of Roma Strategy of Europe (6); the agreement index of EFD is 0.51, and it is 0.70 and 0.66 respectively for EFD+NI and EFD+NI+ECR. Similarly, from the EFD, only SNS, LAOS, and PS voted in favour of the strategy while PRM from independents and TB/LNNK from ECR also voted in favour.

## Conclusion

An intriguing puzzle is the starting point of this research. During the election campaigns for 2014 European elections, several far-right leaders denounce the possibility of alignment with each other due to their conceived racism. These convictions prevent them to form strategic and beneficial cooperation in the EP. Based on a counterfactual question, this article investigates whether the cohesion of a fictional far-right group that would be formed between all of the far-right MEPs; would be higher than the EFD group that some far-right members preferred to form by aligning with some non-far right parties.

The article shows far-right members of EFD are more compatible with independent far-right members in ideological terms according the findings of the key votes from the areas of economic and monetary policy and immigration. The agreement index, thus the cohesion is higher in all cases when the votes of far-right members of EFD group and Independents are calculated. This finding is important since it proves that their conceived differences about each other that prevent them to form a group together do not reflect to the policy level. They share the similar policy preferences for the most salient issues.



Although some of the most prominent European far-right parties try to emphasize more on their diversity, this article shows how united the European far-right parties in their diversity, however in a fundamentally different sense they originally suggest. The diversity of the European far-right parties is not derived from their conceived differences about each other like they claim, or to put it another way, their racism levels. In fact, their voting behaviour on salient issues proves they are united in that sense. The diversity is derived from the country-specific reasons. Thus, it is more than fair to employ the motto of European Union for European far-right parties: 'United in diversity'.

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<sup>1</sup> All online sources were accessed in the period from June to August 2015.



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