

THE POPULIST CHALLENGE TO NORMATIVE AND GEOPOLITICAL EUROPE

İbrahim SAYLAN*

Müge AKNUR**

Research Article

Abstract

Populism has become a remarkable political force in contemporary European politics. Most populist parties in Europe currently have radical right leanings and stand for sovereigntism, nativism, and authoritarianism. Either in government or opposition, these parties have had various impacts on liberal democratic systems both nationally and supranationally. Drawing on the concept of geopolitical European power, the European Union has been in search of effective responses to current challenges, including populism. This research aims at grasping the populist challenge in terms of its impacts on European politics within the broader context of normative versus geopolitical European power debate. Our research shows that populism has not only corroded normative European power but has also turned into an obstacle to the EU's aspirations for geopolitical European power.

Keywords: *Populism, Geopolitical Europe, Sovereigntism, Authoritarianism, Nativism.*

Normatif ve Jeopolitik Avrupa'ya Yönelik Popülist Meydan Okuma

Öz

Popülizm günümüz Avrupa siyasetinde kayda değer bir siyasal güce dönüşmüştür. Avrupa'daki popülist partilerin çoğu radikal sağ eğilimlidir ve egemenlikçilik, yerlililik ve otoriterliği desteklemektedir. İster hükümette ister muhalefette olsun, popülist radikal sağ partilerin ulusal ve ulusüstü düzeylerde liberal demokratik sistemler üzerinde çeşitli etkileri bulunmaktadır. Avrupa Birliği, jeopolitik Avrupa gücü kavramından hareketle, popülizm de dâhil olmak üzere

* Associate Prof., Dokuz Eylül University, Faculty of Business, Department of International Relations, E-mail: ibrahim.saylan@deu.edu.tr, ORCID: 0000-0002-7395-9963.

** Associate Prof., Dokuz Eylül University, Faculty of Business, Department of International Relations, E-mail: muge.aknur@deu.edu.tr, ORCID: 0000-0002-1407-7047.

Makalenin Gönderilme Tarihi: 04/04/2023 Kabul Edilme Tarihi: 04/08/2023

güncel meydan okumalara karşı etkili yanıtlar arayışındadır. Bu araştırma, popülist meydan okumayı Avrupa siyaseti üzerindeki etkileri açısından normatif ve jeopolitik Avrupa gücü tartışmasının daha geniş bağlamı içinde kavramayı amaçlamaktadır. Araştırmamız, popülizmin sadece normatif Avrupa gücünü aşındırmakla kalmadığını, aynı zamanda AB'nin jeopolitik Avrupa gücü hedeflerinin önünde bir engele dönüştüğünü göstermektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Popülizm, Jeopolitik Avrupa, Egemenlikçilik, Otoriterlik, Yerlilik.

Introduction

Populism has become a remarkable political force, shaping both contemporary and future European politics. It has been especially on the rise in many European countries since the Eurozone crisis of 2009 while the 2015 refugee crisis also greatly contributed to the growing electoral appeal of populist parties across Europe. In many European countries, populist radical right parties (PRRPs) have gained political power through electoral success, forming governing coalitions in Austria, Italy, Switzerland, Finland, Norway, and Czechia, and supporting minority governments in the Netherlands and Denmark. Marking the growing appeal of right-wing populism, PRRPs achieved critical electoral successes in 2022. In particular, the Brothers of Italy (*Fratelli d'Italia* - FdI) won national elections to form the first radical right-led government in Italy since World War II. Having come second in Sweden's 2022 general elections, the Sweden Democrats (*Sverigedemokraterna*–SD) gained direct influence over the national government for the first time. In Hungary, Victor Orban's Fidesz gained its fourth consecutive electoral victory since 2010.

Meanwhile, another Eastern European country, Poland, has been governed by a populist conservative coalition in which Law and Justice Party (*Prawo i Sprawiedliwość* – PiS) has been the dominant partner since 2015. Even Germany, which has actively strived to isolate and marginalize radical right political actors since the end of World War II, witnessed a historical break when the Alternative for Germany (*Alternative für Deutschland* – AfD) became the first radical right party to enter the federal parliament in 2015. In France, the National Rally (*Rassemblement National* – RN) competed in the second round of presidential elections in 2022 for the third time in its history. Having gained its highest vote rate in the recent election, the party continues to be an influential actor in French politics.

Above all, Brexit has probably been the greatest victory for populism in Europe, with significant political consequences for European politics.

Whether in government or opposition, PRRPs challenge liberal democratic political systems at both the national and European levels.¹ Populists negatively affect the EU due to their nativist, authoritarian, and sovereigntist ideological characteristics. These impacts have normative and geopolitical aspects. In response to populist impacts, the EU tries to develop effective strategies and policies to tackle the populist challenge. These responses take shape as a part of a broader European attempt that finds its intellectual and political expression on the axis of European normative and geopolitical power debate.

This article neither aims to limit the analysis of populism to the national level nor seeks to make a comparative analysis of populist parties across Europe. Rather, it focuses on defining and analyzing the various impacts of the populist challenge on European politics, specifically on the EU, whose identity and roles are being reshaped in the face of geopolitical challenges. In other words, the aimed contribution of this research is to grasp the populist challenge in terms of its impacts on European politics within the broader context of normative versus geopolitical European power debate. This paper concludes that the populist impacts of PRRPs have not only undermined the normative aspect of European power but have also turned into an obstacle to the EU's attempt to reshape itself as a geopolitical power.

Taking populism as a challenge to both normative and geopolitical conceptions of Europe, this study first outlines the major elements of the normative and geopolitical European power debate before explaining the fundamental characteristics of populist radical right ideology. It then focuses on PRRPs as the most influential populist actors in contemporary European politics. While explaining the nature of populist radical right ideology, the study identifies the major reasons for its political rise. Then, the article analyzes various dimensions of the populist impact on national and EU levels, mainly through PRRPs' policies. In this analysis, the study considers the three primary major components of populist radical right ideology:

¹ Thomas Diez, "The EU in a Changing World Order: In Defence of Normative Power 2.0.," *Marmara Üniversitesi Avrupa Topluluğu Enstitüsü Avrupa Araştırmaları Dergisi* 29, no 1 (2021): 3; Rosa Balfour, "The Resistible Rise of Populism in Europe and Its Impact on European and International Cooperation," *IEMed Mediterranean Yearbook*, 2017, Access Date: March 12, 2023, <https://www.iemed.org/publication/the-resistible-rise-of-populism-in-europe-and-its-impact-on-european-and-international-cooperation/>.

authoritarianism, nativism, and sovereigntism. This empirical research focuses on PRRPs in Germany, France, Italy, Poland, and Hungary due to their high representative capacity, along with other striking examples from other European countries when appropriate. Finally, the study evaluates the EU's responses to the populist challenge in the framework of the normative versus geopolitical European power debate.

I. The Normative vs. Geopolitical European Power Debate and the Populist Challenge

European countries and the EU have recently faced significant challenges, including populism. More specifically, a series of political, economic, and health crises have again revealed major structural problems at both national and EU levels and crystallized the need for effective responses to the intertwined continental and global challenges. Since the national level is necessarily embedded within the EU level in the EU's multilevel governance system, supposedly national problems and efforts to tackle them always have an EU dimension. Nevertheless, responding to the EU's challenges requires the active participation and consensus of Member States at the EU level. Hence, responses to populism in individual European countries and the EU as a whole must be understood within this complex network of interactions centered on the EU.

The EU's responses to populism have developed as part of ongoing intellectual and political debates and competition over Europe's identity and role in global politics. These debates are generally conducted on the axis of normative and geopolitical European power. Although these two conceptions of Europe differ on several grounds, they both favor the ideal of European integration whereas authoritarian, nativist, and sovereigntist PRRPs challenge both conceptions for different reasons.

Normative European power means that European identity and behavior are based on specific shared values, primarily "peace, liberty, the rule of law, democracy, human rights, social solidarity, anti-discrimination, sustainable development, and good governance".² These values have long underpinned the EU's norm-based policies and its self-presentation as a values-based order.³ The EU also promotes these norms in its relations with third

² Ian Manners, "Normative Power Europe: A Contradiction in Terms?," *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies* 40 (2002): 241.

³ Raja Nouredine, "Critically Assess and Analyse the Notion that the EU is a Normative Power," *European Union External Action*, November 24, 2016, Access Date: April 03, 2023, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/node/15687_en.

countries in its efforts to create a rules-based international order. Thus, EU power arguably developed as a normative power in opposition to traditional geopolitically oriented conceptions of power.⁴ Diez argues that the EU's normative power expanded thanks to the favorable environment provided by the "liberal moment" between 1990 and 2009. Examples of the EU's normative power in global politics include the Responsibility to Protect, the International Criminal Court (ICC), and the Kyoto Protocol. However, EU norm promotion has been challenged by populism, autocracy, and multilateralism due to China's rise as well as the EU's inner contradictions, such as Eurocentrism and "othering practices".⁵ More specifically, the EU has failed as a normative actor due to unresolved tensions between Member States' interests and EU norms.⁶

Since the end of the "liberal moment" in 2009, the EU has experienced an obvious shift from a normative to geopolitical Europe.⁷ Kundnani describes geopolitics as a vague concept that has been used in at least five ways: as a synonym of international politics; referring to the role of geography in international politics; the strategic use of military tools; as a synonym of power politics; and as the pursuit of economic interests. According to Kundnani, the EU authorities selectively refer to certain meanings of geopolitics, which makes geopolitical Europe conceptually fuzzy.⁸ In response to Kundnani, Laidi argues that as a doctrine in the making of geopolitical Europe, it is not fuzzy; rather, it is aimed at "redressing norm-based EU's over-optimism of transforming international politics without giving up its norm-based character."⁹

⁴ Manners, "Normative Power Europe."

⁵ Diez, "The EU in a Changing World Order," 3.

⁶ Noureddine, "Critically Assess."

⁷ Stefan Lehne, "Making EU Foreign Policy Fit For a Geopolitical Europe," *Carnegie Europe*, April 14, 2022, Access Date: April 15, 2023, <https://carnegieeurope.eu/2022/04/14/making-eu-foreign-policy-fit-for-geopolitical-world-pub-86886>.

⁸ Hans Kundnani, "Europe's Geopolitical Confusion," *Internationale Politik Quarterly*, Jan 4, 2023, Access Date: April 15, 2023, <https://ip-quarterly.com/en/europes-geopolitical-confusion>.

⁹ Zaki Laidi, "The Meaning of Geopolitical Europe: A Response to Hans Kundnani," *Internationale Politik Quarterly*, Jan 16, 2023, Access Date: April 15, 2023, <https://ip-quarterly.com/en/meaning-geopolitical-europe-response-hans-kundnani>.

Within this context and reflecting its increasing emphasis on “shared interests” and the “European way of life,” the EU introduced the European Union Global Strategy (EUGS) in 2016. In line with the concept of “principled pragmatism,” this document is oriented to achieve a more effective EU defense and security policy, and a more active EU in dealing with crises, such as immigration. By stressing the concept of “strategic autonomy,” the EUGS implies that the EU is willing to improve its own security and defense capabilities to act militarily without over-reliance on the USA.¹⁰

In response to the criticism that the EU is trying to become an actor in a traditional geopolitical great power competition, Josep Borrell, High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, claims that a geopolitical Europe does not mean that the EU has abandoned its focus on norms. Rather, as reflected in his comment that “outside our post-modern garden, the jungle was growing,” the EU should adapt itself to the age of power politics.¹¹ Calling himself “a realist Kantian,”¹² Borrell eloquently defines a geopolitical Europe as “the EU, which is more security-conscious, with a unity of purpose and capabilities to pursue its political goals on the world stage.”¹³ According to Borrell, the Ukraine war brought about a “geopolitical awakening” since European countries realized the high costs of “non-Europe” and accepted that the EU must use its economic and military means as instruments of power to respond to global challenges. The Ukraine war has given impetus to strategic convergence to achieve an integrated EU security and defense policy.¹⁴

¹⁰ “Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe – A Global Strategy for the European Union’s Foreign and Security Policy,” *European Union Global Strategy*, June 2016, Access Date: April 18, 2023, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/eugs_review_web_0.pdf.

¹¹ Josep Borrell Fontelles, “Europe in the Interregnum: Our Geopolitical Awakening after Ukraine,” *European Union External Action*, March 24, 2022, Access Date: April 17, 2023, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/europe-interregnum-our-geopolitical-awakening-after-ukraine_en.

¹² Alberto Alemanno and Adam Mouyal, “‘The Borrell Doctrine,’ A Conversation with the HRVP,” *groupe d’etudes geopolitiques*, October 31, 2022, Access Date: April 19, 2023, <https://geopolitique.eu/en/2022/10/31/a-conversation-with-josep-borrell/>.

¹³ “A Strategic Compass for Security and Defence,” *Strategic Compass*, March 24, 2022, Access Date: April 15, 2023, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/strategic_compass_en3_web.pdf.

¹⁴ Borrell Fontelles, “Europe in the Interregnum.”

Another important political development towards a geopolitical Europe is French President Emmanuel Macron's introduction of the idea of the European Political Community (EPC). The EPC was established in 2022 following Russia's invasion of Ukraine as an intergovernmental forum for political coordination between European countries across the continent. The EPC aims to develop "political dialogue and cooperation on issues of common interest to strengthen the security, stability, and prosperity of the European continent."¹⁵ There is no doubt that a geopolitical Europe requires the EU to be more active in promoting European interests in multilateral global politics. For instance, Taylor recommends that "EU seize the geopolitical moment in the Balkans" and enable the integration of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia. According to Taylor, if the EU fails to do so, Russia may exploit ongoing disputes among these countries to destabilize Europe.¹⁶

While geopolitical Europe is above all a response to global challenges, its progress is also related to the rise of populism at home. Populism challenges both interpretations of European power for specific reasons. Therefore, both normative and geopolitical conceptions of European power must take the populist factor into account. Before exploring Europe's responses to the impacts of populism, we will first explain populist radical right ideology and the nativist, authoritarian, and sovereignist impacts of populism.

II. The Populist Radical Right and its Rise in Europe

Populism is a contested concept. There are various theoretical explanations for its nature, causes, and impacts. Among others, Rovira Kaltwasser highlights two rival yet complementary approaches.¹⁷ According to the first, populism is a political strategy in the hands of elites who aim to

¹⁵ "Meeting of the European Political Community, 1 June 2023," *European Council, Council of the European Union*, June 2023, Access Date: April 20, 2023, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/international-summit/2023/06/01/>.

¹⁶ Paul Taylor, "EU must seize the geopolitical moment in the Balkans," *Politico*, December 14, 2022, Access Date: April 21, 2023, <https://www.politico.eu/article/eu-balkans-accession-russia-china-geopolitics/>.

¹⁷ Cristobal Rovira Kaltwasser, "Populism - An Overview of the Concept and the State of the Art," in *The Oxford Handbook of Populism*, eds., Cristobal Rovira Kaltwasser et. al., (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2017), 12.

obtain or maintain political power.¹⁸ The second approach sees populism as a political ideology that has a particular conceptualization of society and government. However, unlike the classical political ideologies of liberalism and socialism, populism is thin-centered.¹⁹ That is, it lacks a comprehensive political program, so it needs to rely on other political ideologies, which leads to widely differing interpretations of populism. As a political ideology, populism is characterized by two core ideas. First, political authority springs from the general will of the people. Second, politics in representative democracies is a struggle between “pure and virtuous people” and the “corrupt elite”. Populists promise a restoration of popular sovereignty.²⁰

These two ideas underlying the sovereignist conception of populist politics are intertwined with the other two elements of populist radical right ideology: nativism and authoritarianism.²¹ The right-wing populist conception of a pure people is derived from the notion of a homogenous nation, characterized by a common native culture and history, and a determination to live together. Such a conception of national identity undoubtedly excludes ethnic, religious, and ideological minorities. It is also used to justify “welfare chauvinism,” according to which the nation’s institutions and welfare must benefit only its native population.²²

At the European level, populists are Eurosceptic, primarily due to the sovereignist aspect of their ideology. The PRRPs’ approaches to the EU can be grouped as “soft” or “hard” Euroscepticism. The former, which has “conditional” or “compromising” versions, seeks to restructure the EU in the form of a Europe of nations. In contrast, the latter’s political objectives involve “rejecting,” which can amount to leaving the EU.²³ In any case, PRRPs target EU institutions and European integration as they see the EU as

¹⁸ Kurt Weyland, “Clarifying a Contested Concept: Populism in the Study of Latin American Politics,” *Comparative Politics* 34, no 1 (2001).

¹⁹ Cas Mudde, “The Populist Zeitgeist,” *Government and Opposition* 34, no 4 (2004); Ben Stanley, “The Thin Ideology of Populism,” *Journal of Political Ideologies* 13, no 1 (2008).

²⁰ Mudde, “The Populist Zeitgeist,” 543.

²¹ Mudde, “The Populist Zeitgeist,” 543.

²² Montserrat Guibernau, “Migration and the Rise of the Radical Right – Social Malaise vs the Failure of Mainstream Politics,” *Policy Network Paper*, London (2010).

²³ Sofia Vasilopoulou, “European Integration and the Radical Right: Three Patterns of Opposition,” *Government and Opposition* 46, no. 2 (2011).

a continental extension of corrupt elite rule, which is essentially the enemy of popular sovereignty. According to populists, the EU has recently shown its alienation from European peoples during the financial and refugee crisis; supported austerity measures rather than remedying social grievance; and failed to protect European borders, causing damage to national identities and European civilization.

In this sense, populist Euroscepticism has political, economic, and cultural dimensions. Populists consider themselves protectors of national identity and the national interest against the supranational EU, and present themselves as guardians of European civilization against non-Europeans, especially against the “invasion of Islam”.

The rise of populism and the remarkable recent electoral successes of PRRPs can be explained in various ways. Demand-side explanations stress the public’s disappointments and fears from unfulfilled expectations, the poor performance of political parties, falling living standards, and increasing precarity.²⁴ Supply-side explanations focus on the electoral appeal of political party programs, leadership capacity, media, and political opportunity structure, which may help or hinder the advance of populists.²⁵

Besides these demand- and supply-side explanations, the rise of populism in Europe has significantly depended on the present conjuncture. That is, several recent crises in Europe have particularly contributed to the populists’ electoral successes.²⁶ To give three examples, governments responded to the Eurozone crisis of 2009 with austerity measures that incited a series of public protests in many European countries; the refugee crisis in 2015 led some EU countries to suspend the Schengen Agreement and resist

²⁴ Hans-Georg Betz and Carol Johnson, “Against the Current- Stemming the Tide: The Nostalgic Ideology of the Contemporary Radical Populist Right,” *Journal of Political Ideologies* 9, no 3, (2004); Kenneth Roberts, “Populism and Populist Parties,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Populism*.

²⁵ Sarah de Lange, “A New Winning Formula? The Programmatic Appeal of the Radical Right,” *Party Politics* 13, no.4 (2007); Kurt Weyland, “A Political-Strategic Approach,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Populism*.

²⁶ Benjamin Moffit, “How to Perform Crisis: A Model for Understanding the Key Role of Crisis in Contemporary Populism,” *Government and Opposition* 50 (2014); Hans Peter Kriesi and Takis Pappas, *European Populism in the Shadow of the Great Recession*, (Colchester: ECPR Press, 2015); David Art, “The AfD and the End of Containment in Germany,” *German Politics & Society* 36, no 2 (2018).

migrant quotas to share Europe’s refugee “burden”²⁷; Brexit even fueled speculation about the EU’s disintegration.²⁸ However, there are also counter examples. The public health crisis due to the COVID-19 pandemic showed that such crises do not always help populists²⁹ as the pandemic led the public to rally around the flag in favor of central governments. In this time of uncertainty, the EU was able to prepare a financial package of €750 billion for economic recovery.³⁰ Most recently, the Ukraine war has encouraged initiatives favoring a more integrated Europe to face global security and economic challenges. Thus, the empirical evidence suggests that the populist rise cannot be explained by a single general theory of crisis, although economic and political crises specifically do seem to provide a favorable environment for populist mobilization.

To sum up, although the factors contributing to the rise of populism vary, growing populism is generally a symptom of the crisis of liberal democracies. That is, the failure of Europe’s liberal democracies to satisfy popular expectations has contributed to the rise of populism. The continued populist wave has not only made PRRPs established actors in national political systems but also enabled them to increase their ideological and policy-based influences throughout Europe.

²⁷ Ian Traynor and Helena Smith, “EU Border Controls: Schengen Scheme on the Brink After Amsterdam Talks,” *The Guardian*, January 16, 2016, Access Date: March 15, 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jan/25/refugee-crisis-schengen-area-scheme-brink-amsterdam-talks>; Ian, Traynor, “EU Plans Migrant Quotas Forcing States to ‘Share’ Burden,” *Guardian*, May 10, 2015, Access Date: March 16, 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/may/10/european-commission-migrant-quota-plan-mediterranean-crisis>.

²⁸ Hans Vollaard, “One down, any to go? European disintegration after Brexit,” *LSE*, March 23, 2020, Access Date: March 20, 2023, <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/brexit/2020/03/23/one-down-many-to-go-european-disintegration-after-brexit>.

²⁹ Sevgi Çilingir, “The Covid-19 Crisis: Opportunity or Threat for Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe?,” *Anadolu Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi* 21, no 3 (2021).

³⁰ “Europe’s Moment: Repair and Prepare for the Next Generation,” *European Commission*, Access Date: March 15, 2023, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_20_940.

III. Populist Impact

Populism that reflects itself through the policies of PRRPs has created serious challenges to cooperation among European nations. The PRRPs, whether in government or opposition, have unquestionably damaged European values and EU institutions due to their authoritarian, nativist, and sovereigntist policies. Through these policies, these parties have questioned the EU's normative power, particularly by endangering the rule of law, political rights, civil liberties, and minority rights. Moreover, with the help of these three characteristics, PRRPs have promoted nation-first preferences over common EU policies, by weakening geopolitical European power. PRRPs have challenged the EU's integration policies and restrained institutional progress, particularly in high-level political issues such as foreign policy, security, defense, and migration policies.

PRRPs are no longer ineffective marginal actors at the periphery of their political system as they have transformed themselves into established political actors. This can be observed in their stable election performances and their impact on agenda-setting or policy-making across a variety of issues, such as immigration, integration, culture, identity, law and order, and liberal democracy.³¹ They also influence socio-economic policies, encouraging welfare chauvinism, and foreign policy decisions. These parties have created a so-called *Rechtstruck* (right turn) in European politics.³² By time their radical discourse was normalized through their "contagion" impact on the mainstream parties as well as the entire party political system.³³

Among these characteristics mentioned, nativism leads PRRPs to focus on ethno-cultural community and its 'pure culture' and marginalize people belonging to other religions, languages, and ethnicities. Due to nativism, PRRPs consider Europeanism and Christianity components of national identity and therefore oppose immigration, particularly Muslim immigration, to protect their national identity and European values. This leads them to follow an anti-Islamist agenda, both in cultural terms and security terms due

³¹ See Daniele Albertazzi and Duncan McDonnell, *Populists in Power*, (New York: Routledge, 2015), 3; Cas Mudde, "The Study of Populist Radical Right Parties: Towards a Fourth Wave," *C-Rex Working Paper Series*, September 2016, 9.

³² Mudde, "The Study," 9.

³³ Joost Van Spanje, "Contagious Parties and Their Impact on Other Parties' Immigration Stances in Contemporary Western Europe," *Party Politics* 16, no. 5 (2010).

to the increasing number of terror attacks.³⁴ By following their own security-oriented migration policies based on nationalist concerns, PRRPs challenge the normative values of the EU.

Among these parties, while the AfD in Germany in 2015 reacted to Chancellor Merkel's decision to pursue an open-door refugee policy due to its anti-Muslim rhetoric, in France, Marine Le Pen, then leader of the RN, in 2015 offered to impose quotas on refugees and called for an end to the Schengen visa-free zone.³⁵ In Italy, in 2018 interior minister Matteo Salvini of populist Lega introduced the Salvini Bill which included a series of measures to abolish significant forms of protection for migrants.³⁶ Similar tough anti-immigrant policies were taken during the short-lived ÖVP and far-right FPÖ coalition government in Austria and during the rule of current Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni.³⁷ In March 2023, current British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak's government proposed a draft bill that included the denial of asylum even to illegal immigrants who have come from a war zone and faced persecution. Moreover, the bill proposed to deport asylum seekers to Rwanda.³⁸

³⁴ Aristotle Kallis, "Islamophobia in Europe: The Radical Right and the Mainstream," *Insight Turkey* 17, no.4 (2015): 28; Koen Abts and Stefan Rummens, "Populism versus Democracy," *Political Studies* 55, no. 6 (2007): 414.

³⁵ "AfD leader faces legal action for saying 'camel driver' Turks should 'go back to where they belong'," *The Local*, February 15, 2018, Access Date: January 30, 2023, <https://www.thelocal.de/20180215/afd-leader-calls-turks-camel-drivers-who-should-go-back-to-where-they-belong>; Anne-Sylvaine Chassany, "France's National Front taps into rising anti-immigrant mood," *Financial Times*, September 6, 2015, Access Date: January 30, 2023, <https://www.ft.com/content/62131206-5473-11e5-8642-453585f2cfd>.

³⁶ Angela Giuffrida, "Italian Government approves Salvini Bill targeting Migrants," *Guardian*, September 24, 2018. Access Date: February 02, 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/sep/24/italian-government-approves-bill-anti-migrant-measures-matteo-salvini>.

³⁷ Alex Fraser, "How will Italian PM Meloni's anti-immigration stance evolve in 2023?" *CGTN*, December 26, 2022, Access Date: February 02, 2023, <https://newseu.cgtn.com/news/2022-12-26/How-will-Italian-PM-Meloni-s-anti-immigration-stance-evolve-in-2023--1g59e9AJHws/index.html>; Margit Ammer and Lando Kirchmair, "The Restriction of Refugee Rights during the ÖVP-FPÖ Coalition 2017-2019 in Austria," in *Migrants' Rights, Populism and Legal Resilience in Europe*, ed., Vladislava Stoyanova and Stijn Smet, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022): 284-285.

³⁸ Jennifer Rankin, "Europe's far-right praise UK's illegal migration bill," *The Guardian*, March 9, 2023, Access Date: April 03, 2023,

Likewise, following the 2015 refugee crisis in Hungary, Orban's populist radical right party Fidesz closed border crossing points from Serbia, fenced the border with Croatia and Romania, criminalized unauthorized border crossings, and ordered the rejection of all asylum requests made at the border.³⁹ In Poland, the populist radical right PiS exploited the refugee crisis for its election campaign by opposing the quota system proposed by the European Commission for the mass relocation of refugees across the EU.⁴⁰ Thus, these two Eastern European countries did not only damage the EU's normative aspect but also challenge its geopolitical orientation by pursuing their own security strategy and quota system.

The PRRPs' nativism also showed itself through discourses of xenophobia and Islamophobia. In the Netherlands, Prime Minister Mark Rutte, in an attempt to receive populist votes, stated that people who did not want to adapt Dutch values would leave their country.⁴¹ Between 2011 and 2018, France, Germany, Spain, Italy, Denmark, and the Netherlands all passed laws banning the wearing of face-covering veils in public spaces. These policies were all justified by populist politicians or parties as attempts to stop the "Islamization of Europe".⁴²

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/mar/09/europes-far-right-praise-uk-migration-bill>. In June 2023, British Court of Appeal found that the Sunak government's intention to deport asylum seekers to Rwanda was unconstitutional.

³⁹ Elzbieta M. Gozdziaik. "Using Fear of the "Other," Orban Reshapes Migration Policy in a Hungary Built on Cultural Diversity," *Migration Policy Institute*, October 10, 2019, Access Date: February 03, 2023, <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/orban-reshapes-migration-policy-hungary>.

⁴⁰ Karolina Vigura, "Poland's Islamophobia," *Carnegie Europe*, June 23, 2016, Access Date: February 02, 2023, <https://carnegieeurope.eu/strategieurope/63892>

⁴¹ Kartik Raj, "How Nativist Populism is Going Mainstream in Europe," *Human Rights Watch*, February 21, 2020, Access Date: February 02, 2023, <http://www.hrw.org/news/2020/02/21/how-nativist-populism-going-mainstream-europe>.

⁴² "Dutch senate passes law enabling partial 'burqa ban'," *Reuters*, Access Date: February 03, 2023, June 26, 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-netherlands-burqa-ban-idUSKBN1JM1I7>; Rebecca Tan, "From France to Denmark, bans on full-face Muslims veils are spreading across Europe," *Washington Post*, August 16, 2018, Access Date: February 03, 2023, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2018/08/16/france-denmark-bans-full-face-muslim-veils-are-spreading-across-europe/>.

In fact, all these nativist policies that included harsh measures against immigrants and refugees and anti-Islamist tendencies violated significant democratic values of the EU by rejecting multiculturalism and pluralism. Nativism resorts to authoritarianism by supporting majority-ethnic nationalism and by eroding liberal values and democratic institutions in the name of restoring popular sovereignty. Recent anti-immigration policies introduced by the Italian, Austrian, Danish, Swedish, Dutch, Hungarian, and Polish governments under the direct and indirect impact of PRRPs are all characteristic of authoritarian policies. These policies violate civil rights, including individual rights to protection of life, protection against illegitimate arrest, equal access to the law, and equal treatment by the law. Furthermore, the anti-Islamist policies of the French, German, Dutch, Spanish, Italian, and Danish governments regarding the prohibition of face-covering veils can be viewed as violations of political liberties.

The two Eastern European countries ruled by PRRP governments, Hungary and Poland, have not only violated civil rights and political liberties but also disrupted the separation of powers, the rule of law, and EU values.⁴³ Indeed, Orbán's authoritarianism has reached such an unprecedented level that the European Parliament and European Commission declared that Hungary openly violated European democratic values,⁴⁴ thus harming EU's geopolitical power.

Concerning the sovereignist aspect of populist impact, PRRPs reflect their Euroscepticism by stressing their nation-first stance. By becoming a full member of the EU, European countries have consented to share their sovereignty with this organization. They accepted the Copenhagen criteria, ensuring that they have democratic governance, a functioning market economy, and the ability to take on the obligations of membership, such as EU rules and standards. The EU's evolution into a system of multi-level governance in which sovereignty rights are shared between supranational,

⁴³ "Freedom in the World 2023: Hungary," *Freedom House*, Access Date: February 04, 2023, <https://freedomhouse.org/country/hungary/freedom-world/2023>; "Poland has a duty to preserve judicial independence," *Council of Europe*, July 17, 2017, Access Date: February 04, 2023, <https://www.coe.int/en/web/commissioner/-/poland-has-a-duty-to-preserve-judicial-independence>.

⁴⁴ Lili Bayer and Camille Gijs, "European Parliament brands Hungary as 'no longer a democracy'," *Politico*, September 15, 2022, Access Date: February 04, 2023, <https://www.politico.eu/article/viktor-orban-rule-of-law-european-parliament-brands-hungary-as-no-longer-a-democracy/>.

national, and subnational institutions may constrain the supremacy of national governments.⁴⁵

In this context, populists have accused the EU of violating the sovereignty of their countries, particularly during the 2009 Eurozone crisis and the 2015 refugee crisis. Considering themselves protectors of national interests against supranational organizations, populists argue that countries should take back control, particularly regarding the economy and immigration, to restore their national sovereignty. During the Eurozone crisis, they criticized the EU for resorting to austerity measures rather than alleviating social hardships. In Germany, for example, the populist right AfD criticized the bailout packages that Germany was forced to give while the RN in France used the crisis to strengthen its Eurosceptic discourse.⁴⁶ Italian populists also opposed EU austerity measures, claiming instead that they could resolve the crisis by sending immigrants back home.⁴⁷ In the UK, during the Brexit referendum campaign, the idea prevailed that “taking back control from Brussels would make the UK great again”.⁴⁸

Sovereigntist movements gained further momentum due to the 2015 refugee crisis, when the EU was accused of failing to protect European borders by permitting a refugee inflow, thereby endangering European states’ culture, values, and national identity. Most EU Member States were angry at the refugee quotas allocated to them by the EU.⁴⁹ Populist parties saw themselves as the protectors of European civilization against non-

⁴⁵ Nathalie Brack, Ramona Coman, Amendine Crespy, “Sovereignty conflicts in the European Union,” *Dans Les Cahiers du Cevipol*, No. 4 (2019): 7.

⁴⁶ Robert Grimm, “The Rise of the German Eurosceptic Party Alternative für Deutschland, Between Ordoliberal Critique and Popular Anxiety,” *International Political Science Review* 36, no. 3 (2015): 269; Gilles Ivaldi, “Contesting the EU in times of Crisis: The Front National and Politics of Euroscepticism in France,” *Politics*, 38, no. 3 (2018).

⁴⁷ James Mackenzie and Gavin Jones, “Italy delivers tough austerity measures” *Reuters*, August 13, 2011, Access Date: February 05, 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-italy-crisis-idUSTRE77B1GF20110813>.

⁴⁸ Hardeep Matharu, “The 2008 Financial Crisis paved the way for Brexit – Why don’t We Talk About it Anymore?” *By Line Times*, November, 2, 2019, Access Date: February 05, 2023, <https://bylinetimes.com/2019/11/07/the-2008-financial-crash-paved-the-way-for-brex-it-why-dont-we-talk-about-it-anymore/>.

⁴⁹ Ian Traynor and Patrick Kingsley, “EU Governments push through divisive deal to share 120,000 refugees,” *The Guardian*, 22.09.2015, Access Date: February 06, 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/sep/22/eu-governments-divisive-quotas-deal-share-120000-refugees>.

Europeans, particularly Muslims, and considered the allocation of quotas a violation of their country's sovereignty.

To regain national sovereignty, PRRPs, have adopted Eurosceptic policies. In targeting EU institutions and EU integration, PRRPs view the EU as an extension of a corrupt elite and the opponent of popular sovereignty. While some populist leaders, such as Salvini, Meloni, and Le Pen, eventually abandoned their hard Euroscepticism as well as the idea of exiting the EU, others, such as the AfD continued their Eurosceptic approach and supported the idea of leaving the EU. Concerning Brexit, all populist leaders supported Britain's exit from the EU. However, when they considered their own country's withdrawal from the EU, they were all concerned about the functioning of their economy without the EU.⁵⁰ In fact, Euroscepticism poses a substantial challenge to the EU's geopolitical power since it either advocates the exit of the Member States from the EU or reduces the EU's influence over member states. Reduced EU effect on Member States undermines the EU's ability to interfere in these nations' defense and security policies. Most crucially, these parties do not trust the EU on either low- or high-level political issues.

Concerning the geopolitical power of the EU, which focuses on common security and foreign policies, PRRPs claim to protect or defend their own homeland, their national territory, and the country. In her analysis of six populist parties' narratives on security, Oanca argues that in PRRPs in Austria, Finland, and Hungary mainly concentrate on their own citizens' security and welfare.⁵¹ Although the Russian invasion of Ukraine generated an EU-wide reaction among Member States, the nature and extent of sanctions against Russia created disagreements. For example, Hungarian leader Orban due to his geopolitical motivations changed his initial pro-Ukraine policies into a pro-Russian populist narrative.⁵²

⁵⁰ Carlo Martuscelli and Jacopo Barigazzi, "Veni, Vidi, Veto: Giorgia Meloni's March on Brussels," *Politico*, September 22, 2022, Access Date: February 06, 2023, <https://www.politico.eu/article/veni-vedi-veto-giorgia-melonis-march-on-brussels/>; Jon Henley and Jennifer Rankin, "'Frexit in all but name': what a Marine Le Pen win would mean for EU," *The Guardian*, April 15, 2022, Access Date: February 02, 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/apr/15/frexit-what-marine-le-pen-win-mean-eu>.

⁵¹ Alexandra Oanca, "'Security' and 'Crisis' in Populist Discourse – a Brief Exploratory Story—" *Relationes Internationales* 14, no: 1 (2022).

⁵² Marina Henke and Richard Mayer, "The Populist Challenge to European Defense", *Journal of European Public Policy* 28, no: 3 (2021): 389.

IV. European Responses to Populism

These different populist impacts show that populism challenges both normative and geopolitical conceptions of European power to varying degrees. While its authoritarian and nativist dimensions have so far endangered fundamental principles and major institutions of national democratic systems and the EU, populist sovereigntism has become a particular threat to European integration and the EU's ability to overcome geopolitical challenges. The EU has developed a number of responses to global challenges, including populism. EU responses, which refer to a set of strategies and policies, have had direct and indirect consequences regarding different aspects of the populist impact, both on normative and geopolitical grounds.

The authoritarian impact of the populist radical right is deeply felt, especially in Hungary and Poland. In these countries, populist governments have established illiberal orders and insistently challenged the EU's normative power, which is entrenched in a number of fundamental principles and institutions. Against these populist attacks, the EU Commission started a procedure for Poland in 2017 under Article 7 of the Treaty of Union regarding alleged violations of the rule of law and European values. This move was supported by the European Parliament (EP). The EP also started the same procedure for Hungary in 2018. Although the situation in both countries has worsened in recent years, other Member States have hesitated to take the necessary steps to determine "a clear risk of a serious breach" of the EU's common values.⁵³ Nevertheless, the Council of the EU implemented the rule of law conditionality mechanism for Hungary in 2022, following the Commission's proposal. Thus, Hungary has been deprived of its share of €6.3 billion from the EU budget due to the country's "breaches of the principles of the rule concerning public procurement, the effectiveness of prosecutorial action, and the fight against corruption".⁵⁴ These temporary measures can be lifted without loss of EU funding if Hungary fulfills their

⁵³ "Rule of Law in Hungary and Poland: Plenary Debate and Resolution," *European Parliament News*, May 2-5, 2022, Access Date: March 10, 2023, <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/agenda/briefing/2022-05-02/6/rule-of-law-in-hungary-and-poland-plenary-debate-and-resolution>.

⁵⁴ "The Rule of Law Conditionality Mechanism," *Council of the EU, Press Release*, December 12, 2022, Access Date: March 10, 2023, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2022/12/12/rule-of-law-conditionality-mechanism/>.

requirements within two years.⁵⁵ The effectiveness of the EU's response will be tested in time. The authoritarian impact of populism has been less visible in Western European countries than in the illiberal regimes of Hungary and Poland. Nevertheless, populist discourses and policies have undoubtedly undermined the EU's legitimacy in all Member States to varying degrees.

Regarding European responses to nativism, the picture is equally frustrating. Europe has witnessed the mainstreaming of populist nativism, especially regarding migration. While multiculturalism has been abandoned, EU countries have tightened their immigration policies. The EU has also externalized migration control by signing many readmission agreements with many third countries.⁵⁶ This preference has occasionally developed at the expense of human rights protection, especially for asylum seekers. The UK government's agreement with Rwanda is a striking example of the extent of attitude change in migration policies across Europe.⁵⁷ During the refugee crisis in 2015, the EU failed to develop an EU-wide solution followed by its Member States. Instead, some EU members reacted with direct nationalist reflexes. The wall erected on the Greece-Turkey border has also become a new symbol of "Fortress Europe".

The growing populist impact of nativism does not only badly influence the normative aspect of European power. It also impedes the development of a Union-wide migration policy and, at least, equal sharing of burdens caused by irregular migration to EU countries. Migration continues to be a divisive issue among the EU Member States. Similar to the picture in the case of European normative power, Poland and Hungary have been the major countries that have stood against a common immigration policy.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ "The Rule of Law Conditionality Mechanism."

⁵⁶ For detailed information about the goals, procedures, and the list of readmission agreements please see European Commission, Migration and Home Affairs, Access Date: March 22, 2023, https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies/migration-and-asylum/irregular-migration-and-return/return-and-readmission_en.

⁵⁷ Melanie Gower et al., "UK-Rwanda Migration and Economic Development Partnership," *UK Parliament House of Commons Library*, December 20, 2022, Access Date: March 22, 2023, <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-9568/>.

⁵⁸ Jacopo Barigazzi et al., "Migration mutiny: EU summit deadlocks," *Politico*, June 30, 2023, Access Date: March 23, 2023,

Against the sovereigntist aspect of the populist impact, the EU refers to the basic fact that Member States acceded to the EU of their own will and have to comply with all EU rules and regulations, including the ones that dictate co-sovereignty in specific policy areas.⁵⁹ Besides the normative requirements of EU membership, the EU has developed the concept of geopolitical European power as a strategic response to global challenges. Although such an attempt is not directly aimed at tackling the populist challenge, if achieved, it is likely to be an effective response to populists at home. Geopolitical Europe requires deepened European integration on high-level political issues. In other words, it seeks to deepen European integration through a common defense and security policy, which also necessitates comprehensive cooperation on foreign policy. Besides a number of other complicated factors, populism has turned out to be an obstacle to this strategic evolution.

Specifically, populist sovereigntism along with nativism have up until now fueled Euroscepticism at home. In their foreign policy, populists have had good relations with Russia and China. Apart from the allegations that they take financial aid from Russia, populists have seen these countries as good partners to support their nations-first perspective at the expense of attempts to develop common EU strategies to face challenges from these two countries. Therefore, they have created “geopolitical void” by inciting anti-EU sentiment.⁶⁰

The “geopolitical awakening” brought about by the Russian invasion of Ukraine has provided impetus to the idea of a geopolitical European power. Both the EU and Member States have taken assertive steps to support Ukraine and punish Russia. From economic sanctions against Russia to military support for Ukraine, these steps have reflected the EU’s increased use of hard power against an imminent danger in its neighborhood. Nevertheless, countries governed by populists like Orban have not refrained from criticizing and resisting some of these steps.⁶¹ The EU’s

<https://www.politico.eu/article/euco-council-eu-viktor-orban-charles-michel-hungary-poland-migration-mutiny-eu-summit-deadlocks/>.

⁵⁹ “Enforcement of the EU Law,” *EUR-Lex*, Access Date: March 23, 2023,

<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/EN/legal-content/glossary/enforcement-of-eu-law.html>.

⁶⁰ Sven Biscop, “The Dangerous Geopolitics of Populism, and What NATO and the EU Can Do About It,” *Egmont Institute, Security Policy Brief*, no 97, May 2018, Access Date: May 10, 2023, <http://aei.pitt.edu/94373/1/SPB97.pdf>.

⁶¹ Victor Jack, “Orban to Veto EU Sanctions Against Russian Nuclear Sector,” *Politico*, January 27, 2023, Access Date: May 10, 2023,

multidimensional reaction to the Ukraine war was not, of course, a response to populism, but it has still brought about some significant consequences in terms of populism. For instance, PRRPs' support for good relations with Putin's Russia has decreased dramatically after the Russian invasion of Ukraine. It happened to varying degrees among PRRPs in different EU countries, but most remarkably in Italy.⁶²

According to some political analysts, like Biscop, the EU has a valuable trump card against populists. Multispeed European integration can enhance geopolitical European power through deeper integration. At the same time, it can be an effective signal to the countries that insist on keeping authoritarian and Eurosceptic PRRPs in government. Such a conception of European integration may discourage these countries from opposing the formation of common European foreign and security policies, which would benefit all in the long term.⁶³ However, these intellectual speculations do not change the fact that geopolitical European power is currently a far-fetched ideal. According to Lehne, several institutional reforms are needed for a more effective foreign policy: a majority vote in the Council, an enhanced role for the Commission to coordinate and combine external economic relations with foreign policy, and an enhanced capacity for the European Council to lead the policy process.⁶⁴

The recent progress toward a geopolitical Europe cannot easily save the EU from criticisms. As Balfour argues, globalization and Europeanization have made trade, development aid, immigration, and external migration policies highly critical issues with direct influence on people's daily lives. Therefore, the EU and its foreign policy have so far been easy targets for populists. Reforms to empower EU institutions have not made the EU more effective. Instead, they have fueled populist anti-elitist reactions against the removal of decision-making to the supranational level.⁶⁵ It is therefore not

<https://www.politico.eu/article/orban-to-veto-eu-sanctions-against-russian-nuclear-sector/>.

⁶² Moira Fagan and Laura Clancy, "Among right-wing populists, favorable views of Russia and Putin are down sharply," *Pew Research Center*, September 23, 2022, Access Date: May 10, 2023, <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2022/09/23/among-european-right-wing-populists-favorable-views-of-russia-and-putin-are-down-sharply/>.

⁶³ Sven Biscop, "The Dangerous Geopolitics of Populism."

⁶⁴ Lehne, "Making EU Foreign Policy Fit For a Geopolitical Europe."

⁶⁵ Balfour, "The Resistable Rise of Populism in Europe."

easy to achieve foreign policy reforms toward further European integration, even by taking advantage of the EU's geopolitical awakening. The permissive consensus regarding European integration ended in the 1990s. Populism has risen over the democratic legitimacy problem, which has subsequently been deepened by a series of crises. Therefore, Lehne's suggested reforms remain an unlikely objective for the EU given that Eurosceptic populists are already targeting the current level of European supranationalism.

Europe's responses to crises show that the EU seeks to adapt itself to changing conditions through a shift to a geopolitical paradigm but without giving up its normative foundations. Despite significant erosion in norm promotion in its neighborhood, the EU still tries to adhere to its norms. While the war in Ukraine has stimulated a geopolitical awakening, the EU has denied Ukraine's fast-track EU accession, thereby refraining from politicizing its accession criteria.⁶⁶ The EU has also rejected showing any flexibility towards the United Kingdom during the Brexit negotiations.⁶⁷

Nevertheless, it is difficult to assert that the EU has so far responded to the populist challenge effectively. Populism is mostly fueled by a sense of democratic illegitimacy. Therefore, the EU needs to be more receptive to public demands to strengthen its democratic credibility. Here, the EU's attitude during the COVID-19 pandemic crisis may be promising as it responded with a logic of solidarity rather than conditionality, in contrast to its backing for austerity policies in the wake of the Eurozone crisis.⁶⁸ Such instances should undoubtedly be duplicated so that they eventually aid the EU's attempts to close the gap between its policies and public expectations.

⁶⁶ "MEPs Say Work on Ukraine's EU Future Must Start Now," *News European Parliament*, February 2, 2023, Access Date: May 10, 2023, <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20230130IPR70207/meps-say-work-on-ukraine-s-eu-future-must-start-now>.

⁶⁷ "Questions and Answers: EU-UK Trade and Cooperation Agreement," *European Commission*, Access Date: May 10, 2023, December 24, 2020, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/qanda_20_2532.

⁶⁸ Eduardo Ongaro, Fabrizio di Mascio and Alessandro Natalini, "How the European Union Responded to Populism and Its Implications for Public Sector Reforms," *Global Public Policy and Governance* 2 (2022).

Conclusion

In light of their growing electoral appeal and the extent of their impacts, PRRPs have proven to be a force to be taken seriously. Contrary to predictions that populism was more of a warning than a threat to the consolidated democracies of the West,⁶⁹ PRRPs have turned into troublemakers in many ways. Their populist impacts can be understood in terms of their authoritarianism, nativism, and sovereigntism.

The authoritarian impacts of populism in Europe can be seen in many ways. In the cases of the United States and Brazil, populists have come to incite electoral denialism in the event of electoral defeat. Although PRRPs in Western Europe are not as powerful as those in Eastern Europe, they have taken power in Italy and served in coalition governments in Austria. They may also significantly increase their votes in France and overcome the electoral threshold in Germany to take seats in the federal parliament. Equally important, PRRPs have been in government in Hungary and Poland for many years. Whether they will be democratically disposed to accept electoral defeat in the future remains to be tested. However, the populist radical right ideology seems to have taken root deeply in these countries, so their removal from government will likely be caused by other populist parties. In any case, populists have become a threat to the rule of law, the separation of powers, and fundamental rights and freedoms. Their attacks on international law and legal institutions endanger the legitimacy of these institutions in the eyes of the public.

Regarding the nativist aspect, the most apparent impact of PRRPs has been on migration policy, with direct and indirect implications for asylum, integration, and citizenship policies. In particular, over the last two decades, EU countries have abandoned multiculturalism as a type of integration policy and instead tightened their migration policies. The EU has signed readmission agreements with many third countries, reflecting its changing attitude in favor of the externalization of migration control. These restrictive migration policies have been developed at the expense of human rights protection, especially for asylum seekers. Populist nativist propaganda has also increased Islamophobia in many European countries. Populists have employed discourses of Islamophobia not only to target Muslim immigrants

⁶⁹ Cas Mudde and Cristobal Rovira Kaltwasser, “Populism and (Liberal) Democracy: A Framework for Analysis,” in *Populism and Democracy in Europe and the Americas: A Threat or Corrective for Democracy*, ed. Cas Mudde and Cristobal Rovira Kaltwasser, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

in Europe but also to attack incumbent mainstream political party leaders, whom they accuse of encouraging immigration at the expense of the ‘native’ culture.⁷⁰

Domestically, PRRPs promise to restore national sovereignty against the country’s corrupt elite. These ideas are also reflected on a European scale in the form of Euroscepticism. Populists seek to restructure the supranational EU as a “Europe of Nations,” which is hoped to be essentially intergovernmental. Therefore, attempts at further integration, as favored by the conception of a geopolitical Europe, run the risk of fueling support for populism. Ivaldi observes that while the RN has successfully evaded accusations of sympathy for Putin by employing a social-populist agenda in response to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, the war has also increased support for populists due to the growing socio-economic anxieties it has caused.⁷¹

The EU seeks to deal with populism as well as some other global challenges. In doing this, it follows and develops strategies and policies that take shape on normative and geopolitical grounds. The EU responses have direct and/or indirect influences on populist radical right politics. Since PRRPs constitute a challenge from the inside of the EU, the EU seeks to guard its normative aspect at the institutional level with reference to the founding Treaties and current legal procedures to implement EU law. Compared to the EU’s normative aspect, the EU’s geopolitical evolution has so far generated small and indirect influences to restrict the rise of populism.

Therefore, our research shows that populism has not only corroded normative European power but has also turned into an obstacle to the EU’s aspirations for geopolitical European power. Populist governments in Poland and Hungary have played a major role in this process. In turn, the EU’s normative and geopolitical responses to the rise of populism have had limited success up to this point.

Populists are certainly competent actors to channel public discontent, but what they offer are culturally ultranationalist, economically protectionist, and internationally realist policies to address the complex challenges that Europe faces. These challenges, from multilateralism to waves of migration,

⁷⁰ Laçin İdil Öztığ, Türkan Ayda Gürkan, and Kenan Aydın, “The Strategic Logic of Islamophobic Populism,” *Government and Opposition* 56, no.3 (2019).

⁷¹ Gilles Ivaldi, “The Impact of the Russia-Ukraine War on Radical-Wing Populism in France,” *European Center for Populism Studies* 2023, Access Date: May 10, 2023, <https://www.populismstudies.org/the-impact-of-the-russia-ukraine-war-on-radical-right-wing-populism-in-france/>

demand effective international and supranational cooperation within the European context. Therefore, populists are unlikely to be able to avoid this reality. Nevertheless, the rise of populism in contemporary European politics continues. Considering the extent and critical consequences of its impacts, populism can no longer be underestimated as a corrective force for Western liberal democracies. Liberal democratic systems are unlikely to protect themselves from the dangers of populist radical right ideology without tackling the growing socio-economic inequalities and rising uncertainties about the future that feed public discontent.

References:

- “A Strategic Compass for Security and Defence.” Strategic Compass. Access Date: April 15, 2023. https://www.eas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/strategiccompass_en3_web.pdf.
- Abts Koen and Stefan Rummens. “Populism versus Democracy,” *Political Studies* 55, no. 6 (2007): 405-424.
- “AfD leader faces legal action for saying ‘camel driver’ Turks should ‘go back to where they belong.’” *The Local*, February 15, 2018. Access Date: January 30, 2023. <https://www.thelocal.de/20180215/afd-leader-calls-turks-camel-drivers-who-should-go-back-to-where-they-belong>.
- Albertazzi, Daniele and Duncan McDonnell. *Populists in Power*. New York: Routledge, 2015.
- Alemanno Alberto and Adam Mouyal. “‘The Borrell Doctrine,’ A Conversation with the HRVP.” *groupe d’études géopolitiques*, October 31, 2022. Access Date: April 19, 2023. <https://geopolitique.eu/en/2022/10/31/a-conversation-with-josep-borrell/>.
- Ammer Margit and Lando Kirchmair. “The Restriction of Refugee Rights during the *ÖVP-FPÖ Coalition 2017-2019 in Austria*.” In *Migrants’ Rights, Populism and Legal Resilience in Europe*, editors Vladislava Stoyanova and Stijn Smet, 284-285. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022.
- Art, David. “The AfD and the End of Containment in Germany.” *German Politics & Society* 36, no 2 (2018): 6-86.
- Balfour, Rosa. “The Resistable Rise of Populism in Europe and Its Impact on European and International Cooperation.” *IEMed Mediterranean Yearbook*, 2017. Access Date: March 12, 2023. <https://www.iemed.org/publication/the-resistable-rise-of-populism-in-europe-and-its-impact-on-european-and-international-cooperation/>.

- Barigazzi, Jacopo et al., "Migration mutiny: EU summit deadlocks." *Politico*, June 06, 2023. Access Date: March 23, 2023. <https://www.politico.eu/article/eu-council-eu-viktor-orban-charles-michel-hungary-poland-migration-mutiny-eu-summit-deadlocks/>.
- Bayer Lili and Camille Gijs. "European Parliament brands Hungary as 'no longer a democracy'." *Politico*, September 15, 2022. Access Date: February 04, 2023. <https://www.politico.eu/article/viktor-orban-rule-of-law-european-parliament-brands-hungary-as-no-longer-a-democracy/>.
- Betz Hans-George and Carol Johnson, "Against the Current- Stemming the Tide: The Nostalgic Ideology of the Contemporary Radical Populist Right." *Journal of Political Ideologies* 9, no 3, (2004): 311-327.
- Biscop, Sven. "The Dangerous Geopolitics of Populism, and What NATO and the EU Can Do About It," Egmont Institute, Security Policy Brief no.97. May 2018. Access Date: May 10, 2023. <http://aei.pitt.edu/94373/1/SPB97.pdf>.
- Borrell Fontelles, Josep. "Europe in the Interregnum: Our Geopolitical Awakening after Ukraine." *European Union External Action*, March 24, 2022. Access Date: April 17, 2023. https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/europe-interregnum-our-geopolitical-awakening-after-ukraine_en.
- Brack, Nathalie, Ramona Coman, Amendine Crespy. "Sovereignty conflicts in the European Union." *Dans Les Cahiers du Cevipol* no 4 (2019): 3-30.
- Chassany, Anne-Sylvaine. "France's National Front taps into rising anti-immigrant mood." *Financial Times*, September 6, 2015. Access Date: January 30, 2023. <https://www.ft.com/content/62131206-5473-11e5-8642-453585f2cfcd>.
- Çilingir, Sevgi. "The Covid-19 Crisis: Opportunity or Threat for Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe?." *Anadolu Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi* 21, no 3 (2021): 805-826.
- de Lange, Sarah, "A New Winning Formula? The Programmatic Appeal of the Radical Right." *Party Politics* 13, no 4 (2007): 411-435.
- Diez, Thomas. "The EU in a Changing World Order: In Defence of Normative Power 2.0." *Marmara Üniversitesi Avrupa Topluluğu Enstitüsü Avrupa Araştırmaları Dergisi* 29, no 1 (2021): 1-20.
- "Dutch senate passes law enabling partial 'burqa ban'." *Reuters*, June 26, 2018. Access Date: February 03, 2023. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-netherlands-burqa-ban-idUSKBN1JM117>.
- "Enforcement of the EU Law." *EUR-Lex*. Access Date: March 23, 2023. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/EN/legal-content/glossary/enforcement-of-eu-law.html>.
- European Commission, Migration and Home Affairs. Access Date: March 22, 2023. https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies/migration-and-asylum/irregular-migration-and-return/return-and-readmission_en.

- “Europe’s Moment: Repair and Prepare for the Next Generation.” European Commission. Access Date: March 15, 2023. https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_20_940.
- Fagan, Moira and Laura Clancy. “Among right-wing populists, favorable views of Russia and Putin are down sharply.” Pew Research Center, September 23, 2022. Access Date: May 10, 2023. <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2022/09/23/among-european-right-wing-populists-favorable-views-of-russia-and-putin-are-down-sharply/>.
- “Freedom in the World 2023: Hungary.” Freedom House. Access Date: February 04, 2023. <https://freedomhouse.org/country/hungary/freedom-world/2023>.
- Fraser, Alex. “How will Italian PM Meloni’s anti-immigration stance evolve in 2023?.” CGTN, December 26, 2022. Access Date: February 02, 2023. <https://newseu.cgtn.com/news/2022-12-26/How-will-Italian-PM-Meloni-s-anti-immigration-stance-evolve-in-2023--1g59e9AJHws/index.html>.
- Giuffrida, Angela. “Italian Government approves Salvini Bill targeting Migrants.” Guardian, September 24, 2018. Access Date: February 02, 2023. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/sep/24/italian-government-approves-bill-anti-migrant-measures-matteo-salvini>
- Gozdziak, Elzbieta M. “Using Fear of the “Other,” Orban Reshapes Migration Policy in a Hungary Built on Cultural Diversity.” Migration Policy Institute, October 10, 2019. Access Date: February 03, 2023. <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/orban-reshapes-migration-policy-hungary>.
- Grimm, Robert. “The Rise of the German Eurosceptic Party Alternative für Deutschland, Between Ordoliberal Critique and Popular Anxiety.” International Political Science Review 36, no 3 (2015): 264-278.
- Gower Melanie et al. “UK-Rwanda Migration and Economic Development Partnership.” UK Parliament House of Commons Library, December 20, 2022. Access Date: March 22, 2023. <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-9568/>.
- Guibernau, Montserrat. “Migration and the Rise of the Radical Right – Social Malaise vs the Failure of Mainstream Politics.” Policy Network Paper, London (2010).
- Henke Marina and Richard Mayer. “The Populist Challenge to European Defense”. Journal of European Public Policy, 28, no: 3 (2021): 389-406.
- Henley Jon and Jennifer Rankin. “‘Frexit in all but name’: what a Marine Le Pen win would mean for EU.” The Guardian, April 15, 2022. Access Date: February 6, 2023. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/apr/15/frexit-what-marine-le-pen-win-mean-eu>.

- Ivaldi, Gilles. "Contesting the EU in times of Crisis: The Front National and Politics of Euroscepticism in France." *Politics*, 38, no. 3 (2018): 278-294.
- Ivaldi, Gilles. "The Impact of the Russia-Ukraine War on Radical-Wing Populism in France." *European Center for Populism Studies* (2023). Access Date: May 10, 2023. <https://www.populismstudies.org/the-impact-of-the-russia-ukraine-war-on-radical-right-wing-populism-in-france/>
- Jack, Victor. "Orban to Veto EU Sanctions Against Russian Nuclear Sector," *Politico*, January 27, 2023. Access Date: May 10, 2023. <https://www.politico.eu/article/orban-to-veto-eu-sanctions-against-russian-nuclear-sector>.
- Kallis, Aristotle. "Islamophobia in Europe: The Radical Right and the Mainstream." *Insight Turkey* 17, no 4 (2015): 27-37.
- Kaltwasser, Cristobal Rovira. "Populism - An Overview of the Concept and the State of the Art." In *The Oxford Handbook of Populism*, editors Cristobal Rovira Kaltwasser et al., 1-24. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017.
- Kriesi Hans Peter and Takis Pappas, *European Populism in the Shadow of the Great Recession*. Colchester: ECPR Press, 2015.
- Kundnani, Hans. "Europe's Geopolitical Confusion." *Internationale Politik Quarterly*, Jan 4, 2023. Access Date: April 15, 2023. <https://ip-quarterly.com/en/europes-geopolitical-confusion>.
- Laidi, Zaki. "The Meaning of Geopolitical Europe: A Response to Hans Kundnani," *Internationale Politik Quarterly*, Jan 16, 2023. Access Date: April 15, 2023. <https://ip-quarterly.com/en/meaning-geopolitical-europe-response-hans-kundnani>.
- Lehne, Stefan. "Making EU Foreign Policy Fit For a Geopolitical Europe." *Carnegie Europe*, April 14, 2022. Access Date: April 15, 2023. <https://carnegieeurope.eu/2022/04/14/making-eu-foreign-policy-fit-for-geopolitical-world-pub-86886>.
- Mackenzie, James and Gavin Jones. "Italy delivers tough austerity measures," *Reuters*, August 13, 2011. Access Date: February 05, 2023. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-italy-crisis-idUSTRE77B1GF20110813>.
- Manners, Ian. "Normative Power Europe: A Contradiction in Terms?." *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies* 40 (2002): 235-258.
- Martuscelli, Carlo and Jacopo Barigazzi. "Veni, Vidi, Veto: Giorgia Meloni's March on Brussels." *Politico*, September 22, 2022. Access Date: February 6, 2023. <https://www.politico.eu/article/veni-vedi-veto-giorgia-melonis-march-on-brussels/>.
- Hardeep, Matharu. "The 2008 Financial Crisis paved the way for Brexit – Why don't We Talk About it Anymore?." *By Line Times*, November, 2, 2019.

Access Date: February 05, 2023. <https://bylinetimes.com/2019/11/07/the-2008-financial-crash-paved-the-way-for-brexite-why-dont-we-talk-about-it-anymore/>.

“MEPs Say Work on Ukraine’s EU Future Must Start Now.” News European Parliament, February 2, 2023. Access Date: May 10, 2023. <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20230130IPR70207/meps-say-work-on-ukraine-s-eu-future-must-start-now>.

Moffit, Benjamin. “How to Perform Crisis: A Model for Understanding the Key Role of Crisis in Contemporary Populism.” *Government and Opposition* 50 (2014): 1-29.

“Meeting of the European Political Community, 1 June 2023.” European Council, Council of the European Union, June 2023. Access Date: April 20, 2023. <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/international-summit/2023/06/01/>.

Mudde, Cas and Cristobal Rovira Kaltwasser, “Populism and (Liberal) Democracy: A Framework for Analysis.” In *Populism and Democracy in Europe and the Americas: A Threat or Corrective for Democracy*, editors Cas Mudde and Cristobal Rovira Kaltwasser. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012: 1-26.

Mudde, Cas. “The Populist Zeitgeist.” *Government and Opposition* 34, no 4 (2004): 541-563.

Mudde, Cas. “The Study of Populist Radical Right Parties: Towards a Fourth Wave,” C-Rex Working Paper Series, September 2016.

Nouredine, Raja. “Critically Assess and Analyse the Notion that the EU is a Normative Power.” *European Union External Action*, November 24, 2016. Access Date: April 3, 2023. https://www.eeas.europa.eu/node/15687_en.

Oanca, Alexandra “‘Security’ and ‘Crisis’ in Populist Discourse –a Brief Exploratory Story-.” *Relationes Internationales* 4, no 1 (2022): 7-27.

Ongaro, Eduardo, Fabrizio di Mascio and Alessandro Natalini. “How the European Union Responded to Populism and Its Implications for Public Sector Reforms.” *Global Public Policy and Governance* 2 (2022): 89-109.

Öztiğ, Laçın İdil, Türkan Ayda Gürkan, and Kenan Aydın. “The Strategic Logic of Islamophobic Populism.” *Government and Opposition* 56, no 3 (2019): 446-464.

“Poland has a duty to preserve judicial independence.” Council of Europe, July 17, 2017. Access Date: February 04, 2023. <https://www.coe.int/en/web/commissioner/-/poland-has-a-duty-to-preserve-judicial-independence>.

Raj, Kartik. “How Nativist Populism is Going Mainstream in Europe.” *Human Rights Watch*, February 21, 2020. Access Date: February 02, 2023.

<http://www.hrw.org/news/2020/02/21/how-nativist-populism-going-mainstream-europe>.

- Rankin, Jennifer. "Europe's far-right praise UK's illegal migration bill." *The Guardian*, March 9, 2023. Access Date: April 03, 2023. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/mar/09/europes-far-right-praise-uk-migration-bill>.
- Roberts, Kenneth. "Populism and Populist Parties." In *The Oxford Handbook of Populism*, editors Cristobal Rovira Kaltwasser et al., 287-304. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017.
- Rule of Law in Hungary and Poland: Plenary Debate and Resolution." *European Parliament News*, May 2-5, 2022. Access Date: March 10, 2023. <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/agenda/briefing/2022-05-02/6/rule-of-law-in-hungary-and-poland-plenary-debate-and-resolution>.
- "Questions and Answers: EU-UK Trade and Cooperation Agreement." *European Commission*, December 24, 2020. Access Date: May 10, 2023. https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/qanda_20_2532.
- "Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe – A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy." *European Union Global Strategy*, June 2016. Access Date: April 18, 2023. https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/eugs_review_web_0.pdf.
- Stanley, Ben. "The Thin Ideology of Populism." *Journal of Political Ideologies* 13, no 1 (2008): 95-110.
- Tan, Rebecca. "From France to Denmark, bans on full-face Muslims veils are spreading across Europe." *Washington Post*, August 16, 2018, Access Date: February 03, 2023. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2018/08/16/france-denmark-bans-full-face-muslim-veils-are-spreading-across-europe/>.
- Taylor, Paul. "EU must seize the geopolitical moment in the Balkans." *Politico*, December 14, 2022. Access Date: April 21, 2023. <https://www.politico.eu/article/eu-balkans-accession-russia-china-geopolitics/>.
- "The Rule of Law Conditionality Mechanism." *Council of the EU, Press Release*, December 12, 2022. Access Date: March 10, 2023. <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2022/12/12/rule-of-law-conditionality-mechanism/>.
- Traynor Ian and Helena Smith. "EU Border Controls: Schengen Scheme on the Brink After Amsterdam Talks." *The Guardian*, January 16, 2016. Access Date: March 15, 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jan/25/refugee-crisis-schengen-area-scheme-brink-amsterdam-talks>.

- Traynor, Ian. "EU Plans Migrant Quotas Forcing States to 'Share' Burden." *The Guardian*, May 10, 2015. Access Date: March 16, 2023. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/may/10/european-commission-migrant-quota-plan-mediterranean-crisis>.
- Traynor Ian and Patrick Kingsley. "EU Governments push through divisive deal to share 120,000 refugees." *The Guardian*, September 22, 2015. Access Date: February 6, 2023. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/sep/22/eu-governments-divisive-quotas-deal-share-120000-refugees>.
- Van Spanje, Joost. "Contagious Parties and their impact on other Parties' Immigration Stances in Contemporary Western Europe." *Party Politics* 16, no 5 (2010): 563-586.
- Vasilopoulou, Sofia. "European Integration and the Radical Right: Three Patterns of Opposition." *Government and Opposition* 46, no 2 (2011): 223-244.
- Vigura, Karolina. "Poland's Islamophobia." *Carnegie Europe*, June 23, 2016. Access Date: February 02, 2023. <https://carnegieeurope.eu/strategieurope/63892>.
- Vollaard, Hans. "One down, any to go? European disintegration after Brexit." *LSE*, March 23, 2020. Access Date: March 20, 2023. <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/brexit/2020/03/23/one-down-many-to-go-european-disintegration-after-brexit>.
- Weyland, Kurt. "A Political-Strategic Approach." in *The Oxford Handbook of Populism*, editors: editors Cristobal Rovira Kaltwasser et al., 48-72. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017.
- Weyland, Kurt. "Clarifying a Contested Concept: Populism in the Study of Latin American Politics." *Comparative Politics* 34, no 1 (2001): 1-22.