

# **The extreme right in contemporary Europe- a sign of the times or an enemy within the gates?**

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## **Brief Summary**

This paper looks at the current situation in the European Union in general and the extent to which the outcome of the 2014 European Parliament elections do really amount to the “political earthquake” so widely referred to at the time. The deepening economic and social problems in many parts of Europe are part of the political context but do not explain the attraction of the radically different view of Europe’s future for which the extreme right stands. Seventy years after the end of the Second World War and 25 years since end of the Cold War, the success of these particular challengers may also represent a failure of the EU institutions and mainstream leaders to modernise their own narrative in a way which convinces a new generation of Europeans that the original idea behind this project remains relevant and worthy of support.

## **What’s new?**

In fact the situation is not really so new and whether the foundations of the European integration project are at risk still remains to be seen. There can be no doubt, however, that things have not entirely worked out as planned or expected as a consequence of the main elements of the project carried forward since the end of the Cold War:

-The **process of enlargement** has continued relatively peacefully up to the date of the accession of the 28<sup>th</sup> member state, Croatia in July 2013. The solidity of this historic transformation has brought some surprises. Hungary, whose peaceful transformation in 1989 inspired the whole Continent, is now led by an elected leader who enthusiastically champions the cause of “illiberal democracy” seeing it as an alternative to the classical pluralist parliamentary democratic model which the enlargement process was meant to advance. Greece had, in an earlier moment after 1974 provide much inspiration to the cause of democracy in southern Europe and yet in February 2015 a government was formed including a party whose rhetoric contains elements of anti-Semitism and whose inspiration seems to come as much from Moscow as from Brussels. Free movement of peoples within the E.U. has in some countries seen simply taking away local jobs. Immigrants from inside and outside the Union, legal or illegal are seen as a threat rather than a source of economic dynamism or a sign of the attractiveness of European society as compared with the alternatives to the east and the south.

- the **constitutional development** from the E.E.C. into the E.U. up to the Treaty of Lisbon has seen the strengthening of supranational institutions and appeared initially to represent a successful merging of the original functionalist, step by step ,method of integration with the

more explicitly political steps of electing a Parliament, establishing a single currency, creating a foreign policy apparatus, setting up European political parties and most recently putting in office a Commission President based on the outcome of the Euro-elections. The transformative nature of each of these steps has been underestimated, perhaps, but the outcome has been what Loukas Tsoukalis sees as “the unhappy State of the European Union.”  
**(Policy Network 2014)**

- The experience of **life under the euro** has been perceived increasingly negatively. Tsoukalis and others trace this back to the mistakes made during the construction of the monetary union. The effects in Europe of the 2008 financial crisis appear to have increased tensions among countries and the on-going relative economic stagnation undermines the credibility of Europe in the eyes of its citizens and its partners and rivals around the world.

-within Europe the model of a **peaceful multi-cultural society** is being questioned. Anti-Semitism and islamophobia are increasingly apparent and influence the political atmosphere. Post-war taboos seem to be in danger of evaporating as the reality of skilfully targeted jihadist terrorism achieves its goal of spreading fear and division in different countries. In retrospect the attack on a Jewish museum in Brussels just days before the May 2014 elections and a short distance from the Brussels buildings of the European Parliament seems somehow emblematic of a deepening sense of crisis. The fact that the terrorist in this case appears to have been a French national who had returned from jihad in Syria was a dramatic reminder of how convenient the Schengen area of free movement can prove to those seeking to take advantage of the absence of border controls. Another pillar of the integration project which most Europeans take for granted is being questioned.

- An enlarged E.U. was meant to place itself at the heart of a **peacefully reunited continent** where democracy and the rule of law were irreversibly established and the success of this process would prove a model for others. The Union would, henceforth, be surrounded by a “ring of friends” not the ring of fire which appears currently to be raging from Donetsk to Tripoli. Maybe there was a little too much wishful thinking in the European Neighbourhood Policy, but it is certainly not the fault of the Union that the dream of a peaceful transformation after the tragic unfolding of the “Arab spring” did not materialise. The sudden decision of the President of Ukraine to reject a long negotiated Association Agreement cannot be blamed on Brussels even if one can wonder why those in the services responsible for gathering intelligence failed to see this crisis coming any more than the outraged citizens of Ukraine themselves. These events certainly add to an atmosphere of crisis but most importantly for the E.U. institutions they have included a direct challenge to the very ideas on which the Union is founded. Such leaders as UKIPs Nigel Farage, Marine Le Pen of the Front National and leading members of the new Greek Government have achieved electoral success even as they express in different ways understanding and even admiration of for Vladimir Putin. Indeed through propaganda in the international media or

financial assistance to relevant individuals or political parties he has unhesitatingly given backing to those challenging the European integration model.

-on the **global scene** a stronger, more united and economically successful Europe was meant to develop into a much more equal partner of the U.S. 1990s President G..W.H. Bush spoke of a Europe “whole and free” and his successor Bill Clinton had many friends in Europe’s leadership such as Tony Blair, Gerhard Schroder, Romano Prodi and Jose Manuel Barroso and, indeed, the Lisbon agenda for a more dynamic and competitive Europe echoed Clintons own successful economic reforms. By the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century at least in terms of jobs and growth Europe seems stuck in a period of relative stagnation as the American economy more rapidly recovered during the Obama Presidency. Indeed members of his Administration have publicly and privately fretted about the threats to European political and social stability as the apparent consequences of high unemployment and low growth. Shortly after the May 2014 elections Annette Heuser of the Bertelsmann Foundation in Washington asked the question: “ Did Washington lose the European elections?” (**B: Brief May 27 2014**). She noted Ms. Le Pen’s opposition to sanctions on Russia over Ukraine as making it responsible for a “Cold War against Russia” that is not in Europe’s interest. The majority in the newly elected European Parliament has not followed Le Pen on this but certainly hers is not an isolated voice. Heuser also noted that right-wing populists had joined the campaign against the increasingly challenged project of a Transatlantic Trade and investment Partnership (TTIP) which she describes as “a classic example of Governments acting over the heads of their publics on issues that affect their daily lives.” Ms Le Pen shrewdly got herself a seat on the European Parliament’s Committee on International Trade. She certainly has no monopoly on anti-TTIP scare stories but unlike mainstream parties who echo scepticism about TTIP she will not revise her views if and when a successful agreement is negotiated and comes up for ratification, quite possibly, in the run-up to the 2019 Euro-elections. Anti-Americanism is not by any means a purely leftist idea and it is rather likely as Heuser puts it that *“the European election results complicate any moves towards stronger alignment between Europe and the US on key issues. Instead, the potential to “disrupt and dismantle” - to invoke national security terminology- may plague the trans-Atlantic agenda in the years to come. Washington is another victim of the vote.”*

### **Continuity and change in an era of unease and instability.**

So, clearly, the European project and its main elements face increasing public unease, and deepening internal challenges. Not all of this was unforeseen. American critics of the euro were numerous in doubting whether the new system could function without stronger economic governance rules or even political union. Martin Feldstein has recently come back into fashion having argued in a 1997 Foreign Affairs article ( **EMU and International Conflict,**

**Foreign Affairs 76/6 1997)** that the euro could lead to such tensions between countries that war was a possible consequence. Post-election rhetoric in Athens in 2015 does not confirm such a gloomy prognosis but the depth of the crisis is apparent. Ironically while a left-wing government in Greece seems to bring with it the possibility of GREXIT from the Euro or even the E.U. the Conservative Party in the non-Eurozone U.K. seems ready to flirt with the risk of BREXIT. It is certainly rather clear that Tsoukalis is right to insist that

*“It no longer helps to take refuge in the language of Euro-speak that hardly anyone listens to, except for those well paid enough to do so, or pretend that all is well in the best of possible worlds. And it will not be good enough either arguing, as many economists and all kinds of ‘global thinkers’ do, that political reality needs to adapt to economic necessity.” Tsoukalis op.cit p 23.*

In this sense the success of extreme right parties in the European elections should indeed be a wake- up call to those who want the European project to succeed, a sign of very troubled times indeed.

That said, it should immediately be added that these troubles are not necessarily unprecedented. The idea that the process of European integration could provide a new opportunity for extreme right parties and ideas to gain credibility and electoral support is also not new. In 1992 France nearly voted down the Maastricht Treaty, which Presidents Mitterrand and Delors had willed into existence to an extent that Germany went along with but without its leader taking the risk of consulting the recently re-united German people. This was the context in which this author updated the conclusions of his book published in 1993 **“The Dark Side of Europe-the extreme right in Europe today.” (Columbia 1993).** Then as now the then European Community was grappling with a recession and an enhanced fear of immigration. The war in the former Yugoslavia was leading to fears of uncontrolled movements of refugees as now there are fears of an influx from the instability and civil war in North Africa and the Middle East.

Even a decade earlier in 1984 the second EP elections provided the French Front National with its first major national success. It was led by the father of the current leader of the FN. The 2014 Euro-elections provided a similarly perfect platform for right wing anti-EU parties to break through in national elections in several EU member states. Whether this really was such a “bombshell” has been challenged.

In some cases the origins of the parties concerned date back to the post-war era during which neo-Nazi and “new right” alternatives to the European idea continued to circulate in

intellectual and activist circles. Since the 1980s extreme right parties have, from time to time, achieved electoral success. Since the early 1990s referenda and elections have provided signals of an increasing challenge to the official narrative of European integration embodied, most notably, in the failed attempt to achieve ratification of the draft Constitution for Europe.

### **Transatlantic Concerns.....**

In the United States there has been much concern at the potential for instability in Europe.

In August 2014 Human Rights First a leading American NGO wrote of the “rise of hate parties in Hungary and Greece and why America should care” in a publication entitled **We are not Nazis but....** included detailed recommendations for the US Government to act upon in order to “reverse Hungary’s backsliding on democracy” to pressure the former Greek Government to prosecute Golden Dawn leaders ( they did but those concerned still got elected).The report also called on the US Director of National Intelligence “to investigate allegations of Russian and Iranian financial or other support of European far right parties and present a classified assessment of whether the Kremlin is attempting to use such parties to undermine the European Union or thwart further NATO expansion.

Rather explicitly the report referred to the “need for Troika policies to blunt the suffering caused by austerity and to defuse the appeal of extremism.”

In January 2015 Congressional Quarterly , a major source of information for Washington insiders published a special study entitled simply **“European Unrest”** arguing that *“in addition to economic stagnation and high joblessness rates, immigration from poorer to richer countries has led to social tensions, made worse by a new influx of refugees fleeing Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan. Meanwhile after decades of democracy, anti-Semitism appears to be on the rise again. The E.U. has responded by bolstering its fiscal autonomy, but that has provoked a backlash from critics who believe national governments – not the E.U. should set policy. In such a climate far right, anti-immigrant, anti E.U. and even neo-Nazi political parties have been gaining eyebrow raising victories at the ballot box.”* **(CQ researcher January 2015 Vol. 25, number 2)**

**.....but no electoral earthquake.**

Even in this same publication the content belied some of the dramatic introduction. Cas Mudde of Georgia University pointed out, for example, that of the five “bail-out countries” it was only in Greece that a far right party did well in the May 2014 euro-elections.” *The situation in the European Parliament is similar. The European elections were not an ‘earthquake.’ Depending on the broadness of the definition of ‘far right’- mainly whether the*

UK Independence Party is included - far right parties won between 6.8% and 10.3% of the vote, an increase of 1-2%. If UKIP is excluded the far right hold 51 seats up 17 from 2009. Overall the far right gained representation in just 10 of the 28 E.U. member states. In six they gained extra seats, in seven they lost seats. In three East European countries they lost representation. In short, the far right is not growing significantly in Europe, but only in a few European countries." CQ op.cit p.49.

<b>Country (# MEPs)</b> - Party	<b>Percentage of Vote</b>		<b>Number of Seats</b>	
	<b>2014</b>	<b>Change</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>Change</b>
<b>Austria (18)</b> - Alliance for the Future of Austria (BZÖ) - Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ)	<b>20.2</b> 0.5 19.7	<b>+2.9</b> -4.1 +7.0	<b>4</b> 0 4	<b>+2</b> 0 +2
<b>Belgium (21)</b> - National Front (FNb) - Popular Party (PP) - Flemish Interest (VB)	<b>6.4</b> 0.0 2.3 4.1	<b>-4.8</b> -1.3 +2.3 -5.8	<b>1</b> 0 0 1	<b>-1</b> 0 0 -1
<b>Bulgaria (17)</b> - Ataka	<b>3.0</b>	<b>-9.0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>-2</b>
<b>Denmark (13)</b> - Danish People's Party (DF)	<b>26.6</b>	<b>11.8</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>+2</b>
<b>France (74)</b> - National Front (FN)	<b>25.0</b>	<b>18.7</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>+21</b>
<b>Germany (96)</b> - National Democratic Party of Germany (NPD) - The Republicans (REP)	<b>1.0</b> 1.0 0.0	<b>-0.3</b> +1.0 -1.3	<b>1</b> 1 0	<b>+1</b> +1 0
<b>Greece (21)</b> - Popular Orthodox Rally (LAOS) - Golden Dawn (XA)	<b>12.1</b> 2.7 9.4	<b>+4.4</b> -4.5 +8.9	<b>3</b> 0 3	<b>+1</b> -2 +3
<b>Hungary (21)</b> - Movement for a Better Hungary (Jobbik)	<b>14.7</b>	<b>-0.1</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Italy (73)</b> - Northern League (LN)	<b>6.2</b>	<b>-4.0</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>-4</b>
<b>Netherlands (26)</b> - Party for Freedom (PVV)	<b>13.2</b>	<b>-3.8</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>-1</b>
<b>Romania (32)</b> - Greater Romania Party (PRM)	<b>2.7</b>	<b>-6.0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>-3</b>
<b>Slovakia (13)</b> - People's Party – Our Slovakia (L'SNS) - Slovak National Party (SNS)	<b>5.3</b> 1.7 3.6	<b>-0.3</b> +1.7 -2.0	<b>0</b> 0 0	<b>-1</b> 0 -1
<b>Sweden (22)</b> - Sweden Democrats (SD)	<b>9.7</b>	<b>+6.4</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>+2</b>
<b>United Kingdom (73)</b> - British National Party (BNP)	<b>1.1</b>	<b>-4.9</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>-2</b>
<b>European Union (751)</b>			<b>52</b>	<b>+15</b>

Source: <http://www.results-elections2014.eu/en/election-results-2014.html>

Referring to the above table published a week after the elections, Mudde compared the 2014 results with those of 5 years earlier insisting that “ *it is clear that Europe as a whole was not hit by a far right earthquake.*” He has also questioned simplistic views about the link between economic crisis and far right success and underlines the substantial differences within the far right drawing a distinction between socio-economic issues and socio-cultural issues concluding that “ *once the Great Recession ends and the economic situation has stabilised, many potential far right voters will return to prioritizing socio-cultural issues relating to national identity and security. It is then that the dissatisfaction with national and European elites which has grown to new dimensions during the Great Recession, could be most visible, on the far right and in other corners of anti-establishment protest. Whether that happens, however, depends at least as much on the actions of the mainstream parties as on the strategies of the far right.*” ([http://works.bepress.com/cas\\_mudde/75](http://works.bepress.com/cas_mudde/75)).

To put it another way the patchy successes of far right parties are a sign of troubled times in different parts of Europe but the nature of the troubles is different in different countries and the complex overall picture is not reflected in the simplistic and somewhat dramatic newspaper headlines .Indeed looking around the landscape of the European Union early in 2015, the casual observer may wonder what happened to the political earthquake announced around the time of the May 2014 European Parliament elections. Amongst the direst predictions was not only a surge in support for parties challenging the very idea of European integration to the election of a “self-hating Parliament.”\* **Mark Leonard, ECFR November 2013** In fact, around 30% of seats in the current legislature are held by members who could to varying degrees, and with varying solutions be considered as opposing key aspects of EU policy or seeking to advance their countries’ exit from the Union. Even if this can be described as an earthquake it does not, so far at least, appear to have led to a breakdown in the functioning of the EU in general or the European Parliament in particular.

Less than 9 months before the elections two apparently rising stars on the Eurosceptic right, Marine Le Pen of the French National Front and Geert Wilders of the Dutch Freedom Party had announced their joint plan to “*wreck the EU from within.*” \* **Ian Traynor, The Guardian 15.11.13.**In fact Wilders party fell short of his expected progress in the elections and even though his French ally performed better than ever the two of them did not establish enough momentum or support to establish a functioning alliance after the election results came in.

**EU Institutions functioning- business as usual?**

In the weeks following the elections our casual observer limiting his observations to what is going on inside the European Parliament itself might come to the view summarised by Oliver Treib \* (**Journal of European Public Policy 2014, vol 21, Number 10 pp. 1541-1554**) of a situation where “ *the voters say no ,but nobody listens.*” The EP continues to be presided over by German Social Democrat Martin Schulz as it has been since January 2012. Following his party’s failure to win the largest proportion of seats in the EP, Mr. Schulz accepted the logic of his personal and institutional position and the supported the EPP candidate for Commission President. Even the then leader of the opposition in Greece, Alexis Tsipras supported the procedure having himself been the leading candidate if the European Left. Mr. Juncker represented some kind of continuity following 19 years as a member of the European Council. Although his party the EPP lost 70 seats the party still claimed the top job with support not just from the mainstream left and the Liberals but also from the Greens and the far left. To argue that the voters’ voice did not count is itself rather misleading way of talking up the role of the far right. The principle of a Parliament electing by majority the head of an executive is hardly so controversial. Even Juncker seemed well aware of the stakes when he referred to his term of office as some kind of last chance for the Union.

It is perhaps most necessary to draw the distinction between the nature of the challenge the E.U. faces and the somewhat mixed and disunited group of challengers. Looking at the British challenger, UKIP, Simon Jenkins wrote that “*the problem isn’t UKIP , it is Europe*” (**The Guardian April 30<sup>th</sup> 2014**). He added with reference to the immigration issue “ *for a quarter of a century calling any critic of the evolving architecture of the EU ‘anti-European’ was not just inaccurate but stupid. It played into the hands of the rejectionists. The chickens are now coming home to roost.*” Echoing the more scientific analysis of Mudde he sees a very mixed picture of dissident groups rampant across Europe to which “Brussels” must listen if it wants to avoid a an explosion which would destroy the Union. It is, in fact, a truism to argue that elected leaders must listen to the electors and in a Union in which the supranational Parliament shares power with the national Governments meeting in the Council, most importantly the European Council of Heads of State or Government. The elections, therefore, cannot be ignored but to argue that a partial, not so dramatic advance by some far right parties means abandoning the whole project seems unconvincing. Surrendering the initiative to those who oppose the EU in principle is both unlikely and unworkable precisely because the insurgents have no plan of their own and certainly not one around which they can unite.

So can we conclude that there was no bombshell in May 2014 and there is, therefore, no enemy inside the gates to deal with? Not too quickly, as the signs of malaise will not evaporate just because they are reflected by a minority of those elected. In Greece, in early

2015 the left defeated the mainstream right and destroyed the mainstream left. A nationalist right wing party joined a coalition government and an explicitly extreme right part became the 3<sup>rd</sup> largest in Parliament. In France nearly a year after the EP elections the FN remained in the lead in spite of a massive outpouring of national unity following terrorist attacks in Paris. In Germany, Chancellor Merkel faced increasing challenges from anti-euro and anti-immigrant parties and movements. The focus of the “insurgency” shifted away from Brussels, however, and institutions of the EU continued to function without an atmosphere of crisis.

### **Not the 1930s but...**

A well-argued alternative view has been presented by Peter Kreko of the Political Capital Institute in Budapest. In the same CQ study quoted above he shared the view that “*we are not in the 1930s again.*” He did, however, claim that “*the far right is on the rise in Europe with more domestic and foreign support and more impact on the mainstream. In the 2014 Elections support grew for the far right’s ethno-nationalist agenda and for a populist right-wing anti EU agenda.*” **CQ op.cit p.49.** Confirming the reality of what all can agree is a mixed picture he highlighted anti-Roma sentiments and the danger of sharpened ethnic conflicts in central Europe, linking these issue to the anti-immigration issue so powerfully played up by parties in Sweden and Denmark.

It is, therefore, more accurate to see the euro-elections as being 28 national elections with common themes and sensitivities but not reflecting a Europe wide rebellion of the kind Simon Jenkins perceives. Timothy Garton Ash seemed more accurate in his assessment that the election results reflected “*28 varieties of unhappy.*” (**The Guardian May 28<sup>th</sup> 2014**). The unhappiness comes out differently in non-Eurozone Britain and Denmark than it does in Greece. In such a varied landscape an extreme right surge is just one part of a picture. He sees the risk that a future historian could write that “*this was the wake-up call at which Europe failed to wake up.*” In fact given his convincing presentation of the variety of concerns such a result reflects the reaction of mainstream European politicians is less surprising even if building a coalition around Mr. Juncker is itself risky as it appeared to mean that the voters were being ignored. If there was a politician around in Europe who could simultaneously respond to the concerns of the FN, Syriza , Jobbik and UKIP he would have perhaps got the job. Again even on the extreme right no such potential leader was remotely visible to compare with the left challenger Tsipras , pro-European but strongly opposed to the current priorities of the Eurozone leadership.

So far, therefore, it seems exaggerated to see the euro-elections as a vote against the EU or, by themselves, a potential threat to the whole European supranational integration project of which the direct election of MEPs is an integral part. The visions of the future of Europe

presented by extreme right parties have in common a rejection of further political and economic integration but these visions vary between those calling for exit from the Union or just the single currency. Distrust of all EU institutions, a desire to return power to national institutions, opposition to further EU enlargement and calls for reduced immigration form part of the common ground of populist and extreme right MEPs and this distinguishes them very clearly from left-wing challengers to Europe's mainstream parties. They do not have, however, any kind of alternative agenda of their own around which to mobilise and seek power.

### **An enemy within the gates?**

Less than a year after the last EP elections the European Union remains seriously challenged by internal economic difficulties, terrorist and regional security threats, as well as violent conflict in its neighbourhood. It has never before faced such an explicit challenge to its basic purpose as it does from those inside who wish to leave the Union and those outside wishing to undermine the Union from within.

In such a context the distinction between euro-scepticism and Europhobia (or even neo-Fascism) is much more than a question of terminological clarity. Parties such as Jobbik in Hungary or Golden Dawn in Greece fall into the latter category and find themselves operating on the borders of legality with members facing prosecution for violence, threats to democracy or hate speech. Republican US Senator John McCain has even accused Hungary's Prime Minister of being "neo-Fascist." This followed controversial changes to the constitution of Hungary and Mr Orban's explicit commitment to develop some form of "illiberal democracy." Sometimes the line of distinction between the views of Orban's FIDESZ party and those of Jobbik are not clear. The Senator's remarks reflect concerns in the US that Europe is not doing enough to respond to increasing anti-Semitism and racism. In this case Mr. Orban is the Prime Minister of his country and leads a party fully integrated into the mainstream EPP whose leader Joseph Daul publicly supports him and welcomes his electoral victories. One of Orban's closest allies is the Vice-chairman of the EPP group in the European Parliament. This is the party of also of Jean-Claude Juncker.

The role of Hungary has been questioned within the European Parliament and Mr.Orban himself seemed rather proud to openly champion the cause of "illiberal democracy." Indeed whilst the US is increasingly concerned about the stability of Europe, there is much evidence that Russia is actively developing relationships with parties opposing further European integration. A recent summit in Budapest saw Mr Orban tone down some of his rhetoric whilst deepening energy cooperation with Russia at precisely the time efforts are under way to induce President Putin to help resolve the Ukraine crisis. Such a lack of unity seems even worse than the 2003 divisions over Iraq and certainly the EU has never faced before such an explicit challenge during or after the Cold War as the one Russia quite explicitly represents.

Pro-Moscow communists during the Cold War decades never came close to achieving the recognisable fifth column status that anti-EU populists now constitute in national and European politics. Perhaps because the idea of alliance between Putin and such as UKIP, Front National and the Lega Nord in Italy seems so unlikely that it is not yet treated with the serious concern it deserves.

Indeed Russia has chosen to perceive EU enlargement and the development of close links with the EU by its western neighbours as an aggressive act. It has responded by accusing some of those in Ukraine who are keen to join the EU or NATO as anti-Semitic or fascist. Whilst developing links with elements on the extreme right Russia has talked up the neo-fascist threat in Europe. Combining sponsorship to the very forces it is claiming to oppose Russia's skilful use of soft power has proved quite remarkable and has wrong-footed European and American leaders. Its aim is not limited to weakening challenges to its current actions on its western borders but to undermine the EU and NATO from within.

As Peter Kreko has pointed out, only a small minority of the parties on the far right with EP seats are openly hostile to Russia. Parties from France to Finland provide what he describes as a "royal route for Russia to influence political decisions on the national and European level." He illustrates this observation with reference to far right votes against resolutions in the EP criticizing Russia for the annexation of Crimea. Nigel Farage in one such debate referred to the EU foreign policy failure of the EU as a result of its "unnecessary provocation of Russia." The UKIP leader added "in the war against Islamic extremism Vladimir Putin- whatever we may think of him as a human being- is actually on our side." (**Kreko : European Far Right and Putin. Aspen Review March 2014**).

The Centre for European Strategic Intelligence ([www.cesieuropeanintelligence.org](http://www.cesieuropeanintelligence.org)) has found confirmation of support to such parties in the UK, France, Hungary, Bulgaria and Greece.) This appears to be a recycling of a Soviet era practice whereby the USSR subsidised parties and movements whose objectives fitted in with their objectives. Support for anti-TTIP or anti-frobbing movements is perhaps less of a concern than an EU Member State Prime Minister seeing Putin as some kind of model for the "illiberal democracy" he favours in Hungary. Combined with diplomacy, soft power and modern communications it remains to be seen what will be achieved by Russia as it clearly seeks to weaken the EU, its relationship with the US and its ability to unite effectively in support of its neighbours in the east and south-east. Inquiries have been initiated in the European Parliament in relations to financial arrangements between Russia and MEPs from France and Hungary.

**Anti-Semitic and Jihadi violence- a "new" element of crisis?**

A wider sense of what may be at stake in terms of a challenge to post-cold war European stability was publicly expressed by US Ambassador Samantha Power in Berlin on November 13<sup>th</sup> 2014 when she addressed the OSCE's Berlin Conference on Anti-Semitism and referred publicly and specifically to the outcome of the May euro-election results calling on those present to *"look at May's European parliamentary elections. In Denmark the anti-immigrant Danish Peoples' Party finished first. In France, the far right National Front won over a quarter of the vote-more than any other party. In Greece the overly anti-Semitic and xenophobic Golden Dawn received 10% of the vote.....in Hungary- where extreme ethnic nationalist Jobbik party finished second in May elections and where public opinion polling has shown a high level of anti-Semitism..."* she referred to also to Hungarian Government actions to limit the activities of NGOs and to build a monument to the "victims of German occupation" without mentioning the role of the war-time Hungarian Government and citizens in the extermination of Jews. *"There is an important lesson here: rising anti-Semitism is rarely the lone or last manifestation of intolerance in a society. Quite the contrary, it is often the canary in the coal mine for the degradation of human rights more broadly."*

Concerns about rising anti-Semitism were, therefore, already growing well before the Paris attacks. In the months since the EP elections the issue of terrorism undertaken by Europeans radicalised into Jihadist movements then added to a sense of crisis in Europe. In fact looking back it is interesting to note a dramatic event from late May 2014 which has become somewhat emblematic. As mentioned above, a few days ahead of the May 2014 elections a French citizen and a jihadist fighter recently returned from action with ISIS in Syria took the train up to Brussels where he killed four people outside the Jewish history museum in central Brussels, just a mile or so away from the buildings which house the EU institutions.

Expressing anti-Semitism and fanning the flames of Islamophobia the attack was followed by others in Paris and Copenhagen. In these last two cases cartoonists accused of disrespect for Islam were killed on the same day as Jews. The attacks were condemned by all mainstream parties with huge bipartisan demonstrations of solidarity with the victims. If anything the difficulty of associating the far right with these demonstrations only served, so far at least, to draw attention to their very distinctive views especially in relation to the multicultural model of European society. Again the formation of mainstream coalitions only facilitated the emergence of a potentially attractive alternative political vision. It is far too soon to judge the long term effects of these terrible outrages but certainly they have not led to any immediate isolation of populist forces. A misleading rhetorical amalgam of Islam phobia and anti-immigration ideas mixed with a fear of terrorism continues to draw support and as

leaders are obliged to look again at the functioning of the Schengen system another pillar of European integration is called into question.

In autumn 2014 these issues had already been taken up in Germany by a totally new movement explicitly based around an alternative view of Europe. PEGIDA (Patriotic Europeans against Islamisation of the Occident) calls for the maintenance and protection of "Christian-Jewish western culture." (**\*PEGIDA: Islamophobia 2.0 in Germany. Anne Jenichen Transatlantic Academy 9.1.15 [www.transatlanticacademy.org/node/754](http://www.transatlanticacademy.org/node/754)**) The group started organising weekly demonstrations in Dresden and caused enough concern in the mainstream parties to bring out Chancellor Merkel and others onto the streets to denounce such views and champion the model of minority integration. Exposure to the press undermined the leadership of the movement so again it is too soon to judge its long term significance but enough is known of its activities and nature to reveal its overlap with right-wing extremist parties. Some leaders of the anti-euro AFD were reportedly attracted to the idea of building bridges with PEGIDA. The durability and impact of such a movement will be influenced by events and by the evolution of the economy in Germany but the re-emergence of such an explicitly nativist movement in the heart of Europe is certainly a sign of the times. It should not be overlooked that Putinism also combines muscular opposition to real terrorist threats with a claim to be defending western values.

### **Looking ahead.**

It has been argued here that the 2014 elections have not prevented the EU institutions from functioning but this does not mean at all that all goes well. Leaving totally aside the issue of BREXIT and accepting that UKIP is a populist rather than an anti-democratic force the fact that Britain might hold a new referendum on EU membership does provide others with the opportunity of demanding the same sort of choice in their own country. Were the UK to leave the Union a precedent would have been set which others would certainly try to exploit as providing legitimacy for their own demands. The FN in France wants a referendum on the euro as do some populists in Italy. Each challenge feeds off others - stagnation in the European economy feeds anti-immigration sentiment. Terrorism breeds Islamophobia. Political violence in Greece adds to an image of instability in mainland Europe which can undermine the pro-EU cause in the UK. Nothing can be taken for granted.

The election of Syriza in Greece may turn out to be a positive turning point with democracy proving a viable path for critics of EU policies to follow. The war of words between German leaders and the new Greek leadership introduces a new perspective into day to day political debate in which national identity rather than European solidarity comes to the fore. In fact,

in both Germany and Greece there are extremist forces banking on the failure of both Tsipras and Merkel who are both , in their own ways, committed to the European idea. Another test for Europe could come in Spain later in 2015 and meanwhile France and Italy under centre-left Governments are far from getting to grips with unemployment and economic stagnation. In all these countries the main political issues revolve around European policy choices but under the surface it is the traditional mainstream parities of the centre-left and centre-right which are in danger of losing the initiative.

The European Union is a unique political entity and the political and economic significance of its current internal challenges are clear enough. As the problems it faces are not amenable to any quick solutions the ant-European populist tide is, at least, likely to remain a fixed part of Europe's political life. Unfolding developments and upcoming elections in the UK, France, Greece and Sweden will provide the successful parties with a chance to build on their euro-election successes.