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**Extreme Right in Europe:
A Comparative Study of Recent Trends**

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Abstract

The following analysis examines the nature of the contemporary extreme right in Europe. It is argued that in most academic reviews the approach of the phenomenon has been based on historical, socio-economic, political and ideologico-cultural variables. Accordingly, the extreme right is seen as a) the revival of the fascist era; b) the by-product of post-industrial changes; c) protest politics and d) a xenophobic discourse. The article adopts an eclectic approach, which favours the complementarity among the different variables and allows for some flexibility at the level of the national case studies. Based on a critical appraisal of existing academic arguments, it is suggested that most analyses have concentrated on the Western European experience and have neglected the Eastern European framework of the extreme right. The article highlights the need for a comprehensive approach on Eastern Europe and attempts to draw some comparative points. Finally, it assesses the way European mainstream political forces perceive the phenomenon and the way they act when faced with its dangerous implications. A need for a differentiated approach is suggested, which takes into account the regional and national specificities of extremism in the European setting.

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Introduction

Right wing extremism has extensively preoccupied the minds of politicians, social scientists, the media and the public, at large. It has been applied to radical political parties, fringe organisations, clandestine groups and a range of violent racist activities. While the phenomenon has been marginal in the context of mainstream democratic politics, it is endemic in most societies of the advanced world. Its significance varies across time and place, depending on the performance of radical right wing parties in national elections or the frequency of aggressive and violent actions by marginal groups and individuals.

During the 1990s, the revival of nationalism in Eastern Europe, the break-up of the Soviet Union and the continuous presence of radical right parties in Western Europe have renewed the academic and journalistic interest on the extreme right. The most well known manifestations of the 1990s radical right include the flare-up of Neo-Nazi violence in Germany, the growing strength of the National Front in France, the electoral success of Zhirinovskiy in Russia, the inclusion of *Allianza Nazionale* in Berlusconi's government, the participation of the Slovak National Party in the government in Slovakia and the electoral successes of the Freedom Party in Austria, the People's Party in Switzerland and the *Vlaams Bloc* in Belgium. Furthermore, nationalist wars, ethnic cleansing and concentration camps in the former Yugoslavia have been viewed as aggressive manifestations of current extremism and ultra-nationalism in 1990s Europe. At the beginning of the new century, the extreme right seems to be acquiring increasing momentum with the participation of the Freedom Party, in the government of Austria. This is a novel experience as it is the first time in the post-war period that an extreme right party is participating as an equal partner in a government of a European country, which has made European citizens realise that the extreme right is not to be regarded as an exclusively fringe phenomenon but as a force that can penetrate mainstream democratic politics.

The resilience and occasional rise of the radical right poses a serious challenge for social scientists and policy makers. Social scientists are called upon to examine the nature of the phenomenon, the factors conducive to the existence and resilience of the forces of extremism and the impact of far right political mobilisation within national societies and Europe, at large. Governments and policy makers for their part explore ways to marginalise these forces in order to sustain -in Western Europe- and consolidate -in Eastern Europe- democracy in the continent.

But is there a real and sufficient knowledge on the nature and the dynamics of the phenomenon? Bearing in mind the charged historical legacy of fascism in post-war

developments, to what extent does the current extreme right constitute a contemporary expression of the inter-war phenomenon? What accounts for the successful political mobilisation of extreme right parties in some countries of Europe and is there a real threat of contagion for other countries? How have those in the scholarly community and in the government circles responded to the radical right challenge? These are some of the central questions addressed in this article which seeks to offer a comprehensive and comparative assessment of the contemporary European extreme right. It is important to have a clear understanding of what this political force represents in order to deal more effectively with its implications.

Definitional Shortcomings

The paper starts with a systematic and critical appraisal of the current literature on the extreme right, by identifying the main strengths and weaknesses of the current debate. Despite the substantial amount of analyses and empirical research on the European extreme right, our understanding of the current phenomenon remains surprisingly piecemeal. The first thing that comes to mind when considering the existing literature on the extreme right is the lack of a common definition to guide inquiry and give coherence to the phenomenon. While the extreme right is easily recognisable, there is virtually an absence of definition in most of the existing scholarly studies. Some have defined the extreme right in terms of opposition to democracy, and others in terms of racist and ultra-nationalistic attitudes. Others have located the phenomenon along the left-right political continuum. Most studies in the field have concentrated on the examination of the particular parties and movements in country specific analyses.

The overall picture is even more confusing when one considers the variety of terminologies to label the phenomenon. The long list of labels includes the terms of “radical right” and “far ¹, “mimetic or nostalgic fascism”² “new populism”³, “radical right-wing populism”⁴, “new right”⁵, “new post-industrial extreme right”⁶ and “new radical right”⁷. Naturally, all these labels converge to some common attributes, characteristic of the extreme right. Each of these, however, implies a different emphasis that each scholar places in his own analysis.

¹ Luciano Cheles, Ronnie Ferguson & Michalina Vaughan (eds) *Neo-Fascism in Europe*, (New York: Longman, 1991).

² See Roger Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism*, (London: Routledge, 1993).

³ Hans-Georg Betz & Stefan Immerfall (eds) *The Politics of the Right; Neo-Populist Parties and Movements in Established Democracies*, (London: Macmillan Press, 1998).

⁴ See L. Helms “Right-Wing Populist Parties in Austria and Switzerland”, *West European Politics* 20 (2) pp. 37-52 and Hans-Georg Betz, *Radical Right Wing Populism in Western Europe*, (New York: St Martin's Press 1994).

⁵ See Michael Minkenberg, “The New Right in France and Germany” in *The Revival of Right-Wing Extremism in the Nineties* edited by Peter H. Merkl and Leonard Weinberg (London: Frank Cass, 1997).

⁶ Piero Ignazi “The Extreme Right in Europe: A Survey” in *The Revival of Right-Wing Extremism in the Nineties*, *ibid*, pp. 47-64.

⁷ Herbert Kitschelt, *The Radical Right in Western Europe; A Comparative Analysis*, (University of Michigan Press, 1997)

The complex nature of the phenomenon is accentuated by the existence of a variety of radical right parties and groups in the different national settings. These may be nationalist populist parties, nationalist regionalist or nationalist with authoritarian leanings. In a wider sense, the extreme right may also include various fringe groupuscules in the form of militant youth movements, skinheads and militia groups, -prone towards violence and direct provocations against civil society- as well as "direct leftovers from the fascist era"⁸. Such a multitude of cases makes it hard to identify which party or group is more or less representative of the extreme right political family. This leads to a difficulty in the categorisation of the extreme right cases, which is mainly due to the "organisational complexity and ideological heterogeneity"⁹ of the phenomenon. There is, however, a wider consensus among scholars that there is no ideal type in Europe although the French National Front has been considered a characteristic type, based mostly on its successful and lasting representation in the French party system.

Three initial shortcomings can be therefore identified in the study of the extreme right: a lack of a commonly accepted definition, a confusing terminology and a difficulty in the categorisation of the variety of cases that belong to the extreme right political family. One of the major premises of the following study is that although the extreme right is an identifiable pan-European political force, it is at the same time, nationally specific, by virtue of its ultra-nationalistic and xenophobic character. This characteristic does not allow much space for easy generalisations and common approaches, at the European level.

A. Approaches to the Phenomenon

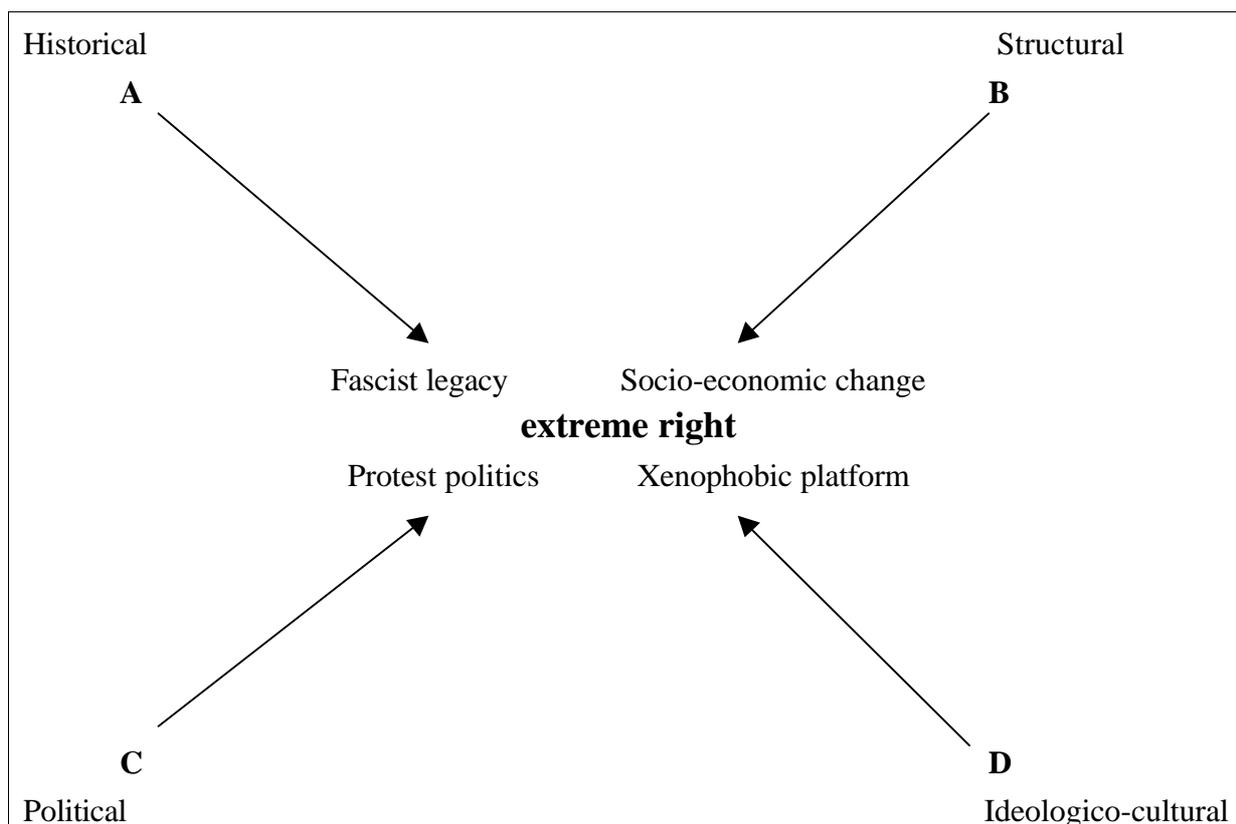
Despite the above mentioned shortcomings, it may be possible to draw some general and systematic comments on the way in which analysts and social scientists have approached the study of the extreme right. Based on a comparative assessment of the current literature, one can define four general approaches/dimensions that are related to the rise, resilience and nature of the extreme right: (1) historical, (2) structural, (3) political (4) ideologico-cultural. The historical is connected with the fascist legacy of the inter-war period. The structural refers to the socio-economic context conducive to the phenomenon. The political emphasises the role of political actors who by their actions can influence the course of events leading to the increasing or decreasing importance of extreme right forces. The ideologico-cultural traces the

⁸ These are small parties and groups composed by a mix of veterans, former middle class or lower rank members of the classic inter-war parties, and of people of the higher age groups in societies. See Stein Ugelvik Larsen, "Overcoming the Past when Shaping the Future" in *Modern Europe After Fascism 1943-1980s* edited by Stein Ugelvik Larsen, (Social Science Monographs, Boulder, New York: Columbia University, 1998), pp. 1777-1844.

⁹ Roger Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism, op.cit.*, p. 170.

historical continuity and significance of radical ideas and focuses, in the majority of cases, on the racist and xenophobic nature of the extreme right discourse. Each of these approaches/dimensions concentrates on the study of different variables, as shown in diagram No 1.

Diagram No 1
Defining Dimensions of the Contemporary European Extreme Right



Based on this initial scheme, I shall examine the validity of four different theses, which are dominant in the current literature:

- Historical: the extreme right as the revival of the fascist era;
- Structural: the extreme right as the by-product of post-industrial changes;
- Political: the extreme right as protest politics;
- Ideological: the extreme right as a xenophobic discourse.

The following analysis will favour an eclectic approach of the historical, structural, political and ideological dimensions, reflecting the complementarity among the approaches and allowing for some flexibility in each particular case. It will also point out two important shortcomings in the study of the contemporary extreme right in Europe. The first refers to a lack of a comparative pan-European perspective and an inadequate understanding of the

Eastern European conditions and circumstances that breed extreme right forces. The validity of the above mentioned four theses will be, therefore, tested in the Eastern European region in order to draw some tentative comparative remarks. The second shortcoming refers to a lack of a consistent strategic analysis regarding the way mainstream political forces perceive the phenomenon and act upon it when faced with its dangerous implications.

1. Historical Approach; the Fascist Legacy

The fascist legacy constitutes a significant variable and a perennial issue in most of the studies of the extreme right. By relating the current extreme right with fascism, scholars have tried to stress the historical continuity of that trend of political thought and behaviour, and attempted to define the political and ideological space of contemporary extremism. There are some persistent questions that seem to preoccupy all those who are involved in the study of right-wing extremism. Are current radical right-wing expressions, a new version of the movements of the 1930s? Are the notions of xenophobia, racism, ethnic chauvinism and anti-Semitism, in part, a historical rebirth of earlier and darker European philosophies? Are there any novel features that give virulent nationalism and right-wing extremism a different face? In other words, the debate of the extreme right is also a debate over fascism's return or perhaps its continuing and continuous presence in contemporary life.¹⁰

By and large, fascism, as a historical phenomenon was born in the aftermath of the First World War, in a volatile international environment of defeated empires, hurt nationalistic feelings and the rise of the communist influence. Fascism was triggered by a severe socio-economic crisis, which in the cases of industrialised economies came as a response to an organised working class movement. Its power alliance combined the fascist party leadership, traditional elites of industry, banking and the military. Its social base was quite heterogeneous. It started by attracting disenchanted individuals and groups and ended up by being a catch all party of, among others, disillusioned petty-bourgeois city dwellers, peasants and intellectuals. As a latecomer in the political scene of an already crystallised party-system,¹¹ it managed to create a distinct style of political behaviour based on an activist party organisation, the cult of leadership, terror, and fanaticism beyond the limits of legality.¹² It was a terrorist regime, fiercely anticommunist, which rejected parliamentary democracy and allowed no political opposition. Fascism employed an all-encompassing totalitarian ideology to manipulate its mass following. Through the means of party mobilisation, it involved different sectors of the

¹⁰ Many writers and historians involved in the examination of the radical right have been wondering, whether we have been witnessing, a "revival of fascism" in the 1990s. See Richard J.Golsan (ed) *Fascism's Return*, (University of Nebraska Press, 1998).

¹¹ See Juan Linz, "Some Notes towards a Comparative Study of Fascism in Sociological Historical Perspective" in *Fascism A Reader's Guide*, edited by Walter Laqueur (Wildwood House, 1988), pp. 3-121.

¹² See Noel O'Sullivan, *Fascism* (London: J.M.Dent 7 Sons, 1983).

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population in the support of a distinctly aggressive nationalist discourse, combined with emotion and action and a propensity for political violence and war.

Fascism as a political force of the inter-war period with an international appeal, emerged in different national settings. Its essence is to be found in its national variations in the particular period that the phenomenon dominated the European context. As Bideleux argues:

Every manifestation of fascism was of necessity unique, reflecting the particular conjuncture of forces and events in each country and in the Continent as a whole at the time of its emergence and of its subsequent struggle for political power and popular support. Each exploited and drew upon its own specific national roots, traditions, preoccupations, ideologies and political, social, cultural and economic context.... each unique national manifestation of fascism was just one of many possible variants or expressions of a more general and deep-seated twentieth century phenomenon, brought about by a distinctive new stage in the development of European capitalism and/or by the rise of increasingly illiberal and extreme forms of nationalism, racism, political activism and mass politics, tending towards more totalitarian forms of governance and mass mobilisation.¹³

What is extraordinary with inter-war fascism is the influence and magnetism of its ideological and mobilisational components throughout the European continent and beyond. A multitude of authoritarian regimes and movements attest to the expansion of the phenomenon during the inter-war period. Yet, despite the big number of national cases (parties, movements and regimes) it has been very difficult to identify an “ideal type” of fascism based on the existing national experiences. The Italian and German regimes, however, have been repeatedly and deservedly singled out as the most representative examples of fascism.¹⁴

Fascism has attracted massive attention from the community of scholars confirmed by the significant and growing amount of relevant publications. Apart from the particular cases of Germany and Italy, the historical and comparative study of generic fascism has instigated a broad debate among intellectuals.¹⁵ Yet, despite the numerous accounts, fascism remains, by and large, a “slippery and resistant to interpretation and even to basic definition

¹³ Bideleux and Jeffries, *A History of Eastern Europe: Crisis and Change* (Routledge, 1998), p 483.

¹⁴ Guy Hermet argues convincingly that the Italian regime could be considered the “fascist prototype” which did not manage to attain its ideological goal of the totalitarian organisation of Italian society, and the Nazi case as one which approximated most closely the ideal type of fascism, achieving a relative approximation between totalitarian Nazi ideology and practice, characterised by the imposition of new institutional mechanisms to serve the dictatorial functions of the state. See Guy Hermet, “La dynamique du Fascisme” in *Aux Frontières de la Démocratie*, (Paris: Economica, 1983), pp.125-149.

¹⁵ Among the most influential arguments, one could mention the following: Eugen Weber’s *Varieties of Fascism*, (New York: Van Nostrand, 1964); Juan Linz’s brilliant comparative study of fascism, in “Some notes towards a Comparative Study” *op.cit*; Nicos Poulantzas’ neo-marxist approach on the “exceptional capitalist state” in *Fascism and Dictatorship*, (Verso, 1974); Ian Kershaw’s extensive work on the Nazi regime in *The Nazi Dictatorship*, (London: Edward Arnold, 1985); George Mosse’s analysis on Nazi culture in *Nazi Culture: Intellectual, Cultural and Social Life in the Third Reich*, (New York: Schocken Books, 1981); Stanley Payne’s distinction between fascist and reactionary regimes in *Fascism; Comparison and Definition*, (The University of Wisconsin Press, 1980); Griffin’s concept of “palingenetic ultranationalism” in *The Nature of Fascism*, *op.cit*; Eatwell’s ideological approach in *Fascism; A History*, (London: Chatto & Windus, 1995); and the recent debate on fascism in *International Fascism; Theories, Causes and the New Consensus*, edited by Roger Griffin, (New York: Arnold, 1998)

phenomenon".¹⁶ Its endurance through time is particularly relevant to the study of the extreme right. Some scholars have endorsed the historical specificity and the essentially inter-war character of fascism, a phenomenon which started in 1922-23 with the rise of Mussolini in Italy, grew during the 1930s with the consolidation of the Nazi power in Germany and died with the defeat of the Axis power in 1945.¹⁷ Other scholars maintain that fascism although defeated during the Second World War, has managed to make its presence felt in post-war democratic societies, either as ideology or as social and political behaviour and that it should be regarded as the key reference in the examination of the political and ideological space for the extreme right.¹⁸ Roger Griffin, in his book *The Nature of Fascism* argues that as a political ideology fascism has been and is still able to spawn new movements and thus should be treated as permanent feature of modern political culture. He believes that the new radical right wing phenomenon can be usefully understood as a product of fascism's "chameleon-like palingenetic ultra-nationalist ideology"¹⁹ to a radically changed historical climate:

As an ideology fascism did not die with Mussolini and Hitler. Pockets of 'nostalgic' and 'mimetic' fascism have persisted since 1945.....Moreover, new generations of fascists have appeared in every westernised country to challenge consumerism, pluralism and hedonism either by imitating or modifying versions of inter-war models or experimenting with completely new formulations of the vision of national rebirth, some of which envisage a pan-European or even global movement of regeneration. Thus palingenetic ultra-nationalism can be assumed to be a permanent ideological structure among the many which together constitute Western socio-political structure. (p. 219)

The influence of the fascist phenomenon is also apparent in most journalistic accounts where the term "fascist" is being used as a derogatory for many 20th century authoritarian dictatorships and leaderships all over the globe. It is a recurrent habit in the press to view each wave of extremist violence or the parliamentary rise of extreme right wing parties not only as a serious threat to democracy, but as the revival of some form of fascism, as well.

It is true that contemporary extreme right in some cases seeks an inspiration from inter-war fascist symbols or slogans aiming at disillusioned individuals and disenchanted social groups who are oriented towards ultra-conservative and aggressive patriotic alternatives. But as Peter Merkl puts it "the question has to be raised whether the eager self-identification with an old and often poorly understood label –and under completely different circumstances- really

¹⁶ See Stanely G. Payne "Historical Fascism and the Radical Right" in *Journal of Contemporary History* Vol 35 (1), (London: Sage Publications, 2000), pp. 109-118.

¹⁷ H.R. Trevor Roper "The Phenomenon of Fascism" in SJ Woolf (ed) *European Fascism* (New York:Vintage Books, 1969), pp. 18-38

¹⁸ See Piero Ignazi "The Extreme Right in Europe: A Survey" in *The Revival of Right-Wing Extremism in the Nineties*, *op. Cit.*

¹⁹ Griffin's widely acclaimed definition of fascism refers to "a genus of political ideology whose mythic core in its various permutations is a palingenetic form of populist ultra-nationalism". See *The Nature of Fascism*, *op. cit.*

resurrects the old identities.”²⁰ Unquestionably, the adoption of certain ideas and the use of various symbols reminiscent of the inter-war years establish an impressionistic connection between fascism and the present extreme right. It would be unrealistic to think that fascism should be erased from Europe without leaving any negative legacies.²¹ But to overestimate the influence of fascism in the current era would lead to a totally erroneous conception of the current radical right. The persistent comparison with the fascist context obfuscates the analysis of the contemporary phenomenon, which is based on a radically different conjuncture of socio-economic, political and international factors. As the paper sets out to argue, the shifts in the international, social, economic, political and cultural climate have resulted into the emergence of a new extreme right, manifested in new movements addressing different ideological and political issues.

2. Socio-Economic Approach; Product of Post-Industrial Changes

It is widely held that people gravitate towards extreme right wing solutions in times of economic recession and/or growing inequalities. Problems of unemployment, high inflation rates, large-scale de-industrialisation and huge increases in rents have caused widespread frustration and a climate for the growth of radical right manifestations, in post-war France, Germany and Italy as well as most post-communist Eastern European countries. In fact, during the last decade we have been witnessing the rise of extreme right parties in the East German states, as well as a considerable number of extra-parliamentary violent activities. Even though country, regional and branch-specific unemployment as well as wider economic problems have unquestionably played a role in drawing some people towards the extreme right, there does not seem to appear always and everywhere a direct correlation between unemployment or other specific economic problems, on the one hand, and voting for radical right parties, on the other.²² Austria stands out as an interesting case study of a prosperous economy with low levels of unemployment and high electoral percentages of the extreme right wing Freedom party. Similarly, the Swiss People’s Party won 22.6% of the 1999 vote in the Federal Council to become the second largest party in the Lower House of Parliament. The Swiss economy was not the cause of discontent given that unemployment in that year was barely 2% and inflation just over 1%. The extent to which the radical right has fed directly off the problems of recession and unemployment in the 1990s is also debatable in the cases of Norway, or the prosperous state of Bavaria in Germany. Similarly, some regions that are suffering from the effects of post-industrialisation are not necessarily experiencing a rise in

²⁰ Peter H. Merkl “Why are they so strong now? Comparative reflections on the revival of the radical right in Europe” in *The Revival of Right-Wing Extremism in the Nineties*, *op. cit.*, p 23.

²¹ See Larsen, “Overcoming the Past when Shaping the Future”, *op. cit.* p 1837.

²² Diethelm Prowe “Fascism, neo-fascism new radical right?” in *International Fascism; Theories, Causes and the New Consensus*, *op.cit.*, pp. 305-324.

right radicalism. In Belgium, for instance, unemployment in Wallonia is consistently higher than the rest of the country and the heavy industry and mining on which the region's economy once depended are in decline. However, it is in Flanders a region, which has done relatively well that the extreme right has been flourishing.²³ Furthermore, in countries with lower levels of economic development, higher unemployment and more backward industries, like Greece, Portugal and Spain, the extreme right wing parties have been achieving minimal gains in their respective national elections.

Be that as it may, it is reasonable to expect that economic recession, unemployment and personal insecurity may create a climate of social disaffection towards governmental policies leading to the support of extremist forces. That was clearly the case with the rise of extremism during the inter-war period although the international circumstances were radically different from the present ones. So what are the current international circumstances, economic changes and new social conflicts that could explain why radical movements have been so popular in the 1990s? Contemporary radical right in Europe has been rightly perceived (by those who have managed to disentangle their analysis from fascism) in the context of advanced global capitalist economies and the modernisation/transformation process from the industrial to the post-industrial era. The exhaustion of the welfare state, deregulation, rapid technological changes, the increasing growth of international trade, a general transformation of the labour markets and more flexible employment policies have been the main features of the new transformed international context. The rapid obsolescence of skills, a continuous pressure on the individual to retrain and reskill, slow and modest gains in real wages and a minimal protection by a reduced state have been some of the most critical social effects of this dramatic transformation which has been increasingly felt in the last decade of the 20th century. These structural changes have left a new unskilled, unemployed, undereducated and unsafe underclass, potential supporter of right-wing radicalism.²⁴ The lack of skill, unemployment and low levels of education have, therefore, been used as explanatory variables for extreme right parliamentary and extra-parliamentary activity indicating that the median supporter of radical right wing tendencies in Europe tends to be a younger male with medium or low level of education, working in a blue-collar job in the private sector or a young unemployed and living in an urban environment.²⁵

Given that there is no direct causality between recession/unemployment and extremism, it is safer to claim that it is rather the fear of unemployment and social dislocation than the actual experience that motivates support for the extreme right.²⁶ The fear is linked with the

²³ Patrick Hossay "Our people first! Understanding the Resonance of the Vlaams Blok's Xenophobic Programme" in *Social Identities*, Volume 2 Number 3 (1996), pp. 343-364.

²⁴ See Hans-Georg Betz, *Radical Right Wing Populism in Western Europe*, (New York: St Martin's Press 1994).

²⁵ Peter H. Merkl "Why are they so strong now?" *op.cit.*, pp.26-27.

²⁶ Stefan Immerfall, "The Neo-populist agenda" in *The Politics of the New Right*, *op.cit.*, p.250.

increasing pattern of immigration and multiculturalism in Europe. Immigration is a growing trend for post-industrial societies because their wealth attracts an increasing number of economic or political refugees from less fortunate regions in Eastern Europe, the Balkans, the Middle East, as well as previous colonies of major European former international powers. The current context of multiculturalism exacerbates fears and perceptions of waves of immigrants that endanger domestic employment in advanced Europe although most post-industrial societies have developed segmented labour sectors that native citizens usually no longer want to enter.²⁷ Immigration and multiculturalism have therefore become time and time again the salient and controversial issues, and in conditions of economic hardships and personal unsafety for the citizens, the refugees become the easy scapegoats for unemployment, crime, diseases, urban degeneration and national decline.²⁸ This has been a persistent trend in most of the advanced European societies during the last two decades, which have witnessed the rise of extreme right parties.

Overall, the context of post-industrialism, unemployment and immigration offers a valuable macro-framework of the international socio-economic changes and their effects on the domestic political mobilisation of extreme forces within the advanced European societies. It is a necessary explanatory framework, which accounts for the existence of social dislocations and frustrations brought about by such radical changes. It can offer a satisfactory explanation why there is a propensity for the support of extreme political forces. But it cannot by itself explain whether these social anxieties are actually directed towards the extreme right and not towards other forms of mobilisation. It accounts for the resilience of extremism but cannot adequately explain why parties of the radical right are going through periods of upsurge and decline. Why is it successful in some national settings and unsuccessful or non-existent in other? Furthermore, if one accepts the socio-economic thesis unequivocally, then one should expect a further rise of extreme right parties, as the process of the post-industrial/technological change is bound to continue and intensify in the future. Having said that, the structural analysis is vital for the understanding of the phenomenon in that it helps to appreciate the general context conducive to the rise of such forces. Economic recession, unemployment (or fear of unemployment) and surges of immigration can act as catalysts that crystallise right wing extremism on the level of party competition as long as political entrepreneurs can embed xenophobic slogans in a broader discourse for which they find a receptive audience.²⁹ What is needed, therefore, at the next level is a political analysis of conditions and choices that give rise to extremist political formations and radical forms of mobilisation.

²⁷ Kitscelt, *The Radical Right in Western Europe*, *op.cit.* p 258.

²⁸ Paul Hainworth, "Introduction. The Cutting Edge: The Extreme Right in Post-War Western Europe and the USA" in *The Extreme Right in Europe and the USA*, edited by Paul Hainworth (London: Pinter Publishers, 1992), p.8.

²⁹ Kitscelt, *The Radical Right in Western Europe*, *op.cit.* p.3.

3. Political Approach; Protest Politics

The contemporary radical right is the offspring of democratic politics; it thrives through elections and democratic procedures and has grown within the politically stable environment of post- Second World War Western European advanced democracies. It is important to stress the stable democratic framework in order to understand that no matter how anti-system³⁰, authoritarian or anti-democratic those forces are, they chose to compete in the national and/or European elections. Historically, the defeat of fascism led to the marginalisation of those extreme right political forces, which were considered to be associated with the inter-war fascist context. In the first decades following the end of the Second World War, the extreme right operated at the fringe of mainstream politics with some presence in Italy or Germany, both countries with a powerful fascist and nazi recent past. These parties acted mainly as remnants of the fascist era holding direct organisational and ideological links with their predecessors. In many ways the MSI (Movimento Sociale Italiano) in Italy can be said to represent a successful case of a post-war extreme right party with parliamentary representation in the National and European Parliaments, links with other neo-fascist parties abroad and a substantial number of members.³¹ Its West German counterpart the NPD (National Democratic Party) achieved some electoral successes in many German states during the 1960s but failed to overcome the 5% barrier in national elections and during the 1970s disintegrated into smaller fractions.³²

A drastic turn in the nature and significance of extreme right wing parties took place during the 1980s and 1990s as a result of transformations of the international socio-economic environment, and shifts in values, issues and life styles.³³ Increasingly western democracies

³⁰ An anti-system party is characterised, according to Sartori, by an activity that undermines the legitimacy of democratic regimes and a belief system that does not share the values of the political order within which it operates. See Giovanni Sartori, *Parties and Party Systems*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976).

³¹ The MSI during the post war period in Italy was relegated to a state of paralegality because it refused to acknowledge the legitimacy of the new republic- it was therefore found at once inside and outside the post-war party system. It was in a way the keeper of the fascist torch mostly in a nostalgic mode, loyal to the fascism of the Republic of Salo. An array of themes remained nearly identical for forty years including advocacy of the third way in between liberal capitalism and social-communism, rejection of the party system, intransigent anticommunism, appeals for a strong executive, support for aggressive government intervention in the social sphere, opposition to the guiding role of superpowers in international politics. Its national election results were around the 5%. Its members were mostly of the southern underclass and the rural oligarchy and in the 1970s from the lower urban middle classes. See Roberto Chiarini "The 'Movimento Sociale Italiano': A Historical Profile" in *Neo-Fascism in Europe, op.cit.*, pp. 19-42.

³² The NPD openly rejected the democratic values upon which the Federal Republic was based and was basically composed by leftover parties from the Nazi era. Despite its electoral successes at the state level, the party failed to surmount the 5% hurdle in the national elections and was doomed to a subsequent decline and the creation of splinter parties. See David Childs, "The Far Right in Germany since 1945" in *Neo-Fascism in Europe, op.cit.*, pp. 66-85.

³³ Some analysts have attributed a change of attitudes and predispositions in the 1960s with the beginning of a fundamental turn in Western politics and culture. The shift of political and social values has been connected with the events of 1968 and beyond when the first challenges to the established political order from the New Left emerged. The challenge of the New Left with its agenda of egalitarianism, feminism, multi-culturalism and environmentalism changed the political spectrum of western European party systems. At the other end of the new politics, the race and immigration issue became

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came under the heavy pressure of the radical right. Extreme right political formations presented themselves as new forces and distanced themselves from the backward-looking, reactionary politics of the traditional neo-fascist right.³⁴ In that era of transformed extreme right politics, the French Front National emerged as the characteristic expression of European political extremism with an openly anti-immigration platform, sizeable electoral numbers and a non-negligible role in the French political system. Other notable cases of the transformed extreme right include the regionalist Vlaams Bloc in Belgium, the Freedom Party in Austria, the Progress Parties in Norway and Denmark or the Alleanza Nazionale and the Lega Nord in Italy. In Germany the extreme right is more fragmented and its electoral successes are more apparent in state elections.

But apart from by-products of the post industrial era, why are the parties of the contemporary extreme right electorally gaining ground in the advanced western European democracies? Most political approaches converge that the contemporary extreme right is a form of protest politics, against a climate of corruption, scandals and patronage dominant in the 1990s western European political culture. The rise and success of the radical right is seen within a context of growing public pessimism, anxiety and disaffection. As the public's confidence in the established political parties has steadily eroded, a growing number of voters have chosen either to turn their backs on politics or to use the ballot as a means of protest. The political thesis therefore sees the radical right wing parties primarily as parties of discontent, which manage to exploit voters' dissatisfaction.³⁵

Indeed, many European political elites and the parties they represent have been recently accused of association with corruption, scandals and patronage. Scrutiny on matters of party funding has proved that many politicians are involved in economic scandals. The governing elites are accused of favouritism in the allocation of jobs and contracts. A prevalent perception in most European societies is that politicians are too absorbed with their own advancement and as a result they have either lost contact with their electorates or they have been unable to adapt to the changing circumstances. In most European countries, opinion research shows that there is disillusionment with politicians and less confidence in such political institutions as the government, the civil service, the police and the judiciary.³⁶ A trend of irregularities has emerged across the 1990s Europe that are damaging the reputations of the continent's political

defining elements of the new extreme right which stands as a negation to the New Left agenda. See Michael Minkenberg, "The New Right in France and Germany" in *The Revival of Right-Wing Extremism in the Nineties*, *op.cit.*, pp. 65-90.

³⁴ In January 1995, Giabfranco Fini leader of the Movimento Sociale Italiano (MSI) officially proclaimed the party's dissolution as well as the abandonment of the ideological stances, symbols, gestures and salutes that had closely identified it with the Mussolinian past. In the MSI's place Fini announced the foundation of the Alleanza Nazionale a neoliberal right-wing movement committed to the democratic process, centrist in orientation and opposed in its constitution to anti-Semitism, xenophobia and racism. Nearly two-thirds of the party's supporters approve of the capitalist system and hold favourable views on the privatisation of state industries.

³⁵ Betz, *Radical Right Wing Populism in Western Europe*, *op.cit.*, p 41.

³⁶ "Is democracy in trouble? *The Economist*, 20 July 99.

leaderships.³⁷ One of the most indicative European cases has been the German slush fund, which involved directly the leadership of Helmut Kohl, a politician who until recently had been widely acclaimed for his European vision and the success of German unification. Similarly, Benito Craxi, the politician who played a key role in post war Italian politics was seriously implicated in scandals and died discredited in Tunisia. Francois Mitterand, Willy Claes, Felipe Gonzalez, Edith Cresson and Silvio Berlusconi in Western Europe are some of the most prominent names involved in scandal accusations. It is therefore plain that the public has become less forgiving of practices to which they might have turned a blind eye before, even when these implicate major political figures of a considerable European calibre.

The perceived climate of disaffection and corruption offers the political opportunity for extreme right parties to expand their particular strategies. Profiting from the voters' distrust and alienation, the extreme right emerges as the alternative force to fight corruption and patronage. Popular resentment for a system of patronage within the Austrian political system and society was one of the main factors that led to the growing electoral strength of the Freedom Party in the Austrian national elections since 1986. The party has reacted angrily against the bipolar coalition of the two major parties (SPO-OVP), which dominated Austrian politics since 1966, developing a system of influence and favouritism in the allocation of jobs, housing and government contracts. The success of the Lega Nord in the early 1990s was also directly associated with widespread disaffection with the established Italian political institutions. The party held as its ideological banner its distrust vis a vis the Italian political system and the Mafia corruption, in the southern and central parts of Italy. The Lega accused the Italian state for being unable to respond to the new challenges of modernisation, to control corrupt politicians and Mafia families, and chose to fight against a corrupt and underdeveloped Italian South which was increasingly dependent on state funds and employment. Similarly, disaffection has been an important feature of the French Front National's political discourse expressed in his infamous attacks against the "gang of four". Political entrepreneurs across Europe, like Haider, Bossi or Le Pen, find the opportunity to promote themselves and their parties as viable alternatives to a perceived corrupt political establishment, by using the tools of political marketing to disseminate their ideas among the electorate.³⁸

The extreme right is also benefiting from a political environment of crumbling parties and volatile electorates that has developed over the past decade. This volatile political climate of distrust and suspicion is also connected with the end of the traditionally perceived class parties, which has resulted into the weakening of traditional voter loyalties and the decline of party memberships. With the end of the cold war ideologies of capitalism vs communism and

³⁷ "Sleaze in Europe" in *The Guardian*, 18 February 2000.

³⁸ Hans-Georg Betz, "Introduction" in *The New Politics of the Right*, *op.cit.*, p.3.

the predominance of the market oriented democratic discourse, the role of ideological parties based on class criteria has diminished. Voters are more flexible in their electoral behaviour. The political context of the post-industrial society of the eighties and nineties is no longer driven by the class dynamics of the industrial revolution. This decline of cleavage politics opens up new opportunities for new parties if they are able to monopolise a new issue and thus find a niche in the new space of post-industrial politics. That brings us to our fourth variable, the ideological component of the extreme right and its ability to mobilise individuals from various or particular social strata on the basis of issues that can manipulate the worries and resentments of individuals and social groups.

4. Ideological Approach; Xenophobic and Exclusionary Discourse

One of the defining characteristics of the extreme right phenomenon is its idiosyncratic ideological character. The principal contradiction of the extreme right ideological discourse is that while there is a common core of beliefs that clearly distinguishes this from the other contemporary European political ideologies, at the same time, it is highly heterogeneous, culturally specific and unique in every national setting. In the existing literature, the radical right is either presented as the re-emergence of a fascist discourse or as a single-issue response to immigration.

Based on the previous discussion on fascism, fascist ideology should be contextualised within the specifics of the inter-war period, in order to appreciate the all-embracing and totalitarian character of a doctrine which claimed to provide a complete and universal theory of man and society against the alternative ideologies of liberalism and communism and to derive therefrom a programme of political action.³⁹ Having been generated within a radically different socio-economic and political climate, the ideology of the current extreme right lacks the all-embracing character and rigour of fascist ideology. While the fascist experience has exerted some marginal influence on the post-war extreme right, the current extreme right ideology has relinquished the bulk of the traditional fascist legacy in exchange for a volatile, issues-oriented, highly opportunistic and populist discourse.

All European extreme right-wing parties share the common ideological notions of ultra-nationalism, xenophobia, hatred towards immigrants and virulent anti-communism. But having been bred in conditions of democracy, the extreme right has accepted the rules of the liberal system. It is in the rejection of the cultural pluralism of the liberal political system, the reaction to the system's tolerance towards national minorities and the adoption of an exclusionary perception of citizenship, where lies the ideological essence of right wing extremism. This is

³⁹ For an excellent study on the ideology of fascism see Zeev Sternhell "Fascist Ideology" in Walter Laqueur *op.cit.*, pp. 315-376.

translated in most cases into open racism directed against foreigners and immigrants, and in some cases homosexuals, women or religious groups. There is, therefore, a hostility towards the “other and the different” which in cases of subversive, extra-parliamentary groups leads into actions of hate, destruction and crime.

The deepest hostility is reserved for immigrants and refugees who are considered responsible for unemployment and crime in societies where they now live. They are perceived to threaten family values and the national education in schools, and to be the cause of economic insecurity. The emergence of racism as a phenomenon of the 20th century has been attributed to modernisation, social and political change. However, there is a clear distinction between genetically-based racist arguments, professed at earlier times and the kind of the contemporary cultural neo-racism, which does not call for a racially pure society but for a return of the masses of non-European foreigners to their country of origin.⁴⁰

Having said that, the extreme right should not be perceived as a single-issue ideological phenomenon. In fact no party or movement can thrive solely on racist beliefs and if it chooses to concentrate on such themes, it is either doomed to remain at the fringe of mainstream politics and/or adopt a more aggressive and anti-system form of mobilisation. It is misleading to focus exclusively on racism, xenophobia and ultra-nationalism, especially as such views have been long pervasive in European culture.⁴¹ It is however, important not to lose sight of the principles of exclusion and intolerance which constitute the essence of a common ideological core of the European extreme right, and a more aggressive verbalism that is evident in most parties, groups and movements of that political family.

Further to a fanatical exclusionary discourse, contemporary right-wing extremism is an ideological force which is addressing wider political and economic issues, as well as the present-day concerns of many citizens.⁴² In political matters, it professes hostility and aversion towards the political class. In economic matters, the majority of western European radical right parties support free market economics and the capitalist system. However, economic nationalism may be espoused, which is directed against international bankers, currency traders, transnational corporations or the Brussels bureaucracy. European integration is a less clear issue and other parties may denounce EU membership altogether, other oppose deeper integration and other object to the eastern enlargement of the EU. In terms of every day citizens' issues, extreme right parties have espoused positions on the ecology, transport, housing, lower taxes, drugs and the death penalty. In terms of cultural values, the extreme

⁴⁰ Jim Mac Laughlin, “Racism, ethnicity and multiculturalism in contemporary Europe: A review essay” in *Political Geography*, Vol 17 No 8, (1998), pp 1013-1024.

⁴¹ Roger Eatwell, “The Drive towards Synthesis” in *International Fascism, op.cit.* p 193.

⁴² Leonard Weinberg, “Conclusions” in *The Revival of Right-Wing Extremism in the Nineties, op.cit.* p.279.

right usually refers to a moral kind of traditionalism, the preservation of the family nucleus, the inferior role of women, and the negative stance towards abortion or homosexuality. Not all the parties of the extreme right, however, adopt similar ultra-traditional values. The Freedom Party in Austria, for instance, favours a liberal position on women and supports the right for abortion.⁴³ The Vlaams Bloc, on the other hand, supports a more conservative and traditionalist worldview on law and order, maintaining the adoption of anti-abortion and anti-homosexual measures, while it has even attacked the Austrian Freedom Party's liberalism. All in all, the belief system of right-wing extremism can be perceived as a catchall ideological discourse, which lends themes from a variety of issues, in order to address as wider an audience as possible, bearing different national expressions. The more committed these parties appear to the democratic process, the safer they become in the eyes of the electorates.

In sum, based on the complementary and comparative approach of the above mentioned four theses, the contemporary extreme right should be studied in the light of the following defining dimensions:

- (1) Historically, its connection with fascism is mostly impressionistic. Fascism is a specific phenomenon of regimes and movements comprising ideologies, personalities, policies, structures and a style all peculiar to it, all of which operated and interacted during the particular context of the inter-war period. On the contrary, the contemporary extreme right is the outcome of a new environment, in the form of new parties and movements with updated ideas.
- (2) Socio-economically, recession, unemployment and personal insecurity within the context of multi-cultural societies can act as catalysts for social distress directed towards extremism. But there is no straightforward causal relationship between recession, unemployment and multiculturalism, on the one hand, and support for extreme right forces, on the other.
- (3) Politically, extreme forces are reinforced within a context of distrust against the political class but they are also developing within the context of democratic party-politics by whose rules they are forced to abide in order to escape their peripheral existence.
- (4) Ideologically, as a European core belief system, the extreme right is xenophobic and exclusionary. At the same time it is heterogeneous, changeable and nationally specific embracing a catchall ideological discourse.

⁴³ See *Programme of the Austrian Freedom Party* in website address <http://www.fpoe.at/english/Program.htm>.

B. The Need for a Comprehensive Analysis on Eastern Europe

The study of the European extreme right is based almost exclusively on the Western European experience. The continuity of extreme right forces in post-war Western Europe has enabled scholars to draw some systematic analyses on the rise, persistence and nature of the forces of extremism in the advanced capitalist democracies. The fall of communism, apart from all the other well-known radical changes, has also unleashed extremist, exclusionary and intolerant ultra-nationalistic forces in the countries of Eastern Europe. Due to the short time span of post-communist democracy, the context of extremism in Eastern Europe is a topic which needs more systematic and comparative examination. In the study of Eastern European politics, the questions of why extremist nationalist forces exist in Eastern Europe are effectively downplayed. Most analyses have concentrated on Balkan extremism, which is, after all, seen as an inherent feature of the region's political culture. Furthermore, there is a tendency to consider those who hold ultra-nationalistic attitudes "as backward in their thinking as well as dangerous, ill-intentioned or blind concerning the practical consequences of their thinking".⁴⁴ While this is to a certain extent true, the wider circumstances that breed extremism in Eastern Europe as well as their implications are not sufficiently accounted for either by scholars or by policy makers. Bearing this in mind, I will proceed by asking the same questions for Eastern Europe -already asked for Western Europe- in order to assess the conditions for extremism in that part of Europe, as well. Are current extreme forces, a reappearance of the inter-war fascist period in Eastern Europe? How does the structural socio-economic international context affect domestic changes in Eastern European societies? Is there a similar political climate of distrust and suspicion against the political class? What is the nature of the Eastern European extremist ideological discourse? I will be, therefore, attempting to apply the previous eclectic analysis in the Eastern European region, in order to suggest some comparative notions between the two regions.

1. The Historical Dimension; A Double Authoritarian Legacy

It has been repeatedly argued that there is a direct connection between current ultra-nationalistic parties in Eastern Europe and the inter-war fascist era. This is seen as the result of communist suppression of all nationalistic tendencies, that in the post-communist democratic context found a political and ideological space to express themselves openly most of them seeking inspiration from the inter-war era. It is also well documented that all Eastern European countries developed strong fascist movements and regimes during the inter-war period, as circumstances in the region provided a fertile ground for the emergence of such forces. Following the end of the First World War, the disintegration of the Austro-Hungarian

⁴⁴ Claus Offe, *Varieties of Transition; The East European and East German Experience*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996).

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Empire, the subsequent unclear nature of borders, the existence of minorities scattered around various newly formed states and the creation of irredentist aspirations, the wider international socio-economic crisis and the predominant influence of the German factor in Eastern Europe, led to the appearance and legitimisation of ultra-nationalistic and fascist extreme forces in the region. During the 1930s almost all the countries in Eastern Europe sought authoritarian and quasi-fascist solutions to deal with their social, economic, political and international pressures and tensions created by the unstable climate at the time.⁴⁵ Regimes and movements, one after the other, started to emulate ideas, symbols, policies and mobilisational aspects from the dominant and influential Italian and German regimes. Corneliu Zelea Codreanu's Iron Guard and the regime of Antonescu in Romania, Ferenc Szalasi's Arrow Cross and the Horthy government in Hungary, Josef Tito the leader of the Slovak Nazi puppet regime during the WWII, Pisudski's dictatorship in Poland, the Ustasa party in Croatia have all been associated in one way or another with the dominant fascist experience.

In Eastern -as in Western- Europe, an overemphasis on the legacy of fascism can obfuscate the importance of the current socio-economic, political and ideological context, which is radically different from the inter-war Eastern European context. Undoubtedly, the legacy of fascism on the current extreme right is more pronounced in Eastern Europe, as nationalistic forces had been completely suppressed under the period of communist rule and re-emerged in the post-communist democratic context. Also, the appearance of leaders and parties, recultivating an inter-war political style and ideology, reinforces the impression that there is a direct correlation between the extreme nationalism of the present and that of inter-war period.

However, what remains relatively unexplored is the nationalistic and authoritarian legacy of communism, as a point of rupture or continuation with the extreme and the other nationalistic forces of the inter-war period. Communism did initially suppress and contain the nationalistic and fascist tendencies, as a result of its military victory over fascism, its fundamental ideological opposition with the fascist discourse and the officially held belief of internationalism over nationalism. However, in practice many communist elites favoured a model of national communism strongly influenced by ethnic stereotypes and nationalist demagoguery, as a way to secure legitimacy and escape the totality of Soviet domination. There has been a blend between nationalist and communist forces in many countries and in various ways: members of the Hungarian Arrow Cross became militant communists, Ceausescu sought political legitimacy and power through the adoption of a Romanian ultra-nationalism, while national communism became eventually a norm in Tito's Yugoslavia. As George Schopflin argues "after the end of monolithism, existing national majorities would be given

⁴⁵ See Vago Bela, "Fascism in Eastern Europe" in Walter Laqueur, ed, *Fascism; A Reader's Guide*, *op.cit.*, pp 229-253. Also Eugene Weber, *Varieties of Fascism*, (1982) and Anthony Polonsky, *The Little Dictators; The History of Eastern Europe since 1918*, (London: Routledge, 1975).

something of a framework within which they could find some satisfaction for their aspirations.....This process was intensified as the communist regimes began to exhaust their enfeebled legitimacy and they turned more and more towards trying to rely on nationalism".⁴⁶ Moreover, national and sub-national differences between the countries of Eastern Europe remained visible in terms of levels of prosperity adopted economic policies and degrees of allowed opposition. Nationalism was, therefore, officially muted and/or freezed by the communist regimes but never obliterated.

In that way, there is a double legacy of fascist and communist authoritarianism /totalitarianism, which greatly influences the nature of extremism in the societies of Eastern Europe, the endurance of certain mentalities and perceptions. However, most importantly, the rise of right extremism in the 1990s is related to the end of the Cold War and the appearance of a radically different international socio-economic, political and ideological conjuncture i.e. economic globalisation the establishment of a democratic/parliamentary system and the predominance of western ideas and values.

2. The Socio-economic Dimension; Imported Capitalism

Following the abrupt end of the communist dictatorships, the countries of Eastern Europe were required to adopt a western model of liberal capitalism, which is foreign to their recent economic philosophy and tradition. This type of radical economic reform has been conditioned by global changes in markets and competition, new international divisions of labour and technology shifts in production. Interpreting socio-economic transition in Eastern Europe is a question of locating the region within the broader framework of globalisation and the context of European integration and the effects these changes bear upon their societies. All the countries of Eastern Europe have been asked by the European Union and the international financial institutions to introduce and adopt rapid reforms aiming at macroeconomic stabilisation, market liberalisation, privatisation, developments of market support institutions, currency convertibility and trade liberalisation.⁴⁷

These types of reform require the introduction of radically different economic rules of the game, which go against a long held statist overprotective tradition based upon centralised planning in which production, distribution and exchange were under state ownership and control. This radical transformation brought significant losses not only to previously dominant political and economic interests but also to other social groups of the populations. More

⁴⁶ George Schopflin, *Nations, Identity, Power. The New Politics of Europe*. (London: Hurst & Co, 2000), p. 165.

⁴⁷ Othon Anastasakis, *The European Union's Enlargement to the East; A Challenge for the Future*, Working Paper Series No 2, Institute of International Relations, (Athens 1999).

important, these countries are forced to adopt an advanced type of liberal capitalism without ever having tried any earlier versions of that model.

Some analysts have gone as far as to suggest that the new international economic environment has only benefitted the advanced countries of the West and has been working at the expense of all the developing and under-developed countries. Eastern Europe is clearly included in the category of countries that have been suffering the costs of the new international economic order. It is even being argued that globalisation processes marginalise these countries. The Balkan region is a case in point where countries are in a chronic state of political crisis, institutional weakness, social and nationalist upheaval. Such processes have given rise to radical nationalism and the so-called ethnic cleansing generating frequent analogies with totalitarian nazi Germany and the Holocaust experience.⁴⁸

Despite a general Eastern European trend towards uncertainty as a result of the current post-communist transition, success varies from country to country in the way they embrace the neo-liberal model, with the countries of Central Europe showing better signs of adjustment than the cases of Southeastern Europe. However, even the most advanced economically cases, like Poland or the Czech Republic, have to endure the shock effects of such a radical process, as it is clear that the path towards liberal capitalism is not a unilinear trajectory but entails ups and downs. The transition to the market economy may therefore imply growing unemployment, widening social and economic inequalities, inflationary pressures and a high degree of personal risk and insecurity. Such effects can be a cause of discontent and frustration for many individuals and social groups. In this transitional context, nationalistic choices that profess an introvert, anti-market and xenophobic philosophy can be legitimised as viable alternatives in periods of economic problems and downturns.

3. The Political Dimension; Reaction to Democratic Politics

The countries of Eastern Europe are either in the process of consolidation (Central Europe) or transition/reconstruction (Southeastern Europe) of their democratic systems, which means that in all the countries the process of democratisation can be reversible.⁴⁹ As electoral systems and party structures have been adopted from the very early stages of transition, electoral coalitions and intra-elite choices and strategies have constituted the essence of political processes in the countries of Eastern Europe. One of the main elements of the Eastern European party system

⁴⁸ See "The Spectre of Balkanism: Globalisation, Fragmentation and the Enigma of Reconstruction in Post-Communist Society" in *Scramble for the Balkans: Nationalism, Globalism and the Political Economy of Reconstruction* edited by Carl-Ulrik Schierup, (London: Macmillan, 1999), pp 1-31.

⁴⁹ For a better understanding of the concepts of transition and consolidation see *The Politics of Democratic Transition* edited by Gunther, Diamandouros & Puhle, (London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), *Stabilising Fragile Democracies* edited by Pridham & Lewis, (London: Routledge, 1996) and Juan Linz & Alfred Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation*, (Baltimore & London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996).

is the high level of party fractionalisation.⁵⁰ This is the outcome of the simultaneous post-communist transition at the economic, political and cultural levels, and the variety of economic, national, ethnic, cultural and political dimensions that have been addressed. Questions of national identity, cultural expression, economic practice and political reform are all part of the current transition/consolidation process. The uncertainty of the socio-economic interests, the fragmentation and weak institutionalisation of the party system and the variety of issues to be solved produce new opportunities for aspiring political actors.⁵¹

As in Western Europe, a similar distrust towards politicians and allegations for corruption scandals has been observed in countries like Poland, Slovakia, Hungary and Romania. In fact corruption is apparent (with varying degrees) in all the countries of Eastern Europe with significant political and economic repercussions. At the economic level, it is associated with privatisation and liberalisation processes and the control of the main assets in the hands of the few, "the political friends". Financial corruption has become particularly prevalent in the post communist systems, and includes organised fraud, illegal cross-border trafficking, bribery of public officials or money laundering. In the countries of Southeastern Europe, particularly, the informal sector has acquired a predominant position in the overall political economy of the region. At the political level, it is associated with corrupt political elites and corrupt administrative systems. Political power is exercised outside recognised political institutions and the rule of law, in a context of clientelism and favouritism. In Eastern Europe, with non-consolidated democratic procedures corruption breeds disillusionment which may be directed against democratic regimes. Mistrust for politics can therefore go beyond the normal scepticism towards the political class in Western democracies.

One trend in the politics of the region has been the emergence of parties and movements espousing ultra-nationalist positions, authoritarian and populist tendencies. The most representative cases have included the Serbian Radical Party under Seselj, the Republicans of Miroslav in the Czech Republic, the Confederation for an Independent Poland, the Romanian National Unity Party (PUNR), the Slovak National Party and the Justice and Life Party of Istvan Csurka. These parties have been able, to a greater or lesser degree, to influence the political agendas and orientations of mainstream parties and/or governments towards more extreme and ultra-nationalistic positions. The fragmented character of the Eastern European party system is also reflected in the composition of the extreme right political family comprising a large number of parties, groups and movements. In Poland there are extreme right parties of a traditionalist-clerical character (Christian National Union), of a populist

⁵⁰ Robert Moser, "Electoral systems and the number of parties in Post communist states" in *World Politics* 51.3 (1999) 359-384.

⁵¹ Jack Bielasiak, "Substance and Process in the Development of Party Systems in East Central Europe" in *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, Vol. 30, No 1 (1997), pp.23-44.

character (KPN, Patria X) or of an openly racist orientation (Polish National Commonwealth-Polish National Party and Polish National Front sharing links with extremist extra-parliamentary groups).⁵² In Slovakia, a large number of extreme right organisations and movements comprises groups created after the Velvet Revolution to defend the legacy of Josef Tito and his wartime Slovak state, skinhead movements, and the more influential Slovak National Party which has participated as a coalition partner in the governments of Prime Minister Meciar.⁵³ In Romania where the extreme right has had a significant presence in relation to the other Eastern European countries, there are extreme parties of an Orthodox Christian orientation with direct references to the fascist era (National Union for Christian Revival)⁵⁴ or of a radical nationalist orientation, (Romania National Unity and the Greater Romania Party both linked to the former Securitate).⁵⁵

Anti-democratic nationalistic and extreme forces are by no means the dominant forces in the East. Yet there is a potential influence of extremisms of Right and Left, who united in their opposition to democratisation and market economic reform, they may occasionally tither the delicate balance of democratic transition and consolidation. Their ideological influence may be more influential converging in some respects with beliefs, attitudes and mentalities held by larger sections of the populations and the mainstream parties in those countries.

4. The Ideological Dimension; the Ethnic Nature of Xenophobia

The foremost ideological characteristic of the extreme right in Eastern Europe is its chauvinistic ultra-nationalistic orientation. While Eastern European radical right nationalism is equally xenophobic and verbally aggressive as its Western European counterpart, it can be also ethnically intolerant, irredentist, anti-Semite and fearful of external/foreign domination. Eastern European extreme right professes the ethnic intolerance towards the other ethnic minorities. Sabrina Ramet supports that it is "intolerance", which distinguishes the radical right from the moderate right, that is "the refusal to allow that alternative ideas have a right to exist".⁵⁶ However, while ethnic intolerance is a necessary defining characteristic of the Eastern European extreme right, it is not the sole the property of the extreme right in Eastern Europe and can be shared by other political groups which do not belong to the extreme right family.

⁵² The radical right is marginalised in Poland with no great success in electoral politics, despite the substantial number of extreme right parties and movements, lacking a persuasive enemy, a coherent economic program or the organisational infrastructure. See David Ost "The Radical Right in Poland" in *The Radical Right in Central and Eastern Europe since 1989*, edited by Sabrina P. Ramet, (The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999), pp. 85-107.

⁵³ See Frank Cibulka, "The Radical Right in Slovakia" in *The Radical Right*, *ibid*, pp. 109-132.

⁵⁴ Catherine Lovatt, "Iron Guard Revival" in *Central European Review*, Vol 1, No 3, July 1999.

⁵⁵ Henry Carey, "Post-Communism Right Radicalism in Romania" in *The Revival of Right Wing Extremism in the Nineties*, *op.cit*, pp.149-176.

⁵⁶ Sabrina P. Ramet, "Defining the Radical Right" in *The Radical Right in Central and Eastern Europe since 1989*, *op.cit*, p. 13.

Political formations in former Yugoslavia have repeatedly espoused ideas of ethnic intolerance leading their countries to destructive wars. In many other cases, the politics of identity have resulted in deliberate governmental policies to exclude the ethnic minorities from power as in Latvia and Estonia with the rights of the Russian minorities, or in Romania with the rights of the Hungarian minority.⁵⁷ Furthermore, in all Eastern European countries, attitudes towards the Roma minorities surpass the ideological territory of the strictly defined extreme right. What this shows is that ethnic intolerance is embedded to a greater or a lesser degree in the political and cultural discourse in Eastern European countries, offering the extreme right parties and groups a fertile ideological ground for infiltration. What distinguishes however, the ideology of the extreme right is an aggressive verbalism regarding the inferior status of the other ethnic populations. Most Eastern European citizens consider the Roma as uncivilised and instigators of crime, but the extreme rightist openly declares them as “pollutant” and “a threat to the national existence” of their respective populations.

Anti-Semitism is another expression of ethnic intolerance and a prevalent feature of the Eastern European extreme right discourse. In Eastern Europe, the numbers of Jews today cannot justify and reactivate the anti-Semitic feelings of previous periods, as the numbers of Jews are limited to a few thousands in most European countries. Current anti-Semitism has less to do with actual Jews than with the abstract image of “the Jew”, generating the interesting phenomenon of anti-Semitism without Jews. The Jew represents the international over the national, the imported and foreign over the domestic, the control over national economies. Anti-Semitism is, therefore, based on a conspiracy theory, or rather clichés about international Jewish conspiracies and plots of world domination, it is quite resilient and is not confined solely in the mentalities of extremists, in the form of widespread negative stereotypes about the influence and affluence of the international Jewry. In Western Europe, on the other hand, anti-Semitism is mostly confined to a historical revisionism and the re-evaluation of historical events, particularly concentrating on the actual existence and significance of the holocaust.⁵⁸

Extreme right nationalism is also directed against the role of the "international factor", a predominant element that has defined developments in the region. All Eastern European societies have been, in one way or the other, exposed either to direct foreign domination (Ottoman and Habsburg rule, Nazi occupation) or indirect rule (Soviet domination). Even, the

⁵⁷ Such governmental discriminations have tended to diminish due in large part to the close scrutiny of relevant international organisations and the EU strict criteria for closer integration.

⁵⁸ There are arguments of Holocaust denial claiming that the Holocaust was a myth fabricated in order to elicit support for the state of Israel and other of historical revisionism, used abundantly by nationalist and extreme right-wing forces in order to exonerate leaders and movements responsible for the Axis-allied states' genocidal policies. See Paul Hockenos, *Free to Hate; The Rise of the Right in Post-Communist Eastern Europe* (London: Routledge, 1993), pp. 271-299 and Roger Eatwell, “The Holocaust Denial: A Study in Propaganda Technique” in *Neo-Fascism in Europe*, edited by Luciano Celes et al (London: Longman, 1991), pp. 120-146.

collapse of communism has been instigated from abroad. Similarly, the post-communist situation is largely seen as the outcome of Western dominant influences, which prescribe the nature of the current domestic political and economic trajectory.⁵⁹ And while there is a wider consensus as to the benefits of the current situation, there is still an underlying assumption that political and economic recipes are imposed from abroad. Such a perception is easily exploited by the extreme right wingers, as a way of resistance towards the influence of Western international forces. The extreme right looks with suspicion any foreign participation in the economy that could harm the security of the state. Most of them share a strong anti-German sentiment, more pronounced in the cases of the Polish and the Czech extreme right. They are totally sceptical of all supra-national organisations and especially EU integration and they reject foreign participation or investment in their respective economies. Eastern Europeans ultra-nationalists who glorify their state and its institutions may view the infiltration of foreign structures or reform based on foreign strategies as a denigration of their institutional and cultural framework and are likely to reject democracy in the interest of preserving traditional more authoritarian political structures.⁶⁰

Due to the statist tradition of the inter-war and the post-war periods the extreme right in post-communist Europe has a statist character, favouring a considerable state role in the economy and the distribution of resources. Despite a virulent anticommunist orientation, Eastern European extreme right may paradoxically share some statist views with the unreformed communists. Both the extreme right and left have rejected the liberal system of governance and have been very suspicious of the market forces. There are significant numbers of ultra-nationalists and unreconstructed communists who harbour hostile feelings towards internationalist strategies against the imported models of market economy. This makes the distinction between left and right much less clear and definitely not as straightforward as in Western Europe, although here too there are some countries where voters of the extreme left may opt for the parties of the extreme right.

Due to the authoritarian tradition, Eastern European extreme right espouses more openly and effortlessly the rejection of pluralism and democratic institutions with a propensity towards authoritarian ways of rule. All too often there is a glorification of the pre-communist past as for example in Poland for the authoritarian Pilsudski regime, in Hungary for the Horthy government and the Arrow Cross and in Romania for Antonescu. As Aurel Braun suggests:

Even in the more stable states such as Poland and Hungary, this is dangerous romanticising of a repressive past that can inhibit the development of a democratic political culture, encourage the worst

⁵⁹ See Adrian G.V. Hyde-Price "Democratization in Eastern Europe; The External Dimension" in *Democratization in Eastern Europe; Domestic and International Perspectives*, edited by Geoffrey Pridham and Tatu Vanhanen, (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 220-252.

⁶⁰ Pamela Waldron-Moore, "Eastern Europe at the Crossroads of Democratic Transition" in *Comparative Political Studies*, Vol 32, No1 (February 1999) pp. 36-62.

antidemocratic instincts of the population and make people more vulnerable again to the preachings of demagogues who are so readily willing to take advantage of any political, economic and social crisis⁶¹

While Eastern Europe shares a seemingly common political and economic trajectory there are also striking national differences based on prior histories and cultures, levels of economic development and degrees of democratic consolidation.⁶² The most updated analyses and data on Eastern Europe divides the region into two relatively homogeneous geographical groupings: the advanced Central European region composed by Czech Republic, Poland, Hungary, Slovenia as a cluster of more stable and promising market economies and essentially more consolidated democratic systems; the more problematic Southeastern region with numerous problems and difficulties in the transition process with crucial differences among the countries of the two regions themselves. Irrespective of different levels of economic and political development, all eastern countries have a range of ultra-nationalistic and xenophobic forces that oppose the establishment of liberal democracy in their countries. Overall, the extreme right is mostly a marginal force within Eastern European societies, in view of the wider consensus on the currently adopted socio-economic, political and ideological post-communist orientation. The vote for the extreme right has been ranging between 4 to 16 percent depending upon country.⁶³ Yet, such organised extreme alternatives have the potential to penetrate the prevailing mainstream Eastern European mentality.

C. Comparative Points; Western vs Eastern Europe

While the causes and circumstances -socio-economic and political- that strengthen extreme right forces are common across Europe, any analysis of the phenomenon is bound to be nationally specific, closely linked with the particular national culture, mentalities and perceptions of each nation state. The ultra-nationalistic core of their ideological discourse has prevented this political family from becoming an organised international movement with a transnational belief system and organisational structure. Cultural circumstances and national conditions influence the attitudes and belief systems of right-wing extremisms and there is no uniform pattern in either across countries or across variables. There is a fundamental incompatibility between nationalism in its far right version and the attempt to create transnational alliances. Extremism varies from country to country and depends on the

⁶¹ See Aurel Braun, "The Incomplete Revolutions: The Rise of Extremist in East-Central Europe and the Former Soviet Union" in *The Extreme Right; Freedom and Security at Risk*, Braun & Scheinberg (eds), Westview Press, p.152.

⁶² Anna Seleny, "Old Political Rationalities and New Democracies: Compromise and Confrontation in Hungary and Poland" in *World Politics* 51.4 (1999) pp. 484-519.

⁶³ Christopher Williams, "The Rise of the Radical Right" in *The Radical Right in Central and Eastern Europe since 1989*, op.cit., pp. 29-48. For a comparative electoral average between interwar fascist and 1980s-1990s extreme right vote in Western and Eastern Europe see Leonard Weinberg, "Conclusions" in *The Revival of Right Wing Extremism in the Nineties op.cit.*, pp 274-276.

historical experiences, the political system, the economic development, the ethnic composition and the perception of external enemies. The recognition of an enormous diversity in Europe is, therefore, essential for the understanding of the particularities of the extreme right.

Having said that, the above analysis has attempted to highlight the regional character of the current extreme right in the post cold war context by discussing the fundamental dimensions of the current phenomenon and by juxtaposing the Western European model versus the Eastern European experience. Indeed there are some differences between the two regions as a result of different historical, socio-economic, political and ideological trajectories. The understanding of the differences between Western and Central and Eastern Europe is essential when trying to apply the right strategy and resolve the problems in causes.

Historically, the fascist experience has been significant in both Western and Eastern Europe during the inter-war period with the emergence of influential fascist or fascistoid regimes, parties and movements in almost all the countries of Europe. However, the legacy of facism should not be exaggerated. In Western Europe, the connection with the current extreme right is mostly symbolic and impressionistic. In Eastern Europe, on the other hand, references with the inter-war context are more direct, as a result of the post-communist reappearance of movements and parties, which had been suppressed during the communist period. The democratic nature of post-war politics in Western Europe has significantly affected the attitudes, goals and organisation of the extreme right. On the contrary, communist totalitarianism has left the countries of Eastern Europe with a double (inter- and post-war) authoritarian legacy and no experience of democracy.

Socio-economically, the extreme right is seen as the by-product of post-industrial capitalism and multiculturalism. Both trends are common in Western and Eastern Europe. In Western Europe, the transition to the current stage of capitalism has been much smoother than in Eastern Europe as the system is deeply embedded in the development of the West and, in any case, most post-industrial changes can be said to be generated in Western societies. In Eastern Europe, on the other hand, with no previous experience of capitalism at all, post-industrial capitalism has been an import of the West. Furthermore, the multicultural context is different in those two parts of Europe. In Western societies it is the outcome of waves of immigration from Third World during the post-war period as well as Eastern Europe after the collapse of communism. In Eastern Europe, multiculturalism is mostly associated with the existence of a multi-ethnic context, the product of an on-going long historical process. The negative effects of post-industrial capitalism and multiculturalism ie. recession, unemployment and personal insecurity, can act as catalysts for social distress in both parts of Europe. But there is no straightforward correlation between them and the rise of the extreme right forces in Western Europe. In Eastern Europe, on the other hand, the precarious nature of the current socio-

economic transition means that unemployment and economic recession can be more directly associated with authoritarian and extremist alternatives.

Politically, democracy is common in both parts of Europe. In Western Europe it is a consolidated system and the extreme right reaction -as protest politics- is directed against the political class and its activities, but not against democratic principles *per se*. In Eastern Europe, on the other hand, with a fluid and transitional democratic framework, extreme right protest politics may undermine fundamental democratic principles. Furthermore, in Western Europe, the political parties of the extreme right have undergone a radical transformation during the 1980s, in terms of practices, beliefs and attitudes. In Eastern Europe, extreme parties are a novel feature of the 1990s post communist politics. Similarly, the nature of extreme right party politics is more consolidated in Western Europe while in Eastern Europe it is more blurred and fractionalised. Finally, in the West the extreme right is politically closer to the traditional right, while in the East the extreme right may have common themes with some of the unrepentant orthodox communists (although one could argue that after the end of the cold war, the ideological boundaries between right and left have become more obscure in the whole of Europe).

Ideologically, extremism generates a climate of xenophobia, it operates within a perceived conspiratorial context and frequently adopts manichaistic conceptions of the man and society. Extremism breeds a fanatical, racist and exclusionary discourse, which is heterogeneous, changeable and nationally specific. But there is absolutely no connection with the fascist and totalitarian discourse of the inter-war period, which appeared much more holistic and rigorous. Current extremist discourse is an amalgam of themes and topics of an opportunistic and populist nature. The difference is that Western European extreme right ideology generates a climate of xenophobia and racism against multiculturalism and immigration while Eastern European extreme right breeds a climate of ethnic intolerance. In Eastern Europe there is a prevalent conception of the nation where citizenship is defined in narrow ethnic terms and ethnic nationalism has come to form the ideological justification for a more violent and exclusionary approach towards other nationalities and ethnic groups. Reaction to international interference is also pronounced in the Eastern European extreme right discourse. Overall, as a system of beliefs the European contemporary extreme right lacks a cohesive and powerful ideological framework, opting instead for a volatile and highly opportunistic fanatical and exclusionary ideological discourse. Such notions are rather a set of disparate mentalities⁶⁴,

⁶⁴ The subject of mentalities, as an important determinant of social and political behaviour has been scarcely examined by analysts, due to the difficulty of carrying out an empirical analysis of it. Yet, it can be a concept useful in many discussions of the way elites and anonymous masses perceive their social environment. Mentalities are ways of thinking and feeling more emotional than rational and they can be easily adapted in response to information and interpretative models that dominate the public discourse. Ideologies, on the other hand, are more consistent, elaborated and refined systems of thought which are not easily modified through time and space. See Juan Linz "Totalitarian and Authoritarian Regimes", in F. I. Greenstein and .W. Polsby (eds) *Handbook of Political Science: Macropolitical Theory*, Vol 3, (Massachusetts

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which may, at times, have an impact on wider audiences. Relevant studies have shown that most European countries display increased intolerance towards other races and foreign workers and an increase in national pride, offering a fertile ground for exclusionary and extreme alternatives.⁶⁵

Comparative variables: Western & Eastern Europe

Defining dimensions	Western Europe	Eastern Europe
Historical legacy	Inter-war fascist and post-war democratic frameworks.	Double authoritarian legacy of inter-war fascism and post-war communism.
Socio-Economic environment	Post-industrial capitalism & multi-cultural societies.	Imported capitalism & multi-ethnic societies.
Political Context	Established democratic context; Reaction to the political establishment.	Transitional democratic context; Reaction to democratic politics.
Ideologico-cultural	Predominance of anti-immigration platform with some liberal tendencies	Anti-ethnic platform with authoritarian tendencies; Strong reaction to foreign Interference.

D. A Piecemeal Strategic Analysis

Mainstream European democratic elites tend to perceive the nature of the extreme right on the basis of two prevailing assumptions:

First, that democracy, market economy and European integration will undoubtedly lead to economic prosperity and political stability and the marginalisation of the forces of the radical right. (Deterministic and unilinear character of European development)

Second, that those who hold extremist ultra-nationalistic attitudes are marginal and backward and they are therefore doomed to fail. (Demonisation of the extreme right)

Addison-Wesley, 1975) p 267.

⁶⁵ Lauri Karvonen, "The New Extreme Right-Wingers in Western Europe: Attitudes, World Views and Social Characteristics" in *The Revival of Right-Wing Extremism in the Nineties, op.cit.*, pp. 91-110.

The Austrian experience has left the European elites bewildered with the actual influence of an extreme right party in a prosperous and stable European country. It goes against both prevailing assumptions and indicates the ability of the extreme right to infiltrate mainstream politics. The Austrian experience has revealed two shortcomings:

First, the inability of policy makers to appreciate the factors that can lead to the rise of extreme right forces and the nature of this particular political family.

Second, the lack of a consistent and unanimous course of action towards such forces.

In principle, the logic of democracy is inclusionary and consensual with respect to all political forces and ideological alternatives. In reality, democracy is faced with major dilemmas when dealing with such forces of extremism. National democratic elites have adopted two strategies towards the extreme right in Europe: to incorporate (inclusionary approach) and to isolate (exclusionary approach). The inclusive school of thought argues that the extremists should be enticed into mainstream politics in the hope that the process of political compromise will strip them of their appeal or will render them harmless. The inclusionary policy was pursued in Italy when the *Allianza Nazionale*, was offered five cabinet posts in the government of Silvio Berlusconi, in the mid-1990s. Currently, the *Allianza Nazionale* has 132 out of 945 MPs making it the second largest opposition party. Furthermore, *Forza Italia* is in alliance with both *Allianza Nazionale* and the Northern League making it impossible to form a government without their votes. A similar inclusionary tactic was adopted by Schussel in Austria resulting in the equal participation of the Freedom Party in the 2000 coalition government in Austria.⁶⁶ The exclusionary school of thought opposes any deal with the far right arguing that such parties have their roots in "Europe's blood-soaked past". The exclusionary policy was actually adopted by President Chirac in March 1998, when despite the success of the National Front in the French regional elections (the Front National held the balance of power in a majority of France's 22 regions), he opposed joining forces with the Front. The official parties of the Right in France have denounced the FN unequivocally.⁶⁷ Similarly, in Germany a rigorous policy of treating extreme right parties with maximum disapproval may be part of the reason why the three main far right parties account only for 2 or 3% of the total national vote. Having said that, the fragmentation of the German nazi right prevents it from becoming an accountable political force while recent studies argue that the far right in Germany has the potential to rise to 13% in the national polls.⁶⁸ A combination of the inclusionary and exclusionary strategy is followed in the Southern European states where although the extreme

⁶⁶ In the elections of October 1999, the SPO received 33.15% of the vote and 65 seats, the OVP and FPO received 26.91% and 52 seats each.

⁶⁷ In 1999 the Front National suffered a disastrous split with Bruno Megret forming the breakaway National Movement and support for both started to decline from its previous 15%.

⁶⁸ In an opinion poll published recently 32% of Germans said that they could imagine voting for a German version of Haider and 36% fully agree with Haider's policies. *The Times* 18.2.2000 and *Daily Telegraph* 17.2.2000.

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and authoritarian forces are openly discredited, representatives from extreme tendencies have been incorporated into the parties of the right.

The European Union claims to be based on the “principles of liberty, democracy, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms and the rule of law” (article 6 of the Treaty of the European Union). Based on this legal/political justification, the EU countries reacted unanimously with respect to the sanctions against the OVP-FPO Austrian government. Proponents of the sanctions have heralded them as a milestone in the development of the EU as a community of political and moral values, a step beyond economic and monetary integration. Critics view them as an unprecedented intervention in the domestic affairs of a member state against the will of a substantial part of the Austrian population, which voted for the Freedom Party. Despite, the apparent unanimity at the EU intergovernmental level, the sanctions have also generated some disagreements among member states. Italy, for instance, reacted strongly to Chancellor Schroder's remarks that sanctions applied against Austria should extend to Italy if the neo-fascist right were back to government and considered the remark as an unacceptable interference in Italian national affairs. The Prime Minister of Italy defended his enemies of the Right and said that none of the opposition forces in Italy profess a neo-fascist ideology and none share any of the ideas expressed by Haider. Furthermore, France and Belgium have been the most vocal in condemning the Austrian government due to the domestic influence of their own national extreme right parties. Eastern applicant countries, for their part, have reacted to sanctions against Austria with mixed feelings and a degree of scepticism, in view of the domestic influence of their own extreme forces. While the initial reaction was justified on the basis of moral values towards extreme right alternatives, disagreements are explained on the basis of domestic public opinion in most of these countries. So far, the EU has adopted a selective attitude towards extreme right forces. While their values are condemned, extreme right parties are represented in the European elections and hold seats in the European Parliament. Furthermore, EU countries did not adopt similar sanctions against the government of Berlusconi's for including the *Allianza Nazionale* and the *Lega Nord*. As regards extremism in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, the issue is more or less a *terra incognita* for the European mainstream forces.

Based on the previous analysis on the European extreme right, one needs to draw some conclusions regarding the strategic significance of the current extreme right phenomenon, in other words "what needs to be done":

First, the European elites should appreciate more adequately the new phenomenon by examining the roots and causes of current discontent among European societies. It is clearly not enough to perceive the current extreme right as a marginal and backward phenomenon. European elites should disentangle their perception of the extreme right from the interwar phenomenon, as it is clear that the conditions and factors conducive to the rise of the radical

right have changed since the inter-war period. The understanding of this historical shift of the international, socio-economic, political and cultural forces propelling this new phenomenon is vital in order to deal with its implications.

Second, a different analysis of the Western from the Eastern European cases is needed. In the Western European case we are dealing with established democracies whereas in the Eastern European case with more fragile systems, prone to forces of extremism and radical nationalism. What is therefore needed is a differentiated response in dealing with extreme right manifestation in the two regions. Eastern enlargement does not automatically mean that extreme right forces will be eradicated. The EU enlargement strategy will have to devise the means of dealing with the potential of a euro-sceptic, ultra-nationalistic opposition in these countries rather than strictly aiming at the adoption of the *acquis communautaire* by the applicant countries. The wider concept of transition in Eastern Europe will have to be constantly evaluated and differences within the Eastern European countries themselves will have to be taken into account. On the contrary, conventional transition theory based on the same strict criteria for all the countries in the region is bound to lead to overgeneralisations and fallacies.

It is more than obvious that the influence of extreme right forces in Europe has not subsided and might be even more powerful in the future when the countries of Eastern Europe become members of the European Union. The success of the Western European (and especially Austrian) extreme right raises the question of whether similar successful cases could emerge in Central European countries. Animosities against the supra-national authority of the EU could be stirred up by Central and Eastern European extreme right forces. The EU and the European national governments will have to realise that extreme right forces are part of the political landscape in Europe and may be critically influential in the transitional countries of Eastern Europe. As Europe today is more united economically, politically and culturally more than any other time in the past, right extremism in the West can have a significant impact in the East and vice versa.

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