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The Re-emergence of the Extreme Right in Europe

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1. Party System Change and the Emergence of Extreme Right Parties

West European party systems are experiencing a period of change in the electoral behavior and in the partisan alignments (Bartolini and Mair, 1990; Crewe and Denver, 1985; Dalton, 1988; Franklin et al., 1992; Mair, 1984, 1989a,b; Wolinetz, 1988). At the electoral level, intraparty volatility has accelerated in the 1980s and "there is little evidence that this flux is likely to abate" (Mair, 1989b: 169), and, at the partisan level, a series of indicators shows the tumultuous process of "decomposition of established party ties" (Dalton, 1988). The decline of party identification, of partisan involvement, and of party members, all indicate that the previous ties between the electorate and established parties are progressively fading away. By consequence, this process enables the emergence of new parties and/or new agencies for the aggregation of demands.

The origin of these changes is related both to societal modifications, such as the long-term change in the socio-economic structure (Bell,1973), which have liberated the citizen by traditional alignments, fidelities and ties, and to modifications in the value system toward auto-direction (as opposed to etero-direction) and self-affirmation (as opposed to group solidarity) (Inglehart, 1977; Dalton, 1988). As a result, voting is no longer the confirmation of the belonging to a specific social group but becomes an individual choice, an affirmation of a personal value system: the "issue voter" replaces the traditional "party identification voter".

Moreover, the organisational change from mass party to catch-all party has brought about the weakening of the party leaders-membership linkage (Lawson and Merkl, 1988b): the traditional (and ideal) bottom-top chain of relation has broken down and the rank-and-file is more and more far away from the decision making process. A different linkage is now surfacing. The spread of the mass media has produced a concentration of the mass public attention on party leaders in a much more decisive way than Kirchheimer's forecast. The "video-power" (Sartori, 1989), whose effects Italy has recently experienced, implies a direct appeal of the leader to the mass public via the electronic media. As the distance of the leader from common man increases because the intermediate organisations vanish, the same leader has to offer himself as a common man: the populist appeal is therefore a sort of necessary by-product of the video-power. In sum, this organisational change, still in the making, determines looser loyalties in the relationship between party and electorate: the party no longer offers voters a strong and clear cue.

The last decade has provided some elements which confirm the existence of a process of change. The outcome of the party system change is twofold in terms of partisan composition: on the left side the appearance of a new type of political party (the Greens) (Kitschelt, 1989; Poguntke, 1993; Müller-Rommel, 1993) and the resurgence of extreme right parties on the other side of the political spectrum. (Betz,1994; Ignazi, 1992, 1994a, 1994c).

This phenomenon is somewhat symbiotic as even the extreme right parties (ERPs) have profited from the rise of the post-materialist or "new politics" vogue (Betz,1994; Minkenberg, 1993; Flanagan, 1987) In other terms the value change emphasised by Inglehart with his famous thesis of the "silent revolution" (Inglehart, 1977) and reinforced by Dalton's "new politics" (Dalton, 1988), has, at first, affected the left side of the political space, but then it has stimulated a reaction on the right side.

The emergence of the new set of non-materialist values (such as freedom, participation, self-realisation) has given rise to a new materialist/post-materialist dimension which is shaping political attitudes in the West. As for Inglehart the post-materialists are massively inclined in favour of leftist parties (Inglehart, 1987: 1299-1302; 1989: 89 ss), this value change has produced new political alignments and new political movements on the left side of the political spectrum. But at the

same time, also the right-wing area has been revitalised. In fact, together with the spread of post-materialism, in the 1980s, a different cultural and political mood, partially stimulated by the same "new politics" (Minkenberg and Inglehart, 1989; Flanagan, 1987) has taken root. This change in beliefs and attitudes has been partially expressed in the neo-conservatism (and has been partially interpreted by conservative parties). But, to a large extent, it remained underground until the recent rise of ERPs. Such an underground melting pot of attitudes and sentiments includes the emergence of new priorities and issues not treated by the established parties, a disillusionment towards parties in general, a growing lack of confidence in the political system and its institutions, and a general pessimism about the future.

In a sense, it could be said that the Greens and the ERPs are, respectively, the legitimate and the unwanted children of the new politics; as the Greens come out of the silent revolution, the ERPs derive from a reaction to it, a sort of "silent counter-revolution". It is useless to stress how much the two new types of parties differ: the more synthetic measure of their difference lies in their relations to democracy as the Greens are radically democratic (there is not enough democracy) and the ERPs are basically anti-democratic (there is too much democracy).

2. Identification and Classification of ERPs

The variation in historic references, issues and policies has traditionally embarrassed the researchers who looked for a common ground of the ERPs (von Beyme, 1988). The point is that the fascist or extremist or right wing family was considered, in previous classifications, as a sort of residual category with an easily identifiable pivotal party, the Italian MSI (plus, *in secundis*, the German NPD) and a series of other, variously labelled, parties. Even one of the more accurate attempt to classify this political family has run into such pitfall: Daniel Seiler, who has elaborated an ambitious theoretical framework for the analysis of party families inspired by the categories of Marx and Rokkan, defines the extreme right parties as "deviant cases", distinct from the bourgeois parties. His extensive overview of this family – which he sub- divides into the categories of "nostalgic reaction", "fascist reaction", "common man protest", "rural pauperism" and "*incivicisme* of the guaranteed" – is significantly labelled as "*le bestiarie du conservatisme*" (Seiler 1980: 207-213).

This classification difficulty is also due to an underestimation of rigorous criteria in defining party families, in general, and the extreme right family, in particular. Even the best-documented survey of "contemporary right wing extremism" (Husbands, 1981) produced up to the end of the eighties was not based upon clearcut criteria of analysis. More recently, the extreme right has captured the attention of the scholars who have suggested some guidelines. Elbers and Fennema (1993) have defined the ERPs in terms of their refusal of democracy and their neofascist, racist and nationalist attitudes. Backes and Moreau (1993) have indicated as common trait of the ERPs the reject of the *ethos* of egalitarianism and the centrality of an ethno-biological or spiritual "community". Griffin (1993) has proposed a quite complex taxonomy including the nostalgic fascism, the mimetic fascism and the neo-fascism (which is further divided into four sub-categories: revolutionary nationalism, cripto-fascism, revisionism, conservative revolution). Betz (1993) has introduced the category of "populist extreme right" on the basis of four elements: a) radical opposition to the cultural and socio-political system, without an overt attack to the system as such; b) the refusal of individual and social equality; c) the defence of the "common man"; d) the emphasis on "common sense"; all these populist parties share racist , authoritarian, anti-women and law and order attitudes. Also Pfahl-Traughber (1993) utilises the category of populism in order to define those "modernising

right-wing parties" which appeal to resentments, prejudices and traditional values and offer simplistic and unrealistic solutions to the socio-political problems.

All these classifications, however, are based on party's ideology and/or issues. A more accurate classification could be achieved adopting more than one criterion. The alternative approach which is proposed in this analysis takes into account three distinct criteria: a) placement in the political spectrum (spatial); b) reference to fascist ideology (historic-ideological); c) attitude toward the political system (attitudinal-systemic).

Following this approach, a party belongs to the family of the extreme right if: a) it is located at the right-wing pole of the left-right spatial continuum and no one party is located more to the right; b) it reveals a fascist imprint; or c) it expresses values, issues and policies alternative to (and de-legitimising) the system.

The first criterion (the spatial one) is based on the parties' spatial location on the left-right continuum. Thanks to the usual "ten point scale" adopted in mass survey researches, we can avail of easily comparable measures of parties' self-location provided by the party identifiers. Therefore one can locate quite precisely all the parties along the left-right axis. The right-most parties must be taken into consideration.

But this is just the first step because the simple spatial location does not tell anything about the "nature" of the party. The identification of a political family needs a more substantive criterion.

Therefore, the second criterion to adopt concerns the party ideology. On this point, it could be stated that the only ideological corpus for the extreme right has been provided by fascism. The reference to fascist ideological doctrine is motivated by three considerations. First, fascism, together with the counter-revolutionary tradition (but we can disregard this tradition because of its very limited impact), is the only ideology unanimously recognised as an extreme right ideology. Second, fascist ideology is a rather complex construct with a solid cultural framework. Third, up until the 1970s, all extreme right groups and parties had referred to and were inspired by the most influential party of this tendency in Europe, the Italian MSI which is patently, by any standard, a neofascist party (Chiarini, 1991; Ignazi, 1989a, 1989b, 1994b) .

Taking for granted the centrality of fascist ideology in defining the extreme right political family, we have to stipulate some basic traits of this ideology. This is a difficult task because fascist ideology is a mare magnum where on can find from anarcho-syndicalism to nationalism and revanche, from futurism to clericalism, from a revolutionary aspiration towards a "new order" to petty-bourgeois conservatism, from industrial modernism to ruralism, from authoritarian corporatism to laissez faire (De Felice,1969,1975; Griffin, 1993; Payne, 1980; Sternhell, 1976,19872,1989). However, the strongholds of fascist ideology common to all of its various streams could be traced in: belief in the authority of the state over the individual; emphasis on natural community – hence nationalism, ethnocentrism and racism; distrust for the individual representation and parliamentary arrangements; limitations on personal and collective freedoms; exhaltation of the strength of the state; collective identification in a great national destiny (against class or ethnic or religious divisions); acceptance of hierarchical criteria for every social organisations. In extreme synthesis, the state comes prior to the individual.

The heritage of fascism in contemporary parties can be seen either in terms of references to myths symbols, slogans of the interwar fascist experience, often veiled of nostalgia, or in terms of a more explicit reference to the ideological corpus of fascism, or part of it. For example, when a party proclaims the necessity of a "new order", it recalls a pillar of fascist ideology, that is "the palingenetic myth" (Griffin, 1993).

However, *not all the parties located at the extreme right are heirs of fascism*. Adopting this criterion, only a few parties would be member of the extreme right

family: the Italian MSI and some other minor parties. The landscape of the right-wing pole would not differ so much from the one of the sixties. In fact, all the other parties spatially located at the extreme right deny any heritage from, or affiliation with, fascism. Nevertheless, in most of the cases, they are part of the extreme right political family because they deploy, better than an ideology, a set of attitudes and values opposite to the democratic system. Therefore, the third criterion for the identification of extreme right-wing parties regards the role of opposition parties in democratic regimes.

The basic question relies upon the degree and mode of opposition: when does an opposition cease to be democratic and become antidemocratic? A tentative solution to this problem could be suggested starting from two classical references: Otto Kirchheimer and Giovanni Sartori. Kirchheimer identifies a typology of opposition (Kirchheimer, 1966: 237): opposition of principle, where "goal displacement is incompatible with the constitutional requirements of a given system"; and loyal opposition, which implies just a "goal differentiation". Sartori has introduced the concept of antisystem party: such party is characterised by an activity that undermines the legitimacy of the democratic regime, and "a belief system that does not share the values of the political order within which it operates" (Sartori, 1976: 133). More recently, Gordon Smith has proposed a typology which combines "compatibility of aims and acceptability of behaviour" and has underlined the existence of a "grey zone of acceptability" according to different time and context; in other terms, what is considered "incompatible with the system in one era may be accomodated in other" (Smith, 1987: 63-64). The evolution of the socialist parties illustrate very well how parties can progressively accommodate themselves to the system's rules.

On the basis of this analytical framework, a party located at the extreme right is part of the extreme right political family if it exhibits an "opposition of principle" and it expresses an ideology which undermines the constitutional rules of the democratic regime. If we refer to fascism as the extreme right ideology, this ideology is, by any standard, alien and extraneous to liberal-democracy; but, by proceeding this way, we come back to our previous criterion, the ideological one. In order to escape from this vicious circle, any reference to a well structured ideology should be abandoned looking for, instead, the presence of antisystem political attitudes and beliefs. Many right-most (non-fascist) parties share some common features which are clearly antisystem. These characteristics include antiparlamentarism, antipluralism and antipartism. Even if such parties do not openly advocate a non-democratic institutional setting, they nevertheless undermine system legitimacy by expressing distrust for the parliamentary system, its procedures and discussions , the weakness of the state, the disruption of the traditional natural communities, "unnatural" egalitarianism and excessive freedom.

In sum, while most ERPs do not share any nostalgia for the interwar fascist experience, and may even refuse any reference to fascism, they nevertheless express antidemocratic values throughout their political discourse. Their criticism is inspired by a refusal of modernity, a hate of divisions and a search for harmony, an exaltation of natural community and a hostility towards foreigners, a faith in hierarchical structures and a distrust of democratic individual representation.

On the basis of these *criteria definitions* of the extreme right political family, we have produced a typology according to which parties more on the right of the political spectrum are categorised according to the presence or absence of a fascist heritage and the acceptance or refusal of the political system. In order to be included in the class of extreme right parties, the most right-wing parties, should either fulfil the (historic-ideological) fascist criterion, or should exhibit a delegitimazing policy, through a series of issues, values, attitudes (rather than a structured and coherent ideology), which undermines system legitimacy. If a party fits the historic-ideological criterion (and, by consequence, the systemic one), we can think of it as belonging to the old or neo-fascist type. If a party is not linked to

fascism but has an antisystem profile, we can think of it as belonging to the new or post-industrial type.

At the end of this definitional treatment we can finally sort out with a classification of ERPs (see table 1) where the parties taken into account are only those which entered the national or regional parliaments or have exhibited a lasting and somewhat relevant presence in the political scene (as for the case of the British National Party). In the category of *traditional* right-wing parties we can include the Italian MSI (even if some change is in progress) the German NPD and DVU, the Dutch CP'86, the British BNP and, for certain aspects, the Belgian Vlaams Blok; in the category of the *post-industrial* right-wing parties we have the French FN, the German Republikaner, the Dutch CD, the Belgian FN, the Austrian FPOE, the Danish Progress party and its Norwegian homologue (for an overview, see Ignazi, 1994a, 1994c) .

The first group constitutes a sort of remnants of those conflicts of the first decades of the century, activated by the industrial revolution, when social groups clashed violently one against the other, which gave birth to fascism. The parties of this type have encountered serious difficulties in maintaining their positions and in three cases , Spain, Portugal and Greece, they have disappeared.

The second group is alien to fascist imprint, and it is not a case that it developed in the eighties (see table 2), in a socio-political climate totally different from the one of the twenties and the thirties. These parties are the by-product of the conflicts of the post-industrial society where the material interests are no longer so central and bourgeoisie and working class are neither so neatly defined nor so radically confronted. The post-war economic and cultural transformations have blurred the class identification and loosened the traditional loyalties linked to precise social groups. The development of the tertiary sector, the decline of the capability of the labour relations to determine social relations, the process of atomisation and secularisation, have nurtured different cleavages and aggregations. Sectors of the traditional working class and of the not highly educated middle class face now the new middle class and the unionised working class in a conflict which has at its core, more than material interests, values. The conflict on the distribution of resources leaves the room open to that on values allocation. In this passage the post-industrial society takes form bringing together the post-materialist values which emphasise the non-material issues of self-realisation and identity. Loosening and even breaking up of the traditional societal and political ties and fidelities, diffusion of the auto-direction and of the "antinomian self" (Bell, 1980), are the outcomes of the recent social transformations. The traditional parties have tried to give an answer to such changes but, inevitably, new actors respond better than old ones to new challenges. The extreme right parties developed in the latest years have offered a more convincing answer to demands and needs arisen by post-industrialism. Some of these demands and needs concern the defence of the natural community from the foreigners and respond to the identity crisis produced by the atomisation; the claim for more law and order, the search for a "charismatic" leader, the seek for harmony and security, and the irritation for the representative mechanisms and procedures, express a desire of an authoritative guide in a society where self-achievement and individualism have disrupted the protective network of traditional social bonds. And finally, the recall of rigid moral standards is the counterpart of the post-materialist libertarianism. All that does not flow into a corporative architecture of the society, or into a "new order", but rather into a mix, often magnificent and fallacious, of direct, plebiscitarian, democracy and authoritarian rule, of private initiative and social protection (but limited to the native), of modernising inputs and traditional reminiscences.

In sum, the newly born parties are not old, disguised neo-fascist parties. Nevertheless, they undermine the system legitimacy; and being located at the

right-wing pole, they can be labelled extreme right parties of the post-materialist type, different from the traditional, neo-fascist one.

3. Crucial Factors of the Re-emergence of ERPs

As Daniel Bell underlined, some intellectuals in the 1970s, mostly disillusioned by leftist ideology, oriented themselves toward the right for the first time since World War II, creating the neo-conservative movement (Bell, 1980: 149-150). Neo-conservatism emerged, on the socio-economic side, as a reaction against the postwar consensus on Keynesian political economy, the "collectivist age", and the rapid growth and costs of the welfare system. This movement advocated, in contrast to the "overloading" burden of the state provisions, the revival of the liberal *laissez- faire* principles, the free market, individual entrepreneaurity, privatisation of the public sector, and cuts in the welfare system. The new feeling regarding socio-economic policy came together with major value changes; as a result, authority, hierarchy, patriotism, the role of the family and traditional moral values have been partly re-emphasised and partly redefined in response to post-materialist issues. The neo-conservatism is nurtured by different and even contradictory contributions: in fact, "liberals" concern with liberty, freedom and progress does not correspond with conservatives "emphasis upon the organic unity of society and the state, hierarchy and the negative consequences of economic activity" (King, 1987: 24-25). But the dominant emphasis of neo-conservatism does not rely upon freedom and individualism against the danger of a bureaucratic and collectivist society but rather upon traditional and neo-conservative values.

Moreover, contemporary conservatism does not just recall the traditional moral values of the past but also offers an "alternative and parallel view of reality" in juxtaposition to the leftist-progressive one (Girvin, 1988: 10). The main feature of neo-conservatism lies in presenting itself to the mass public as a non-materialistic answer to the agenda of the new politics: "the New Left issues (...) have helped to crowd the economic issues off the agenda and have provoked the emergence of the (...) New Right set of moral and religious issues. (...) This new set of issues includes right to life, antiwomlib, creationism, antipornography, support for traditional and moral values, strong defence, patriotism, law and order enforcement, antiminority rights, xenophobia". (Flanagan, 1987: 1308, 1312).

This cultural movement has become highly influential all over Western societies in the 1980s and it has contributed in the affirmation of "conservative-like" parties. But what counts for our analysis is that neo-conservatism have introduced or revitalised themes which have been only partially interpreted by the "conservative-like" parties. Thanks to the radicalisation of the political conflict in the early eighties, more extreme positions have gained legitimacy but "conservative-like" parties have not identified themselves with these positions while the ERPs claimed, instead, the right to represent such positions more adequately. Specifically, ERPs ask for the total dismantling of the welfare system, an aggressive nationalism, a form of social Darwinism, the restoring of moral traditionalism, an authoritarian state and xenophobic policies towards foreigners.

The distinctiveness of ERPs is based not just on the intensity of their neo-conservative approach. They are distinct because they endanger the legitimacy of the system. The adoption of a more radical version of neo-conservative values by ERPs is intended to undermine the foundation of the system by delegitimizing the parties and the party system, the parliamentary procedure, the principle of equality, and, sometimes, even the rule of law.

The ERPs has conquered such a role because their antidemocratic appeal matched with a mounting crisis of legitimacy in Western countries. Such crisis is shown both by a) the decline of confidence in institutions, parties and democracy,

and b) the inability of the traditional establishment to manage new, relevant issues such as immigration and security.

The first point, the "crisis of confidence" of Western societies (Dogan, 1988) is expressed by the growing dissatisfaction *vis-à-vis* politics in general and the democratic institutions (Harding et al. , 1988:77-81). A specific indicator of this climate is provided by the decline in political involvement *via* party and trade-union membership (Katz and Mair 1992). Even if it has been argued that this decline might be counterbalanced by the growth of non-partisan politics (Dalton, 1988; Smith, 1987) or by new parties not organised along the mass membership model (Reider, 1989; Kitschelt,1989), the signs of a widespread dissatisfaction prevail. Traditional parties are increasingly under pressure (Kaase, 1990: 64; see also Lawson and Merkl, 1988a: 5). In general, a widening gap between the citizen and the system (Kaase, 1988: 131) is taking place: as Russell Dalton summarises, "feelings of mistrust have gradually broadened to include evaluations of the political regime and other institutions in society. The lack of confidence in politics and political institutions is widespread" (Dalton,1988: 239). The weakening legitimacy of Western systems has favoured the reception of the antipolitical discourse of ERPs: parties are bad, politicians are corrupted and far from common man, democracy divides and costs.

The second point refers to the irruption in the political agenda of new themes such as immigration and security. The issue of immigration, in particular, has been transformed into a salient political theme all over Europe in the 1980s – only Switzerland and Great Britain had faced the problem in an earlier period . The inability of the established parties to provide an answer to these issues in due time, has seeded the field for the development of overt xenophobic and racist positions. The case of the French Front National is, in a way, exemplary. Numerous studies have demonstrated that the FN supporters and voters place the highest Priority on the immigration issue, closely followed by that of security (Perrineau, 1993; Mayer, 1993). The ability of Le Pen's party to "politicise" those hidden issues is generally recognised as the keystone of its success. In a way or another, the same has happened in countries such as Belgium, Norway, Denmark, the Netherlands, Germany. In the world views of many extreme right supporters, immigration is closely linked to security. Where the immigrants are concentrated it is assumed that delinquency increases. Law and order issues have been also agitated by moderate-conservative parties from time to time, independently of immigration. But no conservative party has ever put as much emphasis on these issues, nor taken as extreme positions, as the ERPs have done.

Dissatisfaction towards institutions, parties, the way in which democracy works, the traditional channels of participation and the output of the system in relation to identity and security tend inevitably to feed opposition and/or antisystem parties and, in particular, the extreme right. In fact, only ERPs indicate, while quite vaguely, a new way of channelling of the demands based on populist style. Only ERPs distrust parties as such (even if they build up strong organisations for their own) because they divide the "people" and they pervert the "general will". Only ERPs offer the electorate a right wing radical alternative to the establishment's political discourse. Only ERPs invoke a direct link with the people. Only ERPs want to "throw the rascals out" and modify the rules, kicking out politicians and hiring honest technicians. Only ERPs offer simple remedies to unemployment and tax burden. Only ERPs demand brutal law and order provisions and xenophobic policies against Third world immigrants. Only ERPs play upon the nostalgia of an harmonious and idyllic past where conflicts and anxiety about the future did not exist.

4. Conclusion

The ERPs identified following our threefold criteria of classification have been divided into two types according to the existence (or absence) of fascist imprint: the old right-wing parties (MSI, NPD, DVU, BNP, CP86) and the new right-wing parties (FN, FPOE, FNb, Rep, FRPn, FRP) with the Vlaams Blok somewhat in the middle. This second group adopts a political discourse which undermines the legitimacy of the democratic system by discrediting the parliamentary decision-making process, the party government and the representative procedure; finally, through their strong xenophobic stances, they enfeeble one of the keystones of democracy, equality of men.

The reasons of their recent re-emergence is mainly attributable to some basic changes, either at the cultural and mass opinion level, and at the societal level. At the cultural level, the neo-conservative mood has legitimised a series of themes which were previously almost banned from political debate, pushing the "conservative-like" parties to the right and consequently increasing the system polarisation; in such a centrifugal process the politics of outbidding pays (Sartori, 1976: 139 ss) and, consequently, the more extreme parties have been favoured.

At the societal level, a different but simultaneous movement was taking place during the 1980s. The decline of the party as such has been coupled with a growing dissatisfaction *vis-a-vis* the political system and a corresponding decline of confidence in its efficacy. The mounting sense of doom, in contrast to post-materialist optimism, has been transformed into new demands, mainly unforeseen by the established parties. These demands include law and order enforcement and, above all, immigration control, which seems to be the leading issue for all *post-industrial* right-wing parties. This value change, stimulated by the reaction to post-materialism and by a re-formulating of authoritarian issues, has been represented by the ERPs which where the only ones to offer a coherent antisystem and antidemocratic agenda.

Table 1: *A Classification of Extreme Right-Wing Parties*

A) Traditional extreme right parties	
Italy	MSI (Movimento Sociale Italiano – Italian Social Movement)
Germany	NPD (Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands – Germany's National Democratic Party)
	DVU (Deutsche Volksunion-List D – German People's Union)
Great Britain	BNP (British National Party
Netherlands	CP'86 (Centrumpartij '86 – Centre Party '86)
B) Post-industrial extreme right parties	
Austria	FPÖ (Freiheitliche Partei Osterreichs – Austrian Liberal Party)
Belgium	VlB (Vlaams Blok – Flemish Bloc)
	FNb (Front National – National Front)
Denmark	FRPd (Fremskridtspartiet – Progress Party)
France	FN (Front National – French National Front)
Germany	REP (Die Republikaner – The Republicans)
Netherlands	CD (Centrumdemocraten – Centre Democrats)
Norway	FRPn (Fremskrittspartiet – Progress Party)

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