

Institute for Social Research in Zagreb Repository

This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published by Taylor & Francis in *The International Spectator* on October 4, 2024, available at:
<https://doi.org/10.1080/03932729.2024.2405153>.

Petrović, N., & Bilić, J. (2025). Why history matters? Populist radical right governments in the EU and their foreign policy. *The International Spectator*, 60(1), 95–115. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03932729.2024.2405153>

Reuse is restricted to non-commercial and no derivative uses.

The International Spectator. Volume 60, Issue 1 (2025): 95-115.

NOTE: This is an accepted version of this paper. You can find the final version at:

<https://doi.org/10.1080/03932729.2024.2405153>

Why History Matters? Populist Radical Right Governments in the EU and their Foreign Policy

Nikola Petrović and Josip Bilić

Institute for Social Research in Zagreb

Contact: Nikola Petrović; nikola@idi.hr

ABSTRACT

Four European populist radical right prime minister parties (PiS, Fidesz, SDS and FdI) have displayed differing approaches to foreign policy. In part, these differences can be explained by their specific visions of history. Central and Eastern European (CEE) parties such as PiS, Fidesz and to certain extent SDS became more radical and Eurosceptic when in power. FdI, on the other hand, became less Eurosceptic and more mainstream after coming to power. CEE parties have constructed their identities around anti-communism and the notion of Western betrayal, making the liberal West and the EU their significant Other. On the contrary, for FdI it is more difficult to have the EU as a significant Other in the same sense, because Italy was a founding member of the EU and its historical grievances are not directed at the West. The Russian invasion of Ukraine has also been approached and used differently by the leaders of these parties. Giorgia Meloni, Janez Janša and, at least initially, Jarosław Kaczyński used the war to strengthen their European credentials, while Viktor Orbán used it to intensify his fight against the liberal West.

Keywords: populist radical right; foreign policy; Euroscepticism; Russian invasion of Ukraine; Israel-Hamas war

The success of populist radical right (PRR) parties in the European Union (EU) over the past decade-and-a-half has raised questions about the direction of the Union and the Western liberal order. Most notably, Hungary's *Fidesz* and Poland's *Prawo i Sprawiedliwość* (PiS) have shown that Brussels could not moderate PRR parties in government. During the migration and rule of law crisis (both starting in 2015), the conflict between Brussels and the governments in Budapest and Warsaw intensified. Their influence, particularly that of *Fidesz* and its leader Viktor Orbán, was also felt beyond national borders. Especially when *Slovenska demokratska stranka* (SDS), a pro-EU party for most of its existence, became a PRR party with elements of Euroscepticism while governing Slovenia in the period of 2020-22. *Fratelli d'Italia* (Fdi), another PRR party inspired by *Fidesz* and PiS, came to power in Italy in 2022. Despite this partly shared background, the Russian invasion of Ukraine has led to tensions between the two most successful PRR parties, *Fidesz* and PiS, and a softening of the anti-EU rhetoric in SDS and Fdi.

In order to identify how coming to power and major international events influence the geopolitical positioning of the PRR, we analyse the foreign policies of all former and current PRR prime minister's parties in the EU (*Fidesz*, PiS, SDS and Fdi) at the start of the research (July 2023). Although all these parties were classified as PRR parties, they belonged to different groups in the European Parliament (EP). Interestingly, they were all manoeuvring between the ideological positions of the centre-right and Christian Democratic European People's Party (EPP) and the Eurosceptic right-wing European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) group. *Fidesz* is a former member of the EPP and was negotiating to join the ECR, but later decided to form its own group ("Patriots for Europe"). PiS is an ECR member with roots in the centre-right *Akcja Wyborcza Solidarność*. SDS is an EPP member whose leader, Janez Janša, regularly attends transnational radical right events organised by *Fidesz* and PiS. And Fdi is a member of the ECR, but received calls from the EPP leaders to join their group. It seems that in this political space either a radicalisation or a mainstreaming of some of the most successful right-wing parties has been taking place, with important implications for the future of the EU.

We therefore examine the foreign policies of these parties, focusing on the period they governed their countries. First, we present the parties' backgrounds and their visions of history. Second, we analyse their positions on the EU, which we see as the main part of their foreign policy. It could be argued that it is problematic to treat positions on the EU as foreign policy. We agree with the notion that over time and through deeper integration, the EU has become a crucial part of the internal politics of all member states. Nonetheless, these parties often present themselves as being in opposition to the EU, particularly to the Brussels elite, and argue for more national sovereignty. An important, related research question is therefore whether there is a difference in the way they view the EU when in opposition and when in power. Third, we analyse their attitudes towards two recent wars that threaten to disrupt the international order, the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the Israel-Hamas war¹. More specifically, we try to understand the variation between Orbán's positioning and that of his PRR colleagues towards these two conflicts. We argue that specific visions of the respective countries' histories, but also of European history, contribute to both commonalities and differences in the foreign policies of these four PRR parties.

¹ To differentiate from other phases of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, we used the Israel-Hamas war as the most common term for the latest phase of the conflict that started with the Hamas attack on Israel on 7 October 2023 and continued with the Israeli invasion of Gaza.

Theoretical framework

As a preliminary step, we need to define the main ideologies of our cases: namely, populism and radical right. This article's understanding of populism is based on Ben Stanley's (2008) view of populism as a thin ideology. According to him, the core of populism "consists of four distinct but interrelated concepts: 1) The existence of two homogeneous units of analysis: 'the people' and 'the elite'. 2) The antagonistic relationship between the people and the elite. 3) The idea of popular sovereignty. 4) The positive valorisation of 'the people' and denigration of 'the elite'" (102). According to Cas Mudde (2007), the core concept of radical right ideology is nativism, which as a concept is narrower than nationalism, but broader than anti-immigration. Nativism is "an ideology, which holds that states should be inhabited exclusively by members of the native group ('the nation') and that nonnative elements (persons and ideas) are fundamentally threatening to the homogenous nation-state" (19). Although, at first glance, these concepts are oriented towards internal politics, they can have important implications for foreign policy. This is particularly true in the context of EU politics, where elites are not only national, but also supranational. Immigration, the main challenge to nativists, is also perceived through EU policy and politics, with the anti-immigration stance of the PRR being mostly directed against Muslim immigrants. This also has implications for their foreign policy as the populist radical right parties have become strong supporters of the State of Israel. Through this support, they wanted to move away from their anti-Semitic roots, become more mainstream and present "Israel as a European frontier against Muslims" (Rose 2020, 7).

According to Bertjan Verbeek and Andrej Zaslove (2017), the end of the Cold War and the rise of regional organisations such as the EU contributed to the increasing importance of populism in foreign policy. They argue, however, that "populist parties do not pursue identical foreign policies despite their shared distinction between the corrupt elite and the pure people". Instead, they discuss the differences between different types of populism (PRR, populist market liberal, populist regionalist and populist left-wing), arguing that "the variation in their foreign policy preferences can be understood via the specific ideology populism as a thin-centered ideology attaches itself to" (493).

In this article, we focus on the PRR because it has become a major political factor in the EU and could influence its Common Foreign and Security Policy. Recent research shows that belonging to party groups matters in voting on issues regarding external relations in the EP (Raunio and Wagner 2020; Otjes *et al.* 2023). There are many similarities in the foreign policies of the four parties analysed here, particularly in their positions towards the EU, but also significant differences, which can be fruitfully analysed through comparative research. Indeed, with FdI coming to power in Italy it is possible for the first time to compare PRR governments from Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) with a PRR government from an EU founding state.²

Foreign policies of CEE PRR parties' have been analysed both as case studies (see Destradi *et al.* 2021) and comparatively. Focusing on populism, David Cadier analysed the foreign policy of PiS and concluded that populist practices can "perform a rupture with technocratic elites [...] enable or constrain certain policy

² PRR parties were junior partners in governments in Italy (*Lega*) and Austria (*Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs*, FPÖ) in the past. From this position, they were able to strongly influence foreign policies (see Coticchia 2021; Müller and Gebauer 2021), but were not primary actors.

choices and mode of diplomatic actions” (2021, 704). Mihai Varga and Aron Buzogány (2021) compared the foreign policies of PiS and *Fidesz* with a focus on their thick ideologies and presented them as outcomes of conservative networks in Poland and Hungary. We find both approaches insightful, but we adopt a historical sociology-oriented approach dealing with the backgrounds, milieus and visions of history of these parties in the context of their country’s historical development. We find that this approach can help explain some similarities and differences between these parties, particularly as we compare CEE parties (influenced by their countries’ communist past) with a party from Italy (a country which was part of the Western bloc during the Cold War).

The debate on PRR parties’ foreign policy in the EU context is intertwined with that on Euroscepticism. Party-based Euroscepticism has been intensively studied in the last two decades by two schools, the Sussex School and the North Carolina School, dominating the debate (Mudde 2012). Paul Taggart and Aleks Szczerbiak (2004), the main proponents of the Sussex School, differentiate between hard and soft Euroscepticism. Hard Euroscepticism “implies outright rejection of the entire project of European political and economic integration, and opposition to one’s country joining or remaining a member of the EU”. Soft Euroscepticism instead “involves contingent or qualified opposition to European integration” (3-4). Also, the Sussex School often emphasises party strategy as an explanation for Euroscepticism. On the other hand, the North Carolina School focuses on ideology, with the so-called TAN (traditional/authoritarian/nationalist) parties being more Eurosceptic (Hooghe *et al.* 2002; Mudde 2012). We acknowledge these and other factors such as economic deprivation (Lubbers and Scheepers 2010), nationalism (Halikiopoulou *et al.* 2012), exclusive national identity (Van Klingeren *et al.* 2013) that have contributed to the emergence of Euroscepticism in the analysed countries. However, in this article, we focus primarily on historical and geopolitical factors that contributed to the emergence of Euroscepticism and populism. Previous research has shown that populism and Euroscepticism are linked to historical grievances (Petrović 2019; Csehi and Zgut 2020) and a failure to come to terms with a country’s fascist and/or colonial past (Caramani and Manucci 2019; Couperus and Tortola 2019; Griffini 2023). Stefan Couperus *et al.* (2023, 259), in particular, have called for a comparison of different parts of Europe “and the varying roles of populist parties in government and in opposition when they mobilize the past”.

In this vein, it is important to further study how PRR leaders and parties understand politics and history in different parts of the EU. We argue that the leaders of *Fidesz*, PiS and SDS are, due to their specific socialisation in politics, characterised by a vision of politics termed as ‘combat tasks politics’: that is, seeing politics as a constant battle against political enemies (Petrović *et al.* 2023). We also use the concept of a significant ‘Other’ to understand how these parties define themselves in relation to other entities in European and world politics. Following Paul Blokker’s and Gerrard Delanty’s (2009) analysis of European identity, we see the end of the Soviet empire and the accession of post-communist countries to the EU as crucial events for the repositioning of political actors and constructions of their identities. Particularly amongst parts of the political elites of post-communist countries, these new contexts brought a heightened awareness of their position in the global order.

Data and methods

Our case selection focused on the most influential PRR parties in government in the EU. We wanted to see their impact on the EU and international liberal order and whether they act differently when in power. Therefore, we focused our research on PRR prime minister parties in power in EU member states. The PopuList database (Rooduijn *et al.* 2019) was used to classify parties as PRR. In order of coming to power, these parties are the Polish PiS led by Jarosław Kaczyński (2005-07; 2015-23), the Hungarian *Fidesz* led by Viktor Orbán (2010-), the Slovenian SDS led by Janez Janša (2020-22) and the Italian FdI (2022-) led by Giorgia Meloni.

By analysing these parties' histories, manifestos and leaders' speeches and books, we tried to outline the historical context of their foreign policies. We analysed all parliamentary election manifestos of these parties present in the Manifesto Corpus (CMP/MARPOR) dataset (Lehmann *et al.* 2024)³, focusing on their attitudes towards the EU and their foreign policy. In particular, we wanted to identify the party leaders' visions of history and the backgrounds of their ideologies, which is why we also focused on their books. Indeed, all the leaders, except Orbán, published books elaborating their worldviews. Orbán, on the other hand, regularly uses essays and speeches marking important events of Hungarian history to elaborate his vision of history and ideology, which were also examined. However, as we also analysed EP voting and government decisions, we complemented this analysis with that of statements by MEPs from these parties and by Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki. We also attempted to compare these parties' foreign policy decisions, with a particular focus on their votes on the EU, the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the Israel-Hamas war. Admittedly, the fact that these parties were not in power at the same time and came to power in different contexts makes the comparison more challenging. A potentially powerful intervening variable is coming to power in the context of a major international event: the Russian invasion of Ukraine in the case of FdI. Despite these limitations, the comparison of the backgrounds of the foreign policies of PRR parties can help to explain some of the mechanisms behind their different policy orientations.

Ideologies and visions of history of PRR parties

Central and Eastern European parties

The demise of the Soviet empire and communism in Central and Eastern Europe in the late 1980s led to an almost universal call for CEE to return to Europe. However, three decades after the collapse of communism in CEE, Poland, Hungary and Slovenia, countries that were deemed to be among the best 'pupils' of the EU accession process, were led by parties that opposed 'Brussels hegemony' and attacked the EU with strong historical references.

³ When quoting specific manifestos, we provide the name of the party and the year of its publication. All of the manifestos can be found in the Manifesto Corpus database (Lehmann *et al.* 2024).

All the founders and leaders of the analysed CEE parties (Orbán of *Fidesz*, Jarosław and Lech Kaczyński of PiS and Janša of SDS⁴) share a similar background. They were anti-communist activists, who, as part of broader national anti-communist movements, contributed to the fall of communist regimes in their countries. Not surprisingly, their parties' ideologies were driven by anti-communism, which was reinvigorated by the rapid resurgence of post-communists who began to embrace liberalism and Europeanism. While they were in the opposition, these conservative politicians presented themselves as the real representatives of the people fighting against the remnants of the old regime and estranged liberal elites. They also engaged in memory wars against their political opponents. While in power, they sought to institutionalise these forms of memory politics and present their nations solely as victims and ignore dark parts of their countries' history. In the case of *Fidesz*, the House of Terror Museum, led by Orbán's adviser Mária Schmidt and in the case of PiS, the Institute of National Remembrance and its 2018 law against any Polish responsibility for Nazi crimes, were the most impactful institutions (Radonić 2020). Although less prominent and less researched, Janša's memory politics also focused on victimisation of Slovenians and anti-communism. Janša's books (1992; 1994) had a strong anti-communist tone, as they dealt with the repression by Yugoslav Partisans in World War II and by the communist regime in socialist Yugoslavia, and with post-communist deep state. In 2005, Janša founded the Commission on Concealed Mass Graves, which investigated communist crimes after World War II. In the same year the SDS adopted a clause requiring party candidates to sign a special statement stating that they had not collaborated with communist secret services (Delo 2011). CEE leaders' narratives and policies show that the historical dimension was important to them and that it could help explain their Euroscepticism. They saw domestic pro-EU liberal elites as remnants of the old regimes and later transposed this domestic populism to the international domain, portraying the EU as the new Soviet Union.

Also similar was the fact that these centre-right leaders became more radical and Eurosceptic while in power. This can be explained by the fact that they shifted their populism from fighting corrupt domestic elites to fighting corrupt foreign elites. They saw the EU as encroaching on their sovereignty and promoting values that were incompatible with theirs. The notion of Western betrayal was often used to emphasise how the West had failed to help CEE nations throughout history. Instead, the West left them to suffer the consequences of Soviet expansionism or even contributed to a significant loss of territory, as in the case of Hungary and the Treaty of Trianon in 1920.⁵ Orbán has been particularly keen to present himself as the heir of the 1956 revolutionaries, who were not understood by the West, as he is not understood by Brussels today (Petrović 2019). In the eyes of CEE radical right leaders, this history denied the West any legitimacy to criticise and condition the CEE states.

After 1989, the CEE countries went through a major political and economic transition: from communist dictatorships to liberal democracies and from socialist to capitalist economies. Their EU accession was a rather long process and entailed much more enforcement of EU laws in comparison to prior enlargements (Vachudova 2005). This sense of sacrifice was visible in *Fidesz*'s 2006 manifesto which stated that the "Hungarian people have made great sacrifices for EU membership over the past decade and a half, so they must experience that they personally benefit from the EU policy of the current government." The 2011

⁴ Unlike in other cases, Janša was not technically 'the' founder of SDS, which was founded in 1989 as a social democratic party. However, he became the president in 1993 and took the party out of the Socialist International in 1995. In 2003 he renamed it as Slovenian Democratic Party (Delo 2011).

⁵ The Treaty of Trianon, dictated by the Allied Powers following the end of World War I, resulted in the loss of two-thirds of the territory that had belonged to the Kingdom of Hungary before the end of the War.

PiS manifesto also emphasised the long accession process and contrasted it with the need for Poland's bigger role in the EU:

After years of striving for admission to the Union, when our country agreed to all the principles of the Union's policy, the time has come for Poland to present to the Union its own vision of the development of Europe, our interests and our role in this process.

Nevertheless, the greatest transformation for the ruling nationalist CEE leaders was arguably due to the fact that their sovereignty and newly acquired freedom from foreign supranational centres of power⁶ were now limited by a new supranational entity. It is this vision of history and related vision of politics that can help explain their Euroscepticism and why it grew stronger as they came to power. Employing combat tasks politics could also come from the fact that they were prominent actors in their respective countries' struggles for national sovereignty. It could be for this reason that they see politics as a constant battle against political enemies whether internal or external. It is therefore not surprising that they equated the EU with the Soviet Union, with Orbán even predicting that the EU will “end up where their predecessors did”, referring to Soviet attempts to break Hungarian unity in 1956 (Orbán 2022b).

The migration crisis, which started in 2015, was a crucial event in the deterioration of relations between the European Commission and CEE member states that rejected migrant quotas. Since 2016, in his speeches on important historical events (Hungarian Revolution of 1848, Treaty of Trianon of 1920 and Hungarian Revolution of 1956), Orbán intensified his criticism of the EU. He contrasted the pure Hungarian people and the EU elites with expressions such as “‘hypocritical alliance of Brussels bureaucrats’, ‘an army of shadowy and unaccountable bureaucrats’ or ‘Brussels’ fanatics of internationalism’, ‘forces of globalism’, ‘hidden, faceless world powers’ or ‘those who want to take our country from us’” (cit. in Sadecki 2022, 264). PiS' criticism was also directed at the EU, but even more specifically at Germany, which due to historical circumstances could resonate with the Polish public. The PiS 2015 manifesto accused Germany of historical revisionism “that actually questions the historical truth and moral sense of World War II”. In his book, Kaczyński (2011) wrote about German atrocities in Poland during World War II and made reparations from Germany one of the central issues of his foreign policy. This was later transposed to the critique of the EU as a whole, as Morawiecki warned against the EU becoming similar to the Soviet system of “dependence, exploitation and neo-colonialism” (2020).

The SDS did not engage in open conflict with the major European powers. It was always less likely that a government of a small open economy, which unlike Hungary and Poland is also a member of the Eurozone, would take a combative approach like that of PiS and *Fidesz*. However, in his third term as prime minister, Janša started using Eurosceptic narratives. He compared the EU's rule of law policies towards Hungary and Poland to communist politics (Janša 2020). In its 2021 resolution, SDS continued to focus on remnants of the old regime in Slovenia and the new radical left party *Levica*. However, SDS linked its left-wing opponents to external supporters, claiming that these “extremists have their supporters in the institutions of the European Union, especially in the Commission and Parliament, where they plot against the government and the prime minister and accuse him of curtailing media freedom” (SDS 2021).

PiS, *Fidesz* and, in a far more oblique way, SDS engaged in the process of othering of Brussels. Due to historical circumstances, they observed the EU from the position of outsiders and looked for stronger alliances among themselves, but also with other actors. In addition to their traditional regional alliance,

⁶ Moscow (Soviet Union) in the case of Hungary and Poland and Belgrade (socialist Yugoslavia) in the case of Slovenia.

the Visegrád Group, other initiatives came to the fore. PiS organised the Three Seas Initiative, a forum comprised mostly of CEE states inspired by the interwar project of Polish leader Józef Piłsudski.⁷ The Three Seas Initiative was meant to serve as a “counterweight to Berlin, Paris and Brussels in European affairs” and project Poland as a regional power (Cadier 2021, 715; Varga and Buzogány 2021). *Fidesz*, on the other hand, built on Hungary’s image of a bridge between the East and West and sought closer ties with Vladimir Putin’s Russia. Each in its own way, both PiS and *Fidesz* wanted to build alternatives to the EU, which they saw as being run by Western member states, and project themselves as regional leaders.

Fratelli d'Italia

Italy's relations with European integration go back to the post-World War II period, when Italy's Christian democratic leaders were among the founders of European integration. Italy was also one of the founding member states of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), and both Europeanism and Atlanticism became pillars of Italian Cold War foreign policy. The Italian elites and public were predominantly pro-EU oriented until the Eurozone crisis, which in Italy culminated in 2011 (Conti *et al.* 2020). During and after the crisis, the centre-right and radical right became more Eurosceptic and influential. This emphasises the dual identity of Italy as both a Western European founding EU member state and a Southern European economy that is peripheral when compared to the core of Europe. Austerity measures and technocratic governments led to the rise of populist Euroscepticism with the *Movimento 5 Stelle* (M5S) and of radical right Euroscepticism, first with Matteo Salvini's *Lega* and then with FdI. In 2018, the populist government led by M5S and *Lega* came to power. The populist government marked a change in Italian foreign policy, particularly with its “harsh rhetoric” against the EU and by joining the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative. However, the harsh rhetoric was not followed in practice and the M5S support for Ursula von der Leyen’s Commission pointed to a divergence between the two parties, which led to their rapid downfall in 2019 (Coticchia 2021, 750-1).

Although technically founded in 2012, FdI is not a genuinely new party. It is treated as a “rooted newcomer” party, because it “can count on preexisting organisational resources, building its appeal also on symbolic elements, already known to the electorate when the party was formed”, namely on the neofascist *Movimento Sociale Italiano* (MSI) and its successor *Alleanza Nazionale* (AN) (Baldini *et al.* 2022, 386). Thus, FdI's attitudes towards the EU and NATO could be interpreted as being shaped by the history of their predecessors.

The neofascist MSI was naturally critical of the liberal West and Anglo-Americans who had brought about the downfall of the Mussolini regime. On the other hand, neofascists also saw the West as an ally in the fight against communism. This ambiguity was reflected in the MSI's changing position towards the West. In the early 1950s, the MSI shifted to pro-NATO positions and saw itself “as a national force for the defence of the Christian, Western world against communism” (Ignazi 1996, 695). However, since the mid-1970s a strong anti-Western faction dominated the MSI, advocating “opposition to NATO and the EEC (and anything sounding Western) in favour of Third World (and pro-Palestinian) stances” (700). Under Gianfranco Fini, the MSI was transformed in 1994 into a more moderate post-fascist AN. AN positions on

⁷ After World War I, Piłsudski drew up a plan called *Intermarium* to create a federation of CEE states as a protection against German and Russian imperialism.

the EU were inconsistent. It combined support for national sovereignty and intergovernmentalism with support for “the EU’s capacity to establish an autonomous presence in the international arena, something that in the end would also enhance the international role of Italy” (Conti *et al.* 2020, 3). AN became part of Berlusconi led the *Popolo della Libertà* (Pdl) party in 2009. Due to Berlusconi’s dominance in the Pdl and after his resignation as prime minister, Fdl was formed (Baldini *et al.* 2022). It came to life during the period of the growing Euroscepticism in Italian society which was reflected in their 2013 manifesto. It stated that a bureaucratic and oligarchic Europe did not work for the common good and had nothing to do with the ideas of the founding fathers. In other words, with the Italian and European elites being alienated from the people, Fdl warned that “more politics, not less, nor anti-politics or technocracy” was needed and announced the regeneration of Italy (2013). With the emphasis on more politics, they criticised Mario Monti’s technocratic government (2011-13), which had imposed austerity measures.

The Eurozone crisis accentuated the differences between Northern and Southern Europe, with Italy being seen as a struggling Southern European economy and once again presented as part of the derogatory PIIGS acronym (Portugal, Italy, Greece, and Spain, with Ireland added during the Eurozone crisis). Consequently, the euro was a key issue and was placed as the first challenge in their 2013 manifesto. Fdl said that they wanted the euro “to be the currency of the peoples of Europe and not the instrument of power of the banks” (2013). Similar to CEE populist radical right leaders, migration was one of the main themes of Fdl manifestos, with an emphasis on criticism of the Dublin Regulation.⁸ However, unlike the CEE radical right, the othering of the West was not feasible because Italy is politically part of the West. Moreover, as Fdl was getting closer to becoming a governing party, they focused more on Italy’s role in the EU. In its 2022 manifesto, Fdl had ambitions for Italy to become “a leading player in Europe and in the world”. Its description of Italy is worth quoting in full, as it helps explain the difference between CEE and Italy’s populist radical right self-perception:

Cradle of Western civilization, economic and cultural power, founding state of the European Union and the Atlantic Alliance: after too many years of marginalisation under left-wing governments, Italy must once again become a protagonist in Europe, in the Mediterranean and on the international chessboard.

Although at the first sight similar to the 2011 PiS manifesto quoted above which called for a greater Polish role in the EU, the Fdl manifesto put a strong emphasis on the European identity of Italy and its role in European integration.

Meloni's attitudes towards Italian history are rather ambiguous. She has distanced herself from Mussolini's fascist regime, condemning in particular racist anti-Semitic laws, but not from the MSI (Ghiglione 2023). In contrast to CEE leaders who present themselves as protagonists of history and liberators of their countries, Meloni presents herself as a hard-working mother balancing her private and public roles. In her book *Io sono Giorgia*, she wrote that every time she tried to go on holiday, she was prevented by some unexpected important event. She even admitted to crying when she had to cut short her holiday with her daughter to return to Italy following the downfall of the populist government in the summer of 2019 (Meloni 2021). This gives the impression that she is an ordinary person with everyday problems, but she sacrifices for a greater good. This is not to say that Meloni is not immersed in Italian

⁸ The Dublin Regulation states that the country where asylum seekers enter the EU is responsible for them. This has been particularly problematic for Italy which has been a major point of entry.

history and narratives of victimhood, but that she is not defined by them in the same way as the CEE leaders. In their 2017 Trieste Theses, which presented their “radical right turn”, FdI proclaimed that Trieste was the most Italian city and a symbol of Italian resistance. They mentioned the Italian defeat at the Battle of Caporetto in World War I and the fight in the aftermath of World War II to return Trieste to Italy (Donà 2022, 785; Jones 2023; Meloni 2017). FdI’s historical grievances are mostly focused on the plight of the *esuli*, the Italian exiles from the eastern side of the Adriatic after World War II. Meloni made irredentist claims towards Istria and Dalmatia in 2014 (Facebook 2024a) and her government has sent out a call to mayors and school offices to intensify the commemoration of the victims of *foibe* mass killings (Siviero 2024).⁹

However, these historical ‘enemies’ (Croatia and Slovenia) do not play an important role in contemporary European affairs. Thus, it is harder for them to have the role of a significant Other as Germany does in the case of PiS or the liberal West in the case of *Fidesz*. Interestingly, Meloni (2021) acknowledges the Western betrayal of CEE countries during the Cold War and accuses former Western communists who pose as pro-Europeans of being unable to come to terms with the West’s role. Like PiS and *Fidesz*, FdI and Meloni warned against the hegemony of the core EU countries using expressions such as “the selfishness of German bankers” (Meloni 2017) and “Franco-German axis” (Meloni 2021, 230). However, there was an important difference between Meloni and CEE leaders. In her book, Meloni said that they see themselves as patriots who “claim a role for Italy of equal dignity with the other founding states of the EU” (Ibid). In her first speech as prime minister, Meloni strengthened this position, promising that “Italy will make its voice heard loudly, as befits a great founding nation” (2022). This implies that, because of the different histories of their countries’ relations with the EU, there is a different perception of the EU in CEE between newly integrated countries and an EU founding member. Therefore, it is easier for CEE leaders to perceive and present the EU as a significant Other than for an Italian leader.

Attitudes towards the EU

The analysed parties’ different backgrounds and trajectories resulted in different attitudes towards the EU. CEE PRR parties are all radicalised mainstream parties (Buštiková and Guasti 2017). FdI seems to have an opposite trajectory, as it appears to be a radical party that is becoming mainstream. This is presented in Table 1, which shows analysed parties changing positions towards the EU according to the Chapel Hill Expert Survey. PiS became more Eurosceptic after coming to power in 2005 and in 2015. This is even more pronounced for *Fidesz*, which was a pro-EU party until coming to power for the second time in 2010. In 2019, all these parties, with the exception of SDS, which was considered as a pro-EU party, were classified as soft Eurosceptic (Taggart and Pirro 2021). However, Alenka Krašovec and Damjan Laj (2020) argue that SDS could be seen as soft Eurosceptic already in the 2019 EP elections as it has started following *Fidesz*’s lead. SDS focused on the dangers of immigration to Europe and aligned itself with the part of EPP which was against *Fidesz*’s expulsion from the group. After coming to power, SDS and Janša became even more supportive of *Fidesz* and PiS and started using Eurosceptic narratives. However, in the 2023 special edition

⁹ *Foibe* mass killings were carried out in the period 1943-45, after Yugoslav Partisans took over previously Italian-ruled parts of the eastern Adriatic. The Partisans usually threw the bodies of fascists, suspected fascists and those opposed to Yugoslav rule in these areas into pits (*foibe*). The Italian far-right and FdI emphasise these killings and ignore the previous two decades of violent fascist rule over these areas.

of Chapel Hill Expert Survey on the Russian invasion of Ukraine, SDS was deemed as becoming more pro-EU. On the other hand, PiS and *Fidesz* were seen as being more Eurosceptic in the 2023 survey, having even hinted at their countries' possible exit from the EU in late 2021 and early 2022 (Spike and Gera 2021; Orbán 2022a). This was also a result of the rule of law crisis, with *Fidesz* and PiS governments being reprimanded by the EU for democratic backsliding and lack of judicial independence. The crisis escalated in 2021 when the European Commission refused to approve Poland's recovery and resilience plan (Blanke and Sander 2023).

Compared to other parties, FdI had the lowest score on EU positions in 2019, reflecting their opposition status and the general rise of Euroscepticism in Italy. But after coming to power, they softened their positions and became more pro-EU in the 2023 survey.¹⁰ EPP leader Manfred Weber even called for cooperation with Meloni and saw FdI as a respectable part of the ECR. On the other hand, *Fidesz* was pushed out of the EPP and PiS was not considered a trustworthy ally for the EPP.

Table 1. PRR parties and their EU position scores.

	2002	2006	2010	2014	2019	2023
PiS	4.7	3.5	2.9	3.8	2.9	2.6
<i>Fidesz</i>	4.6	5.5	5.3	2.7	3.1	2
SDS	6.4	6.4	5.8	6.4	5.1	5.8
FdI	4.3 (AN)	4.7 (AN)	5.7 (AN)*	2.2	1.9	4

Sources: Chapel Hill Expert Surveys (see Jolly *et al.* 2022 for 2002 to 2019; Hooghe *et al.* 2024 for 2023).

Notes: 1 indicates strongly opposed towards and 7 indicates strongly in favour of European integration.

Scores in bold indicate the year when the party had a prime minister.

* As AN was a predecessor of FdI, we also present the data for AN for comparative purposes. Although AN merged with *Forza Italia* into PdL in 2009 it was also surveyed for the 2010 expert survey.

With regard to these parties' decisions on deeper European integration, we analysed the results of their voting on three proposals for deeper European integration in the EP (Table 2). The first case concerns the reform of the European Electoral Act by implementing direct universal suffrage. The second refers to 'Follow-up to the conclusions of the Conference on the Future of Europe' within which institutional reform and treaty revision represent one of the main topics (Ålander *et al.* 2022). Finally, the voting on 'Proposals of the European Parliament for the amendment of the Treaties' was also analysed.

¹⁰ AN, a predecessor of FdI, also became more pro-EU after they entered government in 2006.

Table 2. Voting on deeper European integration in the European Parliament.

	Reform of the European Electoral Act (Direct universal suffrage) (3 May 2022)	Follow-up to the Conclusions of the Conference on the Future of Europe (4 May 2022)	Proposals of the European Parliament for the amendment of the Treaties (22 November 2023)
PiS	-	-	-
<i>Fidesz</i>	+	-	-
SDS	+	+	-
Fdi	-	-	-

Sources: European Parliament Plenary (2024).

Notes: + indicates 'yes' vote; - indicates 'no' vote.

* SDS MEP Milan Zver abstained in the correction to votes and voting intentions.

The analysis shows that PiS and Fdi, as members of the ECR, did not display any inclination towards deeper EU integration. *Fidesz* voted against deeper integration in two cases, while oddly voting in favour of the proposal to reform the European Electoral Act. What is particularly interesting here is that this proposal contains the “key normative proposals for strengthening the Europeanisation of the electoral system” as well as the “controversial and innovative novelty” of transnational lists (Polzin 2022, 3). The position of *Fidesz* MEPs on this proposal is even more confusing if we consider the words of its MEP László Trócsányi. A year after agreeing to this proposal, Trócsányi stated that:

the idea of introducing the so-called transnational lists is an attempt by the left-wing parties to reduce the influence of the Member States, to water down the rights of their citizens leading to such rights becoming mere formal declarations. In fact, it is aimed at creating a United States of Europe, it is anti-democratic and goes against the Treaties of the European Union (*Fidesz* 2023).

SDS showed less aversion to deeper European integration and initially voted in favour of ‘Follow-up to the Conclusions of the Conference on the Future of Europe’. However, an influential SDS MEP, Milan Zver abstained from voting expressing his long-held fears about the centralisation of the EU (2019). On the most important issue for deeper European integration, the revision of the Treaties, which would abolish unanimity, PiS and *Fidesz* expressed fierce opposition and concern. PiS MEP Ryszard Legutko, for example, called this proposal a “proof of how dangerous the EU has become” and compared it to “the story of Dr Frankenstein, who wanted to create a wonderful creature, but instead created a monster” (*Notes from Poland* 2023). Similarly, Trócsányi stated: “The member states are the masters of the Treaties, they decide what part of their sovereignty the European Union may exercise and in what areas, in accordance with their constitutions” (*Hungary Today* 2023). Although the EPP was divided on this issue, SDS voted against the proposal and did not follow the line of German Christian Democrats.

In conclusion, we see that in voting on deeper European integration in the EP, analysed parties were mostly aligned with their European party groups' positions. Deeper integration was unpopular among them, with the exception of SDS, which, when given the choice, opted for less integration. The most

prominent CEE MEPs were particularly concerned with preserving national sovereignty within the EU, and used historical references to emphasise this. Legutko devoted much of his book, *The Demon in Democracy*, to drawing parallels between the EU and the Soviet Union (2018). Trócsányi compared the EU to the Holy Roman Empire, saying that “decisions are made centrally and central Europe is seen as a periphery that has the duty to simply implement them” (*Hungary Today* 2021). Zver warned that “the European Union will not be saved by more unification and more centralisation – we Slovenians have already had this experience in Yugoslavia – but by the member states feeling free within it” (2019).

Attitudes towards the Russian invasion of Ukraine and Israel-Hamas war

The Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 brought to the fore differences between Orbán and other PRR leaders. In his speech in March 2022 Orbán said that “it is in our interest not to be pawns in someone else’s war since we have nothing to gain and everything to lose” (cit. in Kovacs 2022). In the speech, which was part of the celebrations of the 1848 Revolution, Orbán decided to focus on peace. This was in stark contrast to the message sent by his colleagues Kaczyński, Morawiecki and Janša. On the same day that Orbán gave his speech in Budapest, these three PRR leaders together with Czech Prime Minister Petr Fiala visited Kyiv and gave their full support to Ukraine and its President Volodymyr Zelensky.

In his speech Janša invoked European values, saying:

We are now here because we admire your courage and your fighting spirit by which you shattered the myth of an invincible Russian army. We are here because your struggle is also our struggle, and because you are not only defending the territory of Ukraine, but also what are known as the fundamental European values, i.e. freedom, democracy and the right of everyone to choose what kind of country they want to live in (Republic of Slovenia 2022).

Interestingly, these three leaders were presented by the Polish government as being the “representatives of the European Council” and Morawiecki concluded that the “EU supports Ukraine, which can count on the help of its friends – we brought this message to Kyiv today” (Boffey and Rankin 2022). They also represented three post-communist countries and, conveniently, had anti-communist backgrounds.¹¹ The Polish government became one of the most active supporters of Ukraine in the EU, which seemed to lead to a certain thaw in relations between Warsaw and Brussels. However, PiS criticism of the West and Germany remained and, with its newly acquired European and Western credentials, became even harsher. PiS engaged in criticism of the history of German policy towards Putin’s Russia and doubled down on historical references to German hegemony. In August 2022 Kaczyński declared: “We do not fit into the German-Russian plans to rule over Europe. An independent, economically, socially and militarily strong Poland is an obstacle for them. From a historical perspective, this is nothing new” (Notes from Poland 2022). PiS MEP Zdzisław Krasnodębski even claimed the following:

I believe that the threat to our sovereignty from the West is greater than from the East. This is paradoxical. Of course, Russia is brutal, Russia can declare war on us. But Poles know, in a spiritual or psychological sense, how to deal with such a danger. Putin does not divide us, but

¹¹ Fiala and Morawiecki were also involved in dissident activities in the 1980s.

unites us. However, the EU uses completely different means. Rather, incentives, money, soft power (Niezalezna 2022).

The war in Ukraine also helped Meloni to prove her Western and NATO credentials. In 2018, Meloni congratulated Putin on his fourth victory in the Russian presidential election, emphasising the Russian people's unequivocal support for the Russian President (Facebook 2024b). However, after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Meloni emphasised pro-NATO positions, giving full support to Ukraine and directly opposing Putin's positions (*National Post* 2023). Although Meloni was exposed as privately being more inclined towards finding a peaceful settlement (Giuffrida and Roth 2023), she continued to make symbolic gestures of support for Ukraine, further strengthening her EU credentials. On the second anniversary of the Russian invasion, Meloni visited Kyiv together with European Commission President von der Leyen. This highlighted how the transition from her predecessor Mario Draghi to her administration was “not showing any significant changes in policies or positions vis-à-vis the war in Ukraine” (Bruno and Fazio 2023). Moreover, Meloni decided to pull Italy out of the Belt and Road Initiative, again strengthening her Western credentials and jettisoning her populist background.

Recent foreign policy decisions also show Orbán's difference from other PRR leaders (Table 3). We analysed the positions of PRR governments on the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the Israel-Hamas war. We compared votes on two UN General Assembly resolutions: the first on the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the second, initiated by Jordan, calling for protection of civilians in the Israel-Hamas war. Third, we looked at the European Council meeting where the opening of accession negotiations with Ukraine (and Moldova) was discussed.

The results show that all analysed governments agreed with the resolution condemning the Russian invasion of Ukraine, which was prepared by the EU. However, Hungary was absent from the European Council's decision on opening accession negotiations with Ukraine. After the long discussion regarding potential Ukrainian membership, Olaf Scholz, the German Chancellor, famously told Orbán, who was arguing against Ukrainian membership, to “grab a coffee outside the room” (Von der Burchard 2023). In this way, other leaders could vote unanimously to open talks with Ukraine and Orbán, who left the room, could say that he was not in favour. Orbán publicly confirmed his opposition to Ukrainian membership: “Ukraine's EU membership is a bad decision. Hungary does not want to participate in this bad decision!” (Orbán 2023).

Table 3. Populist radical right governments vote on Ukraine and Israel-Hamas war.

	UN resolution demanding Russia leave Ukraine (2 March 2022)	UN resolution Protection of civilians and upholding legal and humanitarian obligations (27 October 2023)	European Council meeting to open accession negotiations with Ukraine (14-15 December 2023)
Poland	+	0	/
Hungary	+	-	x
Italy	/	0	+
Slovenia	+	/	/

Sources: United Nations Digital Library (2023) and European Council (2023)

Notes: + = 'yes' vote; - = 'no' vote; 0 = abstaining; x = absent; / = period before or after the populist radical right government was in power

Recent in-depth analysis reveals the reasons for Orbán's exceptionalism. From the onset of the Ukraine crisis in 2014, Orbán referred to the problems of the Hungarian minority in Ukraine and even argued that "the West should not try to impose its liberal values on Russia, which is a strong and successful country" (Lamour 2023, 15). Thus, it seems that the combination of Orbán's strong emphasis on trans-sovereign nationalism and illiberalism can help explain his specific stance. It should also be noted that the parts of Ukraine where Hungarians live belonged to Hungary before the Treaty of Trianon, so there is again a historical dimension to Orbán's positions.

Finally, on the question of attitudes towards the Israel-Hamas war, Hungary also differed from other PRR governments. In this case, Hungary was against the UN resolution on the protection of civilians, which was a minority decision in the EU. Hungary followed Israel and the United States (US) in opposing the resolution because it did not include Israel's right to self-defence. *Fidesz's* decision should not come as a surprise, as Hungary has blocked common EU positions on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict on several occasions (Dyduch and Muller 2021). The most recent was when Budapest refused to endorse the call for a ceasefire in February 2024, making Hungary once again an outcast within the EU. Orbán has also developed close ties with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and former US president Donald Trump, with whom he shares a radical right ideology. Overall, Orbán has become an international ideological entrepreneur, developing criticism of the liberal West even through his foreign policy decisions.

Poland and Italy abstained when voting on the UN resolution, as did most other EU member states. PiS' general stance on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was lucidly explained by Joanna Dyduch and Patrick Muller (2021), who stated that PiS chooses its foreign policy battles. Although "the PiS government does not identify with core norms and principles of the EU's external foreign policy identity, Polish diplomacy routinely expressed its support for the EU's established foreign policy *acquis* on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict" (583). However, Morawiecki used the war to warn again of the danger of a "huge Islamic wave,

of Muslim immigrants [...] among whom will be hidden fighters and Islamic terrorists” (*Polish Press Agency* 2023).¹² It should also be noted that in 2019 Morawiecki cancelled his trip to Israel, due to Netanyahu’s comments on Polish complicity in the Holocaust (*Al Jazeera* 2019). This was a continuation of the international memory war between Israel and Poland, as the Israeli government objected to the 2018 PiS law against any Polish responsibility for Nazi crimes. Fdi’s position should be interpreted in light of Meloni’s plan to build better relations with the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). At the beginning of her mandate, Meloni positioned herself as a strong ally of Israel, which helped her move Fdi away from its neofascist roots, and of Netanyahu, with whom she shared ideological convictions, as did the other PRR leaders. However, the need to pragmatically follow the Western mainstream and her view of Italy as the bridge between Europe and MENA pushed her towards a more neutral position towards Israel (Momigliano 2024).

Conclusion

The four analysed PRR governments have many similarities, but also important differences. They all ignore the dark parts of their countries’ history. All of them are primarily concerned with migration, which they see as a major challenge for their nations, regardless of whether they were at the forefront of migration routes, like Italy, or were largely spared of major migration waves, like Poland (at least until the Russian invasion of Ukraine). They have all been historically shaped by their anti-communism. As communist ideology became largely obsolete, they managed to redirect their anti-communism towards new targets, either by fighting against remnants of old regimes and post-communists as CEE parties, or against cultural hegemony of the left in the case of Fdi. This is a major difference between CEE parties and Fdi, as the former could still wage relevant memory wars against post-communists. To be sure, all the four parties see former communists now disguised as liberal pro-Europeans. However, CEE parties can present a more sinister scenario due to their countries’ past experience under Communist rule, depicting these supposedly disguised communists as surrendering their national sovereignty to Brussels, as had happened in the past with Moscow and Belgrade.

The EU was a major target for both, but the development of their positions on the EU was different. As TAN parties they naturally opposed liberal European supranationalism. However, their Euroscepticism had different trajectories. CEE PRR leaders became radicalised while in power and largely through opposition to the EU. They felt that their national sovereignty had suffered long enough, both from the concept of ‘limited sovereignty’ during the Cold War and from the arduous EU accession process. As they felt that the West did nothing to stop the former and was responsible for the latter, Orbán and Kaczyński in particular decided that they need to reclaim national sovereignty and resist the EU’s encroachment on their sovereignty. In their growing confrontation with the EU, PiS and *Fidesz* even played with hard Euroscepticism. Janša differs from them in that his Euroscepticism came later and was not as pronounced. It should be borne in mind that Janša governed a much smaller country that was also a Eurozone member. Historically, Slovenia never had an empire nor tried to become a regional power, unlike Hungary and Poland. On the other hand, it seems that Fdi became less Eurosceptic and radical after it came to power. Meloni sought to position herself as a credible mainstream politician, but also to make Italy a leader in

¹² Janša lost his job as prime minister, but he also saw the Israel-Hamas war as a danger for Europe, because of the risk of terrorists coming to Europe, and called on citizens to arm themselves (*IntelliNews* 2023). Janša also strongly opposed the new government's recognition of the Palestinian state.

the EU, a position that she felt a founding member state like Italy rightly deserved. This could be achieved not by confronting the EU, as Orbán and Kaczyński did, but by being a reliable ally.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine played an important role in this, changing the position of the ruling radical right in Europe. Strong support for Ukraine brought Meloni, Janša and Kaczyński closer to the mainstream. But PiS also used its newly acquired European credentials to intensify its attacks on German and Western elites, remaining true to their history-imbued PRR ideology. Orbán, on the other hand, used the situation in Ukraine differently. First, he exploited it in the Hungarian 2022 election campaign to claim that he was the candidate who stood for peace, as opposed to the liberal warmongers. More recently, he has used his advocacy of peace in Ukraine as another point of commonality with presidential candidate Trump. Hungary's decisions on both Ukraine and the Israel-Hamas war have also left Orbán more isolated within the EU. Orbán's forming of the EP group "Patriots for Europe", with FPÖ, *Rassemblement National* and *Lega*, confirmed his rift with more pro-Ukrainian PiS and FdI. With his calls for peace in Ukraine, Orbán remains one of the most consistent critics of the liberal West and what he sees as the dangers of liberal interventionism.

However, these leaders' attitudes and decisions were not just the result of personal political strategies, but come from a broader social and historical context. Analysed CEE parties had their roots in national movements that helped defeat communism. As a result, they tend to construct their identities based on significant Others that are linked to their national histories and a sense of Western betrayal, making them more inclined to become Eurosceptic while in government. In the construction of *Fidesz's* identity, the significant Other was the liberal West and its corrupt elites in Brussels. For PiS, it was Germany, which is also a major power in the EU and this makes most of Brussels' policies appear suspicious. Even SDS shifted its EU positions and began to perceive the EU as a communist-like entity, although its main historical enemy remained socialist Yugoslavia. On the other hand, for the Italian radical right, it is more difficult to have the EU as a significant Other in the same sense, because Italy was a founding member and its historical grievances are not directed at the West.

Certainly, there are many other factors that can help explain the attitudes and behaviour of PRR governments in the foreign policy domain. More research is needed to fully capture the factors at play, but we argue that historical dimensions and visions of history should also be taken into account when analysing the foreign policies of these parties. Even if they shared the same ideology at one time, the historical and geopolitical specificities of populist parties may help explain variations in their foreign policies.

Acknowledgements

The authors are thankful to Leo Goretti, Raffaele Mastrorocco and two anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments. This work was supported by the Croatian Science Foundation under Grant UIP-2019-04-2979.

Notes on Contributors

Nikola Petrović is a Senior Research Associate at the Institute for Social Research in Zagreb, Croatia.

Josip Bilić is a PhD Candidate at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences of the University of Zagreb and a Research Assistant at the Institute for Social Research in Zagreb, Croatia. Email: bilic@idi.hr

References

- Ålander, Minna, von Ondarza, Nicolai, and Russack, Sophia, eds. 2012. *Managed Expectations: EU Member States' Views on the Conference on the Future of Europe*. European Policy Institute Network. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/353680687_Managed_Expectations_EU_Member_States'_Views_on_the_Conference_on_the_Future_of_Europe.
- Al Jazeera. 2019. Polish Prime Minister Withdraws from Israel Visit. 17 February. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/2/17/polish-prime-minister-withdraws-from-israel-visit>.
- Baldini, Gianfranco, Tronconi, Filippo, and Angelucci, Davide. 2022. Yet another Populist Party? Understanding the Rise of Brothers of Italy. *South European Society and Politics* 27 (3): 385-405.
- Blanke, Hermann-Josef, and Sander, Aimee. 2023. Enforcing the Rule of Law in the EU: The Case of Poland and Hungary. *ZEUS Zeitschrift für Europarechtliche Studien* 26 (2): 239-76.
- Blokker, Paul, and Delanty, Gerard. 2009. European Identity, Post-Western Europe, and Complex Cultural Diversity. In Christopher Browning and Marko Lehti, eds. *The Struggle for the West*: 117-34. London: Routledge.
- Boffey, Daniel, and Rankin, Jennifer. 2022. 'Europe Stands with you': EU Leaders Vow Support for Ukraine during Kyiv Visit. *The Guardian*, 16 March. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/15/polish-czech-and-slovenian-prime-ministers-travel-to-kyiv-ukraine>.
- Bruno, Valerio Alfonso, and Fazio, Federica. 2024. Italian Governments and Political Parties Vis-a-Vis the War in Ukraine. In Mihr, Anja, and Pierobon, Chiara, eds. *Polarization, Shifting Borders and Liquid Governance*: 265-83. Cham: Springer.
- Buštková, Lenka, and Guasti, Petra. 2017. The Illiberal Turn or Swerve in Central Europe? *Politics and Governance* 5 (4): 166-76.
- Cadier, David. 2021. Populist Politics of Representation and Foreign Policy: Evidence from Poland. *Comparative European Politics* 19 (6): 703-21.
- Caramani, Daniele, and Manucci, Luca. 2019. National Past and Populism: The Re-elaboration of Fascism and Its Impact on Right-wing Populism in Western Europe. *West European Politics* 42 (6): 1159-87.
- Couperus, Stefan, Rensmann, Lars and Tortola, Pier Domenico. 2023. Historical Legacies and the Political Mobilization of National Nostalgia: Understanding Populism's Relationship to the Past. *Journal of Contemporary European Studies* 31 (2): 253-67.
- Couperus, Stefan, and Tortola, Pier Domenico. 2019. Right-wing Populism's (Ab)use of the Past in Italy and the Netherlands. *Debats Journal on Culture, Power and Society* 4 (2): 105-18.
- Csehi, Robert, and Zgut, Edit. 2021. 'We won't let Brussels Dictate Us': Eurosceptic Populism in Hungary and Poland. *European Politics and Society* 22 (1): 53-68.

Conti, Nicolò, Marangoni, Francesco, and Verzichelli, Luca. 2020. Euroscepticism in Italy from the Onset of the Crisis: Tired of Europe? *South European Society and Politics*: 1-26.

Coticchia, Fabrizio. 2021. A Sovereignist Revolution? Italy's Foreign Policy under the "Yellow-Green" Government. *Comparative European Politics* 19 (6): 739-59.

Delo. 2011. Kratka zgodovina stranke SDS [Short History of the Party SDS]. 11 December.
<https://old.delo.si/novice/volitve/kratka-zgodovina-stranke-sds.html>.

Destradi, Sandra, Cadier, David and Plagemann, Johannes. 2021. Populism and Foreign Policy: A Research Agenda (Introduction). *Comparative European Politics* 19 (6): 663-82.

Donà, Alessia. 2022. The Rise of the Radical Right in Italy: The Case of Fratelli d'Italia. *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 27 (5): 775-94.

Dyduch, Joanna, and Müller, Patrick. 2021. Populism Meets EU Foreign policy: The De-Europeanization of Poland's Foreign Policy toward the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict. *Journal of European Integration* 43 (5): 569-86.

European Council. 2023. European Council Conclusions, 14 and 15 December 2023.
<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2023/12/15/european-council-conclusions-14-and-15-december-2023/>.

European Parliament Plenary. 2024. Results of Votes. Accessed 11 March 2024.
<https://www.europarl.europa.eu/plenary/en/votes.html?tab=votes>.

Facebook. 2024a. Accessed 11 March 2024.
<https://www.facebook.com/giorgiameloni.paginaufficiale/posts/pfbid0XJKqVxZ76bnRZBZ6mpbuXWT3qT1rw9XxpxHHbxQCmF2VV8bPz5kw9UhTx2SAL5x8l>.

Facebook. 2024b. Accessed 11 March 2024.
<https://www.facebook.com/giorgiameloni.paginaufficiale/posts/complimenti-a-vladimir-putin-per-la-sua-quarta-elezione-a-presidente-della-feder/10156154246102645/>.

Fidesz. 2023. The Proposal of Transnational Lists is a Serious Interference in National Sovereignty. 7 May.
<https://fidesz-eu.hu/en/the-proposal-of-transnational-lists-is-a-serious-interference-in-national-sovereignty/>.

Ghiglione, Giorgio. 2023. Why Giorgia Meloni Won't Distance Herself from Italy's Fascist Past. *Foreign Policy*, 6 February. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2023/02/06/why-giorgia-meloni-wont-distance-herself-from-italys-fascist-past/>.

Giuffrida, Angela and Roth, Andrew. 2023. 'Tiredness on all Sides' over War in Ukraine, Italian PM Tells Prank Caller. *The Guardian*, 1 November. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/nov/01/italy-giorgia-meloni-prank-call-russia-ukraine-war>.

Griffini, Marianna. 2023. *The Politics of Memory in the Italian Populist Radical Right: From Mare Nostrum to Mare Vostrum*. London: Routledge.

Halikiopoulou, Daphne, Nanou, Kyriaki and Vasilopoulou, Sofia. 2012. The Paradox of Nationalism: The Common Denominator of Radical Right and Radical Left Euroscepticism. *European Journal of Political research* 51 (4): 504-39.

Hooghe, Liesbet, Marks, Gary, and Wilson, Carole J. 2002. Does Left/Right Structure Party Positions on European Integration? *Comparative Political Studies* 35 (8): 965-89.

Hooghe, Liesbet, *et al.* 2024. The Russian Threat and the Consolidation of the West: How Populism and EU-skepticism Shape Party sSupport for Ukraine. *European Union Politics*
<https://doi.org/10.1177/14651165241237136>.

Hungary Today. 2021. Fidesz MEP Trócsányi: EU Power Held by “Narrow Circle”. 27 November.
<https://hungarytoday.hu/laszlo-trocsanyi-hungary-european-union/>.

Hungary Today. 2023. Unanimity should be Preserved in the European Union, Says MEP. 7 December.
<https://hungarytoday.hu/unanimity-should-be-preserved-in-the-european-union-says-mep/>.

Ignazi, Piero. 1996. From Neo-fascists to Post-fascists? The Transformation of the MSI into the AN. *West European Politics* 19 (4): 693-714.

IntelliNews. 2023. Ex-PM tells Slovenians to Arm themselves against Palestinian Migrants. 24 October.
<https://www.intellinews.com/ex-pm-tells-slovenians-to-arm-themselves-against-palestinian-migrants-298310/>.

Janša, Janez. 1992. *Premiki: Nastajanje in obramba slovenske države, 1988-1992* [Movements: The Foundation and Defence of the Slovenian state, 1988-192]. Ljubljana: Mladinska knjiga.

Janša, Janez. 1994. *Okopi: Pot slovenske države 1991-1994* [Trenches: The Path of the Slovenian State 1991-1994]. Ljubljana: Mladinska knjiga.

Janša, Janez. 2020. Letter to the President of the European Council. *Politico*, 17 November.
https://www.politico.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Letter_of_PM_Janez_Jansa_to_the_PEUCO_Charles_Michel.pdf.

Jolly, Seth *et al.* 2022. Chapel Hill Expert Survey Trend File, 1999-2019. *Electoral Studies* 75 (February).
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2021.102420>

Jones, Erik. 2023. Italy's Hard Truths. *Journal of Democracy* 34 (1): 21-35.

Kaczyński, Jarosław. 2011. *Polska naszych marzeń* [Poland of our Dreams]. Łódź: Akapit.

Kovacs, Zoltan. 2022. PM Orbán on Anniversary of the 1848 Revolution: “Let here be Peace, Liberty and Concord”. *About Hungary*, 15 March. <https://abouthungary.hu/blog/pm-orban-on-anniversary-of-the-1848-revolution-let-here-be-peace-liberty-and-concord>.

Krašovec, Alenka, and Lajh, Damjan. 2020. Slovenia. In Vít Hloušek and Petr Kaniok, eds. *The European Parliament Election of 2019 in East-Central Europe: Second-Order Euroscepticism*: 253-75. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.

Lamour, Christian. 2023. Orbán placed in Europe: Ukraine, Russia and the Radical-right Populist Heartland. *Geopolitics* 29 (4): 1297-323.

Legutko, Ryszard. 2018. *The Demon in Democracy: Totalitarian Temptations in Free Societies*. New York: Encounter Books.

Lehmann, Pola *et al.* 2024. Manifesto Corpus. Version: 2024-1. Berlin: WZB Berlin Social Science Center/Göttingen: Institute for Democracy Research (IfDem).

Lubbers, Marcel, and Scheepers, Peer. 2010. Divergent Trends of Euroscepticism in Countries and Regions of the European Union. *European Journal of Political Research* 49 (6): 787-817.

Meloni, Giorgia. 2017. Le tesi di Trieste [Trieste theses]. Accessed 11 March 2024. <https://www.giorgiameloni.it/tesitrieste/>.

Meloni, Giorgia. 2021. Io sono Giorgia: Le mie radici, le mie idee [I am Giorgia: My roots, my ideas]. Milano: Rizzoli.

Meloni, Giorgia. 2022. Ecco il discorso integrale di Giorgia Meloni alla Camera per la fiducia al governo [Here Is Giorgia Meloni's Full Speech to the Chamber for the Vote of Confidence in the Government]. *La Repubblica*, 25 October. https://www.repubblica.it/politica/2022/10/25/news/discorso_integrale_meloni_camera_fiducia-371646980/.

Momigliano, Anna. 2024. Is Netanyahu Losing a Key Right-wing Ally in Meloni's Italy? *Haaretz*, 28 May. <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/2024-05-28/ty-article/.premium/is-netanyahu-losing-a-key-right-wing-ally-in-melonis-italy/0000018f-bece-d5c5-a3ff-ffe8270000>.

Morawiecki, Mateusz. 2020. In interview with Gerhard Gnauck. Die EU reagiert sich gern an Polen und Ungarn ab“ [The EU is Happy to React to Poland and Hungary]. *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 3 December. <https://www.faz.net/aktuell/politik/ausland/polens-ministerpraesident-morawiecki-zum-veto-gegen-den-eu-haushalt-17081855.html>.

Mudde, Cas. 2007. *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Mudde, Cas. 2012. The Comparative Study of Party-Based Euroscepticism: The Sussex versus the North Carolina School. *East European Politics* 28 (2): 193-202.

Müller, Patrick, and Gebauer, Charlott. 2021. Austria and the Global Compact on Migration: The ‘Populist Securitization’ of Foreign Policy. *Comparative European Politics* 19: 760-78.

National Post. 2023. Italy's Meloni Criticizes Putin's Speech ahead of Zelenskiy Talks. 21 February. <https://nationalpost.com/pmn/news-pmn/italys-meloni-criticizes-putins-speech-ahead-of-zelenskiy-talks>.

Niezależna. 2022. Rosja jest brutalna, ale wiemy, jak z nią walczyć. Prof. Krasnodębski o zagrożeniach ze strony Zachodu [Russia Is Brutal, but We Know How to Fight It. Prof. Krasnodębski on Threats from the West]. 18 August. <https://niezalezna.pl/polska/rosja-jest-brutalna-ale-wiemy-jak-z-nia-walczy-prof-krasnodebski-o-zagrozeniach-ze-strony-zachodu/454276>.

Notes from Poland. 2023. Poland's Main Parties, PiS and PO, to Oppose EU Treaty Change. 21 November. <https://notesfrompoland.com/2023/11/21/polands-main-parties-pis-and-po-to-oppose-eu-treaty-change/>.

Notes from Poland. 2022. We have No Reason to Fulfil our Obligations towards the EU. 8 August. <https://notesfrompoland.com/2022/08/08/we-have-no-reason-to-fulfil-our-obligations-towards-the-eu-says-polish-leader-kaczynski/>.

Orbán, Viktor. 2022a. Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's "State of the Nation" Address Budapest, 12 February. <https://2015-2022.miniszterelnok.hu/prime-minister-viktor-orbans-state-of-the-nation-address-5/>

Orbán, Viktor. 2022b. Speech by Prime Minister Viktor Orbán at the Opening Ceremony of the Mindszentynem. 24. October. <https://abouthungary.hu/speeches-and-remarks/speech-by-prime-minister-viktor-orban-at-the-opening-ceremony-of-the-mindszentynem>.

Orbán, Viktor. 2023. Ukraine's EU Membership Is a Bad Decision, Hungary Does not Wish to Take Part in It. Accessed 11 March 2024. <https://miniszterelnok.hu/en/ukraines-eu-membership-is-a-bad-decision-hungary-does-not-wish-to-take-part-in-it/>.

Otjes, Simon, van der Veer, Harmen, and Wagner, Wolfgang. 2023. Party Ideologies and European Foreign Policy. Examining the Transnational Foreign Policy Space. *Journal of European Public Policy* 30 (9): 1793-819.

Petrović, Nikola. 2019. Divided National Memories and EU Crises: How Eurosceptic Parties Mobilize Historical Narratives. *Innovation: The European Journal of Social Science Research* 32 (3): 363-84.

Petrović, Nikola, Raos, Višeslav, and Fila, Filip. 2023. Centrist and Radical Right Populists in Central and Eastern Europe: Divergent Visions of History and the EU. *Journal of Contemporary European Studies* 31 (2): 268-90.

Polish Press Agency. 2023. PM Warns Middle East Turmoil will Prompt Migration Wave. 12 October. <https://www.pap.pl/en/news/pm-warns-middle-east-turmoil-will-prompt-migration-wave>.

Polzin, Monika. 2022. Transnational Lists, Diversity and Quota Regulation. The European Parliament's Proposal for a New Electoral Law. *EU Law Live* No. 123: https://eulawlive.com/app/uploads/weekend_edition_123.pdf

Radonić, Ljiljana. 2020. 'Our' vs. 'Inherited' Museums. PiS and Fidesz as Mnemonic Warriors. *Südosteuropa* 68 (1): 44-78.

Raunio, Tapio, and Wagner, Wolfgang. 2020. The Party Politics of Foreign and Security Policy. *Foreign Policy Analysis* 16 (4): 515-31.

Republic of Slovenia. 2022. Prime Minister Janša in Kyiv: Ukraine Is part of the European Family. 16 March. <https://www.gov.si/en/news/2022-03-16-prime-minister-jansa-in-kyiv-ukraine-is-part-of-the-european-family/>.

Rooduijn, Matthijs, *et al.* 2019. The PopuList: An Overview of Populist, Far Right, Far Left and Eurosceptic Parties in Europe. <http://www.popu-list.org/>.

Rose, Hannah. 2020. *The New Philosemitism: Exploring a Changing Relationship Between Jews and the Far-Right*. London: ICSR. <https://icsr.info/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/ICSR-Report-The-New->

Philosemitism-Exploring-a-Changing-Relationship-Between-Jews-and-the-Far-Right.pdf Accessed 1 August 2024.

Sadecki, Andrzej. 2022. From Defying to (Re-)defining Europe in Viktor Orbán's Discourse about the Past. *Journal of European Studies* 52 (3-4): 255-71.

SDS (*Slovenska demokratska stranka*). 2021. Za Obrambo ustavnih temeljev Slovenske države [For the Defence of the Constitutional Foundations of the Slovenian State].
<https://www.sds.si/sites/default/files/12KongresSDS/Sprejete%20resolucije/Za%20obrambo%20ustavnih%20temeljev%20slovenske%20drz%CC%8Cave%20-%20sprejeto.pdf>.

Siviero, Tommi. 2024. How Italy's Government Polices Teaching of WWII 'Foibe' Massacres. *BalkanInsights*, 9 February. <https://balkaninsight.com/2024/02/09/how-italys-government-polices-teaching-of-wwii-foibe-massacres/>.

Spike, Justin, and Gera, Vaness. 2021. Is it a Bluff? Some in Hungary and Poland talk of EU Pullout. *Associated Press*, 25 September. <https://apnews.com/article/europe-poland-hungary-brexite-brussels-95779c949531b17aad909ba7d90614d0>

Stanley, Ben. 2008. The Thin Ideology of Populism. *Journal of Political Ideologies* 13 (1): 95-110.

Taggart, Paul, and Pirro, Andrea L. P. 2021. European Populism before the Pandemic: Ideology, Euroscepticism, Electoral Performance, and Government Participation of 63 parties in 30 Countries. *Italian Political Science Review/Rivista Italiana Di Scienza Politica* 51, 3: 281-304.

Taggart, Paul, and Szczerbiak, Aleks. 2004. Contemporary Euroscepticism in the Party Systems of the European Union Candidate States of Central and Eastern Europe. *European Journal of Political Research* 43 (1): 1-27.

United Nations Digital Library. 2023. Protection of Civilians and Upholding Legal and Humanitarian Obligations: Resolution / Adopted by the General Assembly.
<https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/4025240?ln=en>

Vachudova, Milada Anna. 2005. *Europe Undivided: Democracy, Leverage, and Integration after Communism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Van Klinger, Marijn, Boomgaarden, Hajo G. and De Vreese, Claes H. 2013. Going Soft or Staying Soft: Have Identity Factors Become more Important than Economic Rationale when Explaining Euroscepticism? *Journal of European Integration* 35 (6): 689-704.

Varga, Mihai, and Buzogány, Aron. 2021. The Foreign Policy of Populists in Power: Contesting Liberalism in Poland and Hungary. *Geopolitics* 26 (5): 1442-63.

Verbeek, Bertjan, and Zaslove, Andrej. 2017. Populism and Foreign Policy, in Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser, et al., eds. *The Oxford Handbook of Populism*: 384-405, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

von der Burchard, Hans. 2023. Scholz Gets Orbán Out the Room to Open Ukraine's Membership Talks. *Politico*, 15 December. <https://www.politico.eu/article/olaf-scholz-gets-viktor-orban-out-the-room-to-approve-ukraine-accession-talks/>.

Zver, Milan. 2019. Dr. Milan Zver: Recept, vgrajen v Lizbonsko pogodbo, je treba braniti za vsako ceno, saj je z njim zagotovljena zaščita majhnih pri odločanju [Dr Milan Zver: The recipe built into the Lisbon Treaty must be defended at all costs, as it guarantees the protection of small ones in decision-making]. *Milan Zver personal webpage*, 14 October. <https://www.milanzver.eu/clanki/dr-milan-zver-recept-vgrajen-v-lizbonsko-pogodbo-je-treba-braniti-za-vsako-ceno-saj-je-z-njim>.