Is Alt-Europe possible? Populist radical right counternarratives of European integration

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Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

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ABSTRACT

After the 2016 Brexit referendum, European populist radical right (PRR) parties shifted towards what I call an alt-European policy programme. Alt-Europe is a conservative, xenophobic intergovernmental vision of a European 'community of sovereign states', 'strong nations' or 'fatherlands', that abhors the EU's 'centralised' United States of Europe. Whereas most work on the PRR examines its national impact and plots party programmes on a spectrum from soft to hard Euroscepticism, this article instead contributes to cutting edge transnational research on PRR narratives. I use qualitative content analysis to identify narratives that support or undermine alt-Europe, and tropes that refer to them, in the thirteen parliamentary, presidential and European election manifestoes since 2012 of four major PRR parties, AfD (Germany), PiS (Poland), Lega (Italy) and FN (France). Contesting the hard-soft dichotomy in Euroscepticism studies, the article identifies enduring alt-European master narratives across Europe. These stories of geopolitics, democracy, money and especially ethnic understandings of Christian civilisational identity offer important shared narrative resources for programmes of both reforming and replacing the EU. Common narratives also support the PRR unity needed to implement an alt-European programme. However, PRR parties' extreme nationalism and different interpretations of these narratives strongly impede this cooperation.

Introduction

After the 2016 Brexit referendum, European populist radical right (PRR) parties shifted towards what I call an alt-European policy programme. Alt-Europe is a conservative, xenophobic intergovernmental vision of a European 'community of sovereign states', 'strong nations' or 'fatherlands', that abhors the 'centralised' United States of Europe (AfD (Alternative für Deutschland) 2013: 1; AfD (Alternative für Deutschland) 2014: 3; AfD (Alternative für Deutschland) 2017: 17; AfD (Alternative für Deutschland) 2019: 7; RN (Rassemblement National) 2019: 8; PiS (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość) 2019, 20). The term references the transnational alt-right ideology of White, Christian, conservative solidarity but also emphasises that PRR parties are not just nationalist anti-Europeans (see also FitzGibbon and Guerra's 'alt-Euroalternativism' (2019: 9)). As the 2014 manifesto of the Italian PRR party Lega (League) put it, 'Another Europe is possible' (2014: 2). Alt-Europe is therefore an alternative PRR programme to EUxit (my catch-all term for national exits from the EU or Eurozone, e.g. Brexit, Frexit, Dexit, Polexit, Italexit). It may help explain why, despite being strongly nationalist, PRR parties are increasingly allying across Europe and framing their struggle in international terms (Farage 2020; Lega 2014, 2). Alternatively, their aim may be to lend wider legitimacy and momentum

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to their movement, distract from failed EUxit strategies, gain advantages in the European Parliament (EP), influence concrete European policies or capitalise on the resolution of old feuds (Startin and Brack 2016; Cooper, Dunin-Wąsowicz, and Milanese 2019, 4).

Regardless of the reason, the prospects for PRR party collaboration depend heavily on the important resource of compatible narratives. Scholars increasingly see this psychologically powerful type of discourse, organised in story form, as central to European identity (Kaiser and McMahon 2017). Despite this, just a few works contrasting Eurosceptic and pro-European discourse explicitly examine the role of narratives (Crespy and Verschueren 2009: 382–85; Skinner 2013: 127; De Wilde and Trenz 2012, 544).

The present article is based on qualitative content analysis of the thirteen parliamentary, presidential and European election manifestoes since 2012 of the main PRR parties in four of the five largest EU member states, AfD (Germany), PiS (Poland), Lega[1] (Italy) and FN (France) (see Table 1). I examined all manifesto references to the EU or Europe that were expressed in narrative form or contained tropes that implicitly referred to such narratives. This approach complements quantitative transnational comparisons of PRR policy positions (Vasilopoulou 2018a; FitzGibbon & Guerra 2019: 31), but locates these positions within a web of justifying narratrives.

Table 1. Manifestoes examined. **In bold** in bibliography.

Based on this new empirical research, the article makes four claims. First, despite national diversity among PRR parties, I find significant commonality across Europe in their underlying narratives. Second, I confirm other findings that these are also relatively stable over time, even though I cover both the intensifying PRR demands for EUxit between 2012 and the UK's Brexit referendum and the subsequent alt-European turn (Ivaldi 2018: 279–80; Pirro 2017: 408 &, 416). I therefore generally describe narratives in the present tense unless I note a specific change.

Third, these master narratives about geopolitics, democracy, money and especially ethnic understandings of White, Judeo-Christian civilisational identity offer the same powerful alt-European narrative resources, whether PRR parties call to replace or transform the EU. PRR manifestoes consistently argue, as Nigel Farage's last EP speech put it, that 'we love Europe; we just hate the European Union' (2020). Fourth, PRR parties' extreme nationalism and nationally specific policy narratives undermine these common alt-European master narratives, impeding PRR cooperation (Vasilopoulou 2018a: 5; Borriello and Brack 2019, 835).

Most comparative literature on PRR party Euroscepticism and reception of Brexit focuses on quantifying degrees of rejection of Europe, from pessimists about the EU's current 'trajectory' who support 'the ideas underlying European integration' to 'hard' Euroskeptics or 'Eurorejects' (Taggart and Szczerbiak 2018: 1196; Leconte 2015: 251; Neumayer 2008: 136; Van Kessel et al. 2020: 66–67; Vasilopoulou 2018a: 2–3; 2018a: 123–24; Borriello and Brack 2019, 834). The alt-Europe and EUxit programmes map on to soft and hard Euroscepticism but instead of plotting them on a spectrum, I examine the varied narratives that underpin them as they interact with one another, various pro-European narratives and narratives of nation, globalisation etc. These justifying and mobilising narratives may illuminate prospects for PRR collaboration to transform Europe more clearly than

Table 1.

	AfD (Alternative für Deutschland – Alternative for Germany)	FN (Front National – National Front); Rebranded Rassemblement National (RN – National Rally) in 2018	Lega (League; known before 2018 as Lega Nord – Northern League)	PiS (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość – Law and Justice)
2012		presidential		
2013	parliamentary			
2014			European	
2017	parliamentary	presidential		
2018			parliamentary	
2019		European		

recent research that disaggregates soft Euroscepticism into varied policy positions on immigration, corruption, etc. (FitzGibbon & Guerra 2019: 13; Vasilopoulou 2018a).

Building on twenty years of 'more fine-grained typologies' that challenge the hard-soft dichotomy (Flood 2009: 914; FitzGibbon & Guerra 2019: 3), scholars increasingly recognise this 'heterogeneity' in PRR positions, including in their framing of sovereignty and other distinct 'aspects' of European integration (Vasilopoulou 2018a: 2, 2018b; Borriello and Brack 2019: 834; Taggart and Szczerbiak 2018; Pirro 2017: 406 & 416; Cincu 2017: 30–36; Lees 2018: 305; Ivaldi 2018). However most of this literature uses discourse, narratives, ideologies or 'perceptions' to explain the national politics and changing programmes of PRR parties. My comparative approach instead contributes to cutting edge research on PRR's transnational links (Startin and Brack 2016; Kaiser and McMahon 2017). The very few other scholars of pan-European PRR cooperation are beginning to examine ideologies, ideals and values, but not yet narratives (Flood 2009: 914; Startin and Brack 2016; Cooper, Dunin-Wąsowicz, and Milanese 2019, 20–21).

The case study parties account for 61.7% of MEPs elected in 2019 to the EP's two right-wing Eurosceptic party groups. They also reflect the diversity of European PRR. Their countries exemplify varied experiences of the EU's crises, economic situations, and the east-west spectrum of PRR party roles from governing (PiS) to coalition partner (Lega) to ostracisation by mainstream parties (FN/RN and AfD). The four parties also capture different degrees of ideological radicalism and Euroscepticism. PiS, for example, did not campaign in the 2019 European election with the other three in the European Alliance of Peoples and Nations (EAPN) and unlike them, never explicitly advocated any form of EUxit. Opponents accused it of promoting Polexit, but its 'dominant view' favoured alt-European reform of the EU 'from within' (Szczerbiak 2018).

Section one of the article introduces common PRR party counternarratives that reject key pro-EU narratives that integration delivers peace, prosperity and democracy, and will continuously intensify. The section concludes however that PRR narratives of the EU's political, legal and civilisational roots accept a degree of integration. Section two introduces the common narrative resources that support PRR collaboration on an alt-Europe programme. Section three demonstrates that PRR nationalism and detailed policy narratives could impede this collaboration.

EUxit narratives?

From the beginnings of European integration, the narrative that it produced peace by rescuing member states (MS) from their own bellicose natures helped deliver decades of passive public acceptance of European integration (Manners and Murray 2016: 188; McMahon 2017, 240).

PRR parties invert this narrative, claiming that forcing MS together undermines peace. They attribute Europe's present destabilising crises to the EU's violent new imperial campaign to destroy and subordinate nations, betraying its original mission to end the wars that attempts to impose 'continental scale' hegemony always produced (PiS (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość) 2014: 13; PiS (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość) 2019: 19–20; RN (Rassemblement National) 2019: 9 &, 171). PiS accuses 'one or two states' of trying to reimpose 'hegemony', risking 'sharp conflicts' and even war (2019: 20). Lega quotes Commission President José Manuel Barroso's representation of the EU as 'the first non-imperial Empire' (2014: 4). It claims Europe is transforming into a medievalising [medievaleggiante] empire, replacing Westphalian sovereignty with universal 'governance' [rendered in English] in which Brussels is the Holy Roman Empire and the European Court of Human Rights is 'the new papacy' (Lega 2014, 4). AfD represents the EU's failures, Euroscepticism and especially the misconceived Euro and Euro rescue as causing 'irreconcilable conflict between states' (2013: 1; 2014: 4; 2019: 7).

EU claims to produce economic prosperity through trade underpin its peace narrative (Manners and Murray 2016, 188). PRR parties instead represent 'Brussels' as an inefficient gravy train, wasting public money and threatening new European taxes (Lega 2014: 25 & 39, 2019: 4; AfD (Alternative für Deutschland) 2019: 23–24; RN (Rassemblement National) 2019, 14). They criticise the tax and other

privileges of MEPs and officials, their revolving door into a massive 'grey-zone' of corrupt lobbying and 'countless scandals', and the 'bloated bureaucratic apparatus' of the Commission and the EU's many costly and 'absolutely "useless" institutions' (Lega 2014: 25; RN (Rassemblement National) 2019: 8; AfD (Alternative für Deutschland) 2014: 9, 2017: 72, 2019: 12–15; RN (Rassemblement National) 2019: 5 &, 17).

The Euro crisis particularly undermined the EU's prosperity narrative (Bouza Garcia 2017, 286). PRR parties agree that the Euro broke its promises and is a damaging, undemocratic economic failure (PiS (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość) 2014: 157; Le Pen 2012: 2; Lega 2014, 15). The vainly imposed austerity of the Euro rescue is the 'principal cause' of Italy's 'economic decline' and is killing France's economy 'by degrees' (Lega 2014: 15, 2018: 9 & 71; Le Pen 2012: 2, 2017, 7). Like the Commission's irresponsible 'explosion of regulations', it hurts local businesses and farmers and only benefits the rich, arrogant and powerful (Le Pen 2017: 21; RN (Rassemblement National) 2019: 5; AfD (Alternative für Deutschland) 2017: 72, 2019: 11 & 46; PiS (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość) 2014: 157; Lega 2018: 9 & 71, 2019).

In a key integration narrative, especially since the 1980s and for the supranational institutions, the EU has protected and spread democracy in Europe and beyond (Cianciara 2017, 58). Populist Euroscepticism by contrast undermines liberal democracy.

PRR parties respond that it is the EU that is undemocratic and has limited or even 'destroyed' the functioning of 'democratic nation states' (AfD (Alternative für Deutschland) 2017: 6; Lega 2014, 3). Lega claims three quarters of laws adopted in Italy are European and are nearly automatically waived through parliament (2014: 3). For PiS and AfD, 'history shows' that 'feelings of national ties' are 'the mother and heart of democracy', providing the only possible basis for popular sovereignty, so EU 'control' is undemocratic (PiS (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość) 2014: 157; PiS (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość) 2019: 12; AfD AfD (Alternative für Deutschland) 2017, 6).

National democracies must therefore be rescued from an unelected, authoritarian Brussels of 'dark powers', whose institutions lack public control or consent (AfD (Alternative für Deutschland) 2014: 3; AfD (Alternative für Deutschland) 2019: 11; RN (Rassemblement National) 2019: 4, 7 & 16; Lega 2019, 1). Decision-making and lobbying 'in hidden offices in Brussels or Luxembourg' are represented as opaque, distant from familiar national procedures, 'totally unknown' and 'cut off from the realities and aspirations of the peoples', including by incomprehensible acronyms and a constitution of hundreds of pages (RN (Rassemblement National) 2019: 3 & 16; AfD (Alternative für Deutschland) 2013: 2; AfD (Alternative für Deutschland) 2014: 3 & 23; AfD (Alternative für Deutschland) 2019: 11 & 13–14; Salvini 2019).

PRR accounts variously claim that political party representatives, out-of-control bureaucrats or lobbyists or even the particular interests of powerful MS dominate EU institutions (Lega 2019: 1; RN (Rassemblement National) 2019: 4 & 16; AfD (Alternative für Deutschland) 2014: 3–4 & 10, 2017: 10; 2019: 11–12). However these nationalistic parties are particularly reluctant to accept any supranational bodies as legitimate. The Commission is 'the least democratic institution', 'fundamentally technocratic and distant from citizens' (RN (Rassemblement National) 2019: 3; Lega 2019, 1). Its 'unfairness' to Brexit Britain, using 'any judicial measures or pressures to prevent the peoples from deciding' exemplifies the 'arrogance' and 'contempt for the people' in its 'DNA' (RN (Rassemblement National) 2019: 4–5 & 16; Lega 2019, 9). A 'time bomb' in the Lisbon Treaty may meanwhile allow the unrepresentative and irresponsible European Court of Justice (ECJ) to progressively annul 'whole sections of national law' (Lega 2014: 3, 2018: 21 &, 31).

The peace and prosperity narratives legitimated European integration for general publics. Scholars, pro-European politicians and EU officials often also display 'blithe confidence' in a second narrative of inexorable and 'profoundly desirable' progress towards 'supranational government' and 'gradual erosion of national sovereignty' (Puchala 1971: 268; Gilbert 2008: 641–42 & 645–50; McMahon 2017: 238; White 2003: 114; RN (Rassemblement National) 2019, 16). EU official jargon' thus often implicitly contrasts national 'backwardness' with 'EU modernity' (Leconte 2015, 257).

A key PRR narrative attacks this totally failed dogmatic' 'forced march to federalism' by 'the Eurocrats', who do not understand that the EU exists thanks to the MS or that its sole purpose is to support the independence, 'collective power' and wellbeing of Europe's 'peoples' (Le Pen 2012: 15–16; RN (Rassemblement National) 2019: 3, 6 & 13; Lega 2019: 1 & 9; PiS (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość) 2014, 150–51). It warns that the 'half-baked construction of a United States of Europe' through endless 'creeping widening and deepening of the EU' and achieving competence 'over practically everything' threatens the 'loss of our sovereignty' (AfD (Alternative für Deutschland) 2014: 24; AfD (Alternative für Deutschland) 2019: 12; Le Pen 2012: 15–16; Lega 2018: 9 &, 31). In 'an umpteenth heinous cession of national sovereignty', Lega describes national parliaments as mere rubber stamps for transposing European laws (2014: 3–4).

Lega complains that the Euro deprived MS of their most useful tool for dealing with monetary crises (2014: 15). AfD and PiS add that the Euro-rescue gave European institutions too many competences and disciplinary powers over national sovereignty (AfD (Alternative für Deutschland) 2013: 2; AfD (Alternative für Deutschland) 2014: 3; AfD (Alternative für Deutschland) 2019: 11; PiS 2014: 157). Lega claimed MS were reduced to 'Third World states' where 'nominated' administrators implemented brutal '"reforms"' (2014: 15).

For PiS, European federalism threatens the 'functions of the nation state', but these will not disappear while the EU remains an international organisation (2014: 151; 2019: 171). The other PRR parties by contrast demand that lost sovereignty be restored and EU policy expansion 'stop immediately', retracting its competence to strictly necessary priorities and ending 'the diktat of European bureaucrats' over a panoply of policy competences (Le Pen 2012: 13 & 15–16, 2017: 6; Lega 2014: 13, 2018: 10, 2019: 4, 7 & 9; AfD (Alternative für Deutschland) 2013: 1, 2019, 13). The very first point in FN's 2017 presidential manifesto is to 'get back our liberty and control over our destiny by restoring to the French people its sovereignty (monetary, legislative, territorial, economic)' (Le Pen 2017, 3).

PRR parties principally reject the 'faulty political logic' of the increasingly centralised, harmful, 'European pipe-dreams' of supranational institutions (PiS (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość) 2014: 158; Lega 2014, 39). The Commission's unchecked 'immense power' includes sole right to initiate EU laws, which national governments and MEPs can merely amend to 'limit the damage' (RN (Rassemblement National) 2019: 3 & 16; Lega 2014: 3; Lega 2019, 1). Its former President, Jean-Claude Juncker (not a teetotaller) was 'drunk with power' (RN (Rassemblement National) 2019, 17). The ECJ uses its supremacy over national law to permit Sharia and protect Islamist terrorists (RN (Rassemblement National) 2019: 17; Lega 2018: 10 & 21; PiS (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość) 2014, 151).

Taken to their conclusion, PRR narratives of steadfastly resisting and reversing the EU's 'uncontrolled erosion of sovereignty of European fatherlands' support EUxit (PiS (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość) 2014: 13; PiS (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość) 2019: 17 & 20; RN (Rassemblement National) 2019: 8; Lega 2018: 10; AfD (Alternative für Deutschland) 2013, 1). However, the PRR often suggests that integration has merely gone too far. As in Britain (Wind 2017, 10), an important trope in its anti-progressive narrative is that Europeans were duped. AfD and RN criticise federalist European treaties since the 1980s that 'renounced or even betrayed' de Gasperi, de Gaulle and Thatcher's European 'founding ideals' and 'beautiful dreams', which respected national sovereignty (AfD (Alternative für Deutschland) 2017: 6; AfD (Alternative für Deutschland) 2019: 7; RN (Rassemblement National) 2019: 3 & 16; Salvini 2019).

In a legalistic version of the betrayal narrative, PRR parties complain that the EU illegally superseded treaty limitations on its power, including its subsidiarity principle of only doing what is necessary at a European level (Lega 2019: 9, 2018: 10; AfD (Alternative für Deutschland) 2014: 3, 2017: 13, 2019: 11 & 30; PiS (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość) 2014: 157; AfD (Alternative für Deutschland) 2019, 185). PiS uses this narrative of the EU's legal 'double standards' to fend off accusations that under EU law, it illegally subverts Poland's legal system (2019: 52, 177 & 185). It repeatedly insists on the sanctity of the EU treaty principle of equality of MS and the legal precedence of the Polish constitution. Lega uses German Constitutional Court findings to argue that the EU is not the kind of

international organisation to which the Italian constitution allows Italy to give up sovereignty 'for peace and justice among nations' (2018: 9).

Centre-right pro-Europeans have long used ethnic narratives of Christian European civilisation. Interwar federalists like Richard Coudenhove-Kalergi appealed to nineteenth-century romantic narratives of Europe's common cultural roots in medieval Western Christendom (Orluc 2000: 130; Smith 1992: 74; de Bruin in this volume). The powerful post-war pro-integration narrative of Christian Democracy, grounded in Catholicism, linked broadly federalist integration with Christian cultural unity (Kaiser 2007). EU identity promotion strategies since the 1970s also reference a common European culture (Stråth 2013; McDonald 2012; Littoz-Monnet and Richard 2013, 225). Even left-wing intellectuals such as Jürgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida have argued that 'European integration needs to complement economic integration by fostering cultural and political bonds' (Bouza Garcia 2017, 286).

PRR parties use this ethnic civilisational tradition to support alt-Europeanism (see below). However, they also unanimously condemn the EU's 'primitive civilisational experiment' of building a European culture because 'excess homogenisation … kills biodiversity' and weakens 'our continent' (AfD (Alternative für Deutschland) 2019: 11 & 74; PiS (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość) 2014: 12; PiS (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość) 2019: 19; RN (Rassemblement National) 2019: 8; Lega 2018: 9; Lega 2019, 3). They insist that the enduring 'richness' of diverse political systems, 'national identities, languages and cultures' is the source of wealth, strength, development and cultural value of the European 'cultural area' (Le Pen 2012: 15; PiS (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość) 2019: 19; AfD (Alternative für Deutschland) 2019: 11 &, 74). FN therefore rejects the European flag, and AfD, common energy efficiency measures (Le Pen 2017: 15; AfD (Alternative für Deutschland) 2019, 82). PiS and Lega complain of an imposed 'alien' 'European correctness' which is 'completely un-national [nienarodowego]' for Poland (PiS (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość) 2014: 29; Lega 2018, 9). Subsidiarity should protect Poland's conservative 'national identity, traditions, culture, way of life and customs' from this liberal 'cultural education' (PiS (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość) 2014: 157–58; PiS (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość) 2019: 20 &, 185). By encouraging immigration, the EU breaches its own fundamental rights commitment to protect the diverse 'cultures and traditions' of Europe's peoples (AfD (Alternative für Deutschland) 2019, 37). FN, AfD and Lega add that the 'different economic cultures', levels of development and national requirements of MS destabilise the Eurozone (Le Pen 2012: 2, 2017: 7; RN (Rassemblement National) 2019: 15; AfD (Alternative für Deutschland) 2013: 1, 2014: 4–5, 2017: 13, 2019: 7; Lega 2014: 15, 2018, 9).

Any EU 'quasi-state' is therefore 'an illusion' because Europe lacks sufficient cultural identity or a single 'people' with 'a common destiny', which for the foreseeable future Europe's peoples are unlikely to accept voluntarily (AfD (Alternative für Deutschland) 2019: 6–7 & 11; PiS (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość) 2019, 12). PRR parties accept elements of civic nationalism, such as a constitution, 'clearly defined territory', citizenship and political participation (Lega 2014: 5; PiS (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość) 2019: 12; Le Pen 2012, 6). However, 'the true "cultural essence"' of 'national identities' is the cultural 'heritage' of language and 'centuries of historical development', which cannot be incorporated into the EU's voluntary, 'artificial', abstract, technocratic 'tentacular bureaucratic structure' (AfD (Alternative für Deutschland) 2014: 3; AfD (Alternative für Deutschland) 2017: 6–7; AfD (Alternative für Deutschland) 2019: 74; Le Pen 2017: 15; RN (Rassemblement National) 2019: 8; Lega 2018: 9; Lega 2019: 3; PiS (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość) 2019: 12 &, 19).

Alt-European narratives

In 'a significant break from the past', the 2019 EAPN manifesto abandoned EUxit to demand an alt-European EU (Cooper, Dunin-Wąsowicz, and Milanese 2019, 21). As the Euro and refugee crises propelled PRR parties towards the 'political mainstream' and potentially national and European-level power, and popular enthusiasm for EUxit declined after Brexit, PRR parties across Europe progressively shifted from EUxit to demanding profound alt-European reform of the EU (Van Kessel et al.

2020: 66 & 72–78; AfD (Alternative für Deutschland) 2019: 12; Szczerbiak 2018; Wind 2017: 4, 6 & 18; Ivaldi 2018: 287; Cooper, Dunin-Wąsowicz, and Milanese 2019, 4). The manifestoes I examined support Pirro and Van Kessel's contention that 'the overwhelming majority of PRR parties' were never 'entirely 'anti-European'' (2017: 405–7; see also Kaiser in this volume). They often interpret narratives to simultaneously oppose EU integration and support an intergovernmental alt-Europe.

Achieving alt-Europe requires PRR collaboration. A few recent scholars contest the 'dominant' scholarly argument that by insisting on 'national sovereignty and identity' PRR parties are likely to capsize their purely tactical cooperation in the EP (Startin and Brack 2016). Startin and Brack describe concrete progress towards a PRR alliance based on a 'growing sense of shared ideals' within the EU (2016). Lega and RN promoted PRR cooperation, boasting that 'All over Europe, our ideas are coming to power' (Cooper, Dunin-Wąsowicz, and Milanese 2019: 20; Marlowe 2019). RN leader Marine Le Pen claimed collaboration among PRR parties decided her to abandon Frexit (Marlowe 2019).

The parties also seem to be trying to avoid the frictions that undermined previous collaborations. Lega shifted from complaining that EU funding unfairly favoured new MS (2014: 21) to demanding compensation 'as far as possible' (2018: 26). Western PRR parties lionised the authoritarian Hungarian and Polish PRR governments for defending 'European identity' by 'bravely' resisting EU redistribution of refugees to MS (RN (Rassemblement National) 2019: 4; Lega 2018: 23; AfD (Alternative für Deutschland) 2019, 17). Lega leader Matteo Salvini may have refused to publish Lega's 2019 European election manifesto to avoid publicising criticisms of northern Europeans (e.g. Lega 2019, 1) as he spearheaded efforts to create a transnational PRR alliance.

Even following the EU's 'dissolution' therefore, PRR manifestoes envisage recreating voluntary intergovernmental European cooperation that would guarantee MS control, sovereignty and diversity (AfD (Alternative für Deutschland) 2019, 12). The 'legitimately elected' governments of 'free, democratic' 'strong nations' would be 'back in the centre' of this 'Eurorealistic community', 'real confederalism' or 'rule-of-law-based league' [rechtsstaatlich Bund], intensively cooperating in their own interest (Lega 2014: 39, 2018: 9–10, 2019: 1 & 9; Salvini 2019; AfD (Alternative für Deutschland) 2013: 1, 2014: 3 & 24, 2019: 12; PiS (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość) 2014: 158; AfD (Alternative für Deutschland) 2019: 186; Le Pen 2012: 15; RN (Rassemblement National) 2019, 17).

For PRR parties, this alt-Europe can assure peace, prosperity and even some European integration. They reject the pro-European narrative that nationalist competition among nations invariably causes conflict (AfD (Alternative für Deutschland) 2019, 12). Without the EU's intensifying de-democratisation, 'centralisation and bossing around', 'states can cooperate perfectly well', 'in friendship', 'producing lasting welfare and peace' (AfD (Alternative für Deutschland) 2013: 1; AfD (Alternative für Deutschland) 2019: 7 & 12; Lega 2018: 9–10; Salvini 2019).

To restore sovereignty, PRR parties generally accept a need to negotiate with 'our European partners' to 'rebalance' or amend the EU and its policies, rather than abolishing them, possibly even keeping some supranational coordination (Le Pen 2012: 13 & 15–16, 2017: 3; RN (Rassemblement National) 2019: 7 & 16; Lega 2014: 6, 13 & 31, 2018: 9, 2019: 6 & 9; AfD (Alternative für Deutschland) 2017: 7 &, 29). Manifestoes often use language of reduced or 'slimmed down' competences or contributions, 'wherever possible' and stronger national control (Le Pen 2012: 13; AfD (Alternative für Deutschland) 2013: 2, 2014: 8; Lega 2014: 13; PiS 2014: 151). They praise some EU policies, such as those keeping Italian banks in check (Lega 2014: 13, 18 & 21, 2018: 30 & 60, 2019: 6–7; Le Pen 2012: 13; PiS (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość) 2014: 101–2, 2019, 191). EU funding lets Poland 'deepen its role in the EU' (PiS (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość) 2019, 105). PiS endorses the common EU legal system, institutions, budget and market (2019: 177). AfD wants more 'European influence on Nato' (2017: 17). Though Lega and RN favour stronger national border controls, PRR parties agree that the 'great collective challenge' of terrorism from the 'Islamist threat' also requires cooperation on EU frontiers and foreign relations (Lega 2019: 2; Salvini 2019; AfD (Alternative für Deutschland) 2019: 40; RN (Rassemblement National) 2019, 10–11).

Most PRR parties recognise an 'opportunity' in economic integration and carefully monitored EU infrastructure investment to protect Europe's global economic and technological competitivity and

'accelerate growth' while safeguarding 'national patrimony' (PiS (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość) 2014: 98; PiS (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość) 2019: 105, 173, 177 & 186; Lega 2014: 18 & 31; Lega 2018: 24 & 41; AfD (Alternative für Deutschland) 2014: 18 & 20; AfD (Alternative für Deutschland) 2019: 21 &, 86). Lega advocates better trans-Alpine infrastructure, including for Italian exports throughout Europe (2013: 6; 2014: 18, 22–23 & 38; 2018: 45). Though AfD and Lega would reduce the EU to 'essentially economic' matters, for AfD this would include policies such as ensuring freedom of the seas (Lega 2018: 9–10; AfD (Alternative für Deutschland) 2013: 1, 2014: 12, 2019, 21).

As protectionists, Lega and FN/RN advocate stronger EU antidumping and 'customs protections' policies, especially against emerging countries (Lega 2014: 13, 15, 33 & 39; Le Pen 2012: 2; RN (Rassemblement National) 2019, 13). Lega wants Europe to become one of the world's protectionist bloc (2014: 23; 2019: 5–6).

Vasilopoulou is one of few scholars to emphasise the centrality of cultural European civilisation to PRR parties (2018a: 124). I argue however that it creates important potential for their realignment towards something like alt-European nationalism. At a 2019 European election rally in Milan for allied PRR leaders from across Europe, Salvini passionately declared that Europe's future can only develop from what Pope Jean Paul II called 'the old Europe in search of itself, of its origins and roots' (2019). The 2019 RN manifesto agreed that understanding Europe's identity, geography and civilizational values was necessary to define and realise its great political objectives (2019: 8). PiS calls for an EU built on 'wonderful' 'lasting roots' of 'civilizational identity' (2014: 159). Affirming European civilizational values required 'determined' alt-European coordination (RN (Rassemblement National) 2019: 8; AfD (Alternative für Deutschland) 2019: 37 &, 52).

PRR civilisational narratives support Europe's national diversity but also four alt-European agendas. First, because Europe's ancient true 'civilizational identity' resembles an ethnic nation, it can be used to 'liberate … this continent from' the 'abusive occupation' and 'social constructivism' of the technocratic, supranational EU (PiS (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość) 2014: 159; Salvini 2019). In PRR ethnic nationalism, strong states require 'feelings of national ties' because nations are 'essential identification spaces' but the nation in turn 'is a community of culture, language, historical experience, political traditions … civilisational values' and 'destiny' deriving legitimacy from 'a rich, multicentury creativity' (PiS (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość) 2019: 12 & 19; AfD (Alternative für Deutschland) 2017: 6 &, 10).

PRR parties root European culture or civilization in a combination of ancient heritages such as Graeco-Roman antiquity, Christianity and humanism (AfD (Alternative für Deutschland) 2017: 46; AfD (Alternative für Deutschland) 2019: 51; RN (Rassemblement National) 2019, 9). By locating 'the German Leitkultur' in this same cultural heritage, AfD opens the possibility of nesting the German nation within a European one (2017: 46). Referencing different national golden age narratives, RN and Salvini derive Europe's civilizational values from the Renaissance, and AfD from the Enlightenment (RN (Rassemblement National) 2019: 9; Salvini 2019; AfD (Alternative für Deutschland) 2017: 46; AfD (Alternative für Deutschland) 2019, 51). By endorsing laicism and Judaism, PRR parties transform even cultural elements that conservatives originally hated into respected national traditions (Le Pen 2012: 7, 2017: 15; AfD (Alternative für Deutschland) 2019, 51).

The second agenda is to root the PRR's conservative revolution in the 'profound influence' of the 'Judeo-Christian roots' and 'values' of Europe's 'cultural, religious and humanist inheritance' (Salvini 2019; Lega 2014: 8 & 30; PiS (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość) 2019: 6 &, 12). For PiS, 'Poles are always European in the sense of Christianity' and especially the Catholic Church, which even infuses Polish culture with classical Greek and Roman heritage (2014: 159; 2019: 14–15 & 18–19). Salvini packed his Milan speech with emotional references to popes, saints from all over Europe and 'the sweet Madonna [*Madonina*] who protects us from above' (2019).

Christian heritage helps the PRR resist EU 'cultural aggression', which imposes 'political correctness', a 'painful' limiting of freedom of expression, and the current 'madness' of 'gender ideology' and 'Gender Mainstreaming' [rendered in English] as 'moral alternatives' to traditional Christian

European values (Lega 2014: 30; PiS (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość) 2014: 13 & 29; AfD (Alternative für Deutschland) 2019: 20, 2014: 18, 2017: 11, 2019, 73–74).

PiS inserts this defence of 'the natural family' and 'normal social relations' into a complex historical narrative (AfD (Alternative für Deutschland) 2019: 11 &, 184). It hopes pan-European forces 'of freedom, equality, solidarity and justice' can resist the liberal 'invasion of questioning of the basis of Western civilisation' that 'already dominates … Western Europe' and is 'very violently' 'replacing European cultural heritage' with 'an artificially created new transnational culture' (PiS (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość) 2019: 18–20 & 39). Though 'the majority of society' rejects these 'risky cultural experiments', they pose an existential threat to Poland's 'national identity' and 'way of life' (PiS (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość) 2014: 157; PiS (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość) 2019, 39).

This EU-backed 'cultural revolution' is represented as the heir to Nazi and Stalinist 'totalitarian experiments' and 'social engineering' (PiS (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość) 2019: 6–7 &, 184). AfD agrees that gender quotas are 'opening the door' to totalitarianism (2017: 11). Only 'European Party' card-holders may govern this *'ahistoric'*, totalitarian *'centralising, statist … anti-democratic'* EUSSR (Lega 2014: 4; Vasilopoulou 2018b, 2). The transnational Catholic Church and the 'responsibility' imposed by 'Western tradition' have been central to Polish resistance to all these ` nihilistic 'ideological projects' that have threatened 'Europe and Poland' (PiS (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość) 2014: 157; PiS (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość) 2019: 6–7, 14–15 & 19).

Islamophobic solidarity against immigration and Turkey is a third key driver of PRR civilisation narratives. In the 'cultural struggle [Kulturkampf]' with 'international Islamic terrorism', alien Moslem cultural traditions imperil 'our state, society and system of values [Werteordnung]' (AfD (Alternative für Deutschland) 2017: 17, 33–34 & 46; Le Pen 2017, 6). This 'aggressively encroaching Islam' threatens 'EUrabia', the 'Islamisation of Europe' through 'hundreds of millions' of potential migrants (AfD (Alternative für Deutschland) 2019: 37 & 52; Salvini 2019). This replacement theory blames the border policy of 'the political elites and EU institutions' for deliberate 'self-destruction of our states', peoples, identity, prosperity and 'free democracy', putting 'our free and diverse' 'European civilisation in existential danger' (AfD (Alternative für Deutschland) 2017: 27; AfD (Alternative für Deutschland) 2019: 37 & 52; RN (Rassemblement National) 2019, 8). AfD fears 'cultural collapse of historical scale', as Germany's 'native population' faces 'marginalisation' in a country no longer 'recognisable as our Germany' (2017: 27).

In PRR discourse, opposition to Turkey is a key stimulus for replacement theories and for demarcating Europe's 'geographical, cultural and historic borders' with Islam (AfD (Alternative für Deutschland) 2014: 10; AfD (Alternative für Deutschland) 2017: 18, 28 & 61; Le Pen 2012: 15; RN (Rassemblement National) 2019: 9; Lega 2014: 8, 10–11 & 39; Lega 2019: 8; Salvini 2019). Salvini (2019) cites Pope John-Paul II that Turkey's large, growing population 'does not belong … to Europe'.

The fourth PRR civilisational agenda concerns long-standing insecurities about Poland's Europeanness (Törnquist-Plewa 2002, 215). PiS insists on Poland's ancient affiliation with 'the European tradition' (2019: 18 & 62). Its proposal of Poland's conservative 'model of social life' as a 'good example' for all Europe recalls traditional messianic narratives of Poland as Europe's shield against Eastern barbarism (PiS (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość) 2019: 20; Törnquist-Plewa 2002, 217).

Problems with alt-Europe

However, alt-Europe is a tenuous project. The 2019 EAPN alliance, strained by divisions such as AfD's adherence to Dexit, only agreed 'the most minimal of common platforms' and PRR parties such as PiS did not join (Cooper, Dunin-Wąsowicz, and Milanese 2019, 20–21). Islamophobia and related stances on Turkey, terrorism and multiculturalism are the only uncontestedly common planks of the variegated national alt-Europeanisms.

The common PRR commitment to forceful nationalism makes European civilisation difficult to exploit and impedes collaboration. Empirical research suggests that Eurosceptics usually see nationalism as requiring rejection of all other allegiances and cultural identities (De Vries 2018, 15). AfD and

PiS therefore fear EU cultural policy 'more or less openly' works towards a United States of Europe that will dissolve national identities 'bit by bit' into a 'European unity culture' (AfD (Alternative für Deutschland) 2019: 11 & 74; PiS (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość) 2019, 12).

The PRR understanding of the 'ideology of "multiculturalism"' illustrates why these parties believe national and European identities necessarily clash (AfD (Alternative für Deutschland) 2017: 46; PiS (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość) 2019, 12). Because each whole society, such as Germany, has a single culture, 'multi-culture' creates 'parallel societies that always lead to domestic political strife' and incapacitate the state (AfD (Alternative für Deutschland) 2017, 46). For 'a functioning civil society', states must therefore protect their independent national cultures, identities, 'values and traditions', including by requiring immigrants to abandon languages and cultures of origin (AfD (Alternative für Deutschland) 2017: 46; PiS (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość) 2019: 12; Le Pen 2017, 15–16).

PRR nationalist 'assertiveness' makes cooperation particularly difficult. Their 'realist' international relations perspective entails judging all EU decisions in terms of national interest, regardless of any 'supposed' European interest (PiS (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość) 2014: 149–50 & 158; AfD (Alternative für Deutschland) 2019: 178 & 186; Lega 2019, 8). PRR parties represent this as 'strong and effective' national engagement to 'boldly contribute to shaping [współtworzyć]' or even strengthening the EU (Lega 2013: 7, 2019: 6; PiS (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość) 2014: 41, 99 & 149, 2019: 41, 145, 151, 176–77 & 182).

However, assertively bending other MS to one's will make cooperation difficult. AfD insists Germany must play a responsible 'leadership role', with stronger representation in EU institutions to reflect its population and economic heft and offset the majority of 'taker countries' [Nehmerländer] (2014: 6, 8 & 23; 2017: 46; 2019: 17). German should also be promoted as an EU working language.

PiS imagines Poland as an aspirant great power, which projects influence on the basis of a successful economy and social policy to directly contest German assertiveness (2014: 151; 2019: 182). It would use Poland's size, the 'geopolitics of emotion', and especially alliances of MS with 'shared interests and values' in order to subordinate the EU's 'most powerful states' to Poland's foreign policy interests (PiS (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość) 2014: 100, 154 & 158; PiS (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość) 2019: 41, 172 & 176; see Riedel in this volume). PiS claims its plans for a powerful, independent Polish-led CEE in a union of 'multiple regional centres' would strengthen the EU by promoting equality (2014: 158–159; 2019: 175, 126 & 184). However this claim apparently contradicts the party's principled opposition to a hierarchical Eurozone or EU security order 'dominated by Germans' or Franco-German cooperation that could cause a 'break-up into several circles of integration' (PiS (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość) 2014: 157–58; PiS (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość) 2019, 172).

In practice, PiS manifestoes moved from anticipating a productive, 'consequential' and fruitful discussion with Germany, as a good neighbour and equal partner (2014: 156–57), to demanding this relationship as a possibility and confronting Germany over minorities and other nationalist issues (2019: 190–91). The testy historical revisionism of both PiS and AfD regarding WWII would particularly obstruct cooperation (PiS (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość) 2019: 172, 180 & 190–91; AfD (Alternative für Deutschland) 2017, 47).

Like AfD, Lega aims to use EU budget contributions to establish the 'centrality of Italy in European politics' (2013: 3; 2019: 2). However it more often echoes the PiS narrative of ending Poland's 'clientelism' towards Germany and 'the so-called European mainstream' (AfD (Alternative für Deutschland) 2014: 154; PiS (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość) 2019: 33, 41 & 172). Salvini would go to Europe with head held high and demand 'parity' after decades of submitting to France and Germany and accepting their systematic privileges (Salvini 2019; Lega 2019, 1). PiS and Salvini use this argument to attack domestic political opponents for going 'cap in hand' to the EU (Salvini 2019) or undermining 'Polish interests' to please their German 'patrons' (PiS (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość) 2014: 151–52; PiS (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość) 2019: 33 &, 172).

Just as in pro-Europeanism, narratives at all levels interact in complex ways, from transnational master narratives justifying alt-Europe to detailed national policy narratives on EU democracy,

geopolitics, freedom of movement, social conservatism and especially economics. The latter divide PRR parties along north-south, core-periphery and east-west lines (Vasilopoulou 2018b: 125; Startin and Brack 2016).

PRR parties attack the EP (AfD (Alternative für Deutschland) 2013: 2; RN (Rassemblement National) 2019: 3 & 19; Lega 2014, 3–4), but whereas AfD and RN would downgrade or abolish it, Lega consistently insists on returning a strengthened EP to 'the centre' of EU politics (AfD (Alternative für Deutschland) 2013: 2; AfD (Alternative für Deutschland) 2019: 12; RN (Rassemblement National) 2019: 19; Lega 2014: 5; Lega 2018: 10; Lega 2019: 1; Salvini 2019).

In geopolitics, FN would downgrade Nato participation, which is the 'fundament' of PiS security doctrine (PiS (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość) 2014: 153; Le Pen 2012: 9; AfD (Alternative für Deutschland) 2017, 19). Western PRR parties also propose conservative authoritarian Russia as a 'partner' or even part of a pan-European union of sovereign states (AfD (Alternative für Deutschland) 2014: 10; AfD (Alternative für Deutschland) 2017: 17–18; AfD (Alternative für Deutschland) 2019: 18; Lega 2018: 22; Lega 2019: 8; Le Pen 2012: 15; RN (Rassemblement National) 2019, 9). Salvini cites Pope John-Paul II on Russia's place in 'Western civilisation', on 'the front line of defending some of its values' (Lega 2018: 22; Salvini 2019). PiS by contrast campaigns to enlarge both Nato and the EU eastwards to strengthen Europe against Russia's growing military threat (2014: 153, 155 & 159; 2019: 172, 179 & 184). It defines Poland's European identity in contrast to Russia rather than Islam. Communism's 'eastern lineage', cutting Poland off from its 'European heritage' in 'Western culture', 'in large part dictated' 'our revolt' against it (PiS (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość) 2019, 18). The Western PRR parties sharply reject further EU enlargements and describe 'premature' previous rounds as weakening the EU (RN (Rassemblement National) 2019: 9; AfD (Alternative für Deutschland) 2014: 10 & 14; Lega 2019, 8).

Western PRR parties increasingly scapegoat Central and Eastern European (CEE) migrants for 'disloyal competition', fraud, 'social dumping' and welfare tourism (Vasilopoulou 2018b: 125; Startin and Brack 2016; RN (Rassemblement National) 2019: 12; Lega 2014: 27; AfD (Alternative für Deutschland) 2014: 14, 2019, 83). 'Eurocrats' exacerbate these problems through measures like the Posted Workers Directive, which gives eastern Europeans a 'veritable foreign preference' in employment in France (RN (Rassemblement National) 2019: 6 & 12–13; Lega 2014, 27). PiS by contrast prizes EU free movement of people and opposes market-unfriendly restrictions on posted workers (2014: 158; 2019: 177).

Social conservatism also divides PiS, which leant more heavily on homophobia in its 2020 presidential campaign than ever before, from Lega and FN, whose manifestoes have become less strident on 'gender ideology' and gay rights (Walker 2020; Lega 2018: 51; Le Pen 2012: 11, 2017, 13). PRR parties still defend 'the family', promoting motherhood to reverse demographic decline, but they also now attack Islam because its 'women are suppressed and homosexuality is a crime' (AfD (Alternative für Deutschland) 2013: 3; AfD (Alternative für Deutschland) 2019: 51; Le Pen 2017: 13; Lega 2014, 30). Salvini declared that a religion calling women inferior 'will never be boss in my house' (2019). Lega and AfD insist they do not reject Turkey because of religion but rather due to its increasing distance from 'secularised' European and Western values of civil and human rights (Lega 2014: 8–9; AfD (Alternative für Deutschland) 2017, 18).

More generally, AfD and FN emphasise religion less. For AfD the 'fundamental European values' that gender quotas threaten are legal equality and freedom of contract, some of 'the greatest achievements' of the 'Christian and humanistic' 'European civilisation' (2017: 10–11 & 39–40). Even more starkly, FN would actively 'promote laicism', barring 'religious-political ideology' or 'communitarianism' from the public sphere (Le Pen 2012: 7, 2017, 15).

Economic policies, and especially market liberalisation, budget contributions and the Euro, particularly divide the PRR.

Condemning EU and domestic 'overregulation', AfD and PiS link prosperity with free markets (AfD (Alternative für Deutschland) 2013: 2; AfD (Alternative für Deutschland) 2017: 72; AfD (Alternative für Deutschland) 2019: 25; PiS AfD (Alternative für Deutschland) 2014, 157). For AfD, the EU's 'primary

purpose' is to be the 'most open possible' 'big, efficient internal market' with fair 'competition', 'individual responsibility' and productive free trade (2013: 1–2; 2014: 12; 2019: 7 & 25).

The much more *dirigiste* Latin PRR parties, FN/RN and Lega, frequently demand EU investment and intervention in the economy, an active national industrial policy, and state control of 'strategic sectors' (Lega 2018: 9–10, 2019: 6; Le Pen 2012: 16, 2017: 7 & 22; RN (Rassemblement National) 2019, 12). Criticising the 'dogma of "free and undistorted competition", they advocate "profound correction" of the internal market and "intelligent" "economic patriotism" to protect "our economy, jobs and industries" against "disloyal" [/] international competition' and 'internal dumping' (Lega 2018: 9; Le Pen 2017: 7; RN (Rassemblement National) 2019, 12).

PiS accepts globalisation and international 'open society', 'especially in Europe', to make Poland 'wealthier and better organised' (2014: 11). FN/RN and Lega by contrast establish 'savage globalisation' versus identity as the new core political cleavage (Le Pen 2017: 21; Lega 2014, 30). They characterise Eurocrats as willing agents of globalisation, suppressing frontiers and protections and homogenising 'practices and customs, social models, communication and values' in the name of equality (Le Pen 2017: 2; RN (Rassemblement National) 2019: 6; Lega 2014, 30). This 'globalist' vision 'seeks to destroy our great economic and social balances' and encourage 'always more immigration', unbinding nations and communities and turning citizens into isolated numbers or consumers (Lega 2014: 30; Le Pen 2017, 2). Globalisation and the EU agricultural policy put 'the founding values of our society', its 'traditions and the sacrifice of our ancestors' at risk by threatening the 'exceptional richness' of local 'linguistic, regional, food and wine, cultural and social diversity' (Lega 2014: 30; Le Pen 2017: 21; RN (Rassemblement National) 2019, 14).

EU trade deals threaten European quality standards and social, sanitary and environmental norms, have 'killed our industry' and 'very gravely threaten our agriculture' and food security (Le Pen 2012: 13, 2017: 21; RN (Rassemblement National) 2019: 6–7 & 13; Lega 2014: 13 & 22–23, 2018: 25–26, 2019, 5–6). The parties add that neoliberal dogma subjects the 'real economy', including SMEs, to greedy 'international finance', which produced the terrible 'debt spiral' of the Euro crisis (Le Pen 2012: 16; RN (Rassemblement National) 2019: 12; Lega 2014, 2).

Each party would discriminate against the other's country. FN/RN would prioritise French firms in public contracts (Le Pen 2017: 7 & 21–22; RN (Rassemblement National) 2019, 12). Lega wants the EU to favour Italian producers against more productive MSs and multinationals (2018: 9–10; 2019: 6). It would entice offshored firms with low taxes, which the French consider the epitome of disloyal competition (Lega 2018: 9; Le Pen 2017, 12).

Lega manifestoes resentfully gripe that a liberalising north European 'pro-German bloc', including the Dutch, lobbyists and the Commission, favours Asian counterfeit goods, the financial sector and 'north European' fishing, trade and offshoring interests over Mediterranean needs (2014: 13, 21 & 31–32; 2018: 45).

While PiS favours a 'big' EU budget and boasts about maximising Poland's share, the Western PRR parties want to contribute less to the EU and get more back for 'historic' MS (PiS (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość) 2019: 103, 105 & 184; AfD (Alternative für Deutschland) 2014: 10; AfD (Alternative für Deutschland) 2019: 23–24; Lega 2014: 21 & 39; Lega 2018: 10; Le Pen 2012: 13; RN (Rassemblement National) 2019: 5 &, 14).

Lega abandons Western solidarity to attack the systematic privileges of France and Germany in budget, competition and banking rules and accuses Berlin of dictating the Commission's budget (2019: 1–2). Whereas PiS and Lega defend EU funds for agriculture and Europe's poorer regions, AfD would abolish both (Lega 2014: 25, 2018: 26, 2019: 8; PiS (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość) 2014: 98, 2019: 105, 145, 184 & 186; AfD (Alternative für Deutschland) 2019: 25 &, 45). AfD and Lega oppose French interests such as expensive EP sessions in Strasbourg and 'dangerous' EU defence instruments '(dominated by France)' (Lega 2014: 25; 2019: 8; AfD 2014: 9

The Euro crisis split PRR parties on north-south lines, as populists in debtor countries represented the EU 'as a vehicle for German hegemony' (Vasilopoulou 2018b: 125). FN in 2012 complained about contributing to bailouts (2012: 2), but in 2019, RN agreed with Lega that damaging Euro rules only

serve the interests of 'Germany and its satellites' (Lega 2014: 15, 2018: 9; RN (Rassemblement National) 2019, 15). The AfD initially considered forcing out the southern states to create a 'smaller and more stable currency union' with these 'stability-oriented' northern countries (2013: 1; 2014: 5 & 24). Insisting on the EU's foundational principles of equal membership however, PiS rejects such disintegrative multi-speed plans (PiS (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość) 2014: 157–58; PiS (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość) 2019, 184).

Whenever AfD manifestoes accept that Euro rescue austerity harmed 'peripheral' southern 'taker countries', they systematically also mention victims in northern 'giver countries' [Geberländer], such as taxpayers, savers and pensioners (2013: 1; 2014: 3–5, 13 & 22–23). German savers are 'Europe's paymaster', bailing out the soaring debts of 'ailing' banks in Mediterranean countries with unreformed labour markets (AfD (Alternative für Deutschland) 2014: 13; AfD (Alternative für Deutschland) 2017: 7; AfD (Alternative für Deutschland) 2019, 33).

AfD's total rejection of German responsibility for other countries' debts, ECB purchases of 'junk paper' or German companies borrowing at the same interest rate as Greece is diametrically opposed to Lega's proposals for a European rating agency, EU political, economic, banking and fiscal union and Euro-bonds to guarantee 'parity of conditions' for all MS bonds (AfD (Alternative für Deutschland) 2013: 1; AfD (Alternative für Deutschland) 2014: 6–7; AfD (Alternative für Deutschland) 2019: 7; Lega 2013: 3 & 5; Lega 2019, 7).

Despite proposing controversial treasury bonds as 'an alternative' payment system, Lega condemns 'disastrous' and illegal proposals by AfD and FN to reintroduce national currencies alongside the Euro (Lega 2018: 71; Le Pen 2012: 2; AfD (Alternative für Deutschland) 2019, 32).

Conclusion

Since the 1980s, European integration has dramatically deepened, widened, and since 2005, barely survived a succession of existential crises. Eurosceptic PRR parties benefitted from the ensuing politicisation and contestation of the EU. The Brexit referendum campaign emboldened them to campaign for EUxit. However, research on PRR parties stresses that amid popular backlash against Brexit chaos and increasing PRR confidence of winning national and European power, they switched emphasis to alt-European reform of the EU (Pirro 2017, 406). Far more than British PRR Eurosceptics (Farage 2020; Cremonesi and Salvati 2019: 25; Wind 2017, 4), continental PRR parties accept some alt-European integration (Pirro 2017, 405–7). This reflects their long-term transnationalisation, driven by globalisation, the internet, the Trump victory, the EP and hard work by alliance-builders such as Le Pen and Salvini (Startin and Brack 2016; Cooper, Dunin-Wąsowicz, and Milanese 2019: 20; Cincu 2017, 37).

The present article goes beyond the traditional dichotomy in Euroscepticism research of hard and soft programmes to reject or reform the EU, respectively. The manifestoes I examined quite consistently juxtapose counternarratives rejecting the EU and supporting alt-Europe, regardless of whether they advocated an EUxit or alt-European programme. The PRR reject pro-European narratives of ever closer supranational integration, but argue that intergovernmental cooperation can guarantee peace, prosperity and democracy. They use narratives of an ancient ethnic European civilisation of diverse, peacefully cooperating, free sovereign nations to both reject EU cultural unification and envisage an alt-Europe. This civilisation may be Christian or secular, conservative or humanist, free-trading or protectionist, and stingy or demonstrating solidarity, but the PRR will protect it from the EU's artificial, homogenising, totalitarian experiment, which imposes liberalism and Islamist colonists. This evidence of an enduring and powerful PRR master narrative is an important contribution to immemorial structure-agency debates about discourse (Hammack and Toolis 2015).

Some evidence suggests an 'agree to disagree' strategy among PRR parties on divisive topics, mollifying language and perhaps even some ideological convergence (Startin and Brack 2016). Lees detects 'a more orthodox rightwing populist agenda' overwriting AfD's economic liberalism (2018:

304–6). Despite common PRR narrative resources however, the intense nationalist chauvinism, rivalries and policy narratives in these manifestoes will impede concrete PRR cooperation to realise an alt-European dream. Further research on whether PRR narratives may at least be coherent enough to organise in opposition and undermine the EU will therefore be invaluable (Cooper, Dunin-Wąsowicz, and Milanese 2019, 21). This could engage with new work on policy positions within soft Euroscepticism (FitzGibbon & Guerra 2019). It could also borrow policy-studies mechanisms of 'uploading' and 'downloading' to examine how national policy narratives and transnational master narratives of identity interact. Many scholars emphasise that distinct 'traditions' of 'established narratives' about European integration and Euroscepticism are 'rooted and constructed within national political spaces' (De Wilde and Trenz 2012: 544; Lacroix and Nicolaïdis 2010: 1; Crespy and Verschueren 2009: 382; Vasilopoulou 2018b: 125).

Especially given the importance of domestic negotiations within PRR camps, further research could also empirically examine the EUxit-Alt-European debate among PRR voters, contributing to the strand of Euroscepticism literature on public rather than party views (Taggart and Szczerbiak 2018, 1196). This would also help consider whether PRR parties act like some kind of id of nationalism, expressing in distilled form the nationalist narratives that more centrist conservatives and the general public subconsciously assume. If so, PRR counternarratives could be central to this special issue's project of unravelling the increasingly complex web of European narratives and counternarratives.

Note

1. As Lega published no 2019 manifesto, I use two documents. First, journalists (Capone and Stagnaro 2019) obtained Lega's campaign speaking points two days before the election (Lega 2019). League officials also told the press (Allegranti 2019) that Salvini's 18 May speech in Milan (Salvini 2019) is the manifesto.

Acknowledgments

Disclosure statement

Funding

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